

Guidelines for Discographies in the *ARSC Journal*

Following are guidelines for the content and format of discographies being prepared for publication in the *ARSC Journal*. As a scholarly publication, the *Journal* strives to provide its readers with accuracy and detail in its articles. While there are well-accepted standards for the formatting and sourcing of scholarly articles and books (e.g., *The Chicago Manual of Style*), discographies have long lacked such guidelines. It is true that the content and format of discographies may need to differ according to the purpose of the work, as well as the information available to the compiler, and variations of the following guidelines may be discussed with the Editor. However, discographers are asked to incorporate as many of the following elements as possible.

Content

Three basic principles should be observed in preparing discographies for the *ARSC Journal*: completeness, detail, and accuracy.

Completeness. The *Journal* discourages “partial” or “select” discographies (except as examples within articles consisting primarily of text). Discographers may set limits on their coverage, for example a span of years or a type of repertoire, but within those limits should attempt to identify all qualifying recordings. Both issued and unissued recordings should be included where appropriate.

Detail. *Journal* readers value a level of detail beyond that of simple “record lists”. Following are examples of the types of information that should be included for each recording.

Essential

Primary performer(s)
Title(s)
Composer (classical)
Matrix number
Take numbers
Recording date
Label and number of primary release

Desirable

Artist detail (e.g. birth/death dates)
Other performers, backing musicians, etc.
Title variants
Language of performance
Composer (popular)
Recording location
Recording engineer
Playing time
Playing speed
Release/deletion date
Secondary releases and reissues
Couplings (if with other artists)

This list is not exhaustive; for example some discographers include time of day recorded, additional control or manufacturing numbers associated with the recording, dates of subsequent dubbing/engineering performed on recordings, physical characteristics of the record or description of the label. Even more detailed information may include an exact transcription of the label, including spelling variants; subtitles; genre indicated; stamper numbers; song publisher; distributor or corporate owner of the label; and address given on label. Authors are encouraged to include (and thus preserve) any information that might be important to future scholars. However, there is such as thing as data overkill – the “kitchen sink” syndrome – and data felt to be of marginal relevance to the subject at hand may be omitted, or summarized elsewhere, to avoid cluttering the discography.

Some data is so essential – for example, the date a recording was made – that estimates are preferable to omitting the information. Discographers should explain the rationale behind estimates, and clearly distinguish them from “solid” data.

Accuracy. It should go without saying that discographies submitted to the *Journal* should be as accurate as possible. This means taking into account the accuracy of sources, especially secondary sources, and resolving any discrepancies noted. Do not use sources blindly. Reviews, such as those in the *Journal*, may be helpful in establishing the reliability of previous discographies, as can comparison of selected entries in them with data that the compiler has personally obtained from primary sources. A great deal of inaccurate information has been propagated by discographers who copied from each others’ work without regard to typos, unsubstantiated assumptions, and even blatantly wrong original sources. The discographer should do everything possible to correct and improve on previous work, not just copy it. Sources of information used to compile the discography *must* be identified (see page 18).

Format

Format is one of the most variable, and controversial, aspects of discography. In general terms the layout should be clear, easy to follow and appropriate to the subject.

There are three major types of discography, each with its own characteristic layouts:

Label Discographies are concerned with the output of a single company, and are usually arranged by matrix or issue number.

Artist Discographies are generally arranged by recording date or sometimes, in the case of classical artists, by composer.

Subject Discographies are built around some other unifying theme, for example a musical genre (e.g., ‘Decca Calypsos in the 1930s’), a song title or a show (e.g., ‘Early Recordings of Songs from *Florodora*’), or even a style of packaging (‘Acoustic Chamber Music Sets, 1899-1926’). Commonly these are arranged by title or artist, although other systems can be used.

The specific layout can vary as well, but it should be clear, intuitive and scanable. Three common layouts are Columnar, “Rust” format, and Stacked.

Columnar, as the title suggest, displays the information in simple columns. This is easy for the compiler to use when organizing his work on paper or in a spreadsheet, but in print it wastes space, and thus is hard to fit on a page without considerable “stacking” within the columns. It tends to lead to a lot of abbreviations, which are not recommended, or the use of “landscape” mode (in which the reader must turn the page sideways), which is even worse. Columnar format is not recommended unless the amount of data to be presented is extremely limited. The following example is from a discography of bandmaster Giuseppe Creatore.¹ Note the somewhat limited amount of data – no recording location, alternate issues or band personnel – and the stacking required.

