

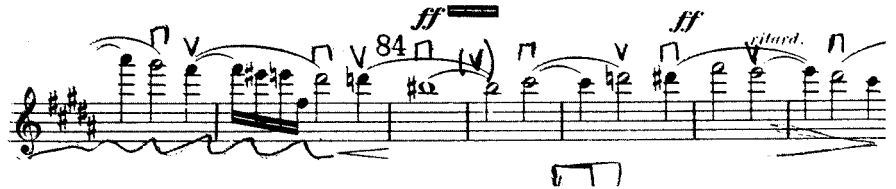
# Crisis manager

An orchestral librarian's responsibilities range from cataloguing music to dealing with last-minute emergencies.

Marcia Farabee talks to **Pierre Ruhe** about her role as head music librarian of Washington's National Symphony Orchestra

I am responsible for every note, on every page, of every single piece the orchestra plays. Contrary to what some imagine, this job entails far more than the reshelving and cataloguing of sheet music. My assistants and I are really music preparation people: we do all the hands-on preparation of music for the entire orchestra. We're musicians who handle business transactions, edit, copy and, yes, we do shelve and catalogue the music.

Our responsibilities begin before the music is even in the library. Once the conductor has planned his or her repertoire (and selected an edition), I set about purchasing the orchestral parts. If the composition is still under copyright protection, then renting a full set is the only choice. Although most conductors arrive with their own score in their pocket, we purchase one for the orchestra's collection anyway. Its holdings now exceed 1,400 titles. In addition, we pay the copyright licence fees and at this stage there can be a lot of negotiating with publishers and rental libraries. When searching for out-of-print music, I drive across town to the Library of Congress to explore its vast holdings. Just for acquiring the music itself, I manage a yearly budget of about \$230,000.



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When the thick bundle of orchestral music arrives on my desk, the real work begins. The strings require far more time to prepare than any of the other sections. Once the concertmaster and section leaders have been consulted, we pencil their bowings and edits into every part. A new set of string parts can take up to 30 hours of preparation. This involves inspecting each part – note by note – against the master score. You'd be surprised by the number of errors we find, even in long-established editions. We also ensure the convenience of each page turn and photocopy as needed to simplify the situation. If everything goes according to schedule, we have all this completed well before the first rehearsal.

For a librarian, effortless music reading is essential. Knowing what it's like to turn pages is also crucial. I know of some orchestra librarians who have Library Science degrees, but that alone is insufficient training – I studied the violin and viola before playing with the Kennedy Center Opera House Orchestra. My career as librarian started when I helped out during a crisis. I liked it and began working part-time. After a few years I was appointed head music librarian.

Through talks I give at the American Symphony Orchestra League meetings, I try to raise the librarian's profile. In many orchestras the librarian is incredibly overworked because the administration simply doesn't realise what's required. When speaking to orchestra managers, I give them ten tasks and problems – the sort of things that come up simultaneously in the last five minutes before a concert – and ask

them to prioritise the list, addressing each issue and suggesting ways to solve the problems. Most of them have no idea of all the responsibilities involved. Their poor librarian!

Perhaps crisis management should be part of the job description too. A few years ago, about ten minutes before the start of a rehearsal, Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos, at the time our orchestra's principal guest conductor, announced he wanted some 'corrections' made to the last movement of Beethoven's Symphony no.7. Even with the normal starts and stops in rehearsal, I knew there wouldn't be more than 45 minutes for the changes to be put in place. In addition, the players were using the music! I had to work fast, before they reached the final pages.

Frühbeck's 'corrections' required, among other things, that in certain passages the violas double the clarinets and later that the first and second violins play in unison. I began by writing out the notes, transposing the clarinet part into alto clef and cutting the paper into thin slips, labelling them as I went along.

The transcribing complete I tiptoed onto the stage, armed with a roll of tape, just as the orchestra started the fourth movement. It was awkward, but the players realised what was happening and were laughing to themselves as between sections I opened each part on the stand, found the exact spot and taped the slips of paper into place. The whole job was finished just as the driving Allegro con brio reached the corrected measures, and not a single note was missed. If the players don't have to think about our work then we've done our job. □