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Music Reference: Just the Basics

by

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MLA/MOUG Educational Outreach Program

In 2006, the Education Committee of the Music Library Association (MLA) and the Music OCLC Users Group (MOUG) recognized the need within the library community to provide greater educational opportunities related to music and music materials and created the Educational Outreach Program (EOP) in response (Smith-Borne, 2007, p. 5). This program consists of a series of workshops, delivered by certified trainers, covering the specific topics of sound recording cataloging, music collection development/acquisitions, and music reference. The target audiences for these ongoing workshops are “new music librarians who would like additional training, library students contemplating a specialization in music librarianship, general librarians who would like to learn

more about music librarianship, library staff members who would benefit from knowing more about music librarianship, and seasoned music librarians who would like a refresher” (Music Library Association, 2005).

During the first phase of the program, a series of “train the trainer” workshops were developed as part of the certification process for music librarians interested in teaching future workshops. Grover Baker of The Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University and Chris Durman of The University of Tennessee Libraries both attended the first “Train the Trainer” pre-conference workshop held in conjunction with the Music Library Association annual conference in Newport, RI, in February 2008.

The initial “Train the Trainer” music reference workshop was led by Jeanette Casey, currently the Head of the Mills Music Library at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, who taught the material in a three-hour session. The workshops may be adapted to almost any length, and while there is a set of desired learning outcomes, instructors are allowed to tailor the outcomes to fit the allotted time and specific audience. The learning objectives for the 50-minute EOP music reference session presented by Baker and Durman at the 2010 Tennessee Library Association Annual Conference in Memphis were:

- Know the questions to ask in a music reference interview.
- Identify the most common formats of music materials.
- Recognize the difficulties in finding songs and instrumental music; learn strategies to overcome these challenges.
- Identify several online and print resources to use in answering music reference questions.
- List basic music reference materials attendees’ libraries may want to purchase.

The presenters began by introducing themselves and by asking the audience whether or not they had a background in music. Some of the audience indicated that they did, but many did not. The learning objectives for this session were then briefly discussed to give the audience some foreknowledge of what the presenters hoped to accomplish. To determine the specific needs of attendees, the presenters asked for a sampling of the kinds of music reference questions typically encountered. The group reported having questions on all genres of music. Questions about particular songs, specific operas, music from the 1940s, Australian aboriginal music, and Celtic music were all mentioned.

Music resources and materials are frequently divided according to a common, but certainly controversial, parlance. The term “classical music” is most often used to mean western art music of Europe, the United States, and Canada. The term “popular music” is extremely broad in scope, typically referring to almost everything other than classical music of the English-speaking world and parts of Europe. Scholars include genres (such as American folk music, the songs of

Stephen Foster and the minstrel tradition, musical theater, and even many forms of gospel music) that most users might not consider popular music at all. Many of the “popular music” resources included in this presentation show a western bias. The somewhat catch-all category of “world music” also reflects this bias and is frequently used to mean everything outside of western art and popular music. Some of the most “popular” music of the world, thinking in terms of strict demographics, comes from the continent of India; however, this music is most commonly included in “world music” resources. Globalization has influenced most genres of music and the boundaries between current musical genres are particularly blurred and fluid.

The presenters polled attendees as to the kinds of libraries in which they worked and were surprised to find that most were from academic libraries with just a few working in public libraries. Baker noted how the different kinds of libraries might be expected to hold different kinds of materials and how these varying assets can make a difference when trying to answer music reference questions. For instance, academic libraries in institutions with a music program would be expected to have sufficient resources (printed music, recorded music, and reference sources) to support the program, while public libraries would not necessarily be expected to support a similar clientele.

The Music Reference Interview

Baker and Durman then assumed roles and enacted a music reference interview to illustrate some of the potential problems those working in libraries might encounter when answering music reference questions.

Baker: “My parents’ anniversary is coming up, and I’m trying to find their favorite song. We want to play it at their party. It’s something about vegetables... something to do with potatoes and tomatoes. It’s a really popular song, I hear it all the time, and I can’t believe you don’t have it here in your library!”

Durman: “Do you know any of the lyrics right off?”

Baker: “I know it says something like, ‘You say tomato’.”

