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Walter H. Rubsamen Music Library Collection

Title

Contemporary Music Score Collection: A Metadata Analysis

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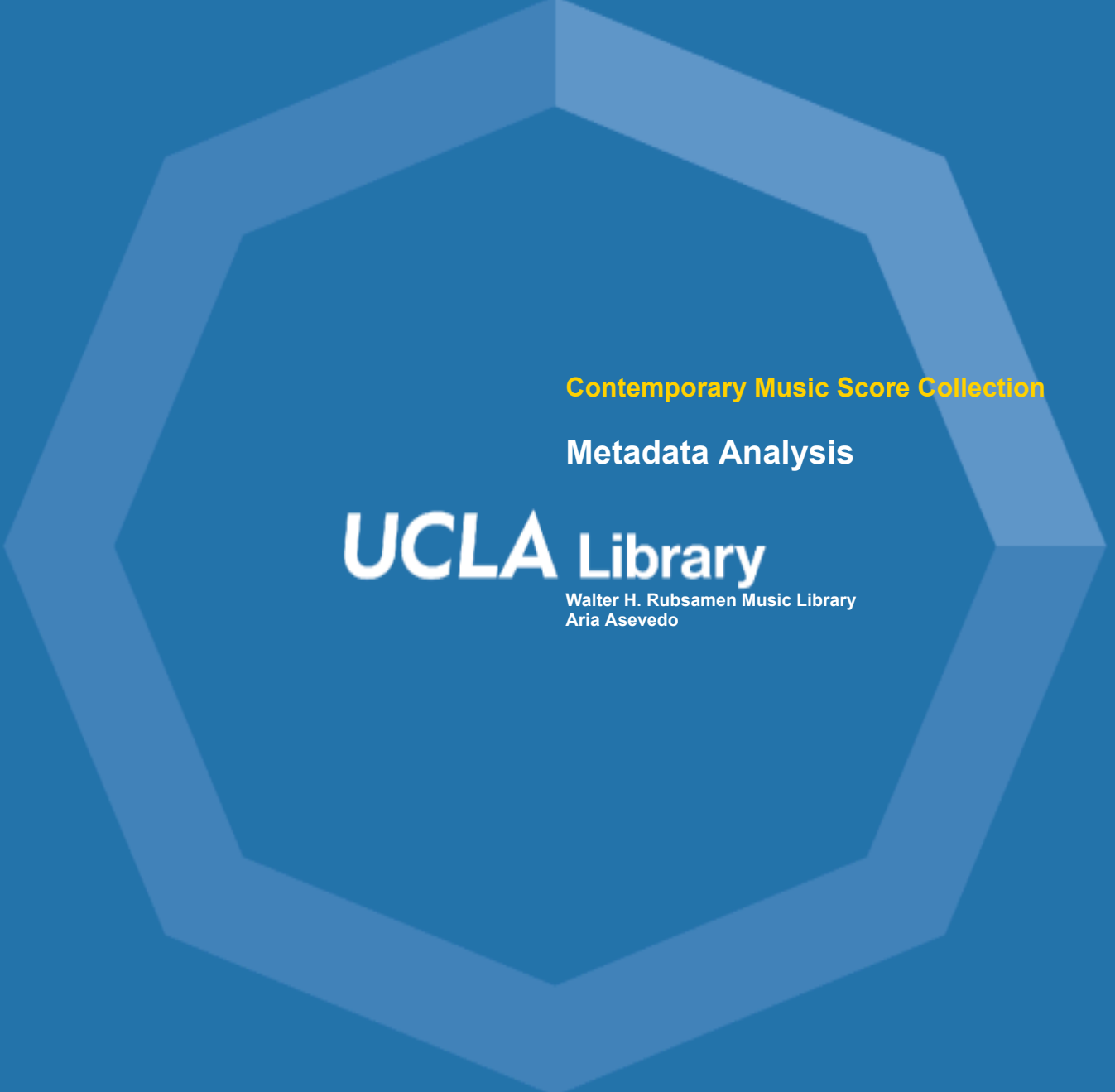
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Contemporary Music Score Collection

Metadata Analysis

UCLA Library

Walter H. Rubsamen Music Library
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Project Oversight: Blair Black, Matthew Vest

Introduction

The Contemporary Music Score Collection is published by the Walter H. Rubsamen Music Library at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), one of the largest and oldest academic music libraries on the West Coast. What started as a small proof of concept in 2018 and 2019 grew rapidly into a collection of over 3,000 scores by 2020, and has since become a globally recognized resource for performers, students, and researchers. Within the first two years of full operation, the collection surpassed 150,000 views¹ and downloads from users all around the world, a number that has continued to grow with nearly 66,000 requests² recorded in 2025 alone based on internal usage data. Digital scores are hosted openly on eScholarship, the University of California's digital repository, while physical scores circulate at the Rubsamen Music Library.

