If you asked the average person if a library would be a good place for musical performances, that person would probably say “no.” Yet Clemson University’s main library, the R. M. Cooper Library, has proven to be exactly that since the fall of 2001. One Wednesday a month, from 12:30-1 pm, University students, staff, or faculty musicians perform in the library’s three-story front lobby. The genres in a given year range from *a capella* to bluegrass to steel drums. Though most of the musicians would be willing to play for free, donor support allows the library to give them a small stipend. Over the years, the number of groups asking to perform has led to the addition of a designated month of weekly, rather than monthly, performances.

Clemson University Steel Band, 2011
While the Midweek Music program described above takes place in a university setting, it doesn't have to. Any library with the right space and people can start and sustain such a performance series; virtually every community has musicians anxious to perform, be they K-12 students, college students, or non-students. Libraries have always been cultural centers; as music is a part of everyone’s culture, it has a place in libraries.1 People expect more of their libraries these days, and hearing music in the library definitely gives people more than they expected. My experience has been that on the whole, the surprise is a pleasant one for them.

Setting the Stage

The success of Midweek Music is due in no small part to the changing ethos of the library from that of warehouse to meeting house, to paraphrase the University’s current president, James F. Barker. In the winter of 2000, the opening of a cybercafé in the library marked the end of restricting food and drink to a small, congested area on one of the library’s upper floors. Once they could eat and drink everywhere in the library, students—and, I daresay, staff and faculty—felt more at home and visited the library more often: a year after the café opened, the number of individual visits to the library rose by 6% in the same year student enrollment actually decreased by 2%.

Prologue

It was in these increasingly welcoming environs that Midweek Music began. Early in the summer of 2001, as a member of the library’s publicity and events group, I was involved in planning activities for the library’s “week of welcome” held at the beginning of the fall semester. One of the committee members mentioned that it might be nice to have some music in the wide, three-storied lobby area; noise would not be an issue, as the floors the lobby

1 A search of the professional literature and the Web turns up many libraries, public and academic, that host ongoing performance series: the Library of Congress, Brand Library and Art Center (Glendale, CA, public library system), Brooklyn Public Library, Collins Memorial Library (University of Puget Sound), Henry Madden Library (California State University at Fresno), and the Pittsburg Public Library (PA), among others.

“Good Vibrations: The Midweek Music Series...” 2011
fronted were group study floors, not quiet ones. I had become friendly with a few of the junior music faculty and set up a meeting with them in the library’s café to sound them out on everything from logistics to suggested performers. The three of them agreed that it would be difficult to get a performance arranged for August, since most students and faculty were away. One of the faculty mentioned that it would be great to have an ongoing performance series in the library. We talked about a fair amount to pay them; the chair of the publicity and events group (who also came up with the name “Midweek Music”) approached the dean of the libraries about funding it, and he agreed to do so, appreciating the “out of the box” thinking the program represented.² The music faculty member I knew the best sent an email to her department, soliciting performers, and at 12:30 pm on Wednesday, September 19, 2001, a quartet from the student symphony orchestra filled the lobby with music until 1 pm.

Space: The Initial Frontier

Midweek Music is possible inside the library primarily because of the way the library is configured. When people enter, they are on a floor that shares a ceiling with two other floors. Given that vertical space connects three floors, they are designated as group study floors where there is no expectation of absolute quiet. Students desiring quiet spaces have three lower floors at their disposal. In the series’ first couple of years, performances took place in a 13’ x 13’ area immediately to the right of the center staircase. Once the 18’ x 24’ front center lobby was cleared of newspaper racks to make space for a traveling sand mandala construction, performances have been held there ever since. This area is directly in front of the windows and exactly between the west entrance and east exit, giving the performances high visibility. In addition, the area boasts an electrical outlet, which has proven useful for musicians needing to plug in an instrument or amplifier.

