Music Library Association Comments on Authority Records for Popular Music Albums

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December 15, 2021

Background

In October 2021, the chairs of the MLA Cataloging and Metadata Committee and Content Standards Subcommittee attended the meeting of the PCC Policy Committee (PoCo) to discuss MLA's response to a suggestion in the LC-PCC Task Group on Aggregates in Beta RDA Toolkit's report on aggregate access points. Specifically, it was suggested that in some cases it might be desirable to qualify an access point for an aggregating work with the name of a creator common to all the expressions aggregated, rather than all the works aggregated. This situation is most often applicable to audio recordings, so discussion below will focus on albums.

MLA outlined situations where it might be beneficial to qualify access points with the name of an expression agent rather than work agent, and PoCo agreed. However, in the course of that discussion, it was mentioned that there would probably be no need for authority records for such access points, a suggestion with which neither the CMC nor CSS chairs were wholly comfortable. There also seemed to be some surprise that there might be a significant number of such authority records already present in the LC NAF. Consequently MLA was asked to outline circumstances in which an authority record might be appropriate for an album or comparable aggregating work.

Extant authority records for albums in the LC NAF

Searching the NAF in the LC Linked Data Service using the term "*(Musical group)*" and limiting the results to name/title records only produces 227 results: 9 FRBR expressions (mostly piano/instrumental arrangements of albums), and 218 FRBR works.

This number is certainly smaller than the true number present in the NAF, as 1) not every band or ensemble requires a qualifier for disambiguation, 2) not every qualifier is "Musical group", and 3) no individual performers are captured in this search.

Most of these records likely fall into one or more of four categories.

1. Albums with name/title AACR2 records

This probably represents the largest proportion of existing records. Any action taken on these records would likely require a case-by-case evaluation as they may also fall into one of the other three categories below.

2. Albums with name/title RDA records or AACR2 records that would still be valid under original RDA

This situation, though relatively rare, applies to any case in which one performer (individually or collectively) is responsible for creating all the content of an album.

Example 1: U2, *Joshua Tree.* The band is collectively credited with the creation of every song on the album.

```
010  n 2021027957
040  DLC ǂb eng ǂc DLC ǂe rda
1102 U2 (Musical group). ǂt Joshua tree
670  U2's the Joshua tree, 2021
670  Wikipedia, May 19, 2021 ǂb (Joshua Tree; fifth studio album by
Irish rock band U2; produced by Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno; released
on 9 March 1987 on Island Records.
```

Example 2: Manic Street Preachers, *The Holy Bible.* Two of the four band members created all the lyrics; the other two created all the music.

```
010  n 2019011128
040  DLC ǂb eng ǂc DLC ǂe rda ǂd OCoLC
046  ǂk 1994-08-30 ǂ2 edtf
1102 Manic Street Preachers (Musical group). ǂt Holy Bible
670  The Holy Bible, 2019
670  Wikipedia, March 1, 2019 ǂb (The Holy Bible; third studio album
by Welsh alternative rock band Manic Street Preachers; released on 30
August 1994 by record label Epic)
```

3. Albums which may represent (expressions of) legitimate whole-part works rather than (expressions of) aggregating works

This would most commonly apply to something like a concept album designed from the ground up with an overarching theme or narrative. While arguably these could still be classed as aggregating works (e.g., Jethro Tull's *Thick as a Brick* could be described as "a plan to collect songs allegedly by a fictional schoolchild"), that seems to be stretching the definition of an aggregating work to the edge of credibility. *Thick as a Brick* purports to be a setting of an epic poem by fictitious eight-year-old genius Gerald Bostock, a controversial figure in the equally fictitious town of St. Cleve; in actuality the lyrics are by band frontman Ian Anderson. The music for each section was also originally by Anderson; during recording the band collectively created additional material to link the individual pieces into a single continuous composition.

An aggregating work is “A work that is a plan to select and arrange one or more expressions of one or more works, and embody them in an aggregate.” When the plan drives the *creation* of works rather than merely the selection and arrangement of expressions of them, that suggests something beyond mere aggregation is at play.

