

“Teaching Music Bibliography”
MLA 2008

First, I want to thank Keith Cochran for inviting me to join this panel on “Teaching Music Bibliography.” Second, in a kind of full disclosure, it is important to make clear that I do not currently teach a graduate level music bibliography class, my teaching assignments at Eastman now focusing on various aspects of the history and practice of sacred music. But over the course of my career I have taught graduate level music bibliography at three different institutions (including Eastman), as well as a graduate level introduction to musicology—a course in which I have always included music bibliographic topics—at two different institutions. More to the point, however, I’ve always enjoyed shaping (and constantly reshaping) the graduate level music bibliography class and its syllabus in light of 1) my changing perceptions of student needs, and 2) my work in developing music library collections—a symbiotic relationship in which the constant work of shaping the library’s collections inevitably informs the teaching of music bibliography. Finally, in this prefatory bit of full disclosure, you should know that the three schools where I have taught graduate music bibliography had one very important element in common—all of these graduate bibliography courses were populated nearly exclusively by students working on the master of music degree in performance. Thus, my comments here today presuppose a graduate class in music bibliography intended primarily for masters level students in performance.

Keith offered me a couple of options for my part on this panel, and I’ve chosen to focus on RISM. The very first question that arises, then, relates to the appropriateness of teaching RISM to masters level students in music performance—do they *really* need to engage with RISM? Because I answer that question in the affirmative, I’ll give some attention to my pedagogical intent in teaching RISM to masters level performance majors. Second, I want to

include consideration of complementary sources that I tend to cluster around RISM. And third, I will give some consideration to where I have chosen to position my teaching of RISM (and its complementary sources) within the overall one-semester graduate course in music bibliography.

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In the literature of music bibliographic instruction there is one article whose title has always stuck with me—that article was written by Arne Arneson, who was at the time he wrote it music librarian at the University of Colorado. The title of his article is “Don’t Quiz ‘Em on RISM”; his subtitle being “An Argument Against Demand Bibliography.” “Don’t Quiz ‘Em on RISM”—it’s a memorable title, isn’t it? Arneson, however, isn’t arguing merely against teaching RISM within the context of music bibliography; in fact, his central point is a much broader, philosophical one. He suggests (plausibly, I think) that a course focused on specific bibliographic tools—demanded by specific music performance or research problems—may not be as effective as a course that deals with broad, overarching concepts of access and retrieval languages. He writes: “The basic objective of formal instruction should be the limited self-sufficiency of the successful student within the realm of the library.”¹ In his conclusion he writes:

In-depth scrutiny of *RISM* and similar tools may clarify and illustrate internal bibliographic formats and respond to a specific need, but it will not, in my experience, produce reasonably self-sufficient library users. I am suggesting a survey of accessing concepts and their inherent problems relative to music.²

It’s worth emphasizing that I don’t disagree with Arneson’s points or his central argument—I referred to his article mostly because of its clever title and its connection to my emphasis here on RISM.

Where I would differ from Arneson is in articulating my pedagogical goal for a music bibliography course. In my view it goes beyond promoting the “limited self-sufficiency of the successful student *within the realm of the library.*” Rather, I would state my goal as *providing the music student perspectives and methodologies that will prove helpful in graduate coursework as well as in subsequent performances, research, and writing during a professional career in music.* Part of this pedagogical goal clearly relates to and builds on the library and its resources, but my goal in teaching a graduate music bibliography course is to provide points of view, perspectives that become useful and even fundamental within the subsequent career of a performing musician. To illustrate that proposition I return to RISM as a case in point.

One perspective that I wish to engender in the performance major—particularly early in the course of his or her graduate study—is a healthy skepticism regarding the editions that we all use in our various performance areas. One’s undergraduate training, whether in the studio or in music literature and repertory classes, may or may not have included attention to the ways that editors and their editions have an impact on our performances. To draw just a single illustration from my own performance area: In some of the free organ works (the preludia) by the seventeenth-century German organist and composer Dieterich Buxtehude, modern editions show some significant differences in allocating certain passages either to the pedal or to the left hand. It makes a big difference in learning the piece, given that a passage may be fairly easily dispatched by the left hand but may be vastly more difficult technically if consigned to the feet and the pedal division. How a student sorts through such a performance-related problem—regardless of composer or chronological era—will be enhanced by the skills and methodologies taught in a music bibliography class. For comparative analysis, a student should be able to identify *all* available modern editions of a given work, regardless of whether they are owned

locally. Intelligent use of the local online catalog as well as WorldCat will be critical in identifying and locating those editions. Eventually the student may wish to know what *primary source* documents might be available—composer autographs, contemporaneous scribal copies, and printed editions issued during the composer’s lifetime. The music bibliography class is the appropriate place to provide the student a working knowledge of tools such as RISM (and its complements)—tools that identify such primary source documents. Thus, the reason to teach RISM to masters level performance students is *not* so much to show how an important series of library reference sources works, but rather to use RISM as a point of departure for talking about the *concept* of primary source documents, for talking about how and under what circumstances a musician might choose to work backward chronologically from modern editions to the sources that will elucidate performance-related questions sometimes prompted by those modern editions. Teaching how to use particular volumes of RISM is, in my experience, less valuable than teaching the *concept* that there exists an entire class of music resources compiled for the specific purpose of putting musicians in touch with primary source documents of music compositions. Students will learn the specifics of using a particular RISM volume when they have need to do so; it is the very existence of RISM (and its complements) as an important type of music information resource that features prominently in my teaching of music bibliography.

