SOUND RECORDINGS

By Stephanie Bonjack and Kirstin Dougan Johnson

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The current state of audio collecting in libraries is shaped by three interrelated phenomena: the changing media distribution landscape, evolving patron expectations and behaviors, and institutional missions that struggle to strike a balance between preservation and access. None of these phenomena are new to libraries, but the rapid changes of the first two in the recent decade have required libraries to think especially critically about paths forward for collecting media. In this article, we will consider how we got here, survey the current landscape, and provide some thoughts for how we might work as a profession to advance our efforts in media collecting.

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) maintains a database called "US Recorded Music Revenues by Format," and it stretches back to 1973.[1] The visualization of this database looks like a series of waves, each representing a sound format entering the market, gaining popularity, only to be overtaken by the next new thing. So it goes with LPs, cassettes, CDs, digital downloads, and streaming services: one after another, each pushing the next format forward.[2] Music sound collections in libraries have followed this wave for many decades, with a slight delay, always a little behind the curve as we adapt to new technologies. Music library professionals now find ourselves in a unique moment within this series of waves, as there is now a significant amount of content that libraries cannot acquire, preserve, or share.

This moment in time was telegraphed over a decade ago by D. J. Hoek, in his article "The Download Dilemma."[3] It was already becoming clear in 2009 that music libraries were at a crossroads, as new content was being released on digital platforms intended for individual users, not libraries.

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1. "U. S. Sales Database," U. S. Sales Database, 2023, https://www.riaa.com/u-s-sales-database/.

2. For a delightful animation of this data, see: James Eagle, "Animated Chart: The Rise and Fall of Music Sales, by Format (1973–2021)," Visual Capitalist, 13 January 2023, https://www.visualcapitalist.com/cp/visualized-the-rise-and-fall-of-music-sales-by-format/.

3. D. J. Hoek, "The Download Dilemma," American Libraries Magazine, 27 July 2009, https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2009/07/27/the-download-dilemma/.

He advocated for library associations to proactively engage the recording industry so libraries would continue to have a hand in the preservation and dissemination of recorded sound. Tsou and Vallier chronicled their attempts to do just that in 2014.[4] Sadly, industry professionals were unresponsive, and the effort failed. Now, in 2023, the number of platforms has proliferated, and the dilemma has remained constant. To be a music librarian collecting audio is to navigate an ever-exploding universe of platforms, some marketed to libraries, others to consumers, and some to both. There is also content released directly by artists in streaming and downloadable forms, in addition to the continuation of hard format releases on CD and LP. Most born-digital music is available to consumers through single-user licenses, to the exclusion of libraries and their patrons.

These changes have brought about the end of siloed video and audio, which is transforming collections and the ways in which we find and evaluate music. To many, this is a boon. When given a choice, patrons and consumers will opt for online content, particularly video, especially if it seems more convenient than other options. Kirstin Dougan Johnson's 2012 survey demonstrated this in the pervasive use of YouTube in both teaching and research among music teaching faculty.[5] Watching, rather than just listening to, a jazz legend like Nina Simone perform in concert, is a multi-sensory experience not easily replicated by audio alone.

For those institutions able to afford it, there are video platforms offering content not available anywhere else that give patrons a front row seat to the most prestigious opera companies, orchestras, theater companies, and jazz clubs in the world. And yet, there are still venues in which libraries cannot accompany their patrons, and that is the ever-expanding shared spaces of social media. A report from October 2022 shows that the video sharing platform TikTok had 109 million users in the United States alone.[6] TikTok's success led other established platforms like Instagram and YouTube to add short video features in 2021 and 2022, and these are often accompanied by music, very little of which can be collected by libraries.

While navigating the digital maelstrom, music librarians continue to maintain—and in many cases, build—physical audio collections. In

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4. Judy Tsou and John Vallier, "Ether Today, Gone Tomorrow: 21st Century Sound Recording Collection in Crisis," *Notes* 72, no. 3 (March 2016): 461–83.

