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**Music Archives**

**Introduction**

It is very rare to come across someone who hates music or any rhythmic expression. People love it so much that there is such a thing as a music archive. Yes, there are places that hold every monumental beat that has ever been made on this earth. Beethoven, Louis Armstrong, and Nas just to name a few. This paper will discuss the importance of archives, some of the problems they are experiencing, and what the future of music archives looks like.

**The Importance of Music Archives**

Archives have a great responsibility to organize and store information that will be of use to those who are interested. The material is often used for research purposes, general interests, or to simply document history. The same can be said for music. It is an oral telling of former and current times. It can even be used as a form of secret communication. Although music can simply be used for entertainment purposes. Either way it’s information that holds value. It highlights culture, progression, and so much more. This is why there are music archives. During Ann Powers interview with the [Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Library](http://rockhall.com/library/) Director Andy Leach, he explained that

"Because music is something that plays such a major role in the everyday lives of so many of us, it's one of those rare subjects that is both worthy of academic study and that almost every ordinary person cares about," Leach continued. "So, that gives us an opportunity here ... to promote the idea that these unique and rare materials are here for *everyone* to use, both to expand their knowledge and from which to gain pleasure. And that's a good lesson to learn about the importance of archives in general."

What Leach stated is true, because people ultimately visit an archive, because they want to explore their interests and have a pleasurable experience. Music is a versatile thing that many people enjoy. It only makes sense to have places like a music archive.

**Popular Music Archives**

There were quite a lot of institutions that currently have music related collections. Many are associated with a university or a larger museum system. Here are a few of them, along with a brief description;

* [Smithsonian Institution Archives Center, American Music Collections](http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives) (Washington, D.C.) The American Music Collections document this country’s diverse popular music and performance traditions. The strength of these collections is the music of the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries including Big Band jazz, Gospel and African American sacred music, and folk music. Among the largest of these collections are the Duke Ellington Collection, 1927-1988 spanning nearly the entire life and career of one of America’s most recognized musicians and the Sam DeVincent Collection of Illustrated American Sheet Music containing images, music, and lyrics of American life and culture between 1790 and the 1980s.
* [Moravian Music Foundation](http://www.moravianmusic.org/) (Winston-Salem, North Carolina) Over 10,000 music manuscripts, books and documents interpreting Moravian and early American musical traditions, including one of nine surviving copies of the first printing of the Star Spangled Banner; a complete set of Civil War Band books from the 26th NC Regimental Band; the Six String Quintets of Moraivan Composer Johann Friedrich Peter from 1789, possibly the earliest chamber music composed in America; the only known surviving copies of symphonies by J.C.F. Bach; sacred vocal and orchestra works used by the early Moravian settlers in America; hymnals from the 16th-20th centuries; and the Irving Lowens Collection of American Tunebooks.
* [Center for Popular Music](http://popmusic.mtsu.edu/) (Middle Tennessee State University)

Fosters research and scholarship in American popular music and promotes appreciation for the role of music as an integral part of American cultural history. The collections contain more than 11,500 books and scores, 82,000 sound recordings, 55,000 pieces of sheet music, 3,500 broadsides, 1,200 periodical titles and extensive holdings of posters, photographs, manuscripts, and ephemera from the mid-eighteenth century to the present.

**Problems Music Archives are Facing**

Music archives are facing many issues that other archives are experiencing. Some of the issues include adapting to the technological advancements, copyright laws, and accessibility.

**Digitization**

Prior to the digitization era, music archives held physical records in their collections. Music archives stored sheet music, musical witings, oral files, and more. This did pose an issue for accessibility, because one often had to visit the archive in person to obtain information. Once the digital era began, a major shift happened in the archives community. More and more collections were encouraged, and almost expected, to be digitized. Mainly because researchers wanted to have the ability to access research material from all over the world. Archives also experienced a physical space issue. Having an increase in records put a strain on the available space, so digitization became the solution for many archives. This was great, but it came at a cost. Not all archives have had the resources to digitize their music collections. The amount of funding provided to archives as a whole is not always enough to spend towards digitization projects. Not to mention the time it takes to convert the collection can be long and very tedious. Also, the upkeep of the files once digitized requires constant monitoring and storage space can be quite expensive. Paul Sacher of the Paul Sacher Foundation collects contemporary music pieces. In the article, [*The Current Status and Issues of Music Archives in Korea*](https://drexel.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_nrf_kci_oai_kci_go_kr_ARTI_536745&context=PC&vid=01DRXU_INST:01DRXU&lang=en&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=Everything&query=any%2Ccontains%2Cissues%20in%20music%20archives&offset=0&pcAvailability=true)*,* Kim explains Sachers decision pertaining to his collections and the digitization process;

“While most of the music archives provide digitized data of their collections, Paul Sacher Foundation decided not to establish a digital archive system because of the limitations of the rapidly changing digital environment. This decision reflects its belief that pursuing research and achievements in the current system is more important than the time and effort required to constantly update the digitalized data and system. Consequently, Paul Sacher Foundation does not digitize its sources, keeping the original method of acquiring sources using microfilms.” (Kim 2016)

Sacher's option to not digitize his collections and to keep all physical material was extremely bold. There are unfavorable aspects that come with the decision not to digitize one's collections, like costs and risks that come with preserving physical material and potential researchers' access to the material. Increasing pressure also arises on archives to digitize their collections.

