

# RILM as a starting point for research\*

Barbara Dobbs Mackenzie, Ph.D.

(Editor-in-Chief, RILM)

Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale, more commonly known as RILM, is 43 years old. In these four decades the project has abstracted and indexed the literature on music from around the world, compiling a database that is now well over half a million bibliographic records. The increasing relevance of the database for music researchers is clear: Use of RILM is at an all-time high. It seems an auspicious moment to reflect upon the past, the present, and the future of RILM and its role in music research, especially in the context of the growing profusion of online information and today's online research environment.

The database, *RILM abstracts of music literature*, includes publications in over 200 languages from some 150 countries. It is classified by main topics and includes original-language titles; title translations in English; full bibliographic information; abstracts—or summaries—in English, and now, whenever possible, in the language of publication as well; and detailed subject indexing. Here is an entry:

**Title:** O enigma do homem célebre: Ambição e vocação de Ernesto Nazareth

**Title translation:** The enigma of the famous man: The ambition and vocation of Ernesto Nazareth

**Author:** Machado, Cacá

**Author:** Rubinsky, Sonia

**Publisher:** São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles

**Year:** 2007

**Pagination:** 264

**ISBN:** 978-85-86707-15-5

**Special features:** Illustrations, portrait, facsimiles, music, bibliography, index, sound recording, chronology

**Language:** Portuguese

**Document type:** Book: Monograph

**Country of publication:** Brazil

---

\* Originally presented during the 18th edition of the ANPPOM annual congress, in Salvador (Bahia - Brazil) - September 2008.

**Classification:** Historical musicology (Western music) — To ca. 1910 (Romantic and post-Romantic)

**Classification:** Historical musicology (Western music) — Twentieth century (history)

**Abstract:** Ernesto Nazareth (1863–1934) was unquestionably the most famous and most successful composer of popular piano pieces in Brazil in the late 19th and early 20th c. Hailed as “the king of tango”, Nazareth developed a highly individual style of piano music that combined Brazilian melodies and rhythms within a framework of dance music that drew from several genres: tango, polka, waltz, samba, lundu, choro, maxixe, batuque, and several hybrid forms. Many of his piano compositions inhabit a transitional space between the popular and the erudite, making them easily acceptable both in the movie theaters (where Nazareth played for silent movies) and in the bourgeois salon. The evolution of Nazareth’s career, the particularities of his style, and the influence he had on the Brazilian musical scene are discussed.

**Abstractor:** Melo, James

**Indexing:**

Nazareth, Ernesto/life

Nazareth, Ernesto/works

dance music—by composer/Nazareth, E.

instruments—keyboard (piano family)/piano music/ Nazareth, E.

Brazil/traditional music/dance music/influence on Nazareth

RILM has become a singularly comprehensive guide to writings about music. It stands alone for its breadth of coverage, which is evident in the number of document types indexed, subjects covered, time span included, and geographical reach.

## Document Types

RILM material falls into two broad categories: (1) writings and other resources that provide an analysis, show the results of systematic research, or give a critical opinion or interpretation; and (2) writings and other resources that provide important source material (including, but not limited to, correspondence, interviews, obituaries, conference reports, and biographies). All significant writings about music, regardless of where they are published, are within RILM’s scope. While other indexes limit their coverage to articles published in a selected list of music journals, RILM’s coverage is determined only by the work itself, without consideration of document type or media: If a publication meets the above criteria, then it is considered RILM material, whether the study appears in a music journal, in another discipline’s journal,

in an interdisciplinary one, in a collection of essays or conference proceedings, or is published as a monograph, dissertation, online resource, or in any other form. A complete list of RILM document types can be found in Table 1.

*Table 1 - Document Types Covered in RILM*

AC - Article in a collection of essays	DD - Doctoral dissertation
AD - Article in a dictionary	DM - Non-doctoral thesis
AE - Article in a Festschrift	
AP - Article in a periodical	MD - Technical drawing of instruments
AS - Article in a symposium	ER - Electronic resources
BC - Collection of essays	RA - Review of an article
BE - Festschrift	RB - Review of a book
BF - Facsimile or reprint edition	RC - Review of a collection
BM - Monograph	RD - Review of a dissertation
BP - Periodical (thematic issue)	RE - Review of a Festschrift
BS - Symposium proceedings	RF - Review of a facsimile or reprint
BT - Translation	RM - Review of an edition of music
	RN - Review of a technical drawing
MP - Motion picture	RP - Review of a periodical
MR - Sound recording	RR - Review of a recording
	RS - Review of a symposium proceedings
CP - Program notes	RT - Review of a translation
CR - Recording notes	RV - Review of a motion picture
CS - Commentary apart from edition	RX - Review of an electronic resource
CW - Edition of music	

## **Subjects**

Topics include writings on music of every variety, from chant to African drumming to bossa nova, from ethnomusicology to music therapy to double bass performance, composition to elementary music education to advanced music theory. In addition, related and interdisciplinary studies pertaining to music are within RILM's scope. For a complete list of major topics, or classifications, see Table 2 below.

