Training the Librarian for Rapport with the Collection

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The following postscript is offered as an adjunct to John Larsen's examination of the pedagogical dimension. This statement is simply an elaboration of the premise that what the librarian needs to know can be derived and identified from an examination of the collection he administers.¹

To twist an aphorism of Goethe's: Was für einen Bibliothekar die Bibliothek will, sollst die fragen; welchen sie will, wird sie sagen.² (Ask the library what sort of librarian it wants; it will tell you the sort it wants.)

It is first of all evident that no art or music librarian is required unless there is a considerable collection of such material involved, and the concept of a library devoted to art and music also implies the existence of substantial holdings of the more unusual information media typical of the art and music fields. This means that in the music library there will be not only books but probably also scores, part-books and libretti, and sound recordings in various forms and formats for music, and in the art library it means museum collections and exhibition catalogs as well as all kinds of dealers' records and auction sales records, photographs (both as reproductions and as works of art), slides, and masses of other pictorial materials such as postcards and clippings—often including, as is the case with graphic art prints, even original works of art! Hence we may be permitted to center our thoughts about qualifications on the demands of such collections with less direct attention given to the nature of the user. We can assume that today and for sometime a university research library will be populated mostly by professors and students, while a public library will be

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patronized chiefly by laymen, amateurs, collectors, a little more frequently by professional musicians, artists and students, but only incidentally by scholars, with only the large public research libraries being exceptions. Yet, in these different types of libraries the demands on the librarian of the material itself are not really substantially different in kind. They can be grouped under the three headings: subject demands, bibliothecal demands, and ancillary demands.

Subject demands call for a secure knowledge of art and/or music history, a safe command of the theoretical and technical vocabularies of these arts, and an understanding of creative processes. From mastery of the above should derive the ability to interpret and evaluate printed scores and recordings, slides, photographs, and other art reproductions according to their musicological, art historical or iconographic loci in the worlds of images or musical sound. Subject demands also include a willingness to become familiar with contemporary trends and personalities and to keep informed on developments.

Bibliothecal demands include the knowledge of all subjects library schools teach—subjects which should be studied with proper emphasis on art and music:

1. The history and present situation of printing, publishing and editing as they apply to music and to the visual arts;
2. Information sources, general and specialized;
3. Techniques of cataloging and classification with special attention to nonbook materials, such as phonorecords, photographs and slides;
4. Organization and administration of libraries (budget, staffing, building planning);
5. Computer applications to traditional library tasks, their use in information retrieval and cooperative bibliographical networks;
6. Bibliography: trade, national and specialized for art and music; and
7. Resources of the world's libraries for art and/or music.

Ancillary demands are diverse and important. They include a good background in general, social and cultural history with concentrations as exhibited by the collection. A reading knowledge of foreign languages should be based on German, French, and Italian. It is important that the art/music librarian is familiar with the historiography of his discipline, that he knows and can distinguish between literary and aesthetic movements and schools of criticism, in
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short that he is well versed in what might be called the “literary history” of music and art.

Looking at such a list from the perspective of systems analysis, we might label these entries as “knowledge goals” to be attained with respect to a particular collection. To become operational, these goals need to be specified into “knowledge objectives.” In this special sense, an objective implies a definite knowledge base, quantifiable insofar as possible. To show the distinction: a goal of the art/music librarian is to “know French”; the objective is to read French well enough to handle the French material in the collection—to put it through the library routines (selection, processing, etc.) and to extract information from it. One might expect two years of successful study of French in a typical college sequence sufficient for handling; German might take closer to four years.

Going from language to subject knowledge, the same sort of question can be asked. How much should be known about music theory? Answer: What does the collection demand? The necessity is to be in rapport with the materials held and to keep them comfortably under control. Accordingly, the more popular library may only demand basic acquaintance with musical notation and score reading (goal: ability to follow scores from the 1600-1900 period, identify themes, find particular passages; objective: knowledge gained from a year’s study of a college-level “fundamentals of music course”). Obviously the scholarly library will demand a rapport with more complexities (goal: ability to read older and contemporary scores, to make comparisons among editions, to understand transcriptions and arrangements, to understand structures, and instrumentation; objective: knowledge gained from four to five years college study in harmony, counterpoint, analysis, orchestration, and compositional techniques). The same requirements in language expertise needed for music should be met for visual arts librarianship. Some knowledge of Latin would obviously help both types of librarians since many of the original sources were written in Latin, as were inscriptions, liturgical, and other texts.

