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Implications of Online Media on Academic Library Collections

Kirstin M. Dougan
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Kirstin M. Dougan, Music and Performing Arts Librarian, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Abstract

Libraries' market share of discovery has been declining rapidly, and in some cases this is directly related to where the content users need and want resides. Music recording delivery models have changed dramatically in the last several years, with more performers and labels offering content directly to consumers via downloads only. Unfortunately, this model is one in which libraries cannot usually legally participate due to licensing agreements. Another issue at play is the growing presence of quality content on sites like YouTube, which users are already very familiar and comfortable with. In light of this, user behavior has been evolving to incorporate more and more nonlibrary sources of music discovery and acquisition. Patrons no longer see the library as the sole source for music content (if they ever did). This is due in part to the convenience of online sources and the fact that, while libraries may still need to buy CDs, users would rather have recordings they can listen to anywhere and anytime. So how can academic libraries address these challenges to continue to meet our mission of building collections and serving our patrons? This paper will discuss current music delivery models, collections and acquisitions pressures involved with online media (primarily audio), the current music discovery and access environment, and information seeking behaviors of music faculty and students. We will offer some suggestions for librarians wishing to address these issues.

Introduction

This paper offers some suggestions for librarians facing the changing nature of music recording delivery models and will address issues around current music delivery models, collections and acquisitions pressures involved with online media (primarily audio), the current music discovery and access environment, and information-seeking behaviors of music faculty and students. While the title of this paper uses the term "media" and this talk is relevant to audio and video, the author is writing from the perspective of a librarian who works most closely with audio collections primarily and video collections secondarily.

Music and Mediation (Formats and Delivery)

Unlike text, music, either in print or recorded form, can never be disintermediated from the voices, instruments, or machines with which to play it back in order for it to be reproduced or consumed as intended by the composer. Online audio comes closest to being a universal format (for lack of a better term), in that a digital file, depending on the format, can often be played on a smartphone or any computer, but those devices are still necessary. The understanding that music

must be mediated is an important thought to hold on to, because this has presented many challenges ranging from acquisition considerations to the maintenance of playback for audio and video materials in libraries and classrooms.

There are several models of music delivery and access in active use, such as compact discs, downloadable files such as MP3s, and streaming audio (and/or video) files. Older formats, including LPs and magnetic cassettes, are still in use as well (the former more so than the latter). Streaming media can be viewed as having several subforms. On one end of the spectrum are licensed subscription tools provided to patrons by libraries and obtained from vendors such as Alexander Street, whose Classical Music Library was released in 2003, and Naxos, whose Music Library launched in 2004. On the other end are free sources such as YouTube (launched in 2005), which offers a combination of creator-uploaded and third-party uploaded content, and Spotify (available in the US in 2011), which offers licensed content only, and many others. It is clear that the library is not now, and perhaps has not been for a long time, the sole source of discovery or access for media content. Tools from outside of the library are prominent and pervasive, easy to use, and always available.

Many students have used them for years before arriving at college.

Music in libraries then is doubly mediated, both in discovery and in access. In many, if not all, cases patrons need to not only come to the library but need consult with staff to obtain physical media, either for in-house use or to take home. And even subscription streaming tools frequently require that the patron sign in to use them, especially if they are off-campus.

Music Collections and Acquisition Pressures

A core goal of music libraries, especially academic ones, is to collect and curate materials regardless of format as a record of scholarship and creation in music. Music libraries frequently need to collect deeply and broadly. Deeply, because every performance is different and each interpretation is unique. Therefore musicians and scholars (and also libraries) often want access to recordings of more than one performance or production of the same work. Broadly, because over time libraries' collecting scope has expanded as music curricula and scholars' research areas have broadened to include popular and non-Western musics and materials in interdisciplinary areas.

