

JAMMING IN THE STACKS: Music as a Progressive Librarian Ideal

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If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music.... I get most joy in life out of music.

~ Albert Einstein (1929)

When one speaks of libraries, music may not be the first topic to come to mind. Libraries are dominated by words as contained in books, journals, newspapers, magazines and other informational documents. Images may receive a passing thought in the form of photographs, paintings, film, visual art. Finally, the more progressive among us may speak of rights and the public services that libraries and librarians provide: the right to be informed, the right to communicate, and the resources and services that make that possible. But listen carefully and one may hear another voice, one attuned to the universal language of harmony, melody, and rhythm. For the 21st century progressive librarian, where does music fit in?

In the following paper, I will explore the topic of music and progressive librarianship. In doing so I will briefly cover 1) music in the context of human rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 2) the importance of libraries and library services in the preservation and promotion of music, and 3) music performance in libraries as an extension of Habermas' theory of communicative action.

Music as a Universal Human Right

In addressing the question of music and progressive librarianship, I will begin with a subject of fundamental importance to both: human rights. A commitment to human rights has been recognized as a defining characteristic of progressive librarianship (Samek 2007; Phenix and McCook 2005). Progressive librarians have adopted a number of ethics and human rights guidelines including the America Library Association's code of ethics, International Federation of Library Association's statements, and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (the UDHR) as principle references. Of these, the UDHR is possibly the most influential. The UDHR is not without its faults. Recently it has been questioned as

outdated and too focused on traditional rights for progressive librarianship in the 21st century. For example, Birdsall (2007) raises concerns that the UDHR does not explicitly address the right to communication, and the technological resources that make it possible, as a universal human right that deserves recognition. In the following, I will briefly address this communications weakness, and comment on the UDHR in the context of music.

The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is an international declaration of universal human rights that was brought about by the need for ethical guidelines that arose out of World War II in 1948. As such, the rights are moral prescriptions rather than descriptions of human behavior as exemplified by the war. Also, the rights are acutely focused on the relation between the individual and the state, and not on interpersonal relations; hence Birdsall's insightful recognition that communication (an interpersonal relation) was underrepresented in the UDHR. Regardless, the post-war recognition of universal human rights was a worthy accomplishment. Universal rights as such are an implicit claim to universal principles of morality and humanitarian ideals.

Is music a universal human right? No less a humanist (and amateur musician) than Albert Einstein recognized the connection between music and the quality of life (1929). Like all human beings, musicians are concerned with human rights, and musicians' rights advocates such as FREEMUSE are both actively promoting these rights and combating cases of censorship. Musicians' rights and human rights in general intersect in many ways, but two rights in particular are of special relevance for musicians: 1) the right to freedom of expression, and 2) the right to participate in cultural life. Together, these rights ensure protection for musicians from arbitrary censorship and persecution. The right to freedom of expression is directly declared in Article 19 of the UDHR

Article 19.

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Free expression is an essential right valued by musicians and librarians alike, and article 19 has been endorsed by the American Library Association (see Phenix, 2008).

There are important exceptions to the freedom of expression including expressions of propaganda, and the advocating of racial, religious, or national hatred. Also freedom of expression can be legally restricted to protect against defamation. Of course, this "gray area" in the limitation of expression can be abused. In the context of music, this would only appear to cross the line with music lyrics, but instrumental music has been

excessively censored as well (for a recent account of instrumental music censorship in former communist Poland see Szurek 2007).

Unlawful limitations of free expression can and should be reported to international human rights organizations such as the UN Human Rights Committee, the European Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

For musicians, freedom of expression entails such things as the freedom to perform music publicly and privately, to give concerts, and the freedom to record and distribute music on CDs, MP3s, iPods, and the Web. Libraries can and should promote these freedoms by developing stylistically broad, well stocked music collections utilizing popular formats and technologies, as well as promoting music performances and events that highlight the cultural life of local or regional communities, ethnicities, or historical eras. In this way, libraries can promote the cultural life of local communities and identities that make up our global village.

In addition, the right to participate in cultural life is declared in Article 27:

Article 27.

(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.

(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

The right to participate in cultural life would include such things as the right to perform and produce music publically, the freedom to listen to and enjoy the music of others, the right to protection of interests resulting from one's own musical productions, as well as the freedom of ethnic minorities to play and listen to the music of their own culture.

By proxy, the UDHR protects both the freedom to express music and the right to share it. Committed to human rights, progressive librarians can be assured that music and musicians are integral to those commitments.

The Importance of Libraries in the Preservation & Promotion of Music

While music lovers tend to be universal, there are exceptions who may question why libraries and library services are important when it comes to music. While an extensive analysis of library music collections is beyond the scope of this article it is a safe bet that the selection is many times lacking. This lack of selection could be the result of an under-representation of new genres, such as electroacoustic music, or folk music represented from all parts of the world, or historical recording tracing

all eras in the evolution of Western classical or jazz music; or a lack of formats, including electronic resources compatible with iPods and MP3 players. Music collections consist of more than just recordings, but music books, music scores, and music programs as well. Organizations such as the American Library Association's Public Programs Office are making an effort to promote music programs in libraries, but much more can be done.

