When the Taiga Forum’s 2009 Provocative Statements were posted on the Internet (www.taigaforum.org) and later found their way to the Music Library Association’s listserv, MLA-L, a flurry of postings erupted from music librarians across the country. As the conversation continued over several days, the call went out for the MLA to make a statement that addresses these provocative statements with our own equally provocative statements.

In most discussions regarding library futures, including those from the Taiga Forum, there is a conspicuous lack of discourse informed by the differences among academic disciplines, for example, the humanities on the one hand and the hard sciences on the other. The manner in which these two ends of the scholarly spectrum function is proof that there is no “one size fits all” scheme for libraries of the future. The very nature of the kinds of materials that music libraries must collect flies in the face of the generalities expressed in the Provocative Statements. Music librarians want to make sure that our administrators keep in mind the ways in which humanistic scholarship and teaching make use of libraries and library collections.

It is important to point out that many of the statements made by the Taiga group do have merit and many of them are right on the mark for certain disciplines. We acknowledge that the world of librarianship is changing – and changing at lightning speed. It is important to point out that music librarians embrace the digital world with the same enthusiasm as any of our colleagues who work in other areas. One has only to look at early advances such as digital audio streaming services to note that music librarians are leaders in adapting these technologies and welcome opportunities to use them to the benefit of our clientele. It is our responsibility, however, to shed fresh light on the ways in which we use our own unique mix of print and electronic materials to further musical scholarship and research and to be vigilant in reminding library administrators that subject-specific librarianship is still very much alive and well.

Thanks to colleagues Phil Ponella (Indiana University), Ned Quist (Brown University) and Dan Zager (Eastman School of Music), the following document offers responses to several of the Taiga Forum’s statements. While these responses deal most specifically with music libraries, its intent could certainly be applied to any of the humanistic disciplines.

I am indebted to Phil, Ned and Dan for their eloquence and hard work and I know they join me in inviting your comments regarding this document.

Ruthann McTyre, President
Music Library Association
February 2010
Taiga “provocative statement”: “Within the next 5 years collection development as we know it will cease to exist as selection of library materials will be entirely patron-initiated. Ownership of materials will be limited to what is actively used. The only collection development activities involving librarians will be competition over special collections and archives.”

It is not only the AULs comprising the Taiga group who posit this type of change for academic libraries. In September 2009, for example, Daniel Greenstein, Vice Provost for academic planning and programs at the University of California System, stated that “The university library of the future will be sparsely staffed, highly decentralized, and have a physical plant consisting of little more than special collections and study areas.” Indeed, it is a now familiar point of view—that academic libraries will hold little in the way of printed collections, with the concomitant need for little in the way of proactive collection development by subject specialist librarians and bibliographers. Of course, that theme has been sounded by some academic librarians for several decades now—those self-styled “leaders” who have boldly envisioned the “paperless” and “bookless” society of the future, a “future,” however, that somehow just never seems to arrive. One wonders just how disappointed those librarians must be as they see continued book publishing, and the coexistence of paper-based and digital library collections—one type of media complementing the other in academic libraries.

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1 All of the Taiga “Provocative Statements” considered in this document may be found at “Taiga 4, Provocative Statements, 20 February 2009”: http://www.taigaforum.org/documents/Taiga%204%20Statements%20After.pdf.

The principal weakness of such “library futures” statements is the tendency for the authors to paint with a very broad brush, lacking any disciplinary nuances or any distinctions by type and size of academic library. The Taiga provocative statement suffers from two “broad-brush” concepts: 1) that “selection of library materials will be entirely patron-initiated,” and 2) that “Ownership of [library] materials will be limited to what is actively used.”

**Fallacy no. 1: Entirely “patron-initiated” selection**

Many small to medium-sized college and university libraries have long relied on faculty- and student-initiated selection of new materials as the principal growth mechanism for their library collections. That concept is hardly new. Such libraries may also rely heavily on interlibrary borrowing to meet more specialized needs of their faculty and students—borrowing that has always been dependent on the generous lending practices of larger academic and public libraries, which do, in fact, foster a culture of proactive collection development by subject specialists and librarian bibliographers trained in specific academic disciplines, such as music. The debate about “access” and “ownership” has always been flawed by the unwillingness to recognize that interlibrary borrowing requires someone (i.e., some library) to acquire, catalog, store, and preserve (i.e., own) materials in order for another library to have access to those materials by way of interlibrary loan. Thus, while small to medium-sized college and university libraries may continue to rely on the dual strategies of patron-initiated selection and interlibrary borrowing (access), larger academic libraries, and subject-specific libraries (e.g., music libraries), will continue to select materials
systematically by drawing on the subject expertise of librarians who combine training in librarianship with training and experience in an academic discipline, such as music.