However, there have always been materials that music libraries have not been able to obtain either because of their format or because of how or where they were produced. For example, session recordings and ethnographic field recordings are rarely commercially available. There are also frequently music scores that can only be obtained on a rental basis (e.g., film scores). Materials from certain parts of the world have also been historically difficult for US libraries to obtain. Now this issue is presenting itself in a new variation, as musicians explore making materials directly available to consumers via download-only MP3s (Hoek, 2009). In these cases, music libraries are not able to purchase, download, and circulate these recordings due to end-user license agreements (EULAs) that prohibit redistribution. Nevertheless, this direct-to-consumer distribution model is not always something students can afford, even though personal collections of scores

and recordings have always been important to musicians.

Budget trends over the last few decades have reinforced the idea that no one library can collect all material in a subject (unless very narrowly defined). Media materials continue to be among the least-loaned formats on ILL (Conor and Duffy, 2012), so libraries and patrons cannot rely on this method to greatly increase their access to media. While CD buying has declined drastically among the general public (Friedlander, 2013), libraries often find that for various reasons they still need to acquire CDs. This includes issues of campus wireless loads, classrooms not universally equipped with reliable network connections, and patrons who do not all have access to technology or connectivity to access online media. Those managing media collections have long had to contend with the issue of format obsolescence. Library collections continue to be comprised of formats spanning many decades, from wax cylinders to streaming files, and this will not change any time in the near future given lack of resources for large-scale digitization projects and the restrictions copyright places on reformatting and delivery. Added to this, new laptops do not all come with CD or DVD playback capability.

Libraries that maintain music media collections struggle with the balance between licensing (or purchasing) online streaming tools and continuing to build physical collections of owned materials. As Theil (2003) points out, if physical or licensed recordings no longer exist leading to a "potential loss of long-term ownership of digital music formats," this is problematic for libraries as it disrupts libraries' goal of preservation, let alone the one of access. And even licensing doesn't directly meet our core mission of building permanent collections. Do research libraries especially need to reassess that part of their mission, or can we gain any control over this situation?

Another consideration is the fact that for several years libraries have been transitioning from building collections "just in case" to a "just in time" patron demand-driven model. While this can be a good way for librarians to adjust to constantly shifting patron needs, it can at times be

problematic because of the rate at which CDs and DVDs go out of print compared to books. In addition, this author has not found a vendor who is able to set up a PDA program for physical audiovisual media. This model also potentially creates tension between patrons and library collections, as when faced with library collections that may lack what they want or that they can't find in library tools that make it difficult to search for music, many library patrons turn to easy and accessible tools like YouTube. Students (and faculty) no longer see the library as the only source for music (if they ever did). Faculty and students are as accustomed to finding music online outside of library tools as they are to using library collections (physical and virtual) (Dougan, 2013, 2014).

Music Discovery/Access Environment

Music librarians have long known that those searching for music scores and media materials face information retrieval challenges that go beyond those faced when looking for books because they are dictated by the specialized nature of music materials. The variety of foreign languages and nicknames used in music work titles, the plethora of titles with generic terms such as "symphony" and "sonata," as well as minute but essential levels of metadata such as key and opus numbers that can be difficult, if not impossible, to focus a search on given that they are but one letter or number in a sea of data, all create searching challenges.

The fact that those searching for music materials frequently need items in multiple formats such as books, scores, and recordings, not to mention the various formats scores and recordings come in, means that any search system is challenged to find all of these things given that they are necessarily described differently. The searcher is also reliant on the cataloger and how much information she or he decided to include in the catalog record (which varies not only due to any cataloging rules in force at the time but also to the cataloger's discretion). Full contents notes and added entries for composers and works are helpful but unfortunately not included in every record. Uniform titles help when the record in question has them, but if there are multiple works

on the recording or in the score anthology, then there is no uniform title (and many searchers do not know how to make use of one to their advantage when it does exist).

Traditional library systems have made some improvements over the years with keyword searching, automatic truncation that means a search for "symphony" retrieves "symphony" and "symphonies" (but not Sinfonien), postsearch facets, and now the use of FRBR in some catalogs and web scale discovery systems, which attempts to collocate the many versions and editions of works. Yet for all of that, traditional catalogs still cannot tie composer to piece, so that when one searches for Beethoven symphonies one does not retrieve a recording with a Beethoven overture and a Mozart symphony. This consistent problem of many works to a single object, often with a title different than that of any of the works contained therein (in the case of many songs in a score anthology or many sonatas on a CD, for example), means that library catalogs have always been challenged in retrieving and displaying information in a way that is helpful to searchers whether they be musicologists or performers.

