GLo
PAC
G

global
performing
arts
consortium

On with the Show
Access to the World's Performing Arts through Museums and Libraries

Abstract

This proposal is an outgrowth of Cornell University Library's active participation in the Global Performing Arts Consortium (GloPAC), an international consortium of individuals and institutions committed to using innovative digital technologies to create important multimedia information resources for the study of the performing arts. We propose a three-year project to test and develop a metadata structure for the Global Performing Arts Database (GloPAD) that will have wide applicability and can serve as the foundation for an international metadata standard for the performing arts. As part of this development, we will also design a series of tools including data entry templates, information managers, an online help system, and special user interface features to expedite both the ingest and discovery processes. The metadata structure and the tools will be readily adaptable by museums, libraries, and scholarly associations for use in local resources and for other purposes.

There is an urgent need for a metadata standard for the performing arts. Existing standards fail to provide a satisfactory framework for describing performance, a complex event that often has multiple creators and participants. Yet it is exactly this complexity—the ephemeral nature of the performing arts, their dependence on image and sound, the involvement of multiple creators—that makes the use of digital technologies in the study of performance particularly potent. Without a satisfactory metadata structure, however, the potential for exploration and study of the performing arts in the virtual environment cannot be fully exploited. No single museum or library on their own can devote the resources to develop a full metadata structure for the performing arts that could serve as a standard in the field. The consortial work that has already been done by GloPAC in this area, combined with the joint effort of the participants in "On with the Show," has the potential to meet this need for all museums and libraries with performing arts collections.

Cornell and its five partners—the Museum of the City of New York, the St. Petersburg (Russia) Museum of Theatre and Music, the San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum, the Gertrude Stein Repertory Theatre, and the University of Washington Libraries—along with other participating institutions will test, evaluate, and refine the current prototype metadata structure of GloPAD, which has been developed over the past three years. As part of this process, these institutions will digitize more than 2,000 items from their performing arts collections and create records based on the GloPAD metadata structure. In addition, consultations with metadata experts and a series of metadata development workshops will aid in the evaluation and development of the metadata structure and the related tools.

By the end of the project, libraries and museums worldwide will have an effective metadata structure accompanied by a collection of online tools and templates with which to describe their performing arts holdings. They will also be able to provide wide access to their collections by including digitized images of materials from their collections in GloPAD. Equally important, the American public (and indeed people around the world) will have immediate access to a database of over 5,000 images and video clips linked to reliable, in-depth information. The availability of this digital performing arts resource to students, scholars, artists, and interested people of all ages will revolutionize the ways in which the performing arts are studied, researched, created, and enjoyed.