The Music Library in its Physical Aspects

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In considering the music library in its physical aspects, the present writers draw from practical rather than theoretical sources. The opinions expressed are based upon observation and experience; reviews of library plans; and accounts of librarians who have participated in building new libraries, remodeling old facilities, or moving materials from a general into a separate library. Some of the ideas presented are an outcome of workshops held at Sibley Library of the Eastman School of Music in the past three years, during which practical problems of music librarianship have been discussed. As for equipment, only the items having application to the music field are dealt with; it is unnecessary to elaborate upon those whose use is identical in all collections. The subject of phonorecords which is treated by E. E. Colby elsewhere in this issue is omitted.

Librarians agree on the impossibility of presenting any single solution to problems of housing a music collection. So varied are the functions and characteristics of individual libraries that no one plan can serve as a model. Fundamental differences in general library organization are reflected in the music library. The music collection within a public library offers a wide variety of services to a cross-section of music-lovers of the area, young and old, amateur and connoisseur. The collection often functions as a separate unit, although it is frequently combined with such departments as fine arts or the dance. The collegiate music library, on the other hand, has a different clientele, composed largely of students and faculty and representing less of a community cross-section than that of the

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public library. The services offered, while possibly less varied, may be of a more scholarly nature. While the music collection is often conceived as an independent unit (as in conservatories or university schools of music), it, too, frequently operates as an integral part of a larger department, such as art or the humanities.

In addition to the type of constitution and administration, widely varying conditions influence music library planning. How large is the collection? Is it a reference library or a circulating one? Does it include multiple copies of choral music and instrumental parts for band and orchestral works? How many people use it? How large is the staff? Because of this complex of factors, there are but a few primary principles applicable to all libraries.

The materials of a music collection are scores, instrumental parts, sheet music, books, periodicals, microtexts, phonorecords and tapes, and a wide range of miscellaneous items (clippings, pictures, slides, filmstrips, etc.). While instances exist in which these materials are divided (e.g., books being placed in the general library while scores and records are in the music library), most librarians agree on the desirability of integrating all of them in one place. This is not easy to accomplish. Physical limitations of size and placement sometimes interfere, and official resistance to integration is frequently met, particularly in regard to general reference works, rare books needing special housing and administration, and materials falling into standard classifications housed elsewhere in the main library (e.g., biography). While there is financial and administrative justification for this resistance, the economy of time and effort is important to the already harassed music student. In the collegiate library especially, the interests of music scholarship may best be served by integrating all materials which are interrelated in function. The use of phonorecords involves scores; scores involve biographies and analytical guides, which in turn may involve bibliographical aids. Even items worthy of seclusion in rare book collections should be accessible if they represent the only form in which a desired composition or commentary is available. With this concept of the integrated music library as the ideal but with the knowledge of variations existing in different institutions, the next consideration is the physical surroundings and equipment.

The question of space is of utmost importance in library planning. The general plea throughout the profession for more space per library, no matter how much has already been allotted, arises from the
lamentable fact that space is a scarce commodity and most institutions lack footage to do justice to their present holdings, to say nothing of providing for expansion. Notable exceptions are those fortunate libraries housed in recently built structures in which planning has been done with an eye to the future. Curiously, some librarians who are fully aware of the mathematics involved in the shelf needs of ordinary books are vague in their ideas of space allotment for music. Music, in spite of its peculiarities, does occupy space. A popular misconception exists that because it comes in limp sheets or in 33-centimeter dimensions, music must be handled differently from books. True, sheet music cannot stand upright unless it is encased in stiff covers, but it can be filed, put into boxes, or stacked. No matter where it is kept, music takes up space and presents expansion problems.

This is particularly true because music does not become conveniently outdated as does literature in many other fields. A set of Beethoven piano sonatas published fifty years ago is as valuable to a musician as one published in 1960 and may contain unique editorial additions. A librarian is loathe to discard the older set as long as it remains intact, and in the meanwhile other worthy editions continue to appear. An artist of the past generation lives aurally in a vintage 78 rpm recording which the librarian preciously guards while acquiring new 33 rpm recordings of the same work performed by contemporary musicians. A music collection therefore accumulates at an alarming rate with the minimum discard to offset its growth.

