Recent Changes in Computer and Electronic Music
Subject Headings at the Library of Congress

by Data B. Davis
Library of Congress

ABSTRACT

The Library of Congress is radically revising its approach
to the subject access of computer and electronic music.
This paper will briefly cover the past practice of subject
access to this medium and will outline the new developments.
Since most academic libraries in the United States, and many
libraries elsewhere, use Library of Congress Subject
Headings, this paper will be useful to anyone who wants to
find computer and/or electronic music in a library.

Because there was no adequate means of subject description, the
Library of Congress has heretofore treated musical works with electronic
and computer elements differently than any other type of music.
Electronic and computer subjects were separated from all other
performing forces, even though many musical works involve mixed media.
One heading was assigned for the instrumental and/or vocal mediums as if
there was no electronic/computer participation in a work, and a second
heading for the electronic or computer medium.

For example, a work for violin and computer would have two subject
headings Violin music and Computer music. A work for two violins,
viola, and violoncello with electronic tape received the subject
headings String quartets and Electronic music. A work for orchestra and
live electronics received the headings Orchestral music and Electronic
music. The Library did not have the subject heading structure available
to combine these headings into one. The Library did have a few subject
headings that recognized electronic and computer music as a full part of
the performing forces, such as Vocal duets with electronic music,
Choruses, Sacred (Mixed voices) with electronic music, and Songs (High
voice) with computer music. In all these instances the electronic and
computer element is the sole accompaniment to vocal forces. If any
other instrument was added to the work, the two-heading approach was
utilized.

This system was not satisfactory to anyone, and owing to the
growth in the fields of computer and electronic music we had to find a
new way to provide subject descriptions before the original system
completely collapsed. Searching for works with electronic and computer
forces has been discouraging at best. Since this genre is found
predominantly on sound recordings rather than scores, the chance of
false hits increases with multiple works.

ICMC 495
In 1987 I submitted a proposal to the Office of Subject Cataloging Policy for a new approach to subject headings for electronic and computer music. The Policy Office suggested an overall policy change to our approach in the Music Section rather than piecemeal changes. In 1989 the Working Group on Electronic Music of the Bibliographic Control Committee of the Music Library Association formed to address this issue. The term "computer" clearly delineates works with computer elements. The challenge was to devise a means to describe works with electronic elements with Library of Congress Subject Heading language, and then fitting it into the existing heading structures. The two headings also needed to be developed in tandem.

The term "electronics" seemed to fit all requirements. However, the term also has other meanings within the Library of Congress Subject Headings. After the head of the Subject Policy Office approved its usage in our context, I submitted a proposal that revamped the usage of the electronic and computer music subject headings and submitted it to the Working Group on Electronic Music at the 1991 Music Library Association meeting. The group amended the proposal and decided to issue a survey to librarians and composers of computer and electronic music to find out under what terminology people expected to find electronic and computer music. In particular, the survey sought to discover what was understood by the term "electroacoustic," which also had been considered for a subject heading.

The response to this question was quite revealing. Not one answer for the definition matched any other. Definitions ranged from anything out of a loudspeaker, and amplified acoustic instruments, to music created by a computer. With such inconsistent interpretations of the term electroacoustic, we could not use the term.

After the survey, I put together another proposal that incorporated the changes recommended by the Working Group on Electronic Music. I submitted this for discussion to the Music section, Special Materials Cataloging Division at the Library of Congress. After much lively debate over two long meetings, a rather elegant solution emerged. In works where the electronic/computer part(s) are used with other instrumental and/or vocal mediums, there will continue to be a two-heading approach. The first heading is assigned for medium or form with qualifiers as appropriate, including qualifiers indicating the electronic or computer part as a full participant in an ensemble. Examples are: Quartets (Trombones (3), electronics); Flute and computer music; and Vocal trios with computer and instrumental ensemble. An additional heading is assigned which uses the term Electronic music or Computer music as genres, followed by qualifiers when there are other instrumental and/or vocal mediums, or multiple electronic/computer parts without other instruments. The headings are qualified by medium with the word electronics or computer used as the qualifier for the electronic or computer part. Two examples are: Electronic music (Piano,
electronics (2), violin) and Computer music (Voices (4), computer). The proposal has been forwarded to the Subject Policy Office and it is hoped that it will be approved without further amendment.

An example of the effectiveness of the new approach can be obtained by considering the catalog records shown in Examples 1, 2, and 3. Since the first work is for computer alone, there is no change from the earlier practice. The second work is for flute, clarinet, violin, violoncello, electronic keyboard (Kurzweil Midiboard), electronic percussion (KAT), and live computer electronics. The subject access for this work under the new approach is: 1. Septets (Electronic keyboard (Synthesizer), clarinet, flute, percussion, computer, violin, violoncello); and 2. Computer music (Electronic keyboard (Synthesizer), clarinet, flute, percussion, computer, violin, violoncello). The order of the instruments is prescribed in the preface of the Library of Congress Subject Headings: keyboard instruments, wind instruments, orchestral instruments, percussion and other (electronics and the computer are considered "other"), bowed strings, unspecified instruments, and continuo.

