

Lincoln City Libraries
Polley Music Library Annual Report 2024
Submitted by Scott Scholz, Polley Music Librarian

The Polley Music Library completed 42 years of service to the public in September 2024. This document will highlight services provided in 2024, and describe plans for services in 2025. We enjoyed a great year with continued expansion of the diversity and quantity of Polley programming.

Highlights FY 2023-24 (September 2023-August 2024)

Public Service/Staffing

The Polley Music Library catalogued music collection remained available to the public throughout the 2023-24 year, with direct access to the shelves any time Bennett Martin Public Library (BMPL) was open. As in previous years, Polley offered twenty hours of public service per week provided by the Polley Music Librarian, but I assisted the public as needed during any other hours I was in the library. In addition to visitors to Polley, many patrons continued to request materials by telephone, email, social media, and through the Lincoln City Libraries (LCL) website, habits that are likely to continue. Similar to other years, many holds were delivered to other branches for more convenient pickup.

Collections

I ordered just under 300 new books this year. Our periodical subscriptions remained the same. The Music Online databases provided by Polley saw noticeably more use this year, which was interesting to note, and CD usage systemwide stayed very stable as well.

Guitars and ukuleles continue to be very popular circulation items, and we seem to have found a good balance of regular circulation with minimal holds for these items. I continue to do basic repairs to instruments as needed, and they're all holding up well.

Donations to Polley stayed at about the same levels as last year. As usual, most were passed through for eventual use at book sales, but we did add a few interesting titles.

Outreach/Collaboration

Collaborations between Polley and other organizations achieved some exciting results this year. By partnering with Lincoln Arts Council, we were able to bring Music Studio LNK to the library for a series of summer events for kids, and we also worked with the Crossroads Music Festival, hosting two of their events this year (see more detail on both of these in the programming/events section below). I'm especially excited about the work done by the Music District Advisory Group this year: our first major project, a rehearsal/recording/performance multipurpose space that will be called the "Music Box" is now under construction on the 1st floor of the Eagle parking garage across the street from BMPL. Using the vacant space provided by the city, the Downtown Lincoln Association secured grants to move forward with building and furnishing the space based on input from the advisory group.

In November, I did an immersive tour experience for a class of 18 at Nebraska Wesleyan called "Off the Beaten Path: Exploring with Multiple Intelligences." Students learned about the history and scope of the Polley Music Library, as well as the many kinds of resources that can be found here.

In February, I featured a display in the Polley area in collaboration with the Rhythm and Blues Preservation Society, an organization from New Jersey that organized an international call for having displays about the history of black music, drawing from a shared curation list. Almost all of the participants were academic music libraries—we were one of the first public music libraries to participate.

I gave a Bethany Book Talk in April, where I focused on 10 of the most interesting music-related books from the last year. We had 6 attendees.

In August, I spoke at the Foundry's monthly member lunch group, giving them an overview of the history of Polley and what we have to offer. There were 18 attendees.

I continued producing the weekly Polley Music Library show, which airs twice each weekend on 89.3 FM KZUM and is archived on Mixcloud: https://www.mixcloud.com/Polley_Music_Library/. I focused mostly on booktalk show formats this year, featuring books from the Polley collection about a diverse range of musical styles and backgrounds, followed by relevant listening examples. We passed the 250 program mark this year. As mentioned last year, the show is available now for public/community radio syndication through the PRX platform, and in the last year, three stations have aired episodes: Raven Radio in Sitka, Alaska aired 18 episodes, Radio St. Pete in Florida aired one, and KECG in San Francisco has recently started to air episodes as well.

I continued to contribute three "recommended reading" book reviews for the LCL Staff Recommendations website each month, adding to a nice body of Polley-related recommendations. This has temporarily ceased, however, as there isn't a section for the staff recommendations on the new library website. If this resource is added back to the website at some point, it will be easy to produce more of these by simply editing radio scripts.