Durman: “Well, a good way to start this might be to let me tie some words together in a real quick Google search. I’m going to type in, ‘You say tomato’ and then I’ll place quotation marks around that phrase.” (Durman pretends to type the phrase.) “Do you think the words might be ‘You say tomato, I say tomato’?”

Baker: “Yes, that’s it.”

Durman: "Well, yes, the actual title for that song is 'Let's Call the Whole Thing Off.' I think we can help you with this. You said you wanted to play it at a party. Would you like a recording of this?"

Baker: "No, no. It's for my parent's anniversary. We're doing a big party for them and we're going to have a big program; somebody's going to sing it."

Durman: "Ah, somebody's going to sing it; perhaps you might want a piano/vocal score."

Baker: "A what?"

Durman: "Is someone going to play with the singer?"

Baker: "Oh, yes! Somebody will be playing with the singer."

Durman: "Let me check in a song index to see if we have the music to that in our collection." (Durman once again pretends to type.) "I do believe we have that in one of our songbooks."

Baker: "Can I get a photocopy of it?"

Durman: "Umm, I'll show you where the songbook is..."

When doing music reference work, one problem often encountered is that people come looking for a song but without the correct title. The song used in the role-play above is not actually called "You Say Tomato, I Say Tomato"; the title is, "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off". There are many songs like this in which the most commonly known words of the song are not the title of the song.

Common Formats of Music Materials

Music is unusual in that the same composition may be available in many different formats. One fact this role-playing exercise intends to highlight is that spending a large amount of time looking for the wrong format is not actually helpful for the patron. They may want the printed music, the recorded music, or, perhaps, just the lyrics. The object of their search might actually be the movie in which a certain song is featured. Maybe they simply want information about a song, or are looking for a song about a particular topic.

The playback device the patron or library uses will determine which audio format is needed. Physical audio formats such as CDs, records, or tapes are still used by many patrons and libraries. Of course, many today no longer want records or even CDs and instead hope to access music in a purely digital format. Many libraries are subscribing to streaming audio databases such as Alexander Street Press Music Online or Naxos Music Library, but fewer have found a way to check

out a digital file to patrons. A few academic libraries are downloading files to iPods and checking them out with the understanding that these files will be deleted at the end of a semester. A business model designed for the checkout of digital audio files is still being devised and will almost certainly be available for patrons in the foreseeable future.

Video also comes in a variety of formats such as DVD, Blu-ray, 3D High Definition, and VHS. To point out how technology trends determine what libraries collect, Baker asked, "How many of you have VHS tapes in your library? How many of you can find replacement VHS players?" Attendees nodded knowingly in recognition of the growing rarity of this equipment.

While most library workers and patrons will have some familiarity with audio and video formats, those without a musical background will undoubtedly have some confusion regarding the various formats of printed music. The first area of confusion can be that almost all printed music is commonly called a score, regardless of whether it is a score by definition. The second area of confusion is encountered when determining the type of score necessary to fulfill patrons' needs.

Full scores contain music for all of the instruments and vocalists of the orchestra aligned together so that a conductor can read all parts simultaneously while conducting the ensemble.

Piano/vocal scores are what most people have in mind when they think of printed music. The vocal line and piano part are included, but the score also often contains chord names and symbols for guitar or another instrument. Piano/vocal scores often take the form of songbooks, containing multiple songs.

Study scores or **miniature scores** are very small reproductions (as much as one quarter the size) of full scores that users may conveniently carry with them when studying or listening to a particular work. Because of their small size, these are sometimes called **pocket scores**.

A **score and parts** for a chamber group such as a string quartet includes separate parts, containing the music for each individual instrumentalist, as well as a full score, showing all the individual parts.

A **piano reduction** is typically used by an accompanist to rehearse with a soloist preparing for a concerto or similar musical form. It takes the many orchestral parts and rearranges or "reduces" them into something a single pianist can play to accompany the soloist during practice.

Choral scores have the music for the different voices of a choir (soprano, alto,

tenor, bass, or whatever combination of voices is required) and may also contain the keyboard part.

Sheet music, although not used as widely as in the past, consists of an individual song/composition and most often uses the same layout as a piano/vocal score (melody line with lyrics, piano accompaniment, and chord symbols). For older songs, sheet music is the most likely format to contain a popular song in its entirety. Piano compositions are also published in this format.

