

The Acquisition of Popular Music in Popular Culture Archives

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This study explores the attitudes and approaches of three different popular music archivists to acquire popular music recordings for their collection. Each of these archivists is employed at a major established academic popular culture archives in the United States. A survey was conducted to understand how these archivists characterize popular music and in what ways their collections are evolving. The study found that all archivists' notions of popular music is generally broad, one that encompasses nearly every genre that appeals to the general population, and one that will inevitably change over time. Donations are the primary method of collection. Archivists then refine the collection based on institutional philosophy and scope, academic curricula, and the collections of their colleagues.

Headings:

Archival materials—appraisal of archival materials

Archives—archival materials—United States

Archives—sound archives

Archivists—United States

Popular music

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Introduction.

“The struggle against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting”—

Czech author Milan Kundera succinctly describes in one sentence the relationship of an archives to history and culture. Archivists, preservers of social memory and historical identity, inevitably create through their saving Evidence¹ a “memory house”² of culture (popular, academic, corporate, and so forth), much of which is subjectively kept and weeded as is deemed fit by both prevalent archival ideas and the personal judgments of the archivist. Music Archivists, then, play a particularly interesting role in this field as, since their necessary existence since Edison’s or Cros’ invention of the phonograph in the late 19th Century, they have helped determine which parts of a culture’s aural memory (language dialects, sacred and secular music, folk traditions, political speeches, radio programs, and so on) will remain in the “memory house” and which ones are unworthy, or at least not as worthy as others. What has not been widely addressed by scholars, remarkably so, is the acquisition and preservation of the recordings that were not in the interests of those in power—whether those in power were/are corporate big wigs, politicians or academics. Effort has been put into retroactively preserving these precious items—collections of comic books, blues albums, Native American songs and so on are cropping up annually—before they completely disappear. However, what steps are being

¹ “Memoir of Sir Hilary Jenkinson,” in J. Conway Davies, *Studies Presented to Sir Hilary Jenkinson*, C.B.E., LL.D., F.S.A. (London, 1957).

² Jean-Pierre Wallot, “Building a Living Memory for the History of Our Present: Perspectives on Archival Appraisal,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 2 (1991), p. 282.

taken to preserve the popular culture of recent generations, particularly the culture that is out of the scope of the mainstream (i.e. what is not on the radio but still widely listened to items—collections of comic books, blues albums, Native American songs and so on are cropping up annually—before they completely disappear. However, what steps are being taken to preserve the popular culture of recent generations, particularly the culture that is out of the scope of the mainstream (i.e. what is not on the radio but still widely listened to by youth, or what is not printed and sold by Barnes & Noble but still read by a significant portion of the populous), are unknown, undefined, or just not done at all.

Acquisition of musical works that have by and large been ignored by academic curricula and the mainstream (i.e. what's on the radio or TV) holds particular importance for ethnomusicologists, archivists, and anyone interested in the popular memory of different generations, whether or not they realize it. Many of these musical recordings are created independently and fall either into obscurity or oblivion until some researcher comes along seeking to dig up an esoteric record, often to turn up empty handed because no one has bothered to save it. Or, if the recording was produced commercially, it may have been considered frivolous or ephemeral and never saved *because* of its popularity. Often an extremely large part of the popular memory is that which is outside of the scope of corporate radio or academic interest; yet, as time passes, the popular recordings of one generation become evidence for the next, especially for scholars (although this does not discount the validity of keeping said evidence for the benefit of future generations in general). Much evidence from subcultures, particularly the subcultures of minorities, is not collected—yet.

When scholarly trends deviate from what is already established at research institutions, what sort of options does the researcher have? Articles and books have cropped up over the past few years that seriously examine previously non-academic musical genres (punk rock and hip hop, most notably) from ethnographic and ethnomusicological perspectives. Journals examining the different roles of popular culture in academic institutions (*Popular Culture in Libraries*, for example) are emerging and taking up shelf space next to other peer-reviewed serials. One university has even started a program for receiving a degree in Popular Culture Studies; very likely, other universities will follow suit. Furthermore, some colleges and universities are beginning to add classes about these subjects to their curricula. The disconnect between the rising interest of scholars and students of popular culture and that which is held and collected by established institutions will only hinder future scholarship; so, efforts must be made to encourage archives to acquire these records and make them accessible to the public and to assure budget dispensing administrators of the necessity of the Popular Culture archive.

The general archival theoretical perspective is evidence-based, where personal and organizational processes/contexts of record creation is the fundamental concern. Additionally, how a particular record or sets of records reflect organizational and personal processes are also of tremendous significance. Context is everything. However, it must be noted that

the archival field includes little in the way of formal theory or abstract notions and concepts. Writings on archival theory are rare, and nowhere in the literature is there a distillation of theory. Archivists have developed a theoretical basis for some work and operate on some important general principles and pragmatic approaches, mostly modified from practical American experience. But they lack a more fundamental philosophical underpinning that addresses such basic

questions as the ultimate purposes of archival work, the role of the archivist in documenting society, or how to gauge archival achievements.¹”

Even without formal theory, notions, and concepts, archivists are far more than just custodians of evidence; rather, they “become advocates for information that must be preserved because of its enduring legal, fiscal, administrative, research or other societal value.²” It is because of the latter point, the “enduring societal value,” that I have interviewed popular culture archivists.

What kind of choices are popular culture archivists making among the vast potential of popular culture music that they can acquire? I expect that, as I am looking at academic institutions, most archivists will collect only what they can justify (i.e. they will support the curriculum that already exists at their institution) and what they can afford (if it is not donated, then purchases will be few and highly selective).

¹ Dearstyne, Bruce W. *The Archival Enterprise: Modern Archival Principles, Practices, and Management Techniques* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1993). P. 222.

² Dearstyne, Bruce W. *The Archival Enterprise: Modern Archival Principles, Practices, and Management Techniques* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1993).

Literature Review

The following readings were selected for two reasons: background information on the subject of music collection in an archival setting and case studies of instances where popular culture material not previously studied became heavily collected and researched. Let us begin at the beginning.

The Sound Recordings Group of the (British) Library Association was established in May of 1964 in order to assist “the professional education of all concerned with gramophone records (p. 3).” So, the 2nd edition of *Phonograph Record Libraries: their organization and practice* was a logical starting point to begin examining literature addressing the collection of music in libraries and archives. Patrick Saul’s article “Museums of Sound—History and Principles of Operation” is one of two essays among the 24 articles in the book that discusses archival collections in any depth.

Saul informs us that the invention of the phonograph in 1877 by Thomas Edison (or Charles Cros of France, independently, fortuitously, and almost simultaneously) meant the beginning of audible sound reproduction. Linguists and folklorists snapped this technology up 10 years later to record and analyze the songs and speech of their particular subjects of study. These recordings were later donated to museums, thus creating the first sound archives, the most comprehensive of which was the Phonogramm-Archiv of the Akademie der Wissenschaften in Vienna, Austria; the policy of this museum was to compile a recorded survey of European languages and dialects, musical performances (with a specific focus on “primitive” cultures), and voices of famous people. Between 1899 and 1914 sound archives began to emerge, typically as branches of a larger library institution.

