

Friendscript

Positively Hilarious

Entertainer Arte Johnson donates papers to University Archives

Dig down deep for the roots of humor—and the human penchant to share it—and you’ll unearth a twining tangle of common experience, incongruity, word play, and even tragedy.

For Arte Johnson ’49 MEDIA, comedic genius arose from a desire to make laughter blossom in a positive way. Oh, and there’s also that thing about the bus.

“Chicago is made up of many ethnic islands, and people would be sitting around me and talking in their various ethnic dialects,” he once told *The New York Times* about riding public transport as a youth. “To me it was like music.”

Johnson would take that music and transpose it into a composition of unforgettable roles and spot-on accents—from the helmeted German soldier and park-bench skirt chaser on television’s *Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-In* to *The Love Boat*, the movies, and a variety of voices on books on tape. He entertained the world for more than half a century—from gigs in the Poconos to Emmy-worthy creations—working from the early 1950s until his retirement in 2006.

Now the University of Illinois holds the personal and professional papers of one of the iconic comic figures of the 20th century. This summer, Archives received 9.7 cubic feet of material from Johnson, who died in 2019 but always held his Alma Mater close to his heart.

A ‘Boat’-load of documents

Johnson’s contributions include 130 VHS tapes (from *Laugh-In*, *The Love Boat*, *The Smurfs*, commercials, movies, and talk-show appearances), signed television scripts, personal and professional photographs, autographs, and three personal scrapbooks containing newspaper



Photographs from the collection capture moments from Johnson’s career in entertainment.

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clippings, photos, and correspondence from throughout Johnson's career. There's even a hand-written envelope from science-fiction author Ray Bradbury.

The cataloguing of materials proved especially intriguing to Sarah Harris, MS '17 LIS, an Archives program officer, and Inbar Michael, a UI graduate student in library and information science, as the youngish people assigned the task were not exactly sure at first who Johnson was. Rather than work from their own memories of Johnson's performances, they turned to tactics such as cross-referencing the materials with YouTube clips to figure out the context of what the tapes contained.

But Harris, 31, a self-avowed aficionado of television and movies, says she loves the fact that the type of material contained in Johnson's donation is getting attention.

"I think the arts are so important in society as a whole," she said, "and I think it deserves as much respect as anything else in [these Archives] does. First and foremost, [Archives'] charge in life is to document the history of the university. . . . But at the same time, these materials from artists and comedians . . . also show the history of the university and what the university can bring to culture. And I think that's really special."

"Given his impact in the '60s and '70s, I think it's important for that to be preserved," the 22-year-old Michael said of Johnson's donation. "I'm sure that [comedy] has its place within history, and people might be looking for that as something very important [in that time period]."

Comedy chaos

If comedy is a mash-up of incongruities, the same might be said of Johnson's life. Entering the university at age 16, Arte (pronounced "ART-ee") flunked a reporting class but graduated in journalism. His

Hereditary Humor

Seems Arte wasn't the only one with a funny bone in the Johnson family. Younger brother Coslough '52 MEDIA also graduated from Illinois with a journalism degree, joined the world of show biz (as a producer and comedy writer), and won an Emmy for his efforts. In 1994, the prolific Coslough donated to the University Library 62 scripts from the first four seasons of *Laugh-In*, as well as 175 scripts from several other television variety series of the seventies. The funnyman passed away in March at age 91.



Arte (left) and Coslough in the early 1930s

well-known comic character, *Laugh-In*'s German soldier, was already in place before he met Gisela, his German-born wife (though he later named him after her brother Wolfgang). Johnson juggled the glitz of Hollywood with a quieter personal life, owning thousands of books and enjoying a nearly 52-year marriage. And rather than yearn for years to jump-start a theatrical career, he broke into show business on a whim one day after lunch.

Returning to his lackluster job at New York City's Viking Press, "he saw this long line on Broadway," Gisela (pronounced "GE-seh-lah") recounted. Discovering it was a casting call for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the young Johnson charmed his way to the front of the line, auditioned, and ended up with a small part as a 65-year-old man. By the mid-1950s, he had moved to Los Angeles, where his big break came with his time on *Laugh-In* from 1968 to 1971.

