

Music Library Association 2014 Conference: First-Time Attendee Report and Impressions

By Houman Behzadi

Four hundred and five members of the Music Library Association (MLA) came together in Atlanta, Georgia from February 26 to March 2, 2014, to participate in the association's 83rd Annual Meeting. They exchanged thoughts, presented new findings, and put forward groundbreaking ideas that will undoubtedly affect the future of our profession. On a practical level, the chosen setting was conducive to an efficient and productive conference: the hotel (Grand Hyatt Buckhead) was situated close to many restaurants and other amenities, and the Buckhead rapid transit station was minutes away from the hotel, facilitating trips to or from downtown or the airport. Those who did not wish to stay at Hyatt were able to choose from several other hotels in close proximity.

As a young and newly appointed music librarian, I was enthusiastic to attend my very first MLA conference. Welcoming strategies for new members and first-time attendees manifested themselves in initiatives such as a discounted conference rate (for those in their first three years of membership), the **First-Time Attendee Conference Mentoring Program**, and the first-timers reception. Communication regarding the Mentoring Program was sent out via the MLA listserv (MLA-L) a few weeks prior to the conference. I signed up as a mentee and was paired with Emily Butler from the Curtis Institute of Music's John de Lancie Library. Meeting Emily was beneficial as we have many common professional interests. As my mentor, she shared her experience of attending past MLA conferences and introduced me to other members, some of whom I might not have had a chance to meet otherwise. The opportunity to meet the other new attendees presented itself during the official welcome session where all first-timers were formally acknowledged and asked to stand. Throughout the entire conference, the shiny blue first-time attendee ribbon attached to my nametag guaranteed smiles and kind words of welcome from seasoned members.

As a big fan of smartphones, I appreciated the Guidebook app that was diligently designed to provide an electronic alternative to the traditional conference program. The app is user-friendly and acts as a multifunctional conference organizer. In addition to the information found in the

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print program, Guidebook provided the following items: a list of attendees (only those who had added themselves to the app's member list), maps of the hotel conference areas, a personal schedule and to-do list, an inbox (for messages coming from the Guidebook administrators), a link to Twitter (with the possibility of posting directly from the app with the conference's official hashtag: #musiclib2014), and a list of restaurants and other amenities. The connection to Twitter was very advantageous as it provided attendees with the opportunity to follow multiple presentations during concurrent sessions.

First day (February 27)

The focus of the first plenary session was the history, philosophy, and techniques behind **Sacred Harp singing**. In an innovative move, the presenters had the audience members participate in singing a number of SATB pieces notated in the Sacred Harp tradition. This exercise was not only educational but also an effective way to mark the official beginning of the conference and to unite all members present. Following this session, I had a chance to visit the exhibitors and meet with several vendor representatives to speak about current and future collaborations. These meetings are an essential part of my job as a collection development librarian. Held in the context of the conference, they provide cost-effective opportunities to carry out such networking and advance important business.

My next stop was the **"Get Involved in MLA!"** session, where attendees could meet with MLA committee and subcommittee chairs. The session was informative for those who wished to learn more about the association's administrative structure. An announcement about a number of open positions in various committees and subcommittees had circulated via MLA-L at the beginning of February, encouraging members interested in serving to connect with the respective committee Chair at this session. I had a chance to speak with several of them and appreciated the detailed explanations of their committees' mandates. Another excellent way to learn about a given committee's specific projects and goals is to attend the business meeting it holds during the conference.

