

*Music Preparation Guidelines  
for Orchestral Music*

*Prepared by the  
Major Orchestra Librarians' Association  
Publication Committee*

*1993 Edition*

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*Revised in 2006*

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*Additional Publications*

The publications committee of MOLA has prepared two other brochures entitled:

*What is MOLA? A Guide to  
the Major Orchestra Librarians' Association  
and  
The Orchestra Librarian: A Career Introduction*

For Further Information about MOLA visit our website at:

*[www.mola-inc.org](http://www.mola-inc.org)*



Major Orchestra Librarians' Association

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# The Major Orchestra Librarians' Association

The primary goals of the Major Orchestra Librarians' Association (MOLA) are to improve communication among orchestra librarians, to provide support and information to the orchestra administrations, to present a unified voice in publisher relations, and to assist fellow librarians in providing better service to their orchestras.

MOLA is an international organization that includes libraries from symphony orchestras, opera and ballet companies, professional bands and ensembles, and educational institutions. Our membership includes musical organizations in North, Central, and South America, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and Australia.

MOLA periodically invites representatives from music publishers to its annual conferences in order to address the publication and condition of printed musical materials. This collaborative effort has led to the formation of the MOLA/Publisher Committee.

MOLA is represented on the MLA (Music Library Association) / MPA (Music Publishers' Association) / MOLA Joint Committee. In addition, MOLA has cultivated relationships with other music service organizations. These include the International Association of Music Librarians, the American Symphony Orchestra League, the American Federation of Musicians, the International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians, and the Regional Orchestra Players' Association

For further information, contact the orchestra librarian at your local symphony, opera, or ballet orchestra or visit the MOLA website at:

*[www.mola-inc.org](http://www.mola-inc.org)*

## Proofreading

It is mandatory that prior to reproduction the parts be proofread by a qualified professional proofreader and NOT only the composer or the copyist who prepared the parts. Please do not expect orchestra librarians to provide additional proofreading services.

## Formatting and Binding

In North America, the parts should be prepared within an image area of no less than 8 x 11 inches on paper at least 9.5 x 12.5 inches. These minimum requirements leave a 0.75 inch margin surrounding the image area. A common page size among many publishers is 10 x 13 inches. Parts larger than 11 x 14 inches are inconvenient and unwieldy.

If using the ISO A and B series paper formats, parts should be prepared within an image area of 170mm x 257mm on paper no smaller than A4. These minimum requirements leave a 40mm margin surrounding the image area. Common page sizes among publishers who use the ISO paper sizes are A4 and B4. While A4 parts are considered the minimum, paper larger than A4, such as B4, is preferred and recommended among librarians. Likewise, parts larger than B4 are inconvenient and unwieldy.

Regardless of what paper size is used, parts should be reproduced with music printed on both sides of the page.

Parts and scores should be bound so that they lie flat on the stand. Plastic comb or coil binding may be used for scores but not for parts. Multiple page parts can be set into signatures and saddle stitched or stapled at the spine. Another method uses a single strip of flexible cloth tape affixed to the left margin of the part. (Tape manufacturers include Vital Presentation Concepts Inc. [www.vpcinc.com] and 3-M Corporation's Micropore surgical tape [www.3m.com].) All pages should be attached to the center spine. Loose pages should be taped or attached to the center margin of the spine. Accordion fold parts (single-sided sheets taped side-to-side) are not acceptable.

## Bibliography

Powell, Steven. *Music Engraving Today: The Art and Practice of Digital Notesetting*. New York: Brichtmark Music, 2002.

Ross, Ted. *The Art of Music Engraving and Processing: A Complete Manual, Reference and Text Book on Preparing Music for Reproduction and Print*. 2nd ed., Miami, Fla.: Charles Hansen, 1970.

Solomon, Samuel Z. *How to Write for Percussion: A Comprehensive Guide to Percussion Composition*. New York: SZSolomon, 2002.

Stone, Kurt. *Music Notation in the Twentieth Century: A Practical Guidebook*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1980.

## *Instrumental Part Readability*

The most readable staff size for all instruments is 8.5 mm (measured from the bottom to the top of the staff). Although 8.0 mm is readable for winds, it is less so for strings. Wind players can read music from staves that measure 7.5 mm, but this is very problematic for string players. Anything smaller than 7.0 mm is unacceptable for orchestral parts. Anything larger than 8.5 mm should be avoided, as it is distracting to players.

Measure (bar) numbers should appear at the beginning of the first measure of each line. Numbering each measure should be avoided, except in the case of multiple measures rest, where measure number ranges are helpful (e.g., “27–117”).

In hand-copied parts it is recommended that all stems, beams, and bar lines be ruled with a straightedge, especially multiple-staff harp and keyboard parts.

Logical cues are expected during long period of rest, the cues being transposed to the reading key of the instrument. Cues must be audible to the musician reading the part.

Tempo and meter changes must shown on all parts, even during periods of extended rest. The use of “Tacet until. . .” is not acceptable.

## Specific Suggestions

- Clefs and key signatures must appear at the beginning of each line.
- Parts for transposing instruments must be written in the proper key.
- Harp pedaling should be left to the performer.
- The Timpani part should NOT be included in the percussion part.
- Percussion parts may be in score form or individual instrumental parts. Each has its advantages depending on the requirements of the music. It is preferable to consult with an experienced orchestral percussionist. In the case of a work written on commission, consult with the principal percussionist of that orchestra.
- Percussion instruments should be notated on the staff from high to low, according to their relative pitch. These positions must be maintained consistently throughout the work. A notation key printed at the beginning of the part may be helpful to the player.
- If any parts are reproduced with a popular transposition (for example, Horn in E-flat transposed for Horn in F), a part in the original key should also be included with the set.
- Care should be taken with the use of the abbreviations *8va* and *8va basso*, avoiding their use if possible.