The show, which some consider a forerunner to today's *Saturday Night Live* with its irreverent tone, madcap nature, and resident acting troupe, made Johnson's reputation. With a talented cast that included Lily Tomlin, Goldie Hawn, and Ruth Buzzi, no other player harnessed a broader scope of zany characters than Johnson. Among his creations were Wolfgang (and his trademark comment, "verrry interesting"); the risqué Tyrone F. Horneigh (his favorite, according to Gisela); Indian guru Rabbi Shankar; and a silent man who constantly fell off a tricycle.

"It was really kind of pure and wonderful," Gisela said of *Laugh-In*. "You laughed belly laughs. . . . So I think it's a wonderful collection you have there from Arte."



Gisela and Arte celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary at the Mauna Kea Hotel in Hawaii

Love in the time of comedy

While Arte maintained a public profile known to many, he was unfamiliar to his future wife when they met in 1968. "I didn't own a television set," she said and was ignorant of his *Laugh-In* fame.

Gisela had emigrated to California in 1961 after surviving in Bremen, Germany, during World War II. As a 5-year-old in 1944, she and her family were buried alive for 26 hours in their home following an Allied bombing raid; for 10 years thereafter, the five of them lived in a one-room garden shack in Wildeshausen. American military personnel were stationed close by, and the family would trade eggs for cigarettes, which Gisela's father then bartered for food from local farmers. "That was when for the first time I got an orange" she said of her interactions with the Americans. "I knew when I grew up [that] I wanted to come to California where the oranges are."

But adjusting to life in the U.S. wasn't easy. By 1968, she had decided to permanently return to Germany that May. But in January, her friends convinced her to come to a charity event on Sunset Boulevard, where she met Arte. "Where do you come from?" he inquired upon seeing her. In an antisocial mood, she replied, "I come from the moon" (words that would later be inscribed in Arte's wedding ring).

But Arte persisted, and their first date in February lasted hours. "We talked about music, politics, art, travel, everything," Gisela said.



Inbar Michael (left) and Sarah Harris are cataloguing Johnson's materials.

A month later, they were engaged. By August, they had married.

Over the course of their marriage, Gisela accompanied Arte to all of his work sites and to the Illinois campus—"his pride and joy," she said. And while Arte may have failed his academic reporting class, he did spend a goodly amount of time in the Main Library, as he lovingly recalled in a Winter 1979-80 issue of *Friendscript*:

Now, I've been called many things in my life, but "bibliophile" is the one term I appreciate most. Through the years I have fortunately found myself in a position to acquire a fine library and to visit some of the world's finest as well. I've seen the Book of Kells in the library at Trinity College in Dublin, and an original Gutenberg Bible at the Museum of Printing in Mainz, Germany. I've visited the Bodleian Library at Oxford; I've been to the library at UCLA, the Folger in Washington, and in the stacks

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Returning the Voices to Our Muted Songbirds

By Scott W. Schwartz, Archivist for Music and Fine Arts and Director Sousa Archives and Center for American Music

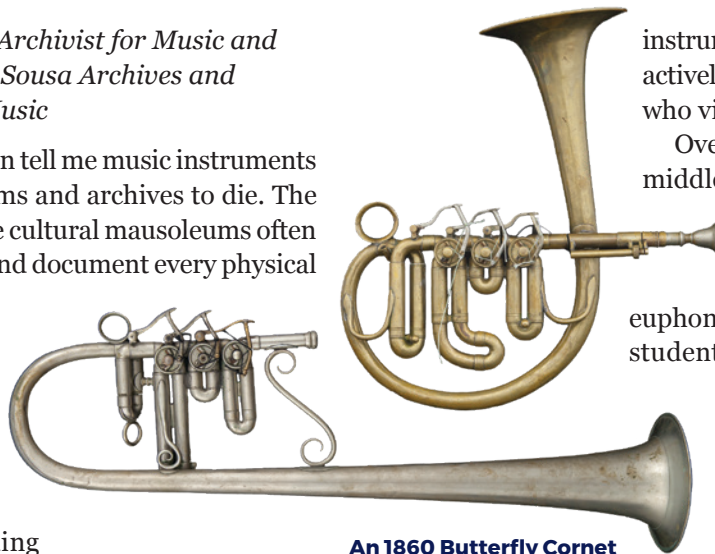
My colleagues often tell me music instruments come to museums and archives to die. The curators of these cultural mausoleums often meticulously measure and document every physical detail of their music cadavers. However, they don't allow them to be played. This essentially robs the instruments of their distinctive voices and mutes our understanding of their unique sound and functions.