Nor are the developments of modern science particularly helpful. Microreproduction, an important restraining element in the phenomenal increase in space requirement anticipated by the general library, unfortunately has only limited application in the expansion plans for most music collections. Helpful as microtext is to theoretical and musicological research, there is no micro-medium suitable for musical performance. Even taking into account the pocket score and the welcome reduction in space occupied by the long-playing records and tapes, miniaturization does not provide an altogether successful solution to the expansion problem. The logical conclusion is that a music library must be planned for continued increase in physical volume.

A second basic concept in planning a music library is its location in relation to its surroundings. While any library may suffer from external noises, the library located in a building used for music
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instruction is notoriously vulnerable. Proper placement can be of great value, the ideal location being as far removed as possible from such classic sources of noise as practice rooms, studios, and locker rooms. Since some situations are unavoidable, serious thought must be given to effective sound-proofing materials and processes.

A judicious use of sound control makes possible a wide variety of activity within the music library. Music being an art of sound, not of silence, it is an error to expect a music library to be an altogether quiet place. Some provision must be made in or near the collection for listening facilities. Although sounds resulting from the simultaneous playing of several records have been reduced if not eliminated by earphone attachments to the record-player, the solution is admittedly not ideal because of mechanical difficulties and quality limitations. With soundproofed walls, however, a series of listening rooms separated from the study area can become a great asset to the library. Listening alcoves within the study area may quite successfully be sound-controlled as well. It is also important that pianos be provided in the library, since “hearing” a composition by visual means is beyond the ability of most persons. Rooms or alcoves for score-reading are obviously another subject for sound proofing and careful placement. The improvements being made in techniques of sound control represent one of the most significant single contributions to the physical planning of today’s music library. Materials and devices soon will be available which can finally eliminate the distracting confusion of necessary and legitimate sounds emanating from various quarters. Happily, many of the methods can be adapted to existing buildings as well as employed in structures under construction.

What the staff members are doing and where they are doing it must be accounted for in physical planning. In small collections where one person performs all the multiple duties of library operation, it is not only desirable but necessary to have materials placed where the librarian can reach them quickly with the minimum of effort. In larger libraries where several staff members perform specialized duties, their quarters should naturally be situated as close as possible to the materials with which they work. In all libraries it is advisable to have one point of entrance and exit, with the main desk located at a strategic spot to enable one person to supervise all activities of the library during slack periods and evening hours, an arrangement serving simultaneously as a security measure and a saving of personnel. Complete visibility from a focal point has been made possible.
by substituting glass partitions for solid walls. In college libraries it is imperative to avoid use of the library area for other than library purposes, with the possible exception of seminar rooms for classes using restricted materials. The library cannot be expected to maintain control while serving as a traffic lane to classrooms and faculty offices. A delicate problem arises, for proximity to materials has great charm, but the position of the library must be considered in fairness to both librarian and faculty, since both suffer if it is impossible to exercise control over library resources.

In further consideration of library arrangement in relation to staff, areas devoted to reference aids (encyclopedias, indexes, and the like) may logically be concentrated in one place in public music libraries, for their use is primarily limited to a librarian in charge of this service. On the other hand, the same materials may be dispersed among various sections of the collegiate music collection according to their specific nature because students are expected to use them more or less independently. The current availability of editions of complete works, monuments, thematic indexes, and other publications of more than ordinary value has created the need for increased security over the open stack. An area with limited access and/or special supervision is recommended, especially in larger music libraries. Likewise, the section occupied by periodicals must receive attention, particularly if complete volumes are shelved near current issues. Since the growing importance as well as the vulnerability of this material is widely known, its preservation requires supervision. Provision for carrells as semiprivate work space for researchers is desirable in libraries where many materials must remain within the building. Adequate and convenient reading areas for those engaged in extended and scholarly projects is one effective deterrent to the unauthorized removal practices which plague even the best managed libraries.

Although separation or integration of activities is largely a matter of individual expediency, the provision for flexibility of space is important in a music collection. The evolution of phonorecords within the past decade and the present uncertain state of tape recordings as a permanent medium point up the necessity for periodic re-evaluation of space allotment. The recent publication of the large composers’ facsimile editions of contemporary works on the one hand and the increased distribution of miniature or study scores on the other are another case in point, though admittedly not as dramatic
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as the phonorecords. Still another is the growing popularity of various types of microtexts for scholarly musical research, demanding as it does some extraordinary provisions.