Every country, according to Saul, should have a national deposit archive that collects published and unpublished commercial national recordings, commercial international recordings, radio recordings, private recordings, and institutional recordings. No records should be disposed of unless they are duplicates, the archive should be completely comprehensive in “sounds of all kinds” and turn away only that which is either already held or in poor condition, provided that the item offered is in “a form considered to be permanent...in effect, processed discs, published or unpublished (p. 217).” With only 90 or so years of recorded music to deal with, this is a very nice idea. He includes popular music, though he does not define what falls into this classification beyond the terms “commercial dance music” and “English and American light music” or “salon music.” European music must be, then, “heavy” and “remote.” He believes that these kinds of popular compositions should not be collected comprehensively; only representative samples from each genre should be preserved, and no method of determining what is representative is outlined in the article.

Saul continues to assert that texts and other documents relevant to the recordings should also be acquired (things like album sleeve notes or opera libretti). He suggests that all archives should establish an agreement or law of legal deposit with different companies in the record industry (nationally and internationally) and radio companies (for broadcasts) if at all possible. Unpublished commercial records, though problematic (he feels) for ethical reasons, are also to be considered for inclusion. Most archives do this as much as possible, and the United States does indeed have a library of legal deposit.

40 years after the publication of this book it is clear that the scope of musical study has expanded tremendously—thank goodness. However, it is interesting to note that Saul’s prejudices against “salon music” and the like are similar to all other research conducted within the mainstream when looking outward at the “other”: some folklore scholars when talking about rock and roll, for example, or even musical format.

Ten years after Saul’s article, Frank Hoffmann published The Development of Library Collections of Sound Recordings, which intends to be a basic textbook or guide for library students and professionals interested in music selection. It is a wonderful endeavor, and most archival collection practices have not deviated from his proscribed methods. Hoffman divides the term “special libraries” into three classes: “those emulating public libraries...specialized research collections...[and] museum holdings (p. 16).” Though he does not specifically use the term “archive,” his inclusion of said “specialized research collections” implies something very like an archival institution is covered in his selection criteria.

Hoffman begins by addressing the inevitable problem of the tendency of librarians to avoid selection of popular music based on biases against “temporary popularity,” recreation, nonprint materials, proneness to theft, and lack of sufficient knowledge to adequately judge different works. Rather than picking a sampling of popular music styles and trends, Hoffman recommends that in the selection procedure the selector must evaluate each potential selection on performance, reputation of composer, print material, packaging, “extra features,” alternate formats, recording availability, and potential popularity; these criteria are definitely more library-centered criteria than archival. He provides an extensive list of periodicals to use as guides for selecting music

spanning classical, jazz, pop, rock, punk, country, R&B, soul, funk, and show/soundtrack genres. Finally, he gives an equally extensive (though unbalanced) list of recommended recorded sound holdings covering the classical, jazz, pop, rock, country, soul, and R&B genres, with classical being the most heavily represented and R&B the least (punk, funk, and soul are all mixed in with rock music with no indication of distinguishing between types, so you have the New York Dolls listed right beneath Olivia Newton-John, both under the heading “Rock, Soul”). However, when his list is compared to the albums listed in Greil Marcus’ book Stranded: Rock and Roll for a Desert Island,³ Hoffman’s list looks to be a good—though biased toward the ethnic and academically influential groups—representation of the critically acclaimed and popular works extant in 1979. Hoffman’s and Marcus’ lists provide useful guidance when considering what sort of music falls under the heading “popular” and to contextualize the acquisition techniques that archivists have been using (at least as far as popular music up until 1979).

Rather than address each kind of potentially collected recording in one chapter or section, in 1983 the International Association of Sound Archives published their 4th special publication: Sound Archives: A Guide to their Establishment and Development. In this collection of articles, both musical and non-musical broadcasts, commercial recordings, dialect, ethnomusicology, folklore, linguistics, natural history (animal and other nature sounds), and oral history are all addressed individually with respect to their histories, acquisition sources, processing and accessioning, technical considerations, staffing, storage, and security practices, and copyright issues (if applicable). This

³ This book was also published in 1979, and represented the favorite albums of 24 of the most widely read music critics at that time. Also, the end of the book features a list of several hundred albums compiled by Marcus, a critic whose work appeared in *the Village Voice*, *Take One*, *Newsday*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *New West*, and *Rolling Stone*.

approach allows for detailed discussion of particular issues specific to the types of recordings under consideration.

So, an archive that either specifically collects or has a marked focus on commercial format recordings will need to consider (to say the least) collecting and acquiring equipment that can play LPs and singles (microgroove records), cassettes, cartridges, and other magnetic tape recordings, shellac records (78s, etc.), wax cylinders, vertical cut discs, and records made before 1920 (and thus with speeds capable of ranging from 64 to 105 rpm); but, a natural history archive will very likely only deal with reel-to-reel portable tapes and the requisite microphones and filters required for field recordings (keeping in mind, of course, that in 1983 CD, digital, and other formats were rare, unavailable, or not in use yet). Sound archives were no longer lumped into one category and the various issues surrounding potentially different kinds of collections were dealt with specifically and not generally.

This article raises interesting questions regarding archival preservation and access: when you have multiple formats, many of which were only extant for a very short time, do you still collect these items? How do you give access? With modern technologies like filesharing, does digitization change the way we can approach these items? How does the tangled web of copyright complicate this further for the research advocate? For example, with hip hop's ubiquitous use of sampling (the practice of using previously published musical material to create new sounds), what sort of questions need to be answered with regard to fair use for research, especially if file sharing becomes an option? How does the archivist find a happy marriage between access-for-all and staying

out of jail? This final point will very likely have significant implications for collection policy and practice with regard to how the music is shared with the public in the future.

In the winter of 1983 the Drexel Library Quarterly devoted an entire issue to music libraries. Four of these articles dealt specifically with issues surrounding collection development, each focusing on a specific music genre as opposed to an academic field of study (i.e. popular commercial records versus the field of ethnomusicology). James Briggs Murray of the New York Public Library⁴ delivers a lengthy argument on “Black Popular Music Collections,” specifying and elaborating on sub genres of Black music: work songs, spirituals, gospel, blues, R&B, soul, funk and fusion, disco, and Caribbean/African sounds. He gives brief but informative histories of each variety of music along with names of the major artists and influential groups. What makes these groups so interesting from the context of this particular research endeavor is that these genres were, at the time, popular (widely listened to and not studied by academics). Now most of them fall into a category that’s easily assimilated into the more standard music archives.

