

Lincoln City Libraries
Polley Music Library Annual Report 2019
Submitted by Scott Scholz, Polley Music Librarian

The Polley Music Library completed thirty-seven years of service to the public in September 2019. In this year's annual report, I will introduce myself as the new Polley Music Librarian, highlight services provided in 2019, and describe my plans for services in 2020. I am excited to have joined the Lincoln City Libraries staff, and look forward to promoting and nurturing this unique gem of a service.

New Polley Music librarian

As the new Polley Music librarian, I hope to bring a balance of musical experiences and professional librarianship to the position. Music has always been a central part of my life, and I have also worked in the library profession since 2005.

After playing trombone in elementary and middle school band, I started playing guitar at age 13. I became especially passionate about music as I progressed with the guitar, playing in high school jazz band and giving guitar lessons to local peers, and these experiences led me to apply to music schools. I studied composition under Donald Keats and Lynn Baker at the University of Denver Lamont School of Music from 1996-1999, where I obtained a BM in Composition, and enjoyed many opportunities playing in both school ensembles and in bands around the Denver area.

After leaving Denver, I moved to Bloomington, Indiana, where I managed the sheet music department of Smith-Holden Music from 1999-2001. I worked directly with the public and a variety of teachers and band directors in obtaining print music materials, and I also spent time on the general sales floor helping to demonstrate and sell all kinds of music equipment and instruments. With my background in stringed instruments, I was also able to help with light on-the-sales-floor repairs and setups for new and used instruments (adjusting action and intonation, changing strings, etc.).

Upon moving back to my home state of Nebraska, my interest in music and recording studios eventually led me into librarianship. In 2005, I started as the Circulation and Audio Production Coordinator for the Nebraska Library Commission Talking Book and Braille Service (TBBS), where I was placed in charge of day-to-day circulation of our state's unique collection of specialized-format audio and braille materials that is made available to patrons statewide who are unable to use regular print. I was also in charge of the two TBBS recording studios, which produce audio versions of books and magazines of Nebraska and Great Plains interest. I went on to become the director of TBBS from 2015-2019. In 2014, I coordinated the relocation of our circulation and studio areas from the lower level of the Atrium building to a wing of the building's 1st floor, which included building new recording studio facilities. I took this as an opportunity to expand and update our recording hardware and software, and also built additional editing and review suites to further improve the quality and consistency of our recordings.

In addition to these professional and academic experiences, I have worked in many other capacities as a musician and music advocate all of my adult life, including:

- Guitarist, vocalist and programmer for rock, progressive, and experimental music projects, in both studio and live capacities

- Guitar teacher
- Music journalist for web and print publications
- Writing liner notes for experimental and classical recordings
- Recording producer and engineer
- Audio postproduction and mastering services
- Freelance commercial music composer
- Music radio host
- Music podcast host
- Booking shows through music clubs, both for touring musicians and on my own behalf
- Hosting house shows for traveling artists
- Running a small record label for experimental and contemporary music
- Cassette duplication
- Social media development and support for a local record store

My goal is to incorporate these musical and library experiences into Polley services, helping to meet the individual needs of our city's musicians with a diverse range of backgrounds, musical interests, and skill sets, as well as the needs of music enthusiasts who find many of the biographical and historical books in the Polley collection meaningful. I hope to create a welcoming, inviting atmosphere in the library, where patrons can feel supported both by staff and through peer support via programming and music-related clubs. I will continue to build and nurture a collection of print resources in which patrons will find materials that inspire them to new heights of creativity, while also approaching musical arts from a diverse range of perspectives and backgrounds, so that patrons can always find materials that reflect their own backgrounds and life experiences.

Highlights 2018/19 (September 2018 - August 2019)

Public Service and Staffing

The Polley Music Library cataloged music collection remained available to the public throughout the 2018/19 year, with direct access to the shelves any time the Bennett Martin PL was open, through holds delivered to other LCL branch libraries, or via interlibrary loan. However, Polley was not directly staffed for a large portion of this year, between the previous Polley Music librarian Carolyn Dow's retirement in late November of 2018 until I began working as Polley Music librarian on June 13th of 2019. During this interim, music questions were answered by other Bennett Martin Public Library staff. Since my hiring in June of 2019, Polley is again providing 20 hours of public service officially per week through my FTE position as posted "office hours." However, I assisted the public as needed any other hours I was in the library.

Shortly after my assuming the Polley Music librarian position, we opted to change the official "office hours" for Polley assistance in the hopes of reaching more patrons who might work 8-5 shifts that precluded them from using the previous office hours. The previous office hours were historically 12-4 PM Monday through Thursday, and on Saturday. Polley's open hours are now 2-6 PM Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, and 3-7 PM on Thursday. These hours also support Polley staff availability during non-office hours, as I am generally present in the Polley area on all of those days from the time Bennett Martin opens. As part of the change, we also opted for having hours on Fridays instead of Mondays, anticipating that musicians may have Polley needs on Fridays to support weekend rehearsals or performances, and because many music stores are also historically closed on Mondays.

