Klaus Keil: RISM: Finding contributors in Latin America

Introduction (1)

RISM is the largest and only globally operating organization that documents written musical sources. (2) The International Inventory of Musical Sources -- Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM) -- aims for comprehensive documentation of extant musical sources worldwide. These documented primary sources are manuscripts (3) or printed music (5), writings (6) on music theory, and libretti. (7) They are housed in libraries, archives, monasteries, schools, and private collections.

RISM records what exists and where it can be found.

(8) In 40 countries around the world, one or more national RISM working groups participate in this project.
In total, about 100 people describe the musical sources housed in their countries. They transmit the results to the RISM Zentralredaktion in Frankfurt, which then edits and publishes the entries.

The results are published in (9) 53 printed books and in the (10) RISM online catalog. The latter contains today 1,062,789 records: 112,553 from series A/I and a part of B/I, and 950,000 music manuscripts. The descriptions we offer are largely from sources created between 1600 and 1850, but you will also find some records from before or after that time.

Even the aim to present records from all countries in our freely available online catalog has resulted in differing contributions. Participation depends on the number of historical sources in any given country and the effort that can be made to catalog them there. In Germany we have a large working group (independent from the Zentralredaktion) with seven full-time positions and this group has been active for more than 30 years. It is therefore not surprising that the German contribution to RISM is the biggest one. But
there are other countries too with big numbers: Italy with about 87,000 records, Great Britain with nearly 82,000, and the US with 52,000 records. The Czech Republic has nearly 44,000, Poland: 32,000, and so on. The number of records in RISM will increase sharply very soon because we are going to include data from other resources. We have just received data from the national library of Spain in Madrid, from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and others. Last year we signed a contract with the Italian ICCU (the Italian national union catalog) in order to exchange data and the process recently started with merging authority records for personal names. So I am optimistically looking forward to being able to offer in just a few years 1,500,000 records in the RISM OPAC instead of 1,063,000 today.

RISM initiatives beyond Europe and North America have taken us in recent years to Asia and South America. After establishing good contacts in South Korea, we continued with some interesting meetings in Beijing, Manila, and Taiwan. So the working group RISM-Chinese Language Region was founded in October 2015. My first visit to South America was about 20 years ago when I attended a conference at the University of Campinas in Brazil. We discovered that there was a database of musical sources made from records of the Laboratório de Musicologia do Departamento de Música da Escola de Comunicação e Artes da Universidade de São Paulo (BR-SPeCa). We got permission to enter the records from the database from the screen, which resulted in 127 records before the database disappeared from the Internet.

At the beginning of the 1990s a working group in Spain was founded. Soon the group started a translation of the RISM guidelines in Spanish, which were published as Normas Internacionales para la Catalogación de Fuentes Musicales Históricas in 1995. Supported by RISM, the group soon started visiting Latin American libraries to persuade them to collaborate with RISM. Today I have to say that the Normas were prepared using the guidelines from two cataloging programs ago, and they are only valid in a general way, not in detail. Especially the field structure is different because we have changed to a MARC21 standard. Please do not use these guidelines any longer. We are working on the translation of the current guidelines into Spanish and soon after into Portuguese.
A few years ago, our dear colleague John Lazos started his work on music collections in Mexico, mainly in the archives of churches and abbeys. Over 500 records from Mexico in the OPAC were made by him. He will report in the next presentation.

As we have realized in the last few years, there has been an increase in interest and activities in Latin American countries that involve cataloging historic musical sources. Brazil was first to have a working group: RISM Brasilia. In Mexico there are cataloging projects in Mexico City - the (11) Musicat online catalog of the Universidad nacional autónoma de México – and in Morelia (12), Zacatecas (13) and other places. There are projects in Santiago de Chile (14) and in Cuba, just to mention some of them. On the other side, there is a big interest on the side of the musicology in Europe in exploring the ways of cultural exchange and its objects, the repertory, and how the European music was adapted in Latin America and later how it came back to Europe. In June 2015 a first conference was organized at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz entitled Vokalpolyphonie zwischen Alter und Neuer Welt: Musikalische Austauschprozesse zwischen Europa und Lateinamerika im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert1 (Vocal Polyphony between old an new world: musical exchange processes between Europe and Latin America). Another conference in Mainz took place in September 2016 and was organized by the Zentralredaktion of RISM. The desideratum left by the first conference was the focus of the second one: we need much more knowledge of sources to be able to research the circumstances surrounding them.

