

Developing and Maintaining Young Adult Audio Collections

by Anthony G. Miller

Every library has to face hard budget choices and must select which services it should provide, which usually means the ones it can afford. A popular music recording collection may serve as well as anything else to dispel the image of stodginess that clings to public libraries, but the first question to consider is whether you can justify spending a substantial part of your shrinking YA budget duplicating what your teenage patrons can already hear on the radio any time they want to turn it on. It will have to be a substantial budget chunk, too, or you'll never have anything current on the shelf. Popular music recordings circulate instantly, often don't come back, and what your patrons don't "weed" for you is what hardly anybody wants to hear.

Which format should you collect? Don't even think of *starting* a long-playing record collection now; and except for the now rare case where the title you want doesn't come any other way, don't buy any more vinyl for an existing collection unless you have continuing high demand for them. The formats of choice are cassettes and compact discs, and they lend themselves to different collection approaches.

Almost everyone today has some kind of cassette player at home, in the car, or at the hip. Cassettes now cost less than many paperbacks. There is something to be said for treating them as

ephemeral, for if they stay in the active collection long enough, they will self-destruct. Joy Vee Davis (p. 96) has some good suggestions for selecting the current most popular titles or getting someone else to select them for you. Do a minimum of physical processing. Put enough information into your online circulation system so you can figure out the overdue notices, and get them out on the shelf before demand for them dies. Arrange them by performer or group name, regardless of the cataloger's choice of main entry. You're looking for recreational use now, not supporting scholarly papers on "popular culture."

Compact discs are costlier, more glamorous, and more durable in library use than cassettes. They can be scratched, but just playing them will not wear them out. Sometimes your CD money gets you more playing time. Many CD issues of popular music and jazz include songs that are not on the LP and cassette versions, and reissues from several companies put the music of two older albums on one disc. Hence, compact discs can be cost effective, especially if you make sure what you buy with this year's money will still be worth having in two to five years. This is the ideal format for a collection that may not be truly current, but which samples the best of the recent past: a collection of "classics" or standards. "Recent past," of course, is a relative term: to say "Jackson 5" to today's teenagers is quaint; the Beatles are ancient history; and Buddy Holly is prehistoric. If you are starting such a collection or have the funds to do some catching up in this area, such sources as the *CD Review Digest Annual* and the "Now on CD" column in back issues of *Stereo Review* can be very helpful. The survey of rock (& roll) on CD published in *Library Journal*, May 15, 1988, is already dated but may help if you check availability.

Having selected a compact disc collection of lasting value, be sure to have it cataloged adequately. Resist all attempts to omit, abridge, or delete notes or subject headings to save computer space. Patrons often are looking for a particular song, and while you may not yet have an online or CD-ROM catalog that can search contents notes, you will someday. Patrons also request music of a particular period, so have your cataloger add decade subdivisions to the subject heading Popular Music if not found that way on your utility; undivided, this heading soon becomes too big to help.

Along with your first order for CDs, get a large supply of blank jewel boxes as well. This ingenious, snap-together package displays very attractively with the right furniture, but the box hinges are very fragile, and the prongs holding the discs inside break, too. If you label the booklet cover that shows through the plastic front, you can then snap on a new front, or replace the snap-in tray with the broken prongs, without having to type new labels — that is, if the patrons return the booklets, which is another problem. A different approach is to label only a paper pocket and attach it with rubber cement. If the part of the box holding the pocket breaks, you can peel the pocket off and attach it to the replacement part. The translucent, one-piece plastic boxes sold by library supply houses appear more durable than jewel boxes, but their disc prongs also break, and there is no place to hold the publisher's labeling that shows through the back and edges of the jewel box.

Yes, give the kids what they want. Just make sure you can afford it, and go in with your eyes open.

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