

# Access Points and Authority Records for Musical Expressions in RDA

## *A discussion paper*

Prepared by the MLA-BCC RDA Music Implementation Task Force  
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### Background

In July 2012, Mark Scharff, on behalf of a newly-formed PCC task group on authorized access points for expressions in RDA, solicited feedback from members of MLA's Bibliographic Control Committee regarding issues related to musical expressions, their access points, and the authority records that support them. This discussion paper summarizes comments gathered using a webpage on the RDA Music Implementation Task Force's wiki space<sup>1</sup> in July 2012.

### Preliminary Considerations

In RDA, authorized access points are used to represent both works and the expressions that realize them. Access points for expressions are crafted using the access point for a work, plus one or more characteristics that are germane to that particular expression. In music, such characteristics include altered medium of performance (represented by "arranged"), format (vocal scores, chorus scores), language, incompleteness of a work or compilation of works (represented by "Selections:"), date (of recording, edition, etc.), content type (notated or performed music, moving image), associated persons, families, or corporate bodies (performers, arrangers, editors, publishers, etc.), and numerous other attributes. Under AACR2, only the first four of these were routinely appended to access points for music; dates were generally added only to access points for the collected works of one composer, and all other attributes of musical expressions were brought out elsewhere in bibliographic records.

RDA 6.27.3, on the other hand, gives essentially no restrictions to the attributes that may be utilized in access points to distinguish one expression from another. The language "Construct an access point representing a particular expression ... by adding ... as applicable", while not explicitly prescribing the crafting of unique access points, *per se*, does unequivocally permit it. To wit, "another distinguishing characteristic" can be just about anything, including but not limited to the attributes listed above.

Two factors stand in conflict with the idea of unique access points for musical expressions. The first is the LC-PCCPS for 6.27.3, which essentially rolls back access point practice to what was done under AACR2. The second is the current wording at 6.28.3 (the music-specific counterpart to 6.27.3), which gives instructions for five specific types of musical expressions, referring, in cases of other types, back to 6.27.3. The conflict here comes from the fact that a significant number of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://mlabcc-sdc.pbworks.com/w/page/51185150/Granularity%20of%20expression%20access%20points>

<sup>2</sup> There is an RDA proposal pending to redefine "Selections" as a work-level attribute. See <http://www.rda-jsc.org/docs/6JSC-LC-20.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The level of prescriptiveness in the language of this rule is a matter of debate.

musical expressions are actually *sub*-types of the types given (e.g., an arrangement for specific media made by a specific arranger). The instructions at 6.28.3.2-6.28.3.6 contain no referrals back to 6.27.3, and thus do not seem to allow *further* differentiation of such expressions within the access point.

The suggestions and examples given in this discussion paper presume that both the LC-PCCPS for 6.27.3 would be relaxed, and that the language at 6.28.3 would be modified, in order for unique expression access points for music to be fully legal under RDA and associated LC/PCC policies. It should also be emphasized that expression-level attributes are abundant and ubiquitous in metadata for music resources; therefore, any general policies regarding the syntax and granularity of expression access points have wide-reaching, significant implications in the domain of music, and ought to be approached judiciously.

### **Granularity of Expression Access Points: The Problem of “Uniqueness”**

Access points for works have historically served a collocating function. In RDA, this is brought out at 6.0, where collocation is cited as the first purpose (“bringing together all descriptions of resources embodying a work when various manifestations have appeared under various titles”). Access points for expressions can collocate as well, but given that a significant number of musical expressions are embodied in only one manifestation<sup>4</sup>, access points intended to uniquely identify particular expressions differentiate to a much greater extent than they collocate. In the current MARC environment, it is not permissible to identify a work and its associated expression with separate access points. Thus, the more expression-level attributes that are added to the access point, the more the collocation function (for works) is diminished.

Another open question is: under which circumstances ought expression-level attributes be added to work access points, in order to render them unique? The first factor in this question is the universe of conflict. For works, this universe has traditionally been the shared bibliographic file (e.g., WorldCat), shared authority file(s), and information found in reference sources. Would the same universe apply at the expression level? Would the cataloger have to examine bibliographic descriptions for every manifestation of a Mozart opera, for example, to ensure that the combination of attributes added to an access point is shared by no other expression in the “universe”? This added research could easily double the time required to catalog a resource.

The second factor has to do with the constantly-changing nature of the bibliographic universe. An expression of a work may be the only one that exists at the time of cataloging, but then what happens when a second expression of that work appears? A similar situation happens at the work-level from time to time: when a living composer has written only one sonata, “Sonata” (in the singular) is given as the preferred title; when a second sonata appears, the older preferred title must be changed to “Sonatas” (in the plural), to match the newly-created preferred title<sup>5</sup>. Another analogous situation occurs when a newly-established corporate body’s name conflicts with an existing name; both the new and existing names must be qualified. Can such practices scale to the level of expression access points? That is, would a “simple” work access point, which serves double

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<sup>4</sup> Two common counterexamples in music are audio recordings reissued in a different carrier format, and scores and parts (notated music) issued/cataloged as separate manifestations.

