

Archives Next: Discovering the Current State of Archival Collections in Music Libraries and
Where we go from here.

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Lets begin with a little exercise :What is the first thing that comes to mind when someone says say [SLIDE 2] “Music Library” – music, books, sound recordings. In essence, a music library is a place to go to find some resource describing some other resource. A simple Google search, however, contests this traditional view; music libraries are in fact adding archival music materials to their collections. Engage in conversation with music librarians and you discover that your Google search barely scratches the surface of the treasures taking up residence in music libraries of all shapes and sizes across North America. Various groups have begun discovery projects attempting to identify unprocessed or under-processed collections in academic libraries. These ongoing activities are of vital importance to the research community yet much work remains to be done to reveal the full extent of the archival collections resting dormant in our music libraries. What follows is a brief review of existing discovery projects, the results of my own attempt to survey the quantity and condition of archival collections in music libraries, and suggested directions for further activity in this area based on survey results and feedback.

I’ll begin the review by paraphrasing Carol Maudel, hidden collections in academic libraries are the elephant in the closet - too big to deal with but far too important to ignore.¹

Maudel aptly captures the importance of archival collections, writing: [SLIDE 3]

The acquisition and processing and service for unique documentary collections are a core function of research libraries... These are the collections on which new knowledge in the humanities is built. Scholars rely on this overall mosaic of primary collections. Each of us contribute just a piece of that, our little tesserae, to make the full picture. It is our institutional responsibility to deliver access to the pieces we hold.²

As early as 1998 the ARL Research Collections Committee recognized that special collections do indeed exist outside the realm of archival repositories but that they may not be receiving the same level of support. Citing a story familiar to many music librarians, the committee noted that special collections within the academic library often remain inaccessible largely due to the

¹ Carol Maudel. “Hidden Collections: The Elephant in the Closet” in *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 5/2 (September 2004), p. 106.

² *Ibid.*, p. 109.

struggle for resources inherent to being “just one element in a comprehensive program of library services.”³ To make meaningful progress in determining the resources needed to provide adequate support for these collections, the ARL Special Collections Task Force devised “a structured, systematic method for inventorying and reporting on these backlogs”⁴ of unprocessed special collections. To that end they surveyed all ARL, IRLA, and Oberlin Group Libraries and asked them to identify three unprocessed or under-processed collections speaking to any of five themes:

- Women
- Advertising
- Pamphlet and printed ephemera
- Material dating from 1865-1918
- Ethnic histories or cultures.⁵

This survey injected renewed interest in academic archival collections outside the traditional repository. When viewed from the music library perspective, however, there are inclusions and exclusions built into the groups surveyed and preferred subject areas that may have precluded music collections from being reported.

Despite these drawbacks, the survey brought hundreds of collections to light and led to the creation of a granting project supported by the Council on Library and Information Resources. The program, Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives,⁶ provides grant funding for the processing and cataloging of previously hidden collections of rare or archival materials. According to the website, **[SLIDE 4]**

The primary criteria the panel employed in evaluating the proposals were the potential national significance of the nominated collections for scholarship and teaching, the application of description standards that would provide interoperability and long-term sustainability for project data, and innovations in the design of workflow processes that maximized both efficiency and connections to scholarly and other user communities.⁷

³ Judith M. Panitch. *Special Collections in ARL Libraries: Results of the 1998 Survey Sponsored by the ARL Research Collections Committee*. (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 2001), p. 3.

⁴ Winston Tabb. “‘Wherefore are These Things Hid?’ A Report of a Survey Undertaken by the ARL Special Collections Task Force,” in *RBM: A Journal of Rare Books, Manuscripts, and Cultural Heritage* 5/2 (September 2004), p. 124.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶ Council of Library and Information Resources, “Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives,” <http://www.clir.org/hiddencollections/index.html>, accessed January 17, 2010.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Given the international nature of our subject area, let's for now make the admittedly gross generalization that much of our special collections pertain to people, groups, and cultures outside the United States; if we can accept this generalization then the very nature of our collections poses an immediate challenge in meeting the first criterion. Perhaps more importantly though, how many of us have the technology and infrastructure to meet the description standards described here? While perhaps some of the larger institutions have the relationships and technological support necessary to manage innovative and sustainable project data, those of us in small to mid-sized institutions typically do not have that luxury. To emphasize my point, let me add that of the 29 projects that have so far received grant funding over the past two years, only one is music related (Song, Speech, and Dance: Special Collections from the Recorded Sound Archives at Yale and Stanford Universities). It also seems worth noticing that all grant recipients are from large academic institutions or significant archive and research centers.