Murray’s collection development advice is to rely on donations, distributors, and dealers and to create a want-list of recordings from catalogs, local and national radio station playlists, and periodicals. He emphasizes the need and common practice of searching bargain bins and consulting rare record dealers. Sheet music, radio, television, photographs, oral history, and film are also covered in his article specifically as opposed to falling under a general “supplementary material” heading. Incidentally, his admonitions have become practice among several popular culture archivists, and nearly

⁴ The New York Public Library has an extensive archival music collection.

anyone who has collected music, all of who are terribly important to music archivists, as the reader shall see.

John Politis of the Philadelphia school district writes about “Rock Music’s Place in the Library,” and while the article focuses its advice mainly to the public or school librarian, Politis addresses the predominant attitude in earlier writings about sound collections, that is, that rock music is culturally inferior (represented in the list of recommended recordings in the IAML’s⁵ 1964/1969 publication and Hoffmann’s book). He lists for the reader some publications and catalogs of rock music discographies and distributors and recommends that locally unreleased rock bands be actively collected.

Overall, Politis looks at rock and roll in a social context and considers the music as a form of expression, background music, and a social bonding mechanism (specifically among minorities and minors); he laments that few libraries outside of the Library of Congress collect this music. The lamentation can be extended to archives, as the music student in Arizona should not be expected to cough up several hundred (thousand, perhaps) dollars in traveling expenses just to complete scholarly research. Politis’ focus on the music medium as the mode by which a subculture expresses itself is key to understanding the purpose of this study and all other studies like it. What is equally essential about this study is that Politis is writing about rock and roll, a musical genre that now is accepted among academics as a legitimate field of study and actively collected by many music archives, albeit 22 years after this article was penned.

“The End of the Avant Garde, Or How to Tell Your Glass From Your Eno,” by Lee David Jaffe from the University of California at Berkeley reflects on the place of Avant Garde and Experimental music in collection policies during the early 1980s. One

⁵ International Association of Music Libraries.

problem with collecting Avant Garde music has to do with both the amorphous group of musicians and what kind of music is considered part of this “advance group:” “artists who adopt techniques or expressive aims radically different from those hallowed by tradition, with the implication that their work makes advances which will subsequently be widely accepted and adopted.⁶” As the Avant Garde changes traditions, that which challenges the established “norm” will change, so the Avant Garde of today is the trend and research topic of tomorrow.

The article outlines different Avant Garde artists (John Cage, Laurie Anderson, Brian Eno, Philip Glass, and so on), discusses briefly the difficulty with collecting a genre that consistently re-invents itself and re-classifies its artists, and then lists some good sources, (discographies, periodicals, and bibliographies), for locating Avant Garde music recordings. However, the author warns, “there are still many artists whose albums will not be reviewed in major publications and whose works will not be played on the radio. Any selector who intends to include these will have to go beyond the obvious sources (p. 117).” What these sources are that exist beyond the “obvious sources,” though, Jaffe does not specify.

As with Politis’ article, Jaffe’s article can be seen as a paradigm for the current state of popular music collection, where a far-reaching term umbrellas genres that also re-invent themselves and demand collection techniques that may be outside of standard archival practice. Also, a significant portion of popular culture material exists beyond the scope of popular sources where, in order to find it, you will need to search unconventional places or get involved in the creation and/or the collection of original,

⁶ Paul Griffiths “Avant Garde” *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

ethnographic recordings. The popular music archivist seems to occupy a strange territory, straddling academic scholarship, underground collecting, and schmoozing.

“Documenting Popular Music Culture in Library Audio Collections” by Sheldon Lewis Tarkan, writer for the *Tarkan Music Letter*, looks at the historical attitudes of social critics (librarians included) toward popular culture. Establishment of a classical pop archive is recommended for all libraries who can afford to do so; this will ensure that a “hierarchy of cultural preference (p. 134)” is not established and that a large selection of popular recordings is made available to (through in-house listening facilities) both researchers and music lovers.

Tarkan provides a lengthy appendix listing discographies and anthologies, which are: popular music before 1900, 1900-1929, 1930-1939, 1940-1949, 1945-1955, 1950-1954, 1955-1964, 1964- present; jazz and blues covering ragtime, blues, Dixieland, big band/swing, bebop/early modern jazz; country and western music of 1922-1932, 1933-1940, 1941-1953, 1953-1960, 1960- present; folk music prior to 1939, 1940-1960, 1960-present; and finally a list of names and addresses of 5 record companies who have excellent printed catalogs of classical pop music. While it is wonderful that he makes a case for the creation of a place that will ensure a “memory house” is created that does not enshrine only the music of the academy, his discographies and anthologies leave out rap music (though not R&B). However, this is probably due to the date of the article, which is only six to eight years after the creation of hip hop music (it depends on who you ask). Still, it does beg the question: is anything out of scope with regard to the acquisitions of music archivists today, and will it be available in six to eight years?

One year later (1984), UCLA's music librarian Gordon Theil wrote "Popular Music Sound Recordings: Recommendations on Selection, Arrangement, and Cataloging." He begins by advising "the librarian/archivist [to] develop an appreciation and working knowledge of all pertinent forms and styles, even those outside the realm of personal preference (p. 29)." All formats and possible recorded performances (live and studio) should be collected; however, he includes pirate, bootleg, air check, and private recordings in his list of desirable performances. MTV is also included with a comment that, if at all possible considering copyright restrictions, recordings of video broadcasts should be acquired.

Theil includes resources for discographical and supplementary/alternate formats, too: trade magazines, record reviews, Frank Hoffmann's sound recording book, and discographies are recommended for consultation (though few are listed by title). For acquisitions: manufactures or dealers, promotional recordings, "small, esoteric, or foreign labels" (p. 31), library vendors, cut out suppliers, record plans, mail order clubs, local retail stores, junk stores, auctions/estate sales, rare materials dealers, swap meets, garage sales, and cooperative arrangements with other archives. His advice regarding what the archivist should be collecting is all-encompassing and was instrumental in assessing the attitudes and policies of the contemporary popular archivists interviewed.

"Popular Music in British Libraries" by Chris Clark and Andy Linehan is a summary of a paper given at the National Sound Archive in late 1986; the article combines information from that paper with a survey of popular music in British libraries conducted jointly by IAML (UK) and IASPM⁷. Though British, this is the only available

⁷ The International Association of Music Libraries (United Kingdom) and the International Association of Sound and Popular Music.

study that took an actual in-depth survey of what existed (instead of making a list of what should exist) in the libraries and/or archives. With the absence of substantial literature about music archives (and specifically popular music archives), library literature had to suffice. The authors found that most academic libraries collect (in order of preference) jazz, folk, blues, pop and rock, and traditional music and avoid “middle of the road” (undefined in the paper) and country genres. 96% of public libraries purchased popular music while only 56% of academic libraries and 26% of national/institutional libraries did.