When I teach RISM, I do want to acquaint the student with the overall structure of this amazing bibliographic project, in its three series A, B, and C. Thus, I characterize Series A as including works that appeared under the name of a single composer, whether printed (RISM/A/I) or manuscript (RISM/A/II); Series B as focusing on publications containing music by more than one composer, as well as on various self-contained groups of source materials; and Series C as focusing on the libraries that hold these source materials. For both parts of RISM A, I discuss

their chronological parameters, doing the same for RISM/B/I and RISM/B/II, bringing in a brief mention of other parts of RISM B depending on the interests of the students in the class, e.g., pointing to RISM/B/VII if there are guitar majors taking the course that semester. In the case of RISM C, I suggest turning first to the “Libraries” article in the second edition of *New Grove*. Having laid out the structure of RISM as a whole, I would then work through at least three sample entries in class, probably one each from A/I, A/II, and B/II.

When I first taught graduate music bibliography, at Penn State in the mid-1980s, I would follow this topic with identification and discussion of various sources that complement RISM, among them the following: the *Census-Catalogue of Manuscript Sources of Polyphonic Music, 1400–1550*, Howard Brown’s *Instrumental Music Printed Before 1600*, Claudio Sartori’s bibliography of instrumental music printed in Italy up to 1700, and even Emil Vogel’s bibliography (and its 1977 successor) on secular Italian vocal music, 1500–1700. I no longer teach those sources (and I hereby publically apologize to my Penn State students!), for I now believe that that level of specificity in a music bibliography class is pointless, whether for performance majors or for musicology graduate students. I can illustrate this *type* of information resource perfectly well through RISM, with no need to bring in these other (admittedly important) complementary resources, which people will discover and use when they need them.

I do, however, continue to teach thematic catalogues as a complement to RISM, and as an important category of music bibliographic works. I usually begin by working through an entry from the Schmieder catalogue in class, each student having a paper copy for annotation as we carefully and deliberately work through a selected entry. That process also gives me a chance to acquaint them with some of the German terminology that is so common in some of the most often consulted thematic catalogues. Subsequent to this class session I divide students into

groups of three or four and ask each group to work through sample entries from selected thematic catalogues during the next class period. The thematic catalogues that I assign most frequently for this second round are those for Beethoven, Brahms, Ives, Mozart, Schubert, and Schumann.

Having considered the structure of RISM and explored some sample entries, and then having worked through sample entries in several thematic catalogues, I try to place these sources back into a practical context in terms of editions and performance-related issues. I emphasize the point that RISM and thematic catalogues direct musicians to primary source documents that have the potential to illuminate a piece of music—and perhaps some performance issues—as nothing else will. I try to stress the continuity among: *sources—editions—performance* more than the small details and peculiarities of individual reference works.

Finally, a quick note about where I insert this unit within the overall music bibliography class. The first two class sessions (one hour each) are introductory in nature, the first focusing on the course itself, the music library, and the concept of library classification. The second introductory session is then devoted completely to informed use of the local online catalog. Four units follow this introduction and take up the balance of the semester. The first is devoted to large-scale enumerative bibliography, including: national and research library catalogues, in-print lists, and guides to reference sources. My pedagogical intent is to begin with the most comprehensive type of sources, knowing that we will refer back to those sources even as we gradually work into more specific areas. The second unit covers the bibliography of *music* (including RISM and thematic catalogues). The third unit is devoted to the bibliography of *writings about music* (*RILM Abstracts*, periodical indexes, music journals, *RIPM*, citation practice, and two days devoted to issues in historical performance, which I divide into 1)

“Primary sources: treatises and facsimiles” and 2) “Secondary sources,” where we usually take a brief essay by Richard Taruskin³ as the basis for further discussion. The fourth and final unit is devoted to “Music information sources” and includes standard music encyclopedias and dictionaries, selected music histories, and directories of various types.

As I have taught music bibliography in various places, and in the context of widely varying library collections, the common pedagogical denominator for me has always been to furnish performing musicians with perspectives and methodologies that relate closely to their love of making music. While the act of making music may well begin in the practice room, students in the graduate music bibliography course discover how much the music library has to contribute to their current and future performance endeavors.

Notes

¹ Arne Jon Arneson, “Don’t Quiz ‘Em on RISM: An Argument Against Demand Bibliography,” in *Musicology at the University of Colorado: A Collection of Essays by the Faculty and Graduates*, ed. William Kearns, Deborah Hayes, and Oliver Ellsworth (Boulder: University of Colorado, 1977), 230.

² *Ibid.*, 237.

³ Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).