The dimensions of a piece of music, being frequently larger than those of a book (though usually thinner in terms of number of pages), should be reflected in several areas of the library. While in most cases the cataloging and classification of music are done satisfactorily in the general library, it is advisable to have the physical preparation of sheet music and scores under the immediate supervision of music library personnel, who are acquainted with problems peculiar to the use of music in performance as well as the methods for its preservation. In libraries where such preparation is delegated to the music department, sufficient space is needed for the storage of music in various stages of readiness as well as for the actual processing. Not only is music sizable but it is generally in need of being bound, a condition calling for greater areas to be reserved for this work. The problem becomes even more acute where phonorecords are processed in the music library. A survey of library plans reveals that processing areas are too frequently victims of space economy, which, judging from complaints of the personnel, is false economy. More is to be gained from ample work space than from allotment of a few additional feet to some other activity. Finally, the unusual size of materials should be taken into account in ordering circulation desks and study tables, as well as in determining the proportions of enclosed cases for exhibits. Special accommodations are expected, of course, where instruments are to be shown. Music librarians should be urged, therefore, to "think big."

Except for the housing of ephemeral sheet music and multiple copies for organizational use, there is an encouraging trend towards standard shelving for music. Although the filing cabinet is still employed, as are special boxes and containers, the gradual conversion of libraries from closed to open stacks has led to a need for classification with specific call numbers, which in turn makes regular shelving desirable. The combination of the present personnel shortage and the tendency towards greater use of library facilities makes it imperative that music as well as books have a definite, intelligible arrangement, material must be readily available to the client by requiring a minimum of staff time in locating desired works and replacing them after use. Fortunately, with the steadily growing collections, it is becoming impossible for the librarian's memory to serve
as the sole means of locating an item, even in a music library. With a well organized system of shelving the patrons can more easily help themselves with the aid of the catalog.

The ideal treatment of music is to consider each permanent addition as a unit to be classified, cataloged, suitably bound, and placed on regular shelves with dividers. Strong objections come from those who feel that this entails too great a financial outlay or that the material itself is unworthy of the care. The opinion of some administrators has been that because music arrives unbound, it may logically remain so. The resistance to permanent bindings is further strengthened by the comparatively low cost of some music, which is, as a rule, considerably less than that of a book. Music therefore seems expendable. This idea is untenable. A properly bound piece of music is more easily and inexpensively housed and more readily handled in circulation than an unbound one; it also lasts much longer. The cost of replacement involves, in addition to the purchase price, the expense of recataloging and reprocessing. Regardless of size or format, each piece of music is a book, to be accorded the same care and dignity as a book. Never should it be treated as second class material accepted on sufferance. Music, like a literary creation, is a primary source. Most important, a library stocked with dilapidated music is as demoralizing to the user as it is to library personnel and is a menace to efficient librarianship.

If complete binding and shelving are impossible, some other form of housing may be indicated for materials enjoying only limited use. Although manufacturers claim great advantages for the pamphlet filing shelf, equipped with dividers and indexed guides, this open shelf offers little protection against dirt and wear. An alternative is a container, the most popular of which is the music file with hinged flap. Serious shortcomings shared by music and pamphlet file boxes designed for horizontal use include poor visibility of contents, waste space, need for closely spaced shelves, and necessity for removing the entire box from the shelf in order to reach one item.

Orchestral and choral materials consisting of multiple parts and multiple copies require other provisions. It is generally agreed that for space economy and ease in handling, vertical filing in expanding red-rope folders in legal-sized steel cabinets is ideal, especially if an accession number rather than a classification number is used for identification. Storage boxes as an alternative have disadvantages, since stacking them usually leads to trouble except where wood
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construction is used. The only really satisfactory arrangement of boxes requires adjustable shelving, five or six inches apart. If the library uses boxes for this purpose, the commercially manufactured rather than the custom-made article should be considered for lower price and uniformity. And if the loss of space resulting from uniform sized boxes is a major objection, the library should probably not be employing boxes at all.

For effective covering of scores and other larger forms of music publication, the standard hand-sewn binding and the comb-type of plastic or wire fastener are two alternatives. The spiral fastener is less satisfactory because it is prone to bending or breaking in use. An economical binding may be achieved for a very strongly made score by using adjustable plastic covers with a cloth strip on the spine. Smaller forms of publication may be adequately protected by pamphlet binders, either hand-sewn or metal-stitched and suitably reinforced with tape. Orchestral parts consisting of only a few pages may be fastened into manila or rag-stock binders with a tape hinge or occasionally mounted directly on the folder with plastic adhesive. For infrequently used multiple copies of choral works a light cover in pamphlet binders or manila folders is usually sufficient. The addition of metal-stitching will prevent the score from opening flat, although this deficiency may not be a serious one if the music is held in the hands for performance. A shelf binder with a back of the necessary width is a wise choice for large vocal scores.