## **Chronological coverage**

RILM's coverage began with publications issued the year after it was established, so for many years RILM's chronological boundaries were 1967

to the present. Because RILM will add previously omitted publications from any year, coverage within this time span is continually amplified. A few years ago RILM began a new initiative to extend the chronological reach of the database back in time. Thanks to a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the first phase of this initiative indexes articles published in conference proceedings, a crucial repository of important research that can be difficult for the modern researcher to discover. Coverage for conference proceedings now extends back to 1835. Phase two of RILM's retrospective coverage was supported by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: articles published in *Festschriften* before 1967. RILM hopes to work on retrospective journal coverage in the future, in coordination with RIPM.

## International scope

RILM's international scope is made possible by its collaborative UNESCO-style structure. UNESCO "promotes international cooperation among its...member states...in the fields of education, science, culture, and communication."<sup>1</sup> For RILM, "member states" are those countries that have established national RILM committees; these committees are responsible for submissions of citations and abstracts of all works published in their countries that meet RILM's scope guidelines. In this way, the national committees help to ensure that the work of music scholars in their countries enters the international discourse on music by being summarized and indexed in the most comprehensive and widely distributed bibliography for music. At its core, RILM is a collaborative effort aimed at disseminating the world's research on music to—and by—the world's research community. Over the years the number of participating countries has grown significantly; at present some 60 countries have national RILM committees.

\* \* \*

What does all this breadth of chronological and geographic coverage, subject areas, and document types and media mean for today's researcher?

In today's world, where vast amounts of information are readily available online to more and more people—including, increasingly, full text publications—how relevant is a 43-year-old abstract database that was originally conceived

---

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, "About UNESCO", [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=3328&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=3328&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

for print only? Does RILM's age and the online environment in which it operates today place it squarely in middle age, with hints of wear, tear, and fatigue? What kind of future can be expected for RILM? These questions depend entirely on how relevant and effective RILM is for today's music researcher.

All available evidence seems to indicate that RILM is headed for a long and bright future. An increasing number of institutions and people subscribe to RILM every year, and—especially noteworthy—those that subscribe use the database more and more frequently. Usage of RILM is rapidly increasing; hundreds of thousands of searches every month are performed on the database—more than double the number of just a couple of years ago.

There are many reasons that account for this, some having to do with computers and the information revolution they precipitated (especially the burgeoning online environment), others with the changing disciplines and methodologies of music research, and still others with the nature of the RILM project itself.

## **RILM usage and the online revolution**

Technological changes have aided all aspects of the database, from the way our data is gathered, processed, and published, to the way it is presented and searched. Access has improved consistently over time, making it ever more useful to the research community. RILM was one of the first humanities databases ever to be made available for searching online back in the 1980s. Now RILM is distributed by four online vendors, one of them being EBSCO, through which Brazil (via CAPES) accesses the database.

In addition to RILM's focus on technological improvements, the online environment by its very nature makes databases like RILM far better than print for powerful searching, retrieval, and other features. Not only has technology allowed RILM's productivity to explode, it has also made the ever-growing amount of data in RILM more useful in several respects. The data are updated regularly, with the result that the latest publications are accessible much more quickly. Furthermore, the online interfaces through which RILM is available offer many search options and added features, including links to full-text resources, document delivery services, alert services, cross-database searching, clustering and visualization options, and much more. The RILM data itself are not only better suited to the online environment, but the online environment serves RILM better as well.

In addition to the obvious point that electronic searching of over half a million records is far easier than browsing years of annual cumulations of data in printed volumes, electronic searching also offers many more

possibilities for research. Searches can be constructed for an infinite array of topics and interests online, with the result that the way the data are used and the potential for how they can be used have changed and grown. For example, users can combine search terms that fit their interests, finding those records that contain the confluence of ideas and concepts germane to their work, rather than having to scan different headings in a print index to find that same confluence record by record. Furthermore, people now report using RILM not just as a finding aid that points them to publications they might want to read (which is RILM's primary purpose) but as an information tool complete in itself. That is, one can search for a topic of interest, retrieve a list of abstracts, and read through them. By the time one has finished, one will know something about the topic and the research around it even before going to the original publications.