I produced one or two e-newsletters each month, highlighting new radio and programming, upcoming Polley events, our songwriting club and guitar lending programs, and new book arrivals.

I only produced one video this year, and it was for internal purposes: it explored censorship of music in recent decades, a kind of cousin to banned books week issues. It was used as a part of "make-up" educational opportunities for staff who weren't able to attend last year's in-service day.

As mentioned in the previous two years, I continue to feel slightly hamstrung with the city's 2022 Social Media Policy that eliminated the Polley Facebook and Twitter pages. Now that Polley is hosting so many events, it's especially important to get the word out through as many media formats as possible. While posts are seen by more eyes overall through the main LCL social media pages, they're not necessarily seen by the same audience who liked or followed the Polley accounts, simply due to the way social media algorithms create information bottlenecks in an increasingly content-dense environment.

I also tended to create event pages a month before events so I could hype them several times before they occurred, but now they sometimes drop within days (or even mere hours) of events occurring, due to technical issues with Facebook scheduling for the many events in the library system. If we were back to individual program social media pages, some of those problems could be reduced or eliminated. I hope the city reconsiders this policy in the future.

Programming/Events

We continue to expand the number of events hosted by Polley. We reached a new peak this year with 19 events, not counting the monthly songwriting/composing club. While my general goal is to host around one event per month on average, we were able to work with some partners to add additional programs at minimal expense. I also tried to mix performance-oriented events with others aimed more at improving skills related to music. This year also marks the first time that I added programs focused on children—previous Polley events have always been for adults or families.

In September, we had a lecture/show-and-tell about synthesizers called “Synthtober,” led by Omaha synthesist Aaron Gumm. He brought lots of synths to show the basics of how they produce sound and how designs have evolved over time, and fielded lots of questions from the audience of 20. He ended up staying for an extra hour to continue addressing questions and allowing people to come up and try the instruments themselves.

In October, we had a performance and presentation by Lincoln’s own *dream journal*, the solo project of J. Bockoven. He performed some of his music, explained how he creates, manipulates, and builds loops in a live setting, and even had members of the audience come up to try it themselves. In his talking about playing at Polley, he reflected on the importance of this resource in his own upbringing: “When I was a kid, this library literally saved me. My dad always took me weekly, and I would grab any CD and any music books I could. I discovered a world of music I never knew existed. Early on, I found techno, house, folk, hip hop, indie rock, and so much more. They laid a foundation for the type of music I make now. 10 year old me would be so proud right now!” There were 16 attendees.

In November, we had a “How to get your band seen: Press kits, websites, and booking!” event with Lincoln musician and promoter Mike Semrad. This was held at Walt branch in the makerspace area. Semrad was able to speak to many issues facing bands and artists who are just getting started, trying to reach more fans and venues. We had five attendees.

December featured a performance by Kearney, NE multimedia artist Patrick Hargon, who discussed how he searches for “the sounds that sounds make” through various kinds of effects, synthesis, and controlled pitch sets, and he performed some of his music in a trio setting. We had 10 attendees.

We were visited by Andrew Borakove from Lincoln’s unique company Gongs Unlimited in February. He and his staff brought a wide variety of gongs from around the world to demonstrate the differences in sounds they can produce, as well as some singing bowls. They had the audience gather in an area in the middle of these instruments to experience a short “sound healing,” one of the common uses for collections of gongs and bowls today, and Borakove discussed additional uses for them, including musical, meditative, and ritualistic applications, from ancient traditions to modern-day innovations. We had 12 attendees.

In March, Lincoln musician Luke Norse performed and discussed the various elements of his long-running Multidimensional Cowboy project, ranging from work with a variety of percussion instruments to flutes to electronics manipulated with effects pedals, and simple singer/songwriter arrangements with banjo. We had 14 attendees.

We hosted a series of three “Secrets of the Song” events with Lincoln songwriter Nick Vaccaro in March, April and May. Each focused on the unique approach of a particular notable songwriter. March featured Dolly Parton, April was Bob Marley, and May was Lin-Manuel Miranda.