## MOLA Guidelines for Music Preparation

### Introduction

These guidelines for the preparation of music scores and parts are the result of many hours of discussion regarding the creation and layout of performance material that has come through our libraries. We realize that each music publisher has its own set of guidelines for music engraving. We wish to encourage music publishers to work together to standardize those guidelines. In the meantime, we would like to express our thoughts regarding the preparation of new music in the hope that an agreement about format may be reached.

### Use of the Computer

#### *Advantages and Disadvantages*

With the advent of computer software for composing and arranging music, it is possible to produce clear and readable music from a desktop printer. Music publishers and professional composers and arrangers are creating scores and parts that are as functional and beautiful as traditionally engraved music.

The technology allows the composer or the copyist to enter the music into the score through various means, including electronic (MIDI) instruments. Once the

score is completed, individual parts are extracted, transposed, formatted, and printed, saving countless hours of work. This technology provides a great level of flexibility for editing, reproducing, and storing music.

These advantages can come with hazards, however. For example, if the editing process of a new work continues after the parts have been prepared and distributed to the musicians, this will require additional work by composers, copyists, and librarians to keep up with revisions in the composition and provide an accurate and suitable set of parts. Also, as digital storage and distribution of music data files becomes more common, there is the danger that the librarian will be obliged to assume the role of music publisher, expected to print, duplicate, and bind all of the sheet music. Not all libraries have the facilities, staff, or time to accommodate these projects, and while librarians can advise on the format and layout of printed music, they should not be expected to act as a surrogate publisher.

Nonetheless, whether a score is handwritten or produced from a desktop printer, there are common, specific elements that make this music readable, and ultimately usable by musicians.

## The Score

### *Cover*

Although each music publisher will have its own publication guidelines and

style requirements, there is some information that is important to see on the cover of any score. The title of the work and the name of the composer should be printed prominently on the cover and spine of the score. If applicable, the name of the arranger should appear, but need not be as prominent as the title and composer. Additionally, the name and address of the publisher should be easily located.

### *Front Matter (Title Page, Preface, etc.)*

There should be a page at the beginning of the work that provides basic information about the composition. This should include a list of the full instrumentation, identifying any doublings, the keys of transposing instruments (clarinets, horns, and trumpets), and all percussion instruments.

An indication of how many percussionists will be required is helpful, though each orchestra may or may not adhere to that number. Any special equipment, synthesizer settings, or other electronic keyboard requirements should be noted here, as well as on the cover page of the instrument's part. These instructions should be as specific and understandable as possible. Any special instructions for "prepared instruments" or other uncommon instruments should also be noted here, as well as on the cover page of the instrument involved. Any special staging instructions should also be mentioned on this or a subsequent page. Detailed

diagrams are helpful to illustrate particularly complex staging. If there are deviations from standard musical notation, an explanation should appear following the instrumentation page.

The full title of the work should be printed as it would appear in a formal concert program, to include appropriate capitalization and diacritical markings, along with movement titles in their proper order. There should be an approximate duration given for each movement and a total duration for the work.

### *The Music*

At the beginning of the musical score, the full name of each instrument should be listed to the left of the corresponding system. On subsequent pages, abbreviations of the instrument names should be used.

All instructions for tempi and dynamics should be in a conventional language such as English, Italian, German, or French. All tempo indications should appear above the top staff and above the first violin line on each score page.

Each measure (bar) should be numbered, beginning anew with each movement. Placement of measure numbers should be the same throughout the work, i.e. above, below, or on a special line of the grand staff, such as above the first violins. If rehearsal letters are used, they should correspond to landmarks in the music and must be used in conjunction with measure numbers.

### *Score Readability*

If traditional engraving or computer output is not possible, it is preferable to produce a completed score done in ink. (Pencil is acceptable, but the publisher must provide some kind of quality control for the final outcome of the reproduction.) This should be done on either vellum or opaque paper and clearly reproduced, back to back on the page. Right-hand pages must be odd-numbered and left-hand pages must be even-numbered in the top right or left corner of the page.

The score should be proofread by the composer and a professional proofreader before it is presented for reproduction.

## **Instrumental Parts**

### *General*

Standard music notation practice should be observed and any deviation from the standard should be clearly explained prior to the first page of music. The front of each part should clearly identify the composer, title of the work, and instrument, including doublings and key(s) of transposing instruments where appropriate. Percussion parts should include a list of the instruments required.

It is preferable to have complete computer-generated parts, which should not have any handwritten additions. If the parts are written by hand, they must be copied legibly in black ink, using an italic or technical pen. Right-hand pages must

be odd-numbered and left-hand pages must be even-numbered in the top right or left corner of the page.

Avoid creating wind parts that have multiple parts on a single staff (e.g., Flutes 1 and 2 should be separate parts). String parts should be created with one part per section. Complicated string divisions should be written on separate staves. Avoid dividing the music for the string section into multiple parts unless necessitated by multiple and continuous division of the voices.

### *Paper*

The paper for parts should be of substantial quality to avoid show-through of music from the reverse side, to ensure durability, and to stand up to on-stage wind patterns caused by ventilation systems. The minimum requirement is usually 60 or 70 lb. [100 gsm] offset paper.

The page layout should allow comfortable page turns. Fold out pages should be avoided or, if absolutely necessary, used sparingly.

Eight or ten-stave paper should be used for any instrument that is subject to multiple ledger lines. Twelve or fourteen stave paper may be used as long as symbols are not crowded and clarity of the notational elements is maintained.