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BAM receives \$1 million dollar grant from the Leon Levy Foundation

Four-year gift will finance the cataloging of historical archives, culminating in the launch of publicly accessible Leon Levy BAM Digital Archive in Spring 2015

Brooklyn, NY/Aug 2, 2012—BAM has been awarded a four-year, \$1 million grant from the Leon Levy Foundation toward the creation and naming of the Leon Levy BAM Digital Archive, scheduled to launch in May 2015. The generous grant will enable the oldest performing arts center in the US to share, for the first time, a comprehensive selection of its unique archival holdings from the BAM Hamm Archives—which include everything from Civil War memorabilia to institutional correspondence with some of the 20th century’s most iconic artists—on a broader scale than ever before, putting BAM in the vanguard of performing arts archives worldwide. Both the four-year cataloging and digitization process, which BAM intends to make as open as possible via a series of symposiums, as well as the final result—a publicly accessible and searchable digital archive—will be a resonant resource for performing arts researchers, historians, peer cultural organizations, and the general public.

Shelby White, founding trustee of the Leon Levy Foundation, says: “Over the past several years, the Foundation has initiated a major effort to help leading cultural institutions care for and provide access to their important archival holdings. We are delighted to add BAM and its rich history to that initiative.”

“The Leon Levy Foundation, under the leadership of Shelby White, is an indispensable booster of Brooklyn, from the Brooklyn Botanic Garden to the Brooklyn Public Library,” says BAM President Karen Brooks Hopkins. “BAM shares this enthusiasm and looks forward to using this generous grant to dramatically enhance the institution’s ability to share its story—which in many ways parallels that of our beloved borough—with a dynamically expanded audience via the Leon Levy BAM Digital Archive.”

About the Leon Levy BAM Digital Archive & the BAM Hamm Archives

The Leon Levy BAM Digital Archive will make materials from the BAM Hamm Archives widely available via a searchable online portal to a comprehensive selection of its catalog and digital assets, permanently hosted on BAM.org and scheduled for launch in spring 2015. “Not only will the Leon Levy BAM Digital Archive enable us to showcase BAM’s amazing collection in a more far-reaching way than ever before,” says BAM Hamm Archives Director Sharon Lehner. “But it will also allow us to share our newfound expertise with a growing community of performing arts archives in the process of building their own digital collections, thereby making a meaningful contribution to this emerging field.”

The BAM Hamm Archives documents the history of the oldest performing arts center in the US through materials and artifacts chronicling the artists, works, and cultural movements that define contemporary performance. The collection, containing approximately 3,000 feet of materials dating from 1856 to the present, is an important record of the contemporary performing arts and the borough of Brooklyn. In addition, BAM’s comprehensive institutional files—including the papers of BAM’s President Emeritus Harvey Lichtenstein, who led the institution from 1967 to 1999—document BAM’s continued cultural importance. BAM was unable to establish a formal archives until 1995; years of improper storage and fluctuating environmental conditions led to the deterioration of some rare materials. But, over the course of the past three years, and thanks to the support of the Leon Levy Foundation, BAM has been able to preserve and expand its collection, as well as make its holdings more accessible to researchers and the general public.

Over the next four years, BAM will digitize and catalog key materials relating to BAM and the performing arts; develop the infrastructure to process new digital assets as they are created; and design and build a multi-faceted online portal. By the end of the project, BAM will have in-house systems in place to streamline access to and submission of archival data; a growing archive of properly cataloged and digitized material; a replicable set of software tools and archival practices that will contribute to the emerging and growing field of performing arts archives in New York City and around the world; and a series of online mechanisms ensuring access to the collection, culminating with the launch of the Leon Levy BAM Digital Archive. In keeping with the overall project’s spirit of open-source information, over the course of the four years leading up to the public launch, BAM will host symposiums for other performing arts archivists and interested peer organization dedicated to sharing best practices

About the Leon Levy Foundation

The Leon Levy Foundation, founded in 2004, is a private, not-for-profit foundation created from the estate of Leon Levy, an investor with a longstanding commitment to philanthropy. The Foundation’s overarching goal is to support scholarship at the highest level, ultimately advancing knowledge and improving the lives of individuals and society at large.

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