The music library community has not ignored the issue either and has been working to create description and access tools for their archival collections. MLA briefly had a working group on Standards for Music Archival Collections. Tasked with the creation of a supplement to DACS (Descriptive Archival Content Standards), the working group under the leadership of Matt Snyder submitted a draft proposal. Quite recently, the joint MLA/RBMS task force posted a draft of *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Manuscripts for Music* for comment to the MLA and RBMS listservs. When it is finalized, the DCRM(M) will provide guidelines for bibliographic description “for monographic printed music of any age or type of production and for monographic manuscript music created after 1600.”⁸ While these two projects aim to provide cataloging description standards, IAML's Working Group on Access to Music Archives is taking measures to improve online access to these records. According to the project's executive summary, the “project aims to create a portal to access music archival collections regardless of their geographic locations.”⁹ To meet this goal, the working group is developing software that will allow libraries to upload catalog records of their archival music collections to a universal database and are working to create a federated searching interface for researchers.

⁸ MLA/RBMS. “DCRM(M)_Version5A_intro,” <http://dcrmmreview.pbworks.com/>, accessed March 14, 2010.

⁹ International Association of Music Libraries, “Project Development,” http://www.iaml.info/activities/projects/access_to_music_archives, accessed January 17, 2010.

Each of these programs makes a significant contribution to the description and access of archival music collections. That so much work on these fronts has already been accomplished may be a clear indication that music libraries do indeed have archival collections in their holdings. What strikes me as odd, however, is that these projects all focus on the final stages of archival processes, description and cataloging. I can find no record of a large-scale effort to get a handle of where these collections are, how many collections are in our libraries, the typical level of processing for these collections, nor even the processing and preservation methods applied. If the goal is to make our archival music collections widely accessible for research, then I suggest that we need to start from the beginning and find out if there are unprocessed music collections in our libraries, the reasons for their unprocessed state, and whether more can or should be done to support these collections. It was with this thought that I decided to create my own survey to determine if there really is a need for a more integrated approach to managing the archival collections in our music libraries.

Testing the water

Bearing all this in mind and with the IT support of Jon Dillon and professional support of Marian Ritter and the rest of music library staff at Western Washington University where I was working at the time, I distributed my own survey to the MLA listserv in May/June 2009. The purpose of the survey when I first sent it out was three-fold: to affirm or negate the anecdotal evidence of under-processed archival collections in music libraries; to get a sense of the current status of these collections; and to provide a direction forward in terms of preservation, processing, access, and collaboration. This survey had 62 respondents. Once those with no archival holdings completed their portion of the survey, 36 respondents with archival holdings continued to complete the remaining questions.

The first section of the survey sought to identify the characteristics of responding libraries [SLIDE 5]. By far the majority of respondents (41.94%) house their music materials in a branch library. The next largest group retains their music materials in a centralized location within the main library. The remaining four groups were significantly smaller: those whose collections are integrated throughout the main library collection, those that keep sound recordings and scores in a branch location and monographs in the main stacks, conservatory libraries, and finally public libraries with significant music collections. While i do not have

enough information to say without a doubt that this mix typifies the music library community, it seems safe to at least say there is fair representation of most library situations a music librarian may work in.

The type of degrees granted by respondents suggests an important point relative to where these collections are and who might be interested in collecting archival materials [SLIDE 6]. Based on the Carnegie Classification System, by far the vast majority of respondents were doctoral-granting institutions (72.4%). Baccalaureate colleges represented less than a quarter of that figure, with master-degree granting institutions being the smallest respondent group. The vastly higher number of respondents granting doctoral degrees suggests that most archival music collections are held by larger institutions. However, it might be worth exploring why more baccalaureate colleges responded to the survey than master level universities; could this mean there is a high interest among baccalaureate colleges? Do they already have a number of collections or is this a new interest? Or was this group merely humoring me in responding to the survey? Or perhaps it is simply a matter of there being few universities that offer degrees at the master's level but not the doctoral.

From informal conversations I had learned of several music libraries interested in bringing in archival music collections but which had yet to do so. To get a sense of why this might be, the 26 respondents who reported having no archival collections were presented with several potential reasons and asked to select all that apply. [SLIDE 7] No institutional support was the most frequently cited reason (54.5%). Lack of trained librarians or staff as well as collection scope tied for second each garnering 45.5% of total responses. No interest in archival holdings took only 27.3% of total responses. Conflict with collecting policies of other university and/or regional repositories was the least often cited reason for not collecting archival materials. At this point librarians with no archival holdings had completed the survey and only those with holdings were asked to continue.

Let's pause here for a moment. What does it mean when lack of institutional support is the most frequently cited barrier to bringing archival collections into music libraries? What bearing does this have on our responsibility as places of research? What does this mean for all the untold smaller collections still owned privately for lack of an able and willing repository? In my mind the implications are tremendous; collections in private ownership remain in the shadows while only the spectacular and exceptional are brought to light. Each hidden collection

is a missing piece to the puzzle of history and is equally important in defining the shape and color of the finished puzzle. If more music librarians are willing to take responsibility for these pieces but are held back by institutional overhead, then as a community do we need to look towards affecting a fundamental shift in the institutional mindset? These are questions deserving of more reflection but for now let's continue on.