In the preparation of chamber music scores and parts many librarians favor the binding of either the score or one of the instrumental parts in a stiff cover, with the remaining parts each sewn, stapled, or hinged into manila folders which are placed in a pocket inside the cover. This arrangement, available from library binderies, can also be used with specially made pressboard binders. One of its advantages is the easily apparent space in the pocket which calls attention to any missing parts. Moreover, it forms a compact and complete unit which is easier to handle than a portfolio.

While the authors advocate binding all permanent additions to the library, and no one questions the desirability of the optimum in library binding for valued reference books and hand-sewn binding for some music, there remains a considerable mass of paper-covered material which does not fall into either category and which is too large for pamphlet binders. The rising cost of professional binding and the generally slower rise in library budgets has brought about
a search for more economical alternative processes. Shelf-binders and case-binders may have to replace Class A binding for some infrequently used items. Orchestra programs, ephemeral periodicals, and college program books will very likely be sufficiently protected in multibinders or magafiles. Even a fairly important periodical may be as well cared for in a multiple binder at $1.90 as in a professional binding at $4.50. In this age it is no more feasible for ordinary music libraries to exhibit shelf upon shelf of handsomely bound volumes than it is to have plush carpets on the floor.

Some music libraries are increasing their use of photocopying apparatus, especially the flat bed type of printer which can reproduce pages of bound volumes. Although many libraries have this equipment available somewhere in the institution, its application to music may not have been sufficiently emphasized. Copyright is still with us, of course, but anything that can be legally reproduced may be duplicated easily and economically where only a few copies are desired, whether it involves one page or twenty. Besides functioning as a direct copy machine, most copiers can produce a master for multilith or other offset process printing equipment, thereby eliminating the necessity of typing texts or copying manuscript on a master. Some machines are even capable of making metal plates. Nearly all can reproduce half-tone or photographic illustrative material; they make black-on-white prints of copy printed in any color, and some reproduce in blue, red, or black lines on white. Some copiers can print directly on card stock. Others can copy Library of Congress cards onto multilith masters for reproduction, a procedure which is quite legal. Although the cost of equipment used in xerography is prohibitive for the music library alone, much advantage is to be gained from the process in terms of time, convenience, and usability if the machine is available in the general library. The inclusion of some copying device in or near the music collection is strongly advised, although the type of equipment depends entirely upon individual choice.

A word of warning is given to those libraries in which many different types of music materials are concentrated in one place, a condition previously called ideal. While the theory of integration is highly desirable, the extreme interpretation of this concept—the inter-filing of books, periodicals, scores, and records—carries with it a number of disadvantages. The varied sizes and different degrees of protection and support required by these materials make separation
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by types within the music library logical. Many libraries also segregate miniature scores from the rest of the music to facilitate shelving and to prevent temporary dislocation of the smaller scores between, beneath, or behind the large ones. This separation is recommended highly for collections containing a great number of large full scores. Many libraries distinguish between materials to be used for research and those to be used for performance (although admittedly in some instances the borderline may be a faint one), and provide separate areas in the library for them. Some institutions house band and orchestral parts in quarters other than the music reference collection because their use varies greatly from that of other library materials. In some cases, where the parts are placed within the music library, they are given special housing and cataloging, and are even assigned special personnel for administering their use. Some very large music libraries are subdivided into several departments, with separate areas, rooms, or floors devoted to such items as phonorecords, rare books, periodicals, reference materials, performance music, etc.

The foregoing is not a contradiction of the stand favoring the placement of music materials in one collection. Integration of materials interrelated by use is advocated but not the slavish amassing of everything just because it is music. In the final analysis it is in terms of service to the clientele, whoever that clientele may be, that any library must be organized. Nor can music libraries exist in splendid isolation; their activities must be correlated with the entire community of libraries.

In some quarters the feeling is that departmental libraries must be strong if they are to exist at all. Because of the growing interest in music, both as a community activity and as a profession of scholarship as well as performance, it is logical to expect the music collection to become a strong department within a public or collegiate institution. It is expected that a music library will serve as a tool for the musician and as such may demand in all fairness the careful planning and thoughtful provision commensurate with the service rendered by it.