

**Onion River Arts Council  
Printed Ephemera & Records, 1982-2004  
MSA 349-350, MSA 925**

## **Introduction**

This is a collection of printed ephemera, including programs and small posters, and a few folders of meeting records, created by the Onion River Arts Council of Montpelier, Vermont, during the period 1982 to 2004. The Council donated these items to the Vermont Historical Society just before ORAC disbanded in December 2004 (ms. acc. no. 2004.9). Michael Levine, a former employee of the organization contributed additional material, especially related to the Midsummer celebration and meeting minutes, in December 2021. The collection fills three archival flip top boxes (1.5 linear foot). Larger posters that were received with this collection have been integrated into the VHS's broadside collection; a count of these posters is at the end of the inventory.

## **Organization History**

The Onion River Arts Council was founded in 1974. It served as the major presenter of performing arts events in Montpelier and Barre, Vermont, until it ceased operations at the end of the year in 2004. In the 1990s the organization's mission statement read, "To present quality arts programs to the widest possible audience in central Vermont; to provide cultural education, both in schools and for the general public; to coordinate and be an advocate for the arts in the community; and to provide opportunities for Vermont artists."

ORAC organized community arts programs, sponsored arts programming in area schools, organized arts festivals such as "Midsummer" and "First Night," and co-sponsored the "Celebration Series" with the Barre Opera House. The Midsummer Festival probably started in 1982, although the collection includes no material from this event. In 1983 the festival was billed as a celebration of Vermont's folk life and heritage and was held at Vermont College in Montpelier. It evolved into a festival of the arts held on the State House lawn featuring theater, dance, popular and traditional music, story telling, and mime. The festival usually included a street dance and a "Pops" concert by the Vermont Philharmonic Orchestra. In its last two years, 1995 and 1996, the festival was billed as a "Midsummer Medieval Festival of the Arts."

Montpelier celebrated "Last Night" on New Year's Eve for several years. In 1995 ORAC and Kids' Fest joined together to host "First Night," a public, alcohol-free celebration that was being sponsored in other cities around the country. According to the program for the celebration welcoming 1996, "First Night Montpelier is a visual and performing arts festival created by and for the community of Central Vermont to welcome the New Year." First Night 2005 was the last event sponsored by ORAC

In 1984 ORAC joined with the Barre Opera House to host the "Celebration Series" to celebrate the refurbished opera house's first season as a fully operational

theater. The Celebration Series was designed to bring big-name acts to the Barre-Montpelier area. Over the years star performers included Doc Watson, Dave Brubeck, The Persuasions, Odetta, National Theater of the Deaf, Alvin Ailey Repertory Ensemble, New England Bach Festival, Peter Serkin, and others. The 2004/2005 Celebration Series was in progress when ORAC closed on December 31, 2004.

### **Scope & Content**

This collection contains printed programs and handbills created by the Onion River Arts Council (ORAC) of Montpelier, Vermont, to promote their arts events. The collection includes a full set of programs from the Celebration Series, a series of “big name” performers invited to perform at the Barre Opera House 1984-2004. The collection also includes a large set of Midsummer Festival programs, 1983-1996, and a large set of First Night programs, 1996-2005.

The collection also includes scattered ORAC published annual reports from the period 1990 to 2002 and scattered newsletters from the period 1989 to 1993. There are also general brochures and additional arts publications produced by ORAC, including two issues of an undated magazine produced by teens.

There are only two pieces of correspondence in the collection: identical form letters sent to Adelpia Cable and the Times-Argus soliciting support for the Independence Day celebration in 2001. Posters from the Independence Day celebrations in 2000 and 2001 are in the VHS broadside collection (B’side D Holidays—Independence Day). Also in the poster collection is one poster from a St. Patrick’s Day celebration sponsored by ORAC in 2002 (B’side D Holidays—St. Patrick’s Day)

The collection includes two publications from events not directly sponsored by ORAC: Plainfield, Vermont’s, first annual Summer Festival of the Arts in 1980, and Vermont Public Radio’s first festival of Vermont folk music in 1981 (which used the same Mary Azarian woodcut sun illustration used for ORAC’s Midsummer Festival).

### **Related Collections**

The VHS manuscript collection also includes the records of the “Women’s Work Project,” a celebration of “the feminine spirit,” and especially of women’s art, that involved ORAC in the 1990s (Doc 531).

The library’s broadside collection includes posters produced by ORAC but received from other sources. The probable location of ORAC posters is in the categories Art Societies, Music, Dance Theater, Holidays, and Festivals.

The VHS museum collection includes buttons from First Night as well as original artwork by Maureen O’Connor Burgess for Midsummer.

**Inventory**

- MSA 925:01 ORAC history, 1982-2004  
 :02 Board minutes, 2002-2004  
 :03 Fundraising plans, 2004
- MSA 349:01 Annual reports, 1990-2002  
 02 Newsletter, 1989-1993  
 03 General brochures, undated  
 04.1 Newspaper coverage, 1982-1990  
 04.2 The Arts Calendar, 1982-1985  
 05 Schedule of Performances, 2001-2003  
 06 Arts-in-Education Program, 1994-2003  
 07 Celebration Series, 1984-1986  
 08 \_\_\_\_\_, 1987-1989/90  
 09 \_\_\_\_\_, 1990/91-1993/94  
 10 \_\_\_\_\_, 1994/95-1997/98
- MSA 350:01 \_\_\_\_\_, 1998/99-2001/02  
 02 \_\_\_\_\_, 2002/03-2003/04  
 03 (number not used)
- MSA 925:04 Midsummer Festival, 1981, promotion and publicity  
 05 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, organization  
 06 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, meeting minutes  
 07 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, second festival and beyond  
 08 \_\_\_\_\_, 1983-1987, promotion and publicity  
 09 \_\_\_\_\_, "Midsummer Memories," documentation  
 10 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, tapes (two copies of volume 1)  
 11 \_\_\_\_\_, programs, 1981-1986
- MSA 350:04 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, 1986-1991  
 05 \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, 1992-1996  
 06 \_\_\_\_\_, photos  
 05 First Night, Montpelier, 1996-2000  
 06 \_\_\_\_\_, 2001-2005  
 07 Independence Day Celebration, 2001  
 08 *Arts & Entertainment*, 1993-1997
- MSA 925:10 Special events, 2001  
 09 Miscellaneous brochures  
 10 Staff photo, no date  
 11 Magazines produced by teens  
 12 Vermont Public Radio's Midsummer, 1981  
 Summer Festival of the Arts at Plainfield, 1980

Posters from this collection filed in VHS broadside collection

- Size D Circus, 1  
 Dance, 3  
 Dance parties and balls, 1

Festivals, 7  
Holidays, 4  
Music, 19  
Theater, 4

Size C Dance, 5  
Music, 9

Size B Festivals, 1

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