

THE INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING
BEHAVIORS OF AMATEUR MUSICIANS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

by
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The information needs of amateur musicians have largely been ignored by information professionals and librarians. In this study, nine amateur musicians were interviewed about their information needs. The participants relied most heavily on informal contact with other musicians to learn about playing opportunities and other needs related to playing music. Most of the information needs of the amateur musicians in this study were satisfied without use of the music library. Some of the participants in this study found the Internet to be their best source of information regarding playing music. The results of this study may act as a foundation for further studies into the information needs of the amateur musician.

Headings:

Information needs

Information seeking

Musicians – amateur

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Introduction

According to a 1997 Gallup Poll, two-thirds of all households in the United States have a member that currently plays or has played a musical instrument. In 38% of these households, at least one member age five or older currently plays an instrument. This represents 37 million households in the United States. Despite the large number of amateur musicians in the United States and elsewhere little attention has been given to this group by information professionals. Studies into information needs have largely focussed on scientists, professionals, social scientists and the general public. There are few studies that have attempted to assess the needs of the amateur, whether it be musician, artist or any other type, by information scientists.

Perhaps one reason for the lack of studies addressing the needs of the amateur musician is the wide diversity of the amateur. The amateur musician can play in any genre of music from rock to Baroque. These musicians also demonstrate many skill levels and musical backgrounds, from being self-taught to formally trained at music conservatories. While many groups and organizations exist that allow musicians to play together, many musicians may play solo or with members of their own families. These reasons make it difficult to design a survey and to find a representative sample.

Purpose of the Study

This study is an attempt to make a first step in the direction of identifying the information needs of the amateur musician. The data collected during the course of the study are used to draw some tentative conclusions about the

information needs of amateurs. It is hoped that they will form the basis of future studies into examining the information needs of musicians.

Literature Review

Very few studies have addressed the needs of amateur musicians. Fewer still have actually questioned musicians. In "Music Library Users: Who are these people and that do they want from us?" Jeanette Casey and Kathryn Taylor (1995) informally survey public and academic music librarians about the information needs of their clientele. They examined the services offered by the music libraries and discussed the effects of technical, demographic and societal change on the demands placed on music libraries. The authors lament the lack of patron surveys. They state, "user surveys are seen as an overwhelming undertaking, impossible to even consider when we feel we are barely able to keep up with the needs we see right in front of us." (p. 4)

Jane Gottlieb's (1994) article, "Reference Service for Performing Musicians: Understanding and Meeting their Needs", discusses the needs presented by students at the Julliard School. Gottlieb used antidotal experiences to demonstrate the type of inquiries the reference desk received from conservatory music students. No formal study was made of the information needs of this population. Instead, the librarians used the types of questions and problems presented by the library's patrons as evidence of what the student's information needs were. No mention was made of other patrons, such as non-conservatory students that may use the music library's services.

In an abstract available from Library and Information Science Abstracts, a Japanese study is described that used a questionnaire survey of music scholars and players (Kato, 1990). The study compared the differences between scholars and players and described problems of library services in music libraries. The survey found that players did not depend on music libraries very much.

While the needs of amateur musicians have largely been ignored by information professionals, music marketers and educators have identified some of these needs, though not as the result of a formal inquiry. Marketers are interested in identifying the trends towards the use of computers in creating music and creating opportunities for adults to begin playing an instrument (Speer, 1996). Music educators are interested in encouraging students to develop an interest in playing chamber music and providing ongoing instruction into adulthood (Miller, 1997; Cummiskey, 1999). Although not specifically addressed, some information needs are implied in these articles.

Methodology

Interviews using general, open-ended questions was chosen as the best way of obtaining preliminary data on the basic information needs of amateur musicians. Since this study was primarily an exploration, in-depth discussion with a limited number of subjects would allow unconstrained, leisurely and in depth exchange. Through this exchange the possibility of discovering the unexpected need was increased.