² Joseph F. Boykin, Jr., e-mail message to author, January 6, 2011.
Selecting the months in which to hold performances was an easy decision, given our university’s academic calendar. While there were a few years during which a performance was held in August, the practice was abandoned because it proved difficult to find student or faculty musicians who played together during the summer at all, much less ones who did so frequently enough to be ready for a performance. The series now consists of a monthly performance September through November, January-February, and one during the first half of April (to keep a safe distance from exams). When the opportunity presents itself, I match the music offered in a given month to local or national custom. During March, to tie into the excitement of NCAA basketball’s March Madness, we celebrate “Midweek Music Madness” with a performance every week except for that of spring break; the increased number also permits us to honor all the requests we get from musicians to perform. In
April, I try to schedule a jazz combo, as the Smithsonian Institute observes Jazz Appreciation Month then.

While it is impossible to schedule the entire performance year in advance, as student and faculty performers’ schedules vary from semester to semester, some details can be worked out ahead of time. In early June, I look at the University’s academic calendar, make a note of holidays and exams, and come up with a list of possible dates for each month, which looks like this:

- September 7/14/21/28
- October 5/12/19/26
- November 2/9/16/30
(etc.)

It is easier for the musicians if they are offered specific dates to choose from, rather than having to produce a list themselves. I send out an invitation at least a month in advance to give the performer(s) ample preparation time. Additionally, I direct that invitation to a specific performer or group, rather than send a mass email soliciting participation, both because I consider it more respectful to the musician(s) and also because it would be difficult for both me and the performers to keep up with multiple emails from different groups at the same time. And while it would be nice to say that Midweek Music is always the nth week of the month, University holidays and musicians’ schedules do not permit such consistency.

I make an effort to have a mix of student and faculty performers (and staff when I can get them), and have learned which months are best for both. I solicit faculty or staff groups only to perform in September, October, and January; student groups are constituted during those first two months and will not solidify their spring semester schedules in time for me to schedule them for the third. When I see that a particular group is both talented and dependable, I invite it back, sometimes every year, especially popular ones like *a capella groups* and the steel drum band.
Performances on a Wednesday from 12:30-1 pm have proven ideal for several reasons. Being in the middle of the week allows for two days to send out reminders of the event, as well as for an alliterative title (Midweek Music) that is catchy and easy to remember. The middle of the day is a natural choice; people are usually eating lunch, rather than studying, and music provides a pleasant backdrop.³ At Clemson University, one of the Wednesday class blocks is 12:20-1:10; while this means that many people miss the performance entirely, the schedule enables many others to attend the performance--or in some cases, perform themselves--and still make their 1:25 pm class.

Supplying the Talent

*Music Faculty*

Initiating and maintaining relationships with music faculty is crucial in establishing and maintaining a program like Midweek Music. Not only do they perform themselves, they also teach courses to groups as well as lessons to individual students. In the first year, one such faculty member's direct solicitations to her departmental colleagues were responsible for all six groups that performed, two of which were music faculty duos. This same faculty member continues to apprise me of changes in both the membership and directorship of various groups in the department.

*Co-Workers*

My library colleagues have been instrumental in connecting me with musicians to play in the series. Some of them, as research liaisons to particular departments, know of faculty in those departments who are also musicians; through one such liaison, I found two groups that have become mainstays of the series. Two other co-workers, walking around campus during their lunch break one afternoon, stumbled upon a group playing bluegrass and got the

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³ In a January 24, 2011 e-mail message to the author, a member of an ensemble that performs every year says, of the library performances, “the auditors are welcome to experience the music as anything between absorbing and wallpaper. Both of those categories were ones that various composers had in mind. (Notice that we've never played Beethoven there).”

"Good Vibrations: The Midweek Music Series..."-2011
musicians’ business card for me. Still another got me in touch with a retired faculty member who attended the same church he did; this faculty member and one of the ensembles he plays with perform for the series every year.