These colleagues argue that their meticulous documentation can be used by scholars to create new replicas that can be played to better understand how past musicians used them. This approach essentially fossilizes an original instrument's physical condition, but as time and experience have repeatedly shown, these instruments will eventually atrophy and become unplayable.

It is true that many finely crafted music instruments can be exhibited as exquisite works of art captioned with detailed information about their creation, makeup, and use over time. However, once encased behind glass the instrument's music-making function ceases.

So why must an instrument's function and voice be silenced in the name of historic preservation? The German musicologist Curt Sachs (1881–1959) argued the absurdity of such a proposition for the study of music instruments. He wrote, “un instrument inaudible est un non-sens, presque au même titre que le serait un tableau invisible.” (An inaudible instrument is nonsense, almost in the same way as an invisible painting would be.) He insisted that to better understand an instrument's cultural, social, and technological contexts one must be able to play and hear its voice to comprehend its original function and purpose.

The Sousa Archives and Center for American Music follows a preservation path less travelled by today's music museums and archives. We preserve America's diverse music cultures and technologies by making our instrument collections fully accessible for those who know how to play them. Music instruments do not come to the Center to die in solitude. Our



An 1860 Butterfly Cornet (top) and 1862 E-Flat Over the Shoulder Horn (bottom)

instruments' unique voices and functions are actively explored and celebrated by everyone who visits the Sousa Archives.

Over the summer we had large groups of middle and high school students from the Illinois Summer Youth Music camp visit the Center to play our 19th and 20th-century cornets, trombones, euphonium, baritones, and tubas. For these students this was the first time they could play these instruments which they had seen only in textbooks. The students' musical explorations, though noisy, allowed them to engage with the past's music history and technology. Without these types of hands-on experiences, the voices of these unique instruments would remain silent and lessen our students' understanding of their musical functions.

Music instruments are always meant to be played. However, not all instruments come to the Sousa Archives in playable condition, and for some their functional life has come to an end. This is the nature of all living things and music instruments are living artifacts. We recognize that no miraculous restoration will return an instrument to its original condition without destroying crucial physical evidence about its creation and use over time. So, restoration techniques are never used by the Center for the care of our instruments.

The preservation of our historical instruments is designed to appropriately prolong their functional life using the techniques and tools originally used for their creation and performance. Our approach is built on practices that do no harm to these historical instruments. When an instrument of enduring value comes to the Center in need of minor repairs to make it playable again, we will follow this simple practice to return its playable voice.

It is true that on rare occasions an instrument can be damaged through its performance. However, when these situations arise, the failure is typically associated with a natural breakdown of a key, valve, or slide due to an instrument's age and condition. Many times, these types of failure can be appropriately fixed at the time of their occurrence. However, if the failure goes unnoticed for months or years because the instrument is never played, this type of problem can become unfixable.

While there is always potential risk of damage when a historic instrument is played, the simple act of playing an instrument many times will reveal through its sound that something is beginning to fail and usually can be attended to. From the Center's perspective, the playing of our instruments both serves as preservation in action for the management of our collections and ensures that our users are given opportunities to play our horns to understand their unique voices and functions for musical expression.

For information on supporting an archival instrument, see “The Library Is Looking For” on page 5.

Library Is Looking For

\$250 for three Sony ICD-UX570 digital voice recorders in order for the **Student Life and Culture Archives** to conduct oral histories. The recorders' enhanced sound quality and slim design make them handy tools for interviewing subjects.