**Fallacy no. 2: Owning only what is “actively used”**

The second problem with this Taiga statement is the concept that “Ownership of materials will be limited to what is actively used.” This statement belies the very essence of research in the humanities. Research-level collections in the humanities have never restricted themselves to materials that are “actively used,” for individual research projects are constantly new over time and routinely draw on materials that may not have enjoyed “active use.” Librarians who develop collections supporting the humanistic disciplines always do so with one eye firmly fixed on an unknowable research future—acquiring materials when they are published (or when they become available on the market) so as to catalog and preserve those materials for future research activity.

**Another point of view**

Librarians in charge of research-level collections, as well as subject librarians presiding over specialized collections large or small, will never be content to see the development of those collections based solely on patron-initiated selection of library materials. While it is true that even our most robust research collections are facing economic challenges of epic proportions, that circumstance means only that the discernment of subject specialist librarians is required now more than ever before. Research-level collections will grow more
slowly than before, to be sure, but they will grow at the hands of librarians who are capable of assessing newly published scholarship in their specific fields, and they will likely grow in newly collaborative models such as the cooperative initiative announced recently by Cornell and Columbia universities.\(^3\)

With regard specifically to music libraries and music collections in institutions large and small, music librarians—by virtue of their academic training and musical experience—can identify scores and recordings that are central to the music performance, teaching, and research activities of specific music departments and schools. Whether the budget for music library materials is small or large, the music librarian is able to expend that budget in a way that meets more than immediate needs (i.e., patron-initiated needs). The music librarian is able to take a longer view, knowing that even in the smallest collection certain kinds of repertory (the “basic music library”) should be acquired in both score and recording formats so that common and recurring patron needs can be met with increasing success over the years.

Contrary to the Taiga provocative statement, collection development as we know it will continue in academic music libraries staffed by music specialists. These music librarians will not only recognize patron needs and acquire materials accordingly, they will also build their collections systematically for long-term use within their specific institutional contexts, maximizing sometimes narrow windows of availability for purchasing newly published materials in order to

\(^3\) [http://www.library.cornell.edu/news/091012/2cul](http://www.library.cornell.edu/news/091012/2cul).
provide for the long-term needs of performance and scholarship, study and teaching.

MLA counter statement: Within the next 5 years—in the face of reduced purchasing power, a continuing robust pace of print publication (especially music scores), and accelerating demand for commercially available digital materials—music librarians will continue to apply their dual training in music and librarianship to an ever more rigorous process of discerning what library materials should be acquired in support of specific institutional needs in music performance and scholarship. In so doing, music librarians will provide a model within academic librarianship of what it means for a librarian to work within a specific humanistic discipline, shaping collections for the long-term use of performers and scholars, faculty and students.

(Zager)
Taiga “provocative statement”: “Within the next 5 years libraries will provide no in-person services. All services (reference, circulation, instruction, etc.) will be unmediated and supported by technology.”

For those who have watched the long-term decline of their reference numbers it seems to some as if this must be the inevitable conclusion of these trends—libraries without librarians. At its heart, this prediction springs from the presumed digital availability of all significant content, where physical books, scores, and media are no longer needed and that the online services offered either free or for a fee are so perfectly designed and so intuitive to all but the newborn, that mediation on the part of librarians is no longer needed. While this may come to pass in some distant future, it certainly is highly unlikely for music in the next five years.

In the academic music library where we typically support some combination of research and performance, the possibility of a freely available all-digital collection remains remote at best. Yes, through Apple’s I-Tunes store, eMusic, and others, it is now possible to purchase a wide range of recorded music, song by song or movement by movement—but only by individuals, not by libraries.⁴ There have been remarkable efforts to license for libraries large portions of recorded classical, jazz, and world music.⁵ Yet these collections fall short of what even many introductory music survey courses demand. The situation for scores online is even worse. Individual libraries continue to digitize

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⁴ And you still can’t get the Beatles online — electronically, yes – online, no.
⁵ Notably the efforts of Naxos (classical and jazz) and Alexander Street Press (classical, jazz, and world music).
substantial amounts of the public domain material. But while this includes many “classic” editions of the core of Western art music (Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, among others), it must omit almost all American popular music and music theatre from 1923 on and any twentieth-century art music published in the United States after that date (and potentially earlier for many European publications). The electronic music stand, while making some inroads, has not been widely adopted, possibly also due to the copyright issues. Thus, there is no large market for electronic performing editions—yet. Compared to the market for popular music, there probably never will be. While online music sellers have made some of this material available (selected popular and Broadway sheet music) to buy as downloadable pdfs, there is currently only one effort to digitize large amounts of copyrighted music, and again licensing issues have prohibited it from being large and complete enough to be truly useful. So until the date when these efforts can be seen as anything approaching what most music libraries maintain in their collections to support what is actually taught, there will be a need for music librarians to continue to mediate between students and faculty and library collections.

