Training for Music Librarianship: 
A Survey of Current Opportunities 

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There is neither a lack of music schools nor a lack of library schools in the United States; there are, in fact, more than enough opportunities for training either musicians or librarians. But what of those individuals whose professional interest lies in a combination of the two fields? It is an accepted fact that training in both areas is required for the music librarian, although there may be some differences of opinion as to where the greater emphasis should be placed. In any case, some balance and integration of the two fields is requisite for the preparation of the music library specialist. The question is whether the prospective music librarian should look to the schools of librarianship or the departments of music for the answer to his training needs. When music librarianship is approached through two separate channels of instruction the student is forced to bring them into some kind of relationship, to define for himself his role as a specialist. The music school has traditionally trained performers, composers, musicologists and music teachers, but it has never indicated that the training of music librarians falls within its province. Therefore, without underestimating the highly specialized subject content of the field, the author will proceed on the assumption that music librarianship is essentially a matter of library education, and examine some of the ways in which American library schools are currently meeting their responsibilities in this direction.

In dealing with the training of music librarians, there are four possible courses of action a library school may take: (1) it may confine itself to general library training and not provide any possibilities for specialization; (2) it may offer a single special course dealing with music bibliography and other aspects of music librarianship; (3) it may permit the student to take graduate courses in music as

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credit towards his library science degree; and (4) it may set up a complete and detailed curriculum exclusively for the training of music librarians. By far the largest number of library schools still adhere to the first approach and do not allow for specialization. This is, of course, tantamount to ignoring the problem entirely. None have as yet attempted to establish a detailed and exclusive music library program.

The number of schools in the second category, which offer a special course, has increased significantly since 1937 when Columbia University offered the first library school course in music bibliography. In the 1959–60 Columbia University catalog the following course is listed: "Music Literature and Librarianship . . . Survey and evaluation of library resources in music, with emphasis upon bibliographical and information sources. Attention will be given to special service problems and organization in music libraries." ¹ This course is part of the School of Library Service’s special music program in which the student must also take a minimum of six points of graduate studies in the history of music and musicology. The library school of Western Reserve University offers a course called "Music Libraries," which is described as "Preparation for the music librarian to meet demands in music libraries which differ in size, scope, and specialization. Music and record acquisition, cataloging, and reference materials." ² A similar course is offered, when there is sufficient demand, at North Texas State Teacher’s College. The program for music librarians offered at the University of Michigan is similar to the Columbia plan, including one special bibliography course and the option of six hours of electives in the Graduate Music School. The bibliography course is described as "a survey of books and periodicals about music, with an emphasis on the bibliographical control of timely information; the history and processes of music printing, copyright, and publication; the bibliography of printed and recorded music; and, for Library Science students, a summary of the history and organization of music. (Listed also as Music Literature 203)." ³

The case against library school courses for subject specialists, in music or any other field, has been expressed in unequivocal terms by J. P. Danton, dean of the University of California School of Librarianship. In Danton’s words:

such courses tend to channelize subject matter dangerously and to result in the specialization being thought of as something unique and
apart; they lead to separateness of types of librarians, libraries and librarianship, whereas I believe the profession is best served by those forces and types of preparation which lead toward unity; they tend to be inefficient, since principles are universal and may be satisfactorily treated in a general course in special librarianship; they tend to be expensive since, by definition, they will be taken by very few students; they must ordinarily be taught by someone who is not on the regular faculty, and this, as we all know, has grave disadvantages for the student as well as for the school.4

It should be added that Danton wholeheartedly endorses the taking of electives in music history or music bibliography offered in the department of music, and he would encourage a certain amount of musical application in projects undertaken within the general library school curriculum; but the substance of his position is that the main emphasis of the library school should be toward the training of the general librarian rather than of the subject specialist. This is not the place to take issue with the philosophy of library education he has expressed, but it is encouraging to note that a number of the leading library schools have departed from it in one form or another.