The presentations I attended on the first day focused mainly on collections. At a session sponsored by the Resource Sharing and Collection Development Committee and the World Music Roundtable, we learned about **building collections of Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, and Japanese music**. The presenters gave a brief account of the current music scene and dominant genres in these countries. Furthermore, they introduced various acquisition sources instrumental to music librarians who wish to build East Asian music collections. Alec McLane (Wesleyan University) spoke about the complexities of Chinese and Taiwanese music traditions that go back to the 6th century BCE. The cultural and musical diversity in this region is understandable, as Mainland China has 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups. The coexisting diversity and homogeneity of the prominent musical genres have created a vibrant

music scene in both China and Taiwan. McLane introduced some of the most important and widely used Chinese instruments, such as the dizi, the pipa, and the erhu. He further indicated that Chinese instrumental traditions are grounded in an ancient classification system based on materials from which the instruments were made (metal, stone, silk, bamboo, gourd, earth [pottery], hide, and wood). For instance, the instruments used in the well-known Chinese instrumental genre, "silk and bamboo" music, were traditionally made of silk and bamboo even though they have evolved and are now made of wood and metal. Virtuoso solo music, regional opera productions, large Chinese orchestral music, Western classical music, and Chinese popular music (modeled after Western popular music) are just a few categories one finds in the corpus of music produced and recorded in China and Taiwan. JVC, King Records, and Lyricord are important vendors of Chinese classical music recordings, while Farside Music and Multicultural Media's World Music Store cover all genres. YesAsia.com and Malmusic.com (Canadian) were introduced as important vendors of Chinese and Taiwanese popular music.

While growing up in Korea, the next presenter, Mi-Hye Chyun (Rider University), knew little about Korean traditional music, as it was—and remains—greatly overshadowed by people's heightened attention to Western classical music. Due to the lack of a strong market, it is rare for Korean composers to release recordings of their works in their home country. Amazon.com is a good source for acquiring Korean music recordings, while the Californian vendor Hanbooks.com specializes in Korean books, CDs, and DVDs. Chyun continued by introducing the main divisions of Korean traditional music as vocal, instrumental, court, and religious. Korean popular music deserves special attention, as there is a considerable number of Western-influenced pop, rap, and hybrid groups working alongside the traditional popular music artists.

The session concluded with a presentation from Joe C. Clark (Kent State University), who introduced the following Japanese instruments: Shamisen, Koto, Shakuhachi, and Biwa. When building Japanese music collections, Gagaku (ancient traditional court music of Japan), Nō (stage art combining music, poetry, dance, and drama), Bunraku (puppet theatre), and Kabuki (similar to Nō but much more flamboyant) are important genres to consider. The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* has discographies for all the above-mentioned genres (although lists have not been updated since 2001). The following resources were introduced and are useful to collection development librarians: Japan Traditional Cultures Foundation; *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World*, vol. 5: Asia and Oceania; *Rough Guide: World Music*; *Ashgate Research Companion to Japanese Music*; Bonnie C. Wade's *Music in Japan*; Smithsonian Folkways; and Naxos Music Library, which contains a rich selection of Japanese music. Clark emphasized the importance of evaluating selections in close collaboration with specialist faculty members.

“Enacted Metadata: Combining Content and Metadata” was the title of a presentation by Susannah Cleveland and Elizabeth Hertenstein (Bowling Green State University [BGSU]). The metaphoric two-word combination "enacted metadata" reflected the act of sharing information about the BGSU Music Library's collections through a series of short video clips. The impetus behind the project came as a result of the presenters' desire to explore new avenues of outreach. Cleveland and Hertenstein argued that when it comes to showcasing collections, moving images are more effective than still pictures or textual representations. Although not a substitute for library instruction, these videos could create interest in, and awareness of, the library's unique holdings. The steps involved in realizing the project were as follows: identifying materials from the collections, deciding on a video format, writing the script, editing the videos, assigning proper metadata (modified Dublin Core), and creating a digital collection of videos using the open source software Omeka. The results of their work can be viewed on the [Library's YouTube channel](#).