Giuseppe Creatore and His Band

Columbia 12” Discs

Commercial Number	Matrix Numbers	Work (Composer) – Ensemble Name	Recording Date
A5363	30915-1	Turkish March (Mozart) – CREATORE'S BAND	15 December [19]11
	30916-2	Per de la Victoire. Father of Victory-March (Ganne) – CREATORE'S BAND [Some copies have Pour la Victoire. To Victory-March]	15 December [19]11
A5364	30904-1	Nearer My God To Thee – CREATORE'S BAND	6 December [19]11
	30912-1	Hallelujah Chorus. <i>Messiah</i> – CREATORE'S BAND	15 December [19]11

Recent examples of discographies in columnar format can be found in *ARSC Journals* 31:2, 31:1 and 29:1.

“Rust” Format, often used in popular and jazz discographies, is named after the well-known English discographer Brian Rust. It is essentially an adaptation of the columnar format, in which artist, location and recording date information are grouped in a heading, beneath which appear three columns: matrix and take on the left, title and composer in the middle, and releases on the right. Although more difficult to type (or computerize) than columnar, it preserves the easy scanability of that layout with a minimum of wasted space. In the following somewhat complicated example, from a discography of early performer George W. Johnson, the matrix numbers (on the left) are further differentiated by 7-inch and 10-inch size.² Note the abbreviations of label names to accommodate the large number of releases sharing the same matrix.

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Minstrels: Len Spencer, Henry Spencer, George W. Johnson and others including soloists Frank C. Stanley, Edward Metcalf, George J. Gaskin, Dan W. Quinn as noted; with orchestra accompaniment. Announced by Henry Spencer. RDF as by Fireside Minstrels.

New York, early 1902

7	642-5	Hear Dem Bells (solo: LS)	Col/Hv/Ox/Peerless/Std 642
10	642-1,2,3	"	Col/Har 642, RDF 1241
7	643-1,2,4	A High Old Time (solo: LS)	Cx/Col/Ox 643
10	643-1	"	Col 643
7	644-2,3,4,6,8	The Laughing Song (solo: GWJ)	Col/Hv/Ox/Std 644
10	644-2	"	Col 644, Col A461, Cort F366

Stacked, most commonly used in classical music, presents each entry in a uniform stack of lines, with each piece of information always appearing on the same line. In the following example from a discography of the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, the artist and recording information appears first, then a separate stack for each title recorded at that session.³ Note the judicious use of bold and italic fonts to facilitate easy reading.

Antal Dorati, cond.
Mercury Recording Corporation
Northrop Auditorium
 20 December 1957
 Producer: Wilma Cozart
 Balance Engineer: C. Robert Fine

COPLAND, AARON
Danzon cubano
 Mercury MG 50172 (LP); SR 90172 (Stereo LP)
 Reissued on MG 50326 (LP); 434 301-2 (CD)

GERSHWIN, GEORGE
An American in Paris
 Mercury MG 50071 (LP); SR 90290 (Stereo LP)
 Reissued on MG 50431 (LP); 434 329-2 (CD)

This format allows an efficient use of space while still maintaining reasonable clarity and scanability. It can generally be presented two columns to a page. Indenting lines should be avoided. Recent examples, some more successful than others, can be found in *ARSC Journals* 34:2, 31:2, 31:1, and 28:2.

Some other considerations:

Abbreviations. Abbreviations may optionally be used for recurring words such as common label names (e.g., 'Col' = Columbia), names of instruments ('bj' = banjo) or voice timbre ('ten' = tenor). These should be intuitive, kept to a minimum and spelled out somewhere. A discography should be immediately understandable to a casual reader without

having to refer to a dense or complicated introduction or list of codes. For example the preferred format for dates is the obvious '9 Sept 1951', not '1951.05.09' or '9/5/51'. [The latter are especially problematic because of different conventions in the U.S. and Europe.]

Fonts. The use of different font styles such as bold and italic, in moderation, is encouraged to improve readability. Font styles are especially helpful with the Stacked Format, as in the example above. Underlining, which was commonly used before the advent of personal computers, is no longer recommended.

