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# ADJUSTING CUTTER NUMBERS FOR COMPOSERS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI LIBRARIES

**Miao Jin and Erin Boyd**

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## Introduction

In music cataloging, two primary methods are used for assigning Cutter numbers for composers. Some libraries maintain a list of composer Cutter numbers and then assign the same number to a composer in all music classes, i.e., Yale University's Composer Cutter List at [www.library.yale.edu/cataloging/music/cutter](http://www.library.yale.edu/cataloging/music/cutter). Other libraries, including the Library of Congress, do not assign fixed Cutter numbers to individual composers, and are only consistent within single music classifications (Smiraglia 2008). There are advantages and disadvantages to the use of fixed Cutter numbers. Catalogers tend to memorize the numbers for major composers. This saves time as catalogers do not have to check the shelflist to find the specific number for a composer within a music class. A disadvantage is that some Cutter numbers would tend to become long (over three digits) due to the need to allow for the possibility of numerous composers with similar names and to keep their Cutters consistent from class number to class number.

At the University of Southern Mississippi (USM) Libraries, a list of composer Cutter numbers was created in the mid-1990s during a music re-classification project. Prior to that, all music materials were arranged by accession numbers. At the time of the project, the music cataloger assigned the same Cutter number to individual composers in all music classes and compiled a list for composers and their Cutter numbers. It was decided that it would be easier to find a Cutter number from this list than having to check the shelflist to find what Cutter number had been used for a composer in a particular class.

Unfortunately, the Cutter number list has not been applied consistently over the past ten years

because of human error, lack of maintenance, and changes in personnel. Consequently, the music collection at USM Libraries now faces the following problems:

- In any particular music class, music scores by the same composer are not shelved together. For example, in class M1001 (symphonies), Beethoven's symphonies are located in two different Cutter numbers (B43 and B67), with works by other composers cataloged and located between these numbers. The inconsistency in Cutters might have been caused by exporting catalog records directly from OCLC WorldCat into the local system without editing the call number field.
- Not all Cutter numbers are in alphabetical order. For example, Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach has a Cutter number of B334 while Johann Sebastian Bach has a Cutter number of B324; this would place Johann Sebastian Bach before Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach. Since the purpose of having a composer Cutter number in a call number is to arrange musical works alphabetically by last name, then first name, the above example would be incorrectly classified and shelved.
- Some Cutter numbers are long (over three digits) especially for composers with very common last names. For example, composers with the last name Smith have a five digit Cutter number, which would be unnecessary if their compositions were not in the same music class. But, in order to keep the different composers named Smith and their Cutter numbers in a logical order throughout the collection, a five-digit Cutter number is used.
- The call numbers for music series have not

been cataloged using the composer Cutter numbers. The records for these series were exported to a local system without editing of the call number field.

## Do We Need to Change the System

In May 2007, the music collection at USM Libraries was moved from closed stacks to open stacks in order to make the collection more accessible to users. Within a short time, there were user complaints that some scores were not shelved in a logical order and that some composers had incorrect call numbers. The music cataloging unit wanted to fix these problems and posted a message to the listserv of the Music Library Association for feedback from other libraries having similar problems.

Responses from the listserv included: 1) no action has been taken since everything can be searched in the online catalog, and call numbers only serve as a location tool, and, 2) it would be nice to have consistent Cutter number at least within the same class.

The cataloging staff at the USM Libraries felt that the ideal way to correct our problems was to pull all the scores off the shelf and reassign call numbers. However, this would be a very time consuming and expensive project. The question remained, does USM Libraries need to re-catalog the music collection or leave it as is like many other libraries have done?

## Literature Review

Little research has been done to investigate whether browsability of a collection will be improved by having logical Cutter numbers across all music classes to justify the efforts and time involved in adjusting Cutter numbers. El-Sherbini and Stalker (1996) studied the nature and extent of Cutter number adjustment at the Ohio State University Libraries. They concluded that adjusting Cutter numbers in classes M, N, and P is worthwhile because in these classes creative works are systematically ordered by Cutter number to achieve effects more complex than mere arrangement by main entry within a specific class. Adjusting Cutter numbers in other classes is not sufficient in justifying the time and

effort required to maintain that practice. Their study did not research on whether they should assign a same Cutter number for a composer across all music classes.

Rodman (2000) conducted another study at the same library to assess the impact on library collection organization if call numbers are not changed to fit into the shelf list sequence. The results indicate that for this library's collection, after three years, only 0.16% of total titles cataloged without call number review may not be easily found in the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) and therefore non-review of call numbers in cataloging would seem to be an acceptable decision for cutting costs and increasing productivity. However, the definition of "browsability" is based on readings about user retrieval preferences in the online environment. It may be different when translated to browsing book shelves.

No study addresses whether a consistent Cutter number should be used across all music class. A decision could not be made based on literature review.

## Survey

An online survey instrument comprised of eight questions was developed (see Appendix) to seek library users' input. Survey questions were designed in an attempted to answer the following questions:

- Do library users understand that the Cutter number represents a composer's last name?
- Do library users think it is important to use the same Cutter number for a composer in all music classes?
- Do library users shelf browsing?

Initially the survey was planned to be sent to both music faculty and music graduate students at the University of Southern Mississippi, since they are the heaviest users of the music collection. However, there is no efficient method of distributing this online survey to music graduate students since they do not have a listserv. As a result, music faculty is the only group of users

who answered the survey questions.

## Profiles of Respondents

Eleven out of forty faculty members responded to the survey with a response rate of 27.5%. All eleven faculty stated that they use the online catalog. Eight of the eleven (72.7%) stated they also browse the shelves. Ten out of eleven (90.9%) have searched online by author, and seven out of eleven (63.6%) always look at the surrounding scores after they select a score from the shelf.

