

Conference Report on
Papers in Music Bibliography: In celebration of the Careers of
James B. Coover and Carol June Bradley

Special Meeting of the New York State/Ontario Chapter of MLA
State University of New York at Buffalo, August 16, 1999

By Lisa Rae Philpott
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One could not have asked for a sunnier day to celebrate the careers of two luminaries of music librarianship. James Cassaro welcomed the attendees and offered a brief history of the genesis of the Music Library of the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo since the arrival of Coover and Bradley in 1970.

From its lowly beginnings as a departmental library, the Music Library has grown to a comprehensive collection serving both scholars and performers equally well. British bassist Nicholas Isherwood had expressed astonishment at the rich, well-developed resources, which he described as “cream” rivalling the resources found in Parisian libraries.

Diane Parr Walker, past-president of MLA and an alumna of Buffalo, offered her congratulations and reminiscences. She spoke of the debt that MLA owes Coover and Bradley for their activities in broadening the literature of music librarianship, and particularly to Bradley for her initiatives in the MLA Oral History project. Buffalo has done much to further the training of music librarians, and many of its alumni have held key positions in the national organization.

Defining Music Libraries Don Krummel,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne

Krummel recalled that Coover’s lexicography was “hot stuff” back in 1953, and soon afterwards Coover became MLA’s youngest president.

Defining music libraries has been ongoing since the 1950’s, but three elements remain the same: readers, collections and programs. The readers also remain the same: performers, lay public, students, and scholars. In the 1950’s, public libraries formed a large segment of MLA; now that has been reduced to a mere fraction, which view MLA as a largely academic group. The suburbs have drawn the public away from downtown; smaller public libraries are generally lacking in music expertise, which is ironic, now that MLA is emphasizing local music. Public library users are varied, liberated from curricula, and have no interest in navigating through layers of bureaucracy. The concept of scholars as librarians also seems passé.

There has been a huge growth in collection size, as the prevailing institutional mission was “to grow.” In 1950, music librarians served performers. Listeners were consumers of live music. It fell to music libraries to

create order out of a media circus (the collection of sound recordings inherited from the departmental library), which also necessitated a shift in the selection process: faculty no longer dealt with the departmental secretary to obtain sound recordings, but with the library. Public libraries responded to user demand for sound recordings, in part as a function of school music programs and civic music-making. "Music libraries are *all* ephemera," declared Krummel. "They are messy and we *love* them." They deal with facts, musical notation and a repertory of sounds in order to put materials and users in better touch.

Music collections originally grew as a function of the 18th century public's need for performances, and the belief that the well-rounded humanist *needed* music. The prevailing view today is that "books are 'better' and less 'bother'" than music, and it is certainly true that the varying formats add complications to the library's routine. Thanks to computers and copious cross-references, we can "cyber-schmooze" on MLA-L, and can access RISM from our offices. We still cry for bibliographic control but, in this information age, music is ahead of the game with respect to the variety and number of media it embraces. Krummel's spin on "Just say no—to music," was followed by the observation that, "It was sure simpler when Jim [Coover] and Carol [Bradley] were kids"—there were fewer formats to handle and collect, and the music-publishing universe was much smaller.

The "right stuff" has changed. We now study the history of American music as well as music written by contemporary composers. Early music librarians were a righteous lot, committed to the uplift and elevation of

readers' tastes. Music libraries justify their existence by being "a pain in the neck" They require vast amounts of space, time and money. They exist only as required, and are regularly reborn from "the flames." One certainty is that users still need guidance, more than they will admit. The 1950's were filled with hopes and dreams, many of which were realized—and some for the worse. The music library will be continually redefined.

On Music in Auction Catalogs Lenore Coral, Cornell University

This tale of a musical family begins with research by Jan La Rue on a manuscript library catalogue and a 200-page auction sale catalogue. The Sharps were descended from John Sharp (1644-1714), an Archbishop of York. A portrait of the family music-makers can be seen at The National Portrait Gallery, London. The brothers held concerts on barges on the Thames, the *Apollo* being anchored at Fulham. Details of performances survive (the Prince of Wales requested a specific song as the barge passed under the Kew Bridge), and there was a canopy for protection from the rain; Sunday evenings were spent at home, performing sacred music. Concerts were also held at the Old Jury in the Tottenham Street Rooms (1770-78), and at the Concert of Ancient Music (1776-77).

