Teaching Music Bibliography and Information Literacy: A New Challenge for Italian Music Librarians[*]

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Abstract: In this report, I consider the impact of a new way of musical research in the small world of Italian Conservatories. Until a few years ago, not many Conservatories activated a course in music bibliography. The dissemination of courses led to a new series of reflections on how the discipline could be taught. In practice, even if not consciously, the introduction to musical research, implied in the bibliography of music objectives, has been transformed in 'music information literacy'. Indeed, the aim of Italian bibliography of music courses is to provide a first basic knowledge on Internet or paper music resources, and furthermore how to recognize and choose Urtext and critical music editions etc.
Today more than ever, bibliography of music, as a global musicological discipline, makes use of free or commercial digital or digitalized resources on the Web. These resources improve and broaden means for those looking for music and writings on music. Undoubtedly, music knowledge benefited in this context, even though today few scholars critically explored the teaching methods in music bibliography.

Keywords: *Information literacy, Music librarianship, Italian music libraries, Italian Conservatories, Music bibliography*

1. Introduction

Information literacy is a much-debated subject at a global level: it is, in a sense, the answer to the question about cultural means to achieve better communication with the surrounding world. Therefore, music information

literacy also presents complexities in its definition. As Maurizio Lana writes (Lana, 2020, p.134): «paradossalmente chiunque può dire che cosa a suo avviso è l'information literacy ed essere ascoltato» («paradoxically, anyone can say what they think information literacy is and be heard»). Therefore, another important issue is the ambiguity of the term: as the locution is suitable for several equally valid definitions, we find different explanations in various areas of librarianship, to different degrees of depth (Passerini, 2013). Therefore, it seems legitimate to make an assessment of the significance in accordance with the Italian Conservatoires and their music libraries, taking into account the educational and study needs of its students. In this case, music information literacy can be defined such as, but not limited to, a methodological approach in the qualitative research and evaluation of music resources. It is critical knowledge, the ability to employ a research methodology, in order to gain knowledge or rather a critical reading of world, a music-based reality, of course (*Manifesto per l'Information literacy* in AIB- Web).

Needless to say, the concept of 'information', and more specifically 'musical information', is equally problematic. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that the semantic Web is fundamental to user research today; equally fundamental is the use of appropriate metadata of internet resources (see 'Web semantico' in Wikipedia.it). In the field of music, the progressive improvement, increase and refinement of authority files for music research is important (Gentili Tedeschi – Riva, 2003). Moreover, searching for music on the Web is not as easy as it may appear at first sight: there is no meta-search engine for all notated music on the Web (https://simssa.ca/about/; MEI; musiconn scoresearch; Sampsel, 2020).

The aim of information literacy is to train students to read information critically, in our case to scrutinize music resources, besides the knowledge of available resources and their benchmarking. Thus: not only is it crucial to focus students' attention on the essential resources for research, analysis and in-depth study of music, but also and above all teaching them to evaluate resources, giving them the tools to deal with a critical reading of this information. Although the subject has been discussed for years in Italy too in the most important librarianship journals (e.g. *AIB Studi* and *Bibliothecae.it*), in the musical field, it does not seem to receive the attention it deserves. It is essential to train people to search for music: because searching for music, as Laurie J. Sampsel says, it is more difficult, bibliographically speaking, than searching for other texts (Sampsel, 2020, p. 15).

Facing the challenge of globalization and the network revolution inside the music libraries too, which led to a significant evolution of international music bibliographic repertoires, to adapt to unlimited global knowledge, we are witnessing the changing role of music librarians in Italy. Today, Italian music librarians have more and more teaching duties, i.e. music research training for young performers. Despite a reform in progress for more than 20 years (https://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/99508l.htm), one wonders whether the Italian Conservatories and their teachers are ready for this remarkable change in music education, with more space to skills in information literacy, alongside with performance practice and other theoretical courses. In addition to the

importance of teaching information literacy in Italian music higher education institutions, there is also an undoubted digital divide (Lana, 2020, p. 180), compared to many Italian universities, and this is particularly true with regard to access to digital library services by students and teachers. It is clear that becoming familiar with network catalogues for musicians to search for music, needs time and patience; with use everything becomes easy and straightforward. Italy has an extraordinary musical tradition, even if nowadays cultured music is nevertheless confined to a limited social cultural area, due to the absence of widespread music education.

