Building a Collection to Meet the Needs Of Research Scholars in Music

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The coming of age in America of musicology, a discipline founded abroad and represented for many years by publications almost entirely of European provenance, is a recent phenomenon. It was not at all long ago that the few music historians on our soil were obliged to go abroad for their training, or were themselves of foreign birth. We now can boast an entire generation of native scholars of international reputation, holding posts in all of our major universities and developing research techniques which are no longer a mere echo of those cultivated abroad.

Research and instruction in musical scholarship between the two world wars was necessarily concentrated in those very few institutions which had been fortunate or far-sighted enough to acquire the basic materials of research in anticipation of their use. These were the Library of Congress; some of the larger city libraries, which had admirably fulfilled their obligations to a future as well as to a contemporary public; and three or four colleges and universities whose collections had enjoyed the attention of a visionary curator or philanthropist.

When the upheavals heralding the second world war brought to our shores a number of distinguished European scholars, musicology was added for the first time to the curriculum of a number of American universities. Few of these possessed what could be called a minimal research collection in music; and those which did seldom commanded a budget sufficient to guarantee the influx of all significant publications in the field.

The more enlightened university trustees and regents recognized, to their credit, that the distinction brought to their institution by the presence of an internationally admired scholar in music carried

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with it an obligation to furnish the raw materials of his trade. Emergency appropriations were placed at the disposal of faculties and librarians, together with instructions to create, forthwith, research libraries of music.

The identification of titles pertinent to such a plan was not an insuperable problem, even before the present day of excellent selective and classified bibliographies of research materials. Lists could be compiled in consultation with practicing scholars or with the scanty and generally obsolete bibliographies available; and the holdings of model libraries examined for content. By cumbersome means, a title list could be assembled to serve the standard requirements of musical research and instruction: musical dictionaries and encyclopedias; thematic indexes, library catalogs, and other bibliographic aids; scholarly periodicals, biographies, and monographs; and the gamut of collected editions and historical monuments.

Identifying a research collection in music was one matter; securing it was another. Most of the few thousand titles in a basic research collection had been long out of print, and were virtually unobtainable in the second-hand market. Some essential publications had been printed more than half a century earlier in editions of no more than two hundred copies, nearly all reposing permanently in institutional collections. Enforced examination of nineteenth or twentieth century secondary sources on microfilm is hardly the means to instill the love of scholarship in young minds; but this was the prospect facing many new departments of musicology twenty, and even ten years ago.

The expansion of a small library of performing editions, or the creation of a research library from nothing, is still no simple matter. It is not the hopeless problem of the recent past, however, thanks in part to modern technological inventiveness, but in greater measure to the imagination and resourcefulness of scholars, librarians, and publishers, working in collaboration. A substantial number of scholarly titles are once again available, in a variety of formats, and all evidence seems to indicate that this happy circumstance will accelerate.

Librarians need no longer lament over the unobtainability of the great collected editions of the works of Palestrina, Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven, for these monumental sets are being rendered obsolete by the issuance of new critical editions. Those unwilling to await the leisurely completion of each new series may purchase reprints on paper superior to that of the original editions, of the old collected works of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms. Reprints of
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several of the most celebrated historical series, including the German Denkmäler, Das Erbe Deutscher Musik, and one of the French monuments edited by Expert, are now offered by their publishers. Projects once suspended, such as the complete works of Lasso and Haydn, have been resumed with indications that the earlier volumes will once again be made available.

A heartening development of recent years was the announcement by a leading European publisher of a series devoted to facsimile reprints of early printed works such as the Quantz Versuch and the Walther Lexicon, whose usefulness has scarcely diminished since the day of their first publication. While some of the titles in this series appear to have been selected for reasons more bibliophilic than utilitarian, the project continues to furnish indispensable texts at the fraction of the cost of an original.

Comparable in purpose and format is a new series of editions in facsimile of important manuscript sources of medieval music. If the project is as successful as it deserves, there is every reason to suppose that its American publisher, or another, will extend the series to embrace other epochs of musical history. While it is unthinkable that a widely comprehensive selection of manuscript sources reproduced in this fashion could be made available in one lifetime, or in several, the pedagogical service of even a manageable selection will be inestimable.

A less expensive form of reproduction are the microcards issued by the University of Rochester Press, featuring a large and growing list of theoretical works published before 1800. A text form esteemed more, perhaps, by the librarian than by the myopic scholar, the microcard enables the research library, large or small, to plug the gaps in its collection of original texts which are not likely to be reprinted in book form. Also in such a category is the doctoral dissertation, of which significant contributions from the major American universities are now being added yearly to the microcard lists.

