Final Report of the CMC Music Genre/Form Task Force
to the Board of the Music Library Association

Letter to the Board

To: Michael Rogan, President
21 February 2016

Dear Michael and Members of the MLA Board,

I am pleased to present to you the final report of the Cataloging and Metadata Committee Music Genre/Form Task Force. This report reflects the discussions, research, and commitment of a group of dedicated MLA members and LC staff over a span of 7 years to develop a thesaurus of music genre/form terms to be integrated into the Library of Congress Genre/Form Thesaurus for Library and Archival Materials.

I am deeply grateful to the hard work and long term commitment (much longer than they expected!) of the task force members. They worked long hours to develop hierarchies and research terms bringing together the musical genres and forms of many of the world's cultures, in a way that we hope is as culturally sensitive as possible within a manifestly Western interpretation of the subject area. I also want to thank members of the Subject Access/Vocabularies Subcommittee who have lent their expertise, and who will be taking over further vocabulary development once the thesaurus is open for new terms.

I would particularly like to thank Beth Iseminger, Chair of the Task Force for the first 3 years, who brought the task force together and laid a strong basis for its work, and Kathy Glennan, then Chair of the Bibliographic Control Committee who created the task force. Finally, I would like to thank members of PSD at LC who participated in the discussions, and especially to Gerry Ostrove, who spearheaded this whole endeavor, and to Janis Young, who took over after Gerry's retirement and who proved to be both a wonderful instructor and patient listener. Finally a big thanks to Mary Mastraccio of Marcive, who converted the authority records to MARC.

Finally, I am grateful to all the MLA members that have shared their ideas, questioned our methods and choices, asked penetrating and intelligent questions, and otherwise helped us to improve and refine the vocabulary over the past few years.

Sincerely,
Nancy Lorimer

Members of the MLA Task Force

Nancy Lorimer, Chair (2013-2016)
Head, Metadata Department
Stanford University

Beth Iseminger, Chair (2009-2013)
Senior Music Catalog Librarian
Loeb Music Library
Harvard University

Ralph M. Hartsock
Senior Music Catalog Librarian
University of North Texas

Caitlin Hunter
Head, Recorded Sound Processing Unit
Library of Congress

Martin D. Jenkins
Head, Technical Services
Wright State University

Mark C. McKnight
Head, Music Library
University of North Texas

Casey A. Mullin
Music Cataloger
New York Public Library

Thomas Pease
Cataloger, Recorded Sound Processing Unit
Library of Congress

Karen A. Peters
Catalog Librarian
Bates College

Sheila Torres-Blank
Music Catalog Librarian
Texas State University

Hermine Vermeij
Team Leader, Subject Specialists & Music
Cataloger
University of California, Los Angeles

Members of the Policy and Standards Division, Library of Congress

Janis Young
Senior Cataloging Specialist & Genre/Form Coordinator

Libby Dechman
Senior Cataloging Policy Specialist

Maggie Kruesi
Cataloger, American Folklife Center

Maarja Vigorito
Metadata Specialist

Contents

Introduction

The MLA-CMC Genre/Form Task Force was established by the MLA Board of Directors in 2009, initially for a one-year term. The term was later made open-ended, with the term ending once the Task Forces' task was completed.

The Task Force was charged with the following:

> The MLA-CMC Genre/Form Task Force will review the genre/form and medium of performance lists posted by the LC Policy and Standards Division (PSD) on their genre/form website. The group will suggest additional terms from LCSH, from other established lists (e.g., the MLA Types of Composition list, the Ethnographic Thesaurus), and from reference sources. Suggestions for genre/form and medium of performance terms will also be solicited from the MLA membership at large. The Task Force will vet the terms suggested by its members and by the MLA membership and will forward these terms on to PSD for possible inclusion in the genre/form and medium of performance lists. The second phase of the project will include working with PSD to establish syndetic structures for each list and to collaborate on coding and other issues, including making MARBI proposals if necessary. The final phase of the project will involve establishing training procedures, both for creation of genre/form/medium authority records and for practical application of the new terminology.