The collection operates with three main goals:³ increasing the visibility of contemporary music, supporting open access publishing, and to bring visibility to composers from underrepresented regions and backgrounds in academic music libraries to broaden accessibility. As part of this effort, 580 scores⁴ were formally cataloged through a project focused on representing non-American composers, though this is on hiatus. According

to referral data,⁵ the collection's international reach includes users from China, the U.K., and other global music research platforms.

Scores enter the collection primarily through the *Resonate* program, an open access call for scores sponsored by the Hugo and Christine Davies Fund with UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music faculty. *Resonate* invites composers to write works for UCLA faculty performers and international partner ensembles, which attracts significant interest. In 2024, the call received more than 500 entries⁶, where submitted works undergo a competitive review process. Applicants are highly encouraged to publish their submissions, but it is optional.

Drawing on four main datasets - top 500 usage data, cataloged scores data, full collection of the all time stats, and a confidential demographic dataset analyzed separately - this report evaluates how well the collection's metadata infrastructure supports these goals. Through an examination of usage patterns, catalog coverage, metadata completeness, composer representation, and how users find the collection, the aim is to identify structural gaps that may be limiting discoverability and accessibility, and to offer practical recommendations for improvement.

Data & Methods

Code was written in RStudio using the R programming language, with the tidyverse packages for cleaning data and creating visualizations. Claude (Anthropic) was used for code troubleshooting and refinement.

¹ UCLA Library, "Contemporary Music Score Collection Is a Global Hit," UCLA Library News, September 19, 2022, <https://www.library.ucla.edu/about/news/contemporary-music-score-collection-is-a-global-hit/>

² UCLA Music Library, "UCLA Music Scores History by Item: Top 500," unpublished dataset, available upon request from the UCLA Walter H. Rubsamen Music Library, 2025.

³ Vest, Matthew. "UCLA Library and Kaleidoscope Announce Open Access Collaboration to Empower Composers." UCLA Library News, January 27, 2020. <https://www.library.ucla.edu/about/news/news-ucla-library-kaleidoscope-announce-open-access-collaboration-empower-composers/>.

⁴ UCLA Music Library, "Cataloged Scores in the Contemporary Score Collection," unpublished dataset, available upon request from the UCLA Walter H. Rubsamen Music Library, 2025.

⁵ UCLA Music Library, "UCLA Music Scores Referral Sources," unpublished dataset, available upon request from the UCLA Walter H. Rubsamen Music Library, 2025.

⁶ Iris Lim, "UCLA Library Announces Winning Composition for Resonate 2024," UCLA Newsroom, September 17, 2024, <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/ucla-library-winning-composition-resonate-2024-scores>.

Dataset 1: Top 500 Most Requested Scores

The primary usage dataset contains monthly request counts for the Top 500 Most Requested Scores in the Contemporary Score Collection, starting from the collection's proof of concept period in 2018 through June 2026. Each record includes an item ID, title, and monthly request totals. To get the dataset ready for analysis, request columns were converted from text to numeric format, and a total request count was calculated by adding all monthly values. Lastly, encoding issued in titles containing accented or non-Latin characters were corrected. The years 2018 and 2019 were excluded from trend visualizations because of the minimal activity during the initial proof of concept phase, and 2026 was excluded since the academic year is not completed yet.

Dataset 2: Cataloged Scores

The second dataset contains bibliographic information for 580 scores that underwent formal cataloging, a process of systematic metadata entry in which detailed descriptive information is recorded for each item including author name, title, publication date, subject edition notes, rights statements, and a URL linking to eScholarship. These records represent the most thoroughly described materials in the collection, with multiple fields consistently populated across all 580 entries. This stands in contrast to the broader collection, where most scores exist with minimal metadata, usually with just a title and an item identifier, making them harder to search, glitter, and discover through the collection's internal systems. Cleaning steps included standardizing author names by removing birth years and role descriptors, cleaning titles by removing instrumentation details and trailing punctuation, converting publication dates to numeric format, and extracting unique item IDs from portfolio URLs. Subject terms were standardized by combining French and English duplicates into consistent English vocabulary, addressing one of the key inconsistencies identified in the metadata audit.

Dataset 3: Full Collection All-Time Stats

This dataset contains cumulative usage statistics for all 5,885 scores in the collection including total requests, total downloads, view-only counts, and the download percentage. It enabled a more holistic comparison between the 580 formally cataloged scores, and the remaining 5,305 scores in the collection that only has minimal descriptive information, providing a fuller picture of how metadata completeness relates to usage across the entire collection. Since no shared identifier existed between this dataset and the Cataloged Scores dataset, the records were matched by title after standardization (removing the instrumentation details and converting to lowercase). This approach achieved a 93% match rate, with 538 of 580 cataloged scores successfully linked. The remaining 42 unmatched records are likely due to special characters or unique title formatting.

