

Current Comments

Looking for a Music Score? There's No Easy Way

Number 17

April 28, 1980

In 1978, over 20,000 pieces of published music were deposited for copyright in the US.¹ This number, of course, represents only a small portion of the music published worldwide that year, and an even smaller portion of the music currently available. I would guess that musical works currently available number in the millions, and more are being produced every day.

Considering the sheer volume available, it is remarkable how often one can easily find a particular piece. On the other hand, it is not surprising that it is often impossible to locate the score for a composition. In spite of the enormous economic significance of the music publishing industry, the situation in music documentation is, to say the least, chaotic.

Part of this chaos stems from a confusion of terms. Music is published in a variety of forms. "Sheet music," for example, may simply consist of a folded sheet of paper on which the score of a single song or an extensive instrumental composition is printed. The scores to several works may be published as a collection in book form, or a few pieces may be published in what's usually called a folio. Donald W. Krummel, University of Illinois, deals with this semantic difficulty by referring to all published music—whether sheet, collection, or folio—as "music editions."²

It is well-known that many scientists and *Current Contents*[®] (*CC*[®]) readers are music lovers. Indeed, many of them play musical instruments. So I suspect

many of you will not be surprised to hear that buying a musical edition is not as simple as buying a book. If you go into any reasonably well-organized bookshop, you can ask for a book and expect to get it. If the book you want is not in stock, you can simply check the title or author in *Books in Print (BIP)*. *BIP* tells you if the book is currently available and who publishes it. *BIP* comes out once a year, and is now also available on-line through Bibliographic Retrieval Service (BRS). This sort of source is available for many foreign books as well. For example, British books are listed in *British Books in Print*,³ French in *French Books in Print*,⁴ and German in *German Books in Print*.⁵

If the book is still in print, it is easy for the book dealer to order a copy. If the book is out of print, you can turn to the local library. Even if the library doesn't have a copy of its own, it can usually borrow one through interlibrary loan.

All of this assumes that if you can't buy the book, you'll be willing to read it and return it to the library. This may be the last thing you want to do with a musical composition! In any event, locating a musical edition is a good deal more challenging than finding a book.

For example, I recently tried to buy Bach's *Italian Concerto* at several shops in the US, France, and the UK. In a London store I finally located a copy, the store's last, which was published by a German firm. In this case, as in so many others, even when the work is

well known, you often have considerable difficulty finding a purchasable copy. (Oddly enough, a recent call to a Philadelphia store produced a copy immediately.⁶) I refer here, and throughout this essay, mainly to "serious" music. The ephemeral quality of most popular music usually makes it difficult to find unless it is a "standard" which is available in most music shops. One would not have much trouble purchasing a copy of "Stardust" or the score for "My Fair Lady."

In a music store, when you can't find what you want on the shelves—where it might be filed under any number of headings—you can approach the proprietor for help. He can look through his collection of publishers' catalogs to try to locate the work. Of course, each catalog only lists music editions for one publisher. If the store doesn't have a catalog for the publisher of the particular edition you want, you are usually out of luck. Since there are hundreds of music publishers worldwide, and music stores don't carry an extensive number of catalogs, the chances are pretty good that you won't find the work. The retailer can also turn to his wholesaler, who usually knows what is available, but this process often requires a good deal of correspondence. In short, there is no single source, such as *BIP*, which combines all publishers and pieces for easy reference.

Actually, to try to list all musical editions in one work would be an awesome, but not impossible, task, considering the amount of music available. The documentation problem is somewhat more complicated than it is with books, since people seeking music may approach it in a variety of ways. In addition to listings by composer ("author") and title, one may be interested in music for a particular instrument, by a certain lyricist, or in a well-known arrangement. Some people are interested in music of a particular period or in

transcriptions.^{7,8} But still the basic problem is the same—to locate a particular work.

Some steps have been taken toward a more comprehensive documentation of serious music. MusicData, Inc., a Philadelphia company, has begun a *BIP* for music. It is appropriately entitled *Music in Print (MIP)*. Started in 1973, *MIP* is a series which currently contains: *Choral MIP* (Sacred and Secular), *Organ MIP*, *Classical Vocal MIP*, *Orchestral MIP*, and *The Education Section of Orchestral MIP*. A combined annual supplement to update these indexes incorporates the *Choral MIP*, *Organ MIP*, and *Classical Vocal MIP* volumes. Entries are indexed under both composer and title, and contain such information as composer, title, arranger or editor, instrumentation, seasonal usage, publisher with address (and American agents when foreign), and American prices. The series is quite valuable for the types of music it covers.