Collections

Because of the gap in Polley being staffed between November 2018 and June 2019, fewer materials were purchased for the Polley collection than previous years. As noted in the 2018 Polley Annual Report, Carolyn Dow focused on collection evaluation (weeding) of outdated or damaged materials before her retirement, and I have spent my time getting familiar with the collection myself. I spent much of my first few months getting to know the depth and breadth of the Polley collection by spending time with these wonderful resources shelf by shelf, observing what materials are presently getting the most use, and taking notes on potentially less-explored areas that might be useful for the collection. Using my analysis of elements of the collection that are relatively less robust, I placed orders for about 200 books toward the end of the 2019 cycle. These orders focused on method books for a variety of stringed instruments, including folk and country instruments like lap and pedal steel, mandolin, and dulcimer, methods and literature concerning early to intermediate jazz studies and repertoire, books on contemporary classical music and contemporary movements in jazz, electronic music, contemporary cutting-edge genres like vaporwave that many local musicians are pursuing, and books that focus on the work of women, persons of color, and LGBTQ+ artists across a spectrum of musical genres.

All subscriptions to music periodicals and the Music Online database remain the same, as subscriptions came due for most of these around the time I started. I will continue to do more evaluation of these materials in the coming year.

A substantial number of music materials were donated during the Polley staffing interim as well. It took me a while to evaluate donations while focusing primarily on our circulating collection, but we were able to add a few materials to our collection through that channel as well. The library system also received many music CD gift donations, and I'm continuing to help with evaluating those.

Public Relations and Programming

I believe that public relations and hosting a range of compelling programming are the keys to success for Polley. Though I only had a couple of months to initiate programming coordinated within the 2019 annual cycle, Polley hosted several well-received programs in September. On September 18th, the library hosted a performance and discussion with pianist Thollem McDonas, coordinated with his traveling through the area for a performance at Lincoln Calling. On the following night of September 19th, Polley hosted a panel discussion in coordination with Lincoln Calling, which focused on issues related to recording studios. This panel featured representatives from several of the most notable recording studios and audio mastering services in the state, and panelists took questions from the audience as well as discussing big-picture recording issues among themselves.

On September 26, Polley hosted an open house/reception which featured performances by former NYC singer-songwriter Scott Severin and violinist Joshua Rector, and instrument builder/designer and educator Jay Kreimer. This was a well-attended program at which I was able to introduce myself to some Polley users, and I also played a few short pieces on guitar.

I hosted a booth that represented Polley for this year's Lincoln Calling and Lincoln Arts Festival events on September 21st and 22nd, and met lots of new and potential patrons. The booth featured a new flyer to get people thinking about how Polley might be able to help with their musical needs, and I also displayed an electronic synth makerspace kit, one of the loaner

ukuleles that patrons can try, and a 3D-printed violin. I also participated in this year's Foundation for Lincoln City Libraries Spelling Bee on September 25th.

There are many potential stakeholders and community partners for Polley, and in my first month as librarian I added to the pre-existing Polley list of various arts and cultural organizations, stores, and clubs that might be potential partners, candidates for programming, or co-sponsors for future events. I am reaching out to each of these organizations, a few at a time, to propose ways we might collaborate in the future, and to ask them what they'd like to see in their very own public music library.

Social media and traditional media will play a role in promoting Polley, too. I have started to use the Polley Facebook page more frequently, both to promote events and to display new materials coming into the library. I also reached out to 89.3 KZUM community radio and pitched a radio program that would be about Polley, and they agreed. It's a pre-recorded 30 minute program that airs twice over the weekends, from 8-8:30 AM on Saturdays and 9:30-10 PM on Sundays. Programs so far have included music from around the time of the Woodstock Music Festival, an overview of contemporary music distributed on cassette tape, and recordings from the recording discussion panel we hosted in September. Over time, if I can establish some music-related groups at the library, these programs can act as a supplement to in-person participation in those groups, and also attract more participants. I'm archiving the shows on a Polley Music Library Mixcloud page for patrons to make reference after they've been aired as well. In addition to radio and social media contacts, we're continuing to place print advertisements with arts organization programs, and I'm also taking printed handbills and posters to places like record stores and musical instrument stores to make sure those audiences are aware of Polley.

Professional Activities

I will maintain Polley's membership in the Music Library Association, and I have actually followed their listserv for my own personal musical interests for the last decade, so I'm familiar with the kinds of issues they address and collegial support they provide. In the short term, I intend to focus primarily on the local needs of Polley and determine how best to promote and support its activities within our community, but eventually I will aspire to participate more in MLA activities.