The first part of this report was written by Beth Iseminger, who chaired the Task Force for its first three years. The rest is written by Nancy Lorimer, who took over as Chair when Beth resigned to concentrate on leading the Cataloging and Metadata Committee.

Phase 2: Developing the Initial Hierarchy

Methodology

Once we had a preliminary set of upper level terms, individual members of the task force selected one of these terms and proceeded to add narrower terms in a thesaurus structure, using LCSH as a preliminary guide. The terms were listed on individual spreadsheets, with the full hierarchy for one term on each line. Once we had completed this, the spreadsheets were combined to form one large spreadsheet for analysis of the resulting hierarchy. Polyhierarchies were noted, as were places where the hierarchy was insufficient or conflicting. We filled out the hierarchies when possible, and noted existing terms that had conflicting BTs or were causing conflicts for further discussion.

Results

Spreadsheet analysis and later discussions resulted in an overhaul of the top terms and a number of their direct NTs. Both Instrumental music and Vocal music were the first to be dropped as top terms. Their status as genre/form terms were in doubt from the beginning of the project, and it became evident that their presence caused more problems than they solved. First, they greatly increased the number of terms that were polyhierarchical, and fairly often ended up as a third BT to a term. Such

intense polyhierarchy suggests a problem with the term choice, and can negate the entire structure of the hierarchy. It also seemed the presence of a term such as "Instrumental music" gave logic to the idea of "Clarinet music" or "Percussion music", which had already been judged to be medium of performance terms. We did briefly consider the terms "Instrumental forms" and "Vocal forms", but in the end, these did not work either.

The resulting working group of top terms became as follows:

Music	Art music
	Dance music
	Dramatic music
	Folk music
	Popular music
	Sacred music
	Songs
	World music

The task force recognized that "World music" was going to cause us problems, since everyone seemed to have a slightly different idea about what it was. We also kept the term "Occasional/Functional music" as a possible contender.

We also began to drop terms that were simple combinations of broader terms (e.g., Sacred songs), since they introduce restrictions that cause conflicts for NTs, and are not considered good thesaurus structuring. Some we left (e.g., Folk songs), because the terms are so prevalent in everyday speech.

With a basic hierarchy structure, the task force was then able to move on to creating records for each term, based on the LCSH record when present. Analysis of the hierarchy was found to be a reiterative process, with everything up to top terms being reviewed and revised as the task force explored the hierarchies more closely.

Phase 3: Developing records for each term

Art music, Folk music, Popular music
These three terms are very commonly use to subdivide music into broad genres or styles. Their definitions, however, can be very challenging. In LCSH, the term "Music" refers both to all music in general and specifically to Western classical music. The task force was determined from the beginning to correct this bias as much as possible, with the addition of "Art music" as a top term. However, we also needed to counter a longtime, if lessening habit, of categorizing all music outside of Western classical or art music as folk music, and to acknowledge the fact that not all cultures assert a boundary between art and folk music. Since these terms were BTs to a large percentage of the hierarchy, the task force worked on scope notes that took into account the literature on these terms, as well as the need to guide catalogers in choosing the terms for all musics. These definitions in turn, resulted in further shuffling of the hierarchies as some NTs no longer fit the definition of the BT.

The scope notes for the three terms and the encompassing term "Music" are as follows:

Music
Music from any tradition that is not of a more specific genre/form.

Art music
Music composed in any classical, learned, and/or court tradition, in cultures that have a division between art and folk music. For popular and folk music in cultures that distinguish it from art music see Popular music; Folk music, or a subgenre of either.

Folk music
Locally or regionally traditional music that was originally developed in performance and aurally transmitted in community contexts, and for music composed stylistically and/or ideologically within these traditions.

Popular music
Musical works composed for mass appeal and usually dependent on mass media for transmission to large audiences.

The Task Force then began creating records for each term, starting with Popular music, the hierarchy for which was best developed in LCSH, and moving on to Art and Folk music, noting when a term probably would belong to one of the other hierarchies as well. Members updated and augmented existing citations and provided new ones when none existed, and otherwise adapted LCSH records to the LCGFT hierarchy. For new terms, required by the hierarchy but not in LCSH, members created new records, with cross references, citations, and scope notes when required.