We can talk about a different awareness on music and its history, today understood in the widest sense, as a space for sound expression. The artistic dimension of 'music making' has acquired a new aesthetic interpretation: it apparently favors equality and horizontality – at least in musicological studies –, rather than a vision of the summit of Western musical culture. Some of the major international music repertoires conformed to this principle, i.e. the global dimension of music-making (https://www.r-musicprojects.org). Music projects that exploit digital technologies, such as MEI (*Music encoding initiative:* https://music-encoding.org/), for creating critical editions and thematic catalogs in a digital environment (Teich Geertinger, 2014), or OMR (*Optical music recognition*), for searching music with music (Calvo-Zaragoza - Haijč Jr. – Pacha, 2020) are rapidly growing, as well as OPAC that allow search for music incipit (as in the case of the On line Public Access Catalog of National Library Service, opac.sbn.it). It is difficult to summarize these resources in a few lines; they are constantly growing and in continuous evolution. The search for music on the Web is perhaps one of the most important: both search for music digitised with OMR (see entry 'Optical music recognition' in Wikipedia.org), and search for non-digitalised music, of which, however, an effective record with musical incipit has been drawn up (in this case encoded with the international *Plaine & Easie Code*: https://www.iaml.info/plaine-easie-code; Zitellini – Giezeman - Wiering - Pugin, 2018). Thus we can search for music both within 'traditional' online catalogues and within large institutional repositories of digitised music.

Certainly, more and more online bibliographies will be needed in the future, such as MusRef, to register Internet-born projects with abstracts and keywords, although many of these are likely to vanish within a few years, or at least undergo substantial changes during their lifetime. It will be necessary to provide a global selective repertoire of Web-based musical resources born directly in internet, or converted into internet, and critical music editions made in a digital environment, with details and goals of each project. This has now become the task of music information librarians.

2. Music information literacy in Italy

In Italy, little space is still devoted to music information literacy, and to reflection on methodologies of teaching (bibliographical) research in music. In the field of librarianship as a whole, however, information literacy awareness is

also increasing significantly in Italy, as evidenced by a number of studies (see Lana, 2020; La biblioteca {in}forma, 2018; Bianchini, 2014 a-b; Passerini, 2013, Ballestra, 2011). What is striking is the amazing variety, the various theoretical and practical variations of the abstract concept underlying these studies: information literacy is now employed in the most diverse areas of librarianship and digital humanities, with remarkable ubiquity, not to mention the relationship with the right of every person to lifelong learning (Vivarelli, *Prefazione*, in Lana, 2020, p. 7; Lana, 2020, p. 25; Gruppo di studio sulla Information Literacy AIB, 2020). The focus on music information literacy in the international arena, especially in the United States, has been particularly alive for the last twenty years or so. Indeed, in recent times it has been growing (Abromeit – Vaughan, 2004; Abromeit ed., 2018; Beutter Manus, 2009; Cary, Paul – Sampsel, 2006; Christensen, 2003; Christensen-Conor-Ritter ed., 2018; Duffy, 2018; Hatschek – Wells, 2014; Müller – Erni, 2008; Pierce, 2004; Pierce, 2009). While the term 'information literacy' has taken on varied nuances over time and in different countries (Passerini, 2013), what particularly involves the Italian Conservatoire librarians is the link between librarianship, music library management and the training of users and students of the new Italian higher education institutions for art and music (*Alta Formazione Artistica e Musicale*, AFAM) of academic rank (Grande, 2018).