Regardless of when we reach that tipping point when music in all its current formats becomes mostly accessible online, music librarians will still have a vital role in delivering music to future library patrons. Their role as dispensers of low-level information may have already begun to disappear in favor of the

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6 Here one points to the various sheet music projects (JHU, Brown, Duke, UCLA) and the projects at Indiana (Variations) and Eastman (Request Public Domain Scores) and the IMSLP (International Music Score Library Project)—now part of the Petrucci Music Library.  
7 Alexander Street Press’s Classical Scores Library.
easily found article in Wikipedia, but other roles, some old and some new, must be strengthened or developed.

What today’s music librarians bring to the academic discourse is a deep knowledge of music publishing, music reference literature, and music copyright. Thanks to our diligent vendors and our own professional journals, we have access to a wide collection of what has been published and is still being published (still quite robustly) in scores, compact discs, DVDs, and monographs. While our users may not use them, our reference collections still contain a prodigious amount of bibliographic and music research information not yet available online. Our experience using these tools gives us access to many sources either not available online or not understood by the current generation of users. Our direct experience with issues such as performing rights, mechanical rights, synchronization rights, and music-specific portions of the law and licensing make us among the most knowledgeable copyright experts in our institutions. We are, many of us, performing musicians, practitioners of our craft, and thus intimately aware of the needs of our patrons. We are not and never have been merely dilettante collectors (as has been suggested by some).

Our knowledge of the literature of music both in its past and present manifestations provides us with the opportunity to teach. Teaching for music librarians can take many forms. In some cases required courses in music research techniques are taught by music librarians. In others the music librarian has between five minutes and an hour of class time to explain key concepts and techniques. In others we might be engaged in teaching notation software or
bibliographic management tools such as EndNote, RefWorks, or Zotero. But even in the occasional encounter, the music librarian has the opportunity to teach a faculty member a quick lesson on thematic catalogs or a grad student on the link between JSTOR and Project Muse or how to fool the clumsy OPAC into revealing which piano trios we have on hand. Many of us also bring to the table an understanding of scholarly method, which most undergraduates lack. For example, we must help to teach an understanding of plagiarism, an insidious problem among today’s students. How and why we provide readers of our arguments a path back to our source has become an especially important issue in the age of easily copied yet highly mutable web content. Still, as experienced and knowledgeable as we may be, we must continue to learn the new paradigms and theoretical concepts that continue to emerge as the field of music engages cultural studies, gender studies, and literary theory. Our field is constantly changing, and we must change with it.

Our knowledge as music librarians places us in a unique position to recommend collections for digitization and to collaborate with faculty and students on their creation, curation, and publication. This has, of course, already begun at many of our institutions. Not all of our institutions will have the depth of collections and digital infrastructure to perform these complex and lengthy processes in-house, but the beauty of digital collections is that their final location is everywhere, so even a collaboration with a local historical society to digitize their archive of a local nineteenth-century brass band, and use an outside vendor to perform the digitizing using local arts council funding, makes no less of a
contribution to the larger scholarly world. In every community, no matter how small, there are musicians, scholars, journalists, and simply enlightened amateurs writing about music or posting their own music and photos in blogs, on websites, with their own online magazines, most of which are currently “archived” on a “free” server somewhere. Many of these are worth saving—some for their special insight, others merely because they represent a point-of-view or a unique local style or subculture. Who is saving and cataloging these? Certainly the free server where they are posted is not. By creating agreements with the authors of these resources, they might be cataloged and preserved digitally in thematic research collections where similar materials may be added through linking, and essays and critical analysis might be added, becoming an online resource for future research.

In summary, the situation in the music library domain suggests that the all-digital library is still a long way off and that there continue to be opportunities for music librarians to become increasingly engaged with their faculty and students through teaching and curation.

**MLA counter statement:** Because music continues to be a vital cultural commodity and one that is still largely not online, music librarians skilled and knowledgeable in music’s publication and dissemination will remain positioned both to teach about music and its scholarly method and to collect and collaborate on the online publication of research collections in music.

(Quist)
Taiga “provocative statements”: Within the next 5 years...

