

Summing Up the MLA Preconference: “The Beat Goes On-athon: Creating Linked Data for Music with RIMMF” by Drew Beisswenger

A thought-provoking and very busy preconference at the MLA meeting in Orlando was titled “The Beat Goes On-athon,” in which participants learned how to use RIMMF cataloging software to create RDA data. It was taught by Kathy Glennan plus a group of hard-working and much-appreciated coaches and facilitators, and was co-sponsored by the MLA Cataloging and Metadata Committee, the MLA Education Committee, the MLA Educational Outreach Subcommittee and the Music OCLC Users Group.

RIMMF is an acronym for “RDA in Many Metadata Formats,” and is the brainchild of Deborah and Richard Fritz, who create cataloging products through their company TMQ, Inc. In describing the history of the project, the Fritzes explain that Deborah, a cataloging trainer, was seeking a visual way to explain the principles behind RDA and FRBR. Richard agreed to “try his hand” at building an RDA input form, and the RIMMF program, initially launched in 2012, grew from there. At present, although it is probably not practical to use the program to make MARC records for use in current library systems, RIMMF has become much more than a training module. It represents a new model for creating and processing bibliographic records with an emphasis on relationships. In addition, RIMMF utilizes RDA vocabularies from the Open Metadata Registry (OMR), and creates new ways to map MARC information into non-MARC forms.

Hallmarks of RIMMF records include that they use no MARC fields, they form “R-Trees” that graphically link all of the FRBR groups (work, expression, manifestation, and item; person, family, corporate body; subjects), and they include highly-specific bibliographic elements that can be set to populate fields as defined in RDA. In essence, users of RIMMF are forced to think in terms of the FRBR models as they work, and especially to contemplate where particular elements of a bibliographic record should be placed most appropriately in a FRBR relationships model.

The preconference itself was organized using a “flipped classroom” format with attendees expected to arrive with a good basic knowledge of RIMMF so they could devote most of their time to creating RIMMF records. Kathy provided attendees good advanced training by giving download instructions for the free program; by offering them instructional websites, a wiki, and a series of helpful emails; and most of all by creating an hour-long webinar that highlighted many of the features and processes in RIMMF.

Kathy began the preconference by giving a brief introductory PowerPoint presentation, after which attendees were divided into pairs and used RIMMF to process items they had brought. The software linked to the LC catalog and authorities file, so attendees were usually able to import and link needed records. Typically attendees began by importing manifestation records, which automatically generated drafts of expression and work records that needed editing. For about three and a half hours, Kathy and the facilitators wandered the room helping attendees with their sometimes-tricky cataloging challenges. Just before lunch, the pairs of attendees submitted their “R-balls,” or folders containing the sets of related entities, so Kathy could tabulate the results. At a wrap-up after lunch, Kathy reported statistics, including that attendees has created

over 350 entity records and made nearly 350 relationships. She also gave a brief presentation on RDA and linked data, and answered questions.

At a time when many librarians struggle to “wrap their heads around” RDA and FRBR, RIMMF offers a good way to gain some clarity. This isn't to say it's easy, as we struggle to understand, for example, why program notes and durations should typically be in the expression record unless they are part of an aggregate, and why publishers are part of the manifestation records but statements of responsibility access points are not. But over time, with practice, the process makes more sense, and through gaining a stronger understanding of these conceptual frameworks we can more effectively analyze and evaluate the principles and practices related to the growing world of linked data.