

**Interview of Dr. Gary Galván**  
**By Gina L. Bixler**  
**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**  
**February 5, 2016**

**Bixler:** This is Gina Bixler, the Edwin A. Fleisher Collection of Orchestral Music's project consultant and historian. I'm here at the Free Library of Philadelphia with Dr. Gary Galván, curator of the Fleisher Collection. I previously interviewed him last February, one month into his appointment as curator. Today is Friday February 5, 2016, exactly one year later. We both agreed that it would be interesting to do a follow-up interview examining the changes that have been implemented in the first year of Dr. Galván's curatorship and charting the collection's course for the upcoming year. Hello, Dr. Galván.

**Galván:** Hi, Gina Bixler.

**Bixler:** I have to ask you, do I have your permission to record this?

**Galván:** You do indeed; have my permission to record this.

**Bixler:** Okay, cool. So, before we get into specifics, what is your overall impression of how your first year as curator went?

**Galván:** Great. (*Laughs*) In a word: "great." We've got a lot of attention. We've accomplished a lot of things over the past year. There's been dramatic observable changes and we're getting feedback from all over the organization about it.

**Bixler:** So, you started off fiscal year 2016, which runs from July 1<sup>st</sup> to June 30<sup>th</sup> for each year. You started the fiscal year for 2016 with three strategic initiatives and they were an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] grant for preserving Fleisher's rare and unique recordings of American symphonic works, informative podcasts about the collection, and completion of the collection's U works. So what I would like you to do is to take us through each strategic initiative and talk about what the objectives were and what kind of progress you've made.

**Galván:** Sure. I was only here for a couple of weeks when I learned about Strategic Initiatives and their desire to get ideas. I think I had about two or three days to throw some ideas together. The first one of them is – and it's kind of fun because welcome, Gina Bixler, who last year was simply a graduate student at La Salle [University] – and that's not simply a graduate student, but *was* a graduate student and now you are a consultant with us, largely because of our first initiative. You, yourself had done more than 400 hours of work here at the Fleisher Collection documenting what we had in both rare and unique recordings and it spring-boarded us to seeing the we had rare and unique recordings. At the time it was not a proposal to be an NEH grant. It was simply a proposal that we should be able to get the recordings digitized. That was the primary objective, that they were singular pieces of Americana.

Strategic Initiatives also thought it was a good idea. They're the ones who identify good projects and raise them to the next level; pass them on to Development, and our Development Department in the Free Library of Philadelphia and the [Free Library of Philadelphia] Foundation finds grant opportunities and financial support for worthwhile projects. Around June they brought information back to us that a National Endowment for the Humanities grant would be appropriate for that. It's a \$350,000 grant. The Fleisher Collection is fortunate enough to have a very good annual stipend that we get from the endowment that Fleisher left us. We were able to offer, not necessarily matching, but offer support for various parts of it. They put us together; development put us together with a grant writer and had us put together the proposal for a National Endowment for Humanities grant to digitize the recordings. We skipped the step of doing a preparation grant because, as I pointed out Ms. Bixler, you did all the 400 hours of ground work to get us to the point where we knew what we had and that it was unique. That gave me an opportunity to provide an opportunity back to a La Salle graduate student, yourself, to come in and work with us on the grant write and at the end of July – in fact, most of the month of July we spent writing the grant with the Development Department and got that in. We find out next month, in March, whether we actually get the grant. We formed partnerships with six other institutions, including the Library of Congress, New York Public Library, Los Angeles [Public] Library, Dallas [Public Library], [The Public Library of] Cincinnati, and Minneapolis [Central Library], was the last one, yeah. (*final institution prompted by Bixler*)

**Bixler:** What are so important about these recordings? Why apply for the grant? What was the whole story behind them?

**Galván:** Sure. It's primarily the Koussevitzky Foundation that recorded these between around '57 and 1972. They are primarily reel-to-reel tape recordings of contemporaneous works, living composers obviously, and predominately premieres of works with orchestras, major North American orchestras. Only a handful, and I mean literally about a handful maybe five or six have ever been commercially released. They were given to seven different institutions, three of whom disposed all of them and four of whom – we are – and the final four, boy I'm falling apart with words. This is going to be a horrible transcription. The four remaining institutions, we are the institution that has the majority of the tapes and we were able to set up relationship with the other institutions that if there's tapes we don't have, they will provide them for us and the caveat is at the end of the three year project we will provide digitized copies of everything to the institutions that are cooperating with us. We have very broad rights and this is going to feed the *Discoveries*<sup>1</sup> program as well.

