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Music Library Collection Analysis

Introduction

Collection management is a complicated endeavor, even more so in the electronic era. There is a blessing and a curse with the contemporary proliferation of technology: it is easier to create and analyze metrics on what and how users access in libraries. However, this massive influx of data can be difficult and confusing to evaluate at best, and it takes a certain amount of flexibility and subjectivity to analyze the content of a collection. In this assignment, I am planning a collection analysis of a fictitious, special library: in this case, the music library of a medium-sized institution. The institution in question has received a generous monetary gift that is ear-marked for the purchase of musical manuscripts only. The vast majority of music that is typically performed in universities and professional ensembles was written over one hundred years ago by white European men, but recent scholarship and initiative have called for more contemporary and more inclusive additions to the repertoire. My goal in this analysis is to find a way for this library to meet the universally growing need for more modern and more diverse music. Qualitative and quantitative methods will be necessary to see how best to make new additions in a cost-efficient manner that also meet the community's needs.

What We Need to Find Out

If an institution plans to acquire new resources, it needs to determine, at least generally, what types of resources it wants to acquire. In this instance, it is a music library trying to diversify its manuscript collection. This is not a simple task to fulfill, because many communities

have been historically excluded from the Western Classical canon. Not only is the canon overwhelmingly white and male, it is also overwhelmingly European: America itself has only a handful of composers in the canon. To add to this, it was not until around the turn of the twentieth century that American classical musical began to develop uniquely American elements, as early composition teachers in the country by and large came from Germany, studied in Germany, or emulated the Austro-Germanic tradition that runs through Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner. This is to say nothing of cultures from elsewhere in North America or any other part of the world.

To this end, it is essential first simply to find diverse bodies of music. This presents multiple options. Does one look at online publishers, print publishers, or perform an internet search? Additionally, once resources are found, it will be necessary to find out how to evaluate them. How important of a factor is cost? What would benefit the community the most, and does the community itself already have ideas or suggestions? Should the institution focus more intently on music for certain ensembles and instrumentations (e.g. orchestra, concert band, string quartet)? Is there any music that aligns with current courses, or potential future courses (for example, UMKC and other institutions offer courses on music from post-World War II as well as World Music)?

Methods and Tools

Fortunately, there are quantitative and qualitative methods to answer these questions and resolve the library's dilemma. Useful, simple-to-find data could be culled from ILL and document delivery stats. What needs is the institution not fulfilling that the students require? To add a qualitative counterpoint to this quantitative data, a survey would be of great use. What

music do students wish the library had? General and specific questions could be asked: students could offer names of composers whose works they are interested in studying and performing; they could offer genres and styles that they want to see more of; they could specify regions of the country or the world. Faculty and staff should be consulted as well. There is likely much music that professors would like to incorporate into current or future courses, and curriculum mapping would be another effective tool in the decision making process.

Checking against authoritative lists is a method both quantitative and qualitative that would be useful in this situation. Journals, magazines, and popular websites list reviews, recommendations, and favorites, and educated, established voices should be kept in mind when deciding on scores to purchase. Prize winners as well should receive consideration. I would have the library review Pulitzer Prize winning compositions from the last fifteen to twenty years, and search for them in the library's holdings, along with their respective composers, to see if the institution already owned any copies of their music.

It would also be of use to analyze the student population and prioritize acquisition based on strengths. If the university has a strong wind ensemble and concert band, it would be wise to prioritize purchases for those ensembles, with less of an emphasis on orchestral music, and vice versa. If the university has a robust string music department, but the latest string quartet the library owns is Webern's *6 Bagatellen* (1913), it would be wise to look for contemporary and diverse string quartets to acquire. To this end, evaluation of publication dates would be helpful, especially if cross referenced with different types of ensembles and instrument groupings; this should be easy to do, as the Library of Congress cataloging system organizes scores by ensemble groupings.

Cost will be a big factor in the acquisition process, and the library needs to consider print as well as digital materials. Works in higher demand from more well-known composers will likely draw higher price tags, although small, independent publishers without extensive resources may also have high prices simply because they do not have steady money-makers (like Beethoven, whose works are in the public domain, yet large publishers continue to make money off of new and so-called ‘definitive’ or *Urtext* editions of his work) to rely on. In the case of smaller, more independent artists, they may sell their own music, without the mark up prevalent among commercial publishers.

