"Whence music librarians?" in "Music librarianship in America"

Whence Music Librarians?

Harold E. Samuel

It is fitting that this symposium brings together the users of music libraries with music librarians, for it was the users—musicologists, mostly—who played such a large role in establishing the Music Library Association (MLA) in 1931 and developing it in the early years. So the musicologists can be proud of this landmark in the life of their stepchild.

At an April 1934 meeting of the MLA at Vassar College, seven of the nineteen persons attending were musicologists: Otto Kinkeldey of Cornell University, Harold Spivacke and Oliver Strunk of the Library of Congress, Paul Henry Lang of Columbia University, George Sherman Dickinson of Vassar College, and Hugo Leichtentritt and G. Wallace Woodworth of Harvard University. Among the non-musicologists present were Eva Judd O'Meara, who had been instrumental in organizing the founding meeting at Yale in 1931, Margaret Mott of the Grosvenor Library in Buffalo, John Windle of the Newberry Library in Chicago, Gladys Chamberlain of the New York Public Library, and Barbara Duncan of the Eastman School of Music. Other musicologists active in the founding years were Carleton Sprague Smith of New York Public, Glen Haydon of the University of North Carolina, and Charles Warren Fox of Eastman. In fact, the first six presidents of MLA were musicologists; of course Spivacke, Strunk, Kinkeldey, and Smith were also librarians.

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To a large extent the musicologists were looking out for their own interests. They were aiding and abetting the establishment and the enrichment of collections that contained the tools of their research. But they also participated centrally in such "library matters" as indexing *Denkmäler*, devising a music classification scheme at Vassar, inducing the Library of Congress to print cards for music, and inaugurating a mimeographed bulletin for members. The bulletin, edited by O'Meara, became the first series of *Notes*, a publication that to this day has remained the leading international bibliographic journal in the field of music and a cohesive element for music librianship in the United States. Over the years, *Notes* has indeed held MLA together.

In 1941 Glen Haydon reported to the Association at a meeting held at Harvard that he had visited sixteen music libraries recently and found inadequate holdings at most of them. Presumably these included the seven to ten universities that were offering a Ph.D. in musicology at that time. During MLA's first decade, its membership grew considerably: forty-two persons attended the meeting at Cincinnati in 1940. That year MLA had 175 members in twenty-eight states and one in Canada. Almost a third of the membership (52) were from New York State. Massachusetts had twenty members. Clearly more and more libraries across the country were engaging specialists for their music holdings. After World War II,

when states upgraded their teachers' colleges and normal schools to branches of enlarged state university systems, new positions were created both for music librarians and music faculty, and new music collections were established. Today MLA has almost 1,200 individual members, and perhaps as many as 600 of them have primary responsibility for a music collection. This rapid infusion of young members as well as the pace of technological change made it necessary at annual meetings to concentrate on technical matters. Although complexities of automation now often dominate MLA conference topics, the basic aims of librarianship—to have the right book in the right place at the right time and to create tools to direct the user to that material—remain as they were in the past. The technical aspects of music librarianship do not generally appeal to musicologists, who no longer attend our meetings. (The last full-time musicologist to serve as president of MLA was Wiley Hitchcock, in 1965 and 1966.) We still need their assistance in other ways, however.

One way musicologists can help is in recruiting persons to the field of music librarianship. Since they are acquainted with large numbers of students, musicologists can identify those who might contribute to our profession. What are we looking for? First of all, the prospective music librarian must have the proper personality and temperament for librarianship. Libraries are service organizations, and not everyone enjoys or is even capable of giving service. In a paper presented at a meeting of the American Library Association in 1937, Otto Kinkeldey listed four goals for the training of a music librarian: (1) acquaintance with the organization and operation of a library, either by means of a degree program in library science or on-the-job training; (2) ability with foreign languages—at least an elementary knowledge of French, German, and Italian; (3) a working knowledge of music bibliography; and (4) a love of music and a basic knowledge of music history and theory.[1] These accomplishments would get a person a job today, too, though on-the-job training is no longer acceptable as an alternative to a master's degree in library science, which now takes precedence over the other requirements. But the vast majority of today's music librarians do have the other qualifications, and the extent to which they possess them will probably determine the size of the collections they will come to manage. As positions in musicology become more difficult to obtain, more holders of doctorates in musicology are turning to music librarianship. Obviously one need not abandon research to become a librarian. Why, however, aren't more people attracted to the field? We in the profession know the variety and challenges of our occupation and enjoy them; musicologists could relay this message to students.

