

Lincoln City Libraries
Polley Music Library Annual Report 2023
Submitted by Scott Scholz, Polley Music Librarian

The Polley Music Library completed 41 years of service to the public in September 2023. This document will highlight services provided in 2023, and describe plans for services in 2024. This year was the closest to a “normal” year since the pandemic, and we had the opportunity to expand programming in the Polley area, a goal of mine since I started in late 2019.

Highlights FY 2022-23 (September 2022-August 2023)

Public Service/Staffing

The Polley Music Library catalogued music collection remained available to the public throughout the 2022-23 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-person visitors to Polley continued to rise toward pre-pandemic levels. 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. Overall, our Polley book circulation stats climbed significantly this year, 9.53% over the previous year.

Collections

I ordered almost 340 books this year, almost entirely newly-published titles. That’s about 90 more books than we ordered for the Polley area last year, and a sign that the publishing industry is getting back to normal as well. Our periodical subscriptions generally stayed the same, though several magazines are going out of print (Jazz Times, Opera News, and Electronic Musician).

Last year, we started our guitar lending program in April with 11 acoustic guitars. It immediately become very popular, and the main issue with the guitars was long hold lists/wait times. In September, we were able to add an additional 18 guitars that were donated by local company Zager Guitars, which immediately made our holds list more manageable. Many of those instruments are smaller sizes as well, easier to play for young patrons or anyone with smaller hands. With over a year of guitars circulating, I have had the opportunity to assess potential issues with their circulation. The main issue is simply guitars not coming back, unfortunately, but that seems to have stabilized, and holds remain minimal. Considering the temperature and humidity extremes that happen to instruments that circulate frequently, I have been pleased at how resilient they’ve proven to be. Other than doing some fret dressing to get them through their first dry Nebraska winters (the wood shrinks and leaves sharp fret ends), replacing a few plastic saddles with bone saddles that will be more durable, and the occasional string replacement, they’ve held up very well.

Donations to Polley stayed at about the same levels as last year. We added somewhat more donations than normal to the collection, picking up some useful resources in early music and low brass repertoire in particular. Most were passed through for eventual use at book sales as usual.

Outreach/Collaboration

In September, we featured an event in collaboration with Lincoln Calling: we hosted Dr. Stacey Barelos from Omaha for a “soundscaping” event, which entailed having participants make sound with various household objects and small percussion instruments, and learning how to make graphic notation scores to have other people play their music with the instruments available. We had 7 attendees, and Lincoln Calling shot some video and photos that were featured in their wrap-up videos for 2022 Lincoln Calling. For 2023, there will be no full Lincoln Calling event—the program has been taken over by the Lincoln Arts Council, who are hosting some smaller events and planning the next full LC event for 2024.

As part of our 40th anniversary celebration in September, we held a “Music Challenge” with 2 winners (1 adult, 1 child). The goal was to get patrons thinking about all of the resources Polley has to offer, so they could check out books about various musical topics, check out different kinds of music-related resources, or attend events, and then check these activities off on a small worksheet that could be returned to me. We ended up with 10 entries, but I think the handouts were useful as outreach literature as well. I handed out around 70 directly from Polley or at Polley events, and others were distributed to branches in early September.

At the beginning of 2023, the Lincoln Ukulele Group (LUG) started hosting their monthly rehearsal/jam sessions at BMPL on the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of each month from 6-8 PM in our auditorium. Anyone from the public is welcome to attend these sessions and join the group if they feel so inclined. This should help to expand the reach and use of the circulating ukulele collection, which LUG has donated and maintained since the start of that lending program. I attended their first meeting to introduce myself and to help them set up for watching the movie “The Mighty Uke” as a celebration of their new location (and I played a little bass ukulele with them). They generally have 20-25 participants each time they meet, bringing more musically-inclined people into the building regularly, some of whom have been visiting Polley regularly.

I presented some of the latest arrivals on the Polley shelves at a Bethany branch BookTalks event on February 24th, which had 5 attendees (this might have been better attended, but we had a significant snow storm the day before). I also presented a guitar program for teens at Walt branch in July, primarily aimed at beginners but we had a couple of more skilled attendees as well. There were 4 attendees for that event.

