

Compiling a "Videography": The Trials of Locating Information on a New Medium

by Charles Croissant

In late fall of 1991 the Music Library Association published my book, *Opera Performances in Video Format: a Checklist of Commercially Released Recordings*, as number 26 in their *Index and Bibliography Series*. This work had its genesis as a semester project in a seminar on bibliography at the University of Illinois; the professor was Dr. Donald Krummel, a noted music bibliographer. My interest was caught one day by a remark of Dr. Krummel's with regard to the "challenges" of dealing bibliographically with nonbook media. I was aware of the growing number of opera videos becoming available commercially, in both cassette and laser disc formats, and I decided to explore the forms of bibliographic control existing for these items. I soon realized that I was on my way to compiling something I think can be designated a videography, that is, a list of video recordings with a defined scope, exhibiting a logical organization tailored to the needs of its intended audience.

Embarking on my quest in February 1990, I discovered that there was really nothing available that contained succinct and usable lists of video recordings in a format that answered the needs of music and fine arts librarians, or even the needs of interested music lovers. All that did exist, I found, were trade publications and catalogs issued by distributors. These were marketing tools. They did not necessarily aim at comprehensiveness (the distributors' catalogs, for example, naturally contained only that particular distributor's items), and none of them were organized along the lines I was envisioning as I considered the needs of my chosen audience. Still, they provided the essential base from which to gather information.

The most important of these trade publications is *Videolog*, the video counterpart of *Phonolog*. Like *Phonolog*, it is a looseleaf publication for which update pages are produced roughly ten times a year. Many media libraries maintain a copy of *Videolog*, but it is really intended for retail stores; it is a good example of the bibliographic drawbacks that are common to all such trade publications. The publishers of *Videolog* do not actively collect information; they solicit distributors to send them copy describing that distributor's videos. In other words, they simply print whatever information a particular distributor sees fit to send them. The result is that there is no consistency from one entry to the next in terms of the information included. My goal was to create, for each video, citations containing at least a fixed minimum set of data elements. It was not often that an entry in *Videolog* provided every single element I wanted to include in a citation. *Videolog* is divided into sections devoted to feature films, foreign films, educational films, music-related video, etc. Within each section, organization is alphabetical by the title of the video. I discovered a number of problems with these title listings. Various performances of the same opera might appear under wildly different titles, and thus appear quite some distance from each other in the catalog — you might see for example, *Luciano Pavarotti sings Il Trovatore* among the L's; or *Verdi's Trovatore*

among the V's; or *The Troubador* among the T's. None of these lists deals satisfactorily with foreign-language titles; (especially) foreign initial articles are a problem. Wagner's *Das Rheingold* was as likely to turn up under *D* for *Das* as under *R* for *Rheingold*.

I was convinced that a videography of opera performances, organized along traditional bibliographic lines, would be a useful enhancement of these trade publications, and that with the information I was locating, I could hope to achieve a comprehensive list of opera recordings in video format that had been commercially released up to that point in time. For operatic performances, it seemed to me that the most useful organization would be by titles entered alphabetically under their composers. I next set out to develop a citation format that would meet the needs of my audience. This was something of a challenge, as there were hardly any models to build on.

I aimed at the traditional two-fold goal of the cataloger: to identify uniquely each manifestation of a work and to collocate all the manifestations of the same work. In regard to collocation, I found that in the context of video recordings this meant identifying and collocating individual manifestations of the same performance of the same work. This emphasizes a peculiarity of the video market: once a particular performance has been recorded, the recording is frequently acquired not just by one, but by several distributors, and each releases the recording under its own name, with its own identifying number. Certain features may be present in one distributor's release that are not present in the others', as, for example, subtitles or an introductory interview with one of the starring singers. I needed to find a place in my citations for all such pieces of information.

The first level of organization for my list was by composer, in alphabetical order. Under each composer's name I used the standard collocating device of the uniform title for each opera and listed the operas alphabetically by uniform title. Under each uniform title heading, the individual performances were listed in chronological order according to the year of the performance. Performances were uniquely identified by the following sequence of information: the title used on the recording itself, the year of performance, the performing ensemble (opera house, orchestra, etc.), the conductor, the director, concluding with a list of the principal singers.

Then came the additional information: language of performance, whether in color or black and white, and citations of any reviews of the video I had been able to locate. Up to this point the information included was common to all manifestations of a given performance; now I could proceed to list each individual distributor of this recording, with the information unique to that distributor's release: catalog number, timing, presence of subtitles. The trade publications provided me with an initial list of titles. In addition to *Videolog*, I consulted *Variety's Video Directory Plus* on CD-ROM, and all the other published video catalogs I could locate. Yet another source of titles was sound recordings

catalogs such as *Opus* (the Schwann catalog), *Gramophone*, and *Fanfare*. I also set about acquiring as many distributors' catalogs as I could find; I worked from distributors' address lists in *Videolog* and from advertisements in opera magazines. I had decided that my videography should have an historical dimension; that is, it would list all the performances I could trace that had appeared in video format during the history of the medium, regardless of their current availability. This was in contrast to the trade sources, which naturally confined themselves to items "in print." I needed additional sources both for this historical dimension and for locating missing information on the currently available items. My strategy was to search the OCLC database for cataloging records of the items on my list.

Another objective of my videography was to lead users to reviews of opera videos. I went through the English-language opera magazines (*Opera News*, *Opera Quarterly*, *Opera Canada*, and the English journal *Opera*) beginning at about 1982, when the first opera recordings became available in video format. I incorporated into my entries citations for all the reviews I located in these publications and in others. The reviews themselves often supplied me with missing bits of information. I used *Music Index*, the major periodicals index in music, as well as the *Humanities Index* on CD-ROM for reviews appearing in less specialized magazines. I also visited large video stores and classical record stores in Chicago that stocked opera videos, finding it helpful to check the information on the containers of opera videos against my citations (by doing so, I also located several new releases that had not yet made it into *Videolog*). Finally, I contacted distributors directly by telephone, in an attempt to track down elusive pieces of information or confirm information. It was not always easy to describe my project exactly, and in some cases it was clear that the person on the other end of the line was not particularly interested in listening to my explana-

tion. I am glad I took the trouble to make these phone contacts, however. In some cases, I was able to determine that a particular video, though widely listed in catalogs, had never actually been released, and I sometimes got information, such as names of performers, that was not available from any other sources.

A listing under the composer's name was inappropriate for two classes of videos I included in my videography: videos devoted to one particular artist and videos devoted to several artists or containing excerpts from several works. To encompass such performances, I created two appendices. In the first I listed (by the artist's name) videos showcasing an individual artist. The second appendix listed videos featuring excerpts from several works; these I listed under the video's title. A final set of indexes provided access to the recordings by way of the titles, performers, and ensembles involved.

In summing up, it can be said that the characteristic experience of a researcher dealing with a new medium, or even with the newest products of an established medium, is that he or she must turn to sources within the publishing industry, to publishers' lists, advertisements, distributors' catalogs and the like. I have seen my function, in common with other researchers dealing with recently produced materials, as sifting through information that exists in these disparate sources and bringing to this mass of information some degree of consistency, coherency, and ease of access.

Mr. Croissant's videography may be obtained by sending a check for \$15.00 to the Business Office of the Music Library Association, P.O. Box 487, Canton MA, 02021.

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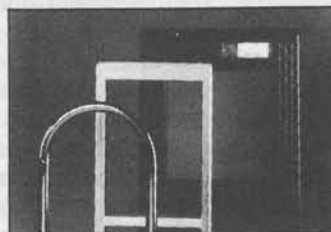
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