Polley will also remain an organizational member of the Lincoln Arts Council, and this is an area where I think that developing personal connections to local arts organizations and events will prove to be more fruitful in the short term, creating new kinds of events and collaborations that meet the needs of our community. Additionally, the Mayor's Office is in the process of forming a committee that will work toward the development of an official "music district" in the 14th and O St. area downtown, which will include the area where Polley is located, and I have already put my name in to be considered for inclusion on this committee. I think that the library can play an important role helping to supplement the many commercial musical activities that have formed a rich tradition along the 14th and O street corridor. Polley can be a place for further musical performance, research, meetings and lectures that will act as a catalyst for the development of musical spaces in downtown Lincoln.

Technology

I selected and purchased a modest PA system for use by Polley and the library system, which will make it much easier to present performances and lectures that may require amplification.

These were already used for all of our September events. This will be useful for on-site Polley events, but it's a portable system that can be used in other library branches indoors or outdoors as needed. I also purchased a modest selection of recording equipment in order to produce the Polley radio program for KZUM. In the future, this equipment can also be used for other staff uses in the library, from recording booktalks to making audio promotional materials, and might be useful as a training tool should we move toward having public-access recording studios in the library in the future.

Plans for the Future, FY 2019/20 and onward

As I mentioned in my personal introduction, I have been compiling concepts that I will implement over the coming year, with the goal of creating a supportive and inclusive musical environment at the library for musicians of all backgrounds and skill sets, as well as music enthusiasts. While some of these will take some time to implement, I think they will expand the use and reach of Polley as a community resource. In addition to continuing my activities analyzing and expanding the Polley print materials collection, these are some of the concepts I will pursue toward expanding the reach and value of the library for patrons throughout the city:

Clubs and meetups

Unlike some forms of art like painting or writing, which can often be done successfully in relative solitude, music making is fundamentally a social form of art. Regularly occurring events at the library that are more participatory in nature can help patrons form networks of mutual support, foster further collaborations, and inspire learning new music-related skills. A few examples of such “clubs” or “meetups” include:

- **A songwriting/composition club**, in which participants bring in material that they're working on, and help one another in areas where they feel they're getting “stuck” or not quite expressing their intentions. I imagine that this could meet on a monthly or bimonthly basis.
- **A recording/engineering club**, where participants could learn skills and techniques to improve the quality of their recordings or live sound productions through peer support. I imagine that there could be some overlap with this group and a songwriting group, in that participants might establish new mentorships among themselves toward making recordings or putting on performances. This too could meet on a monthly or bimonthly basis.
- **A listening club**, where a general topic is provided at the beginning of a monthly or bimonthly cycle, along with a selection of recordings that approach the topic from multiple perspectives. Links to availability of these recordings would be provided as well. This club could include both musicians but also non-musicians, as music is a central part of many peoples' lives, even if they're not active as musicians themselves. The KZUM Polley Music Library radio program can be another way to get the recordings out there for participants to hear. At the end of that topic's cycle, the group could gather in person to discuss their thoughts regarding the recordings and how they resonated with the main topic at hand, as well as recommend other recordings they feel appeal to the topic.
- **A record club** or similar format, catering to the needs and interests of the many Lincolniters who collect records, CDs or tapes. I imagine that a group like this would function by hosting a revolving “speaker” for each meeting who would lead the group for that night as a kind of “show and tell” regarding his or her own favorite recordings or

philosophy toward collecting musical artifacts. There are other kinds of related issues that could be addressed in a group like this, such as the maintenance and selection of playback equipment and relative merits of different issues of particular recordings.

- **An instrument repair cafe**, similar to more broad “repair cafe” formats, in which the library would host a space to facilitate minor repairs being made to instruments patrons brought in. This might be more of a quarterly or biannual kind of program, and would require coordinating with some local instrument repair experts, and perhaps getting some donations from music stores for some basic supplies like instrument strings or woodwind reeds. This can also act as a teaching opportunity, where patrons can not only get something like violin string changed, but also learn how to do it themselves.
- **A band speed dating event**, likely held quarterly or biannually, in which musicians and songwriters could get together meet for brief conversations in a “speed dating” format to determine if they might want to work together on musical projects. Many patrons I’ve already spoken to have expressed interest in simply meeting more musicians, and this would be a fun way to facilitate new musical relationships.
- **A summer reading program recital**, in which patrons would sign up to perform a short piece of music they learned over the summer (and hopefully something they found in the Polley collection). This could be a musical analogue to the general idea of summer reading programs for books, with a fun musical twist. While I started at Polley too late to initiate this concept for 2019, I hope to start promoting it next spring.

