Matthew Wittmann has three tattoos. Two mostly stay hidden: the giraffe on his shoulder, which marked the 2012 publication of his two books on the American circus, and Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, which landed on his arm after he finished his Ph.D. at the University of Michigan in 2010. Most visible is an inky star between his right thumb and forefinger, dating back to college—a tattoo popular among nineteenth-century whalers, he explains. A cultural historian, Wittmann specializes in traveling entertainments (like “minstrel groups, magicians, and circuses”) and the Pacific—interests kindled by a peripatetic navy-brat childhood on the West Coast and in Hawaii. “Having lived so many places when I was young, I don’t get hung up on, you know, home,” he says; neither does he pile up personal possessions. Now the new curator of the Harvard Theatre Collection at Houghton Library, he’s charged with the care and development of the oldest performing-arts library in the country. Recalling his initial reaction to the job description—“Oh, dear”—Wittmann describes his duties as “expansive.” That word also applies to Harvard’s holdings, which are “so vast that every day, I am finding things that you couldn’t believe”: a bronze of actress Sarah Bernhardt, given her by Harry Houdini, sits near his desk. The collection has strengths in some areas he’s less versed in (notably ballet), but Wittmann is unfazed. When he became an assistant curator at the American Numismatic Society, he wasn’t an expert on coins. “It gave me the experience of having to learn wholesale a sort of language and a field and a history that I wasn’t that familiar with.” In turn, he hopes to bring something new to the archive, expanding its scope to include more pop entertainment. Curtains up for the next act.

—SOPHIA NGUYEN

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