Metadata & Discovery Group

Book review: Many Pathways for Discovery

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An important aspect of cataloguing notated or performed music resources is that subject analysis requires a description of what the resource is as opposed to what it is about; cataloguers must record the genre or form of the work(s), the instruments used or required and their number. Such information can usually be expressed via LCSH, yet music cataloguers have for many years sought to record this information separately in a more machine-readable way: since at least the 1980s the coded fields 045, 047, and 048 have been used by some libraries[1]. This effort has been given renewed impetus by the development, begun in 2009, of more comprehensive thesauri for music: the *Library of Congress Medium of Performance Thesaurus for Music* (LCMPT) and musical elements of the *Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms for Library and Archival Materials* (LCGFT). In this context, there is a clear need for a cataloguing manual to advise on the application of these fields. Casey Mullin is well-qualified to write such a manual – he was involved in the development of LCMPT and LCGFT – and with this slim volume he fills the need well.

As well as explaining how to describe medium of performance (LCMPT in MARC 382) and genre/form (LCGFT in 655 and 380), Mullin also explains how to record chronological information (046 and 388), geographic information (370) and demographic characteristics of audience and contributors (Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms in 385 and 386). This approach is more comprehensive and allows for describing greater complexity than the encoded data that was once used (e.g., in 008, 045, 047, and 048), and it renders such data redundant. But the new vocabularies are also intended as a means "to overcome the limitations and drawbacks of LCSH" (p. 26), and their developers "have envisioned a future where LCSH practices … that are duplicative of these faceted terms will eventually be phased out" (p. 27), though for the time being, best practice is for cataloguers to use both the new terms and LCSH.

[1] The Library of Congress ceased using these fields in 1991, but their use persisted in some libraries (Holden et al., 2019, pp. 597-598).

The main body of the book, chapters 2 to 5, serves as a manual for the application of these vocabularies. A reader not already familiar with music cataloguing will need to use this book in conjunction with more general works (p.4), and all readers will need to consult the thesauri directly and have knowledge of existing guidance[2], but this book should help both experienced and new music cataloguers begin using the vocabularies. The writing is clear and concise, both when issuing authoritative guidance and when acknowledging the need for cataloguer judgement, e.g., "When performers play multiple instruments, use 382 subfield $d to indicate this doubling relationship. Input a numeral in subfield $n after each subfield $a and $d" (p. 34), and "Use judgement in determining how many instruments are feasible to record" (p. 35). His advice (on p. 44) about determining how to code the indicators in a particularly tricky case might benefit cataloguers in many other contexts; it is simply: "Do not agonize."

As you would expect from a cataloguing manual, there is barely a page that does not include at least one example illustrating the points made. As well as the field under discussion, the examples typically include the 245 and 650 fields. Many sections have a subheading *LSCH comparison*, which serves to guide the user in adding LCSH alongside faceted fields; cumulatively, these short paragraphs also illustrate the limitations of LCSH as compared to the new vocabularies. Another recurring heading is the *Retrospective implementation note*. This section references what "an automated program" (*passim*) might generate and highlights what further action cataloguers would need to take to remediate the automated work. Despite the generic phrasing, these sections are surely written with the OCLC Music Toolkit in mind. Cataloguers working outside OCLC, and within technological limitations, might have to work with a retrospective tool that produces very different results, and thus they would not be able to use these sections as they are intended. However, their inclusion does at least emphasise to cataloguers the possibility of retrospective conversion, and if it prompts someone to press their systems team for a program, then it will have served a purpose.

Another useful recurring feature is the 'extracts' from the thesauri, such as the listing of instrument category terms (pp. 37-38). What Mullin has done here is extract all the category terms (i.e., not terms for specific instruments) for instruments from the thesaurus and arrange them hierarchically (as opposed to the alphabetic arrangement in LCMPT), e.g., aerophone > wind instrument > brass instrument. Therefore this 'extract' does not replicate what a cataloguer would find in the thesaurus, but presents a new arrangement of the thesaurus, one that is useful for the specific context and that aids a deeper understanding of the thesaurus' structure.

Chapters 2-4 discuss the application of the new vocabularies by the type of music being described, respectively: instrumental music (in the western art music tradition); vocal music (in the western art music tradition); popular and folk/traditional music.

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[2] See, for example (all freely available online), Library of Congress (2022), Music Library Association (2023), and Music Library Association (2024).

Duplication of content is reduced by references to earlier chapters. This is sensible, but it might inconvenience someone using the book as a reference resource. Chapter 5 explains how to describe the content type of musical resources, and so naturally addresses them according to this feature, with sections on scores, audio recordings, and video recordings.

In the final two chapters, co-written by Kevin Kishimoto, the book departs from its cataloguing manual format and offers instead brief introductions to related topics. Chapter 6 introduces non-MARC metadata and describes how the vocabularies might be applied in BIBFRAME. Chapter 7 describes how the new vocabularies might be leveraged in a discovery environment and includes some suggestions that can be applied now (in some environments) and some that should be possible in the future. As in the earlier chapters, examples abound, but I wonder if they are so useful here. Does the reader really need three examples, about two and a half pages of an 11-page chapter, of Alma discovery normalisation rules when they are all freely available online? Similarly, Chapter 6 includes 18 examples of BIBFRAME data in N-Triple or Turtle serialisation. A cataloguer working in BIBFRAME need not encounter these formats, and while I can see how some exposure to them could aid understanding, for the examples to comprise almost a third of the chapter seems excessive. This is a minor quibble, but such use of space is particularly noticeable in a book whose main text runs to just 141 pages. However, it is certainly important that cataloguers have at least a basic understanding of the topics covered in these two chapters, and Mullin and Kishimoto do a sound job of giving a brief – self-consciously so (pp. 119, 131) – introduction to the topics.

The book is generally well produced. The binding seems secure, but it is loose enough to allow the pages to remain open when the book is put down, a feature not to be under-estimated in a reference work! But the book would have been easier to use for reference if the running headers had indicated what vocabulary was under discussion on each page. I think there are misprints in the examples on pages 61 and 123, but neither would cause confusion.

I came to this book with an interest in faceted description and discovery, but no knowledge of the vocabularies developed for music resources and little experience of cataloguing music. It is difficult for me to say, therefore, whether cataloguers who have already been using the new vocabularies (and perhaps those working in libraries that have prepared substantial internal documentation on them) would benefit from this book. But no doubt the primary intended audience for this book is cataloguers coming to the topic with little or no prior understanding of it, and I would not hesitate to recommend it to that group.

References

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