



Listeners' Advisory: Successfully Recommending Music to Teens

By Mark Black

While multimedia collections of public libraries have expanded and continue to grow; supplemental services related to these media formats have not. For example, readers' advisory services have become commonplace in public libraries, while listeners' or music advisory services are a rarity.

In the *Library Journal*, Jacksonville Public Library librarian, Matthew Moyer chided libraries that offered up online recommendation sites like Allmusic and Pandora, "But librarians shouldn't have to leave MA (music advisory) up to commercial services based on search algorithms. Instead, they should be able to provide personalized expertise on and direct recommendations for items within the library catalog." (Moyer, 2011).

Moyer wondered why public libraries couldn't move away from relying on a commercial service model and develop their own listeners' advisory using more a traditional reference based approach – the

same way libraries were doing with readers' advisory.

To that end, Moyer approached his colleague, Andrew Coulon about instituting such a system. The result was a simple music advisory service called "Personalized Playlist". Users would fill out an online form that asked about their musical likes and dislikes. Within a few days, the library user would receive a recommended playlist containing five albums from the library's catalog that would reflect their tastes.

In less than a year, 85 library users were exposed to personalized playlists featuring 645 albums (*Library Journal*, 2012).

Wanting to move beyond one to one emails, Coulon and Moyer decided to go public with the playlists so other users could benefit from the suggestions. To further this and extend their reach beyond the confines of the library, the duo teamed up with the local NPR affiliated station, WJCT 89.9, to create a radio program called *Lost in the Stacks* (Moyer, 2011). *Lost in the Stacks* is an hour-long program hosted by Coulon and Moyer featuring selections from the expansive music collection of the Jacksonville Library (Urban Libraries Council, 2012). According to the *Library Journal*, "During its first five months, the show featured at least 279 albums from the library" (*Library Journal*, 2012).

Due to the strong work put forth by Moyer and Coulon, *Lost in the Stacks* received a permanent spot on WJCT's airwaves as well as earning the duo, Library Journal Mover & Shaker Awards (Urban Libraries Council, 2012). Their work also received national acclaim, leading to the American Library Association hosting a workshop in 2013 led by Moyer entitled, *Building a Music Collection that Brings People to Your Library* (ALA, 2013).

Moyer's and Coulon's work doesn't just focus on adult users of the library, they are very aware of the need for music services for teens and tweens as well. With that in mind, Moyer suggests implementing in-library battle of the bands events and music clubs geared towards tweens and children. Moyer describes the programs as allowing "them to explore different types of music and learn about particular artists, composers, instruments and theory through the most engaging way possible – enjoying live bands and performers." (Buggs, 2012)

Teen and youth services librarians in Canada can certainly take a page out of the Jacksonville Public Library's playbook by creating their own music advisory and music appreciation programs aimed at teens (as well as other demographics).

To that end here's a few things to keep in mind:

- Cast your net outside mainstream rock magazines like Entertainment Weekly, Rolling Stone and Billboard. Moyer suggests magazines like *Razorcake*, *Mojo*, and *The Big Takeover* among others (Moyer, 2013a). For Canadian libraries, magazines like *Exclaim*, *ChartAttack*, *Brave Words and Bloody Knuckles*, *Broken Pencil*, and local alt-weeklies might do the trick. As well, review blogs like *Weird Canada* might help librarians stay in touch with what is on the fringes of youth music tastes.
- "Find out what kinds of music your customers enjoy. Start out with something they know and love and

go from there. Be equal parts challenging and generous" (Moyer, 2013b)

- Let your teen users know that the library doesn't just need to be a quiet place anymore. Music isn't always quiet and serene, especially music geared towards youth. Reflect that in your library.
- Connect with teen musicians in your community. Find out what's going on in your local youth music scene and ensure that your music advisory and your collection reflects that scene. Music clubs and battle of the bands type events can help with that sort of outreach.

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