Other top terms

Work on Art, Folk, and Popular music resulted in yet another rethinking of our group of top terms. Chants, for instance, had been a narrower term to Art music, yet it no longer seemed to fit the definition. Then again, the notion of functional or occasional music kept coming up—music for which the genre was fully defined by how the music was used. There were also sets of terms which did not seem to fall under any of our top terms. These included terms that described types of independently issued accompaniments, musical arrangements, medleys, and teaching pieces; formats of notated music; and some individual terms (Humorous music, Glitch music). So again the top terms were revised with the following final results:

Music   Accompaniments (Music)
        Arrangements (Music)
        Art music
        Chants
        Dramatic music
        Folk music
        Functional music
                Dance music
                Event music
        Glitch music
        Humorous music

> Medleys (Music)
> Notated music
> Popular music
> Sacred music
> Songs
> Sound art
> Teaching pieces (Music)

Sound art, while included here, has not yet been approved by LC as of writing of this report.

Major issues & discussion points

Definition of genre/form

Defining what is and what is not a genre/form proved at times to be difficult, especially when the task force was working from a vocabulary (LCSH) in which terms had already been in use as genre/form terms but did not necessarily fit the LCGFT definition.

The largest group of terms this affected were terms that were named for the text that the music supported. According to our instructions, such terms were not genre/forms. But many are in regular use in LCGFT, particularly in the realm of sacred music—Magnificat (Music), for instance. Even individual psalms are named in LCSH. Some compromises were made here to cater to the needs of musicians. While the names of individual psalms are not part of LCGFT, the general term "Psalms (Music)" is included, as well some terms whose names have become more generic genre terms, such as "Requiems". It should be noted that task force members did not always agree with this proscription of terms named for their texts—a common text has a tendency to create similar form in a musical work— but in general, we followed the LC rule.

Similarly, there was a large amount of discussion about various terms that had been applied as genre/form terms in the past, but seemed to some to be more topical in nature. The group of terms most affected by this issue, has been various song types—Protest songs, Revolutionary songs, Death songs, War songs, etc. And then there is the LCSH heading "Topical songs"—is this a genre? Decisions on these terms have been mixed. "Love songs" went through without question, but "Death songs" remains an issue. With the recent redefining of genre/form terms by the Library of Congress, resolving this issue may become easier.

Precoordination vs. Postcoordination of Compound terms

A difficult aspect of thesaurus development is the use and control of compound terms. Compound terms, which combine words that "are bound together as lexical units", are acceptable in thesauri, but only when the term expresses "a single concept or unit of thought, capable of being arranged in a genus-species relationship within a hierarchy or tree structure."[i] Deciding whether something is a single lexical unit, however, is not always that obvious, and the task force did not always agree.

Thesaurus structure also frowns upon a compound term in which the modifying term simply subdivides the original term, rather than creating an independent lexical unit. Thus, a term such as "Sacred songs" should not be used, but rather split into two terms "Sacred music" and "Songs". Avoiding such simple compounds also has the benefit of simplifying what can become a highly complex hierarchy.

These guidelines, however, are recommendations and not mandatory. If a term is in very common use, one might choose to use a non-recommended compound term. The task force did this with the term "Folk songs", but not with other similar terms. This has caused other problems, namely that users don't understand why there are not also "Popular songs" and "Art songs", and their reasoning is logical. Adding all these layers of hierarchy, however, can increase complexity and reduce usability. Choices and compromises are always necessary.

World music

World music is a term one hears a lot, particularly in the music marketing sphere. It is also a term many music catalogers also have found to be useful. However, the problem was how to define it and where to place it within the hierarchy. Originally we had it as a top term, but in our initial hierarchy (developed individually by top term), almost all the NTs of World music were also NTs of Popular music, Folk music or both. Once we started exploring the literature for definitions, our difficulties increased. We could find no authoritative definition, and those we did find were either so all-encompassing as to be useless or were in conflict with one another. We also found our own working definitions of the term as catalogers differed, and did not have any support from our sources. The one thing we could agree on was that it was a useful term! This issue is not resolved; World music remains in LCSH, but it is not yet, if ever, part of LCGFT.

