

# MLA 2011: FIRST-TIMER IMPRESSIONS FROM A NEW MUSIC LIBRARIAN

BY ROBERT ZYLSTRA  
GRANT MACÉWAN UNIVERSITY

This past February I had the privilege of attending the 80th Annual Meeting of the Music Library Association in Philadelphia, PA. As I am new to music librarianship, this event was an opportunity for me to ask questions and discuss the challenges of the field with experienced colleagues. What follows is a short account of my experiences at the conference in this beautiful and historically rich city.

Upon my arrival in Philadelphia I settled into my room at the Loews Hotel and headed to the opening reception. The number of attendees immediately surprised me: just under 480 people had registered for the conference. Prior to the conference, I had not put much thought into just how many music librarians were employed across North America, but it soon became clear that I was far from alone in this field! During the reception, the 'first-timer' ribbon on my nametag caught the eye of some enthusiastic and seasoned music librarians who welcomed me and then took opportunities throughout the conference to introduce me to others, which I appreciated greatly.

The next morning I arrived early for the plenary, which was preceded by a welcoming performance by a group of the Philadelphia Mummers. The opening panel presentation, entitled *Thinking Beyond the Disc: Disseminating Recordings in the Digital Era*, was an excellent precursor to the concurrent sessions that followed. First, Stephen Millen from the Philadelphia Orchestra explained how recordings that were originally a source of revenue for the organization have evolved into a marketing tool requiring investment. These recordings have become a method of brand recognition that ensures the Orchestra is known outside of the Philadelphia area. David Ludwig from the Curtis Institute of Music then spoke about how the Institute is using the InstantEncore platform to engage faculty, students and the public with concerts, videos and archival material. At the Curtis Institute, new technologies have been utilized to reduce a previously cumbersome recording process in order to deliver content in a time frame that meets current expectations. George Blood from Safe Sound Archives then closed the session with a thought-provoking presentation about the history of the recording industry and its continued importance.

My remaining time at the conference was packed with interesting concurrent sessions, impressive vendor showcases, and informal discussions with my new colleagues about current issues. In one notable presentation, Paul Engle, Director of Library Services at

Berklee College of Music in Boston, highlighted recent developments in the College's online course reserves system. I was impressed by this initiative, which is part of a larger resource management system that the College designed and built using open-source software. In addition to perusing the extensive vendor displays, I also managed to arrange meetings with some of the vendors that I have been working with for the past few months. This was time well spent as I had come prepared with several key questions related to building MacEwan's new music collection.

It would be a shame not to mention the unscheduled aspects of the conference milieu. Local attractions such as Independence Hall, noon-hour organ concerts at Macy's Department Store, and City Hall tours were just a few of the ways to take in the great city of Philadelphia. My favorite attraction was listening to the Wannamaker Organ at Macy's. After hearing the organ and meeting the organist, I couldn't help but give up a second noon hour to do it all over again. Unscheduled time was also spent in the hotel lobby where the only free wireless access could be found. This was at first somewhat frustrating, but joining other conference attendees in the lobby who were also seeking a connection to the outside world proved to be interesting and even entertaining at times. A number of informative discussions and connections developed as a result, including the first of several introductions to my Canadian colleagues. The Local Arrangements Committee Reception at Solmssen Court, University of the Arts, on Friday evening (a scheduled event with an unscheduled feel) was another excellent opportunity to share experiences and meet new people. I particularly enjoyed the search for a pub and the good conversation that followed this event. All of these activities helped make the conference memorable and were in many ways as useful as the program itself.

As a new music librarian eager to meet colleagues and discuss the issues, I felt that the MLA conference could not come soon enough. Attending after having had only six months on the job, I was introduced to new ideas, received confirmation of others and was forced to rethink my approach to some issues. Now that the conference is over I find myself looking forward to the next MLA annual meeting in Dallas, as well as Canadian and international conferences in Sackville (CAML 2011) and Montreal (IAML 2012). At this early stage in my career, opportunities that facilitate learning, discovery and discussion -- such as those I experienced at MLA 2011-- are invaluable. And on a final note, should you find yourself in Philadelphia, the noon-hour organ concerts at Macy's Department Store are not to be missed!