**Implementing a Music Scores Approval Plan at Carnegie Mellon University:   
A Retrospective Analysis 2010-2014**

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**Abstract**

In this article, the authors discuss the reasons for implementing a music scores approval plan and eventually ending it; the parameters of their plan; the method used to collect and analyze data to determine its effectiveness; how the approval plan impacted their budget, cataloging responsibilities, and space on the shelves; and whether or not it would make sense to reinstitute the plan in the future.

**Keywords:** approval plans, music scores,collection development, acquisitions, college and university libraries

**Introduction**

In the summer of 2009, we met to discuss the possibility of creating an approval plan for music scores. The music book approval plan budget was not being fully encumbered so we decided to use the overage to create a scores approval plan. At the time we did not know how long the scores approval plan would last. Five years later we ended the plan because the music book approval plan had grown and we needed to cover those costs. We thought it would be interesting to go back and evaluate the plan we set up and analyze the materials we received to find out how much those have been used. We created an Excel spreadsheet to collect and analyze the approval plan data (2010 through 2014) along with two years of firm order data (2010 and 2011) for comparison.

We had three goals in mind when setting up our approval plan for music scores: 1) spend out unused funds; 2) broaden the scope of 20th and 21st century composers added to the collection that were not being firm ordered; 3) automatically receive new materials published by Bärenreiter and Henle. We enlisted the help of Theodore Front Musical Literature, a music vendor, to assist in this endeavor. They have over forty years of experience working with libraries and we already had a current working relationship with them for firm orders.

Christine Clark, the president of Theodore Front, happily agreed to assist us with the approval plan. Several discussions via telephone followed as we set the parameters which included:

* A focus on operatic vocal scores, vocal repertoire, musicals, keyboard and chamber works for wind, brass and string for up to nine players.
* CDs were added as an auxiliary part of musicals.
* 20th and 21st century mainstream composers, alive and deceased, from Bärenreiter, Boosey & Hawkes, Breitkopf & Härtel, C.F. Peters, Hal Leonard (including AMP), Henle, Presser (and affiliates), Ricordi, G. Schirmer (and affiliates), Schott, and Universal.

We allocated $5,000 for the plan and received about 225 scores per year. Questions we set out to answer in this article are: Did we stay within budget? How much did the approval plan materials get used? How did this usage compare to firm orders? How did increasing the number of scores received impact cataloging and space on the shelves?

**Literature Review**

Each of the articles we looked at were informative in their reporting about vendors used in music score approval plans and factors that contribute to libraries either choosing to use them or not.

Daniel Zager’s 2007 article outlines the selection process for music materials. He discusses external factors (trends in pricing of materials, foreign currency exchange rates, and how long materials remain in print)1 and internal factors (type of institution, nature of curricula or communities, and matters of budget) that contribute to shaping collections.2 Zager points out that “an approval plan should provide the selector assistance in bringing in classes of materials that would be firm-ordered anyway.”3 While this was our intention in setting up our approval plan, it turned out that our experience in hindsight was one of being too open to a wide variety of materials that have not gotten the use we thought they might. There was an element of experimentation with our approval plan that served as a way of gauging the music faculty and student interests, and thankfully we had a firm order budget in place to cover requests by them.

In May 2008, Elizabeth J. Cox, Roger Cross, and John Ballestro submitted a music score approval plan survey to all Association of Research Libraries (ARL) institutions.4 Two surveys were created, one for libraries with music score approval plans, one for those without.5 Their results were published in late summer 2009. They report that 71% of respondents in libraries that do have an approval plan have their music scores located in a music library outside of the main library.6 That is not the case at Carnegie Mellon University. The music collection is located on the fourth floor of the main library (Hunt Library) interspersed with other arts materials (e.g., art, architecture, design, drama, photography). The authors also report that 88% of those libraries have more than 30,000 score titles in their collection and spend over $10,000 annually on scores.7 Our library spends just under $10,000 per year on scores and has about 18,000 score titles. Having just under a $10,000 budget for scores is probably the threshold for firm orders with only one person doing the music collecting in our library. After reading their article, we discovered that we are more in line with the libraries without an approval plan.

Keith Cochran’s 2011 article outlines four reasons to pay careful attention to approval plans: “avoiding duplications between the plans and firm orders; coordinating the plans with standing orders already in place; modifying them as needed to bring them more closely in line with the interests of the students and faculty; and finally monitoring the plans’ budgets in relationship to the other expenditures.”8 We did not have an issue with duplicates but could have improved monitoring the budget annually to stay closer to our $5,000 budget.

**Method of Data Collection and Analysis**

The reporting feature within our Library Management System (LMS) was not conducive to gathering data needed to analyze approval plan music scores. In April 2016, we created an Excel spreadsheet to pull together the information we needed to do our analysis. We set up the spreadsheet with the headings: Fiscal Year (FY), Order ID, Date Created, Author, Title, Publication Info., Call Number, Barcode, Checkouts, In-house Uses, and Last Activity [see Appendix A]. Order information was gathered from the acquisitions module by copying and pasting the order ID, date created, author, title, publication information, and call number. Then the call number was used to look up circulation information. It took six to eight hours to gather data for each fiscal year. After the master list was compiled, it was sorted alphabetically by the composer’s last name (to get a sense of which composers’ works were sent to the library) and then sorted again by number of checkouts (highest to lowest). Scores that did not circulate or get in-house use were highlighted to make tallying easier. Items that had one checkout were not counted as being used since those were checked out to the bindery and not to an actual person.

