

Unboxing History



Ahongir Usmanov and Mimi Lester aren't boxing fans, but they're getting to be. Both recent graduates in history, they also have certificates from the college's archival program, the only one of its kind at CUNY. When a generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities came through this fall, they were in the right place at the right time to become the archivists for the superb Hank Kaplan Boxing Collection.

Their training will be well honed by the Kaplan collection. Bequeathed to the college in 2007 and

valued at some three million dollars the material is stacked in boxes, reaching up to the ceiling, each labeled by Kaplan himself.

For a huge collection maintained by one man, the Kaplan materials are "shockingly well-organized," Lester says. However, bringing it up to archival standards requires plenty of work.

Usmanov explains the approach the college has taken to organizing the vast amounts of material. "You have to keep some of the order the original collector has, but also think about how researchers will use the material and apply archival standards."

An examination of Lester and Usmanov's workspace, with piles of mylar, brittle newspaper clippings and packets of aged photos, evokes work that is rich in history but is also painstaking and repetitive. Then there are the fascinating parts such as stumbling across such gems as a napkin drawing by Muhammed Ali. Some of the more intriguing finds are currently on display in a library exhibit curated by project director Jill Goldstein.

The archive will go a long way to helping the archivists follow their career paths — Lester intends to get her master's in library science this fall, and Usmanov is aiming for his Ph.D. in history.

For sophomore Sarah-Meira Rosenberg, this was her first time at Open Mic. She came simply because she was curious. "I was pleasantly surprised at the level of talent. I thought that if anyone can perform, then who knows what to expect."

The level of talent also impressed Brian Ghezdaigh, a freshman and psychology major who came because he was fulfilling a requirement for his Macaulay Honors College seminar. "A lot of people gave a lot of thought to their art," he said, noting that he may come back and perform next time.

Aleeza Chanowitz, a senior Judaic studies major who wrote and performed the aforementioned poem about hummus, also came to satisfy a requirement for her class on poetry and performance. "Some of the poetry was really good. With some, you had to work a little harder to understand where the artist was coming from," she said. "But that's poetry, right?"



Freshman Elisa Renee Libraty on guitar.