Dataset 4: Demographic Data

The confidential information in this dataset contains gender, nationality, and ethnicity of composers in the collection was analyzed separately to protect privacy. Three separate demographic files with differing column names were standardized and combined. Composers appearing multiple times due to multiple submissions were deduplicated, keeping only one record per composer based on first and last name. Nationality data was cleaned and standardized into regional groupings. Publication status was matched to the UCLA scores dataset by composition title. Nationality data presented additional challenges because the field was open-ended rather than a standardized dropdown. Composers self-reported their nationality in their own words, resulting in inconsistent entries, spelling variations, and typos (for example, "United States", "USA", "US", and "American", all referring to the same country). A standardization process was applied to collapse these variations into consistent country names and regional

groupings, though some entries could not be confidently matched and were excluded from the regional analysis. Additionally, generic composition titles such as “Trio” or “String Quartet” introduced some ambiguity in approximately 30 of 3,451 composers. Groups with small sample sizes - South Asia (n = 5), Sub-Saharan Africa (n= 20), and Other (n = 20) - should be interpreted with caution as percentages from these groups may be unstable.

A note on limitations:

All usage analysis is based on engagement which is a combination of request and download counts. The Top 500 dataset captures only the most requested scores (scores with zero or very low usage are not included, which limits conclusions about the full range of discoverability gaps). The Full Collection dataset does not have the same limitation, but does not include monthly breakdowns. Additionally, referral data reflects traffic sources, but does confirm whether users successfully found what they were looking for.

Findings

3.1 Usage Trends Over Time:

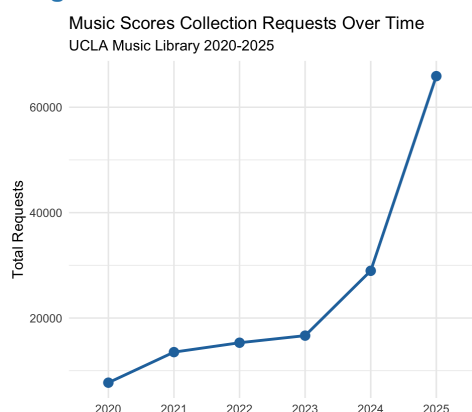


Figure 1: Graph of Music Score Collection Requests Over Time

Since the Contemporary Music Score collection began as a proof of concept in 2018-2019, this period is excluded from the visualization due to minimal activity. From 2020

onward the collection expanded to over 3,000 scores where usage subsequently grew year over year. The initial jump in 2020, reaching 7,732 requests, likely reflects the shift to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed students to further rely on digital resources. Growth continued through 2021 and 2023, before accelerating sharply in 2024 and 2025 where requests nearly doubled each year, reaching 65,898 in 2025. While 2026 data is excluded from the chart due to being a partial year, the 51,310 requests recorded through June suggests that the collection is on pace to match or even exceed 2025. This pattern suggests that this collection has moved beyond its experimental origins and is a significant resource for scholars accessing contemporary music scores.

3.2 Usage Distribution Across the Collection:

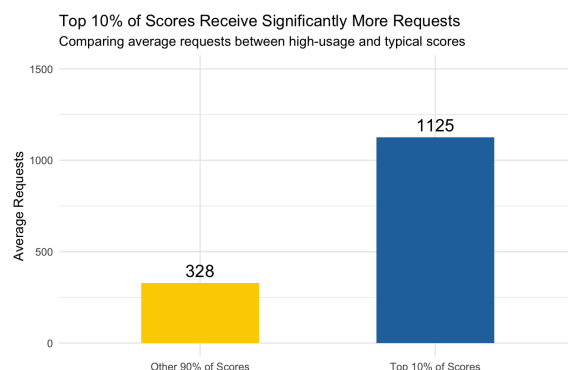


Figure 2: Graph Comparing Average Requests Between Scores

Usage across the top 500 most requested scores is not evenly distributed. The top 10% of scores average significantly more requests than the remaining 90%, suggesting that a small group of pieces drives a disproportionate share of total activity. To understand how concentrated this pattern is, we applied an 80/20 analysis, a common method for measuring inequality in usage that targets the number of items needed to account for 80% of total activity. In a typical collection, you would expect just 20% of items (around 100 scores) to account for 80% of requests. However, in this

collection, 337 out of 500 scores are needed to reach that threshold, meaning that usage is more broadly spread than expected, and students are exploring a wider range of scores than just the top 10% dominance might suggest.