\$300 for the Teaching, Learning, and Academic Support's Family Study Room to increase its kid-friendly atmosphere. Everyone knows all work and no play makes for . . . well, possible grumpiness . . . so help welcome library patrons with children in tow. The space seeks items to tickle the fancy of little ones, including tyke-size table and chairs, plus a bookshelf (with books in Spanish/English, Chinese/English and caterpillar-speak [a la Eric Carle]). Any and all donated amounts are appreciated.

\$550 for *Order of Battle on the Western Front 11 A.M., November 11, 1918 (1918)*, a rare depiction of the end of World War I, emphasizing the contributions of American forces while minimizing those of its allies. The pictorial's two insets illustrate the Western Front as a whole, as well as French ports and railroads critical to the effort. This beautifully detailed item includes an inscription indicating it is a gift made in 1949 to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in Joliet, Illinois. The **Map Library** would consider it a victory to place this item in its World War I digital collection.

\$950 for *It's a Long, Long Way to Tipperary, My Heart's Right There (1914)*, a unique artifact in which a map printed on a handkerchief depicts heart-sore soldiers and their loved ones separated during World War I. The cloth hankie portrays a British military man standing on France's shore, waving his hat to three women and a child who grace the British Isles and reciprocate with fluttering handkerchiefs. The British music-hall song *It's A Long, Long Way to Tipperary*, whose words run along the top, had been a favorite among soldiers in that time period. If you're feeling sentimental, add this memento to the **Map Library's** World War I digital collection.

\$1,000 sought by the Sousa Archives and Center for American Music to give new voice to archival instruments. While many archivists seek to put these unusual pieces behind glass, the Center encourages musicians to play these well-worn beauties in order to appreciate and learn from their sound. Monies would be used to repair natural breakdowns but not to completely restore the instruments, which could destroy information about how the devices were made and used. For more information, see "Returning the Voices to our Muted Songbirds" on p. 4.

\$1,200 for *Hiker and Buzzer's Trip 'Round the World (1929)*, a rare illustration of the 1929 flight around the world of the Graf Zeppelin. While the world map shows both fact

and fiction—pointing out the actual Panama Canal and the fictional whale, Moby Dick—what intrigues the **Map Library** about this piece is its promotion of the *Air Castle Hour*, a children's radio show sponsored by Chicago-based Marshall Field & Company. The department store's name runs along the map's bottom, with text across the top reading "Follow the Zeppelin Around the World During Field's Air Castle Hour—5:30 to 6—W.G.N." The item was created by renowned Chicago artist and architect Edgar Miller.

\$3,320 for scores from the Forbidden Music Regained project, an initiative that shares the music of Jewish and other composers persecuted during World War II. The publication of these works for the first time was made possible by the Leo Smit Foundation; the Dutch Music Institute (NMI), where thousands of the manuscripts are preserved; and Donemus Publishing. The **Music and Performing Arts Library** believes these scores present a valuable source for both researchers and performers; the scores are published in four sets of 25 works each at \$830 apiece.

\$5,000 to support the annual Dmytro Shtohryn International Ukrainian Studies Conference in order that displaced Ukrainian scholars might attend the occasion in person. The annual event, sponsored by the **Slavic Reference Service** and the **Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures**, honors Shtohryn and his significant contributions to Ukrainian Studies and Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. The conference has drawn hundreds of students and scholars from varying disciplines since its inception in 1982; this year's event takes place October 5–7 and honors the centennial anniversary of Shtohryn's birth. For more information about the Slavic Reference Service, see p. 6.

Find more Library Is Looking For items online at library.illinois.edu/friends/library-is-looking-for.

To fund one of these items or to ask for additional titles in an area of interest, call (217) 333-5682 or email friends@library.illinois.edu.

Thank You

The following donors have adopted these items previously featured in *Friendscript*:

- ◆ **Wendee Brunish** for *Radioactive Fall-Out Over Illinois: Our Entire State is Vulnerable (1954)* (Map Library)
- ◆ **Carol Colburn** for her donation of a play kitchen to the Family Study Room (Teaching, Learning, and Academic Support)
- ◆ **Philip Martin** for *Japan Oil Lands (1882)* and *A Map of Europe In which are delineated its Grand Modern Divisions, as well as Partitions into Inferior States Governments and C.* (Map Library)

Slavic Reference Service: Aiding Campus and the World

Service offers unique opportunities to scholars and citizens alike

If CIA analyst Jack Ryan of the eponymously named novel and film series actually existed, there's a good chance he might have used the Slavic Reference Service (SRS) on the University of Illinois campus.