Fake books or **real books** are typically used to perform popular music or jazz standards and often contain two hundred or more songs. For each song, the lyrics and a single melodic line is provided, with chord symbols included. Performers are expected to improvise their own accompaniment. Music written in this format is sometimes called a **lead sheet**. In many cases, the complete music and lyrics are not included.

Tablature is a system for people who do not read traditional music notation. Tablature graphically displays where the instrumentalist would place their fingers on an instrument to play the notes of the work and is most frequently used by musicians playing stringed instruments.

A **facsimile** is a reproduction of a composer's original handwritten score and is used as a reference for people doing detailed scholarly work who cannot access the archival material itself.

A **libretto** contains only the text of an opera or musical.

Finding Songs and Instrumental Music: Challenges and Solutions

Other than determining the specific need of the patron and the proper format to fulfill that need, some other common challenges are easy to identify. As shown in the role-playing exercise, patrons are often trying to find lyrics and titles from a snippet of a song's lyrics. Google is particularly useful for this. Enter the phrase the patron remembers, enclosed by quotation marks, in a Google search. Most frequently this will return the requested information, although patrons should be somewhat skeptical regarding the accuracy of lyrics found on websites and should probably compare those to a recording or to the printed music of the song. Songbooks (piano/vocal scores), sheet music, or fake books would be logical places to look for popular songs.

Like poems, individual songs are most often published in collections. Song indexes are the tools that can help users find songs in songbooks. Since the titles of songs inside songbooks may not be included in catalog records, searchers have basically two choices; either go into the stacks to start reviewing

the tables of contents of all the library's songbooks or consult a song index. While several printed song indexes are available, several libraries or library systems have created and made available online song indexes to their own collections. One created by the University of Tennessee George F. DeVine Music Library may be accessed at <http://www.lib.utk.edu/music/songdb/index.php>. This continuously updated database indexes the songbooks in the DeVine Music Library and allows users to search by title, first line, author of text, composer of the music, or by the accompanying instrument.

Two other song indexes include the California Library Systems Cooperative Song Index (<http://www.sjvls.org/songs>) and the Folk Song Index (http://www.oberlin.edu/library/con/singout_intro.html) created by a joint project between Oberlin College and the not-for-profit educational organization *Sing Out!*. Two fake book indexes that function similarly to the song indexes are the Seventh String Fake Book Index (<http://www.seventhstring.co.uk/fbindex.html>) and the University at Buffalo Music Library Fake Book Index (<http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/ml/fakebooksearch.asp>). While many libraries may not have all of the individual songbooks or fake books identified in these indexes, patrons may still consult WorldCat to locate a library that may be willing to loan a copy via interlibrary loan.

Some institutions such as Indiana University, the Library of Congress and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill are digitizing their pre-1923 sheet music. In addition to the ability to search via title, author, and composer, many of these institutions include the first line search function for these digital holdings. For example, the digitized sheet music collections of Duke University, Indiana University, University of California Los Angeles, and Johns Hopkins University may all be searched via the Sheet Music Consortium (<http://digital.library.ucla.edu/sheetmusic/>). Although it has not been digitized, the Center for Popular Music's entire collection of over 70,000 pieces of sheet music, dating from before the Civil War to the present, has been cataloged and may be searched online at <http://popmusic.mtsu.edu/dbtw-wpd/textbase/musicbrf.htm>.

Classical music presents many problems to overcome and one of the largest difficulties involves the use of generic titles such as "sonata", "symphony", and "concerto". Since a single composer may have written several identically titled works (such as "Sonata in D") the user needs a tool, such as a comprehensive works list or a thematic catalog, to identify the exact work for which they are searching. While comprehensive works lists will, at least, narrow the possible choices, thematic catalogs typically organize and number all of a composer's works and, most frequently, include portions of the printed music (called incipits) that allow musicians to definitively identify the desired work. The thematic catalog numbers (such as the BWV numbers for Bach or the K. numbers for Mozart) may then be used in conjunction with the composer's name to search for

the complete score. This method is the most precise search for a particular recording or score in most OPACs.

Music Reference Resources

While many libraries will not have an extensive collection of thematic catalogs, works lists are available from a variety of sources. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Macmillan Publishers) includes works lists that index the collected editions of composers' complete works. *The New Grove Dictionary* is the most trusted music encyclopedia written in the English language. First published in the late-1800s as *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, this encyclopedic set has been revised and reissued several times since and is now available for online subscription as *New Grove Online*. Older editions of *New Grove Dictionary* are also useful to retain, since they frequently contain information about musicians whose entries have been removed from later editions.