The goal of music information literacy is to provide the tools not only for music research and the research method, but also – as has been amply demonstrated by the work of librarians and researchers – for the assessment of the information and the music resource (Pierce, 2004; Nowlan, 2013). The current situation of the Italian Conservatoires, following the above-mentioned major 1999 framework reform law, which established academic degrees equivalent to university degrees, and mainly performance-based, does not seem to place much value on disciplines that are still considered to be complementary in relation to the academic profile of the experienced performing artist, devoted and focused on the performance of the great Western classical music repertoire of the last two or three centuries, obviously in relation to one's instrument or voice. In short, the learning technology is also changing in the musical field. Music information literacy topics such as those mentioned by Rachel E. Scott (Scott, 2014), are still highly significant for Italian Conservatories today. The author suggests a possible pathway through which the music librarian can influence the performance practice, starting by assessing the quality of music editions in use. Clearly, the concept of authenticity in music has changed and evolved, whereas, as Scott writes, not everything can be written in a score. The author explores the relationship between performance practice, bibliographic research and sources enquiry, reviewing the different information sources for performance practice: organology, iconography, music theory treatises, reports, chronicles, etc.

In recent years, several (but not all) Conservatoires have seen courses in 'Tools and methods of bibliographical research in music' run by music librarians: the approach, however, is rather theoretical; practically every instrument or voice performer should be instructed to start and carry out a search, with the aim of deepening their repertoire and above all the chance of choosing the best quality

information and resources, both in the mainstream and online sources (Sampsel, 2020). As regards the teacher-librarian in Italy, while elsewhere there have been projects where the music history teacher and the music librarian have worked together, side by side in music history classes (Beutter Manus, 2013), the Italian one is an example of educational activity foreseen at the basis of the librarian-teachers' own functions. Our job entails this twofold function, which currently involves teaching the aforementioned subject. The expression 'music bibliography' is a reductive term when put alongside the methodology of music research, as research also involves the acquisition of a musicological language that Conservatoire students are expected to learn today.

I will consider here the impact that a new dimension of making musical and artistic research is having even in the restricted sphere of Italian music education. Until a few years ago, not many Conservatories activated a course in Music bibliography ('Tools and methods of bibliographic research in music'). The slow dissemination of these courses has undoubtedly led to a reassessment of information literacy as a key discipline in music education for all, teachers and students alike. All that led to a new series of reflections on how the discipline could be taught and on its basis. In practice, the introduction to musical research, implied in the music bibliography course objectives, has been transformed in 'information literacy'. The binomial 'music bibliography' – 'Information literacy' originated from my personal experience as a librarian - professor of 'Tools and methods of bibliographic music research' in an Italian Conservatory. As already pointed out, the greatest commitment is to help Italian students in learning and assessment how to use international resources and music research methods for their activity.

An important novelty for Italian Conservatoires has been coming up in recent months. The Decree-Law no. 80 of 9 June 2021, *Misure urgenti per il rafforzamento della capacità amministrativa delle pubbliche amministrazioni* (*Urgent measures to strengthen public administrations' administrative capacity*; https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2021/08/07/21A04886/sg), for the first time makes an amendment to the 1999 Law 508 on the music academies reform: it also allows these university-level institutions to open PhD courses in music. This could lead, in the AFAM (High Education in Art and Music) institutions that might choose to offer this study and research pathway alongside the degrees already in place, in addition to the desirable increase in print and online subscription resources available in their music libraries, also courses to train in the qualitative and selective use of these same resources. Basically, it would involve providing methodological guidelines and research strategies in the field of music. Thus two significant educational steps are emerging: a) explaining music resources; b) teaching how to evaluate and determine what kind of research these resources might be useful for. So we are not talking about knowledge management strategies, but about evaluation and communication. Stefano Passerini (2013, p. 257) writes: «La competenza informativa consiste nel sapere quando e perché si ha bisogno di informazione, dove trovarla, come valutarla, usarla, comunicarla eticamente›› («Information literacy is about knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, how to evaluate

it, use it, communicate it ethically››). In sum: knowing, and being able to access information in order to lay the foundations of one's own knowledge, are two separate but closely related things.