This uneven pattern likely reflects how users currently discover scores. Those that are well known, frequently assigned in courses, or easy to find through a general search naturally receive more attention, while lesser-known scores remain harder to discover regardless of their quality. Introducing features like curated playlists, featured scores organized by region or instrumentation, or better integration into course management systems could help expose users to a wider range of pieces and distribute usage more evenly across the collection.

3.3 Catalog Coverage vs. Actual Usage:

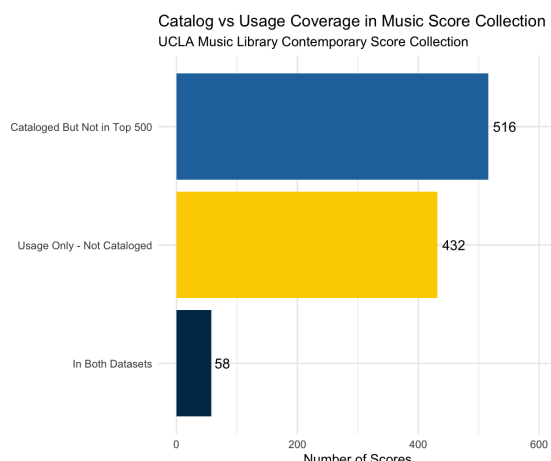


Figure 3: Graph Comparing Catalog Coverage vs. Actual Usage

At first glance, the overlap between the cataloged scores and the most used scores in the collection appears to be limited. Out of the 580 formally cataloged scores, only 58 appear on the top 500 most requested items, and 432 heavily used scores have no catalog record at all. This might suggest that extensive metadata capture has little impact on usage.

However, when looking at the entire collection of 5,885 scores, scores with extensive metadata average slightly more requests than ones that did not (165 vs. 154). Additionally, this

pattern holds even when accounting for a few popular outliers. Scores with extensive metadata represent only 11.6% of the full collection, yet perform proportionally well, suggesting that having a higher amount of metadata does provide an edge in discoverability.

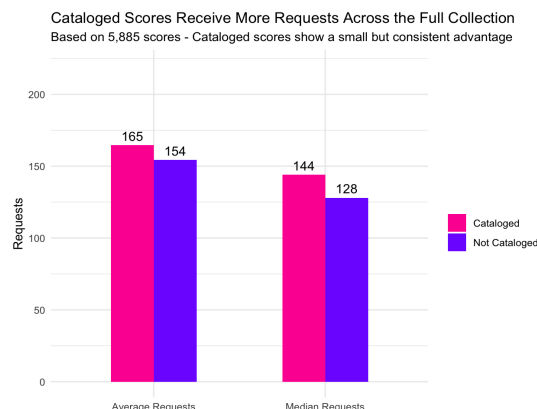


Figure 4: Graph Comparing Requests Between Cataloged and Uncataloged Scores

That said, these findings also reveal clear limits to what metadata can achieve. The 580 scores with extensive metadata were deliberately selected to showcase non-American composers rather than chosen for their popularity, meaning this is not a controlled test of cataloging's effect. More importantly, 522 cataloged scores are not in the top 500, indicating that a catalog record by itself is not enough to ensure a score gets discovered.

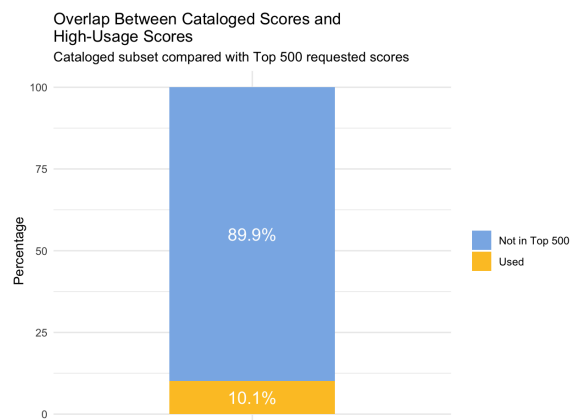


Figure 5: Graph of Overlap Between Cataloged and High-Usage Scores

One explanation could be that most users discover the collection through external search engines like Google rather than by searching through UC Library Search or browsing the collection directly on eScholarship. This means that scores without strong search engine visibility may go undiscovered regardless of how well they are cataloged internally. A completed catalog record improves a score's chances of being found, particularly within UC Library Search and on eScholarship, but only if users know to look in those places first. Taken together, this analysis points to a cataloging as worthwhile but would work best when paired with complete metadata and active promotion. The library could consider actively promoting newly cataloged scores through targeted outreach such as newsletters, course materials, and more prominent placement on the eScholarship collection homepage to ensure that cataloged scores surface more readily for UCLA students and researchers.