**Copyright**

Copyright laws have become a huge problem, especially since the start of the digital era. Permissions are more difficult to obtain and the usability laws are becoming harder to navigate. There is a large need for reform when it comes to copyright laws. Mainly because the laws do not reflect today's changes in how people receive information. Leaving a lot of questions and gray areas when it comes to copyright laws. Archives are walking a thin line with what is an acceptable presentation of information and what is a copyright violation. Especially when it comes to music related archives. Music archives are limited on ways that they can obtain material for their collection. Of course large music platforms like Apple Music and Spotify aren’t going to give free range access to their material. It’s also difficult or nearly impossible for platforms like radio shows to provide access to their material. The reason is because they got permission to play the music, but not to share it with others.

“It was suggested that amendments to the Copyright Act that would allow either a collective licensing model or a broader exception under “fair use” exceptions, where the “use does not interfere with the copyright owner’s market,” were of most use in the era of digital abundance” (Baker 2016)

Another reason why music is becoming more difficult to archive is because there are so many hands in the pot. It is becoming very rare for an artist to own their own music from start to finish. Even if an artist gives permission for their music to be available to the public at a music archive, the archive would still have a whole list of other people to get the okay from. The process is even more intensive when there is music that is missing origination information. This happens with a lot of the older material. It’s difficult to obtain permissions for the public use of a record, if the creator's information is unknown. Not having proper access to the material that patrons desire because of outdated laws will greatly affect music archives.

**Accessibility**

Accessibility in music archives is vastly unique. This topic was briefly touched on in an earlier section, relating to easy access. This section will cover the issues surrounding patrons with disabilities. Many of the records that make up these music collections are available to read or listen to. If a user has a hearing or vision impairment, it may be hard for them to have a good research experience. Things like braille, headphones, captions, or enhanced visuals may be helpful in these cases. Upon reviewing a portion of the archives that were listed on library.rockhall.com, I didn’t see any mention of accommodations that are provided for researchers. Many of them list their contact information for general inquiries, but something as common in today's world should be a little easier to answer. Especially in a public institution such as an archive. Accessibility needs to be offered along with more transparency to promote a better experience for all researchers.

**The Future of Music Archives**

Music is something that will always be around. For many of the music archives, their collections are constantly evolving. Unlike Sacher’s foundation, other music archives have chosen to digitize their collections. This is beneficial, because eventually there will be a need for them to seek new ways of storage. Not everything can have a physical copy, because space will deplete very quickly. There are constantly new angles being explored and new information being discovered. For instance, Dave Allen joined the Pompey Pop Project, which uncovers the effect popular music had in his hometown, Portsmouth. (Allen 2019) He filled in historical gaps in Portsmouth by utilizing music that was popular in that community. The project was a success and he hopes to do more in the near future. Providing space for new projects like Pompey Pop is great. Archives just need the digital resources, time, and funding for it. Luckily archives are finding innovative ways to obtain the resources needed to be successful. Sarah Baker (et al.) discussed the rise of D.I.Y. archives in *Australia in Queering the Community Music Archive*. She specifically touched on feminist and queer communities highlighting their music by creating these archives. Many of the archives are made up of all volunteers, which cuts cost significantly. The community members work hard to keep the archive materials out of mainstream institutions by encouraging community involvement from the archive and from community members. A way that this happens is through the archives continuous activism on social issues that affect their community. This is a great strategy, because music can be a form of activism. It is not elitist and is wildly diverse. In many aspects music archives are a lot like community archives. People are taking their history and their interests into their own hands. Just as a family keeps their familial records and artifacts, we all keep a record of our favorite song or artist. According to Marjorie Kibby, in Nick Hornby’s novel High Fidelity, the hero, Rob, explains that he is reorganizing his record collection by events in his life thereby writing his autobiogra- phy ‘without picking up a pen.’” (Kibby 2011) His description of the impact of music is spot on, because the music one selects becomes a story of our lives. A playlist, vinyl collection, or a box filled with tapes are all forms of an archive. Most people have a music collection and will continue to have one, proving that music will continue to be around. With these scenarios it’s going to be hard for music archives to not be needed.

**Conclusion**

Music is an exciting piece of archives. Its contribution to history, culture, and storytelling make music important enough to be kept and used for a range of things. People listen to music for enjoyment, research purposes, and even for answers. That is why there are a multitude of collections and archives for music. Just like other types of archival institutions, there are things that can be improved with music archives. Ensuring collections are easily accessible to patrons and advocating for a change in copyright laws are both great ways to improve. As long as music archives continue to evolve, and there’s music, they will be here for a long time.

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