3. Teaching strategies and music research methodology

The music bibliography teaching in Italian Conservatories (under the aforementioned title 'Tools and methods of bibliographic research in music') is a work perspective which has been part of the music librarian's competences for a long time. On the other hand, it is a means of introducing students to the historical heritage of music academy libraries. The latter is usually important, not only as regards old collections (pre-1830 collections), but also for 19th and 20th century modern music collections. In spite of this, we still have to note a marginalization of music in Italian culture. As Giuseppe Chiarante remarked almost twenty years ago: «la marginalità sinora assegnata al patrimonio musicale [ha] radici culturali profonde e si manifest[a] tanto nella legislazione come nell'organizzazione che sinora ha avuto il Ministero per i Beni Culturali [italiano]» («the marginality hitherto assigned to musical heritage [has] deep cultural roots and is apparent both in the legislation and in the organisation of the [Italian] Ministry for Cultural Heritage to date» Chiarante, 2003, p. 8). Chiarante provided an original interpretation of the need to enhance the Italian musical heritage as an inspiration for thinking and improving life in Italy (Chiarante, 2003; Ziino, in Caroccia, 2018). In other words, he believes that such valorisation could be a driving force or stimulus for today's cultural renewal. In order to achieve this, a comparative critical reading of musical resources is essential.

In recent years, Italian music heritage documentation produced a whole series of resources and databases essential for its use, including digitization of some ancient and modern music collections, currently ongoing in major Italian libraries (e.g. among Italian Conservatories the one in Milan: https://search.bibliotecadigitale.consmilano.it/). Music is also prominently featured in Italy's largest digital cultural repository Internet Culturale (http://www.internetculturale.it/it/753/remi) (Ciancio, 2010). Nevertheless, there is still plenty to be done as regards the digitization of Italian Conservatories' library heritage (an example are the virtual music exhibitions in some of these: Di Donato – Natale – Zomparelli, 2018). The real problem lies in the gap between Italian music librarians' traditional education and training (mostly musical and/or musicological or literary) and new skills needed for managing and developing online resources, i.e. digital humanities. Ongoing training updates should also be considered for Italian Conservatories library staff.

The documentation and enhancement of Italy's musical heritage and information literacy education are two seemingly different tasks which, nevertheless, engage the Conservatories teacher-librarians. The role of the Conservatory teacher-librarian, with this dual function (advocate of the Italian musical heritage on the one hand, and trainer of musicians with information competence on the other),

is peculiar to our territory. This is a very important commitment, considering that even today music is too often a niche area in Italian culture.

Starting with the notion of 'tools and resources for music knowledge', i.e. qualitative selection of documents and resources for music knowledge, one can understand those things that have nothing to do with the written musical text: study and access to the broader music cultural heritage. Of course, reference is being made here to the Italian system, even in a context of boundless expansion of musical information and of the objects that are now the actual identity of music-making, in other words 'signifiers' of 'music-making'. It is worth noting from the beginning that each library (including the Conservatories' music libraries) has several catalogues: one or more card catalogues, and also collective and/or individual online ones, sometimes published catalogues covering specific areas and music genres. Getting through the different library catalogues is often a challenge. Similarly, it is equally challenging, in music history research, to be aware of databases and resources that make Italian and foreign periodicals, whether musical or general, accessible (an international example is given in Stone-Sternfeld, 2014). Besides periodicals digitalization, collected in the Italian portal 'Internet Culturale', the Ricordi music periodicals are now available in digital form on the publishing house's Web site https://www.digitalarchivioricordi.com/it/periodicals. Another example of a general Italian historical database, with a wealth of periodicals and other open access digitised documents from the 19th and 20th centuries is the Digiteca (http://digiteca.bsmc.it/) of the Library of Modern and Contemporary History in Rome. The ArtMus database (http://www.artmus.it/public/) is also fundamental for Italian music research: it indexes and provides open access to music articles found in several nineteenth-century daily newspapers (Cesari, 2015).