The second and third examples are OCLC printouts from other libraries for the same sound recording following the old practice. Note the contrast between the septet heading (including the computer) and the additional computer music heading with qualifiers, and, the sextet heading in tandem with the unqualified computer music subject heading. The third work for four amplified voices and computer generated tape has the subject headings: Vocal quartets with computer music; and Computer music (Voices (4), computer). The OCLC libraries had considerable difficulty with this work with one using Vocal quartets with electronic music and the other, Vocal quartets, Unaccompanied. Each is misleading at best. The fourth and last work is for two guitars, percussion, and live computer electronics. The first subject heading is Quartets (Guitars (2), percussion, computer); and the second, Computer music (Guitars (2), percussion, computer). Formerly, as shown on the OCLC printouts, this received the subject heading: Trios (Guitars (2), percussion). I hope you can see an improvement.

I have tightened the definitions for electronic and computer music to provide clearer guidelines to librarians so they have a better chance of using the correct terminology. The proposed scope note definitions for electronic and computer music are found in Examples 4 and 5. Other computer-music related headings we have recently established are: MIDI (Standard), Drum machine, Sequencer (Musical Instrument), and Sequencer (Music software).

How can this change help you? It should be significantly easier to find electronic or computer music in a library data base. The medium or form headings provide an access point that contains a richly descriptive phrase. The genre-type headings will generate a comprehensive and cohesive file under specific terms.

ICMC 497
How can you help us? We can only provide bibliographic access that is given to us. Include a specific listing of instruments and voices on your sound recordings. Describe in program notes whether the piece is electronic/analog or computer/digital. Additionally, we will give an access point to an established studio where a work is realized if it is mentioned on the sound recording or its program notes. Our goal is to make this music as accessible as possible via the catalog record to people who want to hear or study it.

Example 1

ICMC 498
Example 4

PROPOSED SUBJECT RECORD CHANGE

08/15/91 [SUBJECTS] [DLC] [M/M] PAGE 1 OF 1

DISPLAYED RECORD HAS BEEN VERIFIED.

VERIFIED

SU

THIS RECORD IS FOR USE BY LC STAFF. IT IS NOT A BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD.

001 0849-29011
040 DLC DLC DLC
190 100
680 Here are entered musical works in which the sounds produced are intended to be generated or altered via digital technology and recorded or performed live. When computer(s) are used with other instrumental and/or vocal mediums, or when there are multiple computer parts without other instruments, this heading is qualified by medium with the word computer(s) used as the qualifier for the computer (e.g., Computer music (Piano, organ, viola, viola (2), violoncello)). An additional heading is assigned for the medium or form with qualifiers as appropriate, e.g., 1. Concertos (Violin and computer); 2. Computer music (Violin and computer); 3. Songs (High voice) with computer and piano; 2. Computer music (High voice, computer, piano); 1. Vocal quartets with computer; 2. Computer music (Voices 4), computer). For unqualified forms such as opera and oratorio, use only the headings Computer music and the form headings without qualifications, e.g., Computer music.

450 Electro-acoustic music [used for]
450 Electronic music [used for]

550 Music (broader term)
550 Technology and the arts (broader term)
550 Computer composition (related term)
550 Electronic music (related term)

Example 5

PROPOSED SUBJECT RECORD CHANGE

08/15/91 [SUBJECTS] [DLC] [M/M] PAGE 1 OF 1

DISPLAYED RECORD HAS BEEN VERIFIED.

VERIFIED

SU

THIS RECORD IS FOR USE BY LC STAFF. IT IS NOT A BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD.

001 0849-24300
040 DLC DLC DLC
190 180 Electronic music
680 Here are entered musical works in which the sounds produced are intended to be performed live on electronic instruments or recorded from electronic instruments or other using sources and subsequently rearranged or altered. When electronic part(s) are used with other instrumental and/or vocal mediums, or when there are multiple electronic parts without other instruments, this heading is qualified by medium with the word electronic used as the qualifier for the electronic part(s), e.g., Electronic music (Piano, organ, viola, viola (2), viola); Electronic music (Voices 4), electronic).

An additional heading is assigned for medium or form with qualifiers as appropriate, e.g., 1. Quartets (Trumpet); 2. Electronic music (Trumpet); 3. Electronic music (Electronics with orchestra); 1. Electronic music (Electronic music with orchestra); 2. Electronic music (Electronics with orchestra); 1. Vocal pieces with electronics and instrumental ensemble; 2. Electronic music (Voices 3), electronic with instrumental ensemble); 1. Choruses, Secular (Mixed voices) with electronic music (Chorus with electronic and instrumental ensemble); 1. Quartets, mixed; electronic music (Piano, electronic and electronic music (Flute and electronics). For unqualified forms such as opera and oratorio, use only the headings Electronic music and the form headings without qualifications, e.g., 1. Opera.

450 Electro-acoustic music [used for]
450 Electronic music [used for]

550 Electronic music (related term)