3.4 Metadata Completeness and Discoverability:

Finding the catalog status alone did not reliably predict whether a score would be used, my analysis turned to the individual metadata fields to identify which might make a difference. Many catalog records include a note about the score's format. For example, whether it is a "Full Score," which displays all instrumental parts together on the same page, or a "Transposed Score," which shows each instrument's part in the key that is most natural for that instrument to read. Others leave this field blank.

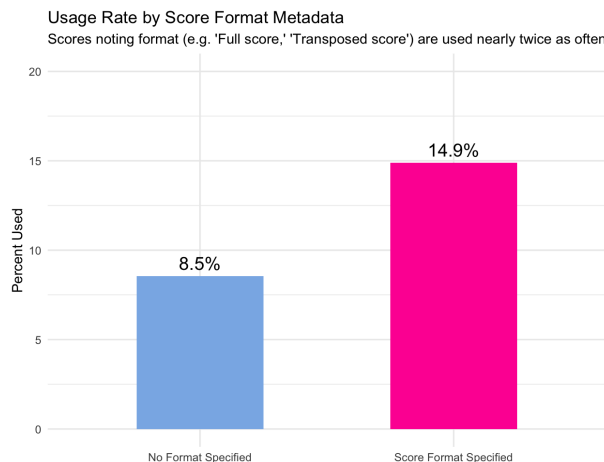


Figure 6: Graph of the Usage Rate by Score Format Metadata

Scores with a format note were used nearly twice as often as those without one. About 14.9% of cataloged scores with a format note appeared among the top 500 most requested items, compared to only 8.5% of scores without one. While this comparison is limited to the 580 scores with extensive metadata since the format field only existed in the Cataloged Scores dataset, it offers a direct finding. This small detail appears to make a real difference. These are practical details that help musicians quickly assess whether a score meets their specific needs before requesting it.

3.5 Metadata Inconsistencies and Unique Challenges of Music Cataloging:

One of the most visible metadata inconsistencies in the collection is the subject vocabulary. The same concept appears in both English and French across different records. For example, "Chamber Music" and "Musique de chambre" refer to the same genre but are treated as separate terms, which can complicate searching and browsing for users who only search in one language. Encoding issues present a related challenge, particularly for scores with titles containing accented or non-Latin characters. Given that the collection includes works with titles in different languages, inconsistent character encoding can cause titles

to display incorrectly, making them harder to find through search.

Another challenge presented is the use of generic titles such as “Overture” and “String Quartet” submitted by different composers. Since composers self-select their titles at submission, the library has limited control over title uniqueness. This makes supporting metadata fields like composer names and instrumentation essential for distinguishing between works that share the same title and ensuring users can find exactly what they are looking for.

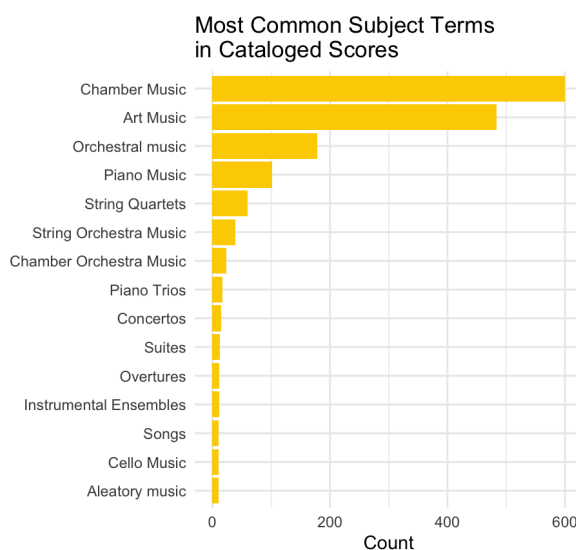


Figure 7: Graph of Most Common Subject terms in Cataloged Scores

Lastly, no multi-composer records were found in the cataloged dataset, suggesting that the metadata schema may not currently support collaborative works.

3.6 How Users Find the Collection:

Understanding where users come from reveals important patterns about the discoverability of the collection actually is. Referral data shows that search engines account for the majority of traffic. Academic and library platforms, particularly eScholarship and the California Digital Library (cdlib.org), represent the second largest source of traffic, suggesting that researchers are also finding the

collection through academic networks and library systems.