It is difficult to determine exactly how many schools permit some variation of the joint library school—music school program mentioned as the third possibility. In some catalogs it is explicitly stated, as, for example, in the Bulletin of the George Peabody College for Teachers: “Opportunities for specialization are afforded . . . for those interested in the special fields of music librarianship. . . .”5 These opportunities consist of the special problems type of course, field work, and the option to continue graduate studies in music. Variations on this plan are offered at the University of California and the University of Southern California. At Berkeley the recommended electives include the graduate music department course, “Introduction to musical scholarship,” and at Los Angeles the graduate music school course, “Introduction to graduate studies.” Another catalog, that of the Indiana University Library School, states that each student’s program will be “developed according to his particular needs and purposes.”6 All library science students at Indiana University are required to take the usual core courses and a sufficient number of electives from library science and related fields to total thirty semester hours of graduate credit. The word music does not appear in the library science school catalog, but it is well known that Indiana has a large graduate music school, especially strong in musicology. In a situation like this
the student must, of course, meet the admission requirements for both graduate schools. Similar possibilities for a joint program of related graduate music studies are stated or implied in the catalogs of the University of Florida, Rutgers, Simmons, and the University of Illinois. At Florida, fifteen of the required forty semester hours are to be taken in “library service and subject field areas.” At Illinois, “depending on his previous training, a student may do a portion of his study outside the Library School. Students thinking of careers in special libraries may find useful the varied courses available through cooperation with other departments of the University.” Students intending to enter the music library field usually have a strong background in music, especially musicology. As much as two graduate units of the eight required for the M.S. degree are taken in the music bibliography section of Library Science 450, taught by the music librarian, Joseph Allen, and in the graduate music courses. Although not specifically described as an element in the program, in practice all of the students in the music specialty spend some time working in the music library.

The Simmons College Bulletin, like Illinois, states that courses in subject fields may be taken. Simmons also offers a course called “Research and bibliographical methods in subject fields,” in which “projects are individualized on the basis of the student’s undergraduate and graduate major.”

An outstanding example of cooperation between the library school and the music school is the program offered at the University of Chicago Graduate Library School. This comes closest, in theory at least, to an integrated curriculum of music library training. When, in 1954, the Subcommittee on Special Library Education of the Council of National Library Associations recommended practical programs for the training of librarians in special fields, they based their recommendations for music librarianship training on the curriculum then offered at the University of Chicago. Although there have been some small changes since that time, the courses and content of the program are still essentially the same. A total of eighteen courses was outlined, divided equally between the library school and the subject courses. The program takes two years to complete. The music subjects recommended include three courses in the history of music, one in music bibliography (the Subcommittee’s original recommendations included two music bibliography courses), and four additional courses in musicology, the humanities and language. The student spends some
time working in the University Music Library. In his general courses in reference and cataloging and in seminars special attention is given to his subject bias. In practice, the student’s subject knowledge is assessed at the beginning of the program, and if it is felt that he has adequate background, some or all of the music courses, except bibliography, may be omitted. It would then be possible to complete the program in four or five quarters.

The most conservative type of training program is that which includes neither a special course to bridge the gap between subject knowledge and general librarianship nor the possibility of a joint program at the graduate level of the subject specialty. In a program of this kind everything is left to the student’s own initiative and imagination; but who is to say that such a program will not produce a music librarian? In fact, the shape and content of many American music libraries, and the concept of music librarianship under which they operate, is largely a product of librarians with this sort of training. It is still true that a broad musical background, plus an innate interest in books and people, are best prerequisites for success in music librarianship. The so-called library “techniques and practices” can be learned most effectively and economically on the job; but it is becoming increasingly important, for professional reasons, that the music specialist have the stamp of approval which a degree from an accredited school of librarianship affords. Most music libraries are branches or subdivisions of some larger library unit, and a smooth working relationship between the branch and its parent administration is as essential as the relationship between the music division and its patrons. Music librarians must be librarians in every sense of the term.

