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Working Title:

“A Corked Bottle of Air: Archival Problematics of the Documentation of Sound and Multimedia”

Abstract:

A true documentation of events has always been difficult to achieve. Throughout history, the narrative of important events has been constructed through an assemblage of primary sources in the form of moving and still images, letters, scores, sound recordings, and production documents. The historical work is made all the more complete through secondary sources of all kinds ranging from announcements and reviews to audience accounts and press documentation. Works of art and music that take the form of multi-media are of course not new, but as they are produced more and more through technology in the form of hardware and code, coordinated through email and texting, and reviewed on the internet and television, a host of new problems arise for both the archivist and historian. These contemporary artistic productions, subject to the ephemerality of the media with which they are produced and by which they are documented, provide a provocative case study for the care and continuance of the cultural history of our society. In this paper, I hope to introduce the core technical and critical issues at work regarding ephemeral media and discuss possible steps for concretizing these works so that they may be (re)produced for future audiences and (re)presented for our physical libraries and future historians.