



ORCHESTRA

Sharing Resources — An Orchestral Lending Library

by J. David Arnott

Have you ever found yourself desperately searching for one more original copy (not a photocopy) of a score the week you needed it for contest? When that failed, did you try to conduct from memory when you came up one score short? This of course brings to mind the old adage that there are two kinds of conductors: those with their scores in their heads, and those with their heads in their scores—but that is a topic for another column.

Have you ever wanted to buy a really cool piece of music for your orchestra—you know—the one we read at the MNSOTA workshop the summer of 200X? But because your budget was depleted (or non-existent) you were unable to do so? Have you wished you could, at the very least, borrow a set of parts for that really cool piece? Have you ever conspired with a colleague to pool resources and buy that really cool piece together?

Has anyone ever asked if they could borrow that really cool piece you bought last year that your own kids loved? We played a nifty *Pirates of the Caribbean* medley here last October and three different conductors have since asked to borrow it to do with their own orchestras. Last spring I was fortunate enough to be able to borrow a full set of parts for the Brahms *German Requiem* for the cost of postage. Does this annoy the publishing houses? Probably. Is it illegal? No.

Ever since Benjamin Franklin set the framework for a subscription library in Philadelphia way back in 1731 (40 shillings to join; 10 shillings per year dues), the concept of borrowing printed materials has grown exponentially. Franklin and his followers began their library both because of the great expense of books and because of the length of time it took for them to arrive from England. While we now enjoy overnight delivery, the high cost of printed materials remains unchanged since the Revolutionary period. In fact, the Free Library of Philadelphia (the roots of which trace back to Franklin) operates the Edwin A. Fleisher Collection, the world's largest lending library of music for orchestra. Their website indicates that they have over 21,000 titles available, including the entire standard canon of orchestral music (<http://libwww.freelibrary.org/collections/collectionDetail.cfm?id=14>).

What a grand idea. Can we do something like this in Minnesota maintained and operated by MNSOTA members? We can create an accessible database of sorts—an online catalog of what we collectively own for the use of MNSOTA members. We would need a database housed on the MNSOTA web site (how about something like: www.mnsota.org/lending-library). The membership of the lending-library would agree to loan materials to other members and each member would be responsible

for inputting information about their own holdings directly into the database. A minimum amount of information would be required for each work entered and I am sure we could make a user-friendly online entry form. It would include composer/arranger, instrumentation, level, and the number of original conductor's scores. Borrowers would be responsible for any shipping/ mailing costs as well as returning the materials in the condition they went out.

To be able to do this for no cost (except shipping) would be the ultimate in budget savings in a tight time. I ask those of you who are interested in seeing something like this created and have ideas as to how we can make it possible, to send me a brief email expressing your support.

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