

To: Marcia Lei Zeng, Chair, IFLA Working Group on the Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Records
Athena Salaba, Co-Chair, secretary, IFLA Working Group on the Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Records

From: Music Library Association, Bibliographic Control Committee

Kathy Glennan, Chair

Damian Iseminger, Authorities Subcommittee Chair

Beth Flood, Subject Access Subcommittee Chair

Jim Alberts, MARC Formats Subcommittee Chair

Jenn Riley, Metadata Subcommittee Chair

Mark Scharff, Descriptive Cataloging Subcommittee Chair

Date: July 31, 2009

Subject: Music Library Association Response to "Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data" Report

The Music Library Association (MLA) agrees with and supports the comments submitted by the ALA ALCTS/CCS Task Force in their review of the IFLA Working Group's draft report of Functional Requirements for Subject Authority Data (FRSAD). In particular, MLA shares the concerns of the Task Force regarding the Working Group's dismissal of genre/form. The Working Group states, "Some controlled vocabularies provide terminology to express other aspects of works such as form, genre, and target audience of resources. These form/genre aspects describe what the item is rather than what it is about. The form/genre aspects are beyond the charge of FRSAR and are not covered in this model."

This prohibition appears even more arbitrary when the Working Group explicitly includes the concept of "ofness" in its conceptual model. "The FRSAR WG recognizes that any statement of the 'ofness' of a work is just as much a subject statement as any statement of the work's 'aboutness', and is just as likely (if not more so) to be the target of a catalog user's search. It is in this sense that 'ofness' is included in this conceptual model. For music-users especially, "isness" is also just as likely, if not more likely, to be the target of a user's search. Music users search for forms (e.g., Sonatas, Concertos, Hymns, etc.) and genres (Jazz, Country music, Hindustani music) regularly. "Isness" is of primary importance in providing access to music materials.

To dismiss one of the major ways that music users and other user groups search for and access works by declaring form/genre out of scope is short-sighted, and it perpetuates the historical confusion which arose from mixing subjects, genres, forms, and other categories without consideration of their innate differences. Genres and forms have been comingled with subject headings since the structure of the Library of Congress Subject Headings was first devised, and it is only until recently that efforts have been made to separate them. MLA believes the Working Group should make provisions and recommendations regarding genre/form vocabularies. Unfortunately the FRSAD report continues the pattern of ignoring form/genre issues rather than facing them in new and creative ways.

MLA also expresses concerns that the Working Group abandoned an attempt at modeling the subject universe. In spite of the fact that competing interpretations for model structure are possible, by choosing concept/object/event/place (or Ranganathan's model, or indeed any other option), the report would be able to delve deeper into the modeling that needs to be done and could provide a way forward for discovery systems. Unfortunately, without specifying a model, the report does not advance this cause at all.

That being said, MLA does find the thema-nomen model helpful and suggests that it could be extended to include other entities beyond subject. For example, Thema could be defined more broadly as anything (including physical objects, or

musical forms or genres), not just topical subjects. It is only in the application of the thema to a work that it acquires its specific duty, either as a concept specifying aboutness, ofness, or isness. For example, the thema signified by the nomen "Symphony" is a concept that can be used either as a subject (a text describing the development of the symphony) or as a form (a score of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony). The thema-nomen model can just as easily be modeled as:

WORK has as form THEMA has appellation NOMEN

is form of

is appellation of

In conclusion, MLA agrees with the ALA ALCTS/CCS Task Force that the Working Group, rather than ignoring the issue of genre/form, needs to either address it directly or provide perspective on the appropriate place for genre/form in the IFLA Functional Requirements models. Given MLA's recent partnership with the Library of Congress to create a genre/form thesaurus for musical works, we had hoped that the FRSAD report would include recommendations for genre/form authority data. As it stands now, the Working Group report, at least from the perspective of the music community, is incomplete.