Aside from the aforementioned *Thick as a Brick* (and its sequel, *Thick as a Brick 2)* examples would include Pink Floyd’s album/rock opera *The Wall.*

```
010  n 2006094762
040  DLC ǂb eng ǂc DLC
1102 Pink Floyd (Musical group). ǂt Wall
670  Pink Floyd (Musical group). Comfortably numb, 2006: ǂb t.p.
(Comfortably numb : a history of "The wall", Pink Floyd, 1978-1981)
```

The dividing line here between aggregating work and whole/part work may be murky at times and we would necessarily be reliant on cataloger judgment.

4. Albums where an authority record is required to support a name/title subject access point added by LC or a BIBCO library

There are numerous examples of these; many can be found via records for the long-running book series *33 1/3*, now spanning hundreds of volumes, each of which is devoted to a single album. PCC policy requirements aside, authority records are useful in this case as consistency is especially important if album AAPs are used as subject access points. Choice of title may not be straightforward; an easy example is the Beatles' *White Album* (which is not actually named the *White Album* despite that being by far the most common way to refer to it). Subject use will likely become increasingly common as academic scholarship continues to focus on popular music.

When (else?) might authority records be desirable?

In linked data discussion, a great deal of attention has been paid to the difficulty, unreliability, and unsustainability of handcrafting unique title or name/title character strings. This is certainly a problem, and one solved by using identifiers or IRIs. However, focusing overmuch on that single issue glosses over another severe problem with certain types of musical resources that linked data does nothing to resolve (and, indeed, may actually complicate): identifying *which* data to link.

Popular and influential albums rarely remain fixed expressions. An album that has stood the test of time is very likely to accrue variants: remasters, issues with bonus tracks from other albums or from live performances, versions with previously unreleased alternate takes or scrapped recordings (especially common in jazz), bundles with documentaries or other bibliographically significant supplementary content, etc. As aggregating works subject to WE-lock, each such alteration results in a new work/expression pair. That means that an album that has stood the test of time likely exists, as far as LRM and RDA are concerned, not as a singular entity but as a chaotic web of related works.

Discogs catalogs over eight hundred releases (manifestations, in LRM terms)—excluding another hundred or so bootleg versions—of Led Zeppelin’s untitled fourth album under the umbrella of a

"master release."[1] A Discogs master release functions something like a BIBFRAME Hub or an RDA *work group* in that it does not adhere to the concept of WE-lock—two releases could be assigned to the same master release even if, for example, they include different bonus tracks. How many of those 800 manifestations must we consider to manifest separate works under the aggregate model? More importantly, who has the time to sort them out, much less determine if the resource being cataloged is a new entity or merely a new manifestation of an existing work/expression pair? Experience has taught music catalogers that machine matching is often not up to the task, at least not without considerable oversight, and especially not when confronted with legacy data in some cases designed for catalog cards.

The reality is that tracing that web of aggregates to the extent the model permits is a dubious use of time and effort and of questionable value to users. While it is easily imaginable a user might be specifically interested in a version of *Charlie Parker with Strings* (or, as it was also released, *April in Paris)*[2] that includes takes not selected for the original release, in all likelihood the user will base any search for such a resource on a search for the "*ur*-work," the original album.

Many albums, like many books, never accrue more than one or a handful of expressions; in such cases an authority record is often unnecessary and undesirable. However, as the network of work/expression pairs grows larger it becomes increasingly more helpful to have, not dozens of authority records to document every minute variant of an aggregating work, but a single record to serve as a guidepost to catalogers and users alike. Such a record could be interpreted in various ways:

- As a tacit acknowledgement of the RDA *work group*
- As the "*ur*-work"/representative expression to which derivative works and expressions may refer for structure and coherence in a database
- As a central store for complex relationship data applicable to all derivatives of an aggregating work
- As a hub for linked data applications drawing on sources not encumbered by WE-lock (e.g., a Discogs master release)

Practical use cases are explored in more detail below.