**Bixler:** So that's part of the dissemination effort of the project

**Galván:** Yes, and as none of these were commercially released, many of the recordings are either very rare or completely unique to our institution. They just don't exist elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup> Fleisher's monthly WRTI radio program, *Discoveries from the Fleisher Collection*

**Bixler:** Let's move on to your second strategic initiative: informative podcasts about the collection.

**Galván:** Right. We were looking at wanting to do small one minute, two minute, short videos introducing different ideas such as: "What is an orchestra? What is an orchestral performance set? Who was Edwin Fleisher?" That idea has been rolled in in part to the NEH proposal 'cause we're going to look at using our PR Department in doing documenting what goes on in this project. So, that'll give us an opportunity to talk about different points, introduce – essentially guide learning about what the project is, what we're doing with the project, and have an opportunity to spin off and talk about what are performance sets and why these recordings are rare. So, that's been rolled into there. We're still looking at doing more with that as we look at other projects in the future, but that has not been independently funded. Part of it has been funded in the NEH grant.

The last one is completion of the collection's U works. We have – and U works, they've come to be known as "uncirculated." That is not completely true. The most accurate assessment of what our U works are is they are "unfinished" sets, and that's not completely true because many of those sets have been completed over the years. That'll get into some of things that we're going to try to do in future years, but the sets that are unfinished, our goal is to identify which of the sets are rare or unique to our collection, and there are many, and work on creating complete performance sets out of those. That goes hand in hand with some of the NEH recording project. If any of the works on the recordings are represented by U works in our collection, and the scores and sets are not available elsewhere, that gives us an opportunity to focus on those and develop those as complete sets so we can get the music from the page to the stage and get it back into the ears of the public.

**Bixler:** And that was one of the advantages to actually having the recordings – I'm jumping back a little bit – here because we had scores. Where the other libraries that had these recordings just had the music and not that that's not advantageous in its own way, but why they should have been kept here is that way a conductor –The whole idea of the project was to have conductors come listen to the premiere recordings so that they would get these relatively unknown works out and, you know, why not do it at Fleisher because you could also study a score at the same time. Is that correct?

**Galván:** That's absolutely right. That's spot on. Initially, and you've picked up on something there, is that initially these recordings only went to six – to five institutions – they did not come to the Fleisher Collection initially. Six institutions, we're number seven. (*Bixler confirms*) They went to six; we're number seven. The seven sisters and it was after the first year that curator Ted Seder contacted the Koussevitzky Foundation with exactly what you pointed out: the advantage of them being here so that the recordings could accompany scores. So that

conductors could not only see, but also hear what the music was all about and inspire them to perform these.

9:12

**Bixler:** Okay, so I think that takes us through... Oh wait, let me ask you one thing about the U works before we complete fiscal year 2016.

**Galván:** Sure.

**Bixler:** Now I know you mentioned that some of the ones that would be worked on could be part of the recording project, but how else would you prioritize what's rare and unique because there really are so many rare and unique works here it almost kind of loses the meaning of the term within this collection.

**Galván:** (*laughs*) Yeah, we're...

**Bixler:** And I mean that in a good way!

**Galván:** Yes, yes we're an unusual collection in that we have rare works, but rare works are not a rarity here. But yes, many of the works that we have are rare and in some cases unique. We're blessed with a really, good, and talented collection assistant, Saul Sandler, who has taken on the challenge of looking at these and continually brings works to me that he says are rare and unique. We're digitizing these. He's digitizing them as quickly as he can so that we're capturing the information as it exists. We have not taken the project on full steam yet. That again is something that I'm going to push for, but we're slowly identifying what these are and we're right now developing them, essentially, on an as-needed basis.