## Survey Findings

*Do library users understand that the Cutter number represents a composer's last name?*

Six out of eleven faculty members recognized that M69 represents Mozart, and that B335 represents Johann Sebastian Bach. Since Mozart and Bach are famous composers, it can be assumed that this is the reason why their Cutter numbers are recognizable and remembered by these library users.

*Do library users think it is important to keep the same Cutter number for a composer across the music classes?*

Four out of eleven (36.45%) of the faculty members think it is "very important" and the same number think it is "somewhat important" to have consistent Cutter numbering for composers.

*Do library users shelf browsing?*

Eight out of eleven (72.8%) of the faculty members browse the shelves as a supplement to finding music materials.

## Decision

The survey results indicate that some music faculty do relate Cutter numbers to musicians and having a consistent Cutter number for a composer across all music classes are important to a certain degree to music faculty. If an online catalog search is the only way for music faculty to locate library materials, it might be viable to leave Cutter numbers as they are, based on Rodman's (2000) study. However, 72.8% of them browse the shelves, therefore having a consistent

Cutter number for a composer within the same class is necessary.

Since music faculty do understand the correlation between Cutter numbers and the composers' names, the same Cutter number should be applied to all works of any famous composer when possible.

A decision was made to start the project to correct the call numbers of the music collection.

## The Project

In order to correct all the call numbers, a reliable composer Cutter number list needed to be developed. To ensure that all composers' names were correctly alphabetized and that all Cutter numbers were assigned numerically, a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was developed from the old Cutter list which has not been updated for a few years. This spreadsheet was also loaded to the department Web site (<http://www.lib.usm.edu/techserv/cat/composers.html>) so all music cataloging staff would have access to the most current information.

The benefit of using Microsoft Excel is that it has a function that allows the user to sort by composer names or Cutter numbers in alphabetical or numerical order. After the data was entered, the lists were checked for accuracy between the alphabetical order of the composers and the numerical order of the assigned Cutter numbers. If a problem occurred between the composer's name and the Cutter number order, that composer was highlighted in yellow and a new number was assigned. The purpose of highlighting these changes allowed the staff to re-evaluate the list and make the proper changes needed to the records in the systems as well as the physical scores for shelving purposes. Musical works with different Cutter numbers than those from the list were pulled off the shelves and a new Cutter number was assigned to them. Several student workers were trained to create new call number labels and process the scores.

To avoid long Cutter numbers, the cataloging staff considered to include only composers who wrote more than 20 works on the list. Composers

who had fewer than 20 works would have flexible Cutter numbers in different music classes to accommodate the arrangement of each class. We had to remove from the list all composers, editors, arrangers, and compilers who have not produced a significant amount of work. Researching and reviewing music history and/or music appreciation literature helped in selecting “major” composers. We also consulted with the music faculty members for their feedback as to which composers are most discussed in music school.

For the music series list, the composer Cutter list was introduced to the serial cataloging staff and they were willing to accommodate the needed changes.

### Suggestions for Other Libraries

Correcting all the errors in Cutter numbers is a gradual, but achievable process. Having a good Cutter list in place is a top priority. For new items added to the collection, the Cutter number from

the list will be applied when assigning call numbers. For existing scores, time should be set aside to correct at least a few hundred musical works each week. The length of this process depends on the size of the score collection and the amount of staff time that can be devoted to this project. Hiring student workers helps to lower the cost for this project. It is possible that this kind of project may never be done in some libraries which are understaffed.

Another benefit of having the cataloging staff change each of the Cutter numbers is that all the records can be checked and updated to the current AACR2 standards. Adding these steps to the project will extend the amount of time it will take to complete it, but the effort may be worth it as the quality of the bibliographic records will be greatly improved, providing better access to all music library users.

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## Appendix

### Library Survey for Music Faculty

1. How many years have you been at USM?
  - A. Up to 2 years
  - B. Between 2 and 5 years
  - C. More than 5 years
  
2. How do you search for music scores (choose all that apply)?
  - A. Search online catalog, ANNA (anna.lib.usm.edu)
  - B. Browse the shelves
  - C. Ask library staff for suggestions
  - D. Ask colleagues for suggestions
  
3. How many times have you used the library's online catalog, ANNA, to search for scores during the last six months?
  - A. 0
  - B. 1-10
  - C. 11-25
  - D. 26-50
  - E. 51-100
  - F. More than 100
  
4. When you search the online catalog, ANNA, which part(s) of a catalog do you search (choose all that apply)?
  - A. Title
  - B. Author/Composer
  - C. Subject
  - D. Series
  - E. Keyword
  
5. When you select a score from a library shelf, do you look at other scores nearby?
  - A. Always
  - B. Sometimes
  - C. Rarely
  - D. Never

6. Symphony No. 39 by Mozart has a call number of: M1001.M69 K.543 1900z. Which of these facts did you know?
- A. M represents Music
  - B. M1001 represents Symphonies
  - C. M69 represents the composer, Mozart
7. *The Well-tempered Clavier* by Johann Sebastian Bach has the call number: M22.B335 W64 1983. Which of these facts did you know (choose all that apply)?
- A. M represents Music
  - B. M22 represents Piano Collections
  - C. B335 represents the composer, Bach
8. How important is it to you that all composers have a consistent unique number to represent them?  
For example: Mozart = M69; Bach = B335; Beethoven = B43; Poulenc = P688
- A. Very important
  - B. Somewhat important
  - C. Neutral
  - D. Somewhat unimportant
  - E. Very unimportant