But there is no reason why the library school training of a subject specialist should be time-serving and have no more than a “stamp-of-approval” utility. It will cease to be regarded as such when the library schools become aware of their responsibilities, and less insistent upon the concept of librarianship in the abstract. There is no surer way to vitalize a curriculum than to offer opportunities for intensive subject application on the part of those who are so inclined. The best opportunity for music library training would seem to exist in those schools that offer both a limited number of electives in graduate music studies and that one indispensable course in music librarianship in which the student can begin to gain some picture of the relationships between library practice and the vast field of music and music literature.
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with which he will be concerned in his job. Special problems can be studied here which are not even hinted at in general library courses, as well as an introduction to the musical implications of community service, adult education, and readers' advisory service.

The amount and character of pre-library school training in the subject field calls for some discussion. The undergraduate prerequisites in music are essentially the same as those for any applicant to a library school, i.e., an accredited A.B. degree. There is evidence that an undergraduate music major is still sometimes considered an inadequate background for the regular library science course work. This view is disappearing. In discussing the background for professional study, the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science bulletin suggests that the student should, during his last two years of undergraduate work, develop a major in a subject area. It mentions eight subject areas, one of which is musicology, "particularly needed in modern library development." Considering the subject knowledge demanded of the college and university music librarian, it is not unrealistic to expect him to have a Master's degree in musicology or music history, or the equivalent in knowledge. And there are an increasing number of music Ph.D.'s who are finding their niche in music library positions, often combined with teaching or research activities. Although musicology is not generally regarded as part of the undergraduate curriculum, its disciplines and the kind of training it requires have much in common with music librarianship. The approach to the materials and the use to which they are put are, of course, somewhat different, but a broad knowledge of the major epochs of music history and the literature pertaining to each period are required of both the musicologist and the music librarian. Several schools have taken advantage of this parallel. The previously mentioned courses at Michigan, California, and Southern California are cases in point.

In terms of what was available twenty years ago in music library training, the present opportunities are quite good. In 1939 the Music Library Association officially endorsed a program based in substance on Otto Kinkeldey's article, "Training for Music Librarianship." This program presupposed a B.A. degree in music, and was to consist of what was then the usual library school curriculum plus an elective course in bibliography and music library techniques. In 1939 the only library school offering this program was Columbia. At the present time seven schools offer either a course in bibliography or a
broader course covering special problems, and at least six schools encourage the student to pursue his graduate music studies within the library science degree program. The music librarians have better training opportunities than, say, the art librarians; but one may cite, as the ultimate in special training, the degree in law librarianship offered at the University of Washington, in which every course is concerned with some aspects of law librarianship.

It is difficult to evaluate the results of the various library school curricula described or to determine if they have produced adequate or superior music librarians. Because of its specialized content there are still avenues of approach to the field which bypass library school training entirely. Some of the most successful music librarians have achieved their positions without benefit of a library science degree. It cannot be said that the current demand for trained music librarians is much in excess of the supply. In any case, the shortage is not critical. The Music Library Association placement file, which had fallen into disuse, was reactivated at the association's annual meeting in 1957, but replies to questionnaires were desultory and the file is again approaching a state of stagnation. But anyone who has worked in this field will be aware that there is a potential that cannot be measured by the current statistics of supply and demand. As Vincent Duckles said when he addressed the Fourth International Congress of Music Libraries in 1955: "When an American librarian considers the role of the public music library in modern musical education, he thinks of the nearly 40,000 library outlets, central libraries, branches and sub-branches, which serve American communities, large and small, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Each of these is a potential avenue through which music can be brought into the lives of the people." It is the music librarian's job to preserve and perpetuate music and music literature, to make it available to all, and to nurture its growth. To accept this view is to be aware that there are important jobs in music librarianship not only to be filled but to be created as well. And it is to be expected that the schools of librarianship will play an increasingly important part in training the personnel to work in this expanding field.

References

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