Overall, the survey found a heavy bias in academia toward jazz with the public libraries focusing mainly on pop and rock. Selection of materials in Academic libraries came mostly from mail order lists, catalogs, and specialist reviews, with little reliance on outside institutions. No mention was made of donations. Apart from the BBC Popular Music Library, no libraries in Britain recruit staff with special knowledge of popular music (that is, no libraries that responded to the authors’ survey). On the whole, public libraries fared better in ability to supply popular music than academic institutions. This is interesting in that according to this study the best place to go for popular music research is the public library, a place not associated with long-term preservation of materials (and necessarily so, as the mission of the public library is generally quite different than that of the archive, apart from the desire to adequately serve their patrons).

William L. Schurk, sound recordings archivist in 1992 at Bowling Green State University, wrote “Uncovering the Mysteries of Popular Recordings Collection Development,” which offers a concise summary of popular recordings library collections in American academic institutions and then makes a case for appropriate budgets and

collection development policies. He specifies that, until the mid 1960s, popular music was ignored by academia and only discussed either by “outsiders” or by rock journalists. Personal experiences of the archivist are drawn on to discuss the ins and outs of creating a sound recordings collection, focusing entirely on the budget, collection development policy, and selection of sound carriers.

Comparative buying is Schurk’s primary piece of advice for realistic and effective use of budget funds utilizing record stores, thrift stores, collectors and dealers, collectors magazines, used record shops, record shows, and retail establishment middlemen. CDs were beginning to be the choice format for recordings, and are included in format consideration alongside 45s, 78s, and LPs. Schurk’s perspective, philosophy, and collection policies are terribly important as he is a pioneer in the popular culture archives field, and in many ways sets the bar for other popular culture archives in terms of comprehensiveness and methods of acquisition.

In 1993 Bob Pymm of the Australian War Memorial wrote “It’s Only Rock ‘n’ Roll: Making a Case for Rock music in the Research Library.” His short article laments librarians’ tendency to ignore recorded music in spite of having been in existence for 100 years; furthermore, that which is collected is only what has had a certain “patina of age and esteem (p. 78).” He discusses the influence of popular music on politics and its definite reflection of social thought. Rock and roll falls into this category, but is left out of nearly all archival collecting policies because of its seemingly ephemeral nature. However, Pymm argues that this is foolish because rock has acted as an aural and unofficial record of social history, helped spread the English language worldwide, given outsiders a window into a counterculture, and played other roles in assorted sociological

phenomena. Pymm's perspective on rock could easily be transferred to the current attitude toward hip hop music and other popular genres, and further justifies inquiry into the active preservation of these genres for scholars and the general public.

That same year William E. Studwell published "American Popular Culture, Music, and Collection Development in Libraries: Some Comments and Five Examples." Studwell describes the relationship between American popular culture and popular music with the intent to demonstrate that this music is worth saving and studying (i.e. ranges far beyond just the "salon music" status referred to in Saul's article above). Patriotic music, classical music, hymns, foreign origin popular songs, and Christmas songs are used to illustrate this relationship from which he concludes that librarians must recognize the deep roots that popular culture has in music (Rossini's *William Tell Overture* used in "The Lone Ranger" radio and television series, for example—some wags say that if you can hear the tune without thinking of the Masked Man, you are a true classical music connoisseur). He provides a bibliography of music reference books that give adequate information regarding his five examples. Studwell's ideas still apply: for example, hip hop music, which has deep roots in African Griot music (music of West Africa), Caribbean traditions (like toasting), American blues, and rock and roll. Archival collection of popular music is just one additional step in the ever-developing line of musical progression and terribly important to provide a context for future and present music scholars.

Gary Burns, in his 1994 article "Where Have All the Records Gone, or When Will We Ever Learn?" discusses the (long overdue) need for libraries to seek out and preserve current and old recordings and the publications related to these recordings. First he gives

specific examples of film and television programs that have decomposed beyond salvation (pilot episodes of “All in the Family,” Dick Clark’s 1960s music show “Where the Action Is,” and the first Super Bowl, for example) because many were filmed on nitrate stock, which is highly unstable—read: flammable—and virtually impossible to preserve.

Then, Burns shifts his focus to popular music—his research forte is late 1960s Boston rock music. He describes a frustrating situation where, in the course of his research, a particular band he was researching seemed to have fallen into oblivion, as he could not locate any indication of the existence of a 1968 music video for them (one which he knew once existed), no matter which archive or library he consulted. He remarks that, in spite of the remarkable durability of sound recordings compared to films, many of them have disappeared without a trace, even from listings in trade magazines specializing in out-of-print materials. Sound journals, even those with national circulation, have either partially or wholly disappeared as well (early issues of *Rolling Stone* included). He concludes by lauding the atypical efforts of institutions that have gone out of their way to, sometimes illegally, preserve material that otherwise would have been lost and recommends that libraries take heed and seek to preserve everything as they should be “the owner of last resort, and the lender of last resort (p. 7).” Burns ideas also coincide my own, and acted as inspiration for this study. However, collecting ubiquitously becomes terribly impractical when space and budget rear their troublesome heads; so, the most likely solution to these kinds of problems as they manifest in a popular culture archive will very likely be a sort of compromise between all-encompassing acquisition of rarities and standards.

With his 1995 article “Where is the Mainstream of Music in the Late Twentieth Century? A Heretical Look at Shifts in American Culture and Their Implications for Music Libraries,” William E. Studwell again examines the shift of the tastes of mainstream culture from so-called “serious” music to popular music. For example, at the end of World War II, Opera was mainstream and Broadway was mass or popular culture; symphonies were mainstream and jazz was mass or popular culture. But, since then the mainstream has adopted what 50 years prior to Studwell’s article was mass or popular culture. He concludes that such shifts are inevitable and that libraries should be prepared to shift their collection development policies to prepare for and adjust to these reconfigurations. Again, his point drives home the fact that one day current genres of popular music will be as much a part of any academic curriculum studying folklore or popular culture as is, say, currently embraced and widely collected genres such as blues or country.

Bowling Green State University’s archive is described in detail in Bonna J. Boettcher and William L. Schurk’s 1998 article “From Games to Grunge: Popular Culture research collections at Bowling Green State University.” Beginning with its establishment in 1967, Schurk and Boettcher detail the institution’s history, including the initial necessity for crusading and legitimizing popular culture studies in the eyes of the academic community. The underlying philosophy of the collection is, according to Schurk, “today’s shtick is tomorrow’s treasure (p. 851)” and so the collection grew steadily in spite of the equal disbelief and confusion of the media at items collected. Collection development initially was to include “familiar subject areas—art and

architecture, business and business law, education, and so on—but excluded materials traditionally collected by academic libraries in those subjects (p. 853).”

Since 1994 this policy has shifted to primary source materials for American popular culture, with the highest priority placed on “acquisitions that support the academic programs of BGSU (p. 854).” Particular strengths of the collection are rock and roll, rap, heavy metal, contemporary Christian, and punk music genres. Print material such as discographies, industry directories, artist biographies, and sheet music are included in the collection. Donations are a significantly important source for new acquisitions, ranging from individual donors (Colbert Cartwright) to corporate (ABC Radio). Schurk’s endeavor produces an excellent example of Studwell’s theories coming to fruition: this archivist has successfully created one of the largest collections of popular culture in the United States, all of which is available to scholars worldwide.