Respondents with archival collections were next asked to identify what level of archival training, if any, their staff had. **[SLIDE 8]** 43.33% of respondents indicated having no librarians or staff with archival training while the remaining 56.67% of respondents of course had librarians and staff with some level of training. The breakdown by type of training is revealing as well: **[3 CLICKS]** the three largest groups with archival training are those who either have an MLS degree with a specialization in archives (36.67%), have acquired archival training through workshop attendance (28.33%), or have gained practical experience as an employee at an archival institution (also 28.33%). Remember that 43% of respondents with no collections cited no trained staff as a preventative factor; with that in mind then the next question might be what effect might increased support for archival workshop attendance have? We can similarly ask whether MLS students should be encouraged to do coursework in archival methods and preservation.

The total number of collections held by respondents at the time of the survey was roughly 4,799. **[SLIDE 9]** The number of collections per institution ranged widely, with a number of institutions holding as few as one archival collection and one institution holding thousands of collections. Four of the 36 collection-holding institutions answered this question with dozens or question marks. Of the remaining institutions by far the majority hold only one to ten collections. As you can see, the number of institutions holding more than ten collections dramatically drops. The question that remains to be asked: why this preponderance of only one to ten collections? Is it related to issues of staffing? Training? Funding? Institutional support? Or is this an indication that archival collections in music libraries is a new trend?

Respondents were also asked to identify the type of archival collections in their holdings and indicate how they are processed. **[SLIDE 10]** Here respondents were able to identify all material types and processing methods that applied so it is important to remember that this number is reflective of the 4,799 collections rather than trends by institution type. The two most common material types identified were non-commercial sound recordings (89.5%) and

manuscripts (81.6%). Following closely were ephemera (78.9%), and photographs and correspondence which both came in at 76.3%. It was interesting to see how libraries handled scores received as part of an archival collection. Only 34.2% reported adding scores to the circulating collection, whereas 52.6% of scores are separated from the collection but stored in closed stacks, and 60.5% kept the scores with the original collection. Clearly individual institutions engage in all three practices, but what criteria are applied to determine how scores are housed and whether they circulate or not? How do these criteria relate, if at all, to the original collection, and how might decisions to remove or keep scores with the collection impact the collection's research value?

[SLIDE 11] In some instances, as little as 20% of an institution's archival holdings had been processed whereas in others 100% of archival holdings have been processed. By far, though, the majority of respondents suggest that most institutions have processed 50-70% of their archival music collections. If we take this 50-70% as a uniformly representative number and do the math, that leaves 1,440-2,400 collections in 36 reporting institutions that have yet to be processed.

Responses varied when questioned about what processing guidelines are used. **[SLIDE 12]** 57.1% of respondents follow archival guidelines while 34.3% follow library practices. Another 8.6% use a combination of both dependant on available resources, formats, and related provenance issues. When I wrote this survey the distinction between archival and library methods seemed obvious so I failed to provide any guidance for respondents here. In retrospect, however, I realize my original phrasing was a bit obtuse. This question of processing guidelines and practices is an important point though and undoubtedly warrants further scrutiny to determine whether archival best practices are being followed.

Housing is a key component of archival practice. Happily 100% of these collections, excepting the scores added to circulating materials, are stored in closed stacks or an area with restricted access. In a day and age when buildings, particularly academic libraries, are air conditioned as a matter of course, surprisingly only 68.4% of respondents reported having climate controlled storage for their archival collections. Moving from facilities to containers, the wide majority of respondents (73.7%) house their collections in archival quality acid-free boxes, folders, envelopes, and similar containers. The remaining respondents use a mix of archival containers and original containers, which is not all that uncommon for repositories with limited

funds or for storing collections waiting to be processed. Responses to questions about preservation measures were extremely encouraging. 81.3% of all responding institutions remove rusted clasps and other metallic items, 78% remove, treat, and or isolate molded items, fragile materials are housed in protective phase boxes by 62.5% of respondents, 56.3% isolate acidic items, and 50% encapsulate fragile documents. Given the mixed levels of training described in earlier responses I was pleasantly surprised by the number of institutions providing such excellent physical care of their collections. However, that not all libraries engage in the most basic and cost effective preventative measure of isolating acidic items raises a few questions: Which institutions are engaging in these higher level preservation measures and which are not; can this be related to institutional size and type? If so, is training or materials fund an issue for those libraries that do not engage in basic level preservation? Regardless, with such a fundamental preservation measure I hope that the number of libraries taking this simple preventative measure will rapidly increase.