The fictional Ryan—whose expertise in Russian history and politics made him a valued resource in global gamesmanship—would have relished tapping into the expertise that SRS offers.

And expertise it is. Established in 1976, the SRS provides year-round research support to a panoply of patrons from around the world—including students, faculty, visiting and independent scholars, and participants in the Summer Research Laboratory (SRL), which has been welcoming researchers to Illinois for the last 50 years.

In the decades prior to SRS's founding, the Cold War accelerated the U.S. government's need for regional expertise on Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia; hence, collections at Illinois and around the nation blossomed with federal and state support. (Currently, the Slavic and East European Collection is one of the largest such repositories in the Midwest and at a public U.S. university.) By 1976, "there was a growing need for a research service that directly worked with SRL scholars," said Joe Lenkart, head of the SRS. "But then once the service started . . . gaining some momentum, it shifted to having this national and international role."

SRS, a component of the International and Area Studies Library, offers assistance typically found at each of the university's libraries as patrons seek help in finding sources, navigating databases, and perusing the on-campus collection. But with the unit's international contacts, expertise in regional languages, global reputation, and awareness of geopolitical changes, it also provides a deep well for scholars to draw from. Is a scholar most comfortable with English-language resources? How can a comment tucked into a memoir be verified? If the University of Illinois does not have the item sought by a researcher, who or what institution does?

"You have to know," Lenkart posits as an example, "what are the major libraries in Poland? What do they have [in their collections]? . . . What's in Kraków at the Jagiellonian University Library versus what's in Warsaw at the National Library?"

"You have to know what sources are needed for this particular project. And so that's where we call it 'specialized.' It's really reference work, but in a highly specialized environment."

The unit also verifies citations, offers duplication and publishing consultation services, and provides access to SRS-curated digital



From left to right: Joe Lenkart, Olga Makarova, Katherine Ashcraft, and Serenity Stanton Orengo from the SRS

collections—among them the **Blondheim Judaica Digital Library** (named after UI professor David S. Blondheim), **Russian Books of the 18th Century**, and **Central Asian Memoirs of the Soviet Era**. Staff members' engagement can run from as little as a few moments to answer a question to as long as it takes to shepherd through a book contract.

In addition to offering consultations and instructional sessions, SRS also hosts webinars and conferences, including the revival this fall of the Dmytro Shtohryn International Ukrainian Studies Conference, held since 1982 in honor of Shtohryn, a driving force behind the Ukrainian Studies program at Illinois. As one of the pioneering group of Slavic librarians on campus, Shtohryn built the Ukrainian Studies collection from the ground up and worked tirelessly to bring together students, scholars, archivists, and librarians. For information on supporting this transnational effort, led by SRS librarian and conference director Olga Makarova, see "The Library Is Looking For" on page 5.

It's all part of what Lenkart and Makarova see as SRS's continual adaptation to the needs of patrons and the duality of the unit serving both an external and internal public. "There are not very many services on this campus that have that," said Lenkart, who proactively seeks ways to maintain the service's relevance and financial health. And while the SRS staff is small in number, "what our users or patrons will appreciate about us is that we will go to as close to the ends of the Earth as possible" to solve their research questions. Since the SRS is only partially funded by a federal grant, contributions are welcomed to maintain its suite of services at Illinois. Visit go.library.illinois.edu/gift to make a gift.

Library Updates

News items from across the Library include:

■ **The interim closing of the Mathematics Library in May** as its host building, Altgeld Hall, prepares for major renovation. Materials from its stacks collection may be accessed at the Main Library Stacks and the Grainger Engineering Library and Information Center; items may be requested and picked up from any campus library. Mathematics Library staff will still be reachable by phone or email to assist researchers.