Libraries will have abandoned the hybrid model to focus exclusively on electronic collections, with limited investments in managing shared print archives. Local unique collections will be funded only by donor contributions.

Library buildings will no longer house collections and will become campus community centers that function as part of the student services sector. Campus business offices will manage license and acquisition of digital content. These changes will lead campus administrators to align libraries with the administrative rather than the academic side of the organization.

Not long ago a senior library administrator asked how long I envisioned needing to continue purchasing printed scores. After all, she asked, our collection, one of the largest in the nation, already has a very comprehensive selection of scores and recordings of the works of major (and minor) composers studied in our School of Music. Moreover, we have had a longstanding digitization operation. “How many more copies of Beethoven’s symphonies will we need to purchase?”

This question came as a result of a request I had made for additional funds for replacement of scores that had been damaged or worn out. The initial response to that request had come from another administrator who asked if I was aware of just how many copies of Bizet’s Carmen we had purchased over the years, and how many we currently had. How could we possibly need more? Couldn’t we simply digitize what we have, and be done with the print scores all together? Moreover, in this era of laptops, and tablet pcs shouldn’t we simply be planning for the electronic music stand? These were all questions posed to me in response to my request for replacement funds.
Music librarians are accustomed to answering such questions. The thought of electronic collections is a fantasy that library administrators have thought about for many years now. With little thought, I was prepared to quickly call up the appropriate response from the top of my head like most any music librarian would. However, this time I had a new answer. Just a few months earlier we had an interesting request from one of our voice faculty members. A grammy-winning soprano, veteran of the worlds’ most prestigious opera houses, she was preparing to teach a new semester of “opera workshop,” a course in which students work on scenes from many different operas during the semester. The repertoire varies from semester to semester. She was upset to learn that, while we had many copies of the piano-vocal score of a particular Mozart opera published by Schirmer, we had only one copy of a recent Bärenreiter edition. She informed us that, if she “walked into the Metropolitan Opera, or Covent Garden with that Schirmer edition, she would be laughed out of the house.” She went on to inform us that our students must be looking only at the more recent Bärenreiter edition. Of course, we discussed that the students should be purchasing their own scores, but her point was well taken. Here was a work, originally published some two hundred years earlier, of which we had many copies and editions, yet, we were lacking sufficient copies of an important recent edition, or in her opinion, the only edition our students should be using.

Electronic Collections

The notion that libraries will focus exclusively on electronic collections or that collections will be funded by donor contributions simply isn’t realistic. First, it
assumes that the music publishing industry will move to an electronic distribution model. To date, that industry has not made any significant changes to move toward such a digital model. Even if the publishing industry changes dramatically in the coming years and musical scores are readily available in digital formats, the practicality of making them available, especially for practice and performance, will make even the most technologically advanced library struggle to effectively make digital scores available in a useful way. While the world of book digitization has developed page-turning applications to display digital books, the practical use of musical scores requires something very different. The early prototypes of electronic music stands, while interesting, are hardly useful in professional settings.

Despite the fact that the canon of Western art music is filled with works that are in the public domain, and thus ripe for digitization, like the Mozart example cited earlier, new editions will always be in demand by performers and scholars. Moreover, digitization of scores is still labor intensive and expensive, and donor funding is hard to acquire even for special purchases of highly sought after, unique items. It is foolhardy to think that donors will provide regular sources of funds to acquire new editions of Beethoven symphonies or Mozart operas.

**Searching vs. Finding**

Students and faculty have difficulty finding materials in our online catalogs. Musical materials in particular have long presented challenges to those searching our catalogs. The provocative statements suggest libraries will not
house physical collections, and only provide access to electronic collections. Therefore, unless the systems that provide access to these digital collections improve dramatically, students and faculty alike will continue to have great difficulty finding materials.

However, when everything is digital, the stakes will be higher. In the physical world many can still browse the shelves, and with a rough knowledge of classification, possibly find their way to the symphonies or operas and thus locate the item for which they are looking. In the digital world it will be “all or nothing” with regard to finding that needed item. As David Lasocki wrote in his 2000 article in *Notes* entitled “Reference”:

> How else has the electronic revolution changed music reference? If you know what you are doing, it has sped up research. (If you don’t know what you are doing, it has left you doing things like standing at a terminal typing “a=mozart” with two fingers, then spending two hours wading through the resultant five thousand entries.)

