



Music in Italy: catalogues and cataloguing rules for an extraordinary heritage

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Abstract

The Italian historical music heritage is unique in the world: hundreds of thousands of printed scores but also a large mass of music manuscripts preserved in thousands of public, private and church libraries.

Current and retrospective cataloguing started on an international basis in the 19th century; Claudio Sartori created the national catalogue of music and in 1965 founded the Ufficio Ricerca Fondi Musicali of Milan Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense. National catalogues of printed and manuscript music were transformed in a database in 1986, that was fully integrated in the national library service in 2004, with the upgrade of the cataloguing system. The catalogue contains about 865,000 records of printed, manuscript or recorded music, and librettos.

The development of cataloguing rules and the MARC standards for music materials is parallel to the cataloguing activity, and as well coordinated within an international framework. In Italy a working group on music is collaborating with the national commission for the cataloguing rules, aiming to integrate the new general principles, adding examples and publishing specific rules; the main focus is now on and application manuals for music cataloguing, and on specific rules for uniform titles and music manuscripts.

Several digitisation projects have been realised and important collections are now available on the web, even if it's still not enough considering the amount of investments that preservation and valorisation of the Italian musical heritage requires.

Italian translation:

Il patrimonio musicale storico italiano è unico al mondo: centinaia di migliaia di musiche a stampa ma anche una grande quantità di manoscritti musicali conservati in migliaia di biblioteche pubbliche, private, ecclesiastiche.

La catalogazione corrente e retrospettiva è iniziata nell'Ottocento in ambito internazionale; Claudio Sartori ha creato il catalogo nazionale della musica e fondato nel 1965 l'Ufficio Ricerca Fondi Musicali della Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense. I cataloghi nazionali della musica a stampa e manoscritta sono stati trasformati in una banca dati nel 1986, integrata nel Servizio bibliotecario nazionale nel 2004, con la creazione dell'Indice2. Il catalogo conta circa 865.000 record di musica a stampa, manoscritta o registrata e di libretti per musica.

Lo sviluppo delle regole di catalogazione e degli standard MARC per i materiali musicali è parallelo all'attività di catalogazione ed è pure coordinato in ambito internazionale. In Italia un gruppo specializzato collabora con la Commissione nazionale per le regole di catalogazione, allo scopo di integrare i nuovi principi generali, aggiungendo esempi e pubblicando regole specifiche; attualmente l'attenzione è focalizzata sui manuali applicativi per la catalogazione musicale e su regole specifiche per i titoli uniformi e per i manoscritti musicali.

Infine si sono realizzati numerosi progetti di digitalizzazione e importanti collezioni sono ora disponibili nel web, anche se c'è molto lavoro da fare, considerando l'ammontare degli investimenti che la conservazione e la valorizzazione del patrimonio musicale italiano richiede.

The Italian historical music heritage is unique in the world: hundreds of thousands of printed and manuscript scores, preserved in thousands of libraries – from the largest and renowned collections of some national and conservatory libraries (like Turin and Venice national libraries, Modena Estense, Naples or Milan Conservatory) to the smallest and most remote private, church or public libraries, sometimes with almost the same fame, sometimes known only to scholars (like those in the abbeys of Novacella, Montecassino and Farfa, the municipal libraries in Ostiglia and San Gimignano, the churches of Vendrogno and Spello, the private libraries Borromeo or Sormani, all preserving invaluable bits of our history).

The reasons of this abundance and dispersion rely in the history of Italy itself: the history of a country that until 1861 has been divided into small states, with their courts and nobles that often found in feasts, music theatres and munificence towards the arts a reason of their existence; the history of the power of the Church, and of the chapels that flourished even in the smallest villages, with long lasting traditions, all with their favourite, sometimes world famous composers and music masters.

And music itself has done the rest: its message can be communicated with no barrier of language, so that everybody can understand and appreciate it without mediation, and a worldwide dissemination has always been easy, through oral or written transmission.