5. Kirstin Dougan, " 'YouTube Has Changed Everything'? Music Faculty, Librarians, and Their Use and Perceptions of YouTube" *College & Research Libraries* (July 2014), https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.75.4.575.

6. "TikTok Users by Country 2022," Statista, accessed 30 January 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/1299807/number-of-monthly-unique-tiktok-users/.

Johnson's 2018 survey, 93 percent of respondents indicated that they were actively collecting or accepting CDs as gifts.[7] This is significant, given that optical drives were phased out of new computers during the 2010s.[8] This development moved CDs further into a legacy format, one that patrons cannot easily access using their own equipment. Legacy formats have long been a staple of music library audio collections, as sound formats have evolved dramatically over the last century. These collections have had mixed discovery and use capabilities. Forstot-Burke documented the precipitous decline of physical media use after peaking in 2009.[9] Imre and Cox discovered sizeable uncataloged LP collections in libraries, consuming space in backlogs with little to no access for patrons.[10] On the other hand, Bonjack found that audio content on LPs is sometimes unique and unrepresented on newer formats.[11] She also discovered that patrons will borrow LP records if they are allowed to circulate, especially through interlibrary loan, if the audio content can't easily be found elsewhere.[12]

Libraries continue to collect physical formats in part to fulfill their mission of preserving content and providing access to the creative record. Additionally, libraries are typically more comfortable with owning content rather than simply having access to it. At the same time, individuals have trended the opposite way.[13] Libraries must also consider an additional aspect of accessibility when acquiring content, as licenses for online platforms are usually limited by IP address, or libraries may not circulate all physical formats equally (e.g., either lending LPs but not CDs or vice versa).

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7. Kirstin Dougan Johnson, "The Changing Face of Academic Music Media Collections in Response to the Rise of Online Music Delivery," *Notes* 77, no. 2 (December 2020): 191–223.

8. "Optical Disc Drive," in Wikipedia, accessed 8 January 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Optical_disc_drive&oldid=1132390532#History.

9. Corinne Forstot-Burke, "Turn Down for What: A Study of Physical and Streamed Media Usage at the University of Kansas Libraries," *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (October 2, 2019): 189–208, https://doi.org/10.1080/10588167.2019.1570439.

10. Andrea Imre and Elizabeth J. Cox, "Are We on the Right Track? Issues with Lp Record Collections in U.S. Academic Libraries," *Notes* 65, no. 3 (March 2009): 475–86.

11. Stephanie Bonjack, "The Importance of LPs in a Digital World," *ARSC Journal* 49, no. 2 (Fall 2018): 143–51.

12. Stephanie Bonjack, "The Audacity of Hi-Fi: A Case for Lending LP Records," *Notes* 73, no. 3 (2023): 364–78.

13. Dan Greene, "Think You Own Your Stuff? Think Again," Vox, 21 April 2021, https://www.vox.com/the-goods/22387601/smart-fridge-car-personal-ownership-internet-things.

STREAMING PLATFORMS AVAILABLE TO INSTITUTIONS

The last few decades have produced several commercial streaming platforms available to institutions. These can be classified by the content they provide (format or genre), acquisition model (subscription or purchase), or audience access (available to libraries, individuals, or both). Each of these models has different benefits and drawbacks. However, one set of considerations for any platform is that of flexibility, diversity, and accessibility. When an institution chooses to purchase or subscribe to a platform that doesn't allow for local content hosting, they cannot add or remove content. This leads to offerings that look similar across libraries. Vendors of such products are often slow to make improvements in interfaces or search capability. Additionally, commercial products do not always include a significant number of works from historically excluded voices and may only include token examples. Finally, streaming audio and video sites can pose barriers to access when they require devices and high-speed internet access that may not be readily available to all and may not have sufficient access for those using assistive technology such as screen readers.