Nine participants were selected to participate in this study. All participants were over the age of 18 and considered themselves amateur musicians. All of

the musicians in this study are actively involved in playing music and participate in one or more musical group. Of the participants, 5 were previously known to the investigator. The other participants were identified through snowball sampling technique. Of the musicians, 2 are regular members of a local orchestra, 5 are active in playing chamber music, 2 play folk music, 3 are members of local bands and 3 also sing in local community choruses.

The participants were interviewed informally in interviews lasting between 30 minutes and an hour. The musicians were encouraged to describe their musical backgrounds and then to share some experiences demonstrating their information needs, and strategies for meeting those needs. Drawing on my years of personal observation, I asked the participants to discuss their needs in relation to the following structure:

- 1) Information needs related to finding musical groups or other individuals with whom they could play.
- 2) Information needs related to discovering new music to play and finding publications of music.
- 3) Information needs related to finding instruments to purchase or rent and the repair of those instruments.
- 4) Information needs related to performance, such as finding recordings of music, rehearsal space, or instruction.

The participants were also asked about the sources they used to address their needs.

Summary of the Data

The participants

Musician A plays mandolin and fiddle in various folk music groups. He is completely self-taught and did not start playing music until an adult. This is the only participant who had no musical training as a child.

Musician B is an oboist who started playing as a child. His mother was a professional oboist and he later received training at the Eastman Conservatory, although his college major was English. Musician B is very active in local chamber ensembles and also sings as a member of some small singing groups.

Musician C plays viola in several chamber groups and occasionally plays with the local community orchestra. This player began taking private lessons as a child. She played professionally for a time as a member of the Peace Corps. She currently maintains a web site designed to recruit players and to book playing engagements. She is one of two musicians that I interviewed who uses music to supplement her income.

Musician D plays trombone in two local community bands and plays with several groups involved in ethnic music. She learned the trombone through band classes as a child and took music classes as part of her undergraduate degree.

Musician E is a cellist who began playing as a child. Chamber music was a regular part of her early years; her father was also an active amateur musician. This musician is active in playing in various chamber ensembles and performs as a soloist at her church.

Musician F also was exposed to chamber music early in life. She plays violin with a quartet and with the local community orchestra. She also sings with a local community chorus. Musician F is currently taking both voice and violin lessons, one of two participants in this study currently taking lessons.

Musician G is also a violinist and plays in the local community orchestra of which she is a charter member and with several smaller chamber groups. She began piano lessons at age 5 and started violin at age 7. Off and on throughout her life she has taken lessons and also played in various orchestras around the country. She currently is taking lessons again on both piano and violin.

Musician H began clarinet as a child but later switched to percussion. She learned to play music as part of a school music education program. 4 years ago she began to play the cornet and now plays cornet in a local community band that she started. She also plays drums to relax and have fun on her own.

Musician I plays Euphonium in two local community bands, sings in some local choral groups and plays flute occasionally. Musician I learned baritone while in middle school. He did not play at all in high school and then in college began playing euphonium and flute.

Finding other musicians

Finding other musicians to play with seems to be a common need expressed by the participants in this study. For those musicians in my study that have lived in other areas of the country, I asked how they found out about groups in this area when they first arrived. Most of the participants in this study started by locating and playing with the local community orchestra or community band.

Only two participants did not do this, musicians A and B. Of the seven who became active playing music first with a larger ensemble, four found out about the group through an advertisement in the newspaper. The others learned about the group through word of mouth. Two of the musicians, musician C and E reported actively seeking out the orchestra as a place to meet other musicians to play chamber music. Both had employed this strategy when moving to other areas.

Another method mentioned by several of the participants is a workshop offered by the state university for chamber musicians. Participants B, E, F, and G all have participated in the workshop and cite it as a place where they have met other musicians.

While the chamber music workshop offers classical musicians a place to network there are also similar avenues available to musicians playing other types of music. Musician D attends a workshop in New York every year in order to play Klezmer music. Musician A reported attending folk music festivals in the region. Both reported that these provided opportunities to meet other musicians. Musician D was surprised to meet local musicians from her area while attending the workshop in New York.