On May 12, I hosted a “Surrealist Games” event, which started with a PowerPoint presentation of the games that Dada and Surrealist art movements introduced to the world, followed by participants trying out visual, literary, and musical versions of the games themselves. We had 10 attendees who had a ton of fun, and this may become a regular event once or twice a year.

Also in May, we had pioneering American free improvising saxophonist Jack Wright visit the library, where he talked about his work, his book *The Free Musics* (which is available in Polley), and he performed as well, both solo and in a trio that I ended up playing in along with Lincoln instrument designer Jay Kreimer. There were 15 attendees.

Polley events in June and July (and one in August) featured a series of 5 Music Exploration programs by Music Studio LNK. These took place every other week, and were timed to start after the Stoller Stories events. We had the luck of great weather on all of these dates, and were able to host these in the BMPL courtyard. We had 16 and 19 attendees at the June dates, over 50 on July 10, 35 on July 24th, and 24 at the final August date. These were made possible through a partnership with the Lincoln Arts Council.

We had two more events in August, both of which were in partnership with the Crossroads Music Festival. We hosted their “Baby Concert” on August 4 in our auditorium, which drew 51 engaged visitors, and we held their “Storytelling Slam,” which also featured lots of musical elements, on 2nd floor on August 5th, with 24 attendees.

The Polley songwriting/composing club continues to meet monthly. This year, I added one Saturday meeting date each quarter due to patron requests. The number of attendees is still very slowly growing: a couple of months, we only had 1 (this is usually due to weather), though many months we were in the 7-9 attendee range.

Technology/Facilities

Technology and facilities for Polley remained the same this year, but there are discussions toward supplementing the area that could start to move forward in the next fiscal year. As mentioned earlier, I participated in the Local Music Advisory Group throughout the year. While the main focus this year was on the Music Box project, we are also continuing to evaluate plans that will create new music-related amenities near the library, likely along 14th street between O and P streets. There is an overlap between these plans and the Downtown Corridors project, which is continuing to be developed, and the Lincoln Arts Council has been exploring what it would to get some part of these plans designated as a state Creative District. As of the time of this writing, it appears that the Lincoln Arts Council will cease operations in mid-October, but hopefully someone else will pick up this work (as well as the many other fantastic programs they offer).

Plans for FY 2024-25

I plan to continue focusing on both performance and training-oriented Polley events over the next year. This is an area where we can have immediate impact on the music community in Lincoln, providing resources that can't be found elsewhere, while also driving traffic into the Polley area where patrons will find even more useful musical resources.

The Music Box project across the street could have some impact on Polley programming/events in the coming year as well. Once it's open, likely in mid-winter, I'll be able to assess the possibilities with more

precision. The potential for more in-depth music workshops, with relevant equipment available on-site, could make for some valuable experiences for patrons.

While that is being constructed, there is also the possibility of doing something music-related with the training room area located immediately north of the Polley area, in the east wing of BMPL's 2nd floor. This space is rarely used (the most recent use by staff was my Ableton Live software training program with Darren Keen last year), and the concept of converting the space into a recording/video production/makerspace area has been raised. It's not likely that we would be able to fundraise to the level necessary to soundproof the area against extremely loud sources like drum kits and amplifiers, but moderate soundproofing to account for acoustic instruments and electronic music production with headphones should be possible. Expanding hands-on experiences in the library, and providing resources and expertise that might otherwise be cost-prohibitive for many, are great ways to make the Polley Music Library even more meaningful for the community.

Expanding into the east wing of the 2nd floor also gives a poetic symmetry to Lillian Helms Polley's first donation to the library: "In 1966 she gave the Lincoln City Libraries \$12,000 to match a grant of Federal funds. The money was used to finance the building project which added the north and east wings to the two-story Bennett Martin Library and included a space that would become the Polley Music Library." <https://www.lincolnlibraries.org/visit/polley-music-library/lillian-helms-polley-and-the-music-of-lincoln/>