There's a flute player recently who contacted us who actually works as a copyists as well. He's identified a couple of rare pieces in his own research of what we have and requested the parts. Now, initially we just don't send out parts as they are, but knowing that he was a copyist, looking at his background and his reputation, we've made a deal with him where we will lend him the parts pro bono or scans of the works pro bono. They're all public domain works. He's producing a score and parts from them and then he provides the files back to us so that now we can manipulate the Finale or the Sibelius files to our standards and print out sets from them and have a full performance set available here. So that's one of things that we're doing. How are we identifying them? Right now slowly, but the goal is to eventually get through all of them and find out what's rare and unique and produce sets from those so that they can be heard back on the stage again.

**Bixler:** So how is the Fleisher Collection working with other departments at the Free Library's Central Branch and even with institutions outside the Free Library now that you have taken over?

11:45

**Galván:** The position that I hold, curator, was redefined partially out of my contract as a project consultant, as a musicologist, as specialist within these areas. We developed curators throughout the institution over other collections: Children's Literature Research Collection, the Rare Books Department, the Theatre Collection within the Rare Books Department, Print and Pictures, the Map Collection, and the organization has appointed curators of those collections much in line with what I am as a curator. The curator position overall within the library has risen to the level of, essentially, a library coordinator and the other curators and I meet on a monthly basis with the Assistant Chief of Central Public Services Division, Janine Pollock, and we discuss issues that affect us all.

For example, environment is an issue with any of our rare items. I mean we have paper here, we've got years and years of bad, high acid content paper. Rare Books has items that are on fragile paper. Print and Pictures has specifically that: they've got prints and pictures that are subject – well, they're at the mercy of the environment. It would be relatively easy for any of us as an individual department to monitor our own area, talk about inconsistencies in lighting and heat and humidity, and talk about and identify high risk areas, and identify whether our collections are at high risk. However, with us getting together as curators, we see that we as individual departments are not the only ones dealing with these issues. So it gives us an opportunity to come to the table as a group, identify, essentially, what are system wide challenges and take them on as a group with the ear of the assistant chief.

To that end, one of things that we started this past year, actually in December we launched it, we've purchased environmental monitoring devices, something called a PEM 2. It's "Physical Environment Monitor?" I'm not exactly [sure] what the PEM 2 stands for. They monitor temperature, humidity; they preserve the data constantly; we use thumb drives in order to pull the data out of them. Well, Fleisher purchased ten of these. We've placed them in strategic locations around all of our areas: the main room in 125 on the first floor, the balcony in the main room, the vault where we sit now, which is probably one of the most temperature stable environments we have, within the closed stacks that we have, and then within our print room. Fleisher, out of our endowment, we paid for a subscription to a service for a company that monitors the environment – monitors what's going on in Philadelphia as far as weather – and provides us graphs of everything that we have. We purchased, at Fleisher, the subscription that allows us to monitor up to I think it was 30 areas and I brought that back to the table of curators and said, "Essentially, what we will do is we will support the subscription to the software and we will have Collection Care collect data from everybody, from all the areas." So now at the end of the calendar year in 2016, we will be able to have, not just information from the Fleisher Collection on the first floor, but we will have environmental information from the basement, where oversized items are stored, where there was actually a fire and a small flood this past Christmas, on the ground floor with Children's Literature, first floor with us and first floor mezzanine with us, second floor with Print and Pictures and the second floor mezzanine with Print and Pictures, the fourth – I'm sorry the third floor with Rare Book[s] Department, and I'm

not sure if anybody is monitoring fourth floor. I'm not quite sure. I have to look back at the data 'cause I got to look at it for the first time this month and then I also neglected to mention Collection Care is monitoring their own area. I just today got to look at the data from the past month and I can look at it from any area in the building. Again, the major advantage to this is that we're a team player and in December 2016 Collection Care can offer to administration a picture of the entire building and this is great because instead of us coming out and saying, "This is our environment. We're at high risk. We need to change our environment," and doing one location, essentially, doing a Band-Aid within the building; we're able to speak out as an organization, team up as curators of valuable collections, present that information to the administration, and the administration can on their behalf look at the entire building and perhaps go for some kind of a super-grant in order to change the entire building, not just our environment.

