

# Introduction to *Library of Congress Medium of Performance Thesaurus for Music*

This 2026 edition of *Library of Congress Medium of Performance Thesaurus for Music* (LCMPT) contains headings established through May 2026. The following introduction provides a brief history of the development of medium of performance terms at the Library of Congress. It then describes the characteristics and structure of LCMPT and its rules for application.

## HISTORY

Musical mediums of performance are defined as the voices, instruments, and other entities needed to perform a piece of music, such as a children's chorus, electronic organ ensemble, flute, orchestra, or a soprano voice. *Library of Congress Subject Headings* (LCSH) has always included headings that describe musical mediums of performance. The headings may consist entirely of one or more mediums of performance (e.g., **Piano music; Violin and cello music; Bassoon, clarinet, trumpet with orchestra**), or the medium(s) may be included in headings that also denote the genre or form of music, as in **Concertos (Baritone with string orchestra), Sonatas (Clarinet), and Suites (Bassoon, clarinet, flute, oboe, violins (2), viola, cello)**. While headings of this type contain valuable information, their syntax and format are not always intuitive to users.

Of particular concern is the frequent subordination of medium of performance, which is occasioned by the order of the elements in the headings – form appears in the initial position, while medium of performance is a trailing element. The discovery of musical works for particular mediums, independent of their forms, can therefore be challenging.

The opportunity to provide more straightforward access to mediums of performance presented itself when LC began to develop *Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms for Library and Archival Materials* (LCGFT). It was determined by 2008 that musical genres and forms would be included in LCGFT. This decision presented a problem: when LC's genre/form terms for music were implemented, LCSH musical form headings – including those that include both form and medium – would no longer be assigned to works of music, leading to the loss of vital information regarding the medium(s) of performance. Mediums of performance are not genres and forms so they do not belong in LCGFT, but what should be done? Should mediums of performance continue to reside within LCSH, perhaps with a revised heading style and syntax? Or should some other mechanism for describing mediums of performance be devised?

Two separate but interrelated circumstances led LC to conclude that the best course would be to develop a new vocabulary specific to mediums of performance. The first was the precedent established with LCGFT itself, which describes what something *is*, instead of describing the "is-ness" with a "topical form" heading in LCSH. Terms from LCGFT are meant to be uniquely coded, so they can be searched separately from subjects.

Coincident with the development of LCGFT, the library community was also working toward the implementation of *RDA: Resource Description and Access*, the descriptive cataloging code that replaced *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (AACR2). *RDA* emphasizes the explicit labeling of individual data elements so that they can be independently retrieved, and encourages the use of controlled vocabularies in those elements. *RDA* includes a musical medium of performance element,

but music catalogers did not perceive the vocabulary included within *RDA* itself to be extensive enough to support the needs of music libraries.

Preliminary discussions about the scope and structure of LCMPT began in 2009, and by 2010 LC and the Music Library Association (MLA) agreed that collaboration would be the key to developing the vocabulary. Within LC, a working group composed of music librarians from various divisions was formed. In order to provide a mechanism for broader community involvement, the Genre/Form Task Force of the MLA's Bibliographic Control Committee as well as BCC's Subject Access Subcommittee participated by vetting proposed terms and suggesting additional ones, assisting LC with the development of the syndetic structure of the thesaurus, and collaborating with LC on coding issues.

The initial 800 medium of performance terms were approved for use in February 2014. New terms and revisions to existing ones may be proposed as needed for new cataloging, and are based on the information in the work being cataloged as well as on research (i.e., literary warrant). Proposals are submitted by catalogers at the Library of Congress and by participants in the Subject Authority Cooperative Program (SACO). The latter may submit proposals individually or through the Music Funnel. More information on the Music Funnel may be found at [http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/Music\\_Funnel.html](http://www.loc.gov/aba/pcc/saco/Music_Funnel.html).

#### **USE WITH THE MEDIUM OF PERFORMANCE TERMS MANUAL**

LCMPT should be used with the *Medium of Performance Terms Manual*. The instruction sheets comprising the *Manual* may be freely downloaded from LC's web site at <https://www.loc.gov/aba/publications/FreeLCMPT/freelcmpt.html>.

