Libraries Acquire an Extraordinary Music Collection

The MSU Libraries have been extremely fortunate to acquire the music library of the Conservatorio de Música Alfredo Levy, a mid-20th century music conservatory in Havana, Cuba. It’s a treasure trove of scores, manuscripts, correspondence, and memorabilia collected by the composer and pianist Alfredo Levy Nadal — more than one thousand items in all.

Highlights of the collection include manuscripts attributed to the Cuban composers Ignacio Cervantes, José White, and Ernesto Lecuona, and by Gonzalo Roig, composer of popular Cuban classics and co-founder of the Havana Symphony Orchestra in 1922. Users will also find scores from the personal collection of opera star Rosalía Chalía, one of a very few artists to record extensively before 1900.

The library was alerted to the collection’s availability by Ricardo Lorenz, Associate Professor and Chair of Music Composition in MSU’s College of Music. “The Alfredo Levy Collection is a testimony to the cosmopolitan musical scene enjoyed in Havana during the first half of the 20th century,” Lorenz explains. “Correspondence between Alfredo Levy and the main composers at the time, including Nin Culmell, Alejandro García-Caturla, Gonzalo Roig, and others, will allow researchers to take a peek into the concerns that drove the music scene in Cuba before the Revolution of 1959.

“Scholars in the field of women’s and gender studies will find a large concentration of scores by Cuban women composers. And, most fascinating to me are the personalized dedications displayed in many of the scores, that make it possible to establish a network of professional relationships — comparable to a primitive version of today’s social media platforms.

“Faculty and students who are interested in the classical music heritage of Cuba, and its interconnectedness with Europe, Latin America, and the United States, will find much to explore in this valuable new acquisition.”

Mary Jo Zeter, Latin American and Caribbean Studies Librarian, examines a rare musical score from the Alfredo Levy Music Collection.
From the Director’s Desk

As director of the MSU Libraries, I strive to chart a clearly defined path for our efforts. But occasionally, an opportunity appears and requires that an entirely new path be established instantly. That was the case this winter, when we were invited to submit a proposal to receive a media collection from the ROVI Corporation.

ROVI describes its business as “creating a better, more personalized way to discover and manage digital entertainment.” Over the years, the company had acquired 729,156 music CDs, 164,490 film DVDs and 17,917 video games. All unique titles, and all brand new.

Many other institutions, including the Smithsonian, competed with us to obtain the ROVI Media Collection. Ultimately, we were chosen, and our holdings of music, film, and video games are now among the finest in the world.

The invitation to pursue the ROVI Media Collection was simply the beginning of the “new path,” which is still being created as I write. The sheer weight of the collection — about 210 tons, with the storage cabinets — meant that engineers had to assess the load bearing capacity of certain building locations before we could accept the gift. Finding space for more than one thousand media cabinets was challenging, to say the least.

Once the collection was in house, we began a massive cataloging effort, so users can find what they need. The video games are a significant challenge, since cataloging rules barely exist for this genre. Our staff are now pioneers in processing the largest library collection of video games in the world.

The ROVI Media Collection will provide unprecedented support for the College of Music, the blossoming Film Studies program, and especially the Games for Entertainment and Learning Lab within the College of Communication Arts and Sciences. I believe that this path, completely unexpected, will prove to be a tremendous resource for the entire MSU community and well beyond. Sometimes an uncharted path can be the most rewarding!
Study Lounge Designation Honors John B. Bruff

The Libraries have recently named a centrally-located study area in the Main Library in honor of John B. Bruff, a long-time supporter, in thanks for past and promised gifts to the Libraries.

The Anna E. Bowman Bruff and John Bowman Bruff Study Lounge recognizes both John Bruff and his mother, Anna Bruff.

A retired Macomb County Circuit Court judge, John Bruff’s career included many contributions to public life. He was the Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor of Michigan in 1966, and he served on the MSU Board of Trustees from 1975 to 1983. He was also a founding member of the MSU Alumni Association of Macomb County.

The new Bruff Study Lounge is a favorite Main Library destination for students. During the academic year, the MSU Writing Center uses it as a satellite location five nights a week. The rest of the time, it’s a comfortable spot to study — with easy access to the Cybercafe!

Icon of children’s literature ready for research, thanks to two generous gifts

Since 1882, children around the world have enjoyed the story of Pinocchio, the naughty puppet who wanted to be a real boy. Thanks to two generous gifts, MSU students can now explore how Pinocchio has been interpreted over the decades.

Shirley Sliker, a long-time supporter of our Special Collections unit, recently gave a marvelous collection of 150 Pinocchio publications: early editions, translations, pop-up books, and vinyl records — even a rare “Remco Showboat” miniature theater from 1962.

“The emphasis on honesty in the Pinocchio story always appealed to me,” Mrs. Sliker explained about her collection.

But one of the few items that had eluded Mrs. Sliker was the first English translation of Pinocchio. The Story of a Puppet: Or, The Adventures of Pinocchio appeared in London in 1892, ten years after Carlo Collodi first published Le Avventure di Pinocchio in Italy.

