



**Describing Music Materials: A Manual for Resource Description of Printed and Recorded Music and Music Videos.** 4th ed. By Richard P. Smiraglia with Jihee Beak. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017. xxi, 197 p. ISBN 978-1-4422-7628-4 (paperback).

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When I was starting out as a music cataloguer 30 years ago, I kept a somewhat battered departmental copy of the first edition from 1983 of Richard Smiraglia's *Cataloging Music* within easy reach. From this valuable gloss on the music cataloguing rules contained in chapters 5, 6, and 25 of the AACR2 cataloguing code I learned at least two things: how to do my job, and that Smiraglia was the pre-eminent guru of the music cataloguing world. He still is. Over the course of

four editions there have been changes to many of the illustrative examples contained in this book, to match shifting trends in publishing, public taste, and technology. Other details have changed too. The original title (*Cataloging Music*) was abandoned with the 1997 third edition to avoid pardonable confusion with Smiraglia's 1989 book *Music Cataloging*, in which he provided a broader historical and theoretical background to his previous practical handbook. This latest edition of *Describing Music Materials* has also found a new publisher, following the 2003 demise of Soldier Creek Press. It has a new co-author; and it is also a little shorter than the previous edition by virtue of jettisoning all references to archival music collections, on the grounds that archival description has "evolved along a different trajectory from library cataloging" (xx).

One of the reasons for this divergent evolution is the ambivalent "wait and see" attitude of the archival cataloguing community towards RDA (*Resource Description and Access*), the successor to the AACR cataloguing rules which have prevailed in various forms—AACR, AACR2, AACR2R—for the last 40 years. The emergence about five years ago of RDA as an increasingly widespread alternative to AACR2 brings us to the fundamental motivation for a new edition of *Describing Music Materials*. What Smiraglia calls "the exigencies of RDA" have necessitated a rewriting that takes into account RDA's new terminology (saying, for example, *preferred title* instead of *uniform title*, or *authorized access points* instead of *headings*) and new rule numbers (AACR2's rule 25.30B has become RDA's 6.28.1.9.1).



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Notwithstanding these changes, and the RDA lingo (“record the attributes of the manifestation”), the fundamentals of the book are the same as ever, because music cataloguing itself has changed little in its essentials. As Smiraglia says in his introduction: “the music cataloger begins by examining an information object, and then proceeds to record a transcription of bibliographic data.... A physical description is formulated, and notes are made where needed to further clarify the content of the item.... [Then] access points are formulated to serve as index entries in the catalog” (xiii-xiv). Of course, this is the basic process for cataloguing *any* resource. Smiraglia points out that one of the reasons music cataloguing in particular is such a “highly specialized and highly rewarding sort of work” (xiii) is that music consists of sound, whose performances are events. Thus the relationship between musical “information objects” such as scores or recordings and the musical works they represent can be more complex than for text-based documents. The malleable nature of music in itself can also make establishing identities for, and relationships between, certain kinds of musical works somewhat challenging. Just how much alteration is allowed in making an arrangement of a work for a different performance medium before we decide it has crossed a line and taken on another identity as a related but new work? Even precisely identifying certain works can be complicated by the Western art music tradition of employing conventional forms and their corresponding generic titles (*sonata, suite, symphony* and their cognates in various Western languages). Publishers themselves can be unhelpful: a music cataloguer needs a grasp of music history to realize that when a publisher blandly calls a piece something like “Suite in F major for trombone and piano by Telemann”, it has to be an arrangement, tracing the origins of which will require poring over a thematic catalogue or two. Music publishers indulge in other vagaries—title pages can be an inconsistent mix of several languages, or they can be completely absent, particularly from popular music folios or recordings. Then there is the difficulty of even applying rigid concepts like “composer” and “work” to certain popular or jazz recordings.

And so forth. The profusion of special cataloguing rules for music is the inevitable response to the complexities of the material, and for the beginner the task of navigating these rules is not made easier by the current structure of the RDA Toolkit. This is where Smiraglia steps in, outlining the principles, adducing examples, and pulling together what the Toolkit sometimes scatters. Another valuable feature of this book is its recognition that most of its potential users are still creating catalogue records using the MARC 21 format for tagging data elements. Those who are fond of saying that “RDA has replaced MARC” will, if they read this book, perhaps realize that they are mixing up different concepts, like saying “soccer has replaced cable TV.” RDA tells us the rules of the game—how to create standardized metadata—but says nothing about how it is to be accessed or viewed. Smiraglia knows that for the present, and for several years to come, music cataloguers will need help in embodying the precepts of RDA into concrete MARC records, and so he provides an Appendix of 26 pages, laying out in MARC 21 format records for all the illustrative examples contained in the earlier chapters. This is a helpful feature even for experienced music cataloguers, given that RDA has spawned a number of new MARC fields and subfields. I should perhaps add that readers who hope to find new instructions and examples for digital media will be largely

disappointed. The introduction (xx) says “Multimedia packages seem not to have lasted in the marketplace, but streaming audio and video are quite evident so examples now include those media as well.” However, while there is one example for a streaming audio resource from Naxos, the five video examples are for discs (four) and a cassette. There is no mention of digital downloads of scores and parts.

We should be grateful to Smiraglia and his collaborator Jihee Beak—whose precise contribution is nowhere acknowledged in these pages—for undertaking the task of RDA-izing the book and realigning the rule references to conform with the RDA Toolkit as it stood at December 2015. Between them the authors have ensured that this practical “how-to” manual can guide a fresh generation through the intricacies, challenges, and pleasures that constitute the art and science of music cataloguing.

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