

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM AN ORCHESTRA LIBRARIAN

by Marcia Gittinger

It has been a pleasure for the Major Orchestra Librarians Association (MOLA) and myself to present some food for thought to our sister organizations. As you will recall, previous articles have focussed on the role and needs of the orchestra librarian, on performing licenses and copyright information, and on commissioning and consortium agreements. This article will address specific concerns that have been relayed to me.

1. *My music director insists that everyone has his/her own practice part for each piece, even rentals. How should I cope with this?*

First of all, this is a more complicated question than it appears. The issue of photocopying is really tied into concerns about individual preparedness and musicianship. Every conductor wants his group to play as well as possible, but time constraints usually get in the way. Consequently, some organizations think that if the librarian makes enough copies of everything the problems will recede. Copying and storing public-domain music becomes simply a matter of the volume of paper and of the hours needed to get the job done. Rental music is another issue. While "fair use" allows you to photocopy music for individual practice, those parts must not be used in lieu of rental parts in a performance, and they must be collected and destroyed following their use. While you can request that a publisher send you additional wind sets and string parts, there will be an additional charge for these extra parts, and you will have that many more rental parts to keep track of. I would apprise the publisher of your needs and ask if they want you to return any photocopies to them. Additionally, you should ask your principal players to indicate problem passages, thereby eliminating the need to copy everything. Finally, string players need to learn to share their music! If the principals and conductor have done their work in a timely manner, the library can prepare the books with enough time left to practice them!

2. *I can never get the principal strings to bow their music right away. By the time the parts come back, I am way behind schedule.*

Sad to say, this is not unique to small-budget orchestras. Some orchestras have a section "bower" who will mark all the subsequent parts. Other orchestras leave it to the library staff. In either case, I would recommend giving your concertmaster a score to bow (so he/she can see what everyone is doing) and dictating a return date. After that, the other principals can finish off their individual parts.

An alternative is to have the principals and conductor meet for a "play-through." While this may put more pressure on the principals, it will also save both library and rehearsal time, as the key people will have already made their decisions. This can be particularly effective if you have any tugs of war going on within the strings. Regardless of how you approach this problem, be sure everyone (including management) is aware of your time frame.

3. *I think I'm doing a good job here, but I'd like to learn more about orchestra librarians and the "tricks of the trade." Where do I go?*

Congratulations! Confidence is important to doing a job well. Have you talked to your music director and executive director? Have you made suggestions to them and kept them informed of your needs? Communication is vital. I would also encourage you to subscribe to *Marcato*, an informative MOLA quarterly edited by Nancy Bradburd of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Consider attending the League's library seminars to hear presentations by MOLA members. Finally, visit the library of the largest orchestra near you—spend a day and watch, listen, and absorb!

Again, I thank you for allowing MOLA to provide some insights into one of the hidden parts of your orchestra. Please feel free to contact me in the future if I (we) can be of any help.

Anyone interested in becoming a member of MOLA should write a letter of interest to:

Marcia Gittinger/MOLA  
c/o National Symphony Orchestra  
The John F. Kennedy Center  
for the Performing Arts  
Washington, DC 20566-0002

Good luck and good music-making!

=p

*Marcia Gittinger is Librarian of the National Symphony Orchestra and President of the Major Orchestra Librarian's Association.*

[part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#)

[back to The Press Room](#)