
SIFF: BUILDING YOUR ARCHIVE FROM THE GROUND UP

— By Drew Burns & Victoria Rincon —

SPONSOR ORGANIZATION - SIFF



Beginning in 1976 with the annual Seattle International Film Festival, then expanding into year-round programming, SIFF is a 501(c)(3) cultural arts organization whose mission is to create experiences that bring people together to discover extraordinary films from around the world. It is through the art of cinema that SIFF fosters a community that is more informed, aware and alive.

The SIFF Archive is designed to showcase the long and remarkable history of the festival, as well as to act as a repository for the unique filmmaking history of Seattle and the Pacific Northwest more broadly.

LET'S MEET THE TEAM!

Drew Burns

- 2024 MLIS graduate
- Specializing in academic librarianship, archives, and preservation
- Longtime interest in film archiving
- Hopes to go into a career in media archiving and preservation

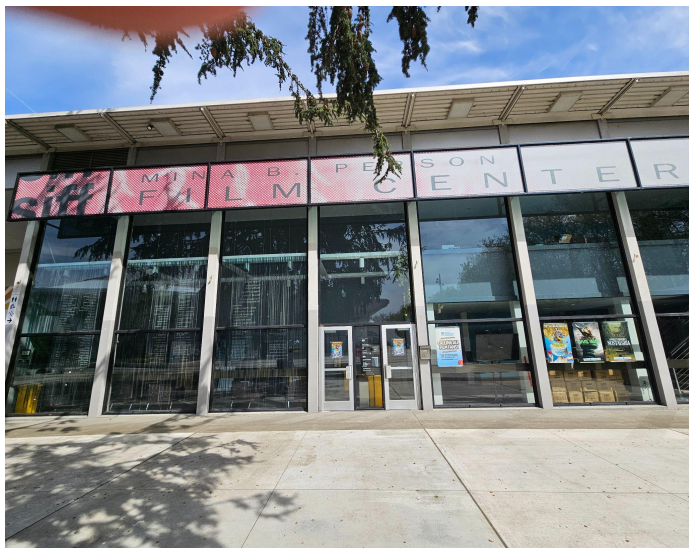


Victoria Rincon

- 2024 MLIS graduate
- Specializing in archives, special collections, preservation, and academics
- Interested in learning how to preserve unique items
- Hoping to find herself one day at an archive, special collection, or a museum



PROJECT OBJECTIVES



- The SIFF 50th Anniversary Archive project was broken up into two phases:
 - Phase One, which we did not participate in, involved creating an inventory of the approximately 9,000 separate and unique items that were the property of SIFF, contained both on- and off-site.
 - Phase Two, which began in January of 2024, involved us scanning, photographing, or otherwise cataloging many of these items, to be included in the online SIFF Archive, which finally went active on May 1, 2024.
- Our objective was to take the various categories of items that the SIFF staff deemed worthy of preservation, and either put them online, or physically store them so they would be accessible to future archivists and researchers.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES, CONTD.

PHYSICAL ARCHIVE

- Primarily made up of festival catalogs and brochures, buttons, t-shirts, and other ephemera going back to the 1970s.
- Stored on-site in acid-free boxes and other appropriate containers.
- Identified with unique markers that we made sure could be easily identified and added to by people who would work on the project in the future.

DIGITAL ARCHIVE

- Primarily scans of festival catalogs, as well as uploads of retrospectives of actors and directors who have visited SIFF over the years.
- Also includes video copies of short films by various local and first-time directors.
- Acts as a repository for the wealth of filmmaking talent from the Seattle area and from the Pacific Northwest more generally.

KEY PROJECT INSIGHTS

- In addition to adding items to the archives website, we were also tasked with creating documents such as a preservation plan and a finding aid.
- These documents would help future archivists understand our categorization system, and prove to be useful first steps in building a stable foundation for adding new materials to the archive.



Your Approach Towards a Solution / Key Features / Surprises

- Copyright restrictions
 - There were a significant number of items that we could not make public on the online archive. Most notably, videos of film retrospectives given by actors, and short films that SIFF did not own. There were also copies or fragments of films that were not in the public domain that we could not share.
- Technical issues with equipment
 - We were using modern laptops with CDs that were made decades ago. Our equipment required the use of external CD drives which would work for a few hours then stop reading the disc properly.
- Technical issues with digital files
 - Some of the files were corrupted or incompatible with our software making it difficult to assess what they were. Thus they were not included on the archive.
- Communication difficulties
 - During the winter quarter we had conflicting schedules and could not come in to SIFF on the same day. While not debilitating it did make being on the same page a bit difficult. It did however, improve our ability to coordinate and accommodate for each other's time.



EVALUATION OF PROJECT EXPERIENCE



- Overall, this was a very positive experience for the both of us. We got to lay the groundwork for an archive in a place where there was not one previously.
- Our shared interest in archiving led us to take an active interest in how materials of different origin and across different formats were categorized within a larger system, and also gave us the confidence to create our own filing system for those materials.
- This project gave us the experience of working with a large organization that acts as a repository of cultural history.

Next Steps Beyond Capstone

- There are already plans to bring in a project archivist to take over the development of the SIFF archive.
- We are leaving behind a finding aid that can be used as a reference should more physical items be donated to SIFF's collection.
- We would recommend thoroughly reexamining all the digital media from the CDs, with proper equipment SIFF may be able to access the files that we could not.
- Take a more active role in contacting the FOOLS Serious group, they have a wealth of knowledge regarding SIFF, it's history, and how the film festival has changed since its inception.
- Apply for larger grants that can help make the SIFF archive more prominent in the study of film. With its reputation, we believe that in time SIFF can become a valuable resource for researchers and academics who have devoted themselves to this art form.