17:36

**Bixler:** So you just mentioned the administration. I know you've been trying to catch their eye in other ways too. I've noticed some changes since I started as even an intern back in 2013 with even just the basic layout of the collection.

**Galván:** Oh yeah, one of the phrases that Siobhan had like to use, Siobhan Reardon<sup>2</sup>, liked to use was "re-envisioning our spaces." Fleisher Collection exists in what used to be the executive boardroom. There has been chatter back and forth about them wanting to redo it. It's a gorgeous room. It's a huge room. Some 1,000 square feet plus. We have a very high ceiling with a mezzanine level. Our walls in the main room and on the mezzanine are lined with the collection, but we have all our desks there. We've got file cabinets down there. We had card catalogues down there and it really blocked a lot of the vision of the room. So when I walked in, I walked in with new eyes and thought, "We need to open up this space. We need to let people see this incredible hand-carved marble fireplace that is a feature of the room." So I really encouraged everybody to get things off of their desks, lower the profile. We've taken boxes off of the mezzanine level balcony. We've put them back into storage areas. We've cleared off desks as much as we could. We have bookshelves where there were books on top of the bookshelves. We've taken those off, put them in a hallway full of bookshelves in between us and Music [Department] and visually, dynamically, we've opened up the room. We've got rid of vertical blinds that were dusty and broken. Talked to the buildings people and we had very nice shades installed that match everywhere else on the first floor that has been redesigned. They match the executive offices; they match the Philbrick Popular Library area that was completely renovated, the music area that was completely renovated. My office, our room, Fleisher, joins with Siobhan Reardon's office and frequently when there are events going on that block the regular door to her office, we'll get her coming through the back door of the office. Essentially, we're the back door escape hatch as it were, jokingly. But she often walks through our office and I thought it was important that we show visually, dynamically that we're changing. There

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<sup>2</sup> President and Executive Director of the Free Library of Philadelphia

are days where she'll walk in through the back of her office and then six VP's will follow her at some point during the day. Knowing this, it gave me an opportunity to show what's going in Fleisher and we've received remarks from everybody that walks through: that visually dynamically we have changed.

20:42

And I say it again, not unlike we're doing with curators in that we're partnering and we're trying to change things and make it a livable space. Fleisher is open 9 to 5, Monday through Friday and after five o'clock the room isn't used. What if we were to get compressed shelving in our closed stacks? Move anything that's free standing on the floor up into those closed stacks, take our 10 file cabinets of correspondence and get them into proper preservation boxes, get those digitized and get those up into the closed stacks, and really clear the floor down there. We could move the desks that we have out to the periphery and put a very large research table into the center of the room and, essentially, make it look like the board room looked or make it look not unlike the board room looked back in 1929. Then five o'clock, when we close for business, the board can have meetings in there in the evenings because most of the board meetings are in the evening anyway. It just provides us an opportunity to partner with administration and show how we are team players here.

**Bixler:** Now also with this new floorplan has come more work spaces and I know in our last interview you talked about wanting to partner with institutions like Temple [University] and U Penn [University of Pennsylvania] in order to bring in some work study students or even researchers because this a collection that's filled with research topics and dissertation topics. So if you want to talk a little bit more about that, that'd be cool.

