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Scott Piepenburg

Valdosta State University, srpiepenburg@valdosta.edu

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My Own PRIVATE LIBRARY

By Scott Piepenburg

It has been said that “catalogers are born, not made.” I’m not certain if there is any scientific basis for that statement, but in my circumstance, I’m inclined to believe it.

Most people associate librarians with people who love books. Make no mistake, I love books, but I also recognize how quickly they can overwhelm a house. My personal book collection is small, less than one-hundred books; if the bookshelf gets too full, it’s time to weed.

On the other hand, I fell in love with music at a very early age. By the second grade, I had the definitive collection of read-along books (on records, of course!) and was one of the “early adopters” of Scholastic records. My first was *Too Much Noise* based on the book by Ann McGovern and *Ferdinand the Bull* by Munro Leaf—both of which I still have. As I grew older (fourth grade), I graduated to listening to my mother’s collection of records on an old Electro-Voice unit on a cart with the speakers sitting on fold out wings and the records stored in a rack below. I started pestering my parents to buy me albums I liked. The first album I remember owning was one by Johnny Cash (which, incidentally, I have to this day).

The collection grew to a total of twenty linear inches, or 130 record albums (there are 6.5

albums to a linear inch) organized into three sections. The first was soundtracks, organized by the name of the movie, TV show, or production; the second was albums by individual artists, organized by last name, first name and then by title for each artist; and the final group was Christmas music (mostly my parents’ albums) sorted by title, sort of. After organizing them, I took each album and typed a 3x5 card documenting it. At the top of each card was the artist’s name (last name, first name) or, in the case of soundtracks, just the title of the production. The next line (usually double-spaced down) was the title of the album. Below that was the name of the record label, the city it was located in, and the year it was released. The following line was information about the speed and size of the recording. The remainder of the card listed the individual tracks on the album along with the playing times, if available. These cards were then filed in a small metal box that I stored in my closet. To this day, I still have that box of cards.



Sadly, I had to discontinue this practice as I got older and my parents felt I was using the typewriter to “play with” and not as the serious tool that it was. Compounding this, I discovered Columbia House Record and Tape Club (twelve albums for a penny with the understanding to buy nine more in the next three years). This caused my album collection to grow at a pace

that prevented me from typing up cards fast enough.

My church confirmation saw the purchase of my first real stereo. (Admiral AM-FM receiver with 8-track tape player and BSR turntable), and my collection grew. High school (and a part-time job) brought my first real piece of “audiophile” equipment in the form of a Technics SL-1950 changer and, in my junior year, a Concept 55-watt receiver and new speakers.

The college years put somewhat of a damper on purchases, but I still bought albums I liked and discovered new genres. Graduate school saw the purchase of my first CD player, and I developed my first collection development policy: I would purchase no CD that I already had on album. My collection continued to grow along with upgrades to my stereo. Marriage brought my wife’s collection into the mix, along with the purchase of a VCR and a new format to organize. Columbia House again entered the picture with my joining the Star Trek Tape Club (a new tape every three weeks).

Alas, divorce then struck. Fortunately, I retained the entire audio-video system and most of the CDs and videocassettes. With my divorce settlement, I bought a laserdisc player and started collecting a new format, again following the policy that if I had it on commercial VHS, I didn’t purchase the laserdisc. Yes, Columbia House supplied me in

this new genre, and post-spouse, the collection grew even more.

Then I really grew up: full-blown, high-end home theatre system, big-screen TV, projector, and DVD player. Soon, the collections started to outstrip my storage space. There were no good CD or DVD cabinets on the market, so I built my own. In my professional career, I took a position with a library automation company; this had the added benefit of giving me access to my own ILS to install. Dutifully, I cataloged all my albums—singles (or “45s”), videotapes, laserdiscs, CDs, and, eventually, DVDs and Blu-ray discs. This cataloging even became part of our corporate retrospective conversion database. I have



maintained this database, which gets sent out every year for authority work, and from it I can generate a list of holdings, which I use for inventory work as needed. It even came in handy when my house was broken into, and I was able to give the insurance company a detailed list of the titles stolen (since I set them to “lost” in the system). The downside is that I don’t have a web presence for them; it’s still an internal structure.

Today, the collection has grown to over 1600 CDs, 1200 albums, 300 laserdiscs, 500 DVDs, and 100 Blu-rays. All organized, all cataloged, and all authority controlled. Once a cataloger, always a cataloger.

Scott Piepenburg is Head of Cataloging at Valdosta State University