Indeed, the aim of Conservatories' 'music bibliography' courses should be to provide a first basis of knowledge, qualitative assessment and use of open or closed access resources on the Web and in printed form, and further to be able to recognise and choose the best music editions for one's own study, those with an 'added value', i.e. critical editions, either Urtext and practical editions for musicians, or a mixture of these, according to the best practical-scientific editions existing today (such as the new Henle digital library). Teaching how to evaluate the best print or digital music editions has become one of our discipline's priorities (Haefeli - Shanton, 2018; Cary - Sampsel, 2006). Basically and theoretically, the tasks of music bibliography can be summed up as follows: a) active learning of research tools through exercises; b) 'Critical reading of information' relating to music and then quality assessment of such information. Traditionally, music bibliography is a music book material history discipline, and of the musical repertoire dissemination. Today, however, the focus towards information literacy has become predominant.

As already mentioned, the quality of musical information should be understood on a Web resource knowledge basis and how to use open and restricted access databases and documents on the network. Music research with the OPAC SBN, the collective network catalogue of the Italian libraries of the National Library Service, including at least four tens of Conservatoire libraries, and hundreds of

libraries with large music collections, is one of the first steps of an elementary knowledge of music resources and the development of a research path towards a personal music information literacy. Nevertheless, its use is not so simple and obvious. There is no possibility to search by 'subjects' and 'keywords', as for example U.S. Library of Congress subject index for classes M, ML, and MT (Sampsel, 2020, pp. 240-244). The search for notated music with the Italian SBN OPAC does not make use of semantics for the most part, although this is actually provided for, but not yet implemented by the vast majority of Italian music libraries. Basically, one has to rely mainly on the uniform title to search for printed music. As already pointed out by Michela Grossi (Grossi, 2020), it is true that the rich Thesaurus of the New Subject Directory of the BNCF (Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze) features a wealth of musical entries; however, several research entries relating to music as a performing act are currently not available, for the complete classification of music editions (https://thes.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/ricerca.php?lettera=&lang=it&tiporicerca=cominciaper&terminericerca=musica).

Besides the subject search of the notated music, nowadays it is hard to search for sacred music in score from the 20th century, for example, in the SBN network catalogue of Italian libraries (unless it is part of a thematic series), as well as searching for notated music for string trio composed in the 21st century. In short: the search possibilities within the music access point in the SBN OPAC need to be enhanced, e.g. with better searchability of uniform title elements. It remains difficult to find notated music based either on scoring or form combined with historical periodization. In short: the current advanced search mask, which also makes it possible to catch the musical work through the uniform title, and also makes it possible to identify the manuscript music through the musical incipit (now readable in uncoded form; it is an extraordinary achievement that dates back only a few years), was designed with the needs of verbal text search in mind. If we consider the necessary training required for an expert use of this important music searching resource in Italian libraries, it offers the musician extraordinary possibilities, yet at the same time it presents obstacles that demand careful scrutiny.

We can talk about music information literacy as an evolution of traditional music bibliography courses. In the age of large global digital music repositories on the Internet, where online and networked music resource searches gradually replace traditional library searches, it is the handover, the natural evolution, of a new discipline growing from the basis of traditional information literacy within the library boundary (Pierce, 2004). The course 'Tools and methods of bibliographical research in music' in Italian Conservatories witnesses the transition of music bibliography from a theoretical to a practical discipline - exercises in music research methodology.

Knowledge of music is always something peculiar to the musician and in any case concretely linked to his or her music-making and to the vocal or instrumental repertoire employed. It is, generally speaking, a rather limited domain. The aim of Italian music Conservatories librarians is therefore to expand that territory by promoting the skilled use of databases and resources for

music research. Even today in Italy there is insufficient understanding of the importance of music research methodology applied to the live performance domain.

Music information literacy can therefore be understood as a new awareness in the field of music research. Hence the importance of artistic research in itself and furthermore the reappraisal of information seen as the basic foundation for musical research and cognitive reflection.