Albums which benefit from the disambiguation/cross-referencing of an authority record

Example 1: Led Zeppelin's fourth album is untitled, though that has not stopped fans and in some cases publishers from assigning it *de facto* titles. The most common is "Led Zeppelin IV," after the pattern of the previous three albums (*Led Zeppelin*, *Led Zeppelin II*, *Led Zeppelin III*), though numerous alternatives exist, many related to the four symbols (one for each member of the band) that appeared on the disc labels of the original release. Manifestations of this album have circulated one or more times under one or more of the following titles:

- [no title]
- Led Zeppelin IV
- Led Zeppelin 4
- Led Zeppelin Vol. 4
- IV
- Symbols

[1] https://www.discogs.com/master/4300-Led-Zeppelin-Untitled-
[2] https://www.discogs.com/master/271505-Charlie-Parker-With-Strings-Charlie-Parker-With-Strings

- The New Led Zeppelin Album
- Vol. IV
- レッド・ツェッペリン IV
- [reproduction of the four symbols]/Led Zeppelin IV
- Stairway to Heaven

Additional colloquial names for the album include:

- Runes (as an alternative to “symbols”)
- Zoso or ZoSo (which one of the symbols appears to spell)
- The hermit (based on the album art)
- The fourth album (the phrase used by the band itself in discussions about it)

It is unreasonable to expect all these variations to be accounted for in each manifestation record, implausible to expect catalogers to come to a consistent decision about the AAP for such a record, and highly optimistic to expect automated processes to collate them accurately and consistently.

```
010  n 2005003321
040  DLC ǂb eng ǂc DLC ǂd IAhCCS
1102 Led Zeppelin (Musical group). ǂt Led Zeppelin IV
4102 Led Zeppelin (Musical group). ǂt Led Zeppelin four
4102 Led Zeppelin (Musical group). ǂt Led Zeppelin 4
4102 Led Zeppelin (Musical group). ǂt Four symbols
4102 Led Zeppelin (Musical group). ǂt Runes album
4102 Led Zeppelin (Musical group). ǂt Zoso
670  OCLC 10930234 ǂb (hdg.: Led Zeppelin (Musical group). Led
Zeppelin IV)
670  The South African rock encyclopedia, May 18, 2005 ǂb (Led
Zeppelin IV, also known as Four Symbols, the Runes Album or Zoso)
```

Example 2: Similar if not exactly comparable issues surround the Sigur Rós album titled *( ),* which presents obvious difficulties for search and retrieval.

```
010  n 2014012870
040  DLC ǂb eng ǂe rda ǂc DLC ǂd DLC
046  ǂk 2002
1102 Sigur Rós (Musical group). ǂt Untitled album
4102 Sigur Rós (Musical group). ǂt Bracket album
4102 Sigur Rós (Musical group). ǂt Svigaplatan
4102 Sigur Rós (Musical group). ǂt Parentheses
670  Sigur Ros's ( ), 2014
670  Wikipedia, Mar. 12, 2014 ǂb (( ) is the third full-length album
from Icelandic band Sigur Rós, first released in October 2002; The
album's title consists of two opposing parentheses, representing
either the album's two halves, or the idea that the album has no
title, leaving the listener free to determine it. Members of the band
have referred to ( ) as Svigaplatan, which translates to "The Bracket
```

```
Album". In the credits of the film Heima, it is referred to as The
Untitled Album)
```

Example 3: An opposite problem is illustrated by Weezer's inordinate number of self-titled albums (also colloquially identified by color, like the Beatles' self-titled *Beatles,* almost universally known as "the White Album"):

- `Weezer (Musical group). ‡t Weezer ‡n (1994)`
- `Weezer (Musical group). ‡t Weezer ‡n (2001)`
- `Weezer (Musical group). ‡t Weezer ‡n (2008)`
- `Weezer (Musical group). ‡t Weezer ‡n (2016)`
- `Weezer (Musical group). ‡t Weezer ‡n (2019 January 24)`
- `Weezer (Musical group). ‡t Weezer ‡n (2019 March 1)`

```
010  no2002064061
040  IAhCCS ‡b eng ‡c IAhCCS ‡d PPi-MA
1102 Weezer (Musical group). ‡t Weezer ‡n (1994)
4102 Weezer (Musical group). ‡t Blue album
670  Weezer, p1994.
670  All music guide WWW site, July 15, 2008 ‡b (Weezer (Blue album))
[etc.]
```

The presence of authority records for these albums serves as a valuable signal to catalogers (especially those who may not be familiar with the *oeuvre* of Weezer) that something is afoot and caution is required, as well as providing a hub for disambiguation via alternate titles as in previous examples.

