

To: Joint Steering Committee for Development of RDA
From: John Attig, ALA Representative
Subject: Performances: Addition of examples in RDA 6.12.1.3 and 6.27.3

ALA thanks EURIG for proposing additional examples illustrating Other Distinguishing Characteristics and authorized access points for performances. ALA agrees that performances present particular challenges for RDA. We do not believe that the introduction of these examples by themselves will do much to meet those challenges.

ALA does not disagree with the proposed examples given, but we worry that the information illustrated is not sufficient to identify particular expressions in many cases. A conductor or a performing group may perform and record the same work on different occasions, so there will be numerous instances when additional characteristics will need to be recorded to name a particular performance. The date of performance may be sufficient to distinguish the different expressions, but this might not be particularly meaningful to the user.

We can see the need for recording multiple performers in order to identify the performance. For example

Tilson Thomas
London Symphony Orchestra
A performance of Gustav Mahler's Symphony no. 7 conducted by Tilson Thomas and performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, recorded in 1997

Tilson Thomas
San Francisco Symphony
A performance of Gustav Mahler's Symphony no. 7 conducted by Tilson Thomas and performed by the San Francisco Symphony, recorded in 2005

However, all this complexity may be counterproductive. ALA believes that this proposal reflects what we hope are short-term solutions limited by our current less-than-ideal conditions. Although it is desirable to allow users to select from among many expressions, it is not clear that access points are an effective way to do that for expressions that have many distinguishing characteristics – as is the case with performances. Settling on a single, optimal order of characteristics in a string may be necessary for consistency, but it does not always yield useful results. One of the participants in the U.S. RDA Test pointed out that in most OPACs, pages upon pages of access points for perfectly-delineated expressions of Beethoven's 9th Symphony are more likely to overwhelm users than help. They won't be able find the forest for the trees. This suggests that the authorized access point may not be the best way to identify *particular* expressions; instead, the authorized access point may work best when it identifies a *group* of related expressions, and lets the user distinguish the specific expressions based on the other attributes of the expression recorded in the description.

If we do start creating expression and work records, then performers and conductors should be easily identified by machine (being in their own elements with distinctive relationship designators), and there will be no need to redundantly record them as Other Characteristics or to add them to the access point. Once we get to that stage, a computer should be able to mix and match the elements to identify a work or expression and should be able to alert someone when a work or expression is insufficiently distinguished in a given universe. To make this work in practice, however, it will be necessary – as the Library of Congress pointed out – to use relationship designators consistently.

If the proposal is accepted, ALA makes the following suggestions:

- We agree with the Library of Congress that the examples of performers of musical works belong in 6.18, rather than 6.12, and under 6.28 rather than 6.27.
- We believe that the examples by themselves will be insufficient. For instance, should the name of a contributor be recorded as surname only or preferred name or authorized access point, or what? There will need to be instructions for recording this information, as well as for selecting which contributors should be selected as Other Distinguishing Characteristics, and an instruction on what to record, if anything, when there is no named or predominant performer.
- The instructions for authorized access points are particularly challenging. In the case of the example proposed for 6.27.3, we believe that the authorized access point should include the Content Type (performed music). If these authorized access points are to result in an ordered sequence, they need to be consistent in what elements are included and the order in which they are given.