Modern but out-of-print monographs and bibliographic tools are categories neglected until recently by commercial publishers of reissued scholarly titles in music. Microfilm has proved an especially unsatisfactory substitute for bibliographic works, in which often only a single page needs to be consulted. Remedy is shortly to be sought in the novel process of xerography, by which prints are efficiently produced from microfilm at the cost of a few cents per page. A joint committee representing the Music Library Association and the Ameri-
can Musicological Society has been directed to compile a list of out-of-print works in greatest demand for musical research, which will be reproduced and made available at cost on a subscription basis. Even more than others less altruistic, this project merits success, and may hope to be expanded in the course of time.

Missing from the actual and projected reissues of scholarly works are a number of essential categories such as musicological journals, and serial and monograph titles not included in the projects outlined above. For these texts, as well as for most primary sources, microfilm is the only economical recourse. The new or resurgent library and its users suffer less from prejudice against this medium than does the older, established library; in consequence, it often exercises greater responsibility in furnishing for its readers the total requirements for a given field of research. The newer research library, too, may be in a better position or mood to furnish the up-to-date devices which make the reading of microprint less arduous than did those of a few years ago.

The librarian specializing in any subject, however, cannot afford to rest on his accomplishments of providing microtexts of the suitable materials of research. These are merely the passive servants of an energetic and essentially creative discipline. The vitality of learning is weakened by any obstructions separating the thinker from his facts; and anything which is a substitute for the actual fact will inhibit the thinking process. Microfilm is an indispensable accessory to scholarship carried on anywhere in the world, and so it will remain until a handier form of textual duplication or transmission is invented. No less than the scholar himself, however, the librarian must be aware that some of the meaning, and certainly some of the impact, of a book or manuscript is vitiated by photoduplication. Let us subject the exciting materials which pass through our hands to what is lamentably and almost universally termed "processing"; let us warily concede that the purpose of examining a book is "information retrieval"; but let us not forget that musical archeology, like other sorts, receives no mean part of its stimulation from such sensory delights as the redolence of a binding; the soapy texture of a vellum leaf; or the unreproduceable red of a rubricated page. A set of shiny three-by-five cards should be a substitute for Mersenne's *Harmonie Universelle* only until its custodian has the luck and the funds to find a bargain copy of the real thing.

Should a research library in music, newly underway, attempt then
to amass original materials in quantities comparable to the rich stores of European libraries? Or can it hope to compete even with the historical collections of venerable American institutions, some of them accumulating treasures for at least the past hundred years? A qualified yes is the immediate answer. Rivalry is out of the question, although a rich library might in a century overtake its ancient but impoverished neighbor. Growth of special collections can obviously not be encouraged at the expense of providing the essential core of a reference and research library. A growing representation of primary musical materials in a library, on the other hand, has many arguments in its favor.

What use are original editions to a modest research library? Sometimes they are the only editions, in a field with few best sellers. Although there are exceptions, the antiquarian book market for music remains generally well below the dizzying levels sustained by some of the more glamorous regions of book collecting. Many works of Johann Christian Bach, to cite a single example, are obtainable in original editions for less than the cost of photostating them, and for no more than a modern edition—if it were available—would cost. Librarians chary of eighteenth century editions and their problems of preservation may be depriving their readers of the sole available texts of important works. Their oldness or rarity, in such a case, is an irrelevant matter.

What of a rare text whose cost exceeds that of a photocopy, in sufficient measure to argue against its purchase? The individual circumstances of available funds will dictate the answer; but again, the incentive to inspired scholarship which an original document furnishes must not be overlooked.

What, finally, of an important book or manuscript whose text is rendered more legible, more accurate, and more comprehensible in a critical edition of the 1960's; what justification is there for its acquisition? One worldly argument is that it can capture the imagination of a potential benefactor, as specimens of more utility but less celebrity would fail to do. A sounder argument, once again, is on behalf of the mentality of the research scholar. It is he for whom a unique document of historical importance and a carefully assembled and comprehensive collection of primary materials in a chosen topic have meaning which a row of identically bound scores cannot reproduce. No less than in other sorts of institutions, a library benefits from the pride of its members in the resources it can offer.
The canny librarian can obtain early books, scores, and manuscripts at prices far below what might be imagined, particularly if entire collections are purchased at one time. Almost every year, American libraries gain new distinction by acquiring the private musical collection of a connoisseur, or the entire stock of an antiquarian dealer. The riches of many established research libraries in America were largely acquired in lumps, under such circumstances.