Albums where we may wish to record relationships in a linked-data-friendly way

Like other works, albums may exhibit relationships we want to record in an actionable form. This could be a simple reciprocal relationship, such as the musical *American Idiot*, based on the album of the same name:

```
010  no2010202127
040  PPi-MA ‡b eng ‡e rda ‡c PPi-MA ‡d DLC
1102 Green Day (Musical group). ‡t American idiot (Album)
5102 ‡w r ‡i adapted as musical theatre (work): ‡a Green Day (Musical
group). ‡t American idiot (Musical)
670  Green Day (Musical group). American idiot [SR] p2004.
670  Wikipedia, Dec. 13, 2010 ‡b (American idiot; the seventh studio
album by the American punk rock band Green Day, released Sept. 21,
2004 by Reprise Records)
```

It could also entail a more complex network of relationships such as (hypothetically):

```
1102 Jethro Tull (Musical group). $t Thick as a brick
4001 Anderson, Ian, 1947- $t Thick as a brick
4102 Jethro Tull (Musical group). $t TAAB
5001 $w r $i Lyricist person: $a Anderson, Ian, 1947-
5001 $w r $i Composer person of work: $a Anderson, Ian, 1947-
```

```
5001 $w r $i Related nomen of work: $a Bostock, Gerald
5102 $w r $i Composer corporate body of work: $a Jethro Tull (Musical group)
5102 $w r $i Sequel work: $a Anderson, Ian, 1947- $t Thick as a brick 2
```

Albums we may wish to recognize as representative expressions

The concept of representative expressions becomes somewhat muddy when dealing with aggregating works. In 2020 the RSC amended the guidance for representative expressions to clarify that the representative expression of an aggregating work is, rather than the aggregating expression (which is in most cases so nebulous as to be effectively a non-entity), the cumulative body of expressions that are aggregated. Applied to an album, this means that the representative expression of the album is the collective performances embodied by it.

For much of Western art music, which tends to focus attention on the work, the notion of declaring any particular expression representative is fraught at best. In that context, representative expressions are much more useful, and much less problematic, if viewed as a network of characteristics common to many expressions, rather than characteristics of one or more specific exemplars; RDA does not require that a representative expression exist to be treated as representative.

However, much modern popular music evolved and spread in tandem with recording technology, to the extent that often specific recordings (usually the first issued) *are* considered definitive. It is much easier to consider a particular performance of a popular song or a particular aggregation of performances in an album "to be an original or canonical realization of a work," as RDA puts it. In 2015, before the LRM introduced the concept of representative expressions, Christopher Holden wrote:

> According to the FRBR model, a work is abstract to the point of not even having a form. "Sound recording" exists in FRBR as a form of the expression, rather than a form of the work. Under FRBR, *Dark Side of the Moon* exists as a nebulous, formless musical composition that only becomes a sound recording on the expression level. This is problematic.
>
> It could be argued that for many forms of popular music, the work is considered by most to be the recording, rather than the abstract composition of ideational content. Gracyk proposes a thought experiment in which every copy of Bruce Springsteen's 1975 album *Born to Run* disappears, and asks if the work *Born to Run* would still exist without an instance of the original recording. After all, even without the original *Born to Run*, many live performances of the work would still exist, as well as covers by other artists and published sheet music. According to the traditional work model, Springsteen's 1975 recording is just one instance of *Born to Run* among many. However, Gracyk argues that if all instances of Springsteen's 1975 album disappeared, all access to the original work *would* be lost, positing that the specific sound mixing decisions, instrumental timbres, guitar overdubs, and vocal stylings on the 1975 album are essential qualities of the work itself. He writes that: "*Born to Run* is only accessible by playing, on machines, end-products derived from a montage of partial performances that [producers] Landau, Appell, and Springsteen combined on a strip of magnetic recording tape in 1975."

> Gracyk is making the case that *Born to Run*, and all recorded rock music, exist primarily as autographic works, rather than allographic works. Without access to the original "artifact," the work is lost.[3]

Representative expressions do not fully align with Gracyk's conception of the work; however, recording representative expression elements in a work authority record for an album provides a possible path of communication between the LRM and a recording-centric view of music—or, for that matter, the concept of the *recording work* outlined in Object Oriented FRBR.