Peter Berg, head of Special Collections, wanted to thank Mrs. Sliker for her constant support over the years. After enlisting rare book dealers in the search, he was able to locate a first edition copy, and purchased it in her honor with funds from another generous gift: the Patricia A. Anderson Library Endowment Fund for Children’s Books.

Few readers now realize that Pinocchio was originally a novel-length work for older children and adults. Scholars have traced Pinocchio’s origins to the Commedia dell’Arte and the picaresque novel, while the 1940 Disney version imagined Pinocchio as a sweeter, simpler tale for young children.

With more than a century’s worth of Pinocchio now available in Special Collections, MSU students will be able to trace the surprising history of the world’s most famous puppet.
This winter, the MSU Libraries were selected — among a number of competing institutions — to receive an enormous media collection from the ROVI Corporation.

ROVI works with content producers worldwide “to make it easy for consumers to find the content they care about.” Along the way, the company had amassed hundreds of thousands of music CDs, film DVDs, and video games — more than 862,000 items in like-new condition. The collection represents the full spectrum of mainstream and independent productions.

Nearly 80% of the ROVI donation is music: a tremendous expansion of our music holdings, which have had a strong focus on classical and jazz recordings to support the curriculum of the College of Music. Now, we have an outstanding collection of popular music genres and world music as well. Kevin M. Bartig, associate professor of musicology, says, “The acquisition of the ROVI collection has transformed MSU’s holdings. Perhaps most significantly, the scope of the collection’s styles and genres will prove invaluable in designing new and more innovative coursework.”

The next largest component of the ROVI donation is film, an area where our holdings will now increase by a factor of ten. “At a time when MSU’s engagement with global media is expanding,” says Joshua Yumibe, director and associate professor of film studies, “ROVI Corporation’s incredible donation dramatically enhances the library’s film and media collections. This material will undoubtedly be essential viewing in our classrooms and as well as for our research.”

MSU students and faculty will not be the only beneficiaries of the new media collection. Nearly all the material will be available for interlibrary loan through MeLCat, the Michigan eLibrary. We anticipate a significant increase in borrowing requests — yet another way the Libraries advance MSU’s land-grant mission to serve the people of Michigan!

Casey O’Donnell, Associate Professor in the Department of Media and Information, explores collaboration between video game developers in his research.
What do you do when your library receives 862,000 pieces of media — all at once?

You take a deep breath...and then get to work!

Once the material was in-house, we turned to the challenge of “discovery.” That’s shorthand for “How will users know what’s in the ROVI Media Collection?”

The content lists provided with the collection aren’t in the format needed for the library catalog, so metadata librarians are analyzing the data and writing programs to translate it. The first 100,000 records have been loaded successfully, and many more will follow.

The next step was to test our new procedures for paging ROVI items. Media cabinets are located throughout the building, in both public and staff areas — wherever we could fit them in! When users request a ROVI title through the library catalog, Circulation staff will retrieve the item and send a message when it’s ready for pickup.

And, we’re already hard at work on preservation plans for the ROVI Media Collection. Watch for an interview with Ryan Edge, media preservation librarian, in the Spring issue of Insight!

Video games: a completely new collection

With the acquisition of 17,917 video games, plus scores of consoles and accessories, MSU has suddenly become — as far as we know — the largest library collection of video games anywhere in the world.

Nevertheless, the ROVI video game collection is a natural fit for MSU and for the Libraries. Our Russel B. Nye Popular Culture Collection has long been a leader in popular culture studies. With 300,000 comic books, westerns, mysteries, romances, textbooks, tabloids, television scripts and more, the Nye Collection has attracted scholars from many institutions to study “the stuff of everyday life.”

And, video game studies are gaining speed in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences. The College now has a graduate certificate in Serious Game Design and Research, while its undergraduate minor in Game Design & Development is available to students majoring in Computer Science, Studio Art, or Media and Information. Comm Arts is also home to the Games for Entertainment and Learning (GEL) Lab.

“The implications of an archive like this are staggering,” says Casey O’Donnell, associate professor in the Department of Media and Information. “It certainly affords us unique opportunities for our already recognized undergraduate game design and development curriculum, but the research possibilities are truly staggering. I can imagine any number of dissertations or research projects leveraging an archive like this. Truly, it is career changing, if a games, art, media or cultural studies scholar wants it to be.”

Justus Nieland, Professor of Modernism and Film Studies, MSU Department of English

ROVI Media Collection

- 680,850 CDs
- 151,898 DVDs
- 11,487 Blu-Ray discs
- 17,917 video games

“The Rovi collection is a very exciting addition to the MSU library’s media holdings, and one that other libraries would envy. I look forward to exploring its riches for both my teaching and research, and will encourage my students to do the same.”