A free online resource that contains useful works lists, in addition to pdf files of many scores, is the International Music Score Library Project/Petrucci Music Library (http://imslp.org/wiki/Main_Page); however, users should be given the caveat that this resource is made in compliance with Canadian copyright law and may not conform to all aspects of the copyright law of the United States. These scores may have also been taken from an edition other than the one from which a particular teacher expects his or her students to learn. The freely accessible Classical Net (<http://www.classical.net/>) holds a wealth of musical information, including works lists, historical essays, links to various music schools, festivals, competitions, musical societies, organizations, and much more. While more familiar as a popular music reference tool, AllMusic (<http://www.allmusic.com/>) is yet another free web resource that includes a substantial classical music reference section.

Even though these free resources can be used to answer many questions related to music, libraries may want to acquire the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press). This single and quite affordable print volume can be just the tool for providing authoritative answers. It is also helpful to remember that general dictionaries and encyclopedias will often be able to answer numerous questions about music and musicians.

Another resource the presenters recommend for every library to purchase is the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music* (Oxford University Press). Now in its fourth edition, this ten-volume set (also available via online subscription) includes entries for popular music artists, genres, record labels, and key events from 1900 to the present. Discographies, an album rating system, and suggested readings are also incorporated, making this the first stop for researchers interested in a brief overview of almost any facet of popular music of the last century.

The previously mentioned free online resource, AllMusic, offers much information on popular music figures and styles. Bibliographies, biographies, discographies, and listening recommendations are all available on the site, which also features an extensive collection of album reviews. *Billboard*, a magazine devoted to covering the music industry and famous for popular music charts, also has an online presence (<http://www.billboard.com>). This site contains much up-to-date information on current artists and charts. Magazine subscribers have access to the pay site (<http://www.billboard.biz>) and all charts, but the free site allows users to access much information and many charts.

Many of the resources already mentioned such as Grove Music Online, AllMusic, and the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music* will be useful for questions involving world music. One particularly useful print resource not previously mentioned is the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (Garland Publishing) which is available in a ten-volume print edition and electronically as a subset of the subscription database Alexander Street Press Music Online. This encyclopedia contains overviews of the various regions of the world, descriptions of their musical cultures, and essays on the specific musical practices of many groups.

Many non-music reference sources, such as the databases included in the Tennessee Electronic Library, articles accessible via Google Scholar, and Google Books, will offer much information on all facets of music. In addition to information about musicians' lives and inspirations, biographies often contain complete works lists and discographies. Liner notes, the printed materials included with sound recordings, should not be neglected as potential sources. Likewise, the official websites of artists, organizations, and music industry groups, such as the performance rights organizations ASCAP, BMI, and SESAC, may also provide valuable information.

Other online sources worthy of note include the RoJaRo Index (<http://www.rojaro.com/>) which provides an index to periodicals covering all aspects of rock, jazz, and roots music. Rock's Back Pages (<http://www.rocksbackpages.com/>) is a subscription database containing new and old articles on popular music and musicians. While much of the content requires a subscription to view, a significant amount is offered for free upon registering. PollStar is a magazine and subscription database devoted to the live concert industry and used by professionals in that business. The free site (<http://www.pollstar.com/>) may be used by anyone to find tour schedules of artists or to determine the performance schedules for particular venues or cities. A variety of articles on touring artists and events may also be accessed for free on the site. Finally, Twitter should not be neglected, because it allows users to follow several of these organizations, such as Billboard or Pollstar, and occasionally allows access to materials that might otherwise be accessible only by subscription.

In closing, Baker and Durman reminded attendees that they should not be shy about calling their local academic library or specialized music library when confronted with a difficult music reference question. Speaking from their experience working in a music archive and in a music library, both presenters assured the audience that music specialists recognize the difficulty in addressing some reference questions and, if called upon, will be happy to assist.

Music Librarianship Workshops may be scheduled for any organization or library. Those interested in scheduling a workshop or simply finding out more about the MLA Educational Outreach Program may visit <http://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/employmentanded/workshops/index.shtml>.

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