**Galván:** Indeed, that lights up the other part of the question that you asked: which is partnering with outside organizations. As the curators we are also talking to curators at Rosenbach Museum which is now part of the Free Library, at the Print Center which has an affiliation with the Free Library, at Mutter Museum which has an affiliation with the Free Library, and we're reaching out to other organizations. All of us who are curators have become part of PACSCL,<sup>3</sup> which is – you're going to need to look that up – it's like Philadelphia Area... It's about Philadelphia area conservation specialists. The other issue is that when I came here I knew that the four core full time people – Stu [Serio], my assistant curator, me, and then Abu [Tilghman] and Carol [Eresian], who are our library assistants – we are just busy as it is with circulation. In fact, Stu and Carol and Abu are the heart, they're – Stu's the innervation to the heart and Carol and Abu are our heart who keep the works pumping into and out of the collection. I get to be the face. I get to be the PR person, but it means that I'm missing a lot of research; which I why I pulled you in as a consultant because you're helping me handle a lot of these projects. So, there are many other things going on that need to be done. There's elephant projects everywhere. It's like eating an elephant. We got to do it one bite at a time. So over this past year we've brought

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<sup>3</sup> Philadelphia Area Consortium of Special Collections Libraries

in a number of volunteers, a number of work study students. I have work study students right now from the Community College of Philadelphia. I have a volunteer from Drexel University. I'm going to be outreaching in the next month to University of Pennsylvania and Temple University, who both have musicology programs because as I love to say: "You can't throw a rock around here because it's dangerous, but also you can't throw a rock around here without hitting a dissertation topic." It's an opportunity to bring students in to get research done and get projects done that can help us as well.

24:27

**Bixler:** Everyone will remember that joke from the *last* interview (*laughs*).

**Galván:** Did I say that then too?

**Bixler:** You did.

**Galván:** The rock? Oh gosh...

**Bixler:** That's okay. I'm just messing with you. Alright, well we've talked about what you've accomplished over this last year. We've talked about, you know, day-to-day changes and day-to-day workings at the collection. So let's talk about now: strategic initiatives for fiscal year 2017. Let's talk about where you're going.

**Galván:** I have a meeting next month with two very highly reputed copyists that were recommended not only by my assistant curator, Stu Serio, who was a librarian with – he was a music library intern with Philadelphia Orchestra under Clint Nieweg. Clint Nieweg is a highly reputed music librarian. He's the one who is behind the formation of the Major Orchestra Librarian Association, also known as MOLA. We have worked with Clint for some time, with other copyists, where we get re-engraved sets back. He reviews these and hands them back to the copyists. It goes back and forth sometimes for up to a year before we come up with a final product that is worthy of putting in front of an orchestra. So next month I have a meeting with two more copyists that we're going to put to work on projects: on Cuban music, on pulling some of the items that are within the recordings that we have focused for NEH, and looking at some of our U works. We're going to work with them and with Clint in starting to produce newly engraved sets. And I want to make that a regular practice here and just commit to that every year. We've got the budget to do it; let's do it. Let's get the music out there. And that's the way to tackle the U works and other works.

**Bixler:** So you – before you move on to the next topic, sorry.

**Galván:** Sure.

**Bixler:** I want to point out you mentioned MOLA and it got me thinking about the PR hound that you've become for the library.

26:17

**Galván:** *(laughs)* I'm the face, yes.

**Bixler:** And so, what kind of conferences you attend to promote Fleisher. So if you could talk a little about that.

**Galván:** Sure. This past year, within the first year of being curator, I've attended two organized conferences: the College Music Society conference up in Boston in the spring of 2015 and then the Major Orchestra Librarians Association, we sponsored a table – an information table – at the MOLA conference in Montreal, in Quebec. We worked with our PR Department, External Relations, Sandra Horrocks is the vice president in charge of that and she worked with us to create a brand: a brand approved banner for the Fleisher collection, of which we have two of the banners now; the appropriate and approved colors, the appropriate and approved fonts, and a design that they went with. We have those available for future conferences. I happened to be out in Tennessee and Louisiana this past fall and took advantage to go to meet with music librarians, both of the Nashville [Symphony] Orchestra and the Louisiana Philharmonic and talk to them about some of our goals. So yeah, public relations is there. I've been fortunate enough to be asked to introduce different musical events that are here. This past November I met with Yannick Nezet-Seguin from the Philadelphia Orchestra in order to start reaching out to one of our major important partners here and re-establish what [Leopold] Stokowski and what Eugene Ormandy had with us, with the Fleisher Collection. Yannick seemed very pleased. He was hit with the "wow factor" coming into the Fleisher Collection and I think is just on the edge of realizing what a gem is here at the Fleisher Collection.