Non-music Faculty and Staff

While music faculty efforts got Midweek Music started, most of the non-students who perform hail from other departments. Some of the faculty, as I mention above, came to the series via one of my colleagues. As the librarians here hold faculty status, we are on various university committees, interacting with faculty from all over campus; committee service provides a great opportunity not only for publicizing the series, but also for recruiting performers. In other cases, staff members found out about the performances, either on the Web or by being in the library when a performance was going on, and contacted me about participating.

Students

Students are the lifeblood of the series. Most of the performers are students; in some cases, they even direct their own performances, though they usually have either a faculty or staff advisor. In addition to drawing their friends to the performances, these students often recommend other performers or groups to me, which increases the diversity of musical genres the series is able to feature. I always make sure to secure contact information for the following year when a particular group performs well; not infrequently, the student with whom I negotiate a performance is a senior with plans to graduate at the end of the academic year.

Publicity

Publicity efforts focus on the university community and make use of both virtual and print media. Our university has a master calendar system (www.clemson.edu/calendar/main.php) that allows individuals to enter
information about an event, which is then posted to an online calendar, subject to a moderator’s approval. Certain events posted on the calendar also appear on the university’s homepage and in university-wide email messages sent out by the News Services department. I also post an announcement to a student digest which generates a weekly email about University events to all students. At the library, I make small and large posters and place them around the library on the Monday morning before a Wednesday concert; the large ones are attached to music stands to make them more eye-catching. The person in charge of library marketing and publicity puts the information on our homepage and her daily blog, the latter of which also connects with our libraries’ Facebook and Twitter accounts. Midweek Music also appears on the paper calendars that our circulation department puts out to the public—in the lobby as well as the elevators—at the beginning of every month. Finally, on the morning of the concert, I hang a banner with the name of the series near the performance area so that it is visible to everyone entering the library.

Libraries that do not have the multiple internal communication paths of the average university can use the local media to promote performances. Community newspapers, especially, often have events sections, and charge little to nothing to run an announcement. A local radio station, especially one affiliated with National Public Radio, is another possible publicity venue. Using social media is another way to promote events; I have recently discovered that sources as diverse as students and the state’s museum society promote Midweek Music performances using Twitter.

Equipment

The equipment needs for Midweek Music are minimal: armless chairs for the musicians and seating for the audience. While none of the following are absolutely necessary, not only do I find them useful, the musicians appreciate their provision:
• music stands (the performing arts department lets me keep four in my
  office and borrow more when I need them)
• flatbed cart (for transporting chairs and, on occasion, instruments)
• grounded electrical strip with surge protector
• grounded extension cord

For the first few years, I set up rows of chairs for the audience, but
discontinued this practice when one of the musicians intimated that it made
the performance seem too formal. The performance area has benches on one
side and overstuffed chairs on the other; on performance days, I move some of
the latter to the periphery so they might also serve as audience seating.

Compensation

Even though I inform the musicians that they will receive a stipend when
I invite them to perform, many seem surprised when I give them a form to fill
out after the performance so that we can pay them. Musicians generally love
performing in public and will often do so for little to no financial
compensation. However, we recognize that performers deserve something for
the extra time they put in both preparing for the performance and also
performing. In the case of faculty and staff, we take requests for items to
purchase for them (DVDs, CDs, sheet music, books, etc.); in our state, as
employees of a public institution, they would have to fill out a dual
employment form if we were to issue a check or gift certificate to them. If an
institution has no money, there are other creative ways to reward people;
library fine forgiveness up to a certain amount, an extra renewal period on
items checked out, or extended computer access time, for example.

How do you decide what to pay musicians? In our case, I asked music
faculty members what a fair rate would be. In 2001, it was $25 per person for a
30-minute performance and $200 for groups of seven or more; those amounts
have risen to $35 and $300, respectively. Two years after the series began, the libraries’ development officer found an alumni couple who already supported certain performing arts events at the university. She pitched the series to them and they donate a certain amount to the library every year to support cultural events like Midweek Music. Their support is acknowledged in every publicity announcement the Libraries post, they are invited to the individual performances, and they receive a summary of events at the end of the academic year.