Commercial publishers and databases like G. Schirmer, Boosey & Hawkes, and Alexander Street Press offer digital access to scores and/or subscription options, but price and utility need to be considered for this. Musical scores can see use upwards of one hundred years, and if a database becomes too costly and the subscription is discontinued, then the music is no longer available, rendering the initial acquisition impotent. A print copy will not run into this issue; it only needs to remain in decent condition. However, collection needs are malleable, and if this initiative to purchase more music works as intended, students will be inclined to scour the collection further, which could drive up database traffic. Additionally, since databases update, if the initial subscription price is manageable, more relevant resources could eventually become available to students as the database updates. However, with databases (and digitization in general), it is easier to run into copyright issues regarding reproduction and dissemination. Ultimately, in this specific scenario, it would be wise to focus almost entirely on adding to the print collection. The institution is working with a gift, a one-time donation that makes no guarantees for future donations. In this situation, without the finances to guarantee continued

subscription to databases, it is more prudent to buy physical materials that will last almost indefinitely, provided proper care.

Not every available method of evaluation is useful. Turnover rate, for instance, is for the most part not terribly useful, since this library is attempting to procure new resources, not evaluate old ones. It is not useful to see that scores by Beethoven have a high turnover rate. With that said, there is a handful of contemporary composers like Jennifer Higdon and John Adams, who are frequently performed and the library would likely have some of their scores. In this rare case, if there are contemporary composers whose works have had a decent amount of circulation, this could factor into a decision to buy more of their music.

Citation patterns are also mostly unhelpful, as musical scores themselves are not often cited. Citations may occur in music literature, like music theory and musicology books and journals, but this metric is still not useful. More helpful would be faculty consultation as described above. Also of potential use could be not strict citations, but reviews of performances and/or recordings of the music in question.

Lastly, weeding and digitization would not be useful in this situation. Rarely are music libraries filled beyond capacity, and the use of scores and parts for performance places a premium on print materials over digital. This is particularly true of instrument parts, where MOLA (Major Orchestra Librarians' Association) guidelines specify a page size that is not standard and thus could not be printed on letter- or legal-sized paper. Furthermore, this initiative is to augment the library's resources, not reduce them. The music of Beethoven will still need to be available, as well as that of other, even older composers. Guillaume de Machaut's music from the fourteenth century still sees activity in medieval music courses and period performances, for instance.

In the end, there is no way the library would be able to purchase everything it wanted, given how underrepresented marginalized communities are in the collection. A few things must be considered here to maximize the impact of this pending acquisition. First, consider unique titles. Is there anything the library has that no one else has? The collection can build upon unique strengths. This leads to a second consideration: overlap. The library, knowing they cannot purchase everything they desire, must look at nearby institutions and see if any items on their wish list are readily available at neighboring institutions, or part of a sharing system like MERLIN. If so, these should receive a lower level of priority unless the demand for them is high. Thirdly, there may be potential for cooperative collection development. This is not the most reliable option, but it is at least worth consideration. The tendency of music libraries to diversify their collections is growing around the country, and neighboring institutions (or institutions in a sharing system or consortium) may be interested in working together to coordinate purchases. Institution A will buy certain materials that they and institution B both desire, and institution B will buy others. That way, while neither institution will own a copy of both resources, both resources will still be readily available to both institutions in a symbiotic relationship.

The Institution's Future of Collection Access and Management

In this fictitious scenario, seeing as funding was provided in the form of a one-time gift and not a budgetary increase, this institution's future is unclear. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon occurrence in American libraries today. More and more institutions are seeing their budgets remain stagnant at best, and be cut substantially at worse, and must rely increasingly on donations (often ear-marked) to augment their collections. At UMKC, for instance, the budget for electronic subscriptions has remained static, while costs have increased, and the job title

“Head of Acquisitions” has become a bitterly ironic misnomer: the position does not acquire new resources, but rather finds which resources the library can best afford to lose. This is one of the main reasons that, in my scenario, the institution would opt to focus much almost exclusively on print resources rather than electronic ones.

Fortunately, musical scores have longevity. While it could be debated whether or not it is a good thing for the field that the same pieces of music continue to be performed for hundreds of years, from a library’s perspective, it is a positive factor that any newly acquired materials will likely have staying power. This differs from reference sections, where resources are updated on a regular basis, or academic journals that continue to publish new volumes. Even circulation may need to acquire multiple copies of a currently popular item, only to need to weed the collection a few years down the line.

As a type of special library, music libraries pose certain challenges of collection management that differ from those of public or academic libraries. However, there are methods of quantitative and qualitative analysis that can be applied in all circumstances. The level of success and specific manner of their implementation will vary, but the principles remain the same. Ultimately, collection building requires some level of guesswork, as library and community needs are constantly in flux, but this guesswork need not be done blindly. With sound methods and a combination of a variety of metrics, library faculty and staff can make sound acquisition decisions to provide a positive impact on the library and its community of users.