“The Center for Popular Music at Middle Tennessee State University: Documenting the Broad Range of American Vernacular Music” by Paul F. Wells describes the archive’s history from its creation (1985) to the date of the article’s publication (1998). The parameters of the collection were defined after 3 large acquisitions: Brigham Young University’s 5,000 duplicate copies of mid 19th century sheet music, Ray Avery’s personal collection of jazz and African American music, and 25,000 pieces of sheet music from UCLA. Wells, a folklorist who formerly worked at the John Edwards Memorial Foundation at UCLA, used his academic and professional background to approach his research collection as one that “would cut across genre lines, that would encompass all media in which music has been fixed and sold, and that would have considerable historical depth (p. 864).” The Centre focuses on collecting rock and

roll (to create a Southeast archive comparable to that at Bowling Green), vernacular religious music, 20th century sheet music, blackface minstrelsy, and musical theater. Here again Studwell's point regarding the shift/blur between popular and scholarly material as manifested in the popular culture archive is evident.

William E. Studwell revisits his 1995 topic in "The Shifting Mainstream of Music in America and its Implications for Popular Culture Libraries," published in 1999. He summarizes his 1995 article and continues his thoughts on the shifting tastes of the mainstream. He feels that popular culture studies are even more justified than ever because "what was formerly popular music is now linked to more traditionally legitimate musical forms (p. 56)." So, the mission of the popular culture library is made larger and more important.

Michael Dewe's 1999 article "Don't You Rock Me Daddy-O': Popular Culture, Local Studies, --and Skiffle!" discusses the importance of Skiffle music to the history of popular music (the Beatles were formerly a Skiffle band). However, Dewe, like Gary Burns, had significant trouble finding Skiffle recordings in his research endeavors at libraries and archives, and concludes that "local studies librarians need to be more concerned with local popular culture activities...and not just those which reflect high culture (p. 10)." Here we see yet another request for the active collection of music outside of the scope of academic institutions or fashionable collection trends—and obvious support for archives like Bowling Green and Tennessee.

November of 2000 saw the creation and passing of H.R. 4846, or the National Recording Preservation Act of 2000. This piece of legislation requires the Librarian of Congress to

establish the National Recording Registry for the purpose of maintaining and preserving sound recordings that are culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant; establish criteria and procedures under which sound recordings may be included in the Registry, except that no sound recording shall be eligible for such inclusion until ten years after its creation...and determine which sound recordings meet the established criteria and select them for inclusion, up to a maximum of 25 sound recordings...each year.⁸

This legislation is an important step in the legitimization of the popular music archive. Some selections included in the registry's list are Public Enemy's album *Fear of a Black Planet* and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's single "The Message," both representing (a small) portion of hip hop culture, which to date has exploded in popularity and leads the top spaces on billboard charts, has heavily influenced fashion design, gets used frequently for television commercials, and so on.

This is not the only way that the Library of Congress works to preserve popular culture. In January of 2002 the Library posted the collection policy statements for their American Folklife Center (which was created in 1976 as a subset of the Archive of Folk Culture, created in 1928). They define folklife as "the traditional expressive culture shared within various groups: familial, ethnic, occupational, religious, [and] regional." Older popular culture materials reside in this collection, although some "traditional expressive culture" is absent from the collection (no hip hop recordings are cataloged here in spite of the collection housing music covered under "African American Folk Music and Narrative," for example). For other popular culture materials, the Library does have a significant collection of 45s, 78s, wax cylinders, CDs, LPs, and cassette

⁸ Summary by National Recording Preservation Foundation.

tapes. A brief subject search in their online catalog reveals that under the heading “Rock Music 2001-2010” there are 1251 hits; for “Rap (music)” there are 3401 hits. Most of these items are housed in the Recorded Sound Reference Center, whose mission is to provide “access to the commercial and archival radio holdings of the Library of Congress.”

Robert Freeborn examines the lack of attention devoted to a less-popular “popular” music genre in his 2002 article “Confronting the Dark Side of the Beat: A Guide to Creating a Heavy Metal Music Collection.” In spite of the genre’s 30-year existence, he notes that most libraries ignore it completely or do not collect comprehensively. As with many of the previous articles discussed here, Freeborn provides an excellent set of guiding principles for collectors of this particular contemporary genre. So as a guide to future collectors, Freeborn covers the basic musical concepts, sub-genres, and history of heavy metal and lists print and electronic resources for both acquiring and learning more about this kind of music. This article is considerably similar to the other articles surveyed for this study where the collection methods prescribed range from scouring record stores to staying current with genre-specific magazines so that both supplementary materials and new groups can be added to the collection as quickly and comprehensively as possible.

Based on the opinions and observations of the authors of these books and articles, the prevailing opinion of sound preservation professionals is that everyone ought to somehow collect everything; however, this simply is not the case in both practicality and practice. Sound recording acquisition and preservation started with focusing on Classical music and academic work—anything not related to these two areas was either an

afterthought or ignored. And, notably, few of these articles pertain to concerns that an archivist would have. Nearly every article available that discusses popular music collection looks at library policies and not the needs of archives; but, as there is no archival code or guide to consult for popular music collection these articles had to suffice. Though many have acknowledged and written about the importance of preserving music not yet associated with an academic discipline, hardly any seem to be heeding these suggestions with the exception of very large archival institutions, and these instances are few. However, even with these large institutions collecting that which is considered alternately ephemeral, esoteric, or unimportant, some researchers (Burns and Dewe in this case) still find themselves at a loss for locating necessary articles and recordings, some of which would serve as the only validation for the existence of an artist. Clearly research that delves into this problem is necessary, specifically at what musical genres are still being ignored, particularly in the case of popular music, which is emerging as one of the next large focuses of musicology and ethnomusicology.

To further drive home the point, let us briefly consider a different field where previously ignored or marginalized material has become a hot research topic and large focus of collection. Specifically, comic books, in spite of their near-100 year existence in American popular culture, have only recently found their way into the academic sphere and therefore the archives of major institutions. A few examples will be provided, primarily for comparison to the likely circumstances popular music will find itself in the future.