Teaching faculty have always been, and must continue to be, helpful in building and maintaining library collections. This is not so important at the several institutions with "elite" collections, whose librarians usually anticipate the needs of degree programs and of faculty research. Faculty assistance with acquisitions can be very important in college libraries, whose goals differ from those of research libraries. At any rate, it is probably no longer financially feasible to develop exhaustive collections such as already exist in our major music centers. Not only would the costs be unreasonable, but too much of the material is no longer available. Particularly

[1] Otto Kinkeldey, "Training for Music Librarianship: Aims and Opportunities," *ALA Bulletin*, 31 (August 1937), 459–463.

with limited budgets, materials must be carefully selected to support degree programs in history, theory, and performance. Unfortunately some college and university libraries do not have music collections adequate for their degree programs. Here the faculty can play a major role, providing the impetus and advocacy for improving library holdings.

When a student somehow gets an urge to pursue a topic—an urge often inspired by a teacher—the library should have what the student needs or what makes further investigation possible. Therein, of course, lies a goal of education: enticing students to pursue topics independently, without a teacher's supervision. Among general library holdings, music scores can complicate the pursuit of a topic. Books can be read in a reading room; records can be listened to in a record library; but scores must often be taken from the library to a place for performance. Ideally students in performance should read through bushels of scores to become acquainted with the literature; singers should study orchestral music and orchestral musicians should study the song literature. Motivating such students is difficult; they need continuous encouragement from the faculty.

These matters were discussed by Otto Kinkeldey at a meeting of the Music Library Association here at Harvard in 1948. Kinkeldey's talk, "The Music Teacher and the Library," was followed by a talk titled "The Graduate Student and the Library" given by a young Harvard instructor, Richard F. French.[2]

Regarding another matter, Kinkeldey reminded the Cornell community in a librarian's annual report that a university has three essential components: faculty, students, and library. Accrediting agencies, such as the Middle States Association and, for music, the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), attempt to assure adequate library holdings. Librarians, however, are seldom included on accrediting teams, whose faculty members would perhaps be the first to admit that they are not fully qualified to judge a library's holdings and procedures. NASM pays lip service in its *Handbook* to the importance of libraries but in fact does little about them. Although it would be difficult for the Music Library Association to play the role of national watchdog in assuring strong library programs, the Association should participate in the accrediting activity of NASM.

A final point. Donald Grout, at the 1941 MLA meeting, gave a paper titled "The Music Library and Musicology." He began by quoting Archibald MacLeish, then Librarian of Congress, who defined civilization as "a spider that hangs itself from its past on a continuously lengthening thread." Grout then asked permission to describe musicologists as a nest of spiders—"a group of industrious and possibly annoying insects, whose ever-lengthening thread of communication with the past is maintained by the music library. It is obvious that for the development of musical scholarship no single factor can possibly be of greater importance than the music library. We depend on you [music librarians] for our very existence."[3]

Grout continued by emphasizing the importance of source materials for the musicologist, and he advocated three long-term programs: (1) selecting a limited special field of source materials and collecting heavily in it (as the Library of Congress has done with opera librettos); (2) collecting photographic copies of primary sources (as the Isham Memorial Library at Harvard has done); and (3) "collecting

[2] Both papers were subsequently published in the *Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association*, 42 (1948), 81–92.

[3] Donald J. Grout, "The Music Library and Musicology," *Notes*, 1st ser., no. 11 (Aug. 1941), 3–12.

and preserving material relative to American music, both past and present." He realized that little or no interest in American music existed then, but that "when such research is undertaken—as it eventually must be—it will be based on the material available in local archives: records of the musical life of a community or a region, its concerts, its musical organizations, its teachers and its performers, the manuscripts and papers of its local composers—in short, material which will enable us to learn what music was composed and performed, when, by whom, under what circumstances, and with what relationship to the whole social life of the people."[4] Grout anticipated by twenty to thirty years the rise of interest in the sociology of music, which we attribute to the influence of ethnomusicology. Paul Fromm made a plea similar to Grout's at an MLA meeting in 1966. Now, of course, it has become permissible to study American music. Scholars must scramble for materials, just as scholars had to scramble thirty or so years ago when it became permissible to study the nineteenth century, whose materials our libraries had not been collecting because there was no demand for them. We now have demand for musical Americana, much of which is in manuscript form and belongs in archives. Our major regional research libraries should be seeking out music sources, past and present—at least those from their own geographical areas. The Library of Congress and the New York Public Library have been collecting American music for decades, as have, on a smaller scale, other libraries and archives around the country (they are identified in Donald Krummel's *Resources of American Music History*).[5] This collecting must include all styles of music. Last fall, the Yale School of Music hosted a meeting of the Canadian and United States chapters of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music. For many the meeting was a revelation, as seventy-five persons from around the country gathered to present and discuss over fifty papers on topics concerning popular music.

Those are some of the ways in which teachers and librarians in the past have influenced each other and in which faculty members today can be helpful. The influences will surely continue to our mutual benefit.

4 Ibid., 10–11.

5 D. W. Krummel, et al., *Resources of American Music History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).