Information literacy itself implies a 'democratic' research view (Catalani, 2017). Many librarians pointed out that the purpose of information literacy is to provide the learner with the tools for critical information reading. Others have emphasised the links between information literacy and lifelong learning (Lau, 2004), since information literacy is active learning and thus criticism and evaluation of information quality. If music information literacy is knowledge of the means with which to carry out specific research in music, it takes different forms according to the different areas in which the discipline is applied. As previously stated, it largely coincided with the aims of teaching music bibliography in Italian Conservatories. The latter has a practical aim of training in research methodology and includes, as I have already stated, research exercises on a variety of topics, using printed and online resources. Indeed, the discipline becomes a vehicle for promoting the library's services and bibliographic resources (Hatschek – Wells, 2014). Indeed, if it is feasible to consider a parallel between the two experiences in such dissimilar geographical and cultural environments, music information literacy in the USA has some similarities with our courses on 'Tools and methods of bibliographic research in music' in Italian conservatories. Beyond the notions, the heart of music information literacy is in the continuous practical experimentation of research situations: students are offered different inquiry topics, and resource learning (repertories, databases, catalogues and collective and individual network bibliographies, etc.) takes place in the field. In this case the librarian is a true instructor (Beutter Manus, 2009; Christensen, 2003).

Information literacy in the Conservatory is essential both for the possibility of approaching and using remote resources that still today struggle to get into the everyday life of music teachers and students, and also for opportunities which better knowledge of repertoires and resources offer to those who want to be a music performer today. Yet, information literacy also outlines the profile of an ethical scholar-student, aware of the need for a personal deontology, a new methodological approach to research didactics (*Manifesto per l'Information Literacy* in AIB-WEB http://www.aib.it/struttura/commissioni-e-gruppi/gruppo-literacy/ilmanifesto/).

4. Conclusions

In Italy, music information literacy has its own specificities, linked to the institutional teaching standards in music conservatories. The notion of music information is also problematic (Vivarelli, in Lana, 2020, p.11). As Maurizio

Lana (2020, p. 25) rightly points out, the two terms information literacy and digital humanities are both related. A consequence of the current open or closed access to the internet and the availability of online resources, is that nowadays students privilege the search for authoritative music bibliographical references on the Internet, rather than only on paper. The Dizionario Enciclopedico Universale della Musica e dei Musicisti ('Universal Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Music and Musicians') published by UTET in Turin, the main Italian music encyclopaedias nowadays, is now exclusively in paper format.

As regards music editions, Rachel Scott in 2013, talking about singing students in the US, stated that apparently the majority of music students search for the music edition they need directly online (Scott, 2013). She also points out that the qualitative assessment of music editions is important for information literacy. This observation is totally agreeable also in the Italian context. As regards early music sources currently digitized and belonging to digital libraries, they are obviously better accessible and therefore more widely consulted, unlike the many others that have not been digitized but are nevertheless still important (Tangari, 2006). The creation process of digital music libraries is relentless: to give a famous Italian example, see the integrated research of the International Museum and Library of Music in Bologna, which today provides some of its ancient music sources openly available on the Web (http://www.bibliotecamusica.it/cmbm/tools/pro_dig.asp).

The 'shift' of library resources from paper to virtual has resulted in the detachment of the librarian from the physical perimeter of the library, in order to help students and teachers in finding and consulting resources in the digital world (Nowlan, 2013).

Inevitably, these issues have now become even more acute during the global epidemic of COVID-19, given the health restrictions imposed on all Italian schools and universities. An even more important issue is the accessibility by Conservatories to online commercial music and musicological resources and databases. Italian Conservatories, advanced schools for specialist musical training, struggle to get away from the still traditional view of the musician as both performer and interpreter, for whom artistic and scientific research is still regarded as only a secondary part of his academic career and performance training, focused on getting to know the main repertoire of one' s instrument. Needless to say, online commercial databases and resources, which are essential for music research today, are not considered by many Conservatoires to be an indispensable and/or affordable expense. The gap between resource-rich and resource-poor institutions is increasingly pronounced: today, commercial subscription resources enable research in the world of music and musicology that was unthinkable just a few years ago. It is therefore important to continue, as far as possible, to improve and increase free online music resources.

The Italian Conservatories should therefore stay on the path set by the 1999 law, proceeding along the challenging path of institutional reform.

As far as music information literacy is concerned, Conservatory students need their own pathways. Until now, Italian research in music has mainly focused on the performance of educated musicians. It is necessary to improve and broaden

music knowledge through the skilled use of already mentioned resources. In this way it will be possible to define a link between research and creativity.

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