Subject knowledge for visual arts librarianship must include two kinds. One kind is a knowledge of methodology and historiography and the “literary history of the fine arts” which can be studied in a number of ways, but chiefly by reading works such as those listed in the Additional References by Lavalleye, Tietze, and Kultermann, which should be superimposed over a solid art history major. The other kind of knowledge that is needed for visual librarianship requires more
subject specialization in a period, medium or style and much more training in connoisseurship including a good deal of practical work with actual works of art in a museum, since the tasks of the curator of photographs and slides are very closely related to those of the art historian/curator working with original works. Tasks include identification, attribution and re-attribution of reproductions of works of art; the devising, development and maintenance of philosophies of pictorial classification; and the creation of classification schedules as well as their application in day-to-day work. As a rule work with images requires much greater subject knowledge than work with printed books because the many aids which already exist for books must first be created by the visual librarian. In large institutions a Ph.D. background in art history will be needed by the librarian working in the visual collections; very large collections may require even closer specialization with individual curators responsible for, e.g., ancient Near Eastern and classical art; medieval and modern Western art; Islamic, Far Eastern or perhaps pre-Columbian American, African, and Oceanian art and architecture.

Whichever aspect of art librarianship is preferred, library school education alone equips the student adequately as a generalist but, in most instances, does very poorly in equipping him as a specialist.

On the bibliothecal side, much of what has been said with regard to art image cataloging is also applicable to music cataloging. The needs of a popular library can be accounted for rather simply (goal: ability to process books and some scores, recordings, and slides—for most of which LC copy exists—using basic descriptive approaches; objective: knowledge gained from one library school cataloging course). At the research library level, one encounters massive problems with less common materials. Original cataloging is often required, and it needs to be very descriptive, as well as “analytical.” Subject headings may need to be invented, and classification schemes modified or created in specialized areas. The objective could reasonably be quantified as two years of library school cataloging coursework—taking the student beyond the range of M.L.S. curricula into the advanced certificate or Ph.D. levels.

From these examples, it is clear that a long and intense academic program would be appropriate for one who seeks rapport with a research collection in the realms of art or music. The greatest benefits could be derived from a judicious combination of historical courses at the graduate level, general training received in a library school and a library internship served in the art/music department of a large
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departmentalized general research library. Recently a number of two-year programs have been introduced at certain library schools that make it possible for the student to concentrate on subject-specialized courses during the second year and to count a significant number of graduate level courses in either music or the fine arts as credits toward a certificate of advanced training in librarianship. This is an encouraging trend because there are obvious needs for library school programs that go beyond the traditional library science *cum* art history or music courses: programs that should stress—much more than has been done until now—the *total* sphere of knowledge of the two separate musical and visual cultures. Unfortunately, it appears that library schools have been prevented from offering more specialized education chiefly for managerial and economic reasons, much to the detriment of the profession.

Two avenues are open, however, which make the principle of the art/music librarian's ideal of an education also a manageable one. Much of what has to be learned can be absorbed after formal education has been completed, in the so-called lifelong university, i.e., on the job. However, it is certainly dangerous to anticipate that a poorly prepared person can relate even tangentially to a complex collection; the soil must be rich if continuing education is to take root. The other factor to consider is that "talent" in the sense of accomplishment in the studio and in performance practice is not a prerequisite for the library career. Present formats of art and music education in many, but by no means in all, institutions of higher education call for huge blocks of time to be expended in studio work or music performance. By eliminating most of the academic time which is consumed in burnishing these kinds of talents, real or imagined, we could shape a curricular pattern more adapted to librarianship in the two fields under consideration.

References


Additional References


