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How and Why, Not What and Where: An Examination of Four Music Library Research Texts and their Relevance in the Digital Age

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Abstract

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Abstract:

In a time when information expands at an exponential rate the idea that a university course could—or should—even approach comprehensive coverage of the resources in any field is unthinkable. Yet textbooks continue to be written with this approach of instruction. This article examines four texts in music library research instruction: *A Guide to Library Research in Music* by Pauline Shaw Bayne, *Sourcebook for Research in Music* by Phillip D. Crabtree and Donald H. Foster, *Music Library and Research Skills*, by Jane Gottlieb and *Music Research: A Handbook* by Laurie J. Sampsel. Resources were analyzed based on their stated purpose, content and current applicability. The growing need for a new perspective on the instruction of library research skills that extends beyond the items themselves to the methods and strategies for information retrieval in a variety of contexts is proposed as an area for future examination.

Keywords: Music Library Research | Library Research Instruction | Music Bibliography | Information Literacy |

Pauline Shaw Bayne. *A Guide to Library Research in Music*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2008. 290 pages. \$75.00.
ISBN 978-0-8108-6148-0
Paper (\$45.00) ISBN 978-0-8108-6211-1

Phillip D. Crabtree and Donald H. Foster. *Sourcebook for Research in Music. Second Edition*. Revised and expanded by Allen Scott. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005. 408 pages. \$25.95.
ISBN 978-0-253-21780-6

Jane Gottlieb. *Music Library and Research Skills*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009. 384 pages. \$70.20.
ISBN 978-0-1315-8434-1

Laurie J. Sampsel. *Music Research: A Handbook. Second Edition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 352 pages. \$49.95.
ISBN 978-0-19-979712-7

When beginning an analysis of any textbook, or in this case a comparison of four, one must first contemplate the larger context in which the book is written and the use for which it is intended. In the Preface to *Music Library and Research Skills*, Jane Gottlieb describes her experience in a Music Bibliography class creating index-cards, each bearing the description of a single source in neat, library hand. The goal of a bibliography class has historically been to expose students to resources that the experts of the field have determined to be the best. While I acknowledge that, for a young researcher, a detailed discussion of the individual items available as resources holds great value, I am led to question the practicality of this as the focus of an entire semester course. In a time when information expands at an exponential rate the idea that a course could—or should—even approach comprehensive coverage of the resources in any field is unthinkable. Yet textbooks are still being written with this approach of instruction. Though they may contain well-crafted selections of excellent resources, it is difficult to evaluate them because they neglect to acknowledge that the information seeking process has drastically evolved since the beginning of the digital age. If texts on music research are to remain relevant to a new generation of musical researchers, they must reexamine the foundational assumptions that have gone unchallenged for too long.

Of the four texts analyzed, Phillip D. Crabtree and Donald H. Foster's *Sourcebook for Research in Music Education* is the most straightforward. Evidenced by the title, Crabtree and Foster do not intend their work to be taken as anything other than an

introduction to key sources. They do not claim to instruct in research methods or searching strategies. They approach the text in an old-fashioned method, providing little, if any, annotation to the citations. Having said that, this approach is not entirely without value. The authors provide definitions of common terms prominently at the beginning of the book, rather than in a glossary or appendix. They include English, German and French terms, which is very useful to users with varied experience in foreign languages. Crabtree and Foster also include a number of bibliographies highlighting women composers and performers, a sub-topic often overlooked. I cannot deny that *Sourcebook for Research in Music* adequately accomplishes its goal to provide an introduction to important resources, but this same information can be found easily elsewhere. Students now are less likely to reach for a book than to enter a search term. Authors must provide more than a list of resources to lure students away from the instant gratification of a web search.