Access and Pricing Structures

Subscription platforms often have significantly higher price tags for institutions than they do for individual consumers—if they are even available for library access. Netflix, Spotify, and YouTube Premium are very popular with individuals, but do not offer library licenses. Vendors use different models to factor pricing for libraries. Some use the FTE model, which is a tiered pricing structure based on how many full-time-equivalent students, or only music students, are enrolled at the institution. Another common model is the concurrent user seats model, in which institutions pay for anywhere between one to an unlimited number of concurrent users.

Cost is also affected by whether the acquisition is a purchase or an annual subscription, with many vendors not offering the purchase option. While outright purchase costs are often much higher than annual subscription costs, they pay for themselves after several years. Some vendors offer discounts to regional consortia, lowering the price further as more institutions subscribe. Price information is rarely available without contacting a sales representative. Two platforms—Alexander Street Press's AVON and Kanopy—have a patron demand-driven purchase model option, often called Demand Driven Acquisition (DDA) or Patron Driven Acquisition (PDA). This model allows for bibliographic records to be loaded into a library's discovery interface where purchases are triggered by patrons.

Content, Coverage, and Features

Models for content and coverage often depend on how varied the focus of a resource is. For example, some large platforms offer discrete modules for different formats or genres (e.g., video or audio; jazz or classical). Each module has a separate cost, but institutions may see a price break for subscribing to or purchasing more than one module. The module model is also used in some cases to add more content to a platform (at an additional cost), while other resources add content via regular updates to the platform. There is generally not a lot of overlap of specific content between platforms. Paid sites can lose content due to changes in licensing, and there may be no way to access that content afterward.

Streaming platforms vary in their features, from search options, closed-captioning, availability of a mobile app, inclusion of liner notes or other related information, ability to save content, create playlists, and share tracks. Some have much easier interfaces and features to use, and searching algorithms vary widely. The list in Table 1 is not exhaustive, and the features listed are examples and not comprehensive.

Table 1. Commercial Streaming Databases Available to Libraries
Codes: Format (**A**udio, **V**ideo); **A**ccess model(s) (**I**ndividuals, **L**ibraries)

Platform (Company) (Format)	Genre(s)	Access Model(s)	Select Features/ Notes
AVON (Academic Video ONline) from Alexander Street Press (ASP) (V) *https://alexanderstreet.com /products/academic-video-online*	All	L	Offers media hosting to libraries including locally produced streaming content and content licensed from other vendors.
Berlin Philharmonic Digital Concert Hall (V) *https://www.digitalconcerthall .com/enh*	Classical; concerts, films, interviews	I, L	Live and recorded content
Broadway HD (V) *https://www.broadwayhd.com /subscription (for individuals)*	Theater, including musical theater	I, L	Was a module available from ASP, but is now part of DigitalTheatre+
Classical Music in Video (ASP) (V) (now part of Music Video Collection) *https://alexanderstreet.com /products/music-video-collection*	Classical; performances, masterclasses, documentaries, interviews	L	Can create, annotate, and organize clips and include links to other content.

Table 1. Continued

Platform (Company) (Format)	Genre(s)	Access Model(s)	Select Features/ Notes
Digital Theatre+ (V) *https://www.digitaltheatreplus .com*	Theater, including musical theater; performances, documentaries, interviews	L	Text resources such as essays and teacher tools
DRAM (Database of American Recorded Music) (A) *https://www.dramonline.org*	Classical	L	Liner notes and essays
Ethnographic Sound Archives (ASP) (A) *https://alexanderstreet.com /products/ethnographic-sound -archives-online*	World	L	Supporting field materials
Ethnographic Video Online (ASP) (V) *https://alexanderstreet.com /products/ethnographic-video -online-series*	World; four volumes variously containing ethnographies, documentaries, shorts; and festivals	L	
Ethnomusicology: Global Field Recordings (Adam Matthew) (A)	World; field and studio recordings, interviews	L	Essays, field notes, image gallery, instruments
Filmakers Library Online (ASP) (V) *https://video.alexanderstreet.com /channel/filmakers-library-online*	All; documentaries	L	
JazzComposersPresent.com (V) *https://www.jazzcomposerspresent .com*	Jazz; livestream masterclasses, listening sessions, roundtables, group lessons, and artist Q&As.	I, L	Will work with composition and arranging member faculty to build curated lists of existing events from our archives to compliment course syllabi.
Kanopy (V) *https://www.kanopy.com/en/*	All; Various	L	Can create clips and playlists; computer, mobile, and TV apps; can combine PDA, subscription and perpetual access models