History of Lincoln and Nebraska music

The Polley collection already includes many resources preserving the rich heritage of music throughout the state and in Lincoln in particular, both in physical/archival holdings and through the online Virtual Music Library project. There are several other online projects I have found useful in the past that are unaffiliated with any institutions, and their continued existence is somewhat tenuous depending on individuals keeping them online as a labor of love. Two examples of excellent resources with precarious online futures are the “Encyclopedia of Lincoln Bands” on Star City Scene (<http://starcityscene.com/Encyclopedia.html>), and The Band Broke Up collection of recordings by now-defunct area ensembles (<https://thebandbrokeup.com/>). These online resources contain a large amount of useful history and archival recordings, but they haven’t been updated in the last decade.

There are several local musicians and historians who are also familiar with the value of these resources, and I think that it would be a worthy project to archive what is already there, as well as supplement the material with more recent historical updates, and ultimately find an online home through Polley where the material can be hosted with fewer concerns for its permanency online. Now that Hear Nebraska has ceased online publication, there may be opportunities to incorporate some of their music journalism documenting state activities throughout the 2010s, and I imagine there may be collaborative opportunities with the Nebraska Music Hall of Fame, which has struggled to maintain an updated/accessible online presence for public research.

Performances and lectures

Polley already has a history of hosting performances in the library, and I will continue and expand upon the library as a place for people to enjoy free performances representing the diverse musical traditions of our city. I will continue to nurture relationships with music and arts organizations in the city and propose regular performance series opportunities, and I will also

pursue hosting lectures related to musical issues in the library, as we started with the recording/production discussion panel in September.

I maintain relationships with a lot of national artists who sometimes tour the country, and when the timing can work out, I will try to provide some out-of-town variety with musical visits to Polley for performances and discussions. The performance/discussion we hosted with Thollem McDonas in September came about this way, and I think this is a great way to introduce some new ideas into the Lincoln music community, as well as getting to hear perspectives from traveling musicians on the more pragmatic and logistical considerations of taking musical work on the road.

Technology, makerspaces, and recording studios

As public libraries continue to expand their makerspace offerings, and evolving technology becomes increasingly important to music literacy, I think that creating public-access recording studios through Polley and the Lincoln City Libraries system is a critical means to meet the needs of Lincoln library users and musicians. As an extension of the makerspace equipment already offered in Lincoln City Libraries, a modest set of recording studio spaces could serve as a way for musicians to learn how to use contemporary hardware and software used both to produce recordings and as compositional tools in and of themselves. Much as the robust print collection in Polley provides public access to resources that might not otherwise be accessible to those who can't afford to attend a music school, a recording studio space would provide both learning and production opportunities to those who might not otherwise be able to act on their creative dreams.

Recording studio facilities would be of tremendous value to musicians of many backgrounds, and they also offer the opportunity to be used for non-musical kinds of projects that patrons may wish to pursue, such as podcasting, working with audio/video projects, or recording interviews for historical, documentary or genealogical purposes. They could also be used by staff for creating promotional materials.

Having recently overseen the construction of new recording studios and editing suites at the Talking Book and Braille Service for the Nebraska Library Commission, I'm familiar with the general considerations needed to build successful facilities, and I would love to take the lead on bringing a project like this to fruition. At this early stage, it's possible that these plans could change to include both video and audio production capabilities, but the fundamentals toward such a goal would remain similar. It is likely that such facilities could be constructed near the existing Polley area, roughly in the area where biographies are shelved presently. In case the library should be moved in the future as part of a new Central Library project, facilities could be built using modular materials that could be taken down and relocated if needed.

Should construction plans come to fruition, I'm researching policies for using such facilities at other libraries around the country toward establishing some "best practices" for how we would train patrons and support staff to use the facilities, and how long patrons would be able to "check out" a facility session at one time. While this is an ambitious project, it has been implemented successfully at dozens of libraries around the country, and I am confident that we could make it work.

Sharing the "Best Kept Secret" of Polley

In attempting to try a lot of new ideas through the Polley Music Library, it is possible that some will be better-received than others. Building on concepts like these requires some time and outreach to the public, and finding patrons and community members interested in participation. From that perspective, I think that the 2019/2020 year will be both an exciting and challenging time. In my 14 years at the Talking Book and Braille Service, I found that outreach was a never-ending challenge: talking books service was and is a kind of “best-kept secret” that many people don’t know about until a time comes in their lives where they need it, or when a close friend or family member needs it. To some extent, Polley is also a best-kept secret, as I discovered in talking with many people at our Lincoln Calling/Lincoln Arts Festival booth who hadn’t heard of it or visited the 2nd floor of Bennett Martin to notice it. I hope to use my outreach skills to find as many musicians and music lovers as I can throughout our city, invite them to attend events or participate in them, and make the Polley Music Library “our library” for music in Lincoln.

Scott Scholz
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