The goal of Gottlieb's *Music Library and Research Skills* is less clear. The title indicates a focus on the instruction of skills, which I take to mean searching strategies and guidelines for evaluating sources. Her first chapter, which includes a list of "Rules for Successful Music Library Users," initially upholds this expectation through the explanation of terms and a number of examples, but quickly devolves into pages of citations with varying amounts of annotations. Again, this does not render the text meaningless, but I find myself asking why I should spend time reading title after title from a book that takes up space on my shelf when I can look up title, location, access terms and cost on my phone while on vacation at the Grand Canyon? The introduction of resources that students will likely not have encountered in their undergraduate studies, such as a thematic catalog or complete works editions, are valuable and necessary. However, upon discovery that they exist, I do not need an exhaustive list of published subjects because I default to the assumption that information does exist, rather than that it does not. As such, an explanation of what makes these particular resources excellent, why the author has selected these and not others, would be of significant value to the reader. Lists of published discographies are less useful to me than an explanation of how I might go about accessing complete works editions, and under what circumstances I might find a bibliography to be useful.

So if a recitation of resources is not of particularly high value to the modern researcher, what should a book advertising instruction in music research contain? The focus should be on *how* to effectively retrieve information, *how* to evaluate the credibility and importance of that information, and *why* one method should be used over another, rather than *what* information might be encountered. Children of the digital age are programmed to begin any information seeking process with a general keyword search. Textbooks in library research must address how this can be done most effectively as well as give a convincing argument about why such a search may not always be the best information retrieval strategy. Those of us who have grown up in the digital age are hardwired to expect to be able to search multiple resources and platforms at once. What Bayne calls ‘metasearching’ is already standard practice – an example of how quickly these texts become out of date. Authors must address how to determine which indexes will be most appropriate to a topic and why the prominently placed “smart search” is grossly inadequate to an advanced researcher’s needs. Pauline Shaw Bayne and Laurie Sampsel come closer to addressing these issues than Gottlieb and Crabtree and Foster, but even Sampsel’s brand new edition of *Music Research: A Handbook* falls short of my lofty expectations.

Sampsel chooses to divide her work into two main parts. Part I focuses on “Research Process and Research Tools” while Part II covers “Writing, Style Manuals, and Citation.” This division indicates a commonly encountered methodology of research instruction—the research comes first and the writing comes second. I do not accept that this is how modern students write, though it may still be how they are instructed to write. No longer of the mindset that any letter typed is permanent, students today go from writing to reading to searching and back. This interactive process must be addressed if a text on research hopes to be effective, current and applicable.

Sampsel is perhaps the most effective at employing a discussion about *why* a particular type of resource is useful to the researcher. She begins each chapter with an explanation of, and rationale for, each new type of resource. Encyclopedias are explained to be a good starting point because they contain foundational information and bibliographies of resources to get the user started. Periodicals are advocated as the most up to date resource. Thematic catalogs are explained as a way to identify a work and ascertain the uniform title. Sampsel gives the reader an understanding of why and

how these items are useful rather than just informing the reader that they exist. In each chapter she follows this opening discussion with analysis of a few select resources she considers to be most valuable, and follows that up with an annotated bibliography of a slightly wider range of resources.

Two attributes set Sampsel apart from the others: she closes each chapter with an evaluation checklist for the resource type and includes a suggested reading list of articles as well as books. These additions are extremely helpful for a young researcher. The sheer volume of possible resources can be very overwhelming, and the process of choosing one over another can be paralyzing. A guiding checklist to evaluate sources addresses the need to determine a source's credibility and gives a practical process for the student to use in varied contexts.

In *A Guide to Library Research in Music*, Bayne spends more time than Sampsel addressing the writing process itself, and of the four authors Bayne alone discusses the frustrating process of selecting a topic for research. Young researchers, and even experienced ones, often express frustration and a feeling of being overwhelmed until a topic is narrowed to a manageable and pointed research question. Yet, this stage is the least discussed among graduate level research instruction, likely because of an often times false assumption that this has been mastered in the students' undergraduate studies. Bayne describes topic selection as taking place in several stages. She suggests choosing a broad topic, doing some basic background reading, determining the extent of previous research, and then re-examining the topic. Bayne states that a researcher will likely repeat this process several times before determining a topic focused enough to produce a meaningful product. All four authors refer to Booth, Colomb and Williams's book *The Craft of Research*¹ as a key text for the young researcher, and Bayne provides a useful reference to its formula for focusing a topic and thus a thesis statement.