While the promise of technology leads the authors of the provocative statement to present a library that is more campus community center/computer lab than library, Lasocki’s simple example suggests that library users will need even more help navigating an exclusively digital collection. Thus, it is hard to imagine the library as a campus community center under the auspices of the administrative arm of the university. It should be noted, however, that even student centers are there to provide services to help students succeed. It seems logical, therefore, that this new library-student center that houses no physical

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collections would need to have a staff to support and train users how to search for and find materials in this new digital library. Will this be less costly than the current model of acquiring, cataloging, shelving, and circulating physical items?

**Administrative vs Academic**

The administrative infrastructure of an institution of higher learning is complex. The individuals who work in that part of a university are charged with responsibilities for budgetary oversight, legal and policy compliance, etc. Their skills in negotiating licenses would be welcome. However, to turn over the long-term supervision and planning of library activities to those not tied directly to the academic mission of the institution places libraries in the mode of cost center rather than service provider. Soon every expense needs to be explained and justified, not in light of the benefit to the curriculum, or to students and faculty, or the teaching and learning mission, but rather to a bottom line. While libraries currently evaluate all expenses with an understanding of the cost benefit, there are clearly times that the benefit to the academic mission, like buying yet another edition of a Mozart opera for which we already own many editions and copies, outweighs the cost.

Having worked for several years in a university IT organization, I was able to get an insight as to how services that are more aligned with “infrastructure” rather than teaching and learning get funded. Rightly, there is a strong desire to provide the service as inexpensively as possible and deflect costs to other units when possible. This often leads to duplication and inefficiency.
However, even working within the academic mission, such cost concerns create questions and inefficiency. Two years ago we purchased the complete set of *The Orchestra Musician's CD-ROM Library*, published by CD Sheet Music. Those familiar with this series know they come in cardboard sleeves, not in jewel cases. For long-term storage and preservation we wanted them to be shelved in the normal CD cases. As we were receiving some fifty discs at once we placed an order for extra jewel cases. Our library financial officer questioned the unusual expense. When explaining on the phone why we needed the extra cases, she wanted more information about what “orchestral excerpts” were. We explained that they were compilations of passages from the repertoire for each instrument that are frequently requested for auditions. This led the administrator to suggest this expense for both the jewel cases and the discs themselves should really not be the library’s but should belong to the music school, as this was a “career planning and placement” expense. I, of course, had to go on to explain that we have purchased orchestral excerpts for years in print form and this was indeed a library expense. But the point is a good one, the administrative wing, doesn’t really want to think about the curricular issues, but rather distribute (or deflect) costs whenever possible. Such an environment will only make it more and more difficult for librarians to provide appropriate materials for students and faculty.

The technological improvements of the last decade have been tremendously exciting. Keeping up with the advancements and fantasizing about the possibilities in the near term and long term is tremendously exciting. The authors of the provocative statements speak in generalities that omit the
importance of discipline specificity. While some academic disciplines will likely make use of technological innovations that will completely obviate the need for a library or traditional library materials, other disciplines will not be able to utilize those innovations at all, or at least not in the same way. It would be equally wrong to suggest that certain disciplines, in the sciences for example, should be prevented from moving in more technological service models, because music or art can’t adhere to a one-size-fits-all approach that would best serve science.

It is for this reason that the provocative statements, while achieving the goal of provocation, can be harmful. Administrators, both within libraries and more importantly at the upper levels of the university, read such statements with one eye toward the future and the other toward the bottom line in troubling financial times. They see these statements as a way forward. While the thought of eliminating print collections and the services required to process and maintain them is alluring, the total cost of providing digital collections can be quite expensive too. Reformatting, preserving, and providing appropriate access for students and faculty is not as simple as saving a file and placing a link on a webpage. The costs of working in that digital realm are very real, and potentially just as expensive as our traditional model. Therefore, music librarians must continue to find appropriate uses of new technologies that fit into their institutional culture and also continue to support traditional services and materials as needed by the students and faculty they support . . . as they done have for decades. As Lasocki summarizes in the aforementioned article:
I believe that, in this digital age, we need strong music reference service more than ever—at the reference desk, in the instruction room, or beating a path to a publisher’s door. We need more and better reference sources, whether they are formatted as books, databases, Web sites, or some newly invented medium of the future. Music reference librarians need time for training and development in that challenging but endlessly fascinating dance with users, computers, and reference sources.\footnote{Ibid., 610.}

**MLA counter statement:** In the coming years librarians will demonstrate that it is more cost effective, and better pedagogically to continue supporting traditional services and materials, in conjunction with new technological services and collections. The hybrid model will be further developed and emerge as the best way forward for libraries, especially music libraries. Librarians armed with new technological skills, and traditional subject expertise, working closely with technologists, will be uniquely qualified and suited to guide this development.

(Ponella)