Music Cataloging and Music Database Websites

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"Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without." -Confucius

Introduction

This research paper will look at structures used and some challenges in cataloging popular music; as well, music database websites will be examined and how their cataloging methods offer guidance to the future of BIBFRAME, FRBR, and RDA.

Cataloging Music

For the purpose of transparency, here is an overview of systems and standards currently involved in cataloging music (see Harden & Feustle, 2017, for more):

- MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging) and BIBFRAME (Bibliographic Framework Initiative) are cataloging structures that provide fields for data. BIBFRAME was intentionally created to replace MARC as an update to better link data and include the library community in "a much larger web of data" (Library of Congress, 2012).

- FRBR (Functional Requirement for Bibliographic Records) is a concept model that defines user tasks as Find, Identify, Select, and Obtain. It is concerned with applying relationships between entities and attributes.

- RDA (Resource Description and Access) succeeded AARC2 (Anglo-American Cataloging Rules, 2nd edition) as the standard for descriptive cataloging. RDA improved upon AARC2 by incorporating FRBR (and other Functional Requirements) to produce more computer-friendly data for librarians.

- MLA (Music Library Association) Best Practices offer a guide to creating bibliographic records in RDA

Everything looks set to operate smoothly, but music cataloging has its challenges. Every recorded performance of a song could be considered a new work and catalogers are responsible for designating authorship of songs and albums, and ideally create access points to related works and musicians (like a linked environment). When a musician covers a song by another or performs a variation of their own song with a different lineup of band members, how is that relationship expressed? Kishimoto and Snyder (2016) propose an interpretation of FRBR to recognize the underlying composition (e.g. song samples, cover songs) and the realization of compositions (e.g. albums be equal to songs as access points) to lessen the "dissatisfaction in [the] community with FRBR's application to popular music" (p. 80). "By considering the information on the resource at face value, as a user usually would" (Kishimoto & Snyder, 2016, p. 79), all entities, works and expressions would be access points that would allow a more intuitive, web-like search experience within the catalog. An example could be a song covered by five separate musicians, the original songwriter would be an access point, followed by all renditions and its performers or notable performances. Implementing access points and thinking like a user broadens the prospect of integrating library catalogs with the Semantic Web of Linked Data, where "information is given well-defined meaning, better enabling computers and people to work in cooperation" (Berners-Lee et al., 2001, p. 37).

User Music Collection Websites

A cataloger may not be able to determine some fields of a music material, such as genre, based on their own knowledge. Patricia Falk and David R. Lewis encouraged catalogers to search the web for any missing information, using sites like Discogs or AllMusic, in "A New Take on Cataloging Popular Music Recordings" (2020) so what are those websites?

AllMusic is an online music database, whereas Discogs is a music database and

marketplace. Both sites are relatively similar, allowing members to create collections and playlists, review albums, and stream audio. The biggest difference is Discogs' audience; it attracts audiophiles looking to buy and sell music material. As well, Discogs has a forum for users to socialize, whereas AllMusic projects itself as a publication of featured articles. One is not better than the other, but they do serve different purposes.

Looking at Discogs, users are able to create their own catalog entry for other users to use or to sell from their music collection. This is a great way to show the condition of an object, but having so many catalog entries of the same album can be frustrating to a user who is simply trying to build a complete replica of their music library. Professional catalogers and users need to recognize a "most collected" album from a search result may not necessarily have the most complete, accurate, or relevant credits. An interesting component of the website is an option to convert a collection into a CSV document, which could be applied in computer language programs to manipulate and visualize the data set.

Conclusion

Music library cataloging and music collection websites unite the professional with its user audience. Music cataloging with FRBR presents problems that require a reshaping of rules: does a song get credited to the songwriter or performer, how can this relationship be made most clear to a user? Kishimoto and Snyder examined such faults and offered access points as a solution, Falk and Lewis outlined new developments in the music cataloging process and advocated searching user-generated websites to aid in a fuller bibliographic entries, and the social music databases could be seen as proof of the importance of music and the desire for its authoritative records to connect to the Semantic Web.

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