Bayne also presents an entire chapter as a case study of the research process. She 'follows' a student's thought process from a seed of broad curiosity, through the initial information gathering/evaluation stage, to the crafting of a working thesis statement. Bayne is also the only author to discuss the product of research as anything other than a

¹ Wayne C. Booth, Gregory C. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams, *The Craft of Research*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

scholarly paper. She presents samples of program notes, literature reviews in different citation styles, research and recital papers, book reviews and dissertations as examples for the reader. In spite of the very non-textual nature of music, none of the authors discuss any product that is not text based. The Digital Humanities is emerging as a field, and instructors and students alike must reconsider what it means to produce scholarly research in music. Any conversation about library research must include discussion of the production of podcasts, websites, multimedia projects, and new forms of media we have yet to discover.

All four authors indicate the importance of following the appropriate style manual when writing scholarly work. By graduate school, students should have experience citing sources, but most will likely have only been exposed to one style manual; therefore, the concept of different styles for different areas of music research is one that is probably new to most graduate students. Crabtree's discussion is the most brief, only mentioning that the most commonly used models in music are Chicago and APA and providing lists of style manuals alongside other writing guides. Sampsel provides not only explanation but also examples of the difference between a passage that is plagiarized and one that is properly cited. This is of particular use to a relatively inexperienced researcher in avoiding accidental plagiarism. Bayne adds the necessary comment that one cannot simply copy a source's citation from the library catalog and paste it unedited onto a Works Cited section of a research paper. Gottlieb contributes with discussion of the citation of electronic resources, a murky area for experienced and young researchers alike. Taken together, these four authors discuss all the important aspects of citation procedure, but any one text lacks complete instruction on the subject.

Gottlieb and Bayne (though surprisingly not Sampsel) also discuss copyright, which is a necessary topic for inclusion. When young researchers have grown up with information immediately available all around them that can be copy-and-pasted into a Word document, discussion of copyright law is a must. Both authors discuss the Fair Use limitation on copyright and point the reader to additional resources about the specifics of copyright law. This is much more of an issue now that so much is available online, often illegally, than it was even a few decades ago. Though keeping up on the details of copyright law can be a headache, at least a general overview must be covered if graduate students are to be equipped to make important decisions.

The greatest weakness of any research instruction textbook is the speed at which it becomes outdated. A prime example of this, as well as a major disappointment, is the sparse coverage of Web resources and searching strategies for online platforms. The Internet has drastically changed the way we interact with information, and we must adapt accordingly. The struggle for the modern researcher is in framing the question and constructing a search query. How do we find the right words to ask for things we assume, but do not know for sure are out there? So many search platforms with which current students are familiar search full bodies of text for the phrase entered into the search box. The concept of controlled vocabulary is a foreign one to current students and *must* be explained. Databases continue to improve, but must still be manipulated in a very particular way. In addition, current students most likely require instruction about the selection of an index or database and the evaluation of the applicability and credibility of the journals included. Students require a discussion of why thorough research will most likely require them to search several different indexes separately. This may seem elementary and intuitive to someone who has been in the field a number of years, but is a key piece of information in instructing young students about searching techniques. Music undergraduates often spend much more of their time in the practice room than in the library, and it must not be assumed that these skills were mastered at the undergraduate level, but rather taught directly at the graduate level to avoid beginner mistakes.

Another frustrating task involved in music research is finding things in the library online catalog. Gottlieb discusses why a keyword search may not bring up the desired results because of language differences (e.g. “Die Zauberflöte,” “Zauberflöte”, and “The Magic Flute”) and controlled vocabulary in subject headings. Bayne proposes a need for thoughtful construction of a search rather than just typing title or subject words into a text box. Sampsel gives a more in depth explanation of authority headings and uniform titles and their effect on the results retrieved. All three authors caution against the overuse of keyword searches, though this advice should be more prevalent and the rationale more clear if it is to be internalized by the Google generation of researchers.