In his article “A Practising Comic Book Librarian Surveys his Collection and his Craft,” Randall Scott describes the comic art collection at Michigan State University. It

was started in 1970, “75 years after comics began to show themselves as a separate and distinct literary medium.” The entire reason that their collection was even created was because of a chapter in Russel B. Nye’s book, The Unembarrassed Muse, which argues that “creators of popular art [are] producing a sort of truth different from that produced by already academically canonized creators.” Nye felt that scholars should be able to check his scholarship on comic books, and so the university was asked to allow the acquisition of 6,000 comic books into its library collection. Since then their collection has grown significantly (as of the publication of this article in 1998 their holdings were upward of 200,000 items: 80,000 US comic books, 20,000 foreign comic books, and 20,000 books, journal issues and fanzine issues relating to comic books and strips, to name a few things). Scholars use the collection frequently, where “every day [the collection gets] intelligent and often answerable reference questions from around the world by email” with topics ranging from cosmetic surgery to Tibet. Popular music genres need not be any different than comic books, where scholarly publications covering current popular culture topics like Dr. Todd Boyd’s collection of essays The New H.N.I.C.: The Death of Civil Rights and The Reign of Hip Hop or Joseph Schloss’ book Making Beats: the Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop will demand primary sources for future scholars to continue and expand on the research of these and other scholars.

Stephen Weiner’s article “Beyond Superheroes: Comics Get Serious” provides a general overview of the comic book genres; his writing is very likely directed at the public or academic librarian who knows little to nothing about the graphic novel. He indicates that the graphic novel is becoming increasingly popular and explains that the subjects dealt with therein are primarily adult (as in mature, not pornographic). He tells

the reader that “academic programs on comics and graphic novels have also been spawned, giving the form a new kind of critical approval.” Weiner asserts that mainstream comics are not to be confused with the graphic novel, as the sexual exploitation and violence prevalent in the former are largely absent in the latter; however, I do not think that this is necessarily a good point to make for or against collecting comics versus graphic novels, as many items that are already found in a library (academic or public) can be considered by some groups as extremely offensive. This works for popular music collection as well since many genres of popular music has potentially offensive groups, definitely non-offensive groups, and all sorts in between. Another recent article by Chris Matz, “Collecting Comic Books for an Academic Library,” published just last year, not only re-asserts the aforementioned points but outlines for the reader the major comic creators, web sites, and selection tools for creating a core comic collection. A genre that was once almost a sub-culture and certainly considered non-literary now is emerging as a legitimate and literary form that is actively collected by libraries and archives.

The popular culture program at Bowling Green will likely inspire other universities to follow suit, and extant programs in music studies will inevitably remain and come to include in their curriculum classes on these (now) popular genres. There are articles that for the past decade or so have been outright telling librarians and archivists to start paying attention to collecting comics, and now we see that many institutions find that they have very valuable research collections. Why should this be any different for popular music and related materials?

Methodology

The literature surveyed indicates some acknowledgement among archivists of the importance of popular culture in the archival music diapason as does it indicate the potential for once obscure or ignored materials to abruptly become essential research materials to scholars and archives. Also, the collection methods used by these archivists are all very similar; however, no literature exists that establishes a best practice for music archivists in general, specialized popular music archivist. So, this study seeks to fill in some of the gaps left by the literature, namely what the archivists actively collect in practice (as opposed to what ought to be collected), what these archivists anticipate will be collected in the future (electronic files, perhaps?), and where they feel that popular music archives will stand in the future.

Only archivists working at an *academically* supported (i.e. funded and housed by a university or college) popular culture archive were surveyed, so the sample is seemingly small—though, let it be noted that even without these restricted selection parameters, only a handful of popular culture archives exist in all of the United States and rarely do they exist on their own—often they are a subset of a larger archive and music share a limited bit of funds with other under-funded departments. To date, there is only one academic program for popular culture studies at any American university. Interview participants were considered eligible if employed at an academic archive that supports and actively collects popular culture materials. These archivists were chosen through an informant (a professional music archivist), which was the best possible method as there is no directory of popular culture archivists available.

Music archivists who perhaps support popular culture collection but cannot heavily collect in that area were not considered for part of the sample, as were archivists who work at popular culture institutions that did not have a research collection open to the public. The latter group was not considered, as the agendas of these institutions were too different from that of the academic groups to include in such a small and general study, while the former would have posed difficult problems for the researcher with regard to selection criteria (what percent of a collection's coverage of popular culture constitutes as being "supportive" of the field overall?) and time required to find such institutions.

Instrumentation

Participants were interviewed over the telephone as distance necessitated thus. A mailed survey would have not produced such lengthy responses, and with such a small sample size the data collected in such a case would not have provided the in-depth information this study required. Further, the questions were structured to elicit in-depth responses and trigger unwritten questions, consequently the interviewer was able to ensure that the participants fully understood the questions asked. There were six questions (see Appendix A), beginning with a basic warm-up question to get the participants thinking generally about their field, followed by more specific questions about what the participants collected, how choices were made, how materials were found, and what they felt would happen with popular culture collecting as time passes and people's perceptions change (which, according to my experience and the literature surveyed, they will). The second question was originally created with a visual aid

(Appendix B), however this aid required a lot of clarification with the first participant (an in-person interview), so the question was re-formatted without a visual aid so that the telephone interviews would move more smoothly.

Procedure

After receiving a short list of names of archivists (6 total), each was sent an email requesting their participation in the study. All who were willing to participate responded within a day or two, so the total time required for interviews was relatively short. After an archivist consented to participate, an interview time was arranged by email. No participants were interested in viewing the questions in advance, even though this option was presented in the email. All of the interviews proceeded in an informal, conversational manner, so each participant provided information not only regarding the questions asked but also on questions not even conceived by the researcher.

The interviews took place over the course of two weeks in October 2005. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher, though no names (the archivist or otherwise) were saved; all participants were given a name (“participant 1,” etc.), and no information that would reveal their employing institution was kept in the transcription or included in this study. All recordings of the interview were destroyed, and the transcriptions were saved on a password-protected laptop computer (researcher’s own).

Participant Profile

Fifty percent of the archivists contacted were willing to participate; so, the study had three participants. Though much lower than anticipated, this total was still deemed sufficient as there are few popular culture archives in America, so the group could still be considered partly representative, and the participants all worked at the leading institutions in the field, so their practices are considered as model methods by most other archivists (academic or non). All participants were white males; however this, too, is fairly representative as there are few female or non-white members of the popular culture archivist community—let it be known, though, that the researcher did do her best to contact both non-male and non-white members of this group, however none chose to participate.

Two of the participants have been in the popular culture archive field for over twenty years; the other for nearly ten. Only one participant held an advanced degree in Library Science; all participants had bachelor's degrees in music. The institutions in which they work are all large universities (population minimum: 50,000) in heavily populated cities. Each university offered accredited degree programs in music, two of which went up to the PhD level.

Survey Précis

The first question, *please list some adjectives that you would include in your definition of “popular music” in a dictionary*, required the most explanation. It seems likely that this was because this question struck each participant as odd. The prototype for this question, *please give me your definition of popular music*, had to be referenced before this question was really made clear, and at that point each participant went on at length regarding his thoughts on what the phrase “popular music” really denotes.

Participant 1 characterized it as “music that people listen to, every day music.”

