The Music Catalog as a Reference Tool

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As soon as special materials are segregated into special collections, general cataloging codes and subject heading lists become, to a degree at least, ineffective. The very fact of specialization implies an intensive use of materials and points to a need for different or more precise avenues of approach. The average music library is part of a larger complex, and many of its rules, procedures, and records are determined by the parent organization. Here there arises an initial conflict: Cataloging, classification and subject heading work can be most efficiently carried out in a general cataloging department, so far as the techniques of handling materials, reproducing cards, and so forth are concerned. On the other hand, special needs cannot be anticipated or understood as well by a cataloger working at a distance from the service point, as by the reference librarian who deals directly with the problems of the catalog user, and whose knowledge of his field and its bibliography qualifies him as a subject specialist. In its most extreme form, this conflict leads to a situation in which the reference librarian's demands for detail and analysis cannot be met by the catalog department. If the reference staff of a special library finds it necessary to reclassify, analyze in detail, or create new subject entries for any considerable proportion of material, the efficiency of the whole cataloging operation is impaired.

The normal path of development has been for nonbook material to be cataloged at the service point until special rules for its handling have been developed and codified, at which time it can be absorbed into the regular routines of a general cataloging department. In the music field, this situation has been achieved by the pioneer work of the Music Library Association and the development of the Library of Congress/American Library Association codes for cataloging musical

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scores and recordings. Theoretically, so far as descriptive cataloging is concerned, all of the basic materials can now be handled effectively in a general cataloging department. At the same time, the present codes have been developed within the framework of the general dictionary catalog.

Administrative organizations vary, but in most branch libraries at least some parts of the cataloging process are the responsibility of the reference staff. Catalog maintenance is an obvious area: the catalog department may send to the branch books which have been accessioned and prepared for the shelves, together with their sets of cards; and the branch itself may decide on its own catalog organization. If the assignment of subject headings is allocated to the reference librarian, the wasted time involved in dual handling of the materials is in one sense offset by the fuller knowledge he gains of the content of the collection.

There are many types of material, ephemeral in nature or so slight as to be undeserving of full or even of limited cataloging treatment. Sheet music editions that are expendable or readily replaceable are often indexed as a supplement to the catalog proper. Pamphlets, reprints of periodical articles, practical opera librettos, concert programs and clippings, are normally indexed by the branch staff. In libraries of certain types, recordings may be regarded as ephemeral material. New techniques and increased historical knowledge are constantly resulting in better recordings and more authentic performances. It is often impossible or impractical to replace an outworn disc with an exact duplicate. Unless an archival collection is intended, recordings may well be cataloged as simply and as cheaply as possible, perhaps in index style by the branch staff.

As subject specialists, music librarians are far less concerned with general catalogs, either of their own or of other libraries, than with bibliographies and special catalogs in their field. The filing title system for scores and records, in placing its emphasis on the composer's original title, adheres to the philosophy of book cataloging, in which the title page is more or less inviolate. Many bibliographies and thematic catalogs, and many of our foreign colleagues prefer other arrangements. The chronological entry secured by opus number order as it occurs, for example, in Hofmeister, Pazdírek, and in the thematic catalogs of certain nineteenth century composers, would be impractical for most American libraries, although it has been successfully used in Northern Europe. But the "systematic"
arrangement in the Schmieder and van Hoboken thematic catalogs of Bach and Haydn, the lists of works in most encyclopedias and dictionaries, and the catalogs of many European libraries, would be more satisfactory than title arrangement for the works of voluminous composers. As a matter of fact, the conventional title system results in a half classified, half alphabetical arrangement; certain musical forms are translated into English and arranged by form, medium, and opus number, while works with individual titles are written in the original language and word order. Bach's cantatas, for example, appear under their distinctive titles, but a collection of miniature scores or an edition of the complete texts would have the filing word, "Cantata."

The primary use of the catalog is as a finding list of the materials in an individual library. For "art" music, the basic approach is normally through the name of composer. At this point there is a divergence of need for different aspects of library practice. For purposes of order checking and bibliographical search, the need is for a precise citation of a definite title page, for a specific physical volume is the object of inquiry. For reference purposes, the content of a volume is often more important than the volume itself, and that content may be broken down into a number of significant subdivisions any one of which may be an object of search. The reference function might therefore be best served by an entry for each individual work of art, arranged through filing title in a meaningful order under its composer. For the order librarian, checking a publisher's or dealer's catalog against a library's holdings, any kind of filing title is an impediment.

Books as well as scores are subject to these conflicting approaches. Since most bibliographic citations refer to individual articles, it would be useful, from the reference point of view, to have the contents of Festschriften or congress reports analyzed by author and subject, even at the expense of omitting an entry for the volume as a whole.

The difference in viewpoint is nowhere more marked than with regard to main entries for recordings. Several major works are often pressed on a single LP disc. As with published music, these are usually assembled by composer, form or instrument, but the title of the whole as given on the record jacket is often meaningless. The need for accurate identification of content is increased by the fact that the recording itself is visually impenetrable: it is fairly simple to identify a specific organ prelude in a printed collection, but much
more time consuming to select a similar work from a composite recording. If the main approach to recorded materials is by composer, the title entry of a composite release is useless from the reference point of view, and has value principally for the purposes of order checking. It is a substitute for a title page, and in part an effort to make a kind of material entirely different in nature conform to the principles of book cataloging.