What makes music so important, and why does it matter? For one, its importance is a reflection of the values of the communities from which it originates. Music is the expression of cultural values and norms in sound. In many cases it is converted into a product that is in turn revalued by the technology of exchange. The technology of exchange in capitalist societies is money. Money has had a profound impact on the way music gets created, packaged, performed, and consumed. A problem arises in capitalist societies when these cultural values and norms get perverted by market forces, i.e., the profit motive. Honest musical expressions too often give way to formulaic and pre-packaged sound bytes designed to manipulate the masses: music turned into a product that can be bought and sold, and in turn used both to create and to sell identity.

Music is used to sell emotions such as cheerfulness or anger; attitudes such as defiance or conformity; personas such as the rebel, the diva, the superman, the poet; and also fashion trends, politics, philosophies, ethics, religions; and all of this in turn is used to sell consumer products (Martin, 1997). From dish soap to sports cars, music is the soundtrack.

Library music collections can provide a safe haven from market forces, and in turn protect the universal rights of free expression and participation in cultural life. Although music executives and the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) may disagree, music can be appreciated and valued for reasons other than its current popularity or commodity value. Music also has historical value as well as potential future value: music and musicians may be under appreciated or misunderstood in the present, and later be highly valued and appreciated at a future time: examples include Bach, Mozart, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, John Coltrane, and so on. Libraries can and do develop music collections based not only on popularity or demographic trends, but on aesthetic, ethnographic, historical and shared cultural values. In this way, avant-garde, experimental, and musical forms that generally fall outside the mainstream are protected from neglect and disregard. The folk music of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations are preserved, appreciated, and passed on to future generations. The war pipes of the Scottish, Irish, and Celts, the dance of the Argentinean tangos, Tejano conjuntos, Cuban danzons and habaneras: music preserved thanks to libraries. Without libraries, and progressive librarians, such music might very well fade from cultural consciousness.

The Digital Revolution in Music

Besides protection from the market, libraries provide music to poor and underserved populations who could otherwise not afford it. And in the best cases, not only do they provide the music; they provide the technological resources that allow them to participate in the new digital contexts in which music thrives. As Kusak and Leonard (2005) describe it, the digital revolution in music started with the convergence of three technologies: the Internet, the MP3 file (developed by Fraunhofer IIS) and Napster (the first popular peer-to-peer web application developed by college student Shawn Fanning). MP3s are a digital music format that compresses the audio in order to reduce the file-size. While some of the fidelity is lost, this makes it possible to download and transfer music files over the Web. Napster was a file-sharing software that made it possible for users to share their digital music collections over the Web. Napster quickly ran into legal issues with the major record label cartels (represented by the RIAA), and subsequently was bought by AOL/Time-Warner and converted to a pay-for-music service similar to Apple's iTunes.

Libraries are struggling with copyright issues related to their digital collections as well. The U.S. Copyright Act was written with analog intellectual property in mind. Currently, the Section 108 Study Group, formed by the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP) of the Library of Congress and co-sponsored by the U.S. Copyright Office, is considering revisions of relevant aspects of U.S. copyright law in order to balance the private interests of copyright holders and public interests of libraries and archives. The digital revolution is not only necessitating the revision of copyright laws, it is redefining the music business as well.

The digital revolution in music has transformed the way music is produced, distributed, and consumed. This continues to have a tremendous impact on music business, music performers, music consumers, *and* music libraries. The top-down model of music executives dominating the market is declining (although they still have a strong hold). The "old" music business is currently run by 4 corporations: TIME/Warner, Sony/BMG, Vivendi/Universal, and EMI. Almost all so called "indies" (independent recording companies) are in fact owned by one of the 4 major labels. Many pay-for-music sites such as iTunes, Napster, Rhapsody, eMusic, etc. pay fees to the major labels for access and distribution rights to their music collections. The only true "indies" are those that can be found by searching the Web and label-free music services such as CD Baby.

In addition, Apple's iPod has revolutionized the way music is transported and listened to. iPods (and other proprietary media players) have made it possible to carry and collect a staggering quantity of music (thousands of songs as opposed to approximately 40 minutes worth as found on a standard CD). And recently satellite radio services such as Sirius and XM

are providing both a quality and quantity of music programming options (and without advertising) that was simply not available before.

These developments have not only changed the expectations of music professionals and consumers, they have also changed expectations of library professionals and patrons as well. Standard music collection reference texts rarely mention these technological changes and their impending impact on library services (for example, see Davis, 1997). Are library music collections and technologies keeping up with these changes? Are MP3s in most libraries music collections? Are iPods welcome in the typical library? Are podcasts readily available? Progressive librarians should promote these technological innovations and be active participants in the digital revolution in music for the sake of libraries, library services, and the communities they support. But progressive librarians can do more than adopt new music technologies; they can promote live music and the musicians that make it possible.