Phase 4: LC assessment, Conversion to MARC records & Community assessment

The task force's preliminary headings list, with records, was submitted to the Library of Congress in August 2014. Janis Young and Libby Dechman then vetted the lists—accepting terms as is, asking for clarifications or further research, rejecting a few. Some groups of terms were set aside for later consideration—genre terms for performing arts (Sound art, various dramatic genres) or that conflicted with terms in the Literature hierarchy that was also in development. Many of these terms have since gone through, but others remain.

Once there was a final list agreed on by LC for preliminary publication, they were ready to be converted to MARC. This was done by Mary Mastraccio of Marcive, who had generously offered to do this conversion for the music and literature domains at no cost to us. Once the records were converted and detected errors cleaned up, we moved to the final step of community assessment.

The records were made available to the broader cataloging community through various email lists and the Library of Congress website. Feedback was collected over the space of a month by the task group and LC, and some vigorous debates took place, some of which resulted in changes to terms or the hierarchy.

Outcomes

Publication of the Vocabulary as part of LCGFT

On February 15, 2015, the Library of Congress published a list of approximately 560 genre/form terms for musical works submitted by the Genre/Form Task Force. Since then, approximately 40 more terms have been added or reworked. Approximately 50 are left to consider. These last should move faster, since the Library of Congress has now completed the initial publication of Religion and Literature terms in LCGFT and the Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms (LCDGT), all large sets of terms.

Best practices document

The Genre/Form Task Force and Vocabularies Subcommittee prepared a document providing best practices for using music genre/form terms in the interim period between the release of the terms and the publication of best practices for LCGFT in general in the forthcoming Library of Congress genre/form manual. It is available on the MLA website at:

http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.musiclibraryassoc.org/resource/resmgr/BCC_Genre_Form_Task_Force/BestPractices150608.pdf

Presentations

Task force members have given number of presentations about music genre/form terms over the last few years, to both publicize them and promulgate best practices for their use. The following is a list of the more formal presentations:

What It Is! Music Genre/Form and Medium of Performance Terms in the Future of Music Subject Access. Presentation, MLA, February 16, 2012, Dallas, TX. Beth Iseminger, Mark McKnight, Hermine Vermeij. Slides: http://bcc.musiclibraryassoc.org/BCC-Historical/BCC2012/MusicGenreForm2012.ppt

LCMPT/LCGFT Training. 4-hour workshop given at MOUG annual meeting, Denver, 2015. Beth Iseminger, Kevin Kishimoto, Nancy Lorimer *(in absentia)*, Casey Mullin, Thomas Pease, Hermine Vermeij, Janis Young. Abstract at: http://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/mpage/mla_2015_abstracts; slides at http://musicoclcusers.org/recent-meetings/2015-presentations/

Exploring a Faceted World: discovering music resources using medium of performance and genre terms. Presentation, MLA 2015. Beth Iseminger, Kevin Kishimoto, Nancy Lorimer *(in absentia)*, Casey Mullin, Hermine Vermeij. Slides: https://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/resource/resmgr/MLA_2015/Exploring_a_Faceted_World-f.pptx; Video: http://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/mpage/mla_2015_media

LCGFT for Music: Library of Congress Genre/Form terms for Music. Presentation, ACIG meeting, ALA Annual, June 28, 2015. Nancy Lorimer. Abstract & slides available at: http://connect.ala.org/node/242710

Coming to Terms with the New LC Vocabularies: Genre/Form (Literature, Music, General), Demographic Groups, and Medium of Performance. Presentation, ALA Annual, June 29, 2015, San Francisco, CA. Adam Schiff, Hermine Vermeij, Janis L. Young. Slides: http://alaac15.ala.org/files/alaac15/Coming%20To%20Terms.Combined.pptx

