"A Better Score: How to Produce Exceptional Scores and Parts"

MOLA Guidelines
for Music Preparation

MOLA

Major Orchestra Librarians' Association

Introduction

This brief set of guidelines for the preparation of music came about after many hours of discussion regarding the condition and layout of performance material that has come through our libraries. We realize that each music publisher has its own set of guidelines for composers. We wish to encourage music publishers to work together to standardize those guidelines. In the meantime, we would like to express our thoughts regarding the preparation of new music in the hope that an agreement about format may be reached.

Use of the Computer
Advantages and Disadvantages

With the advent of computer software for composing and arranging music, it is increasingly possible to produce clear and readable music from a desktop printer. Music publishers and professional composers and arrangers are creating scores and parts that are as pristine and beautiful as regularly engraved music.

The technology allows the composer or the copyist to enter the music into the score through various means, including electronic (midi) keyboard. Once the score is completed, individual parts are transposed, formatted, and printed automatically, saving countless hours of work. This technology provides a great level of flexibility for editing, reproducing, and storing music.

These advantages can quickly become disadvantages for music librarians, however. For example, if the editing process of a new work continues after the parts have been prepared and distributed to the musicians, the music librarian may have to double or triple the amount of work that goes into producing a suitable set of parts. Although digital storage methods are increasingly efficient and popular, there is a danger of the librarian assuming the role of music publisher as the pages produced from a desktop printer still must be duplicated and bound. Nonetheless, whether a score is handwritten, or produced from a desktop printer, there are common, specific elements that make this music readable, and ultimately usable by musicians.

The Score
Cover

Although each music publisher will have its own guidelines and style requirements, there are a few things that are very helpful to see on the cover of any score. The title of the piece, and name of the composer should be printed prominently on the cover and spine of the score. If applicable, the name of the arranger should appear, but need not be as prominent as the title and composer. Additionally, the name and address of the publisher should be easily located.

Title Page

There should be a page at the beginning of the work which lists the full instrumentation required, including doublings, keys of transposing instruments, and all percussion instruments.

An indication of how many percussionists will be required is helpful, though each orchestra may or may not adhere to that number. Any special synthesizer settings, equipment, or other special synthesizer requirements should be noted here, as well as on the cover page of the synthesizer part. These instructions should be as specific and understandable as possible. Any special instructions for "prepared instruments" should also be noted here, as well as on the cover page of the instrument involved. Any special staging instructions should also be mentioned on this, or a subsequent page.

Detailed diagrams are helpful, especially for complex staging. If there are deviations from standard musical notation, an explanation should appear next to the instrumentation page. There should be an approximate duration for each movement and a total duration included on the instrumentation page.

The Music

At the beginning of the musical score, the full name of each instrument should be listed to the left of the corresponding system. On subsequent pages abbreviations of the instruments should be used.

All instructions should be in a conventional language such as English, Italian, German, or French. All tempo indications should appear above the first violin line on each score page. Each measure (bar) should be numbered (beginning anew with each movement). Placement of measure numbers should be the same throughout the work, i.e. above, below, or on a special line of the grand staff such as above the first violins. If rehearsal letters are used, they should correspond to landmarks in the music and must be used in conjunction with measure numbers.

Score Readability

If computer output is not possible, it is preferable to receive the completed score done in ink (pencil is acceptable, but the publisher should provide some kind of quality control for the final outcome of the reproduction). This should be done on either vellum or opaque paper and clearly reproduced, back to back. Right hand pages must be odd-numbered and left hand pages must be even-numbered. The score pages should have a sturdy cover and be securely bound so that they lie flat on the desk.

Prior to printing, the score should be proofread by the composer and a professional proofreader before it is presented for reproduction.

Instrumental Parts
General

Standard music notation practice should be observed and any deviation from the standard should be clearly explained prior to the first page of music. Parts should be clearly identified on the front cover with the composer, title of the work, and instrument (including doublings where appropriate. Percussion parts should have a list of the instruments required). The parts must be copied legibly in black ink, using an italic or technical pen. If parts are computer generated, they should be entirely computer generated with no hand written additions.

Paper

The paper for any set of parts should be of substantial quality to avoid show-through of music from the reverse side, to ensure durability, and to stand up to on-stage wind patterns caused by ventilation systems. (The minimum requirement is usually 60 or 70 lb. [100gsm] offset paper.)

Consideration in layout must be given for comfortable page turns. Fold out pages should be avoided, or if absolutely necessary, used sparingly. Page turns should occur only on odd-numbered pages.

Eight or ten stave paper should be used for any instrument that is subject to multiple ledger lines. Twelve or fourteen stave paper may be used as long as symbols are not crowded and clarity of the notational elements is maintained.

Instrumental Part Readability

The most readable staff size for all instruments is 8.5 mm. and although 8.0 mm is readable for winds, it is less so for strings. Wind players can read music from staves that measure 7.5 mm, but this is very problematic for string players. Anything smaller than 7.0 mm is unacceptable for orchestral parts. Anything larger than 8.5 mm should be avoided as it becomes distracting to players.

Measure (bar) numbers should appear at the beginning of the first measure of each line, much like the engraved classical pieces. Numbering each measure (as in the score) gets in the way and becomes confusing in the parts. For multiple measures rest, measure numbers are helpful (e.g. "27-117" and so on).

In hand copied parts it is recommended that all stems, beams, and bar lines be ruled with a straight edge; especially multiple staff harp and keyboard parts.

Logical cues are expected during long periods of rest, the cues being transposed to the reading key of the instrument. Cues must be audible to the musician reading the part.

Specific Suggestions

- Clefs and key signatures must appear at the beginning of each line.
- Parts for transposing instruments should be written in the proper key.
- Harp pedaling should be left to the performer.
- The Timpani part should NOT be included in the percussion part.
- Percussionists prefer parts in score form.
- Notation should be from high to low. These positions must be consistently maintained.
- If any parts are reproduced with a popular transposition (Horn in E-flat transposed for Horn in F) the original should be included with the set.
- Care should be taken with the use of the abbreviations 8va and 8vb, avoiding their usage if possible.
- Complicated string divisions should be written on separate staves.
- If there are deviations from standard musical notation, an explanation should appear prior to the first page of music.

Proofreading

It is mandatory that prior to reproduction the parts be proofread by a qualified professional proofreader and NOT only the composer or the copyist who prepared the parts. Please do not expect orchestra librarians to provide additional proofreading services.

Format and Binding

The parts should be prepared within an image area of no less than 8.75 x 11.75" on paper at least 9.5 x 12.5" (A4). These minimum requirements leave a 3/4 inch margin surrounding the image area. Parts should not be reproduced on paper larger than 11 x 14" (B4). Parts larger than 11 x 14" can create just as much of a problem as parts that are too small.

The parts should be saddle stitched or stapled at the spine. Parts prepared on transparencies should be reproduced by diazo process, front and back, not accordion folded. Loose pages must be appropriately taped. The preferred method of binding loose pages is to employ a single strip of special tape to the spine. This is a fast method of binding parts and it insures that the pages lie flat when opened on the stand. The plastic comb binding and accordion fold methods of binding parts are not acceptable.

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