Abstract
In the cultural imagination, libraries often conjure images of pristine aisles of books managed by strict, shushing librarians. However, libraries in the United States, both large and small, have embraced the sights and sounds of music concerts for well over a century. As a crucial point in this historical trajectory, the Great Depression provides a fascinating window onto the multi-layered music histories of American libraries and their patrons. In the midst of economic struggle, libraries joined concert halls and community centers to host high-profile Library of Congress concert series, local “Evenings with the Victrola,” and WPA composer forums. In their repurposed reading rooms and lecture halls, libraries served as symbolic spaces that promoted Progressive-Era democratized knowledge and New Deal cultural democracy.

This study, informed by U.S. newspaper reports and archival materials between 1929 and 1940, locates the library as an overlooked space across intersecting cultural axes that has served as a symbolic musical center for a variety of music networks and philosophies. Libraries were central to federal programs, private citizens, and charities alike, and their distinct ideologies were articulated in concert locations, times, and repertoires. In addition to digital visualizations of American library concerts and context via the histories of music ensembles, performance spaces, and libraries in the Great Depression, this paper seeks to restore the image of the library as a musical-cultural center in American concert life.
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