The musicians in this study also cited word of mouth or social contacts as a common way of hearing of other musicians. Musician G is listed as one of the local contacts for the community orchestra and receives several calls a month requesting information about other musicians available. Musician C is also active in seeking the names of individuals who want to play in chamber groups. She

maintains a list of people that she shares with other interested musicians.

Musician H also maintains a web site and a database of musicians interested in playing in her ensemble. Though she states that the web page acts as advertisement, she also has people call her who found out about the band through a friend.

Actively playing in different groups tends to increase the likelihood that someone will be contacted to play. As musician E states, "I played enough that my name gets passed around". For those interested in playing music with others, being visible in the music community seems to be a good strategy for meeting other musicians.

Some of the participants reported attending parties in which playing music was one of the main focal points. Musician A stated that many people and their families get together for an evening to play music. These musical gatherings were typically informal and generally involved "jamming" or playing by ear. Musician D reported similar gatherings. Musicians C and G reported other social gatherings where music was also the primary focus. However, these gatherings were more formal in that they required forming smaller groups and moving to different rooms to play. Typically these gatherings were initiated by someone with a large enough house to accommodate this type of playing as well as at least one piano and a large collection of sheet music.

Only Musician I reported using the Internet and in particular newsgroups to find other musicians to play with. Musician I found out about a community jazz band by reading an advertisement posted to a newsgroup. While musicians H

and C also reported using the Internet, neither one of them found out about groups to play with using those means.

Finding music to play

The strategies for finding new music to play seem to vary according to the type of music being played. Musician A reports getting songs that are “old and familiar, but not forgotten”. He states that often a song will be “on my brain” or “on my mind”. He then figures out the music for the songs by ear and then will use the World Wide Web to seek song lyrics. Musician A also states using the music library to find music to play. Similarly, Musician D uses old 78s to listen to music and figures out the chords and melody lines by ear to teach to others. She also states that at times she will hear music on the radio or at the workshop she attends. Musician D also regularly checks the music store for recordings of Klezmer music.

Musician H selects and purchases the music for the band that she started by using a vendor with a web presence. She finds one particular company very helpful, in that she can listen to a recording of the music before ordering it for the band and she can return the music within 30 days with no questions asked. She will also rely on suggestions from other members of her band.

The other sources for getting music are the music library, catalogs and music stores. Most of the participants mentioned using at least one of these sources and some used all. Musician B has collected “volumes of music” from catalogs and from mailings that he received as a member of the Double Reed Society. This musician reported frustration at not being able to find music at

times. He reported one occasion in which it took 10 weeks to receive some music he wished to purchase. It arrived after the performance for which it was needed. Musician B uses the music library to find music but prefers to purchase his own copy. This is sometimes difficult when a selection of music goes out of print or is available only through an obscure publisher.

Musician C also has been building her own collection of music, but because of financial constraints is not able to purchase as much as she would like. Her principal source of music is her sister who owns a music business. Musician C also uses the music library and music catalogs. While most of the music that she plays comes from the standard repertoire, occasionally the music is at the request of a particular client, often some popular song. In this case, she is challenged to find an arrangement that will work for the ensemble that she has for the performance.

Musician E finds music by using music catalogs, music stores and also uses music written by her son. In the past, she has relied heavily on purchasing music from catalogs "but it doesn't always work well". Sometimes the music is beyond her ability to play. The last time that she bought music, she took a friend along who could play piano. Her friend was able to play the music while they were in the store and Musician E was able to decide which music she wanted to purchase and was happy with what she got. Musician E also listens to one of the local classical radio stations and finds music to play by listening. Her father is also a source of music and will recommend music for her to play.

Musician F gets music primarily from the people that she plays music with and from her music instructors. As a member of a string quartet she has mostly played 2nd violin and has only recently started playing 1st violin. According to musician F, it is generally the responsibility of the 1st violin player to select the music. Since this is a new role for her, she is relying on music that she already owns and is familiar with. When she purchases new music, she uses music catalogs. She has also called one of the local music stores and had music delivered to her. She recently visited the same store to pick up some vocal music and stated that “it was better over the phone”.