The discussion of search techniques within databases is also extremely lacking in all four texts, a gross oversight as articles are often the first type of resource students will attempt to access. Crabtree mentions the existence of JSTOR briefly, but gives no

explanation of access to online journals or searching technique. He does not even include the website of Oxford Music Online, which also hosts the Grove Music Online Dictionary. If an author intends to successfully make the case for the importance of subject dictionaries and encyclopedias in a world of Wikipedia and full-text article availability, a discussion of web-based access options of these resources is mandatory. Gottlieb gives the matter a bit more page space but not much. She presents *Music Index*, *RILM*, *RIPM*, and *IIMP* as useful indexes, but gives few details about their differences and no instruction about database searching strategies.

Sampsel gives the most updated examples of database searching and describes the major music indexes (*Music Index*, *RILM*, *RISM*, *IIMP*) individually for the reader. She presents the focus and strengths of each one, and also names other indexes of related disciplines that could be useful to the music researcher. She defines useful terms, such as *abstract* and *peer-reviewed*, which professors may take for granted but graduate students often need defined. While Sampsel adequately covers the 'what' of online indexes, her explanation of *how* to effectively search them is relegated to a short appendix in the rear of the book. Bayne devotes the most space to the strategies of effective searching rather than the names of indexes. Bayne discusses the concept that controlled vocabulary is not universal, and shows the need to analyze each index for the necessary search terms in order to retrieve the desired information. She lists many broad and narrow subject terms in several indexes as examples, leading the reader to an understanding of both the theory behind and the function of the subject terms. She shows the reader how to use broad terms to find the narrow ones that will allow the user to pinpoint the most applicable resources.

Bayne then addresses information about keyword searches in a separate chapter. She acknowledges this as the general default technique for most users, and posits its advantages and disadvantages, as well as specific tips about Boolean searches. It is unclear whether the authors have not discovered the power in a well-crafted Boolean search, or do not believe graduate students have the patience to use them. Either way it is a topic that warrants a great deal more attention in any text that claims to teach research skills. Sampsel and Bayne also discuss the value of limiters on a search, another hidden gem that can ease the frustration of an onslaught of results at the beginning of the research process.

Bayne alone covers related-record searching and citation indexes. She describes the process of finding related records through identification of subject headings and/or author of a resource as particularly useful. Perhaps this process was once intuitive to researchers who combed through card catalogs, but it no longer can be assumed to be a strategy with which young researchers are familiar. An experienced researcher knows that once a few key authors of a topic are identified, their bodies of work combined with the citation trail they leave will lead to a comprehensive understanding of that topic. An experienced researcher knows this, but the novice researcher does not. How to go about this process is a key topic largely missing from the available research texts.

The usefulness of technology is not limited to information gathering, though a reader may not infer that from the four texts at hand. The tedious process of crafting citations has become considerably easier through the continual advance of technology. Here, again, is an example of how quickly any print book becomes hopelessly outdated. Bayne, Gottlieb and Sampsel mention *RefWorks* and *EndNote* as possible software aids to citations, but only briefly. Bayne includes *Zotero* as an additional resource, the best in my opinion. Even Microsoft Word offers a “Reference Manager” that helps the user keep track of their citations and automatically produces a Works Cited section of the document. These tools merit a more in-depth discussion on several levels. Though handy, these aids are not faultless and students must be aware that citations must still be double-checked. Like print or web-based resources, citation managers must be evaluated for accuracy and ease of use.

Any summative evaluation of these four resources proves elusive since they vary so widely in purpose and intent. Each list important resources that every music researcher should know, but these resources can be found through so many other means that this alone cannot be the justification for a textbook’s existence. The goal to provide an introduction to resources is achieved by each text considered. All are well-organized and clearly thoughtful texts by respected researchers in the field. I applaud these four texts for what they are; my discontent lies not in the information the authors extend, but in the prioritization of resources over evaluation methods and statements over strategies. The new generation of scholars has been raised in a vastly different information world and begins the research process with different foundational assumptions that challenge the status quo of research instruction. A complete re-examination of the methodology of

library research instruction must be conducted with this new perspective in mind if music libraries and music research courses are to remain the relevant and reliable source for students and researchers we so desire to be.

WORKS CITED

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*.
Third Edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008.