Indexes. For larger discographies, authors are encouraged to compile indexes for major access points. For example if the main discography is in artist order, title and release indexes might be provided.

Page Orientation. Pages should be in normal "portrait" mode. Do not use "landscape" mode in which the reader has to turn the page sideways.

Sources (adapted from Brooks [2000])

Every discography should be accompanied by a paragraph (or more) on "Discographical Sources," and annotation of individual entries if necessary. The basic test of sourcing should be the same for discographies as for scholarly text. Does it allow the reader to retrace the author's steps and locate the source of factual information? In scholarly work, anything short of that is a failure by an author to meet his obligation to his readers.

Many discographies draw their information from a single source and in those cases a simple paragraph on that source may be sufficient. For example, if most information came from record company files, simply saying that will source the vast bulk of listings. The essay should be specific, however; the concept of a "sources" essay has been much abused by compilers who offer only a few sweeping generalities, making it impossible for others to actually retrace their steps. If the source is company files the essay should outline where those files are located, how they are organized and what information they do (and do not) contain. It is also helpful to know whether they are available on microfilm or in print.

If listings have been assembled from catalogs or trade papers, specify which ones. Another catalog may surface later containing different information. If listings are based on examination of actual copies of the records, say so. It generally is not appropriate to publish the names of owners of specific records, for privacy reasons, and also because records often change hands. However if the copies consulted reside in a collection at a public institution, that information can be helpful to readers and may be cited.

When most listings are from the "principal source" described in the sources essay, but a few are not, the exceptions should be individually noted. This might be called the "exceptions" approach, and can be done in a note immediately following the relevant listing, or in a footnote or endnote depending on frequency.

Most difficult are discographies that are drawn from a plethora of sources, although these, arguably, are the ones most in need of sourcing. The most precise form of sourcing, via footnotes or endnotes, has rarely been used in discography but is encouraged (the *Journal* prefers endnotes to footnotes). If several sources have been used for an individual entry they can be grouped in a single endnote to avoid clutter. See for example the inconspicuous use of endnotes for individual entries in the George W. Johnson discography in *ARSC Journal* 31:2.

A bibliography is encouraged, but is not a substitute for an explicit discussion of sources. Some compilers may be reluctant to admit that they have drawn much of their information from prior discographies, but this must not be allowed to get in the way of proper sourcing. Writers of text articles are not allowed to “hide their sources” in this way. In any event, reorganizing previously published information, and adding and correcting data, is legitimate scholarship.

Also problematic are discographies that have been assembled over a long period of time, perhaps by numerous people, in which sources were not recorded at the time the information was gathered. It may be difficult or impossible to reconstruct at a later date the exact origin of the information. In such cases simply tell the reader as much as you know about the sources. What might seem obvious to you may not be so clear to a reader, many years from now. Even a “best guess” about the sources of information, labeled as such, will be helpful to future readers.

Acknowledgments

Special acknowledgement is owed Tim Brooks who prepared these guidelines at the request of *ARSC Journal* editor Barry Ashpole. The basic approach was to compile guidelines that are: 1) as flexible as possible, recognizing the different purposes of individual discographies and source data available to the compilers; and 2) in line with “best practices” actually used in *ARSC Journal* discographies published in recent years. Ten major discographies published in the *ARSC Journal* between 1997 and 2004 were analyzed for this purpose.

The guidelines were reviewed by publisher Ted Sheldon, book review editor Jim Farrington, ARSC Board members Brenda Nelson-Strauss, Sam Brylawski and Patrick Feaster, and Discography Committee members Vincent Pelote (chair), Chris Strachwitz, Barrett Crawford, Garrett Bowles and Richard Warren. The input of all of these individuals has been greatly appreciated; final editorial decisions are those of the author and editor.

Bibliography

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- Smolian, S. "Standards for the Review of Discographical Works," *ARSC Journal* 1976;7:3:47-55. Although somewhat dated, this article contains an interesting chart of types of discographical information and the categories of discography in which the author believes they belong.
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Endnotes

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2. Brooks T. "George W. Johnson: An Annotated Discography," *ARSC Journal* 2004:35:37-66.
3. Ritosalmi-Kisner K, Rooney DD, "Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra/Minnesota Orchestra: A Discography of Recordings, 1924-2003," *ARSC Journal* 2003;34:2:160-193.