Musician G’s primary source of music is the music library. She also listens to the radio and makes decisions about what pieces to obtain based on listening to them. Musician G also purchases music from music catalogs and music stores. She finds the music library to be very helpful and often browses the stacks to find music to play. Musician G is also on the steering committee for the orchestra and has some input into selections for the orchestra, although the conductor has the final say so. This musician states that when determining what music the orchestra should play the steering committee considers the playing ability of the orchestra, what music the orchestra has already played, and what music is available to the orchestra.

This is similar to the criteria mentioned by musician C. Musician C also needs to consider the playing ability of the other members of the group she is playing with. This includes what music has been played for a particular performance and what music she or other members of the group already own.

She mentions that this a challenge for her at times. She stated that frequently when playing pick-up performances (short, one time performances such as weddings or art gallery openings), some musicians may be reluctant to rehearse. If she is playing with a musician with whom she is unfamiliar, she must try to gauge the music to what she anticipates their playing ability to be.

Musician I relies mainly on music that he already owns. However, he has purchased music from local music stores and has “inherited music from different groups”.

Instruments, supplies, and repair

Most of the participants in this study found out about instrument repair shops through word of mouth. For many musicians, finding a good repairperson is almost as important as finding a good doctor, so personal recommendations are very important. Musician D stated that she found a repairman for her “horn” and she “won’t let anyone else touch it.” I found that it was common for the musicians in this study to be quite emphatic when describing the importance of a good repairperson.

Musician B requires reed-making supplies. He used advertisements found in a double reed journal to find a source for these supplies. He stated that he tried several different vendors before finding one that he liked, but that there were a limited number of places that he could choose.

Musician E needed extensive repairs on her cello and needed to leave her instrument for repair for several months. The possibility of being without one’s instrument is a major concern of musicians actively involved in playing music.

Musician C acknowledges that her viola needs to be examined, cleaned and possible repaired, but is unwilling to risk the possibility that she will be without an instrument for any length of time.

Musician H is the most active in seeking out new instruments for members of her band. She tends to do a lot of research to find the best prices for an instrument. She often looks first to the World Wide Web. After finding some pricing information, she will approach a local music store and see if they can meet the price, if not, she purchases the instrument online.

Musician I has also been looking for an instrument to purchase, however, he prefers to go to a local merchant where he can play the instrument before buying. However, before going to a local merchant he would like to be able to view their inventory online before driving to the store. He stated that he is not always able to call or visit the store during the store's business hours, so viewing the inventory from a web site would be a benefit for him.

Musician A has looked at instruments while at folk music festivals. He also related a story to me about purchasing a violin for one of his children. He stated that he used newsgroups to look for an instrument, but ultimately found an instrument through his child's violin instructor.

Instruction and technique

Musician A uses the World Wide Web to find information regarding music theory and to find technical exercises for the mandolin. He was the only musician in this study to rely on the web for this type of information.

In this study, there are two participants currently receiving instruction. Musician F is taking both voice and violin lessons and musician G is taking piano and violin lessons. I asked them how they found their instructors. Musician F started by calling the university's music department and eventually found out about an instructor from another member of the community orchestra. Musician G also found her instructors through word of mouth.

Musicians E and G found listening to recordings of music that they were working on to be helpful. In contrast, Musician B does not listen to others recordings because he "doesn't want to slavishly imitate someone else's interpretation". However, he stated that he knows several people who do use recordings. Musician E stated that she often plays along with the recording to rehearse a piece.

Musician A is the only completely self-taught musician in this study. He spends time figuring out music by ear before playing the music at a gathering with others. He stated that he tries to increase his playing ability by practicing exercises that he finds on the web.

Musician D learns music from the other members in the groups that she plays with. She stresses the importance of introducing new members to her groups. She played in a local Klezmer band for many years in which the members did not change. She stated that the band began to lose its freshness and played the same repertoire all the time. After introducing some new members, the group benefited by being introduced to new songs and techniques for playing the music.

Other needs

There were several other information needs that arose as a result of this study. Most of the musicians in this study have performed in public at one time or another. So for most, finding places to perform was an information need. Another need was finding rehearsal space and time to practice.

