

NOTES FROM A NOVICE: COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO MUSIC LIBRARY

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For over thirty years the University of Toronto's Music Library enjoyed the services of a dedicated music selector, John Whitepost. He worked at the central technical services of the Robarts Library, as I still do. Since his retirement in 2009, I have been struggling to fill his shoes, while still remaining the Head of the Cataloguing Department, and the Music Cataloguing Supervisor. Mr Whitepost was not replaced with a full-time successor because of budgetary constraints: in the current climate of retrenchment, our librarians increasingly are expected to be jacks of all trades, covering Reference and/or Cataloguing and/or Collection Development. This is a departure from tradition for U of T / Robarts, although of course very much the norm at many other libraries. Historically, the decision more than forty years ago to hire librarians to specialize in Collection Development at Robarts was taken to insure a breadth and impartiality of coverage, so that acquisitions did not reflect only the current interests and biases of certain faculty, but were purchased with an eye to posterity and for the benefit of a broad range of potential scholars. These specialist selectors were subsequently responsible for setting up and maintaining approval plans with vendors, thereafter adjusting the approval profiles where necessary, and monitoring vendors' compliance. The sheer scale of our current operations (on average, 8000 books and scores per month are received and catalogued at the Robarts Library) means that such monitoring can be a time-consuming process.

APPROVAL PLANS

The new reality of part-time selectors (*very* part-time in my case) means a greater reliance than ever on these approval plans. These seem to be working reasonably well for the mainstream and academic music publications available from the big vendors in Europe, and North and South America. It means that U of T's acquisitions of such material will be pretty much in line with those of other North American academic libraries. (This includes music scores, from our approval plans with Otto Harrassowitz and J.W. Pepper.) The more esoteric items, on the other hand, are no longer getting covered so fully. These include publications from small presses, self-published items, etc. particularly in French, German and Italian—titles that our previous full-time selector would probably have discovered by poring over national bibliographies, European journals, publication lists, reviews, and so on. These are typically the kinds of things that are *not* being acquired everywhere else, and for which there may be relatively little anticipated demand; but which nevertheless a major music library ought to collect, if it is trying to uphold the principles I alluded to earlier regarding posterity and a broad range of scholarship.

PATRON-DRIVEN ACQUISITIONS

Fundamentally the problem stems not only from restricted budgets for salaries or acquisitions, but also from an increasingly utilitarian administrative attitude across the continent. University administrators are succumbing to the prevailing view that the marketplace is the ultimate measure of all things, including education. But a cost-benefit approach to libraries ends up begging the question, since the costs are all too precisely measurable in dollars, but the benefits, like the benefits of scholarship itself, are diffuse, nebulous, a Social Good, to be “monetized” in dozens of different ways according to your politics. From a strictly utilitarian point of view, what could be more appalling than to spend money to buy, catalogue and house books or scores that will seldom—perhaps never!—be used? However, it remains an economic fact that the cheapest and best time to buy a book or score is usually upon publication. Moreover: just because something has not circulated in twenty years does not mean, for a research library, that it was a waste of money. Who can tell what obscure titles might prove useful for a doctoral dissertation in the year 2067? One of the functions of a research library, unlike most public libraries, is to anticipate the needs of posterity as well as those of the present. And even those needs which are commercial as well as scholarly can benefit from the fact that research libraries are willing to put a roof over a book’s head in perpetuity. If all libraries were to become as market-driven as publishers, then how would things like Dover reprints ever be possible in years to come?

This is a discursive preamble to the subject of Patron-Driven Acquisitions (PDA), which for some is becoming an easy solution to the Accountant’s Nightmare mentioned earlier, namely, the so-called squandering of money on items that get little or no immediate use. From that short term point of view, it seems the ideal approach: find some way to supply users with comprehensive lists of new and recent publications, and let *them* decide what we should buy. As long as your users are undergraduates and scientists primarily interested in current publications, how can anything go wrong? On the other hand, if you are building a collection that you hope will also provide primary research material for historians and scholars as yet unborn, then responding only to contemporary demands may result in gaps in your holdings that will subsequently be difficult, expensive, or impossible to fill. This is why we have not yet resorted to the “PDA” technique at Robarts, except in the sense that we always attempt to buy titles requested by students and faculty as a matter of course. But the point is, that is not *all* that we buy, or even a significant proportion of what we buy.

PRINT VERSUS ELECTRONIC

The rise of e-books is not yet yielding significant cost reductions except when titles are purchased in large packages and/or through consortiums. But economic considerations aside, there are added benefits, such as the convenience of remote access which library users are increasingly taking for granted when it comes to journals and certain kinds of monographs. Music scores are as yet somewhat outside the mainstream market of electronic publishing. For public domain scores, the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP) “Petrucci Music Library” provides an ever-growing trove of free music scores (currently almost 100,000) to consult and/or download and print on

demand.¹ For “in copyright” titles, Alexander Street Press continues to expand its (far from free) collections, which are provided for individual study and consultation rather than performance. As things stand, their Classical Scores Library Vol. 1 (with Vol. 2 forthcoming later this year) includes around 25,000 scores, which is still only one-tenth of what can be found on the shelves of the U of T Music Library. The question is whether the Classical Scores Library database search features, and the ability to view scores online, will provide sufficient added value to make it worth offering to our users, even without the ability to download and print scores from the collection as performance material. Once the coverage improves, I think the answer will be “yes”.

STRIKING A BALANCE

It is necessary, or soon will be, to refocus our acquisitions, to strike a balance between the ideal (“buy everything” plus “the best time to buy something is when it is first published”) and the pragmatic (cuts to acquisitions budgets and staff). I anticipate some major work ahead on adjusting the approval plan profiles to improve the coverage for music books. Our approval plans are by vendor, and our vendors are by language rather than discipline, so we will have to try issuing more precise instructions to Brockhaus (German), Aux amateurs de livres (French), and Casalini (Italian). The object is to get more of what we want (e.g. German books about German musicians) and less of what we don’t want (German popular biographies of Elvis Presley). It will never be completely satisfactory to turn over selection entirely to our vendors. But careful monitoring of their choices and a constant effort to refine approval plan profiles will, I hope, compensate at least to some extent for the loss of in-house expertise.

This article is based on notes for the session “Music Library Collection Development Policies and Their Impact on the Academic Enterprise,” held as part of the 2011 CAML/CUMS Conference in Sackville.

¹ See <http://imslp.org/wiki/> (accessed June 30 2011)