Justus Nieland, Professor of Modernism and Film Studies, MSU Department of English
This summer, MSU was the site for an exciting, four-week enrichment program on African studies for high school teachers. “Africa in World History” was sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and organized by MSU’s Department of History and African Studies Center. Twenty-five teachers from all over the country took part: attending lectures and presentations, discussing documentaries and readings, and working on individual research projects. Our Africana Library was a critical resource, and two teachers made special use of our Map collection, to examine the how the depiction of Africa by European cartographers evolved over the centuries.

One item of particular interest was the “Typus Orbis Terrarum,” a world map made by Abraham Ortelius for the 1588 atlas Teatro de la Tierra Universal, acquired by the Libraries in late 2014. Another was “Africa Corrected from Observations of Mess. of ye Royal Societies at London and Paris,” made by Charles Price and John Senex in 1711. In contrast to the 1588 Ortelius, this map is crowded with annotations about natural resources, many of which would soon be exploited by Europeans. “A Country Naturally Abounding with Deers” says one note, while another reads “From whence is Brought Gold to Morocco.” Both maps have been scanned and are available online. And thanks to oversize scanners in the library’s Copy Center, the teachers could easily print full-scale reproductions for classroom use.

It was an honor for MSU to be chosen to host this NEH teacher enrichment program — and the Libraries were glad to be part of the team! ☺️

1588 Map Enriches African Studies

The Map Library was able to purchase a rare copy of the “Typus Orbis Terrarum” thanks to a generous gift from the late Dr. David Campbell, MSU Department of Geography.

Dr. Campbell’s research focused on the relationship between society and environment in Africa, so it is very fitting that his gift has already made a contribution to teaching about Africa!
Conservation Spotlight: The Nuremberg Chronicle

In the world of rare books, the Liber Chronicarum is one of the most remarkable. It’s a history of the world — as European scholars understood it — just before the discovery of the Americas.

In English it’s called the Nuremberg Chronicle, after its place of publication. The Chronicle is prized for its numerous woodcut illustrations, which depict the creation of the world, eminent persons, mythological creatures, and the important towns of Europe and the Near East. The illustrations were hand-colored, meaning that every copy of the book is unique — and MSU’s copy is a superb example.

However, five centuries of use have taken their toll. The original medieval style binding is in surprisingly good condition, but the interior pages have numerous creases, tears, and losses to the paper. Surface dirt, staining, and water damage can also been seen in places. As a result, Special Collections conservator Bexx Caswell-Olson is giving the Chronicle special attention this year.

Many kinds of treatment are involved. Each page is gently cleaned to remove dirt and debris from the surface, before any repairs are made. Creases are humidified and flattened. Tears are realigned and repaired with thin Japanese paper and cooked wheat starch paste.

It’s slow going, because many tears have to be repaired in stages, and each mend has to dry completely before work can continue. Tears across a hand-colored illustration are especially tricky. Since December, Bexx has repaired more than 100 tears and 16 creases, and the work is only half done.

MSU’s copy of the Nuremberg Chronicle is one of the cornerstones of our collection, and a volume that scores of students and faculty members use every year. The painstaking work of conservation ensures that it will be usable for many more generations!

Preparing the next generation of librarians

In May, the MSU Libraries welcomed 13 students from graduate programs in Library and Information Science for a four-day visit. Sponsored by the Association of Research Libraries and its Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce (IRDW), the visit is part of a series of professional development opportunities for students from traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

MSU has a strong relationship with the IRDW program, having hired three graduates from previous cohorts in the last two years. Six MSU librarians planned the site visit, which combined presentations tailored to the scholars’ interests in area studies and special collections, and activities highlighting the work of MSU librarians in emerging fields such as data management and digital scholarship.

Scholars also learned about tenure and promotion models, campus diversity initiatives, and the importance of cultivating diversity in academia. Guest presenters included Theodore H. Curry, Associate Provost & Associate Vice President for Academic Human Resources, and Paulette Granberry Russell, Senior Advisor to the President for Diversity and Director of the Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives. Speakers from LGBT Resource Center, Muslim Studies Program, and Latino/Chicano Studies Center also offered their perspectives.

“The open, welcoming, and relaxed atmosphere made me feel comfortable to ask questions,” said one of the participants. “Library school has been mostly about theory and information,” said another. “Seeing the application of all this training to real projects and problems was very valuable to me!”
Learn more about the experiences of Muslims in this scholar-led book group. We’ll begin with an introduction to the Qur’an and its place in the lives of Muslims. Then we’ll read four memoirs exploring the authors’ paths in countries including Egypt, France, Iran, Lebanon, Turkey and the United States. Each session will start with a short lecture, followed by facilitated book discussion, and finish with a question and answer period.

Learn more at:
libguides.lib.msu.edu/muslimjourneys

Questions? Please contact:
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Jill Abood jabood@cityofeastlansing.com.

Sponsored by MSU Muslim Studies Program,
MSU Libraries, and East Lansing Public Library

• All are invited to participate.
• Drop-in for one or attend all five sessions.
• No sign up required.
• Free and open to the public.
• Light refreshments served.

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