■ **The protection of patrons from possible exposure to heavy metals** in Victorian Era book cloth. Preservation Services is taking monographs published between 1800–1899 out of circulation as it analyzes the situation of its collections, urging patrons to seek digital versions of needed materials instead. Visit go.library.illinois.edu/heavymetals for more information.

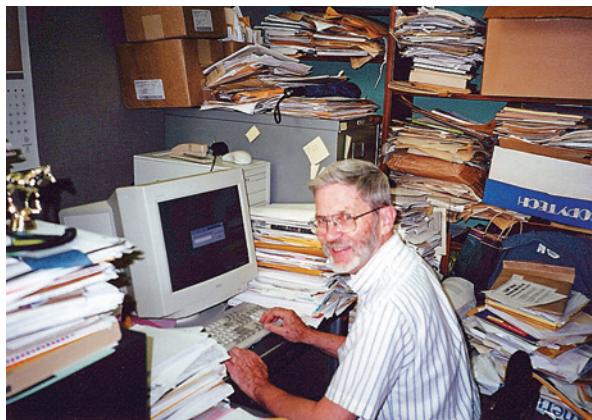
■ **The passing of Marianna Tax Choldin**, the inaugural Mortenson Distinguished Professor and founding director of the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs,



on July 1, 2023. A fierce defender of freedom of information, she brought nearly 600 librarians from around the world to the Center during her 11-year leadership of the unit, and lectured extensively in the Soviet Union on censorship and information-access issues. During her more than 30 years at Illinois, Choldin served as an adjunct professor in the iSchool and headed both the Russian and East European Center and the Slavic and East European Library. Her many accolades note her national and international impact, and include Russia's Pushkin Gold Medal for

contributions to culture, the iSchool's Robert B. Downs Intellectual Freedom Award, and the John Ames Humphry/OCLC/Forest Press Award for significant contributions to international librarianship from the American Library Association's International Relations Committee. Memorial contributions may be made to the Marianna Tax Choldin Fund—11772028 at the University of Illinois, the Greater Chicago Food Depository at www.chicagosfoodbank.org, or Temple Beth Israel at www.tbiskokie.org. Please see library.illinois.edu/mortenson to read more about Marianna Tax Choldin.

■ **The passing of John Littlewood**, MS '61 LIS, longtime librarian who was greatly responsible for acquiring materials for gay studies at the University of Illinois, on July 19, 2023. A government documents librarian, gay literature bibliographer, and associate professor of library administration, he established the John Littlewood/Don Laube Professorship in Gay Literature at the University Library to ensure that the gay studies collection on campus continues to thrive. Littlewood—known widely for his depth of knowledge, prodigious work ethic, and friendly demeanor—served the university for 40 years before retiring in 2000, working in the Chemistry Library, Serials, and Acquisitions. Memorial contributions may be made to the John Littlewood and Don Laube Professorship in Gay Literature Fund—770672.



We encourage you to visit the Library's online calendar at go.library.illinois.edu/calendar for the most up-to-date information about events.

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Positively Hilarious, *continued from page 3*
at the Library of Congress—to name just a few. But, of all the libraries I’ve visited and seen, the Library at the University of Illinois remains most firmly impressed on my memory. In my dreams, I can still see myself walk up those marble stairs and, being a creature of habit, turning to the right and finding a table in that corner just in front of the bound copies of Life and not far from the Saturday Review of Literature. I learned and I enjoyed. The Library was for me at once a place to escape to, a place of enlightenment, a place of encouragement.

Despite his showbiz schedule, Johnson never forgot the Library and remained a longtime supporter. And woven throughout the complex of interests that defined him—from *Laugh-In* to libraries—ran the thread of Johnson’s essence: his genial outlook. As Gisela put it, “Arte always made sure in his acting—you gotta be positive.



From left to right: Christopher Hewett (from the Mr. Belvedere TV series), Arte Johnson (note his Illinois attire!), and Bob Denver (from the Gilligan’s Island TV series)

“Arte always said, ‘If you smile at somebody, the smile comes back.’ And that is really the mantra.”
No doubt quite true. As Arte himself might have surmised, a “verry interesting” mantra indeed.