

Directions in Music Cataloging. Peter H. Lisius and Richard Griscom, editors. Middleton, WI: Music Library Association / A-R Editions, 2012. xi, 173 p. (Music Library Association Technical Reports Series; 32) ISBN 978-0-89579-719-3.

There is a risk that the word “Directions” in this title could mislead potential readers. Perhaps “Music Cataloging: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow” would have been closer to the mark, since these “directions” are as much backward- as forward-looking.

The book is dedicated to the late Ralph Papakhian, who was an important figure in music librarianship. His name crops up dozens of times in Part 1, “The Foundations of Music Cataloging Today.” This section begins with two articles by Richard Smiraglia (another big name in the profession). The first summarizes a 2010 replication by Smiraglia’s students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, of Smiraglia and Papakhian’s 1981 study of the coverage of music in OCLC WorldCat. It demonstrates, I hope unsurprisingly, that this coverage has improved over the course of thirty years.

The second article revisits Papakhian’s 1985 study of name headings in the Indiana University Music Library card catalogue, in which he demonstrated that such generalizations as “Lotka’s Law”—which postulates that most authors in a library catalogue are associated with only one work—do not apply to music catalogues. This was valuable empirical evidence, enabling Papakhian to prove that replacing AACR with AACR2 headings for music would require far more changes than originally thought, at a time when such changes involved the manual and therefore laborious updating of many catalogue cards, or their expensive replacement. By reviewing Papakhian’s evidence and comparing it with similar studies, Smiraglia demonstrates the continuing importance of empirical observation as we move into another era of rule changes and massive updates to existing catalogue headings.

Part 1’s history lessons conclude with an article by Jay Weitz on the creation and contributions of the Music OCLC Users Group (MOUG). This retrospective of a time in the late 1970s, when details of the MARC record format for music were still being worked out, serves to remind us how much music librarians now take for granted, and how far we have come in the development of OCLC products and services for music libraries.

It is only with Part 2, “Cataloging Theory in Transition,” that the focus shifts to such current topics as RDA (“Resource Description and Access,” the updated cataloguing code), and the Music Genre/Form Project. Damian Iseminger’s painstaking exposition of the theoretical inconsistencies, as he sees them, of RDA’s guidelines on establishing *works* and *expressions* is

unlikely to win many new converts to the RDA cause—at least, not among those who consider that RDA is already too wedded to a confusingly abstract and untested entity-relationship model. But he provides an interesting discussion of the potential repurposing of AACR2's concept of the uniform title, from its obsolete provision of access in an alphabetical card catalogue to a new role in establishing *work* and *expression* access points. And for those who need to brush up on FRBR (“Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records”) and FRAD (“Functional Requirements for Authority Data”), in which *works* and *expressions* were first proposed and defined as distinct bibliographic entities, well, he provides a quick overview on these things too.

It is debateable to what extent rigorous embodiments of FRBR and FRAD models in a cataloguing code will improve actual access to music materials—at least, many heated debates are currently raging on blogs, discussion lists, and other electronic soapboxes. But any reader of Beth Iseminger's chapter, “The Music Genre/Form Project: History, Accomplishments, and Future Directions,” will surely agree that this initiative should be enormously helpful for those who are not searching by title or composer, but by particular instrumental combinations and musical forms. She reminds us that, as early as 1989, music librarians were proposing ways to improve the inconsistent, hit-or-miss results produced by such searches on musical resources catalogued using the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). LCSH is primarily a set of topical subject terms for describing what books are *about*, when what is needed for music is a properly structured system for describing what instruments it is for and what forms it takes.

This widespread discontent gave rise to the Music Thesaurus Project, an MLA initiative that attempted to extract music terminology from LCSH and redeploy it in a genuine thesaurus structure. This proved to be a thoroughly intractable task, and the project was eventually abandoned in 2007, undone not only by unforeseen complexities, but also, so Iseminger tells us, because it was not accepted by the Library of Congress. She goes on to explain how the Music Genre/Form Project rose from the ashes of the Thesaurus Project, this time with the full backing of the Library of Congress. She gives a clear outline of the principles of a “syndetic” hierarchical structure for genre/form terms that have been “decoupled” from terms for medium or language, and discusses how the broadest or top term “Music” should be defined to include all forms and genres from all parts of the world, in order to escape the historical bias towards European art music embodied in LCSH terminology.

In the final section of the book, “Current and Emerging Standards in Practice,” Suzanne Mudge and Peter H. Lisius contribute chapters on cataloguing audiovisual field collections, and digital media files, respectively. Lisius outlines in minute detail his struggles to confer benefits of cataloguing standards (AACR2 and RDA) such as uniform titles and standardized headings on to

indexing and displaying music tracks in iTunes and Windows Media Player. His disheartening conclusion is that the limits of the technology and application design make this noble endeavour very difficult at present. Jenn Riley rounds off the section with a chapter on “The FRBR Models” and their potential specifically for music discovery systems like the Variations/FRBR initiative at Indiana.

Conspicuously absent here is any mention of hot topics such as “Bibframe,” the new bibliographic framework being developed under the leadership of the Library of Congress. Intended to replace the MARC record format, Bibframe incorporates principles of linked data and proposes a less complex entity-relationship model than FRBR. Nor is there any reference to the launching of next-generation “Library Service Platforms,” i.e., the remotely hosted, shared data systems that are already starting to replace local Integrated Library Systems. New systems using linked data models and the “semantic web” promise a radical transformation of our catalogues, and probably of cataloguing itself. Once “co-operative cataloguing” means literally *sharing* remote bibliographic and authority records rather than the constant downloading of *copies* of records to a local system, the tasks of providing catalogue access will change, even if the intellectual concepts do not. Music cataloguing will surely get swept along as part of this overhaul. To be fair, these ideas are new and rapidly developing. Indeed, most of the concrete proposals from the Bibframe project have appeared since this book was published last year.

So who is this book for? It is published as volume 32 in the Music Library Association Technical Reports Series, but unlike many of the earlier and shorter volumes it cannot be described as a practical manual on any particular aspect of music librarianship. Nobody is likely to read it more than once, or to use it as a reference guide. However, for librarians new to the field of music cataloguing, its diverse range of topics will provide a useful overview of the current terrain, along with a broad understanding of how we got here. Perhaps that is reason enough for its existence.

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