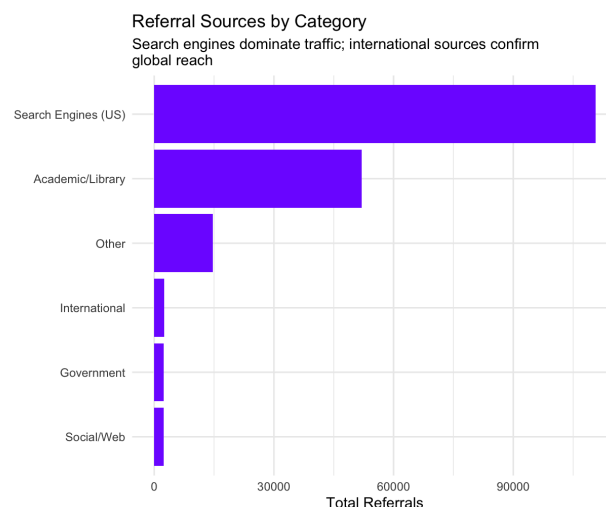


Figure 8: Graph of Referral Sources by Category

Despite being a UCLA Library resource, the collection receives a very small fraction of its total visits from the *ucla.edu* domain. This could suggest that the collection is significantly more visible to the open web than to its own institutional community, pointing to an opportunity to improve how the collection is promoted and integrated within UCLA's own discovery systems and course management platforms.

The referral data also confirms the collection's international reach. Sources including Baidu (China's largest search engine), UK academic institutions, and RILM, a global music research platform, all appear among the collection's referral sources. This global audience makes metadata quality especially important. International users rely entirely on the collection's descriptive information to translate, find, and evaluate scores. Inconsistencies or gaps in that information may be limiting discovery for users who cannot rely on institutional knowledge or personal familiarity with the collection.

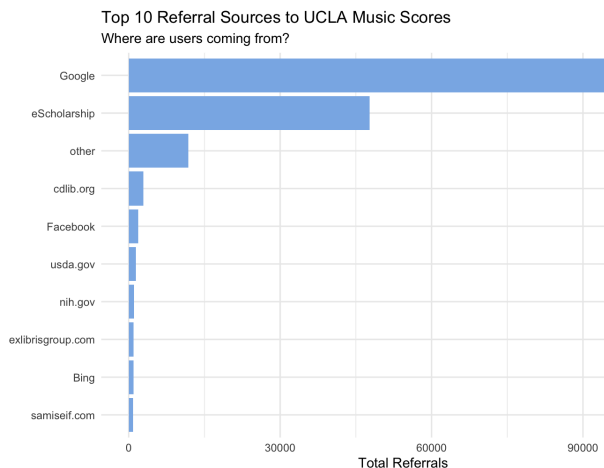


Figure 9: Graph of Top 10 Referral Sources

This pattern also helps explain the usage concentration found in section 3.2. When most users arrive through Google search for a specific title, the same well-known scores get found repeatedly while lesser-known works, regardless of their quality or catalog status, remain difficult to discover.

3.7 Composer Representation: Who is Submitting?

To understand whether the collection is meeting its goal of representing non-American and underrepresented composers, demographic data for composers in the collection was analyzed separately due to confidentiality requirements. The following findings are drawn from that analysis.

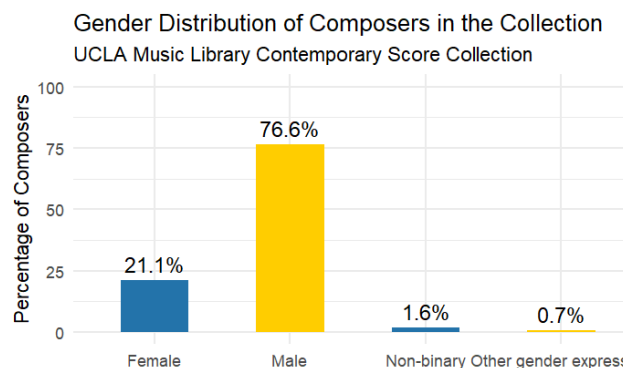


Figure 10: Graph of Gender Distribution of Composers

The gender distribution of composers in the collection skews heavily male, with 76.6% of

submissions coming from male composers, 21.1% from female composers, 1.6% from non-binary composers, and 0.7% identifying as other. This pattern reflects a broader industry trend that men outnumber women three-to-one in popular music and women consist of only 6.5% of producers and 19.5% of songwriters in the recording industry, as researched by USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative⁷. The open submission process appears to be creating space for underrepresented genders, however, the gap between male and female representation remains significant.

Since submission to the collection is optional, targeted outreach to female and non-binary composers could meaningfully shift the gender balance over time. The library could consider targeted outreach with organizations that support women in music composition, explicitly encouraging female and non-binary composers to submit through promotional materials. Small deliberate steps at the submission stage could gradually move the collection closer to its stated goal of broadening whose music gets preserved and made accessible.