The opera libretto has been repeatedly discussed in library literature. The usual decision has been to catalog according to the use of the publication rather than according to its nature, for the libretto is normally entered under the name of the composer, even though not one note of music may appear in the publication itself. In most libraries of any extent, there are borderline publications, some of which are cataloged as music, some as literature. For the library intending a special collection of librettos, title main entry, as in the printed Library of Congress catalog, is a practical alternative. The case for this treatment has been clearly stated by Franz Grasberger.

For each of the special materials of the music library, there are bibliographical practices of which present cataloging codes do not take full advantage. However, if an integrated catalog is desired, there is perhaps no other way of achieving it than by making all materials conform as closely as possible to the general code.

The card catalog in general and the dictionary catalog in particular have been criticized for size, inflexibility, and general unwieldiness. The worst aspect of our profession is the permanence of its records. Once a pattern has been set up, change becomes difficult, and the difficulty of change increases in direct proportion to size. At the same time, recataloging and revision of entries is a continuous process, with the result that most catalogs are a patchwork of old and new. Any new material, initially a small specialized collection, tends to be treated in great detail, but as the body of material grows, the cost of such cataloging becomes prohibitive, and the need for it less apparent. This process can be witnessed in Library of Congress cataloging of both scores and records. An early Library of Congress card for a collection of scores is far more detailed, in both contents notes and analytical entries, than a revision of the same card as printed in 1960. The change in cataloging rules is in part responsible, of course, but there is also a change in attitude toward the material itself. Similarly, the first printed cards for recordings revealed fuller
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analysis than is being given at present. Any catalog long in use reflects varying attitudes and varying rules: the streamlined entry of today stands side by side with the detailed one of yesterday, and the Library of Congress printed card is filed beside an entry, simpler perhaps, produced by the library's own processing unit.

It is a safe assumption that no catalog will ever be perfect. If it fulfills its basic purpose of listing the content of the library by a kind of entry consistent with the nature and use of the material it is a valuable tool, whatever the criteria on which the entry is based, and however the cards are assembled. There are advantages in a dictionary catalog which will show the relationships between different kinds of material; which will place in one file Beethoven's letters, scores of his symphonies, recordings of the same works, criticisms or analytical studies, and biographies of the composer. There is a distinct economy in such organization: duplicate entries can be avoided, and a single cross reference serves several purposes. There are equal advantages, from the point of view of use, in separate catalogs for scores, recordings, books, librettos; and the smaller the catalog, the more quickly a specific item can be isolated. A subject catalog designed as a separate unit and for a distinct kind of material is free in its choice of terminology and organization.

Since the basis of entry is normally the bibliographical unit rather than the content analysis which would make the catalog a true index to the collection, the reference librarian is in part dependent on supplementary tools. One of the most valuable of recent additions to the reference shelf is Anna H. Heyer's guide to the content of historical sets, which lists contents for complete works and monumental editions, with composer index for much of the material. Minnie E. Sears' song index has long served a similar purpose for the contents of standard collections of vocal works, and has acted as a substitute for analytical entry. Composer entries in such dictionaries as Moser refer to works issued in the various monumental sets. Wolfgang Schmieder supplies an index to standard editions of Bach, including the Bach-Gesellschaft, and Georg Kinsky performs a similar service for Beethoven. For lesser works, the process must often be one of checking the contents of actual volumes.

Bibliographie des Musikschrifttums is a source for the content of congress reports and periodical articles, with Music Index as a valuable supplement, especially for domestic publications. Access to older periodical articles is available through E. C. Krohn's index
and through biographical entries in standard German dictionaries and encyclopedias. The weakness of any printed index is, of course, its inability to cover current publications.

Such publications as the Schwann catalogs are sometimes helpful in locating specific recordings, but only in a roundabout way, unless the recordings themselves or a set of cards are arranged by manufacturer's number. The World Encyclopedia of Recorded Music analyses the most important works in record anthologies, and presents a complete listing of their contents in a special section.

These and similar tools serve to supplement the catalog as substitutes for analytical entries, and at the same time to extend it. In the reference and research library, it is the second of these two functions that is the more important. The scholar does not ask merely what materials a given library contains, but rather what materials exist, for microfilm techniques and interlibrary loan services have made the contents of many libraries coextensive. Catalogs and printed lists of holdings of other music libraries, and union lists, such as the British Union Catalog of Early Music are of inestimable value in enlarging the scope of the individual music library.

The question of subject coverage is a perplexing one, capable of various solutions in libraries of various types. The scholar, thoroughly familiar with the bibliographical tools of his field, has little need of the kind of help given by subject headings: he is more concerned with an exhaustive list of all available material than with the subject content of the individual library. In the educational institution, particularly if it is historically oriented, the same kind of approach is better taught if the student is forced to use a variety of books and bibliographies, rather than permitted to depend primarily on the library's subject catalog for his material. If an open shelf library is adequately classified, the casual reader may prefer to browse among the books themselves rather than to thumb through a file of subject cards. And for information on specific topics, an article in Grove or Apel is often adequate. In many respects—aside from coverage of the most recent materials—the bibliographical references in the better dictionaries and encyclopedias are preferable to subject entries, for here, a known authority has assembled what he considers to be the most indispensable references.