The final section of the survey examined access, an area where again responses varied. Asked to mark all that apply, respondents indicated how access is provided to their collections [SLIDE 13]. 61.8% of respondents have bibliographic records available in institutional catalogs, 47.1% provide at least a brief description in prose on institutional websites, and 82.4% of collections have finding aids. In the “Other” field, many respondents indicated a desire to create online finding aids but limited funding and resources were so far preventing them from moving forward. Additional “other” responses include, “memory of librarian,” old computer files, and computer key-punched lists.

I was surprised and not a little bit pleased with the high percentage of institutions reporting finding aids, but a closer look at these finding aids suggests there is still a need in this area. Until comparatively recently, finding aids have tended to follow local conventions. The archival community, however, has been on an extensive campaign to normalize finding aids across institutions through the development of various standards such as Descriptive Archival Content Standards (DACS) and mark-up language such as EAD. [SLIDE 14] This question of standards and conventions was put to respondents. The majority of those with finding aids, 61.3% follow local conventions in creating their finding aids whereas only 48.4% adhere to archival conventions. It is a closer split between institutions that make their finding aids available online (51.6%) and those that provide finding aids upon request (41.9%). The

remaining 18% expressed a desire to make their finding aids available online but have yet to do so for budgetary reasons or lack of staff.

[SLIDE 15] So, can we find meaning in any of this?

A few general observations can be made. Presuming that this survey captured a representative cross-section of the music library community, then it appears that the majority of institutions with archival holdings are doctoral granting. At the same time, a lack of institutional support is the most frequently cited reason for not collecting archival collections in the music library; how this particular issue relates to institution type and size still needs further exploration.

In regards to training, the outlook is quite positive. By and large there seems to be a high level of standards for storage and preservation. Overall numbers from this survey indicate that the majority of archival holdings in music libraries are processed and managed by people with archival training. When we consider the number of collections being processed by people with no archival training (roughly 25-30% of collections reported here) as well as the collections that are completely unprocessed (1200-2400), and expand those figures as representative of a much larger library community then it might be fair to hypothesize that there is an enormous number of archival music collections at risk for accidental mishandling and of remaining entirely inaccessible. At the same time, throughout the survey there was an expressed desire to provide care and access at an end-product level commensurate with archival best practices accompanied by explanations of insufficient staffing, funding, and/or training. The desire among music librarians is clearly there, but a broader infrastructure to support archival activities within music libraries is still largely absent.

Further investigation needs to be done as to what the processing standards are for music archival collections. While slightly more than half of respondents to this survey follow archival standards, we still need to examine precisely what “library” practices entail in terms of collection integrity, long-term preservation, arrangement of materials within a collection, and description and access.

Overall, too many of our collections remain hidden to the broader public. While a large number of respondents have finding aids, the majority reported following local conventions. The use of local standards as opposed to archival standards gives rise to accessibility problems; inconsistent metadata within a given institution and across institutions, differences and changes

in style and terminology all make it difficult for researchers to construct effective search queries and also severely limits interoperability in instances where migrating to different platforms may become an option. While we should hope that more and more finding aids are made available online, we also must look forward to the continued development of DCRM(M) and encourage the increased creation of bibliographic records for our collections; these provide a basic description of our collections which will be accessible worldwide through OCLC. In the absence of resources to create finding aids, bibliographic records also provide a stopgap measure to make our collections visible.

By and large, the lack of funding and resources necessary to provide adequate description and online access to these descriptions seems to be one of the largest problems facing music libraries with archival collections. Creating funding sources for music libraries with archival holdings with the express purpose of supporting collection processing and description should be one of the primary areas of focus for future development.

[SLIDE 16] The Way Forward

This survey of mine had its issues and perhaps raised more questions than it answered. I believe it has hit deep enough, though, to warrant further investigation by the music library community. It is my fervent hope that the conversation will continue well beyond this conference session and so to try and help push things along I suggest a three-pronged approach to further comprehensive examination of the issues and needs of music libraries with archival collections:

Clearly another survey must take place. This survey should be supported by the larger music library community (represented of course by MLA, IAML, and ASRC) and crafted with the goal of discovering the true extent of archival holdings in music libraries and what the common practices are for processing, housing, describing, and providing access to these collections. Certainly in this endeavor the participation of archival groups such as SAA would be beneficial. To ensure meaningful results, this survey should allow analysts to follow a single respondent's answers from beginning to end rather than automatically dumping all answers into anonymous spreadsheets.

More must be done to promote the use of archival best practices over local and/or library-based methods in caring for archival collections. Support for workshops in archival methods supported by the music library community, perhaps in collaboration with the archival community

should be increased. Similarly, there must be more discussion of archival matters within the music library literature in the form of articles and books.

Finally, sources for funding, perhaps similar to those developed by CLIR, should be pursued to promote the processing, description, and online access of our archival collections.