I was the featured speaker at the Lincoln Music Teacher’s Association meeting in May, where I gave a presentation about past, present and future trends related to the Polley Music Library. After the presentation, I gave the group of 12 a tour of Polley.

I continued producing the weekly Polley Music Library show which debuted in August of 2019, 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. I did one author interview on the program this year, featuring Cisco Bradley talking about his new book *The Williamsburg Avant-Garde*. We passed the 200 program mark this year. The program still airs twice a week on the weekends, but now has a new time on Saturday mornings of 10-10:30 AM. One big change with the radio program this year is that KZUM has decided to make it their first program available to other stations through PRX, the syndication

vehicle for public and community radio stations. About 40 of the programs are now available through PRX, with more added every week. So far, no other stations have picked up the show on a regular basis, but it's early in this pilot project, and the chances are good that it will get some further reach through PRX.

I have been able to appear on NET radio's "Friday Live" program occasionally to help promote Polley events. I was on with them in October to promote an October 8 performance with the Golden Studio Band, and again in March promoting a performance by Montréal-based composer Jeremy Young.

Throughout the year, I continued to contribute 3 recommended reading book reviews for the LCL Staff Recommendations website each month, adding to a nice body of Polley-related recommendations. In February, author Richard Koloda contacted me in gratitude for my review of his new book *Holy Ghost: The Life and Death of Free Jazz Pioneer Albert Ayler*.

I produced 1 or 2 e-newsletters each month, highlighting new radio and programming, Polley events, our new songwriting club and guitar lending programs, and new book arrivals.

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 of events occurring. I hope the city reconsiders this policy in the future.

Programming/Events

Hosting more events has been my primary goal since becoming Polley Music Librarian in 2019, but pandemic conditions had made it difficult to start implementing these concepts. This was the first year where I was able to host what I'd like to think of as a new "normal" amount of events. We went from essentially 1 in-house event last year to 14 performances and/or lectures this year, not counting the monthly songwriting/composing club meetings. My general goal will be trying to host around 1 event per month on average, and to feature both performances and events that function more like trainings for a variety of musical topics.

September marked the 40th anniversary of Polley, and on Sep. 18, we hosted an afternoon 40th Anniversary Party for Polley with 3 performances: The Ludus Duo, LNK New Music Collective, and the Bottle Tops Duo. We had around 25 unique visitors, generally 10-15 during each performance. Channel 8 and Channel 10 news stations came out to cover the event, and ran stories interviewing me about Polley in general and the new guitars from Zager that we had just added to our guitar lending program.

Also in September, we hosted a lecture by Mike McCracken on Sep 8 detailing the history of the resophonic guitar (dobro). We had 9 attendees, lots of great questions from the audience, and I learned a little myself!

On October 8, we had the Golden Studio Band perform. This ensemble plays traditional and popular music from Yazidi culture and broader Middle Eastern musical traditions. We had about 20 attendees,

and the audience had lots of questions for the band, who were happy to keep discussing their work and traditions for some time past the end of their performance.

On December 10, we had the Omaha ensemble Omkara perform. They specialize in performing music from the wide repertoire of Bollywood film soundtrack music. This program covered music from the entire history of Bollywood, and they discussed various trends and changes in the music over the decades between performances of representative pieces. About 20 attendees watched the entire event, with several more coming and going. We had Omkara back for another performance in August, this time focusing on music from the 1990s, a period when evolving technology greatly enhanced what was possible for Bollywood composers to produce, and the period where the music and film of India began to receive more worldwide attention. We had 15 attendees for that performance.

On January 15, Lincoln composer/producer Darren Keen gave a training session on how he uses Ableton Live to compose, record and perform. We had a full house in the training room of 16 attendees (I had to bring in some extra chairs for the center aisle).

On March 25, we had composer Jeremy Young visit from Montreal, his final stop on a tour of the Midwest. He performed a piece based on using ¼" analog tape loops containing his guitar work. After touring this piece around the world, we may have hosted its last performance, as he handed out some of the tape loops to the audience at the end. Around 20 people attended.