Conversely, music has always been subject to the fashion, and is difficult to write down (modern notation is less than 700 years old, but is used all over the world); music is expensive to print out, and despite such a large market the greatest part of the works still circulates only in manuscript: this has been the destiny of most church, theatre and orchestral works, that have never expected to sell enough to deserve printing: music manuscripts have thus been a valid substitute, and only the photocopy has finally replaced them!

Briefly said, except for chamber music and for piano or vocal scores in the case of opera, for centuries it has been much cheaper and simpler to copy music by hand than to print and sell it, facing the issues of a worldwide distribution, or even to order an “instant” manuscript copy than to buy a printed set of parts in a shop. This is why we still have such a large mass of music manuscripts in our collections.

While international current bibliographic catalogues of music date back to 1817, with the *Handbuch der musikalischen Litteratur* published by C.F. Whistling (mentioning all music printed in Germany and neighbour states, later continued as a monthly issue by F. Hofmeister), retrospective cataloguing started some 150 years ago, with the first bio-bibliographic catalogues of scholars like Robert Eitner, who published the *Bibliographie der Musik-Sammelwerke* in 1877 and the 11-volume *Biographisch-bibliographisches Quellen-Lexikon* in 1900-05, both listing the sources held by libraries disseminated in the whole world. Italy was naturally central in this research, and several catalogues of the main libraries were published in this period and in the first half of the past century.

Immediately after WW2 this effort received a new impulse, internationally with the foundation (through the joint initiative of the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Music Documentation Centers – IAML and of the International Musicological Society – IMS) of the Répertoire International des Sources Musicales – RISM, aiming at continuing Eitner’s work on musical sources all over the world, and nationally with the creation of a national card catalogue by Claudio Sartori, which in 1965 became the Ufficio Ricerca Fondi Musicali of Milan Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense. What distinguished this latter was the time limit, pushed forward for the first time to the year 1900 from the so far common 1800. The catalogue counts some 160,000 title-cards of printed music, 162,000 of music manuscripts, owned by any kind of library, and 26,000 of the international catalogue of Italian librettos, printed until 1800.

While the digitisation of the catalogue of manuscripts is fairly recent (it is accessible at <http://www.urfm.braidense.it/cataloghi/catalogomss.php>), the catalogue of printed music was converted in a database in 1986 – together with the titlecards produced in Italy for RISM and held by the Istituto di Bibliografia Musicale – providing the nucleus of the national online catalogue of music libraries: SBN-musica, accessible online since 1989 as a special search form in the OPAC (<http://opac.sbn.it/opacsbn/opac/iccu/musica.jsp>).

SBN-musica has grown thanks to the data uploaded from other major and minor cataloguing projects, until, in 2004, it has been fully integrated in the national library system SBN, acquiring the advantages of shared and current cataloguing. Music is almost 10% of the bibliographic records: on a total about 865,500 records of music materials, 529,500 of printed music, 190,500 of music manuscripts, 43,000 of librettos, 102.500 of sound recordings.

The inclusion of music in the general catalogue as a sort of prototype for other special materials has entailed a deep redesign of the central cataloguing system. The system itself is fairly flexible: it is thus possible to catalogue in a less detailed way or to add a large set of data that are indispensable to fully describe and access music materials, such as the music incipit, the musical form, the medium of performance (expressed in coded way, both synthetically and with the list of all the instruments of the orchestras and the choral voices), as part of a uniform title divided into several subfields. Highest level encoding includes links to all the cast and characters, bibliographic control on thematic catalogues, etc. Special maintenance projects have focused on major composers, like Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, with the control of all uniform titles and most bibliographic records.

The development of cataloguing rules and MARC standards for music materials is parallel to the cataloguing activity, and is coordinated as well within an international framework.