Fortunately, there are a few other similar indexes. For example, *String Music in Print* (R.R. Bowker Company) covers works available up to 1973 for violin, viola, violoncello, double-bass, and viols.⁹ *Piano Music in Print* (Pallma Music Corporation) lists piano music available up to 1974.¹⁰ A major gap, however, is in the area of popular music.

Frederick Kent, music librarian at the Free Library of Philadelphia, confirms that if you want to locate a popular piece, you are dependent on specialized dealers and the catalogs from the few publishers and distributors who deal with this type of material. Every major city has its specialized dealers. Charles Horn, Screen Gems-Columbia Music, Warner Brothers, and many others publish popular music. Older works, unless they have become popular standards, may not appear in these catalogs.¹¹ In such cases, a bibliography such as *Popular Music* (Adrian Press),¹² edited

by Nat Shapiro, can be useful for determining the composer/lyricist, publisher, and date of publication of a song. This six-volume work, which covers popular US songs published between 1920 and 1969, lists about 18,000 songs. The publisher says there are no immediate plans to update this work.¹³

Other sources of information about published works are the catalogs of performing rights societies. In the US, the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP), Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), and the Society of European Stage Authors and Composers (SESAC) are the three best known. These organizations, which were created to protect the performance rights of composers' copyrighted music, periodically issue catalogs listing the works, authors, and publishers they represent. They also provide telephone reference services. Through them you can find the publisher of a particular work, whom you can then contact for more information.

For example, we called ASCAP to find out who published "Saxophobia" by Rudy Wiedoft and learned that it is published by Robbins Music, 6753 Hollywood Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90028.¹⁴ ISI's Calvin Lee and I visited ASCAP several years ago. They had a huge room full of 3x5 cards for the hundreds of thousands of songs they represent. We thought they were a natural for on-line computerization, but we were ahead of our time.

Good places to turn for information about contemporary composers and compositions (mostly of serious music) are the international Music Information Centres (MIC). There are currently 18 countries with MICs, which are organized under the auspices of the International Association of Music Libraries (IAML). Each country is represented by one center, whose purpose is to "promote national music by furthering the knowledge of this music at home and

abroad, by the establishment of extensive collections of scores, parts, recordings (tapes or discs), books, periodicals, bibliographies, and other informational material and by making published and unpublished compositions available for study and/or performance."¹⁵

The centers are primarily concerned with contemporary music. The US representative is the American Music Center (AMC), 250 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019. Scores from the collection of this organization may be borrowed, and the AMC will answer questions about American music, compositions, composers, publishers, music ensembles, funding organizations, recording companies, artists' managers, etc. More information about the AMC and the other music information centers is available in the article "Directory of Music Information Centres," which appeared in the journal of the IAML, *Fontes Artis Musicae*.¹⁵

Sometimes, though, even after exhausting all these sources, a musical edition still can't be found. In such cases, the best place to turn is a good library music collection. There are literally thousands of music collections in the world. The Free Library of Philadelphia, for example, has an excellent music collection. Its music department contains over 100,000 bound music editions, 140,000 pieces of sheet music, and 60,000 pieces of chamber music.¹⁶ Its Fleisher Collection of orchestral music includes some 13,000 compositions.¹⁷

The US Library of Congress (LC) has a large and diverse collection. LC holdings include over four million pieces of music, which are international in scope and span many centuries. Although most LC material is only accessible at the Library, written requests are handled by the Library staff. Occasionally, arrangements can be made to have a work copied. Most of the Library collection is available through the music

division's card catalog. Not all the music is represented in the catalog, however, and a librarian's help may be needed in locating some pieces.¹⁸ Some national libraries, such as LC and the British Library, are required by law to accept copies of all music published in their countries. Laws requiring the deposit of musical editions in the French Bibliothèque Nationale were instituted as early as 1537.¹⁹

Finding out what is in a specific collection can be a problem, however. Many libraries, of course, do issue catalogs describing their collections, but the majority of libraries do not publish catalogs. Kent explains that, because of the expense involved, many which do issue catalogs do not include their sheet music holdings in them.²⁰ The major collections, however, are fairly well documented. A catalog detailing the Free Library of Philadelphia's Fleisher Collection is available, although the rest of the library's music collection is not cataloged. The *Library of Congress Catalogs, Music, Books on Music, and Sound Recordings*, published semi-annually by the Library of Congress, is a bibliography of works currently cataloged by the Library of Congress and several other North American libraries.²¹ A comprehensive reference tool for international collections of pre-1800 music is the *Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM)*.²²

Bibliographies such as Vincent Duckles' *Music Reference and Research Materials* can also lead you to the published catalogs of various music collections. This important reference work lists the catalogs for 424 music libraries and collections. Entries are given by city and/or country, and each entry contains information on the collection cataloged, catalog title, and a brief description of what is covered by the catalog.²³

