Enriching the Music Experience:

Making Locally-Developed Digital Resources Accessible

By Deborah Campana

With Charles McGuire

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Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today about the evolution of Oberlin

Conservatory Library's locally developed digital resources. My colleague, Professor

Charles McGuire, will greet you virtually a little later in this presentation. First, however,

I would like to begin by telling two stories related to the theme of our conference.

The first:

Perhaps like me, you were unaware that **centerNet** the international network of digital

humanities centers, hosted on May 19 "A Day in the Life of the Digital Humanities."

This annual event is intended to bring together scholars interested in the digital

humanities from around the world to document what they do **on one day**. In connection

with this occasion, Jacob Heil, Mellon Digital Scholar for the Five Colleges of Ohio (of

which Oberlin is one) provided a webpage link to us at Oberlin. On that webpage, I

found randomly generated answers to the question: "What is Digital Humanities?" And

because I appreciate clarification on terms, in this case, "digital humanities," I thought

you, too, might appreciate what they had to say:

First up is Brett Bobley, Chief Information Officer of the National Endowment for the Humanities and Director of the Office of Digital Humanities" who said:

> "We use 'digital humanities' as an umbrella term for a number of different activities that surround technology and humanities scholarship. Under the digital humanities rubric, I would include topics like open access to materials, intellectual property rights, tool development, digital libraries, data mining, born-digital preservation, multimedia publication, visualization, GIS, digital reconstruction, study of the impact of technology on numerous fields, technology for teaching and learning, sustainability models, and many others."

In answer to the same question came a more succinct comment from Ethan Watrall, Professor of Anthropology at Michigan State University: "Who the hell knows…I certainly don't."

And then there was the comment of Philip R. 'Pib' Burns, who provided a less technical observation than his title, Senior Computer Programmer at Northwestern University, would indicate:

> "My stock curmudgeon answer: Humanities is humanities, digital or not – the study of literature, fine arts, history, language, and philosophy. We don't distinguish digital sociology or digital astronomy, so why digital humanities? Just because computers are involved doesn't mean the basic nature of the subject area is any different than it has been traditionally. Computers allow for doing things with texts and other cultural artifacts that could not be done feasibly without the

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computational power and storage modern computers provide. Computers should

be considered as an extension of the scholar's mind – very useful tools indeed."

My second story begins when I was new to my first professional position. As Music

Public Services Librarian at Northwestern, I found myself reviewing filing cabinet

drawers filled with mimeographed bibliographies compiled in the 1970s by one of the

first people to hold my position there, Steven Fry. Without the World Wide Web,

personal computers, discovery or content management systems, Mr. Fry managed to

develop extremely useful finding aids on a myriad of topics for library users.

In the "post-mimeograph-age" otherwise known as the "advent of library online

systems," bibliographies like these could be created in an instant. When we leap ahead in

time to present day, we are well aware our libraries can offer access to subscription-

based, online resources that enable users to listen to music or view videos on devices in

the library or while walking down the street.

Advancements in technology have of course changed the manner in which we access

information. But perhaps it is less evident that these changes also allow us to publish our

own digital content. As part of a liberal arts college, the Oberlin Conservatory Library

represents a smaller institution, however, we are large school of music and music library.

We are called a conservatory yet we offer to music students a full complement of

academic courses in music and in the sciences and humanities. We are a comparatively

small institution yet we are integral to large and strong consortia including OhioLINK and the Five Colleges of Ohio.

These characteristics helped define and inspire the design of the Oberlin-based tools I will soon describe. These tools take the form of database indexes and digital collections. And their development was initiated purely within library or from classroom activities.

Generally, when considering digital resources, we think first of computing and funding. To be clear, however, the most important assets to these projects are the creativity and dedication of people: librarians, faculty and students alike. Aside from the names I will mention during the course of my discussion, it should be noted that assistance toward making these resources available came from computing, networking, serials and metadata librarians and programmers.

As a publisher of digital resources, the Conservatory Library first began offering access to an index to song anthologies, the *Oberlin Song Index*, in the 1970s. Music public services librarians, Carolyn Rabson started the card-based file and Kathleen Abromeit continues to oversee today's database that currently contains 55,000 entries.