Table 1. Continued

Platform (Company) (Format)	Genre(s)	Access Model(s)	Select Features/ Notes
Medici.TV (V) *https://www.medici.tv/*	Dance, Music (Classical and Jazz); live performances on-demand, documentaries, masterclasses, Verbier Festival	I, L	Computer, mobile, and TV apps
Met Opera on Demand (A) (V) *https://www.metopera.org /season/on-demand/*	Opera; live performances on demand, radio broadcasts	I, L	Computer, mobile and TV apps; multi-language subtitles, track listings
Music Online: Listening (ASP) (A) *https://alexanderstreet.com /products/music-online-listening*	Available modules include: American, Classical, Smithsonian Global, Jazz (also available separately), Popular, and Contemporary world music	L	
Naxos Music Library (A) *https://www.naxosmusiclibrary .com/*	Classical	I, L	Mobile access; liner notes, some opera libretti and synopses; can create playlists
Naxos Music Library Jazz (A) *https://www.naxosmusiclibrary .com/jazz/*	Jazz	I, L	Mobile access; can create playlists
Naxos Video Library (V) *https://www.naxosvideolibrary .com*	Dance, Music (Classical, Jazz, World), Theater; competitions, concerts, documentaries, films, interviews, masterclasses	I, L	
Opera in Video (ASP) (V) (now part of Music Video Collection *https://alexanderstreet.com /products/music-video-collection)*	Opera	L	
QwestTV (V) *https://qwest.tv*	Dance, Music (Classical, Global, Jazz; Popular); concerts, documentaries, interviews	I, L	Computer, mobile, TV apps; 24-hour live channels

AD-SUPPORTED AND OPEN ACCESS SITES

In addition to the licensed streaming platforms described above, there are also subscription sites available to individuals (e.g., Spotify) and numerous free (or ad-supported) sites. Some of these tools may offer access to everyone but require individual accounts and logins (e.g., Soundcloud and TikTok). Free sites have benefits in terms of their convenience, accessibility, and often, breadth of content compared to institutionally available sites that usually require logins and multiple layers of authentication and can be quite narrow in the content they contain. However, free sites (and sites with subscription costs aimed at individuals) often have drawbacks related to stability and permanence of the content, legality of content, and accuracy of metadata describing the content. They also often lack robust searching and filtering mechanisms. In addition, for those sites not designed for classical music, it can be difficult to find all related tracks of a work if they have been uploaded separately and are not somehow linked via metadata or the playback interface.[14]

There are also sites produced wholly or in part by scholars and institutions. A few examples of note include:

- 92nd Street Y (NYC) Concert Recordings Archive (Video)[15]
- Africa Focus: Sights and Sounds of a Continent (Audio and still images)[16]
- Arhoolie Foundation's Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings (Audio)[17]
- EVIA Digital Archive (Video)[18]
- Internet Archive (Audio and Video)[19]
- National Jukebox (Audio)[20]

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14. Recognizing the problems posed by traditional streaming apps for classical music, Apple Music recently launched a separate app for this content. https://www.theverge.com/2023/3/9/23632184/apple-classical-music-app-features-primephonic-ios-android-launch-date

15. "The Archives - 92NY, New York," 92Y, accessed 30 January 2023, https://www.92ny.org/archives/topics/concerts.