Introduction to Music Medium of Performance and Genre Vocabularies. Webinar, October 28, 2015. Nancy Lorimer, Casey Mullin, Hermine Vermeij. (part of the *MLA Webinars* series). Slides: http://www.slideshare.net/ALATechSource/mla-workshop-introduction-to-lcs-music-medium-of-performance-and-genre-vocabularies

Ongoing and Future Tasks in the Music Genre/Form Hierarchy

While the stated work of the Genre/From Task Force has been completed and the group dissolved, there are some remaining issues to be resolved. These include:

Completion of initial vocabulary term submissions

Shepherding through the approval process terms that were on the original list that have not yet been approved or were initially rejected. These include a number of "performing arts" terms, terms lacking enough information for evaluation, and basic disagreements over whether a term constitutes a genre/form. With the disbanding of the task force, this final work will be carried out by Nancy Lorimer, in her role as Music SACO coordinator in collaboration with Janis Young.

Integrating music vocabulary with that of other domains in LCGFT

Integrating the music terms with vocabularies of other domains. Since subject domains in LCGFT were developed by separate groups, there is a need for integrating the terms through common broader terms when applicable. This work is being done primarily by the Library of Congress with input from Nancy Lorimer.

Integrating headings approved in LCSH that are appropriate as genre/form terms

Integrating newly approved subject headings that are genre/form terms. Since there is a temporary moratorium on catalogers suggesting new genre/form terms, new terms that can be genre/form may be submitted as subject headings. These need to be evaluated individually for inclusion in LCGFT.

This has already been taking place, with new terms being included in the list of terms from our original lists that had not yet been published. Nancy has been doing this by either picking terms from the *Music Cataloging Bulletin* or through individual emails addressed to her. At some point, however, we need to look back at LCSH and see if any have been missed.

Defining the relationship of LCGFT & LCSH, and revising LCSH

With the publication of LCGFT terms, there are now a large number of duplicate terms in LCSH, some of which are only usable as genre terms, some of which may also be used as subject headings. At some point, it will need to be decided what will happen to those terms and whether LCSH should be heavily revised.

There is also a need to reconcile some of the terms in LCSH and LCGFT. In some cases, a different term was selected for LCGFT; in some cases changes to LCSH that reflect more current thinking did not make it to LCGFT. Some of these will likely be part of the work of the Vocabularies Subcommittee for some time to come.

Special projects for particular groups of terms

Certain groups of terms presented a level of difficulty that requires individual attention by small task groups, possibly with specialized knowledge. These include: Part songs; Japanese art music; harmonization with the Sound Recordings hierarchy; "experimental" music; and the review of several terms from questions coming out of email discussion lists or changes in LCSH.

Retrospective conversion of LCSH terms to LCGFT & LCMPT

Automated derivation of genre/form and medium of performance terms from legacy data in LCSH in bibliographic records. The MLA Vocabularies subcommittee has already done a fair amount of work on this, working with Gary Strawn of Northwestern University, to develop an automated process that can be applied to the bibliographic records.

LCSH Cleanup & Reorganization

With the publication of LCGFT, it remains to be decided what to do with genre/form terms in LCSH. A large percentage are necessary for the formation of subject headings about genres (e.g., Music—History and criticism; Music—Analysis and appreciation), so genre terms cannot simply be removed. An overall analysis of the vocabulary and how to remove pure genre terms is probably necessary.

LC Genre/Form manual

The Library of Congress recently released a draft version of the new *Genre/Form Terms Manual* (available at: https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCGFT/freelcgft.html). The Music section (J 250) is not yet completed. Once it is, the Vocabularies Committee will need to revisit the interim best practices, and decide a. whether it is still necessary; and b. if yes, to revise it as necessary to comply with the new manual.

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[i] *Guidelines for the Construction, Format, and Management of Monolingual Controlled Vocabularies.* ANSI/NISO Z39.19-2005 (R2010). http://www.niso.org/apps/group_public/download.php/12591/z39-19-2005r2010.pdf.Part 7, Compound terms, p. 36-41.