

Site Evaluations

by

Ben Peeples

The Paley Center for Media

William S. Paley is the man who built the Columbia Broadcasting System up from a radio network to one of the first and still most powerful TV networks in the world. CBS would become one of the biggest corporations in America, becoming an enormous media conglomerate. Paley was forward thinking in trying to preserve mediums outside of film and literature. His desire was to bring equivalent preservation to television, and in 1975, he founded the Museum of Broadcasting. The museum opened in 1976 on 1 East 53rd Street. The emphasis was on archiving and preserving America's television heritage (this work was actually done outside of New York due to storage). Paley's concern with losing television programs was well-founded. Until the advent of inexpensive videotaping methods, tapes were extremely expensive, and reused over and over again, the thought being most programs had no value outside their initial broadcast. Much like the pre-sound era of film, the early days of television are mostly lost due to practices like this.

The Museum of Broadcasting is odd in that it began to shift its focus considerably to access, to a degree that most hadn't even dreamed of. Patrons could visit and view programs, many of which have never been seen outside of the center. Patrons cannot take programs with them, instead they are seated at consoles and make selections from a vast library of thousands of television programs. In 1991, the center was renamed and moved. It became The Museum of Television and Radio at 21 West 52nd Street. It was a truly unique attraction. Before YouTube and the ease of finding vintage TV shows on DVD, it was significantly difficult to find programming that you could truly watch at your own leisure unless you happened to tape it or catch it when it aired.

As the decades passed, the center under its various names located hundreds if not thousands of unique and long-thought-lost pieces of programming on various formats. With the new awareness of the rarity of broadcasts made before the 70s, donations flooded in from all over the world, including many unique recordings of game shows such as the Chuck

Woolery-hosted variation of "Wheel of Fortune". As mentioned before, DVD and YouTube changed the face of television, especially in terms of its accessibility to the public. In spite of this, the museum continued to thrive. In 2007, the Museum of Television and Radio was rechristened as The Paley Center, and moved a few buildings from its former site to 25 West 52nd Street.

As both the Museum of Television and Radio and as The Paley Center, the site has hosted an array of retrospective screenings of classic TV shows, documentaries, and seminars with contemporary TV personalities, most notably the cast and writing team of shows like "Arrested Development" and "The Larry Sanders Show". In the past, the center had taped discussions with TV legends like Carol Burnett and Dick Van Dyke, some of which have been made available online and on DVD.

Fully embracing the shift to digital and the opened accessibility the internet provided, the Paley Center is currently working to digitize its vast holdings, and is slowly gathering bits and pieces of its library for use online so that viewers worldwide can get a sampling of their efforts. Its still a unique and enjoyable place to visit; effectively made the shift to digital, and is continuing to make good on its initial goals of preserving America's television legacy, past and present.

Museum of the Moving Image

In September of 1988, the former site of Paramount's east coast offices (in itself within spitting distance of the historic Astoria Studios, used since the dawn of cinema) became the American Museum of the Moving Image. The name was given to differentiate itself from the Museum of the Moving Image in London (now defunct). Over the past twenty-odd years, the Museum of the Moving Image has gone through significant change and expansion, including a massive retooling that doubled its size, which began in 2008 and concluded in January of 2011.

In spite of its reputation as a great revival venue, Museum of the Moving Image does not have its own film archive. Instead it rents prints or DCP files from studios, other archives, and film museums around the world. The theaters are capable of projecting 16mm, 35mm, and is one of the few places in the entire country that can project large format 65/70mm. It also was an early adapter of video projection, as well as digital projection in the early 2000s. All year long there are repertory screenings of classic and contemporary films, some tying into special exhibits in the museum proper (for instance, the Jim Henson exhibit showed every movie the subject was involved in, including rare early experimental work).

Moving Image also sponsors 'Pinewood Dialogues'; showings of recent films at the Director's Guild Theater in Manhattan with filmmakers present for a Q&A session after the feature.

Even without a working film archive, Moving Image has an incredible array of artifacts, not the least of which is a stunning assortment of cameras, including an original three-strip Technicolor camera (extremely rare due to most of them being converted to VistaVision cameras in the mid-1950s). MOMI also collects props, costumes, sketches, and even sections of sets from film and television shows. For over a decade they had the diner set from "Seinfeld" on the second floor of their museum. They are constantly adding to the collection; for classic props that have been with the museum for upwards of 15 years including a model from "Blade Runner", the 'head-twisting' puppet from "The Exorcist", costumes from "Altered States", and set designs for "The Silence of the Lambs"- new props from films like "Black Swan" are added intermittently.

Museum of the Moving Image also has an emphasis on video, computer and arcade games, collecting systems dating back from the 70s and up into the modern day. This is where the preservation aspect comes in. Comparatively, the Library of Congress has an expansive collection, but no real preservation plan in place apart from just keeping the systems and games around, while MOMI is committed to truly saving video games; striving to develop ways of preserving video game history with the same care other venues have taken

to film.

Moving Image also made its mark with a spin-off website launched for the 2008 election. The Living Room Candidate is a massive online-only collection of campaign ads and commercials dating back to 1952, built as a way for people to see the evolution of 'selling' a candidate to the public. The website garnered an enormous amount of publicity and attention on its launch, being featured in everything from The New York Times and NPR, to "The Colbert Report", where Lyndon Johnson's infamous 'Daisy' ad was excerpted.

Even without a proper film archive, the Museum of the Moving Image has established itself as the world's premier film museum and a unique case in interactive preservation. Not just content to make its mark in the world of film, MOMI has embraced all manner of media, bringing a new approach to the world of preservation.