In 1957 IAML started publishing the *Code international de catalogage de la musique*, including rules for printed and manuscript music; in Italy a *Manuale di catalogazione musicale* appeared in 1979 as an appendix to the *Regole italiane di catalogazione per autori*, providing rules and examples for printed music and sound recordings, together with the Italian translation of the international rules for music manuscripts. The latter were replaced in 1984 by the rules provided in the *Guida a una descrizione catalografica uniforme dei manoscritti musicali*, modelled on the national rules for the description of manuscripts (that contain two large appendixes on liturgical and music manuscripts).

At present a working group on music cataloguing, established by ICCU (Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo Unico, the central institute for libraries and cataloguing), collaborates with the national commission for the revision of cataloguing rules discussing issues that are included in the general code and proposing specific examples. Several chapters concern music (e.g. the format of music, the plate numbers, the specific material designation, the sources of information, several aspects of the concept of work and expression, the uniform titles), but it is not always possible to reach the due detail in the general rules. The working group is thus producing publications developing spe-

cial topics, as well as an application manual for music materials in SBN. All materials produced are pre-published at the ICCU website, <http://www.iccu.sbn.it/genera.jsp?id=344>. The main focus is now on uniform titles and music manuscripts.

Uniform titles are widely used for music materials since the 1950's, initially for music manuscripts, as filing titles (most manuscripts in fact have fancy or no titles at all), later as identifying titles, indispensable to group under one controlled access works that have only generic titles, such as concerts, symphonies, sonatas, most sacred music, paraphrases, etc., presented in the documents in a variety of languages and styles. In these cases there is no way to establish an original title, and the only way to identify a work is to define an ordered set of elements (musical form, medium of performance, opus or catalogue number, key, etc.), formulated in the language of the bibliographic agency. SBN counts some 405,000 music uniform titles, thus the work is particularly urgent.

Besides establishing the criteria for the compilation of the uniform title for all the different musical forms and genres, the new code proposes a new punctuation scheme, in order to follow the prescriptions of the general rules.

Music manuscripts are an essential documentation source and must be included in the central catalogue, thus bibliographic records have to share the general data structure: this is why the first draft of the new rules was based on the ISBD, and was largely modelled on ISBD(A) and ISBD(ER), the latter particularly interesting because it considers non-published materials. Surprisingly enough, the application of the standard to music manuscripts did not present any particular issue. At present the norms for music manuscripts are under revision, according to the prescriptions of the chapter on non-published materials and following step by step all the articulation of the new national rules. The group is evaluating the possibility to propose its adoption within the international standard bibliographic description.

Italy is particularly active in the field of MARC standards. In the recent years the Italian working group on music in UNIMARC has collaborated with its French correspondent and with IAML in presenting proposals concerning music materials to the IFLA Permanent UNIMARC Committee. Thanks to this common effort, new fields or revisions have been adopted for Musical forms (UNIMARC 128), medium of performance (145), music incipit (036) and format of music (125).

Finally, in order to improve the preservation and the accessibility of the national music heritage, several digitisation projects have been realised and important collections are now available on the web. To mention just a few, Milan Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense has digitised its collection of historical librettos, including about 9,000 items, Naples Conservatory library the collection of manuscripts and autographs, and more than 3,400 items are already available online, Turin Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria the manuscripts of the Raccolta Foà Giordano, including the famous Vivaldi autographs, Rome Accademia di Santa Cecilia, has digitised 1850 manuscripts and printed scores pre-1830, Milan Conservatory library (one of the first music libraries undertaking a digitisation project in 1995, with the 280 Renaissance manuscript and printed items of the Fondo Santa Barbara) since 2007 is very active digitising its holdings of rare 19th century music and music periodicals. Most of these projects concur to the national digital library, the Biblioteca digitale italiana (<http://www.internetculturale.it/moduli/digi/digi.jsp>), that already gives access to the images of more than 15,000 music items.

Considering the extent and the exceptional value of the Italian music heritage and the responsibility that its preservation and valorisation imply, we are aware that much more should be done, but considering the amount of investments that this means, we may be proud of what we are achieving.