The compensation musicians receive goes beyond material gains, though. Performing in the casual atmosphere of the library gives the musicians a chance to reach people who might not seek them out in a concert hall. Additionally, as a member of one ensemble puts it, because “the demands on the audience, and therefore the musicians, are less formal than in a normal concert venue, . . . the musician is a little less constrained in the transaction, and able to enjoy the music more for itself than as part of a formal relationship.” Playing in a public venue affords the musicians an opportunity to step out of their traditional academic roles and share their creative sides with the community. I also encourage them to bring CDs to sell, if they wish, and to publicize their upcoming performances in other venues. Performing for the series also leads to other opportunities for them; I am often contacted by individuals, both on and off-campus, who are looking for musicians for other events.

When Midweek Music Is Not Music to Someone’s Ears

Over the years, the dean and the head of library facilities have both received occasional complaints from library users who do not believe the library should be, in the words of one, “a concert hall.” In a recent instance, the complainant reported being unable to find a published policy permitting the type of sound that the performances necessarily create. After examining our

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4 On the infrequent occasion that a group does not perform for the entire half hour, compensation is adjusted accordingly, at the rate of $10/minute.
5 Lewis Fitch, e-mail message to the author, January 25, 2011.
study environment policy, we decided that this individual was right and I revised the wording to accommodate such cultural events as Midweek Music:

In addition to being a center for study and research, the library also hosts occasional special events (Midweek Music, author signings, readings, etc.) from which noise necessarily emanates. Notice of these events will be posted at least 24 hours in advance so that individuals seeking a quieter work space will know to locate themselves on the floors with quiet areas (1st, 2nd and 3rd floors) during the event.

The library administration’s response to complaints usually includes a reference to the library as a cultural center; the current dean mentioned in one such response that “It has been our philosophy that cultural events are an important part of the DNA of Cooper Library” and that holding such events “is not an uncommon practice in academic libraries across the country.”

Once a decision is made to host cultural events, then, it is important to put a policy in place that not only includes the event but also characterizes it as part of what libraries do.

“Not Your Grandfather's Library”

Having music in the library has changed people’s perceptions of it as a place. In 2003, a member of the class of 1955 visiting the library—coincidentally, during a Midweek Music performance—had this to say: “Just inside the door, I was greeted by music from a group of singers. They were just one of several special programs scheduled on a regular basis. It is not ‘your grandfather's library anymore.’ The place is alive!” The former dean of the Clemson University Libraries recalls that “during a concert, a jazz one I think, a faculty member came up to the desk and said ‘I don’t know whether to check out a book or order a drink!’” In both instances, the individuals find the presence of music uplifting—not an experience people normally seek or expect.

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6 Kay Wall, e-mail message to the author, November 12, 2010.
7 Davis, Wayne R., “From the Editor.” The Tiger’s Echo, no.2 (Fall 2003): 1.
8 Joseph F. Boykin, Jr., e-mail message to author, January 6, 2011.

"Good Vibrations : The Midweek Music Series..."-2011
in an academic library, but one they certainly appreciate. After every performance, at least two or three attendees tell me how much they enjoyed it. Coordinating a music program is not something I ever thought I would be doing when I accepted a position as a reference librarian at a mid-sized (18,000 FTE), land-grant institution. As with so many things librarians end up doing, Midweek Music fell into my lap; thanks to institutional and community support, it has become a fixture in the main library and promises to be so for years to come.

Coda: A Checklist for Starting and Sustaining a Music Series

- appropriate performance space
- access to musicians
- armless chairs for them to sit in
- a way to compensate them
- a way to publicize their performances
- a written policy that permits music in the library