Participant 2, with a bit more to say, called it the “music of the people. Which doesn’t have to mean that it’s folk music but it can also be music of the pen. Music that is widely disseminated, celebrated, enjoyed on all [sensory levels].... People are interested in and also live by...popular music in...how that actually affects them.... Music for every taste! And that’s what popular music is all about. It’s multi-dimensional. It doesn’t reach only one dimension—it brings out the best and the worst of us.” Participant 3 thought that popular music “is anything that’s popular with the nation in general. It’s a song that catches the nation’s fancy. Usually it’s played with instrumental accompaniment; pop songs themselves are defined by the lyric organization. And usually they have a catch in them. And I would say that it’s defined as something that’s popular...For example: when you have people who go out and buy all this sheet music, buy ten thousand pieces of sheet music, that means it’s a popular song...pop songs versus rock and roll, it’s something that’s well-received nationally. It’s popular nationally.”

Question two was the second-most problematic of the questions, however this had more to do with the physical location than the question itself. Participant 1 was given a map, which was intended to be sent to the other participants, but required so much explanation and evident confusion with Participant 1 that the researcher chose to ask the remaining participants a variant of the question without using a visual (if I could not demonstrate the purpose of the material in person, confusion over the phone was even more likely). So, Participant 1 indicated that “early pop” would be his primary collection area; rock and roll roots, country, blues and folk rock took second; and Motown, R & B, jazz, gospel, funk, and disco were indicated as being the third-most important. The question asked of Participant 2, *what do you feel are the core genres of music for collection in a popular music archive*, replied as follows: “my interests, which I think are the key thrust of our collection, are of course popular music which includes rock and roll, jazz, blues, country, and even a little show music, and then of course you have all of the off-shoots like Cajun, zydeco, Latino, all the different dance music, you know like boleros, mambos, cha-chas, tangos, it all overlaps in one...we’re based on the premise that we are trying to include all types of popular music and of course Rock and Roll is kind of like the bed and then you shoot off of that with all of the roots with all of the causes and effects of rock and roll which all of a sudden by the 1960s pretty much started to include everything.” Participant 3 interpreted the question as being part of collection policy, and said, “we have a pretty broad collection development policy. It’s not as broad as [other enormous archive] but... We collect the American experience...and within that umbrella we collect popular music, Jazz, Rock and Roll, we collect Soul music, Rhythm and Blues, hillbilly, country & Western, bluegrass.”

Question 3, what are the most fruitful methods for collecting music for your collection, was met with generally the same answer all around: donations. All archives seem to function a Blanche Dubois-type philosophy: they always rely on the kindness of strangers. Participant 1 indicated that, for his archive, “the best way [to acquire music] is through gifts. You’re getting it through donors. You’re going through donors who have significant collections. For me, I could spend a lot of time doing a lot of stuff on E-Bay, trying to buy an individual item here and an individual item there versus finding a collector who has 75,000 items and donates them all at once—and that works really well. So, yeah, getting it from primarily one donor and then after that...well, you know, the thing is that when we get a lot of these collections from donors, sometimes we get duplicates, so it’s helpful to work with other archives to trade off our surplus.”

Participant 2: “we do have that method of donations; the thing is that with donations you can’t control what you really want, unless you get cash. Which is not all that readily available. But donations: you’re always happy to get the wonderful things that come in; but what you really, really want you’re gonna need money for. I’ve had to spend a lot of time finagling. You figure out how you’re gonna get the cheapest things, so sometimes it takes a little extra time to find certain things at the price you really want. I used to go through cutout distributors also. And I used to get their catalogs on a regular basis. And, with the cutouts you’re picking up stuff that’s now out of print and you’re getting it really, really cheap. And so. I don’t really deal much with them any more because they aren’t really around like they used to be.... Fortunately, of course, we have had the support of the university. And of course we always want more money. I have never gotten the budget that I know we truly need. What money I do get has to be spent quite

thinly...[at a certain point in the year] we have a big record sale where we sell records and books to the students and whoever else comes, and we make quite a bundle on that, and that kind of carries me through the end of the fiscal year.” Participant 3: “our collection is built from donations. And, we don’t pay for collections. We do have an acquisitions budget, we buy certain items, usually outside jazz, or, I don’t know, blues and things like that, but our collection has been built from gifts. The thing about is when you begin to pay for collections; people will expect you to pay for collections because they think you can afford to pay for it...gifts are definitely the way to go with an archive. You cannot afford to buy records anymore. One thing is, Ebay has changed everything and these auction lists have changed everything. I cannot afford to go on [line] and buy early hillbilly and blues and jazz...that’s just out of our price range because people pay 100s of dollars for some of these items.” He also mentioned that alternate methods for providing access is essential, too—such as seeking out a reissued record in a less-expensive format, or perhaps a compilation of remastered old recordings.

The second part of this question, what is the easiest method for acquiring materials, the donor method seems to be implicitly the easiest since that’s often the least expensive (up-front, that is. To my knowledge no study has been done to determine the cost of buying materials outright versus the time, energy, and resources required to acquire and process a large donated collection). Participant 1: “Yeah I would say it’s the easiest since you get the largest quantity, but the thing is you don’t always have...you know in general what the donor has been collecting but in terms of getting the individual item you know it’s kind of a hit or miss; you take a rather shotgun approach to it all. But you get some amazing things. Some things that you probably would never have gotten

had you gone at it with, you know, [the approach of] ‘well these are the top 10 records so I’m going to get those’ ... [with the donor method] you get a lot of really *odd* stuff... that’s part of what makes collections so unique!”

At this point the second and third interviews were deeply conversational, so the fourth and fifth questions were not directly answered by either of these participants. However this was intentional in part because, based on Participant 1’s answer, question four would inevitably reveal the identity of those participating in the study. So, with regard to the former, all archivists felt that their collections did a good job of covering music that is “broad,” “for every taste,” and “anything that’s popular with the nation in general.” Participant 2: “There’s nothing we won’t include in this collection. The problem we’ve got is that...new music [is] coming, appearing on the scene every 10 years, or 5 years or so, or variants thereof...and with the advent of CD reissues you’re getting all kinds...you’ve gotta be justified in buying another Beatles CD because they’re gonna have some other unreleased tapes or something like that!”

The latter question, number five, also received answers that were similar across the board. All participants were willing to go get a collection if the personnel and funds were available and if there was a significant chance of discovering something really wonderful in the donation. All of their collections had significant holdings and had been acquiring music for at least 20 years, so many of the older genres were well represented. Participant 2 sums the sentiment up best: “[we get people] who call up and say “I’ve got a collection of big band music;” you know, thanks but no thanks. But if you’ve got a younger person that’s got this great do-wop collection or bluegrass collection or R&B

collection or maybe punk rock or something like that; but most of those people are still holding onto their records. We really aren't getting a lot of that stuff."