Musician A finds that when he and a group that he playing with performs at some local café or bar, that “they will turn around and ask you to play again”. Musician D also reported that people in the audience will approach members of the band after a performance to request future performances. Musician D will also pass out business cards and take names and numbers at performances. Musician C has had similar experiences. She finds that when she performs somewhere, someone in the audience will approach her about playing somewhere else. She stated that sometimes this could be a problem, because the potential client would want the same group that they heard to perform again and that was not always possible. Musician C plays with several different people who are not always available to play. Musician C also gets recommendations from her clients and will often get a request for music through these recommendations.

Musician C had used newspaper advertisements and flyers to advertise, but found that she did not get many calls that way. Musician C also finds nursing and retirement homes good places to perform. Musician E performs at nursing and retirement homes and stated that the homes were also good places to

rehearse. She finds that the nursing and retirement homes usually are very welcoming. Musician G has also performed at local retirement homes.

Musicians F and G perform regularly with the community orchestra and occasionally perform at local churches or university clubs.

Musician H actively seeks performance venues. She “checks the web” to see what is happening in the area and then calls to see if the organizers of the event would like to have her band perform. She has also had people contact her through email after they had seen her advertisement on the web.

Some of the participants in this study were interested in using computers and music software to arrange or transpose music for themselves. Musician B has been using the Internet to research what type of keyboard and MIDI interface to purchase. He felt that it would be helpful if some central organization could provide this type of equipment for musicians. He suggested that the church to which he belongs would be one example of such an organization. Musician C relies on arrangements written by her sister. Musician E takes a more flexible view of arranging. She relayed a story of a rehearsal where she played the viola parts on the cello and the 1st violin parts were played on accordion.

Finding the time to play and more importantly finding a time that is convenient for all members of a group is difficult. Some groups attempt to solve this problem by scheduling regular rehearsal times and making the commitment to attend rehearsal. While this sometimes is a successful strategy, some find that it is more helpful to schedule a performance. Musician B stated that it is “easier to get people to play if there is some performance in view”. Musician E

has a regular rehearsal each week. She makes it a priority in her life to find someone to play with. Musician F stated that she only meets with other members of her quartet occasionally, though she would like to meet more frequently. Typically, they may only meet once a month. Musician H has scheduled rehearsal for her band so that they can meet every other week. Musician D stated the importance of finding other players that are committed to playing regularly. Musician C stated that many of the people she plays with are retired, not only do they have the time to play, but frequently they are able to act as organizers and have collections of music that they have gathered throughout their lifetimes.

Another issue for many of the participants of this study is finding low cost alternatives to purchasing music. Sheet music and recordings of music are expensive. Musician C finds that people she plays with are usually willing to share printed music and recordings with her. Musician G makes extensive use of the music library. Musician B also uses the library but prefers to own his own copy of music.

Although several of the participants in this study purchased sheet music through catalogs, it seems to be a 'hit or miss' proposition. When buying music through catalogs, the musicians tend to order pieces by composers that they are familiar with. However, this does not seem to be a guarantee that they will be happy with the music that they have purchased. One exception to this was Musician B who recently received a "huge box of music" from the widow of a well-known oboist. He has been happily reading through them.

Information systems

I wanted to know what type of information system the musicians would find most helpful in meeting their information needs. Musician B was interested in seeing an interactive database in which it was possible to listen to part of the music. He also wanted to be able to search based on the instrumentation.

Musician H also preferred a database. She would use it to track contacts and other groups. The database would also help her keep track of uniforms and instruments that she has purchased.

Musician F was interested in seeing a web site, where one would be able to sign up and look at music. She related a similar listing of amateur musicians in a different city. Musicians would rate their own abilities and list the type of music they were interested in playing.

Musician G's idea for a system would be a way to contact people and groups when you are new to an area. She does not use the Internet, so for her this system would need to be non-electronic. She mentioned that in the workshop that she attends, a board is put up and people are allowed to "freelance": meet with other musicians to work on different music after the regular hours of the workshop.