On April 22, we had Lincoln guitarist Dennis Taylor perform at the library, a fitting program for International Guitar Month. Dennis' 1983 album "Dayspring" has enjoyed a bit of a revival in the last five years, having been reissued by two record labels on CD and LP, and he's gotten some national and international attention for the record since then as a kind of bridge between the "modern primitive" and "new age" guitar styles of the 70s and 80s. Around 20 people attended.

In June, we hosted a songwriting workshop featuring local songwriter Nick Vaccaro. He focused on the classic "four chord song" and its variations. We had 8 attendees and some great interactions, and Nick referenced music all the way from the Renaissance to Lady Gaga and much more.

In July, we had a performance by traveling musician Sean Gaskell, one of the few artists in America who play the kora, a 21-string harp from West Africa. He played many traditional songs and a few of his own, and discussed the storytelling tradition around the instrument, as well as his own experiences during multiple trips to Gambia where he learned to play from several master musicians. We had 17 attendees.

On August 6, internationally-renowned composer and performer Toby Driver appeared with his newest project Alora Crucible, in which he plays the hammered dulcimer. In addition to performing, he discussed how he's incorporated this instrument into the project, and the challenges of composing for it. We had 26 attendees.

The Polley songwriting/composing club continued to meet throughout the year, typically on the 2nd Thursday evening of each month. It feels like the group is still looking for its identity to some extent. Some months, I'm getting 0—1 attendees (though that's sometimes weather-related), while other months I'm getting up to 6 or 7 attendees, with a couple of regulars. I'll continue to try to nurture this group toward what I think could become a kind of mutual support group for musicians in the area.

Technology/Facilities

Throughout the year, I attended meetings of several different groups that will have some impact on music and arts programming in the downtown area. In February, the Local Music Advisory Group began meeting regularly, and I am a member in an advisory capacity. This group is hosted by the Downtown Lincoln Association, who are also exploring grants related to music district concepts, and was formed by the Mayor's Office as part of the Downtown Master Plan that focuses on establishment of a more formal downtown Music District. This year, the Advisory Group has been holding focus groups with young Lincoln musicians, and exploring the possibility of turning a vacant space in the recently renovated Eagle Parking Garage across the street from BMPL into an all-ages venue that could be "checked out" by young people to put on events.

The Lincoln Arts Council (LAC), which recently took ownership of the Lincoln Calling annual music-focused event, is also continuing to explore designation of parts of downtown as a Creative District, which overlaps with the Music District concept but also ties into the state-level Creative Districts designation program that was enacted last year (this has some funding and tax advantages for cities). They were relatively quiet this year, though they held two meetings in May featuring presentations from two UNL classes who collaboratively created downtown creative "Blocks" proposals as part of the finals for their classes. Many of their ideas were similar to things that have been discussed by the Downtown Lincoln Association and Lincoln Arts Council folks in the past.

There is a third downtown initiative that I'm monitoring as well: the Downtown Corridors project held their 2nd open house in September, though there hasn't been much movement the rest of this fiscal year. That project involves a series of beautification projects along the O Street corridor from 8th Street up to roughly 21st Street, where it would intersect with development happening there with the Antelope Valley Project. Here again, there is conceptual overlap: all three of these initiatives potentially include music-related developments happening in the area of 14th and O Streets.

Plans for FY 2023-24

Now that we are back to hosting more regular and substantial in-person programming, I want 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.

I also want to continue building on the idea of regular groups that can meet at Polley. While the songwriting/composing club is off to a slow start, I hope to come up with ways to increase regular participation in this group, and once that's feeling more stable, then I plan to add a listening club concept that could appeal to both musicians and non-musicians who are music enthusiasts.

As various downtown organizations continue to develop plans for creative district/music district boundaries in the immediate area of Polley, I will make sure that Polley is included in those plans however possible. If the Music District Advisory Group moves forward with the venue concept across the street from the library, it's likely Polley will play some collaborative role.