The Music Division of the
Library of Congress

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The collection of music in the Library of Congress antedates by many years the founding of the Music Division in 1897. There was a small but interesting section of books on music in Jefferson's library when it was acquired by Congress to replace its library destroyed in the War of 1812. By the time the present main building was opened in 1897, there had accumulated in the Capitol a great number of pieces of music which had to be moved into the new building. During the subsequent six decades, this number increased almost tenfold and there are now over three million items in the custody of the Music Division. The services which developed as a result of this phenomenal growth are both complex and varied. This study, however, will be limited to a discussion of those special services and activities of the Music Division which are unusual in the library world, some of them the result of the special position of the Library of Congress and others the result of what might be called historical accident.

There is an apparent reciprocity between the constituency which a library serves and its collections and services. The accumulation of a large quantity of a certain type of material will in itself frequently attract a new type of library user. The reverse is often true in that the growth of a certain type of musical activity in a community will lead a library to acquire the materials and develop the services necessary to support this activity. It is not always easy to determine which came first, the growth of a collection or the growth of interest among the library’s patrons. In the case of the Music Division of the Library of Congress, there has been this relationship between the growth of its collections and services and the development of American musical life. The pioneering activity involved in the establishment of the

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The Music Division of the Library of Congress

Archive of Folk Song was one of the most significant factors in the development of America's appreciation of its indigenous music. This is a case where a collection attracted a new type of library patron. On the other hand, the systematic acquisition of the autographs of famous American composers may be said to have been influenced by the growing appreciation of America's contemporary music and this would constitute an example of a collection growing out of public interest. More will be said later about both these activities but first a look at the constituency of the Music Division would seem to be in order.

The first obligation of the Library of Congress is, of course, to Congress itself. Although in the past, music has not been one of the major activities of the Congress, in recent years there has been a tremendous increase in requests for service from this source. The growth of interest in cultural matters, both domestic and in international relations, has had a marked effect on the number of requests for aid received from Congressional offices. Second only to Congress in priority, is L. C.'s obligation to the other government agencies. Here, however, there has been for a long time a considerable interest in music. There are few government agencies which at one time or another have not called on the Music Division for information or advice and there are several which make continual use of its services.

Leaving the field of government, the prime constituency of the Music Division, as of the library in general, are the other libraries in the country. Along with the better known services of the Library of Congress, such as the printed card program and the interlibrary loan service, there are some specialized services rendered by the Music Division which although designed for its own use are still made available to the libraries of the country and the world. An example of this may be found in the current book lists prepared by the Music Division staff as a regular activity in order to acquire a comprehensive collection of books on music. These lists furnish the basis for the book lists published in the magazines Notes and The Musical Quarterly. (The magazine Notes of the Music Library Association is not a government publication although it is occasionally mistakenly assumed to be so because almost the entire editorial staff is in the Library of Congress.)

Another large class of users of the Library of Congress are the musical organizations of the country. An indication of the close relationship between these organizations and the Library of Congress
may be found in the fact that the chief of the Music Division is ex officio the archivist of the National Music Council and permanent member of its executive board. In addition to the national organizations, scholarly, professional, and commercial, should be added the orchestras, opera companies, radio and television broadcasting companies, motion picture companies, and local music organizations scattered throughout the nation which constantly call on the Library of Congress for information needed in their work. Finally among the constituents of the Library of Congress are the musicologists and other scholars working in the field of music, the performers, the music educators, the music critics, the copyright lawyers, and in fact every type of individual who works in the field of music both here and abroad.

To serve this broad and varied constituency the Library of Congress has a collection of music which is equally broad and varied, a collection truly international in character. Although naturally very strong in American materials, it includes a cross section of the music of the entire world. In a brief survey such as this one it is obviously impossible even to mention more than a few of the most outstanding sections. Particularly noteworthy is the collection of books on music which is as comprehensive as the Library can make it. The Music Division also contains a remarkably fine collection in the field of opera, including about five thousand full orchestral scores, several times that number of vocal scores, and over forty thousand librettos. Its collection of early musical scores printed before 1800 is one of the best. And since the Library has been the U. S. copyright depository for almost a century, the Music Division now possesses the largest collection of music published in recent times.