Musician I was most interested in seeing an electronic bulletin board system. He says he likes to have information available and likes to see advertisements of events and openings in different groups. He talked about to use of web sites to network with others and thought that too many people were trying to do this. He suggested that some central location would be much better.

Musician A was most interested in seeing a human information source. “A perfectly patient person incredibly musically talented who would teach me the elements, styles, methods I need to know as well as go out and find lyrics, recordings, etc.”

Summary table of information sources

Musician	Primary Genre	Primary Ensemble	Sources of Information			
			Groups/ People	Music	Instruments /Repair	Performance /Rehearsal
A	Folk	Small group	Other people	Internet/ Library	Internet/ Other people	Other people
B	Classical	Chamber group	Other people	Catalogs/ Library	Catalogs	Other people
C	Classical	Chamber/ Orchestra	Other people	Others/ Library/ Catalogs	Other people	Other people /Advertising
D	Folk	Small group	Other people	Recordings/ Concerts	Other people	Other people /Advertising
E	Classical	Chamber group	Other people/ Ads	Catalogs/ Recordings/ Other people	Other people	Other people
F	Classical	Orchestra/ Chamber	Ads/ Other people	Other people/ Instructor	Other people	Other people
G	Classical	Orchestra/ Chamber	Ads/ Other people	Library/ Instructor/ Catalogs	Other people/ Instructor	Other people
H	Popular/ Folk	Band	Ads/ Other people	Internet/ Other people	Internet	Internet/ Other people
I	Popular/ Classical	Band/ Small group	Internet	Other people	Internet/ Ads	Other people

Analysis of data

Although the sample used in this study was small, analysis of this data should prove informative to those who are interested in the needs of amateur musicians.

The information needs of amateur musicians

Although the participants in this study come from different musical backgrounds and play somewhat different music, many of their basic information needs are the same. The musicians in this study were interested in playing music with others, interested in increasing their skill levels, and playing more challenging and rewarding music.

The musicians in this study all routinely used friends, family, co-workers and acquaintances to find information. Although there have been few studies that have examined the amateur musician's information needs, this is not contradicted by other literature examining information needs in which some generalizations are made regarding user behavior. In particular, studies such as by Faibisoff & Ely (1974), Kuhlthau (1993), and Harris & Dewdney (1994) all suggest that people tend to seek information from interpersonal sources. All of the musicians in this study cited "word of mouth" as the most common way of finding information regarding musical needs.

Another pattern that emerged and is supported by other literature examining information needs, was the tendency of the participants in this study to use information sources that were most accessible to them. For example, the rehearsal space for the community orchestra is in the same building as a music library. Musician G, who is in the building weekly for orchestra rehearsal, routinely uses the music library as a source of music to play and suggested that the library would be a good place to post availability for playing in chamber

groups. Musician H enjoys spending time on the Internet and finds the Internet most accessible to meeting her needs.

The musicians in this study tended to stick to habitual patterns of information seeking behaviors. For example, when Musician E described her move to this area, she stated that she joined the community orchestra in order to meet other musicians, a strategy that she had employed when moving to other areas. The musicians in this study who performed the most tended to rely on informal contact to find places to play. Even Musician C, the one musician in this study who expressed a desire to earn some money playing music, tended to stick to this pattern of seeking. However, the musicians here also tended to experiment a bit before settling on a routine strategy. Musician C tried flyers and other forms of advertisement before deciding that relying on word of mouth and gathering contacts at performances was the best way to learn about possible performance venues.

Another example of habitual patterns exhibited is the tendency to stick to music and composers that were familiar to the musicians. Musician E wanted to avoid buying music that she would not be able to play or enjoy, so she tended to buy only music by composers with whom she was familiar. Musician H generally only purchases music that she can listen to beforehand. Musician G listens to the radio and then looks for music to pieces that she particularly enjoys. For example, she recently purchased the music for Shindler's List and has begun learning it.