The music collection was extensive, requiring many parts for performance; the presence of separate solo-ripieno parts will give some indication of performance practice. Composers such as Able, Borghi, Giardini, Handel and Boyce are represented—obviously the repertoire contained music of 20 years' past, plus newly-composed material. There is much secular music; notable is the paucity of keyboard music. (The Sharps subscribed to the

Handel Arnold Edition, ca. 1786.) At some point (after 1776; before 1783) the Sharp music collection was appraised by the music publisher Longman & Broderip, and valuation was by-the-page. Also included in this list were the musical instruments (now in the Bate Collection), the manuscripts and “nineteen music desks, some tall;” not all of the listed works have an incipit. (The instrument collection may be seen the the portrait and comprised three clarinets, two chromatic clarinets, bassoons, flutes, horns, kettle drums, violins, violoncellos, viols and a serpent.)

The auction catalogue notes lower prices than those ascribed by Longman & Broderip; the manuscript catalogue describes the bindings in detail. This is a fascinating record of amateur music-making in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and promises to provide information on both social history and performance practice.

Keynote Speaker Christopher Coover, Christie’s Auctions, New York

Christopher Coover, son of James Coover, rare books’ specialist at Christie’s Auctions in New York, and a graduate of SUNY at Buffalo, was the luncheon speaker. He spoke of his father’s success in collecting a few significant and valuable early editions while living in less-than-promising region in terms of book-collecting, and while raising a family on a small salary. (The family survived on the dreaded “carrot loaf.”) He provided a student’s view of the growth and improvements to the Music Library of the University at Buffalo, and extolled the wisdom of collecting and managing ephemera for the use of future scholars.

What is Hip? and Other Inquiries in Jazz Lexicography Richard McRae, SUNY, Buffalo

McRae prefaced his paper with a spoken paragraph that aptly illustrated the need to understand the vernacular when it comes to the language of jazz.

The jam session was the central agency of communication for jazz players and, if you couldn’t understand the vocabulary, you would be very lost indeed. From 1934 through 1970, “jazz slang” dictionaries and glossaries appeared. By contrast, *American Speech* (1932) espoused correct, “highbrow” language. An article by Gustav Klempt in the August 1923 *Etude* proclaimed the “Jazz Age is Dead”; judging by the derogatory comments, one might well have believed him. In the early 1930’s, *Downbeat* ran “Jazz Slang—the ‘Slanguage’ of Swing” which contained the following adjectives for classical musicians: “longhair,” “salon man,” and “paper man” (referring to the player’s need to play from printed music). Much of the vocabulary originated from Tin Pan Alley, while much of the rest may be an amalgam of “Negro slang” (H.L. Mencken). Jazz slang is often buried in other slang dictionaries. The *NG Jazz* defines some 85 terms, but sources such as *A Jazz Lexicon* (1964) and *Jazz Talk* (1970) are also worthwhile.

Oral History and MLA: A Progress Report Jane Edmister Penner, University of Virginia

Who would ever have believed that a music librarian attended university on a football scholarship? Or that one might have a second career as a music librarian? Penner’s background—as a music theory professor who became a music librarian—is a living example

of the latter; Harold Samuels, the former. Living in Charlottesville, Virginia, with proximity to the MLA Archives at the University of Maryland, College Park, coupled with an interest in her family's oral history gave Penner the impetus to join the MLA Archives' oral history program. She played examples of tapes by Harold Spivak and Dena Epstein, with Carol June Bradley as interviewer on the latter.

According to Marjorie Hassen, Chair of the Oral History Subcommittee, the duties of the chair are to document MLA's history. However, one is at the mercy of the person who has agreed to conduct the interview. The interviews are scheduled for a mutually convenient time, and a release form is signed by the interviewee. The transcriber provides a typed copy and a diskette, and the tape is audited by the Chair to catch typos and other errors, with the corrections made directly to

the diskette. One copy of the transcript goes to the interviewee; another to the Archive at College Park. The Archive contains 20-30 biographies (including a seven-page handwritten submission from Anna Harriet Heyer), plus the archives of various MLA chapters. Bonnie Jo Dopp, curator of the Archive, has catalogued the tapes so that they appear in the University of Maryland OPAC (thanks to funding from MLA). At some future time, it may be possible to scan transcripts onto the Web and perhaps offer sound bytes. MLA must continue to gather the raw materials, be diligent in providing access to same and to devote some time and energy to study the interviews.

The afternoon concluded with a delightful reception in the Music Library, where a retrospective of publications by Coover and Bradley was on display.