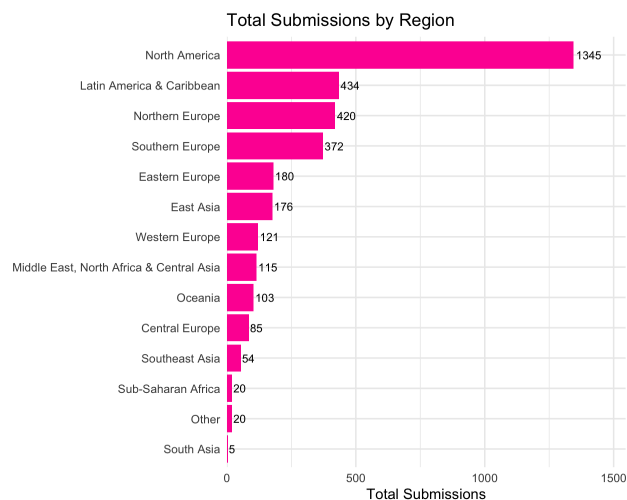


Figure 11: Graph of Total Submissions by Region

⁷ Stacy L. Smith and USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, "Women in Music Hold On to Gains, but Have More Room to Grow," USC Annenberg, January 29, 2025, <https://annenberg.usc.edu/news/research-and-impact/women-music-hold-gains-have-more-room-grow>.

In terms of regions that are submitting, North America accounts for the largest share of submissions, accounting for 1,345 of 3,451 composers, or nearly 39% of the total number of submissions. Latin America and the Caribbean is the second largest region with 435 submissions, followed closely by Northern Europe (420), and Southern Europe (372), reflecting strong representation from composers with ties to European and Latin American music communities.

However, certain regions remain notably underrepresented. South Asia accounts for only 5 submissions, the lowest of any region in the dataset. Sub-Saharan Africa (20) and Southeast Asia (54) are similarly underrepresented. The Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia combined accounts for only 115 submissions. These numbers deserve some careful context. Since submission to the collection is entirely optional, some regional imbalance likely reflects composers choosing not to publish rather than being excluded from the opportunity. What the data does tell us is that certain parts of the world could have more representation in the collection, and expanding international partnerships could be one of the most meaningful steps towards making the collections' composer base as diverse as the global music community.

3.8 Publication Rate by Region:

While the submission rates reveal who participates in the collection, the publication rate offers a different view on representation. Not all submitted scores are published and examining publication rates by region can reveal whether composers from certain parts of the world are more or less likely to see their work published once they submit.

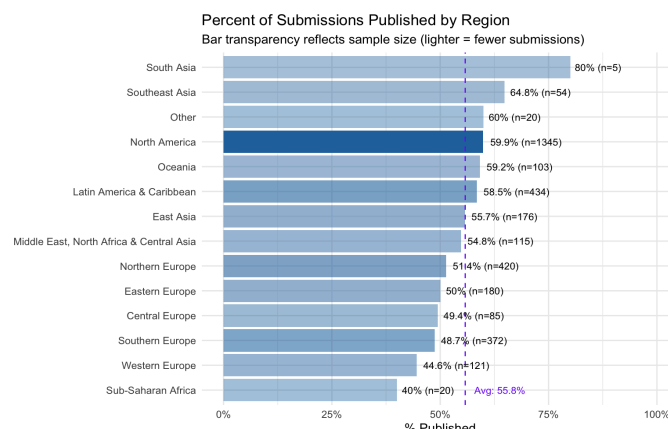


Figure 12: Graph of Percentage of Submissions Published by Region

Overall, publication rates are relatively consistent across most regions, usually between 48% and 60%. North America has a publication rate of 59.9%, Latin America and the Caribbean (58.8%), East Asia (55.7%), and the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia (54.8%) all perform near the average.

The lower submission rates from certain regions may also reflect structural barriers beyond awareness or outreach. Global copyright law⁸ has largely been shaped by institutions in the Global North, creating legal frameworks that can feel unfamiliar or uncertain to creators from other parts of the world. For composers from countries with different intellectual property traditions, the idea of publishing openly while retaining full copyright may raise questions that could be difficult to navigate without institutional support or legal guidance. Since the Contemporary Score Collection allows composers to retain full copyright⁹, this hesitation may come from unfamiliarity with the open access model rather than an actual legal barrier.

⁸ Klaus D. Beiter, "Access to Scholarly Publications in the Global North and the Global South — Copyright and the Need for a Paradigm Shift Under the Right to Science," *Frontiers in Sociology* 8 (November 15, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2023.1277292>.

⁹ Ariane Bicho, "UCLA Library's Online Publishing of Music Scores Makes History," UCLA Newsroom, July 23, 2020, <https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/library-open-access-publishing-of-musical-scores>.

One practical step towards broader international participation would be to communicate this clearly and early in the submission process. Ideally, before composers are asked whether they want to publish their work. Addressing this upfront and in plain language could help reduce hesitation and simplify the decision. Additionally, ensuring that submission forms are fully accessible in multiple languages (including verifying that automatic translation tools are accurate) could remove a significant barrier for composers who do not speak English, making the process more genuinely inclusive for the international community the collection wants to represent.

