

BCC2008/SMF/2**MARC Formats Subcommittee MLA Conference Report
Newport, Rhode Island, Feb. 22, 2008
Compiled by Jim Alberts**

Present: Kerri Scannell Baunach (recorder), Spiro Shetuni, Joe Hafner, Peter Lisius, Catherine Gick, Jim Alberts (Chair), Steve Yusko (LC representative), Jay Weitz (OCLC representative); absent: Matthew Wise.

The subcommittee began by reconsidering a question left over from last year: whether to draft an official MLA BCC statement of best practices regarding coding the transposition/arrangement and presence/absence of parts fixed fields that were reintroduced into MARC21 with the harmonization between MARC21 and UK-MARC. While there was some question whether such a statement was necessary, it was the sense of both the subcommittee and some of the visitors present that such a statement, which would be addressed to catalogers in the United States and Canada, was advisable and would be beneficial. Both bytes should be “n” for sound recordings, as the fields are considered not applicable for this format. In the scores format, the default is blank for both transposition/arrangement and presence/absence of parts. In the absence of agreed-upon policies for the application of these fixed fields within the North American music cataloging community, it is the recommendation of this subcommittee that these defaults be adopted as MLA-recommended cataloging policy for scores and sound recordings.

Steve Yusko and Jay Weitz both gave brief reports on activities at Library of Congress and OCLC, respectively. In a question to Steve, it was clarified that while the phonogram and copyright symbols have been approved for use in MARC 21, the Library of Congress is not planning to apply them, although it will pass-through records using these symbols without editing them. The Subcommittee and visitors had a lively discussion of several MARC discussion papers and proposals that have implications for the music community. Perhaps the most important of these was MARC Discussion Paper No. 2008-DP04, entitled “Encoding RDA, Resource Description and Access, in MARC 21.” This proposal outlines numerous changes and additions to MARC 21 that will be necessitated by the introduction of RDA. RDA requires a much higher degree of granularity in physical description (or description of virtual files) than MARC 21, in which several subfields in the 260 and 300 fields are made to serve multiple functions. These will have to be broken out as separate subfields to accommodate RDA description. Also, the RDA emphasis on content type, carrier type, and media type will render the current general material designation obsolete, since the degree of descriptive information called for by RDA could not be usefully fit into the 245 field. Such issues of granularity in description arise regularly in this discussion paper; for instance, thesis information in the 502 field would have to be recorded with greater parsability than is currently the case. Also, because the RDA data elements do not carry labels, greater specificity would be necessary in such fields as the 511 and 508, with more detailed use of the 1st and 2nd indicators as a likely possibility for encoding RDA element names in such fields.

Other agenda items included a discussion of whether or not to propose an open forum on RDA and MARC for 2009, possibly as a joint program meeting with the Subcommittee on Descriptive Cataloging. It was decided that this would be premature, since RDA content will not have been finalized by MLA 2009, and aiming for 2010 would make more sense.

We also discussed several of the MARC proposals that would impact the music community, including DP2008-02, which proposes (not for the first time) making the 440 field obsolete. Several questions were raised around this issue, although most large research libraries have some type of automated series authority control that frequently performs a function similar to what the proposal suggests. One question that was raised (both at MARBI at ALA Midwinter and the Subcommittee on MARC Formats) was why the PCC (which put forward the discussion paper) wishes to change the MARC format rather than simply recommend their preferred series treatment as PCC practice. Also, although the discussion paper does not directly suggest this, the question was raised of whether 8xx fields would have to be justified by 490 fields in the record. It was pointed out that current CONSER practice and certain concepts in RDA will entail moving away from the philosophy that every added entry (or access point) would have to be justified within the bibliographic record. Currently, we can only take a wait and see approach and make further decisions (and seek more input from the music community) when this discussion paper returns as a proposal.

Last updated March 13, 2008