Possible suggestions for treatment of aggregates where qualification of an access point using the name of the creator of the expressions manifested has been deemed appropriate

For an aggregate known or presumed to manifest the original or canonical version of an aggregating work/a representative expression:

- Identify the aggregate via title proper.
- Provide an AAP for the aggregating work as required.
- Identify the works/expressions manifested by the aggregate by means of a contents note and/or access points.

For an aggregate manifesting an aggregating work/expression known to modify or expand on the plan of a prior aggregating work/expression through remastering, addition of bonus tracks or alternate takes, supplementary content, etc.:

- Identify the aggregate via title proper.
- Minimize structured description of the aggregating work and expression manifested by the aggregate in hand. Generally do not attempt to create an AAP that uniquely identifies the aggregating work/expression pair. If desired, provide an access point for the original or canonical aggregating work. Relate the aggregating work/expression to the original through an appropriate relationship element:
    - Work: related work of work or Expression: related expression of expression
        - Work: augmentation of work *or* Expression: augmentation of expression
        - Work: source work *or* Expression: expression of source work
        - Work: expanded version of work *or* Expression: expanded version of expression
- Identify the works/expressions manifested by the aggregate by means of a contents note and/or access points.

[3] Christopher Holden, "The Definition of the Work Entity for Pieces of Recorded Sound," *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53, no. 8 (November 2015): 873–94, https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2015.1057886.

Draft MLA Best Practices for AAPs for Musical Collection Aggregates

The name of a creator agent of expression may be used to qualify the AAP for an aggregating work when:

- Both of the following apply:
    - The works aggregated do not share a readily identifiable common creator agent of work, especially if the music does not belong to a creator-centric art music tradition
      AND
    - The aggregate specifically highlights one particular performer, conductor, performing group, music producer, etc., including but not necessarily limited to
        - A manifestation with a generic preferred title such as "Greatest hits" that makes little or no sense without the context of the performer's name
        - A self-titled album
        - An album in which the name of the featured performer, ensemble, etc. is emphasized and the creator(s) of the works aggregated are significantly downplayed or omitted
        - A manifestation that purports to transcribe in notated music format a specific performance or set of performances of one agent

  OR
- The creator agent of expression also functions, or can reasonably be assumed to function, as the creator of the aggregating work through the selection, arrangement, etc. of works to be aggregated
  OR
- The expressions manifested by the aggregate share a common creator agent of expression and belong to a musical genre or tradition in which boundaries between composition and performance are blurred or absent (e.g.: free jazz; raga)

Note these conditions may significantly overlap.

Ex:
Dido, 1971- Greatest hits
Dido, 1971- Greatest hits (Deluxe edition)
A compilation album released in a standard and an extended version (containing nearly twice as much content) in 2013, rereleased in 2018

Ex:
Shankar, Anoushka. Land of gold
An album identified as "Anoushka Shankar's response to the humanitarian trauma of displaced people fleeing conflict and poverty," implying creative responsibility for the selection of works aggregated

Ex:
Dread Zeppelin (Musical group). Fun sessions.
A compilation album recorded by Led Zeppelin cover band Dread Zeppelin, logically necessitating creative responsibility for the selection of works aggregated

Ex:
Kelly, Wynton. Wynton Kelly collection.
A compilation score of jazz piano solos transcribed from recorded performances originally issued 1958-1967

Do not use name of a creator agent of expression to qualify the AAP for an aggregating work when the aggregates represent:

- Manifestations that highlight multiple performers, ensembles, etc. with approximately equal prominence
- Notated music manifestations that merely aggregate works associated with a particular performer, without significant evidence that they represent an attempt to replicate specific performances
- "Recital albums" of music by prominently credited creators featuring a single performer or group

Ex:
Doris Day songbook (Hal Leonard)
A piano/guitar vocal score that claims to contain songs and motion picture soundtrack excerpts "as performed by" Doris Day; a personal name only heading for a related agent may be appropriate

Ex:
Songs of joy & peace (Audio recording)
An album, also released as a concert videorecording, credited to "Yo-Yo Ma & friends," but without any particular emphasis on a single performer or group

Ex:
Watercolors (Album : Von Otter)
An album of songs by Swedish composers, all sung by Anne Sofie von Otter; preferred title is found associated with many types of aggregate and albums by that title also recorded by numerous other performers.