Use of the library by amateur musicians

In general, the musicians in this study did not routinely utilize the library in information seeking. Only musicians G and A stated that they used the library with any frequency, while musicians I, H, and D did not use the library at all. Musician B stated that he wished that “libraries had more (music) and were better organized” but also recognized that there may also be problems with the music industry in general. For example, pieces of chamber music are going out of print and are becoming harder to find. Musician B says, “my gosh, I know if (local music store) has trouble when they know I want to buy something, then libraries must have a world of troubles too.”

When asked about library usage, the musicians that did not routinely use the library stated inconvenience, not having the time and believing the library would not have the music they needed as reasons for not using the library.

Use of the Internet

Three of the musicians in this study routinely relied on use of the Internet in satisfying their information needs. Three of the musicians rarely used the Internet. However, eight of the musicians felt that better use of the Internet would be helpful in addressing their needs. For example, Musician F, who does not routinely use the Internet to find information, suggested that a web site that could be used for looking at music and signing up for various chamber groups would be very helpful. Most of the participants in this study agreed that a better system of advertising playing groups and musicians availability was needed.

Use of other media

Many of the participants in this study felt that an interactive database would be helpful in addressing their needs. The musicians wanted something that would allow them to view and listen to music. They also felt that the databases should allow more flexibility in searching, for example by instrumentation or period rather than just by composer.

The catalogs of music publishers and music journals were also cited as sources for sheet music as well as other musical supplies. Four of the musicians listed the same music publisher as a routine source of music.

Most of the musicians in this study also listed music recordings as a form of gathering musical information, such as performance suggestions. Four of the musicians routinely used music recordings. For the musicians who were primarily interested in playing popular, ethnic or folk music, recordings were also valuable in providing ideas on what music to play. This was in contrast to the musicians who played classical music. For those musicians, printed sheet music was more important. The musicians playing classical chamber music rarely attempt to play a piece by ear or to transcribe a selection from a recording.

Conclusion

The information needs of amateur musicians have been largely ignored in the information and library science literature. With 62 million amateur instrumentalists in the United States (Speer, 1996), these are needs that should be examined in more depth. The existing literature in library science suggests that music librarians are only addressing a small number of potential patrons.

Models for the types of services that could be offered exist in other countries such as Denmark (Madsen, 1995). There a project exists to provide Music Information Centers that document Danish music and disseminate knowledge regarding Danish music and musical life.

This study, though limited suggests that there is a need for more centralized information for musicians. This is particularly important for musicians that are new to an area, though the need exists for all musicians that have a desire to play music with others. One suggestion for such a centralized source would be to make the music library more of an information center. In addition to providing sheet music and recordings, perhaps music libraries could provide some type of listing of amateur musicians in an area who are willing to meet with others to play. Casey and Taylor (1995) suggest that users may expect music libraries to provide “the instruments (i.e., computers), the software, and manual that creating music at the turn of the 21st century requires” (p. 8) Two of the participants in this study stated that this is indeed something which they desire.

One possible reason that the information needs of the amateur musician have been largely ignored by librarians and information professionals is that this group seems not to be patrons of the music library. Perhaps a better understanding of this groups’ needs may result in an increased number of music library patrons.

Other opportunities exist for the information professional interested in supporting the needs of amateur musicians. Perhaps some of the greatest challenges for the information professionals in to provide additional types of

access to music. Music symbols and representations of music provide technical challenges. Retrieving music through non-textual means create even greater challenges for information scientists. (Burbank and Henigman, 1992; McLane, 1996). Delving into solving these challenges without an examination of the needs of those who would be most invested in using the resources that are developed seems to me to be fundamental mistake.

Care needs to be taken to further examine the needs of the amateur musician and let these needs guide the solutions to the technical challenges of representing and retrieving music.

While limited in scope this survey into the needs of the amateur musician suggest that while somewhat diverse, there are some common needs that could be addressed through some type of central or regional agency. Music libraries could fill this need. Such an attempt may increase patronage. Music stores could act as an information center and it could be in their financial best interest to do so. Community bands and orchestras could also act as focal points for musicians that are new to an area and looking for fellow musicians.