In addition, when faced with a list of search results that includes titles such as "200 Songs in Three Volumes for Voice and Piano," "21 Schubert Lieder," or multiple versions simply titled "Schubert Lieder," the average searcher will be frustrated and unlikely to click through these to find the version they need. One could argue that this is a problem of poor interface design and not one of metadata or infrastructure, and yet no widespread practical solutions have been created for these problems.

Separate silos of content, which some see as a problem for discovery, continue to exist for media materials. While one approach to this is to employ a web scale discovery layer or similar tool, they are not ideal for music given the issues named above. In this case separate media-specific silos may actually be a good idea. Another approach is to load vendor-created MARC records (or MARC-XML records) for individual recordings in library streaming resources into library catalogs. However, these records are often of inferior quality and rarely can the vendor keep up with the

demand, so not all works have records available. If all of the records aren't in one place, patrons still need to search in multiple places.

Information-Seeking Behavior

There is not an easy way to see the entire picture of student and faculty media consumption and determine where exactly the library fits into the equation. We don't know if the library is used for 30% of discovery and 80% of access, or 10% discovery and 10% access, or some other balance. Studies show (Dougan, 2013) that students use multiple tools and there are many variables: where they are at the time, what technology they have access to, what they are looking for, and what the eventual end use of the item will be. In an informal conversation with a music faculty member that spanned CDs, DVDs, library streaming tools, YouTube, and Spotify, it was clear that there are nuances involved that take into account the variables listed above as well as whether the faculty member needs audio, video, or both. The quality, legality, and scope of content available are also factors. He also revealed that for him interfaces do play huge part in the decision to use or not use a tool. Useful features don't even have a chance to get discovered if a user can't get past the interface.

As Schonfeld (2014) said, we need to understand the reasons users don't always start with the library. However, I'd argue where patrons start is somewhat irrelevant. Where does the library fit anywhere in the process? Research projects rarely have one point of origin and by nature are iterative, so does it really matter if the library is the very first point? What is influencing what most? Are libraries' tools and collections having an effect on user behavior, or vice versa? Which should be the driving the cause? Do patrons go to YouTube because they don't like library-based tools and/or because library collections don't have what they want? Or is it because patrons already use YouTube that patrons don't bother to come to investigate library collections and tools? The answers to these questions are crucial in aiding libraries in building collections and tools.

Suggestions for Solutions

It's clear that there is no one solution to address the effect that online media, both free and licensed, have on library collections and user behavior. Librarians should make every effort to understand their patrons' needs and information-seeking behaviors. It may become clear that patrons do not use library resources because they are unaware of them, or perhaps because they do not meet their needs. Depending on the issues discovered, some approaches to addressing them may be found in the following: 1) target marketing of library physical and online media collections to specific classes and studios, 2) weave mention of the tools and collections into tours and classes and well as into class and subject guides, 3) consider making one guide just for faculty about the library's online media collections with suggested uses and links to tutorials, 4) consider circulating media and loaning it via ILL (if you don't already), 5) in instruction sessions highlight the significant difference that can be found in sound quality in different media formats, and 6) work with vendors to develop PDA programs for media materials. On a larger scale, librarians should continue to advocate for music and or media specific search tools or improvements to broader tools. Finally, priority should be given to digitizing and/or preserving unique media collections at institutions, as these materials are deteriorating far more quickly than print in many cases.

Conclusion

Librarians must carefully consider the collection development equation from many angles, including choice of vendors, cost, subject area, and formats. As libraries and librarians we often talk about whether we can afford particular products from vendors in a monetary sense. But we also need to think about the parallel question of whether library patrons can afford to use the library, not in a monetary sense, but in a time, convenience, and outcome sense. Our initial reaction is that surely they can't afford not to, but they may prove us wrong if we aren't more proactive than reactive.

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