

Last June, I had the privilege to attend the 41st MOLA conference, hosted by the Berliner Philharmoniker. The magnificent Philharmonie is located in the heart of Berlin, metres away from the Berlin Wall.



Berlin Street Detail.

The Conference was a unique occasion to meet and reconnect with over 200 colleagues from all over the world. My stay in Berlin was greatly facilitated by a generous sponsorship from [BI International](#).

MOLA: An Association of Music Performance Librarians presents itself this way on its website landing page:

“MOLA’s mission is to facilitate communication between professional performance librarians, educate and assist them in providing service to their organizations, provide support and resources to the performing arts, and work with publishers to achieve the highest standards in music performance materials.”^{vi}

Performance librarianship is a very specialized area of library science and is indeed not taught as a degree in Canada. Day in, day out, performance librarians throughout the world provide the necessary materials to their respective ensembles’ members. This makes it possible for them to be able to rehearse, perform and record musical works for their audience to enjoy. Often facing tight deadlines, they work closely with musical directors, administrative staff and musicians, monitoring the whole journey of the music scores needed. This includes acquisition (sometimes through rental, quite rare in the library world), cataloguing, processing, distribution, maintenance. They are also in charge of securing the performing and internet dissemination rights, a very complex operation in the music world, due to the potential large number of stakeholders involved: composers, librettists, arrangers, publishers, to name but a few. Streaming online has become a standard practice for ensembles, so negotiating synchronization licenses is also part of the performance librarian’s daily life. While all of us rely on a solid musical background to operate, some of us also hold a library degree—in North America, most of the time it’s the MLIS (Master of Library and Information Science), an ALA (American Library Association), accredited graduate program. Whatever context they evolve in—in the academic world, within military bands, opera houses or professional orchestras, Performance Librarians

mostly work alone, or within very small teams. Therefore, meeting with peers on a yearly basis plays an indispensable role in our professional development.

The international network around [MOLA : an Association of Music Performance Librarians](#) is a wonderful chance to socialize and forge professional bonds. Being able to create and deepen relationships with our colleagues, share our common experiences and challenges gives us a professional identity, a sense of belonging. The experience proved extremely empowering and was enhanced by the fact that we were gathering in one of the most mythic musical cities of the world.



MOLA sign: Philharmonie's entrance hall

The various sessions covered a wide range of topics. For the first time in 2023, MOLA devoted a complete day to a “Tech Fair” on June 2, first day of a content-packed conference. This special event took place at the [Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler](#). It was the occasion to discuss the current trends in our field:

- An extensive conversation around the implementation of reading tablets for orchestra musicians. Pro and cons of both hardware and software new products were listed. Librarians shared their respective experiences and their musician’s responses to the current change.

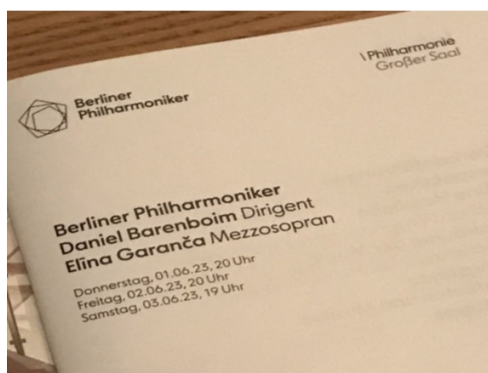
This being an ongoing conversation for us in the field, it was the occasion to discover and start using exchange platforms discussing music-related technologies. A few very active musicians and librarians are behind excellent blogs and podcasts, helping all of us to navigate through constant technological change. I wish to cite Scoring Notes as a magnificent example of shared expertiseⁱⁱ. Many thanks to Philip Rothman, a New York-based composer/music preparer, who is behind this invaluable source of information.

Throughout the rest of the weekend, other sessions included:

- Presentation of Berlin Philharmonic Digital Concert Hall: a comprehensive introduction to the platform and the history of its conception. Due to the design of the Philharmonie as a collective, the whole process was handled with utmost care. Consultation at every level was very extensive. This model is unique in the music world and proves a very inspiring example of the power of communities of practice.
- An Academic Roundtable: a time for reflection and brainstorming for those of us evolving in the field. We were able to compare our realities, which made us realize how

vastly different our job descriptions are. The post-pandemic return to normal was very challenging in education, and music schools are no exception. Strategies to maintain clear boundaries and handle the emotional burden of some students' responses to stress were addressed, the Performance Library being often seen as a safe place by its users.

- A Brief history of Our Publishing Houses and the Challenges Faced Today:
A most welcome occasion to hear about the history and unicity of the great German publishing houses, and the challenges they're facing.
- Part quality, a rare face-to-face discussion between performance librarians and the main European publishers (Schott, Breitkopf & Hartel, Ricordi, Boosey & Hawkes, Bärenreiter). Musicians from the Philharmonie were invited to share their impressions, challenges and expectations. We were able to appreciate the different perspectives and understand each party's context better.
- A few sessions were devoted to mental health and self-care, providing advice, support, and strategies to find and maintain balance in an often-stressful work environment. Here are a few examples of the topics addressed: last-minute changes and how to navigate them, advocacy strategies to obtain the necessary resources in our respective units, how to survive as a new Performance Librarian, panel discussions about the realities of working abroad.
- The Berliner Philharmoniker music librarians generously opened their workspace to visitors, and we were able to admire a very space-efficient workplace.
- Every MOLA conference typically features a concert by the hosting institution ensemble. This year was no exception, and was a unique occasion to enjoy the best orchestra in the world perform in its iconic concert venue.. The musicians performed with Berlin-based conductor Daniel Barenboim and Ms Elena Garanča appeared as a soloist in Wagner's Wesendonk-Lieder. As most of the Berliner Philharmoniker regular events, the concert was recorded by the previously-mentioned [Digital Concert Hall](#) (subscription-restricted access).



Concert Program

On Sunday evening, all attendees gathered in the Philharmonie Entrance Hall for the annual MOLA Conference banquet. Like every year, MOLA chose this moment to publicly announce the name of the Eroica Award recipient. This recompense for outstanding service to music is voted by MOLA members on a yearly basis. This year's recipient is conductor JoAnn Falletta, in

recognition of decades of leadership and advocacy. She was not able to receive her award in person, but gracefully sent a thank you video for us to watch.

The conference ended on Monday June 5, after a last plenary session in the morning. It's fair to say that the Conference was a complete success. Every MOLA conference is helping us all to become more competent individually. More importantly, though, the shared learning and brainstorming moments are part of a collective culture, increasing a level of professionalism that we refine year after year as a community. Congratulations to Berlin Philharmonie and MOLA different organizing committees for a flawless conference. I would also like once more to express my gratitude to BII International for their financial support with per diem, as well as MOLA for their travel-assistance award. Both instances made this very important learning moment not only possible, but much more comfortable.

Geneviève Beaudry

Senior Reference Assistant & Cataloguing Editor (Gertrude Whitley Performance Library)

McGill University, Montreal (CANADA).

Notes

i <https://mola-inc.org/>

ii <https://www.scoringnotes.com/>

All photos by Geneviève Beaudry: CC BY-SA 4.0