It is not to be supposed that these materials drift of their own accord across the Atlantic. In each case among recent acquisitions of notable European collections by American libraries, ingenious sleuthing by a scholar or librarian has uncovered the treasures for his library. Two advantages favor this aggressive approach to the collecting responsibility: an unpublicized private collection may be obtained before other libraries or even national governments have descended upon it; and personal negotiations with an owner ordinarily have results more favorable to a library than does the mediation of a dealer. In this manner have enviable collections come in recent years to institutions such as the Universities of Michigan and of California at Berkeley.

The economics of purchasing ready-made collections applies no less to the texts of a basic research library than to the rare or unique materials which may be counted as luxuries. For the library aspiring to meet the new demands of scholarship made upon it, a personal working library assembled over many years by a practicing scholar should furnish promptly a large quantity of essential titles which would otherwise require years of searching. The lump cost would certainly be less than for volumes individually purchased.

Because a research scholar's library is rarely released before he is dead, this acknowledged ideal for establishing the core of a new institutional library for research raises problems of some delicacy. It is perhaps not so difficult to acquire, however, as might be anticipated. Ambitious librarians have been known to cultivate the realistic, if somewhat ghoulish practice of following notices for the demise of eminent musical scholars. The more fastidious have other, and actually more efficient means for locating available research collections and of negotiating for their purchase. If such collections are not sold piecemeal on the auction block or sold to a dealer for resale, neither of which procedures guarantees maximum profit to an heir, the latter will frequently ask the aid of a dealer in finding a purchaser. A librarian in search of a ready-made research collection is well ad-
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vised to make his requirements known to several antiquarian music specialists in key cities here and abroad, and to await opportunities which they may report. The commission for the dealer’s services will not likely be exorbitant, and the exercise of his professional talents will amply justify his fees. He is a useful collaborator, too, in the disposal of duplicates which will invariably come with the purchased library, and in the recouping of some of the purchase cost.

Special circumstances have destroyed the integrity of certain private research collections dispersed in recent years, such as the Scholes and Dent libraries, as well as the fabulous stock of an Otto Haas. Others, however, such as those of Alfred Einstein, Manfred Bukofzer, and Olin Downes, have served to enrich substantially the libraries fortunate enough to inherit or purchase them. Many private libraries of greater or lesser scope than these remain to contribute a wider usefulness after their original collector has passed on.

The foregoing discussion has dealt only with the problems of retroactive collecting for a research library in music. Current publications as well, obviously, must be systematically acquired. The alternative is a kind of microcosmic national debt, leaving to later generations the consequences of the irresponsibility of our own.

The task becomes increasingly formidable as the steadily growing lists of new historical publications in music put more and more strain on budgets. Concomitant with the blossoming of the historical discipline and of healthy solvency among publishers here and abroad has been the proliferation of worthy monographs and critical editions. One remarkable sidelight of this development is the recent issuance of rival editions of identical music, each equipped with the expensive apparatus of scholarship. While mysterious personal factors are possibly involved, the phenomenon is surely symptomatic of an international race to bring the accessories of musical scholarship to a level with that of the older disciplines.

The selection by the research librarian from current publications, especially musical scores, is not the unequivocal matter it once was. Certain hallmarks formerly gave instant identification to critical editions: an arresting price tag; a monumental format; introductions and appendices of greater bulk than the accompanying musical text; and a refreshing absence of editorially imposed expression marks. The attributes of the “performer’s edition” were just the opposite in every regard. That one of the ultimate objectives of scholarship has taken effect may be seen in the blurring of the lines between these once
distinct categories. If the scholar wishes, for example, to consult the complete works for keyboard of Wilhelm Hieronymus Pachelbel, critically edited by a reputable scholar, he will find such a publication among the inexpensive performing editions of a widely distributed organ series. (The old German Denkmäler edition, while ampler in commentary, lacks one composition.) At the same time, modern series of historical monuments have come, by apparent common agreement, to abandon many of the occult mannerisms once barring their use by the uninitiated. They have even taken, somewhat confusingly for the library classifier, to issuing instrumental parts for practical use by performers.

There can be no question that the faculties of a research librarian in music are being challenged in increasing measure, whether they be his powers of judgment in selecting within the confines of his budget the materials which tomorrow's scholars will demand, or his talents of persuasion to fiscal authorities who must recognize the accelerated needs of musical study. His responsibility in the 1960's is a grave one, and one providing stimulation surely unmatched by any other humanistic field of librarianship.

References
