

How to Organize Your Band Library

by Roe Lewis

Finally you've built up your band's repertoire. The question is "What's in it?" You don't know what tunes you have, who the arrangers are or the exact instrumentation. It's time to get organized and put together your band library. Here are some guidelines to get you started.

Put someone in charge: Put someone in charge of your library. Your first choice might be a student. This will work if the student is a good speller, attentive to detail and willing to devote quite some time to the endeavor. It will be his or her responsibility to maintain the library, cataloging everything you already have and continuing to do so as charts are added. It will amaze you how quickly these things can get away from you. You will be glad someone is dedicated to the task when your library has grown to include several types of genres and numbers into the thousands.

Get it together: Begin by organizing what you currently have. Separate your files/folders by the type of instrumentation. For example: separating your Marching Band folders from your Orchestra folders. Doing so will give you a better sense of what you have and help you in creating your database. You will also need storage. Shelves or file cabinets can serve this purpose. Some things to keep in mind are the size of the music. If your music is oversized it may not fit in a standard file cabinet. (I have lead sheet books that "just about fit" in my file cabinets. Over time and the constant opening and closing of drawers the pages have gotten frayed and torn. Obviously this was not the best choice!) Shelves can work well but should have a built in system to keep the files upright. If they are bending and falling over the music will become damaged. My library has evolved into using shelves for the band music and file cabinets for the smaller vocal arrangements.

Folders are a good idea as well. If your organization can afford them, custom folders with spaces for information can be a great tool. If those types of folders are unavailable, you can create your own system of labeling your folders. Each label should contain a space for a log number, the title, the composer, the arranger, the instrumentation or group (i.e. Orchestra, Concert Band, Sax Quartet etc.) and some space for notes or comments. NEATNESS COUNTS. Remember someone will need to be able to read the folders to input the information into a database. Completing this process first will help the rest of the project run more smoothly.

Computer: Get a computer. This is not open for debate. Find a computer that you and your colleagues can easily access. (It won't do you any good if you are working after-hours and the PC resides in a locked up office.) Most schools and universities have computers readily available. For those small organ-izations there are now cheaper computers available that have the minimum requirements. On that note: you don't need the newest, fastest, state-of-the-art computer available on the planet. (Hey, if you can get one more power to you!) You will need one equipped with the software you have chosen to use and enough hard drive space to hold your database now and the size it will grow to in the next few years.

Choosing A Database Pro-gram: I personally use Microsoft Access because it is a versatile program and has a great deal to offer. The nice thing about it is that you can design your database to be as simple or highly detailed as you desire. A table can be set up in just a few minutes (seriously). If you are more technically inclined you can spend a little more time to set up a database that is more involved. Of course you can always set up your database using a simple spreadsheet. Remember however, the more simple the program the less versatility you will have with your database.

Cataloging: Decide how you want to catalog the items in your database. You can do so numerically, alphabetically or a combination of both. You've already organized your materials so this should make this step easier. I strongly suggest getting input from your colleagues as to what would best suit your needs. It has been my experience that the less complicated and more user-friendly the better. On two separate occasions the organ-izations that I was working with hired outside companies to create databases. In both situations the databases were far too complicated to use and maintain. The databases were never used and were consequently replaced by simpler systems created by the people who would be using them on a daily basis.

Here are some questions to consider. Do I want everything in one large database or do I want separate databases for each type of music? (I.e. Marching Band database, Jazz Band database etc.) If we go with separate databases, what databases will we need? Should I allow everyone access to the database or only select persons? What information do we want in the database? What pieces should be left out? (I.e. The year, the instructor, difficulty-rating etc.)

Plotting out your Fields: Plot out what fields (pieces of information) you would like to put into your database and the order you would prefer.

For example: your database might include: A Log Number, Title of the Piece, Composer, Arranger, Instrumentation, Show, or a Comment Field.

It is important to bear in mind as you are setting up your database and inputting information, how you will eventually look for these items in your database. Recently I was given a chart to add to our database. The title was "Rudolph, that Swingin' Reindeer". Upon closer inspection, the song is an arrangement of "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer". Several months from now someone will ask me for that "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" chart that was done for the a cappella group. I will be able to find it easily because I have enough space in my title field to put "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" in parenthesis after the actual title. There may also be special considerations about a piece that you may want to add to your database. For example you may be missing the 1st Trumpet part. You can easily add those types of information to your comment field.

Allowing Access: If many people will have access to your database, and your program allows it, store your information in a read only format. This will prevent less than savvy users from accidentally deleting or altering your information while at the same time allowing them to find what it is they are looking for.

Keep it Current: Once you have entered all of your information, it is critical that someone continues to enter new data and keep up with all the new material in your library. Your database will be of little use to you if it's not complete. I reiterate, assign someone the responsibility. Someone needs to be dedicated to maintaining the information.

Organizing your library, as you can see is more than just creating a database. It is labeling and organizing your folders, storing them appropriately, returning them to their proper place and in general, taking care of your music. Take care of your music and it will take care of you, by being there when you want it and having a longer life than its cousins haphazardly thrown on a desk somewhere, gathering dust amidst coffee rings, Twinkie wrappers and last month's paper.

Having a database is a no-brainer, saving you countless time and energy. Whatever programs, or numbering system you decide to use, get the input of your colleagues. You want it to be as easy and accessible as possible. Isn't that the point after all? Good Luck!

Roe Lewis is the librarian for the Walt Disney World Music Library. She is also the Editor of Staff Notes a weekly music newsletter published by Express Music Publishing. Express Music Publishing is an online music publisher offering both original and unique traditional arrangements for Vocals, Percussion, Jazz Band, Marching Band, Concert Band and Brass Ensemble. EMP publishes a free weekly newsletter entitled Staff Notes that offers down-to-earth, real-world advice and information for teachers and students of all ages. Staff Notes covers topics in performance, arranging for bands, percussion how-to, vocal techniques, interviews with industry professionals and other great stuff. Visit Express Music Publishing on the web at:

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