Several opportunities exist for those interested in using the Internet to provide such a central agency. While many web sites exist for local groups, there does not seem to be an easy to find site. Also, the web sites could make use of studies such as this to provide additional information needed by musicians, for example a listing of music repairperson in the area and a satisfaction rating by different patrons. In addition, the pages could provide a forum for those interested in sharing experiences playing different pieces of

music or performing in different locations. Some resources are available. A list serve, [rec.classical.music.performing](#) exists in which members ask questions about finding arrangements of music, definitive recordings and elicit suggestions for interpretation. There are also numerous web sites that provide listings of people, the instruments they play and the type of music that they wish to play. Indeed, one of the musicians in this study has set up such a site. Digital libraries could also be set up to address the needs of the amateur musician.

Amateur musicians are a growing, yet somewhat invisible, section of our population. The musicians in this study came from diverse educational backgrounds and hold even more diverse careers. Because of these differences they provide something of a challenge to the researcher interested in fully exploring their needs. The differences in the genre of music that people play also provide additional challenges. This study suggests that there is some commonality. However, the needs of musicians that primarily play alone were not addressed at all, neither were the needs of musicians playing all types of music. This study did not explore the needs of musicians playing any types of electronically based music or the use of computers in creating music. There are still several avenues of possible exploration available to researchers of amateur musicians.

These possibilities could include addressing the needs of the musicians described above. Also, the results of this study could be used to create a questionnaire in order to survey a larger sample of musicians. A survey of the needs of amateur musicians in comparison to professional musicians would

provide added insight into this population's information needs. Other possibilities include exploring the information sources for musicians available on the Internet, as well as monitoring news groups.

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Appendix – Letter of Consent



THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH

CAROLINA

AT
CHAPEL HILL

School of Information and Library Science
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
CB# 3360, 212 Manning Hall
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599-3360

Student Research Project

Introduction to the study:

- You are invited to participate in a study to determine and explore the needs associated with being an amateur musician.
- Lynn Narveson, a graduate study enrolled in the School of Information and Library Science will be doing this study under the supervision of Dr. Paul Solomon of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Purpose:

- The purpose of this study is to determine the prevalent needs associated with rehearsing and performing music by amateur musicians.
- We hope that this study will provide insights that will aid in developing information systems that will support the amateur musician.

What will happen during this study:

This is what will happen during the study.

1. You will be asked to consent to an audio-taped interview.
2. The interview will last approximately 1-2 hours.
3. You may be asked if you would consent to a follow-up interview to confirm or clarify statements made during an interview.
4. You will be asked about what needs you have regarding making music and how you meet those needs.
5. You may be asked to provide names of other musicians that may consent to an interview.
6. If you have any questions or concerns about being in this study you should call Lynn Narveson at (919) 304-2999 or her faculty advisor, Dr. Paul Solomon at (919) 962-8086.

Your privacy is important:

- Every effort will be made to protect your privacy.
- Your name will not be used in any of the information gotten from this study or in any research reports.
- Audio-tapes used in the interview, notes taken from the interview and transcripts of the interview will be recorded with a code number so that Lynn Narveson will know who you are.
- When the study is finished, the key, which matches a code number with a name, will be destroyed.
- Since we will be making efforts to protect your privacy, we ask you to agree that we may use any information we get from this study in any way we think best for publication.

Risk and discomforts:

We do not know of any personal risk or discomfort you will have from being in this study.

Your rights:

- You decide on your own whether or not you want to be in this study.
- You have the right to stop being in this study at any time.

Institutional Review Board Approval:

- The Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board (AA-IRB) of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has approved this study.
- If you have any concerns about your rights in this study, you may contact the Chair of the AA-IRB, David A. Eckerman, at CB #4100, 300 Bynum Hall, UNC-CH, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-4100, (919) 962-7761, email: aa-irb@unc.edu.

Summary:

- I understand this is a research study to discover and explore needs associated with rehearsing and performing music.
- If I agree to be in this study:
 1. I will participate in one or more interviews with Lynn Narveson.
 2. I may be asked to name other musicians who may be interested in participating in this study.

I have had the chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me.

I have read the information in this consent form, and I agree to be in the study. I understand I will get a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)