In its custodial responsibilities, the staff of the Music Division does, of course, regard this assemblage of materials physically as a collection of books, but in its reference work, they are more apt to regard it as a body of knowledge. As a result, the members of the staff have through the years developed special competences which are recognized by the patrons of the Library of Congress throughout the musical world. The unusual calls for expert opinion and advice are indications of this broad experience of the staff as a whole. It can hardly be explained as a coincidence that during the past decade various members of the Music Division staff were appointed to serve in a number of responsible positions for example, as member of the U. S. National Commission for Unesco, chairman of the Council of
The Music Division of the Library of Congress

National Library Associations, first president of the International Association of Music Libraries, chairman of the Music Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies in one case and a delegate of a learned society to the Council in another, and member of the American National Theatre and Academy Music Panel of the President’s Program. Furthermore, three members of the staff have served at different times on the advanced Fulbright Committee for music, two as chairman. Members of the staff have also held office and important committee assignments in many scholarly and professional organizations. Even though most such work is extracurricular, it does constitute a recognition by the musical world of the unusual competence of the staff.

This does not mean that the more usual reference and bibliographic services are neglected. On the contrary, the number of scholars who consult the staff in the course of their research is legion, and bibliographical and reference services are rendered not only to American students but by correspondence to scholars throughout the world. The world of performance is also served; concert artists, orchestra conductors, opera companies, radio and television producers and motion picture directors frequently call on the division for aid in preparing their programs. And among government agencies, the State Department, the U. S. I. A., and the armed forces are some of the most constant patrons of the division’s services.

The special activities of the Music Division fall into several categories. There are those which derive from the contents of the collection and others which involve the creation of new documents to be added to the collection. As examples of those derived from the collection might be mentioned the concerts of chamber music in which are performed works found on the shelves of the library and also the issuance of phonograph records based on the library’s archives. Examples of the creation of new documents may be found in the recording activities of the Archive of Folk Song, as well as in the commissioning of new compositions of music although the creation of a document is not the major purpose of a commission. There are still other activities which do not fall into either category, such as those of the Sonneck Memorial Fund and the Louis C. Elson Lectures. Most of these special activities are supported in whole or in part by endowment funds set up by generous donors.

There are several foundations supported by endowments which are attached to the Music Division. The first to come into being was
the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation, established in 1925 by the late Mrs. Coolidge at the time she donated to the Library of Congress the auditorium which now bears her name. The Coolidge Foundation has as its main purpose the promotion of chamber music in the United States. To achieve this, it gives concerts regularly in the Library and its festivals presented from time to time have achieved international fame. This foundation also subsidizes concerts of chamber music throughout the country. It encourages the creation of chamber music by awarding commissions to outstanding composers and the autograph manuscripts of these commissioned works are added to the library's collections.

Another foundation which supports the creation of new music is the Serge Koussevitzky Music Foundation, established in the Library of Congress in 1950. Since the work of this foundation is not limited to chamber music, it only occasionally gives a concert in the library to present a new work. Most of its commissioned works are in larger forms, which are introduced by major symphony orchestras and opera houses throughout the world, but the autograph manuscripts of all the works so commissioned are also added to the library's collections.

The accumulation of contemporary autograph manuscripts from these two foundations alone would make the library's collection an outstanding one but in addition there have been other significant sources for this type of material. The Fromm Music Foundation of Chicago, although not otherwise connected with the Library of Congress has arranged to donate the manuscripts of its commissioned works to the library's collections. Furthermore, the Music Division has in recent years attempted to persuade American composers to donate all their autographs to the Library of Congress so that future historians would find in one place most of the original documents of the outstanding works composed in this generation. The results of these efforts have been very encouraging and already some of the composers who have agreed to such regular donations include Samuel Barber, Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, Roy Harris, Alan Hovhaness, Ulysses Kay, Walter Piston, Richard Rodgers, William Schuman, Leo Sowerby, Deems Taylor, and others. To these should be added the names of some composers whose manuscripts were already in the Music Division such as George Gershwin, Victor Herbert, Charles Martin Loeffler, Sigmund Romberg, and John
The Music Division of the Library of Congress

Philip Sousa. The importance of a collection that contains such significant materials is obvious.