While it would be nice to review this data annually to see how the statistics change, there really is not an easy way to do that other than manually plugging barcode numbers back into the LMS and updating the stats in Excel. It would be beneficial to work with Library Management System vendors to improve the reporting capabilities to make this more of an automated process.

**Circulation Results**

Datafrom our analysisrevealed that on average 54% of approval plan scores circulated or had in-house use. Circulation rates were slightly higher in 2010 and 2011 since they had been on the shelves longer. We weren’t sure how that compared to our firm orders. Out of curiosity we prepared another spreadsheet for music score firm orders in fiscal years 2010 and 2011. We discovered that 87% of firm order scores circulated or had in-house use vs. about 60% of approval scores during those same years [see Figure 1].

**[Insert Figure 1 here]**

We anticipate that the approval plan percentages will change as time goes on. The longer the materials are on the shelves the greater chance they will be discovered and used. However, after seeing those numbers it is clear that adjustments would need to be made to a future scores approval plan. Materials we received and kept that were out of scope of our collection were works for saxophone, recorder, a Ready-to-Play series, and works with a juvenile audience focus. We have had very few saxophone majors over the years and would prefer to firm order standard works. The works for a juvenile audience could be used by students and faculty who teach lessons to youngsters, but it is not an area in which we actively collect. We did not receive a large number of these materials so the impact on the statistics above is minimal.

There was no pattern to the list of composers or types of works not circulating, so we looked at publisher data. What we found was that 52% of Schott and Henle scores had not circulated and 46% of Bärenreiter scores had not circulated. We had hypothesized that works by those publishers would have higher usage but that has not turned out to be true.

A list of Top 50 and Top 10 circulating scores was also assembled [see Appendix B]. Not surprisingly works for voice and solo piano were among the top 10 scores used. Samuel Barber, Beethoven, Leonard Bernstein, Chopin, Debussy, Rossini, Schumann, and Stephen Sondheim were the composers who landed in the top 10 list. Chamber works showed up in the Top 50 list along with voice and solo piano. It was a mix of concertos, trios, string quartets, a percussion quartet, a few works for flute, and solo instruments with piano.

**Lessons Learned**

Setting up an approval plan for music scores impacted our budget, cataloging responsibilities, and space on the shelves.

Budget

Although we allocated $5,000 per year for this plan, we ended up going over budget by an average of almost $1,100 each year. The overage could have been due to Theodore Front anticipating returns or annual budget increases; however, we did not return scores since we were open to experimenting with them and did not find duplicates with firm orders. The overage was not too significant and acquisitions was able to find funding to cover the difference.

Cataloging

The music librarian cataloged an average of 244 firm order scores per year between 2010 and 2014. Theodore Front sent an additional 225 scores per year on our approval plan during that timeframe, almost doubling the number of scores that needed to be cataloged. In some cases, original cataloging needed to be created or subject headings added to incomplete OCLC records which took more time.

Space

Increasing the number of scores added to the shelves by 48% over a five-year period definitely contributed to overcrowding. We are currently assessing the music scores collection on the shelves to create more space for future acquisitions. Data gathered for this article is helpful for determining what students and faculty are using on a regular basis.

**Conclusion**

Does it make sense for our library to reinstate an approval plan for music scores? The literature, the size of our institution, and budget all support not doing so. After reviewing all of this data we came to the conclusion that adding standing orders for Hal Leonard vocal materials and musicals might be a way to streamline our ordering process.

The allocation of more money to the music scores budget sounds like a great idea in theory but would not actually help our situation. We still only have one person cataloging music scores and a limited amount of space on the shelves, so working with what we already have and trying to streamline the process a bit (even in just one area such as voice) could be worth it to us. Should any factors changes in the future (e.g., space, personnel, budget) we could consider reinstating an approval plan for music scores with data to back up our profile decisions.

**Notes**

Daniel Zager, “Essential Partners in Collection Development: Vendors and Music Librarians,” *Notes: Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 63, no. 3 (March 2007): 567.

2 Zager, 566.

3 Zager, 570.

4 Elizabeth J. Cox, Roger Cross, and John Ballestro, “Music Score Approval Plans in Research Libraries: A Survey of Librarian Satisfaction with and without Approval Plans,” *Library Collections, Acquisitions, and Technical Services* 33, no. 2-3 (2009): 81.

5 Cox, Cross, and Ballestro, 80.

6 Cox, Cross, and Ballestro, 82.

7 Cox, Cross, and Ballestro, 82-83.

8 Keith Cochran, “Biz of Acq – Am I Still Selecting?,” ed. Michelle Flinchbaugh, *Against the Grain* 23, no. 4 (September 2011): 63.

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**Appendix**

A: FY 2010 Approval Plan Scores (Excel spreadsheet)

B: Top 50 Circulating Scores (Excel spreadsheet)

**Figure 1**