Music Performance in Libraries

Libraries are traditionally considered to be places of quiet contemplation. Musicians performing in libraries can complement such quietude and solace in immeasurable ways. I should make clear; what I am suggesting is something close to chamber music settings to support local musicians and music lovers. Many bookstores and cafes already provide these services. Libraries are to a certain extent in a state of competition with bookstores and coffee shops for traffic. Responding to this, many libraries have introduced coffee shops into their services. For those that can afford it, a cappuccino or latte can make the library experience all the more pleasant. Many brick and mortar bookstores not only have coffee shops, but live music as well. There is rarely any direct cost for the audience. The musicians usually perform for the right to promote and sell recordings, or for a small fee paid up front by the bookstore. And many stand-alone coffee shops provide live music as well. Music performances can stimulate a creative ambiance and do so without intrusive volume or theatrics. A classical guitarist, a string quartet, a jazz combo, or an acoustic blues “jam” are just a few examples.

Music performances in libraries are not limited to entertainment; such performances can include educational outreach as well. Libraries can collaborate with local talent to offer music education seminars on a variety of music-related subjects, and these seminars can include performances. These “enhanced” performances are something rarely offered in traditional concerts, and allow the audience to participate and interact with the musicians in a way not possible in crowded arenas or large theaters. The opportunities for increasing historical awareness and intercultural dialog through music performances are something progressive librarians should be actively promoting based on their shared values.

The *Library Jazz* series provides one example of the kind of events that I am suggesting. The presentation and performance includes a lecture on jazz history and jazz collections, as well as a jazz guitar performance. Since locating to Tampa, I have been giving these jazz and blues presentations and performances throughout the Tampa-Hillsborough County Library System and other regional Florida libraries. The events promote the historical significance of jazz music, educate librarians on jazz collection development, and introduce potential students to the University of South Florida School of Library and Information Science program. In the process, I have also built professional relationships with state librarians and promoted circulation of local music collections.

With the right intent and purpose, music performances in libraries are more than just forms of entertainment or even educational outreach; they are a form of communicative action.

Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action

In the theory of communicative action, the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas describes agency (the capacity of an agent to act in a world) as a form of communication limited to deliberation, i.e., the free exchange of beliefs and intentions without manipulation or coercion (political or otherwise); in other words, much like free expression as defined by article 19 of the UDHR.

For Habermas, communicative action is not only a form of agency, it's a form of social action that can be contrasted with instrumental action (self-interested), normative action (adapted to a shared value system) or dramaturgical action (one which is designed to be seen by others and to optimize our public self-image). Habermas claims that all these actions are subordinate to communicative action, i.e., free expression (1985, pp.82-101). Communicative action is social because it is inter-personal, making use of shared language systems and structures. Music, as a form of communicative action, is a deeply social activity, hence the need for social institutions such as libraries to preserve and promote it.

While Habermas is not explicit about the role of music in communicative action, his argument suggests that music performance, freely expressed, is an ideal extension of his theories. Music has been described as a universal language; a language that at best communicates the core of human feeling and spirit. A music performance is certainly instrumental, the musicians are self-interested in their performance and its reception. It is normative as well: music conventions are themselves a product of norms. And it is dramaturgical, the musicians are engaged in a public display of their musical talents and skills and in the process hope to enhance their public self-image. But, a freely expressed musical performance, in a setting that libraries are perhaps best equipped to provide, goes further. Free from market demands, free from popular constraints, free from the public demand

for drama, music expressed for the sake of its own merits, this music can truly be said to be a form of communicative action. Such communicative action is often the stimulus for great works of art.

Habermas' theories suggest that the free expression inherent in communication action, and by extension the free expression of music, is not merely a part of what classical Marxist theory calls the "superstructure"; rather, it is a base for the conflicts and power struggles that shape and form societies. A contemporary of Habermas, the political theorist Jacques Attali (1985) developed this view further by arguing that certain forms of music, especially avant-garde, experimental, and newer forms not yet assimilated by a society, both reflect and anticipate changes occurring or about to occur in a society. Thus music, freely expressed, acts as a social "subconscious," as both a herald and precursor of changes to come. With the help of progressive librarians, perhaps music can change the world after all?

Conclusion

Music may not be a top priority for libraries and librarians, but times are changing. There is a growing recognition and importance of human rights by librarians, especially in regards to free expression and participation in cultural life. These universal human rights, highly valued by librarians, intersect the shared rights and values of musicians. Committed to human rights, progressive librarians are well positioned to both support and advocate the value of music and universal rights of musicians to free expression and participation in cultural life. They can do this by promoting the development of music collections based not only on current popularity or market values, but aesthetic, ethnographic, historic, and shared cultural values as well. Libraries can enable this by adopting and making available the latest music technologies and digital formats such as MP3s, digital music players such as the iPod, and new media forms such as podcasts. Libraries can do more than develop music collections and adopt new technologies; they can promote musicians and music performances as well. While music performances in libraries support the universal human rights of free expression and participation in cultural life, they also connect local musicians with their communities; expose new, ethnic, or historical forms of music to an appreciative audience, and provide opportunities for music education as well. As Habermas' and Attali's theories suggest, the free expression of music may be of deep significance both as a fundamental human right aligned with progressive librarian ideals, and as a force for social change.

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