It is quite possible for a classified library to function without a subject catalog. The classification schedule and the shelf list, if it is made public, identify the major areas from the subject point of
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view. With the addition of reference cards to bring out multiple aspects of a given book, and an alphabetical index to the classification, the shelf list can easily be transformed into a true classed catalog. A Dewey library whose schedule is of the proper vintage can take advantage of some of the elements of the Brussels expansions, and an L. C. library has a logical system in the original tables.

A classed catalog is particularly appropriate for musical scores. The primary elements of subject headings and those divisions set up by an adequate classification schedule are the same: medium of performance and musical form, or some combination of the two. In the Library of Congress tables, for example, the principal divisions are by medium of performance. In instrumental music, the larger classes are sub-arranged by form; in vocal music, there is a prior division by purpose, in terms of sacred and secular, dramatic and non-dramatic. The order of classes is logical and easily grasped. For performance libraries, and for performance purposes in libraries of all kinds, the classification table supplies the primary approach to the material. In certain classes, such as chamber music, further detail may be needed; otherwise, there is little value in subject analysis by medium, for a reference to the appropriate numbers in the shelf list serves the same purpose. In such an adaptation of the shelf list as a classed catalog, any kind of chronological subdivision is lacking, save in the small percentage of cases in which both form and medium are practically synonymous with stylistic period. Division by nationality or school is another impossibility. Style is not necessarily coextensive with either chronological period or nationality, and this type of approach may well be left to bibliography.

In many libraries, record collections are unclassified. If they are arranged according to the same schedule as scores, the shelf list may be made to serve in the same way for subject approach. If the arrangement is simply by accession number, there is nevertheless a kind of medium of performance heading in the entries for performer. The library user who does not have a specific composer and title in mind is more apt to want to listen to a particular violinist than to violin music in general. It might indeed be practical to combine the two types of entry, and write Violin: Oistrakh, Conductor: Scherchen, Orchestra: Philadelphia. Form and period divisions may seem important in the educational library, but perhaps the task of drawing up lists of recordings for class use is one for the instructor.
or the reference librarian rather than for the catalog. There are of course numerous and extensive discographies in historical studies, unfortunately out of date almost as soon as issued; and the various anthologies: History of Music in Sound, Anthologie Sonore, Archiv Produktion, are available for examples of forms and stylistic periods. A subject grouping is most important in recordings of other than art music. Ethnic music and folk song collections clearly need to be grouped accordingly to place of origin, and if the music library is the custodian of nonmusical recordings, subject groupings of language or documentary recordings are imperative.

For an alphabetical subject catalog, there are now two excellent guides in the Library of Congress list and in the recently published subject heading list of New York Public Library. They are similar in that both have been designed for a combined dictionary catalog of scores and books. The Library of Congress list is aimed primarily toward a body of subject cards for music integrated in a general catalog; the New York Public Library list for a separate departmental catalog. For scores, the basic element in the L.C. list is form, which complements the primary division by medium in the classification tables; the basic element of the New York Public Library list is medium, corresponding to its closed stack arrangement and broader classification. Both follow the principle of specific topic in assigning subject headings for books. Neither is especially well suited to subject entries for a record catalog, for both are more detailed than necessary in bringing out precise instrumentation.

There is a third, perhaps embryonic set of subject headings for music in the conventional title system itself. The first two elements of the conventional title for a musical form are the name of the form and the medium of performance, the latter expressed in score order. If the limitation of elements in the conventional title supplies a sufficiently detailed medium of performance, it would be both economical and consistent to express the subject heading in the same way. If a similar classification were used throughout in conventional title place, placing Opera before Don Giovanni and Cantata before Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis, the first part of the filing title and the heading might simply be inverted for a form-medium subject approach.

An alphabetical subject heading system is valuable insofar as it complements the classification in grouping or segregating materials in other ways. If the classification is broad, subject approach should
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be detailed; if the classification is narrow, subject approach may reasonably try to bring together all related aspects of a particular subject. In the specific approach, interrelationships between subjects must be expressed by cross-references. In the classed or alphabetically-classed catalog, interrelationships are shown in the order of the material. In a special field, the user of the catalog is often better served by the latter, for specialization implies a clientele with knowledge of the field covered.

For references purposes, the catalog is most important as an author list, as complete as possible, for the permanent holdings of the collection. There are substitutes for subject approach in the library's classification schedule, in bibliographies, in reference tools in general. In the special library, the kind of subject approach that is most useful may be entirely different from that required for the same type of material in a general collection. If one set of records can be made to serve multiple purposes, as in the adaptation of the shelf list as a classed catalog, there is economy in card production, filing, maintenance, and use. The reference librarian's value depends on his understanding of the catalog and related bibliographies, for the catalog is never self-explanatory, and the reference librarian must serve as its interpreter and apologist.

References