Working Group on Terminology in 20th-Century Music

Progress Report
January 19, 1996

Members: Dan Cherubin, Michael Colby (chair), Ralph Hartsock, David Lesniaski, Brian Newhouse, Deta Davis (LC Liaison)

The working group was appointed after the 1993 MLA meeting in San Francisco. Our charge was to identify and define key concepts in 20th-century music and to compile a list of terms derived from these concepts. We would then decide which of these terms should be sent to the Library of Congress as proposals for new subject headings.

We first met as a group at the 1994 MLA meeting in Kansas City. There we divided the work into broad categories and each group member took responsibility for specific areas. We also decided that we would compile our list of terms in the form of a thesaurus and determined what information each entry should ideally contain.

Prior to the Atlanta meeting in 1995, a preliminary version of the thesaurus was mounted on the MLA Clearinghouse. We received some comments before the Atlanta meeting. At our business meeting in Atlanta, we considered these comments, members brought forth new comments and we made decisions on many terms, both on their form and appropriateness for the thesaurus and for LCSH proposals. We received and took under consideration further comments expressed at and after our open meeting.

Over the past year, the group has continued to work on the terms. A new draft of the thesaurus has been prepared; while it is still not a final version, considerable work has been put into it and it is not far from being finished. Of course, no thesaurus of musical terms could ever be considered complete, as music is a dynamic, living art form. Three subject heading proposals have been accepted by the Library of Congress. Eleven more have been sent and await a decision. About a dozen more remain, needing some further work before submission. A list of the terms with actions and decisions is appended to this report.

While the group had hoped to complete its charge by this time, some work still remains to be done, in completing the thesaurus and submitting the remaining subject heading proposals to LC. We would like to ask for another year extension in order to complete our charge.

Last updated February 4, 2000