16. "Africa Focus: Sights and Sounds of a Continent - Databases - UW-Madison Libraries," accessed 30 January 2023, https://search.library.wisc.edu/database/UWI11039.

17. "The Strachwitz Frontera Collection of Mexican and Mexican American Recordings | Strachwitz Frontera Collection," accessed 30 January 2023, https://frontera.library.ucla.edu/.

18. "EVIA Digital Archive Project," 30 January 2023, https://eviada.webhost.iu.edu/Scripts/default.cfm.

19. "Internet Archive: Digital Library of Free & Borrowable Books, Movies, Music & Wayback Machine," accessed 30 January 2023, http://archive.org/.

20. "About This Collection | National Jukebox | Digital Collections | Library of Congress," Digital Collection, Library of Congress, accessed 30 January 2023, https://www.loc.gov/collections/national-jukebox/about-this-collection/.

The content on such free, scholarly sites comes with authority, legality and stability.

CALLS TO ACTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PROFESSION

The relationship between audio content and libraries is more complex than ever before. The dominant market preferences access over personal ownership. It excludes libraries in favor of direct-to-consumer commerce. It privileges mobile access over metadata or discoverability. This leaves libraries in a difficult position, not only those who collect for current use but especially those with a mission to collect to preserve content. Advocacy, outreach, and infrastructure are three ways that libraries can strive to meet their missions while attempting to meet user needs.

Libraries must advocate anew for access to content that is currently restricted to individual access. Tsou and Vallier conducted their work during a time when digital downloads were still a significant slice of the audio market.[21] Now that paid streaming subscriptions command over 50 percent of the market, the landscape may have changed enough for advocates to revisit this work. We call upon the Music Library Association to engage with other representative bodies like the American Library Association, Association of Recorded Sound Collectors, and International Association of Music Libraries, Archives, and Documentation Centres, to create a cohesive outreach and advocacy plan. We must demand institutional license options for commercial streaming services, like Spotify and Apple Music. We need an expansion of existing services, like Hoopla, that already deliver this content, but only to public libraries and their patrons. Creators are already helping each other navigate licensing and dissemination of their works.[22] Libraries must develop approaches to work with content distributors (i.e., creators and record labels) to make it possible for libraries to legally acquire and share digital audio in a way that is beneficial to both libraries and creators.

Closely tied to this is a need to consider shared infrastructure development for buying, licensing, and hosting individual digital recordings. AVON is one solution for digital video, as subscribers may use the product to host videos, but access is still tied to individual institutions and not everyone can afford to license AVON. There may be opportunities for music librarians to work with existing platforms to reframe licenses

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21. "U. S. Sales Database," RIAA, n.d., https://www.riaa.com/u-s-sales-database/.
22. Xavier Foley, "Licensing Your Studio Recordings | beyond CD Sales.," Xavier Foley, 30 June 2019, https://xavierfoley.com/blogs/xavier-foleys-blog/licensing-your-recordings-beyond-cd-sales.
23. The music vendor Theodore Front has made progress in offering e-scores for purchase: https://www.tfront.com/topic/DigitalDownloads_Library. We would like to see platforms like Gobi and Oasis offer this functionality for digital audio recordings.

to allow for library subscriptions.[23] Consortia or other groups of libraries could pursue building shared repositories for purchased and licensed digital audio. This is an incredibly complex venture, but libraries have been collaborating for decades to build shared print repositories, and with more content being produced only in digital form, we must advocate for this to be the next priority.

For as long as they have collected audio and visual recordings, music library professionals have dealt with the changing wave of sound formats. The latest developments in the distribution of sound and video recordings present new and very real challenges. However, the preservation of the music and creative output of our time—our cultural heritage—remains central to libraries' missions. We must address these challenges if we wish to remain true to our missions and relevant to patrons. If we are to continue to collect audio at all, the time to act is now.