The Legislation Committee sponsored the **“Copyright Litigation and Academic Libraries: Wisdom to Share”** session. Speakers Laura Burtle and Gwen Spratt (Georgia State University [GSU]) gave a brief history and update of the lawsuit filed against the university by three different publishers. In April 2008, the plaintiffs (Cambridge and Oxford University Presses and SAGE publications) claimed that the university had infringed copyright laws by regular and unauthorized copying and distribution of copyrighted works. The issue was concerning GSU's electronic reserves system (ERes), “an online version of a library reserve bookshelf. Instead of setting aside physical books in the library for students to photocopy, professors submit an ERes request and the library uploads the content for password-protected digital distribution to their students, who can access the files for the duration of the course.”¹

In the pretrial activity period, the university attorneys and librarians updated GSU's copyright policy for electronic resources and included a fair use checklist. The trial began on May 6, 2011 and addressed 75 alleged infringements. The judge's decisions in this case (Cambridge Univ. Press v. Becker) relied upon determining whether or not GSU's policy had caused ongoing copyright violation. Judge Evans determined only five cases of infringement and ruled that the policy has been a good faith interpretation of fair use. The [court's final order](#) is available online. The presenters' recommendations for other universities and academic libraries were as follows: 1) make sure you have an updated campus-wide policy for the instructional use of copyrighted materials; 2) when in doubt, consult legal experts regarding fair use; 3) pay permission fees when appropriate, but not by default; 4) educate constituents about fair use, open access, and Creative Commons (CC). Learn more on the [GSU Library Copyright Lawsuit Guide](#).

1. Ross, Kathleen Poe, "The Precedent," *Georgia State University Magazine*, September, 2012, <http://magazine.gsu.edu/2012/09/precedent/>.

Another interesting highlight of my first day was crossing paths with celebrity music librarian and author of *Music Research: A Handbook*, Laurie J. Sampsel. I have used Sampsel's book on many occasions and was thankful for the chance to ask a few questions. I was also pleased to see several Canadian colleagues with whom I communicated extensively during the conference. A strong and consistent Canadian presence at MLA conferences is of great importance, I believe, as it has the potential to benefit music librarianship on both sides of the border. It was encouraging to hear several American colleagues express their willingness to strengthen existing collaborations with Canadians. For instance, Eric Harbeson, Music Special Collections Librarian at University of Colorado Boulder and former Chair of the MLA Legislation Committee, stressed the need for, and importance of, ongoing communications between Canadian and American members when it comes to copyright issues and implications.

The day ended with a wonderful concert at the Atlanta Symphony Hall. It was a pleasure to hear Hilary Hahn and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra give a robust performance of Carl Nielsen's rarely performed violin concerto.

Second day (February 28)

The second plenary session was entitled "**Moving on from MARC: An Examination of BIBFRAME.**" The presenters stated that a new and innovative cataloguing language such as BIBFRAME would facilitate the discoverability of libraries' OPACs on Internet search engines. Kevin Ford (Library of Congress) explained that in this resource description structure, all elements and attributes of a record are based on uniform resource identifiers (URIs) that link the record to various authoritative sources of information (for example, VIAF or LC authority records). Questions following the presentation revealed concerns from cataloguing and RDA experts. Stronger collaboration among various communities will, one hopes, lead to the emergence of cataloguing practices that are better aligned with the modern-day user's needs.

Poster sessions followed next and included overviews of some very interesting projects. One that grabbed my attention in particular was Veronica Wells' project at the University of the Pacific. Veronica had gathered usage data of electronic resources such as the Naxos Music Library and illustrated the financial benefits of such investments by using simple charts and clear visual representations.

"**Digital Humanities in the Library: Music Librarians as Collaborators**" was a question and answer period, moderated by Lisa McFall (Hamilton College), with panelists Robert Simon (University of Notre Dame), Stephen Henry (University of Maryland), and Anna Kijas (University of Connecticut [UCONN]). The panelists defined Digital Humanities (DH) in the context of their work and institutions. Depending on the nature of the project, DH could refer to initiatives such as open access, digital curation, digital preservation, and the building of cooperative digital

tools that enhance traditional scholarship. Below are the questions posed and a summary of the answers provided.

Q: How are DH projects supported in your institution and what is the role of libraries?