 [Folk Song Index SLIDE] *The Folk Song Index* is a more recent offering. Started by the not-for-profit, educational organization, *Sing Out*, under Mark Moss's direction, the database made its first appearance at Oberlin in 2004. Since that time, Kathleen Abromeit has overseen Oberlin's collaboration; her student reference assistants are indexing all newly published folksong anthologies and adding the data to the jointly-

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owned index. The index focuses on traditional folk songs of the world with an emphasis on English-language songs. Each entry includes the song title, first line of chorus, first line of verse, and full bibliographic information on the source. Currently there are over 63,000 entries indexed from over 2,400 anthologies.

[Autograph collection SLIDE]

The Oberlin Conservatory Library Collection of Musicians' Autographs and Photographs is an eclectic mix of autographs, letters, stamps, and photographs of musicians. Several gift collections provide the basis of the collection, those of: Mr. and Mrs. C. W. Best, Frederick G. Marks, Charles W. Morrison, and Frank H. Shaw. Oberlin Conservatory Library's curator of music special collections, Jeremy Smith, oversaw the digitizing of highlights representing this collection and the compilation of its inventory. The collection depicts autographs and photographs of musicians such as C.P.E. Bach, Amy Beach, Hector Berlioz, Nadia Boulanger, Henry Cowell, Claude Debussy, Clara Schumann, and many others.

In 2010, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation first awarded the Five Colleges of Ohio, a consortium including Denison and Ohio Wesleyan Universities, Kenyon and Oberlin Colleges, and The College of Wooster, a three-year grant entitled, "Next Steps in the Next Generation Library." The goals included creating digital resources to enhance research and teaching, and to promote information management and digital publishing. As a result, the grant enabled librarians, faculty, and students to produce more than 50 digitization projects in a wide range of disciplines.

One of the by-products of the collaboration between the Frederick R. Selch Collection curator, Barbara Lambert, and Conservatory professor, Claudia Macdonald can be seen here. [Frederick R. Selch Collection of American Music History SLIDE]

Their musicology class featured Selch collection objects to help illustrate the history, design and use of musical instruments and performance. The objects featured in the digital collection represented here include paintings, drawings, prints; photographs and tintypes; correspondence; posters, playbills, and other ephemera from the Frederick R. Selch Collection of American Music History found in our special collections.

Another project, *SongWorks for Children*, was developed by Oberlin music education professor Peggy D. Bennett with assistance from a number of Oberlin librarians, but principally, Kathleen Abromeit, again our public services librarian, and Alan Boyd, associate director of libraries. This class continues to be popular draw for children in the area. The online collection features video clips of pre-school children

> "immersed in singing games, nursery rhymes, masterworks, pop songs, and score reading. You will see teachers and parents being playful, interacting with children and music in ways that capture imaginations, focus attentions, stimulate senses, and elicit responsiveness."

Over 700 songworks are presented at this site, and they provide parents and teachers the opportunity to observe their children in group-instructional creative activities.

Before I introduce my colleague, Charles' presentation, there is one more digital collection I think will be of interest to you. [SLIDE Roderic C. Knight Musical Instrument Collection] One of Oberlin's ethnomusicologists, Roderic Knight, initiated this collection as a class project. Students chose instruments, studied them carefully to compose the metadata, and then they took photos of the more than 300 instruments from all over the world that are featured here.

In concluding my portion of this presentation, I wanted to tell you about the second phase of the Mellon Foundation grant that the Five Libraries of Ohio received. Beginning in 2013, the second grant continues to promote the goals of creating digital resources to enhance research and teaching, scholarly communication, information literacy, information management, and digital publishing. Entitled "Digital Collections: from Projects to Pedagogy and Scholarship," it also aims to "strengthen the digital capabilities of the libraries and embed the use of digital scholarship practices into the liberal arts curriculum."

As with the earlier phase, each faculty grant recipient is joined by a librarian who is a liaison available for consultation during the development of the digital collection.   Since I am acting in that capacity for the following project, let me introduce you to Dr. Charles McGuire, professor of musicology at Oberlin Conservatory. He will tell you about his "Musical Festival Database."

[Charles McGuire video presentation]