Unfortunately, the same problems faced by the editors of music informa-

tion services plague music librarians as well. People seeking music editions look for a variety of things—specific composers or compositions, types of music, special instrumentation, specific music eras, etc. Since librarians feel that, ideally, the music seeker should be able to browse in one area and find what he wants, the problem of how to classify materials is highly complex. Numerous attempts to create workable classification schemes for music have been made. Frequently used schemes include the Dewey Decimal System, the Library of Congress System, and the Universal Decimal System.²⁴

In addition, many individual scholars have attempted to develop better methods of music classification; among them, Bliss,²⁵ McColvin, and Brown are a few whose systems have received wide attention. All of these schemes, of course, attempt to provide an efficient means of describing music editions so that they can be easily retrieved through both the library catalog and random browsing in the collection itself.²⁴

In general, these schemes are all similar. With the exception of the early editions of the Dewey Decimal and the Universal Decimal Classifications, all the schemes separate music editions from music literature.

They further classify according to type of music—for example, opera, vocal, instrumental, etc. The main differences lie in the arrangement of the different types of music: for example, the LC scheme places "dramatic music" with string orchestral music and operas, while the Dewey Decimal Classification and the Universal Decimal Classification place it with "sacred music."

The schemes also differ in their designation and ordering of subdivisions. Vocal music, for example, is divided into unaccompanied and piano accompaniment in the LC scheme, while McColvin subdivides vocal music as sacred (organized by form) and secular (organized by number of

voices). Since many librarians feel that no one of these systems seems to be quite adequate alone, many libraries use a combination of schemes.²⁴

In addition to classification problems, music libraries face other difficulties not encountered by regular libraries. The volume of music produced annually makes it difficult, both financially and physically, to develop a complete collection. The collection and storage of sheet music and performance parts in particular is especially difficult. The music for a string quartet, for example, should ideally be shelved together. Krummel notes, however, that such pieces are usually filed separately.²⁶

British Librarian Jack Dove points out some of the problems connected with sheet music in his comprehensive work *Music Libraries*.²⁷ Since sheet music is exactly what the name implies—sheets of paper—it must be bound in some way to endure library use. This is both time-consuming and expensive. In addition, because sheet music is so thin, finding a way to label pieces for easy identification when they are on the shelf is challenging. Still another problem is the size of sheet music. Since sheet music is usually larger than most books, it often requires special shelves or containers. Identifying what pieces should be added to a collection is yet another problem facing music librarians.²⁷

Music libraries are working on solving these problems. One organization that is concerned with these and other aspects of music librarianship is the IAML. In the US, the Music Library Association (MLA) also deals with music and music libraries. The MLA publishes a quarterly journal, *Notes*, which details all aspects of music librarianship.

It is precisely because I've had to mention so many different potential sources of music information that one can justly characterize the music business as chaotic. I applaud any efforts to improve the situation. Since it is such a dynamic problem, on-line sources offer

great potential. So far, though, very little is available through on-line services. Dialog offers RILM abstracts from the file of the Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale. RILM covers music-related literature.²⁸ On a smaller scale, the COMMPUTE program, a consortium of music-related institutions, offers on-line retrieval of information about the scores in members' collections. This service, however, is only available to COMMPUTE members. Information searches of the music contained in the Gustavus Adolphus College Performance Library (St. Peter, Minnesota) are available through the Minnesota Interlibrary Telecommunications Exchange (MINITEX). Some library music collections are also available through the OCLC, Inc., on-line system.

On a small scale, the *Arts and Humanities Citation Index*[™] (*A&HCI*[™]) can be of some use in locating music scores.²⁸ Although *A&HCI* is primarily an index to articles, when a score is reproduced in an article, that fact is noted in *A&HCI*. By looking up the composer of a score in *A&HCI*, you can locate articles that contain a copy of the score. Of course, this is a fairly limited music source, as reproduction of complete scores in articles is not especially common.

The ultimate solution must be the creation of a single printed or on-line service similar to *BIP* that would deal exclusively with music scores. Such a reference tool could give rapid access to current information about individual pieces. Simply by looking up the title or composer of a work, you could find who published it and when. Of course, other useful information such as performance reviews could be included. With such a source, you would know immediately where to turn when you couldn't find a piece of music in your local music store.

As I have stated elsewhere, the problem of music documentation is intimately related to the problem of music copy-

right and piracy—through unauthorized copying and “fake books”—that goes on worldwide, depriving composers of their royalties.^{7,8}

Once we have adequate means for locating and identifying musical editions, it is a relatively simple step to establish centers that can provide for legitimate

document retrieval capabilities. No musical composition, once published, should ever be classified as out-of-print.

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My thanks to Patricia Heller for her help in the preparation of this essay.

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