Additional information on each of the topics below may be found in the *Manual*.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS**

*Library of Congress Medium of Performance Thesaurus for Music* is a stand-alone vocabulary that may be used in conjunction with any subject heading or genre/form vocabulary and descriptive cataloging code. All musical instruments, voices, and ensemble types that are necessary for the performance of music are eligible for inclusion LCMPT.

##### Authorized terms

Terms in LCMPT are generally in the grammatically singular form and consist of a single medium of performance. Some terms consist of one word, as in **fiddle**, **kaval**, and **zither**, and others consist of a phrase, as in the case of **baby rattle**, **new century harp**, **reed organ**, and **tenor voice**. As these examples indicate, the terms often refer to specific instruments; terms for ensembles are also included, as in **band**, **gamelan**, and **mixed chorus**. Terms may include a parenthetical qualifier if it is necessary to distinguish between homonyms (e.g., **angklung (rattle)**; **angklung (xylophone)**).

All terms are established in English unless the foreign-language term has been borrowed into English, or the foreign-language term is unique to the language of the work being cataloged and cannot be found in English-language reference sources. A **bajo sexto**, for example, is a large 12-string Mexican guitar, and is referred to in Spanish within English-language reference sources.

Indication of the geographic origin of a medium is generally excluded from the authorized term, but in some cases it is an essential component of the name of the medium and may be included (e.g., **Appalachian dulcimer**). In rare cases, the only viable parenthetical qualifier to disambiguate homonyms includes the geographic origin (e.g., (e.g., **setār (Iranian instrument)**)).

### Used for (UF) references

Sometimes called “see” references, UF references display the equivalence relationship. They lead the user from a non-preferred term to the authorized term. Under the authorized term that is referred to, the notation is UF, but if the user searches for the non-preferred term, a USE reference is generated.

UF references may refer from synonyms or provide different forms of the authorized term. The latter are most commonly represented with inverted references, which bring significant words to the front. UFs may also refer from formerly authorized forms of the term. Occasionally, UFs are made from terms that are not strictly synonymous when it is determined to be impractical to establish separate terms for the concepts. In this situation, the UF generally has a slightly narrower meaning than the authorized term and is called an “upward” UF. UFs may occasionally include a parenthetical qualifier. Foreign-language UFs are not made to English-language terms unless the foreign word or phrase is typically found in English-language reference sources. *Examples:*

pandeiro  
USE tambourine  
*[Spanish term found in English-language sources]*

piano, toy  
USE toy piano  
*[Inverted reference to bring the significant word to the front]*

grinder organ  
USE barrel organ  
*[Synonym]*

bariton  
USE baryton  
*[Variant spelling]*

toy symphony  
USE toy orchestra  
*[Upward reference]*

### Broader Term (BT) and Narrower Term (NT) references

Broader terms and narrower terms display the hierarchical relationship. Each NT is a class member of the class represented by the BT. BT/NT is a reciprocal relationship, and only the BT is explicitly coded in the MARC 21 authority records. The computer generates the NT references.

The hierarchical relationships are generally based on Sachs-Hornbostel classification. Terms are linked to the one immediately next to it in the hierarchy. Each term has at least one BT except the “broadest term” in each of the three hierarchies: **ensemble**, **performer**, and **visuals**. *Example:*

**aerophone**  
BT instrument

**chamber organ**  
BT organ

**instrument**  
BT performer

**organ**

BT aerophone

Terms may occasionally have more than one broader term. For example, **electronic piano** has the broader terms **electronic instrument** and **keyboard instrument**.

The strict hierarchies allow all of the terms in a discipline to be found by searching up and down the levels.

Scope notes (SN)

Scope notes are single-sentence definitions that are intended to help catalogers maintain consistency in the way that the term is assigned, and to help users determine whether the term covers the material that they seek. Generally, scope notes are provided when a term may be unfamiliar to most users, or when reference sources disagree on the meaning of a term and the term must therefore be defined for the LCGFT context. *Examples:*

**jin qian ban**

A Chinese clapper used in storytelling.

**gamelan**

An ensemble from Bali, Java, and the surrounding areas consisting of various gongs, metallophones, and drums.