A (Simon): Librarians looked around the campus and identified ad-hoc initiatives; all expertise and resources were gathered and put in one place; primary gaps (Geographic Information Systems and metadata expertise) were identified and addressed.

A (Henry): So far, the support has been on an ad-hoc basis; librarians support DH initiatives through [Research Data Services](#); librarians are trying to be in a leading rather than a supporting role.

A (Kijas): Things are at the beginning stages at UCONN; [Scholar's Collaborative](#) portal offers help and support to faculty and students; librarians with metadata expertise are getting involved.

Q: Are other librarians or staff being re-skilled to support DH projects? How?

A (Simon): Yes. Workshops; librarians share useful knowledge and expertise through effective and ongoing communication.

A (Henry): Yes. [Digital Humanities Winter Institute](#) (DHWI) provided relevant learning opportunities through a 5-day intensive program; [Digital Humanities Incubator](#) offered a series of 4 workshops on DH initiatives, research ideas, data management, and best practices.

A (Kijas): Yes. DH workshops for staff; creation of [guides](#) on the subject.

Q: Provide examples of recent projects or procedures underway.

A (Simon): [Seaside research portal](#); [Inquisitio](#) (manuscript and print sources for the study of Inquisition history)

A (Henry): [Music theatre online](#)

A (Kijas): [Virtual Hartford](#); [Book of Judith](#)

Q: How do you suggest librarians with interest in DH get involved?

A (Simon): Find people involved in DH projects; collaborate with IT staff but avoid complete dependence; use MOOCs or online workshops.

A (Henry): Become the driving force behind DH projects; [THATCamp New South](#) workshop; [Digital Humanities Summer Institute](#) (DHSI)

A (Kijas): Start conversations with colleagues and librarians; learn about faculty's needs through outreach and liaison; participate in workshops (for example, learn to create your first Omeka exhibition).

The Emerging Technologies and Services Committee sponsored an informative session entitled **“Broken Patterns, New Worlds: A Whirlwind Tour of the Latest Technologies.”** Dr. Barbara Wiermann (Hochschule für Musik und Theater »Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy« Leipzig) joined via Skype and spoke about [VuFind](#), an open source software for designing library union catalogues. According to Wiermann, building a VuFind OPAC is complex and requires IT support and metadata expertise. The important advantage of VuFind is its ability to host and link to external materials, such as IMSLP's digital surrogates. She found the software to be responsive to the needs of Web 2.0 users. Next, we heard from Anne Shelley, Music and Multimedia Services Librarian at Illinois State University. Shelley reported on the [Collaborative Stations](#) project at Milner Library. The stations (table and chairs) allow multiple users to collaborate and share their laptop, tablet, or notebook screens by means of a large central monitor. Users have to connect their mobile devices to this monitor using existing cords with VGA or HDMI connectors. To bring costs down, station tables were built in-house (\$3,000-\$3,800 per table). There are currently 10 stations at Milner and the largest one accommodates 8 users. Usage is at its peak in the evenings and feedback collected from users has been very positive. The next presenter, Kerry Carwile Masteller (Harvard University), introduced [Paper.li](#), a site that lets you create your own digital newspaper in minutes! Paper.li can pull together feeds from selected social media such as blogs, Google +, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and then create a customized newsletter with a regular update schedule.

Pamela Pagels (Southern Methodist University) introduced [Beethoven's 9th Symphony](#), an app for iPad and iPhone. Touch Press' latest music appreciation product is a result of the company's close collaborations with Deutsche Grammophon and the British Library. The app allows users to follow the score or the 1825 manuscript while listening to or watching a fully synchronized performance. Switching between performances is seamless and instantaneous; tuning and tempi differences are clearly audible. Other features include: 90 minutes of extra videos and interviews with well-known figures, harmonic analysis, BeatMap of the orchestra, and the story of the symphony. I downloaded and tried the free iPhone app and appreciated its entertainment and instructional values.

“How You, Too, Can Conduct User Studies in Your Library” was the title of Kirstin Dougan’s presentation. Dougan, Music and Arts Librarian at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, hinted at the decreasing number of reference interactions in academic libraries.