The total number of concerts in the Library of Congress exceeds forty each year and of these the majority are presented by the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Foundation. This foundation was established by Mrs. Whittall in 1935, at which time she donated to the library five magnificent Stradivari instruments (three violins, a viola and a cello) and five Tourte bows to accompany them. More than twenty of these concerts are played by the Budapest String Quartet on these Stradivari and the available funds are sufficient for about ten additional concerts by other eminent artists and ensembles. (All of the concerts in the library are broadcast in their entirety in Washington and by delayed broadcast in other cities.) Although the Whittall Foundation does not acquire manuscripts as a result of commissions, it was the personal generosity of Mrs. Whittall that enabled the library to acquire a remarkable collection of autographs of classical composers, including Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and particularly Brahms. There is still another foundation which occasionally gives concerts. This is the Nicholas Longworth Foundation, established in memory of the late speaker of the House of Representatives who had served as the first president of the Friends of Music in the Library of Congress which was active from 1928 to 1942.

There are several smaller endowments which deserve mention. The Sonneck Memorial Fund was set up to continue the interests of the first chief of the Music Division, Oscar Sonneck, by subsidizing the publication of original research in the history of American music. There is also a fund which provides for the delivery and publication of lectures in memory of the late Louis C. Elson. The Dayton C. Miller Fund was established to support and develop the Miller Flute Collection. There are still others but those described here are of more general interest. Endowments supporting such activities are administered by the Library of Congress Trust Fund Board, a quasi-corporation created by act of Congress in 1925. The funds themselves are held and managed by the U. S. Treasury Department under the terms of a permanent loan which pays four per cent per annum in perpetuity.

The pioneering work of the Library of Congress in the field of folk song is internationally recognized. Its activities have been one of the most potent forces in the development of the appreciation of
indigenous folk music not only in the United States but throughout the western hemisphere. The Archive of Folk Song was founded in 1928 and supported at first by a group of private individuals and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. It is now a section of the Music Division supported by appropriated funds. Before the perfection of the magnetic tape recorder, it was very difficult to make field recordings and for many years, therefore, the Archive was forced to organize its own recording expeditions or lend its portable disc recording equipment to private collectors. Today this is no longer necessary and the Archive increases its collection by duplicating parts of collections located at state universities or in the hands of private collectors. About eighty thousand songs in recorded form have been assembled in this fashion, most of them from the United States but with a gradually increasing representation of the folk music of other parts of the world.

The Recording Laboratory is another section of the Music Division. It was established in 1939, with funds donated by the Carnegie Corporation, in order to satisfy the ever increasing demand for copies of the folk music recordings. It soon branched into other fields and during World War II was responsible for many educational recordings prepared for the armed forces. At present, in addition to musical recordings (folk songs, concerts, etc.), the Recording Laboratory is involved in the production of poetry and other literary recordings, the editorial responsibility for which rests with other divisions of the library. The laboratory has for years offered for sale selections from the folk song and literary collections issued in the form of vinylite pressings. (Catalogs may be obtained from the Recording Laboratory.) The Recording Laboratory also provides copies on magnetic tape or instantaneous discs on special order.

All sound recordings, irrespective of subject matter, are in the custody of the Music Division. This collection has grown to large proportions and the library, as a first step in solving the problems of storage applied for aid to the Rockefeller Foundation, which made a grant of $65,000 to support a preliminary study. This project has just been completed and the report, *Preservation and Storage of Sound Recordings* by A. G. Pickett and M. M. Lemcoe is now available from the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, at a cost of forty-five cents. It is hoped that this report will prove useful to all libraries faced with the problems involved in the storage of sound recordings.
The Music Division of the Library of Congress

This has been a brief description of some of the more unusual services and activities of the Music Division. In a changing world, and particularly with the growing interest in cultural matters, new activities or at least modifications of the present programs will undoubtedly be developed to meet changing conditions.