Discussion

The Contemporary Score Collection has achieved remarkable growth in both usage and global reach, but the metadata infrastructure supporting it could have some improvements. Across every level of analysis, from individual metadata fields to catalog coverage to how users find the collection, the evidence consistently points that the way information is organized and described directly shapes what gets discovered and what gets overlooked.

The relationship between cataloging and usage illustrates this well. As of July 2026, the collection contains 5,885 scores, yet only 580 have been formally cataloged. Of those, 89.9% do not appear in the top 500 most requested items, a finding that might suggest cataloging has little impact. However, the full collection analysis demonstrates that cataloged scores do receive modestly more requests on average than uncataloged ones, implying that cataloging provides a real discoverability advantage.

The value in cataloging lies not only in creating a record but also in making that record as complete and useful as possible. Scores with a format note in the catalog record were used nearly twice as much as those without one. Not because the note itself drives more traffic, but because it gives users the practical information

they need to decide whether a score is worth requesting.

The representation findings add another layer to this picture. Scores by composers from underrepresented regions that choose to get published may go undiscovered if they lack complete metadata, strong search engine visibility, or active promotion. Even though the collection is reaching a diverse audience, the diversity goals cannot be fully realized through cataloging and submission alone. They require deliberate outreach, multilingual communication, and active efforts to surface underrepresented works to users who might benefit from them.

It is important to note that the Contemporary Score Collection receives very little traffic from UCLA's own website. This could suggest that the collection has achieved organic global visibility, but has not been as promoted into the institutional systems. Bridging this gap between external visibility and internal discoverability may be one of the most impactful steps that the library could take to ensure the collection can reach its full potential.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from the findings of this report and are organized around three core areas: improving how scores get discovered, making metadata more useful and consistent, and expanding who the collection reaches.

5.1 Improve Discovery and Visibility:

The collection would benefit from tools that help users find scores beyond a direct title search. Creating a rotating "Featured Scores" display could draw attention to underused works. Monthly or quarterly curated playlists organized by different themes like instrumentation and genre could give users a more guided browsing experience. Developing browsing pages organized around specific categories such as "Newly Added", "Works by Composers from X region", or "New Scores for Ensembles" would make the collection more

direct and accessible to users who are exploring rather than searching for a specific title. Adding filters for instrumentation, genre, or difficulty level to the search interface would further support both experienced researchers and people that are just beginning to learn an instrument.

5.2 Connect the Collection to Courses:

One of the most direct ways to increase usage is to link the collection to UCLA's academic curriculum. Creating collections organized by course number (so that students can find relevant scores and similar suggestions) would integrate the collection into existing student workflows. Reaching out to faculty to build these course-linked collections collaboratively would also strengthen the relationship between the library and instructors, and ensure the collection is actively used in teaching and learning.

5.3 Use Usage Data to Guide Decisions:

Regularly reviewing which scores are being requested, which ones are overlooked, and which ones tend to spike around certain times of the year could directly inform decisions about what gets digitized first and what could get spotlighted and promoted online. This data could also help identify scores with low usage but strong research or teaching value. Additionally, analyzing failed searches and common search terms could reveal gaps between what users are looking for and what the collection currently offers, allowing metadata to be adjusted based on real discovery behavior.

5.4 Standardize Metadata:

Standardizing key fields including subject terms, composer names, format descriptions, and instrumentation, would directly improve both discoverability and the library's ability to analyze and maintain the collection over time. Adopting a controlled vocabulary for subject terms, rather than relying on free-text

entries, would eliminate duplicated terms that were identified in this report. Consistent metadata also makes future data analysis significantly easier, enabling the library to track trends and identify gaps more efficiently as the collection continues to grow.

Conclusion

The Contemporary Score Collection stands as a genuinely innovative model for open access music publishing that achieved remarkable global reach. From less than 400 requests in its first two years to nearly 66,000 in 2025 alone, the collection has grown into one of the largest and most accessed repositories of contemporary music scores in the world attracting users from all over the world. This report's findings affirm that the collection is working, and that relatively straightforward improvements to its metadata infrastructure could make it work even better. Small, specific details like format notes and standardized subject terms are already associated with higher usage rates, suggesting that targeted enhancements to existing records could meaningfully expand discoverability without requiring large-scale new investment. The collection does not need to be rebuilt, it just needs to be more fully described.

The representation findings are equally encouraging. The collection includes composers from across the globe, and its open access model has already created space for voices that are often underrepresented in traditional music publishing. With deliberate outreach, multilingual communication, and active promotion of underrepresented works, the collection is well positioned to become an even more equitable and inclusive resource for the global music community. With continued investment in metadata quality, internal discoverability, and international outreach, its impact over the next five years could even exceed what it has already achieved.

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