**Bixler:** Okay. So, sorry to take you off on that segue, but...

**Galván:** That's okay.

**Bixler:** I think it was important.

**Galván:** That's part – that's just the edge of the PR piece.

**Bixler:** Yes, well, this is a comprehensive overview of everything.

**Galván:** Yes.

**Bixler:** So let's get back into strategic initiatives for 2017. So –

**Galván:** We talked about hiring copyists.

**Bixler:** Yes.

**Galván:** We've identified some 26 works by Cuban composers that do not appear to exist anywhere else. We have more than that by Cuban composers, but I've identified some 26 that don't even appear to exist in Cuba. So the plan is to head to Cuba within the next month or two

and speak to the government officials who are in charge of music because everything's controlled by government, find out what we have permission to reproduce, reproduce sets, re-engage sets, and coordinate something with a performing organization up here, performing organization down there, perhaps get an exchange of musicians, and present a newly engraved set that might have been neglected and lost to the Cuban government as a gift. We will say much more than any politician from either side of the aisle could ever say. We can say that through the arts, something that can't be said through politicians for sure. So that's, you know, one of the things we talked about there.

29:39

Also one of the ideas that – and one of the reasons I saw you as a really incredibly promising young professional is that you had the inspired idea of: “Hey, well, you know I've read your stuff and you've obviously pointed out that the Fleisher family was important in Philadelphia and they're a major Jewish part.” You were the one who invited me to go look at an exhibit at the National Museum of American Jewish History and offered the idea that we should do something there. It's been my good fortune to really put you at the lead of that project and we're looking at, I'm thinking probably upwards of half a million dollar proposal to put together over the next year – two years – to put a special exhibit on at the National Museum of American Jewish History that can become a traveling exhibit. Where we can take artifacts and information and sound bites and other archival treasures and let the public see what influence this major important American Jewish family had, not only on local Philadelphia culture, but also, through Fleisher, world culture: musical culture. Those are two of the biggies. Again, getting back to the U works, bringing in more researchers I think is important, but, again, these other two items are – the Cuban music and the National Museum of American Jewish History – are big projects for focusing on this next year.

**Bixler:** And the Philadelphia History Museum.

**Galván:** Indeed, yeah the traveling exhibit should go to many places.

**Bixler:** Yes.

**Galván:** And that's just the edge of it. Those two Philadelphia based organizations are perfect places to take them, but that's not to say that there aren't more. Even opening up exhibits, you know smaller exhibits, here within the library. You know, if I get my, what was – I put out as my five year plan of converting the downstairs room to an open kind of board room again – that gives us an opportunity maybe even to set up some of the exhibits within that room and then as board members come in we can also inspire their curiosity and guide their learning about what a treasure Fleisher Collection is to the Free Library of Philadelphia

**Bixler:** Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

32:06

**Galván:** It's exciting. You know, it's – I'm still thrilled that every two weeks they actually pay me to do this. I think it's amazing. I'm working in one of the most important music collections that's ever existed and it's fun to set the course and work with people who are interested and work with an incredible number of talented people. I think it's great to have brought attention to the collection, particularly in administrative circles, that I think hasn't been there for a number of years and it gives us an opportunity to push forward the library mission and show what team players we are.

**Bixler:** Well, I think it's safe to say that you've definitely brought some attention to all the exciting new things that you've been doing at the collection. So, thank you very much for your time.

**Galván:** And thank you for your time and your participation; becoming part of the Fleisher family.

33:06

**End of Interview**