

# Innovation in international library programs

## The Slovenian Music Collection at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

by Peter G. Watson-Boone

Thanks to a generous bequest received more than 20 years ago, the Golda Meir Library at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (UWM), has been able to develop an interesting and possibly unique set of initiatives in international library activity centered upon the music of Slovenia.

UWM is an urban research university with more than 24,000 students. The music department offers programs to the master's level in theory, performance, history, and education and has long had an involvement with various traditions of ethnic music.

As is fairly typical of non-standard collecting missions in university libraries, this one began through the scholarly interests of one faculty member. UWM Professor of Music Leo Muscatevc, who was Slovenian-born, donated his own materials and persuaded Mary Ermenc, a local Slovenian-

American, to bequeath funds for the collection and performance of the music of Slovenia.

### Slovenia

Slovenia, part of the former Yugoslavia, gained its independence in 1991, but it has had its own distinctive language, culture, and sense of nationhood for hundreds of years. Before ever being part of Yugoslavia, it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

It is a nation of 2 million people, situated at the head of the Adriatic Sea, and extending north-

east toward Austria and Hungary. The capital city, Ljubljana, boasts one of the oldest public symphonic societies in Europe, the Academia Philharmonicorum, established in 1701, a time when most European orchestras were the property of kings, princes, archdukes, and others.



National & University Library, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

### About the author

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## Building the collection

To complement the UWM library's mission of building a Slovenian music collection, a local community group, the Slovenian Arts Council, works under a related bequest by Mary Ermenc to arrange concerts, performances, and related activities.

For many years, the library's sole collecting activity was the acquisition of modern printed scores as they became available in the United States from the Society of Slovenian Composers, which has an agent in New York City.

A radical change came in 1998, when I was able to incorporate a visit to Slovenia into my trip to Europe for the IFLA conference in Amsterdam. This highly fruitful visit turned out to be an excellent example of the crucial importance of direct, personal contacts in ventures of this kind. This exposure to the Slovenian musical community established a basis of personal trust, opened up several new channels of cooperation, made us aware of additional materials we could acquire, and thereby lifted our Slovenian collecting mission to a new, and very exciting level.

We still collect scores via the printed catalog of the Society of Slovenian Composers, but we have expanded our scope to include sound recordings and musicological works, contemporary Slovenian art, literature, architecture, culture, history, and geography to furnish the essential context for those who will use the music materials.

I returned from my 1998 visit with more than 90 CDs of Slovenian music, most of them unavailable through commercial channels in the United States. I chatted with the hotel concierge about why I was visiting his country; when he came to work the next day, he gave me an LP record (which I later found to be very rare in North America) of Slovenian folk music. I am told that the UWM Slovenian music collection is now the largest in North America.

## Other recent activities

**Professional visits:** The head of the UWM Music Library has visited Slovenia to acquaint herself with the people and the nation's music librarianship. In addition, I was able to fully fund a one-month visit from the head of the Music Library of the National and University Library in Ljubljana to improve UWM Library's proficiency in cataloging our growing collection of Slovenian music materials.

**Exchange agreements:** We have established agreements with the National and University Library in Ljubljana and with two

branches of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, namely the Institute of Musicology and the Institute of Ethnomusicology.

The basis for the agreements is simple: our Slovenian partners send us their current publications and/or library exchange lists, and the UWM Library,

not itself being a regular publisher, obtains and sends North American musicological and ethnomusicological publications the Slovenians tell us they need. All parties understand that exact monetary equality for the services received is not possible; the intention is for each party to receive benefits that are generally equal in value. The Golda Meir Library has obtained many excellent publications through these agreements.

**National Ethnomusic Archive:** A particularly exciting part of the initiative is a relationship with the Institute of Ethnomusicology, whereby copies of the entire Slovenian National Ethnomusic Archive scores will be made available to the UWM Library. While touring this archive, housed in an old building of wooden infrastructure, I learned that the staff was planning to photocopy the entire printed archive for storage in a different building. I suggested that they make an additional copy for us, at the UWM Library's expense, and this was agreed to in



Home of the oldest public symphony society in Europe, the Academia Philharmonicorum, 1701, Ljubljana.

principle. The institute later decided to scan the archive, which will lead to new and interesting opportunities for technical cooperation between us, and should result in an end-product that is much more accessible to scholars worldwide.

**Possible student visit:** One enterprising UWM faculty member with an existing interest in the choral music of eastern Europe has responded enthusiastically to publicizing our Slovenian music materials. She has begun to program the music in local concerts, both on and off campus, and is planning to take the UWM student choristers on a summer trip to Slovenia in 2002, where they will give concerts, perhaps with Slovenian students.

Slovenia boasts four excellent summer music festivals. I was privileged to attend a student concert at one of them, the Brezice Early Music Festival 2000, where a most impressive student ensemble from Krakow, Poland, was performing.

**Commission:** During the mid-1990s I would occasionally joke to colleagues that our Ermenc fund was sufficiently large enough that if the Slovenian music we wanted didn't exist, we could commission it. A wonderful moment came when I realized that institutional policy changes at UWM would permit me to do exactly that.

The UWM Library has therefore commissioned a piece of music from an accomplished Slovenian composer and, given a successful outcome, may commission further works. This is another example of how a deepening network of contacts and trust can produce new options.

In summary, what was at its inception a very low-key, traditional type of library operation to collect specialized material has been developed into a multifaceted, active, and highly rewarding venture in international library cooperation with direct links to scholarship and learning.

The benefits of increased knowledge and awareness of a little-known part of Europe are accruing to UWM students, faculty and staff, including library staff; the local Slovenian-American community in southeast Wisconsin is delighted to find out more about its ethnic homeland; and in Slovenia, the music community now has Milwaukee firmly in its sights as a primary center of interest and activity. ■

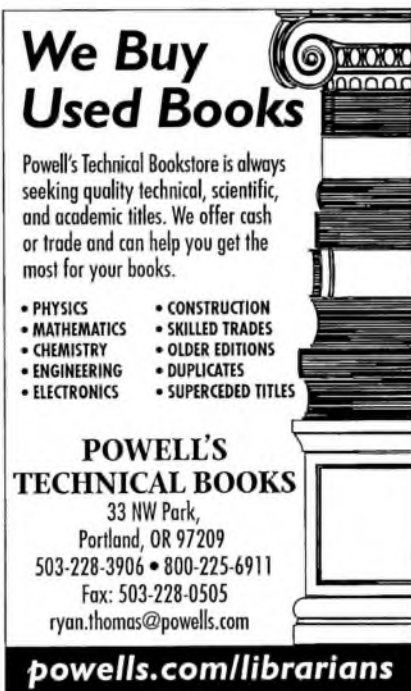
*("Information literacy . . ." continued from page 1088)*

that we fit outside-the-library/inside-the-classroom time into our schedule.

Spending time in classrooms, listening in on discussions, being aware of the spontaneous suggestions/ideas/topics that arise during a class (or meeting) that either students or faculty or both want to pursue gives the librarian the opportunity to be there at the moment of need. Being able to advertise then and there the kinds of resources students and faculty have available to them is far more meaningful than instructing them when they don't perceive an immediate need.

Beyond advertising our wares, librarians can follow-up with e-mail, campus mail, or even by delivering a book or two to the office, classroom, studio. Over the course of a semester, seeds can be planted for future library sessions, individual appointments with students, and class-tailored resource guides.

More and more, I see the pivotal role of librarians as one of relationship-builder: the better you and your patrons know each other, the more comfortable you are with each other, the better you are able to know their needs and to serve them. ■



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