(15) RISM has 1,165 records from Latin America in its online catalog: Brazil (459 records), Chile (91), Mexico (557), Uruguay (21), and Venezuela (37). Moreover there are source descriptions in the printed (16) RISM volume B/XV: Mehrstimmige Messen in Quellen aus Spanien, Portugal und Lateinamerika (Polyphonic masses in sources from Spain, Portugal and Latin America, ca. 1490-1630): Columbia (2 records), Guatemala (4), Mexico (10), and others.

(17) The first step in improving our knowledge is to learn more about institutions –
libraries, archives, etc., – that hold musical sources. Today we have RISM sigla for 98 libraries in 15 Latin American countries: Mexico (28), Brazil (17), Cuba (12), only to mention the biggest figures.

(18) We do not yet have information about libraries in Belize, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, and most of the smaller Caribbean islands.

(19) Coming back to our conference in Mainz: (20) Librarians and scholars from different countries were invited and presented their cataloging projects: (21) Leonardo Waisman from Argentina, Piotr Nawrot from Bolivia, Beatriz Magalhães Castro, André Guerra Cotta, and Pablo Sotuyo Blanco from Brasilia, Cecilia Astudillo Rojas from Chile, Egberto Bermúdez Cujar from Colombia, Miriam Escudero from Cuba, (22) and Edgar Alejandro Calderón Alcantar, Lucero Enríquez Rubio and John G. Lazos from Mexico. The presentations were recorded and will be soon available on YouTube. We will inform you through our website and social media once they are available.

The result of the conference was the establishment of an Latin American network in order to better communicate between the countries and to collect data at one place and exchange them with RISM.

(25) Let me just talk about one single presentation in particular, the one by Leonardo Waisman. In it Leonardo compared four catalogs. Three of them were recently published and a further one is in preparation: (26)

1. Aurelio Tello (and team): Catalog of the Sánches Garza collection (Mexico)
2. Javier Márín Lopez: Catalog of the polyphonic choir books of Mexico Cathedral (2012)
3. Piotr Nawrot: Catalog of the Moxos Musical Archive (Bolivia) (2011)
4. Leonardo Waisman: Catalog and edition of the Offertorio part books at the Archivo Musical de Chiquitos (Bolivia)

(27) All these catalogs were made by musicologists and display the special interests they have. The Moxos catalog, for example, describes the sources in a mission, where music was mainly used for the church. Therefore the liturgical function is widely recorded, as it
is also in other catalogs of sources with church music. The catalog of the polyphonic choir books gives detailed descriptions of a very rich collection and has a lot of space for concordances, divided into North and South American sources, Iberian sources, and European sources.

(28) All catalogs use their own fields and do not use any particular standard of description. In the Moxos collection more than 90% of the compositions are anonymous. Therefore the catalog lacks a field for composers.

The aim of these projects seems to be creating a printed catalog rather than producing data for an online catalog.

It seems to me that a challenge in Latin America is a lack of music librarians, and in church or private collections there are no librarians at all. (Cecilia Astudillo and some others are of course exceptions.) The general staff does not have the specialist skills to work with historic music manuscripts or prints. As a result, musicologists have to fill the gap. (As André Guerra Cotta reported, there is a law in Brazil that prohibits cataloging by non-librarians – but who else can do the work?)

The right way is not to exclude skilled people from cataloging but to organize the work in a way in which the result meets international library standards. RISM supports MARC21 and uses authority files for names and institutions that contain VIAF numbers. In general abbreviations should be used according to the list of abbreviations in the RISM guidelines. See also the help text in the RISM OPAC.

(30) Existing data can be transferred if they can be provided in MARC21 or MARCXML. Other formats are more difficult because we possibly would have to write a conversion program. Data without structure cannot be included.

(31) The best solution is to use the RISM cataloging program Muscat. It is a browser-based and system-independent program. We can provide it free of charge to contributors. The program is open source and can be adapted to fit needs of projects. But it guarantees that the data produced are exchangeable and sustainable. The aim of Muscat is to create
data but a printout for producing books is even possible.

(32) RISM data are open data. They can be downloaded for a local online catalog or for further projects, even for scholarly research. We offer them as linked open data and several standard resources like an SRU interface and PND Beacon files.

I hope I could show that RISM provides tools to support catalogers in their basic work and special interest and collaboration would be fruitful.

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