The final question produced the most thought-provoking answers. Participant 1: "you know I read this article about Ray Charles where he was talking about music and his place in music and people were saying, "Oh you were a genius..." and he was saying 'no, I'm not a genius.' If you look at music and you only look at people like [Ray Charles] or you look at people like Charlie Parker then you're really looking at the corners of a frame. You're not really looking at the full picture. You're not really looking at all the little guys who are doing exactly what the other people were doing but didn't get to be famous. And there are a lot of people in [our] 78s collection that are like that. And I thought that was a really fascinating way to think about popular music. But, I don't know, I get the impression that, 100 years from now, people are gonna be looking at the corners. They're gonna be studying Motown, they're gonna be studying The Beatles, they're gonna be studying the things that made a huge impact, you know, in life culture, and Ray Charles, too. And rightly so, and, I don't know, I guess that's the way that history gets shaped. We talk about Bach, we don't talk about Bach's good friend, who also played the organ." Participant 2: "what's an archive? Are we preserving what a Columbia Label looks like, what an RCA label looks like? It's nice to have a lot of these, but...I remember [here Participant 2 describes a meeting of collectors where one particular collector gave a presentation on some rare 78s. The collector was asked about whether these rare records are ever played, and the reply is that no, he has them all on CD]. We try to keep the originals. But, you know, we need to be practical about it because you've got to have something that our public can listen to. And so I'm just as

happy getting CDs for the collection. I'm always discovering something new, a new path to travel down. Most libraries, you know, for sure, aren't doing all of what we're doing...and also the internet of course has proved to be a wonderful source for acquiring special items that you are looking for and, you know, all of a sudden there it is on Ebay [or] gem.com and maybe Amazon. Stuff where otherwise you wouldn't of known about it or never been able to get it. I don't see a lot of popular music archives—there aren't a lot. A lot of what we do of course is because we have support from the university.... So we have a constant parade of students who need the collection.” Participant 3: “we have maybe 70% of the collections that we get in [from donors]. And what's valuable to me is very similar to the definition of 'ore.' You know like gold ore, silver ore—if it's worth taking out of the ground: it's ore; if it's not, it's dirt.... I think it's important to collect right now as hot and heavy as you can, because in 10 years, in 10-20 years, you won't see any 78 collections, you won't see any LP collections hardly.... Digital preservation is evolving; you don't want to get too far ahead of it or too far behind it—you have to stay on the curve in development.... I don't want to sound arrogant but a lot of these archives are just not up to speed anymore. They kind of live in a nether world, you know? 'Oh poor little me in my dusty corner.' That's why so many of them are shutting down.... here's what I think is gonna happen. [W]hat's gonna shakedown the future of the field. I think that there will be regional depositories. A lot of institutions will or will not choose to support these kinds of collections. We collect regional musical heritage. What you'll see is not that many, maybe 10, institutions positioned strategically [throughout the country].”

Conclusions

This study attempted to examine the methods and attitudes that American popular music archivists have with regard to their sparsely populated field. The apparent lack of institutionally supplied or even academic literature regarding popular music collection is discouraging for future music archivists, who will have to find a clever way to educate themselves about the ins and outs of this complicated field. Still, the attitudes among the archivists surveyed here are remarkably the same in spite of different locations and university curricula. Clearly, the archivists interviewed have a very keen knowledge of their field and how to go about acquiring new things, and have a healthy anticipation of what to expect in the future. But what about their predecessors?

Many of the comments made by the participants in this study raise interesting questions about this small subset of the archival profession. However, the idea of the archivist “collecting collectors” really brings up an interesting point. Outreach is often listed as an administrative task, an extension of reference duties, and a significant role in the education of the public.⁹ These are all excellent reasons to perpetuate outreach efforts; but, what about for the popular music archivist, whose future donors are still quite young? The ones who may find an archive fascinating, if only they could be bothered to go inside of one—or perhaps put another way: if there was anything inside that enticed them to enter. Archivists should consider outreach programs such as radio programs that feature the music of the archive (some large universities are doing this already with much success), or hold surplus record sales at the archives, or even host symposiums that cover

⁹ This is all described in detail in Elsie Freeman’s article “Education programs: outreach as an administrative function.”

contemporary topics where the speakers are more likely to draw young faces who had previously assumed that the archives building was some weird campus museum. If DJ Cool Herc would talk to Terry Gross,¹⁰ why not speak at an archive that collects hip hop, for example? Outreach could range from education to anticipation, where the music freaks and geeks who hoard albums in their apartments and automobiles become aware of the possible future home for their beloved treasure. Most collectors that popular culture archivists are interested in—or rather will be interested in—are not the bowtied men who rummage through the sheds of old ladies looking to salvage a rare Billie Holliday recording, but rather as-yet unknown local DJs, indie rock snobs, or grumpy punk/hardcore kids who have a penchant for Japanese grindcore music.

Conversely, what about the other end of the donor spectrum? Personalities with careers in popular music, individuals like the aforementioned DJ Cool Herc and artists like him who make a living off of having unique, extensive record collections? What they have will inevitably be special precisely because of what they do: play records at parties where the high attendance is expressly because of the rare records played by the DJ. The same justification would apply to any other pop culture/subculture personality whose music collection has every thing to do with his or her profession or place in a particular popular culture community.

The lack of theory or scholarly work to draw on to guide this study was significant—even basic questions could not be answered by extant archival literature that focused on music archives (what little of it there is). This must change. Without theoretical framework, what sort of classes can be offered to future music archivists in an archival degree program? Will they all be field studies? This is unlikely and impractical,

¹⁰ NPR broadcast on the program “Fresh Air” September 30, 2005.

as the processing process often takes significantly longer than a single semester long class could possibly cover. While many of the theories and ideas that are prevalent in paper-based archives are in fact in wide use for music archives, the very nature of the materials collected demands that different methods and philosophies will emerge.

Theory supplements and directs vocational practice, and provides a necessary groundwork for future scholarly endeavors. Theory will help to move popular culture archivists away from second-class citizen status in an already under-appreciated and under-funded field. Theoretical knowledge guides practice, theoretical framework helps professionals engage in self-evaluation, and established theories unify and develop professional beliefs. Hopefully this study has illustrated a need for these things, and is, with any luck, the beginning of many studies and articles about archival collection of popular music.

Appendix A

1. Please list some adjectives that you would include in your definition of *popular music* in a dictionary.
2. Please look at the attached piece of paper (covered in colorful circles). Here you see a “map” of popular music, drawn up using genres, positioned and colored based on level of influence. Please circle what you feel are the most important genre(s) for collection in a popular music archive using a **RED** crayon, circle the next-to-most important using a **YELLOW** crayon, and third important using a **BLUE** crayon.
- 2a. If you feel that there are genres missing from the map, please use a pencil to add it to the map.
- 2* What do you feel are the most important genres to collect for a popular music collection?
3. What are the most fruitful methods for collecting the music that exists in your collection? The easiest? The most often used (by you or others)?
4. Of the adjectives that you listed in question one, how does your collection mirror, contrast to, ignore, or contradict these adjectives?
5. How do you limit yourself, that is, how do you set boundaries for finding and adding music to your collection?
6. What direction do you think popular music collecting is heading in; what are the future steps for the field of popular music collection?

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