<sup>5</sup> See PCC-LCPS 6.14.2.5 for more information.

duty identifying the associated expression when only one expression exists, have to be edited retrospectively when a second expression appears? If yes, then the potential bibliographic file maintenance is daunting. If no, then the resulting browse lists would be a perplexing mixture of access points both with and without expression-level additions.

These fundamental issues led some respondents to advocate for the continuation of legacy practices (in concurrence with LC-PCCPS 6.27.3 and 6.28.3 as currently written), or even the complete cessation of adding expression-level attributes to work access points. However, it was recognized that, even if not striving for absolute uniqueness in expression access points, legacy practices could be extended in certain ways, with potentially beneficial results. Consider the following cases:

1. Well-known arrangements  
Mussorgsky, Modest Petrovich, |d 1839-1881. |t Kartinki s vystavki; |o arranged. |s Ravel
2. Compilations, complete editions, etc. of well-known composers  
Beethoven, Ludwig van, |d 1770-1827. |t Sonatas, |m piano. |s Wallner
3. Specific performances of musical works  
Tchaikovsky, Peter Ilich, |d 1840-1893. |t Concertos, |m violin, orchestra, |n op. 35, |r D major. |h Performed music. |s Mutter. |f 1988

As the above examples show, the number and type of expression-level attributes is highly dependent on the nature of the work expressed, and on the number of extant expressions from which to distinguish. Moreover, as MARC lacks the granularity in access point fields to designate each type of expression-level attribute in its own subfield, many such attributes would have to be designated using the same subfield code (|s)<sup>6</sup>, in repeating occurrences of the subfield if necessary. Take the above examples: in the first, the name given in |s refers to the arranger/orchestrator; in the second, the editor; and in the third, the principal performer (violin soloist).

It is perhaps not a worthwhile exercise to give every possible permutation of expression-level attributes, in an attempt to derive a systematic prescriptive order, especially since not all attributes apply to all musical expressions. However, some systematic order would be required to ensure consistency in practice, and (more importantly) to allow for comprehensible and predictable browse lists. The following broad notions may be considered about the following specific attributes (i.e., those outside of what is specified in 6.28.3).

- *Content type*: this core element is useful inasmuch as it gives context to other qualifiers (e.g., a name in |s following “performed music” is probably that of a performer). As any musical work can be expressed as notated music, performed music, or two-dimensional moving image, this attribute (if given in the access point at all) should probably be given as the first expression-level attribute, to provide a visual sorting mechanism at the broadest (i.e., leftmost) level possible.
- *Related person, family, or corporate body*: since many users seek and identify musical expressions based on such relationships (e.g., “I’m looking for the Bernstein recording of Beethoven’s Fifth”), they would often be valuable to bring out in access points, in a succinct

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<sup>6</sup> It is also possible to give such attributes in parentheses at the end of the access point, with no further content designation. This is less desirable, of course, from the standpoint of machine-actionability.

manner. The choice of which, and how many, names to give is dependent on the nature of the work.

- *Medium of performance (of an arrangement)*: this attribute is problematic as an access point qualifier, especially when the work access point already includes a statement of (the original) medium. Given the verbosity of some medium statements, this could also result in extremely long strings. Giving the altered medium in a variant access point (for works whose access point includes medium), however, is a long-standing practice and desirable to continue.
- *Date of expression*: dates of edition and recording are valuable for user selection, especially as editorial and performance practices change over time. Moreover, since such dates do not always correspond with the date of publication of the manifestation, it would be desirable to display them in a prominent way elsewhere in the bibliographic metadata. When included, dates should be given as the final component of an access point, especially in cases where they would be needed as a distinguishing characteristic of “last resort” (e.g., when multiple recorded performances by the same performer exist for the same work).

In summary, the problems associated with striving for unique expression access points for all musical resources are numerous and compelling. However, this does not mean that legacy practices could not be reexamined, with an eye to expanding and optimizing practices for qualifying work access points used to represent particular expressions, so long as this is approached in a judicious way. On the other hand, a new bibliographic framework is on the horizon—one that will rely less and less on textual strings as entity identifiers. Focusing on the syntax of those strings, in an increasingly complex information universe, is arguably not the best use of scarce policy and standards development resources. It is also a matter of debate whether today’s end users utilize left-anchored browse lists to a sufficient extent in their resource discovery behavior to warrant further refinements in this area. Emphasizing the recording of expression-level attributes as separate machine-actionable elements seems more efficacious, especially in discovery environments that support faceted browsing.