Contrasting scope notes may also be provided when two or more authorized terms are closely related or overlapping in meaning, or could be confused. One sentence is generally provided for each term being contrasted, and reciprocal notes are provided for all of the affected terms. *Example:*

**gusle**

A single-string bowed lute of Southeastern Europe. For the psaltery from Russia see gusli.

**gusli**

A psaltery from Russia. For the single-string bowed lute of Southeastern Europe see gusle.

**APPLICATION OF TERMS**

Multiple terms are assigned to bring out each medium of performance pertinent to the work. Terms are never subdivided. In the MARC 21 format, terms are assigned in the 382 field, and multiple terms pertinent to a single work are assigned in repeating subfields. There is no prescribed order for assigning medium of performance terms. When several works are described with a single record, a 382 for each work may be provided. The number of performers for each medium is provided when it is available; it is coded in a \$n, which appears directly after the appropriate medium. The total number of performers is provided in \$s when possible (for ensembles in particular, the number of performers may not be available) The number of ensembles of the same type is provided in \$e, and the total number of ensembles is provided in \$t. *Examples:*

382 01 \$a piano \$n 1 \$a trumpet \$n 2 \$a trombone \$n 1 \$s 4 \$2 lcmpt  
[a quartet for a piano, a trombone, and two trumpets]

382 01 \$a alto saxophone \$n 1 \$a tenor saxophone \$n 1 \$a baritone saxophone \$n 1 \$s 3 \$2  
lcmt

[a work for a trio consisting of an alto, a tenor, and a baritone saxophone]

382 01 \$b flute \$n 1 \$a orchestra \$e 1 \$t 1 \$2 lcmt

[a work for one flute accompanied by orchestra]

382 01 \$a clarinet \$n 1 \$d castanets \$n 1 \$a oboe \$n 1 \$d finger snapping \$n 1 \$s 2 \$2 lcmt

[a work for clarinet and oboe, the performers of which double castanets and oboe,  
respectively]

382 01 \$a cello \$n 1 \$s 1 \$2 lcmt

382 01 \$a violin \$n 1 \$a cello \$n 1 \$s 2 \$2 lcmt

382 01 \$a violin \$n 2 \$a viola \$n 1 \$a cello \$n 1 \$s 4 \$2 lcmt

382 01 \$a violin \$n 1 \$a viola \$n 1 \$a cello \$n 1 \$s 3 \$2 lcmt

[a recording consisting of nine pieces: four for solo cello, two for violin and cello, two for  
string quartet, and one for violin, viola, and cello]

Detailed information on the use of the 382 field may be found in the MARC 21 formats for bibliographic and authority data. Provisional best practices for assigning LCGFT terms and the 382 field have been developed by MLA's Cataloging and Metadata Committee (formerly the Bibliographic Control Committee) and may be found on CMC's website, <http://www.musiclibraryassoc.org/mpage/cmc>.

## PRODUCTS

Four services provide information about new and revised medium of performance terms.

1. **Monthly Lists.** New and changed medium of performance terms appear on *LC Subject Headings Monthly Lists*, which are posted on the World Wide Web at <http://www.loc.gov/aba/cataloging/subject/weeklylists>; free subscriptions to the *Monthly Lists*, via e-mail or RSS feed, can be arranged at <http://www.loc.gov/rss>.
2. **Classification Web Plus.** *Library of Congress Medium of Performance Thesaurus for Music* is included in *Classification Web Plus*, a fee-based World Wide Web service that also provides access to *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, *Library of Congress Genre/Form Terms for Library and Archival Materials*, *Library of Congress Demographic Group Terms*, and *Library of Congress Classification*.
3. **LC Linked Data Service.** Medium of performance records are included in the LC Linked Data Service <http://id.loc.gov>, a free-web based service that allows for browsing, display, and bulk download (in various formats) of the authority records.
4. **Free record downloads.** Full MARC 21 authority records in MARC UTF-8 format are freely provided for downloading from <https://classweb.org/LCMPT/>. Two files are posted whenever LCMPT is updated. One file is cumulative and consists of all of the records that are valid at the time the file is created (i.e., it is a "snapshot" of the database). The other consists only of the records that have been added, revised, or cancelled since the last time a file was created. The structure of the file names and information about downloading the files is provided at <https://classweb.org/LCMPT/>.

**CONTACT**

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