Without the benefits of frequent personal communication with patrons, librarians need alternative methods of assessment and evaluation to better understand their users' learning patterns or information seeking behaviours. User studies show how patrons approach processes and accomplish tasks. A possible first step in designing user studies is to look at similar projects and determine if existing models are applicable. Dougan categorized user studies as ethnographic (e.g. observation logs, interviews, space-mapping exercises) or task-based (e.g. presenting specific tasks, recreating a process, surveys, focus groups). Task studies can teach us a lot about how users employ library tools and resources; they can also reveal problematic aspects of users' research processes.

Dougan offered the following suggestions for constructing a task study: avoid having too many tasks; make tasks realistic; pre-test tasks with another staff member or student assistant; consider having non-librarian moderators; have the participants think out loud; if at all possible, record the screen and audio; pick a sample representative of your user population (data collected from five users could be enough for most task studies). Data analysis from such studies could bring positive changes to library websites, catalogue interfaces, instructional sessions and materials, library spaces, and library services.

“Women Representing: Exploring Roles as Scholars and Traditional Music Collectors During the 20th Century,” the last presentation I attended on the second day, offered presentations by Suzanne Moulton-Gertig (University of Denver) and Margaret Ericson (Colby College). A beautiful reception at the Rialto Center for the Arts, sponsored by the Southeast Chapter of the Music Library Association (SEMLA), concluded the day.

Third day (March 1)

The sessions I attended on the third day focused on music business reference resources and information literacy. Finding **current information and data from the music industry** is a challenging task and requires familiarity with a significant number of multidisciplinary resources. Marci Cohen (Berklee College of Music) and Grover Baker (Middle Tennessee State University) shared some of the free and subscription-based online resources they use to access music business information. Keyword searches by company and artist name can yield useful results in *Oxford Music Online*, *International Index to Music Periodicals (IIMP)*, and *Music Index*. Complementary business databases are Gale Business Insights, General Business File ASAP (Gale), EBSCO Business Source Complete, and ProQuest ABI/INFORM. Academic Charts Online (ACO) provides graphical representations of music trends by using data from chart providers such as Billboard, ARIA, and Official Charts Company. AES E-library is a beneficial database for audio engineers and the AES oral history projects are important sources to consider (AES E-Library members receive per-title discounts). As many of the music business databases are intended for individuals in the music industry (and not librarians), it is beneficial to seek help

from colleagues with licensing expertise who might be in a position to negotiate access prices on behalf of librarians. Other databases mentioned were CelebrityAccess from EventWire (very expensive with a highly restrictive access model) and PollstarPro, which provides detailed information about venues, ticket numbers sold, and gross concert revenues.

Next, Andy Leach (Rock and Roll Hall of Fame) shed light on the resources available at his institution's Library and Archives. He provided examples of correspondence between artists and managers, recording contracts, accounting books, and other documents that could be of interest to researchers.

In the afternoon, Brian McMillan (McGill University) and the members of the Instruction Subcommittee gave a report of their work and progress on creating an **online music information literacy repository**. Rather than a formal presentation, this session was an open discussion where the audience members gave their feedback and suggestions about the project.

The conference was formally closed at the **MLA Business Meeting**. During the meeting, James P. Cassaro, Head of the University of Pittsburgh's Theodore M. Finney Music Library, was awarded the MLA Citation. I was inspired and moved to learn about his significant contributions to the fields of musicology and music librarianship. Learn more about Cassaro and his achievements on his University's [Department of Music blog](#).

Overall, the conference was highly stimulating, instigating many thoughts and ideas for future projects. At this early stage of my career as a professional librarian, I greatly appreciate the learning, communication, and networking opportunities the conference provided. As it stands, I am planning to attend the MLA 2015 conference in Denver (February 25-March 1) and I look forward to sharing the experience with other Canadian colleagues.

Many presentation slides and handouts can be found on the [conference website](#).