### Authority Records for (Sets of) Expressions

Expression “records” do not exist as such in the current MARC environment. Whereas many name-title authority records containing only work-level attributes can theoretically be construed or repurposed as “work records”, the same is not true of authority records with expression-level elements. To illustrate, an authority record for a name-title access point that has been appended with “arranged” represents *all* arrangements of that work; a record with a language term represents *all* translations into that language; etc. While it may sometimes be the case that an access point in such an authority record occurs only once in the bibliographic database, and thus the record represents only that one expression, this is happenstance and will cease to be true when that access point is used again to represent another expression.

The assertion in PCC’s *RDA in NACO* training modules<sup>7</sup> that an expression-level authority record constitutes a description of an entity, and thus is subject to RDA core requirements, is problematic to implement, since existing authority records—and new authority records created in accordance

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<sup>7</sup> [http://www.loc.gov/catworkshop/courses/rda\\_naco/index.html](http://www.loc.gov/catworkshop/courses/rda_naco/index.html). See “MARC 21 in NACO RDA Authority Records” module, slide 49.

with LC-PCCPS 6.27.3 as currently written—rarely represent a single expression but rather sets, or clusters, of expressions. As such, they are analogous to undifferentiated name authority records, with the added limitation that there is no fixed field value to indicate this, as there is with undifferentiated personal name records.

The above issues aside, such “undifferentiated expression” records have historically served a significant purpose for music catalogers and music users alike. Records for all arrangements of a work can show, by virtue of variant access points, the various media of performance a work has been arranged for (or even reveal to a user that a medium thought to be the composer’s original is actually the result of an arrangement). Records for collective title access points (e.g., “Piano music. Selections”) are even more useful, as they refer from titles of well-known compilations (e.g., J.S. Bach’s “Clavierübung III”) to their associated collective titles. Translations are a special case in music; translated titles of musical works (e.g. “Magic flute” for “Zauberflöte”) are currently given as variants in the name-title authority record for the work.

On the other hand, “undifferentiated expression” records can result in some confusing incongruities in granularity, and thus be potentially confusing for the end user. For example, variant access points which are germane only to specific expressions, such as arrangements for a specific medium, or variant titles appearing only on manifestations embodying one specific expression (e.g., “Concord symphony”) or specific subset of works (e.g., the “Clavierübung” example given above), refer in the current environment to authorized access points at a much lower level of granularity (e.g., “Sonatas, piano, no. 2; arranged” and “Organ music. Selections”, respectively), thus reducing the precision of the attendant search. This has a deleterious effect on the Identify and Select functions

Any change in practice regarding granularity of expression access points will require a reassessment of these historic practices. It is possible (and potentially desirable) that multiple authority records for expressions of a work, at varying levels of granularity, could co-exist in the authority file; this is analogous to the idea of records for both an ongoing conference and for individual occurrences of it. In the new bibliographic framework, such records could serve as nodes around which to cluster metadata describing more specific expressions. These and other possible re-imagined purposes for expression-level authority records are admittedly beyond the scope of this paper.

The use of 38x fields in expression-level authority records was also considered. Though most of these fields are for work-level attributes, they are potentially useful in expression-level records as well, inasmuch as the attributes given in them pertain to all expressions represented by the access point. A brief summary of each of the fields in question is below:

- **380:** useful when the form of composition is part of the access point and it is an expression of an entire work or group of works (e.g., “Concertos. Selections”). It would also be useful for expressions of works or compilations of works with distinctive titles, if they all in the same form.
- **381:** can mirror the attributes given in subfields o and s (e.g., “arranged”, “Selections”).
- **382:** useful when the access point is for an arrangement(s) for a particular medium.
- **383:** very useful when a collective title access point represents a group of works in a specific range of opus or thematic index numbers. Also useful when an arrangement of a work

bears an opus or thematic index number that differs from the one applied to the original work.

- **384:** very useful when an arrangement of a work has changed key from the original.

336 (content type) presents a particular challenge for musical expressions in authority data. If this field will be routinely required in expression-level authority records, then it would be highly advisable to routinely input all three of the following content types for music (notated music, performed music, or two-dimensional moving image), unless a specific content type is given in the access point.

As to the question of when to create NARs for musical expression access points, the PCC's general guidelines for uniform titles<sup>s</sup> provide an excellent jumping-off point. The first situation ("to trace a reference to that element") could be extended to include recording any data pertaining to that particular (set) of expression(s), including but not limited to 38x fields. If these guidelines are to be brought forth into the RDA environment, specific guidance for musical expressions would be needed.

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<sup>s</sup> <http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/naco/utfaq.html#1>