One of the primary reasons that RILM is increasingly relevant today is the ongoing vitality of music research itself. Over the course of the past four decades the number of music and interdisciplinary journals, collected volumes and monographs being published—not to mention the quantity and importance of electronic publications of all kinds—has grown at a tremendous rate. RILM's database has not only expanded in tandem with this growth, but the scope guidelines have evolved in recognition of the changing modes and topics of music research and the resulting changes in the documentary needs of the researcher. That is, coverage has also broadened to keep up with the expanding fields of music research, encompassing traditional musics from all over the world, interdisciplinary studies, jazz and popular music scholarship, and perception and cognition, to name but a few examples. In addition, the types of documents RILM covers have expanded, reflecting the explosion of different publishing media, primarily on the internet. Electronic journals and some websites, as well as scholarly CD-ROMs, are now represented in RILM. In recognition of these changes in the world of music research, RILM's scope guidelines were rewritten in 2001 to be inclusive of these new realities.<sup>2</sup>

That RILM reflects changes in the methodologies and topics of music research may seem obvious, but perhaps less obvious are some research possibilities this might suggest. One area is music historiography, reflected in RILM's ongoing and changing coverage. The early conference reports provide one example: In scanning conference proceedings from the early

---

<sup>2</sup> The complete guidelines can be read in English, French, or German at <http://www.rilm.org/coverage.html>.

19<sup>th</sup> century, when people began to meet and present papers on topics in music that were subsequently published, one can see that the first conferences were almost all in France and tended to be about Gregorian chant and other liturgical music; then the locations of conferences began to expand to Brussels (where, for example, a paper was given in 1879 about prehistoric South American bells), Madrid, Berlin (an 1881 paper was presented on “curious” hymns in a synagogue in Corfu), and beyond. There were papers on music presented in Chicago as early as 1893. That Germany became an important center for conferences on music will be no surprise. A study of just these events and topics would be fascinating in itself.

Another historiographical topic that could be studied through RILM is the waxing and waning of subdisciplines within music research, which are reflected in RILM’s classifications. Every record is assigned a major heading, or classification, from 1 to 99, which are themselves grouped under 12 overarching topics, as shown in Table 2.

A number of questions come to mind that could be studied through the RILM database classification scheme. For example, in the late 1960s, did most publications fall under classification numbers 20 to 24? When did later periods gain validity and subsequent importance? When did ethnomusicological studies (represented by the 30s) begin to equal the volume of publications in the 20s, and what do these statistics reflect today? When did classifications 38 and 39 (jazz, blues, and popular music) begin to grow? When did performance practice research start gaining momentum? What about studies of synthesized sound? How have the fields of music theory and analysis, and electronic composition waxed and waned through the years? When did interdisciplinary studies begin to flourish as reflected in studies of music that cross the boundaries of other disciplines? Music in ritual has been a topic since the early days of musicology, especially as it relates to chant, but what about musics of other religions?

Trends in document types could also be studied. When did the number of music journals begin to increase, and where? When did electronic publications become acceptable publishing media?

The increasingly international coverage also suggests new research topics and again positions RILM well in today’s world, which seems smaller and smaller every day. Through the four decades of RILM’s existence, travel has become less expensive and more common, interest in other cultures has soared, communication across the globe is easier and cheaper, and for all these reasons and more, peoples of one country have contact and familiarity with—and in many ways, dependency upon—cultures and countries

Table 2 - RILM classification scheme\*\*

**Reference & research materials**

- 01 Bibliography & librarianship
- 02 Libraries, museums, collections
- 03 Encyclopedias & dictionaries
- 04 Catalogues (library, museum, exhibition)
- 05 Catalogues, thematic.
- 06 Bibliographies, general
- 07 Bibliographies, music
- 08 Bibliographies, music literature
- 09 Discographies & filmographies
- 10 Iconographies
- 11 Chronologies & almanacs
- 12 Directories & membership lists

**Collected writings**

- 14 Periodicals & yearbooks
- 15 Festschriften
- 16 Congress reports & symposium proceedings
- 17 Essays & documents

**Universal perspectives**

- 19 General (historical/ethnographical)

**Historical musicology**

- 20 The discipline
- 21 History, general
- 22 To ca. 500 (Antiquity)
- 23 To ca. 1400 (Middle Ages)
- 24 To ca. 1600 (Renaissance)
- 25 To ca. 1750 (Baroque)
- 26 To ca. 1825 (Classic & pre-Classic)
- 27 To ca. 1910 (Romantic & post-Romantic)
- 28 1910 to present (history)
- 29 1910 to present (musical life)

**Ethnomusicology**

- 30 The discipline
- 31 General
- 32 Africa
- 33 Asia
- 34 Europe
- 35 North America (north of Mexico)
- 36 South & Central America & Caribbean
- 37 Oceania, Australia, & New Zealand
- 38 Jazz and blues
- 39 Popular music

**Sound sources**

- 40 General (including conducting, organology)
- 41 Voice (including choral ensembles)
- 42 Keyboard, organ
- 43 Keyboard, general
- 44 String (chordophones)
- 45 Wind (aerophones)
- 46 Percussion (membranophones & idiophones)
- 47 Mechanical
- 48 Electrophones (synthesized sound)

**Performance practice & notation**

- 50 General
- 51 To ca. 1600.
- 52 Ca. 1600–1825.
- 53 Ca. 1800–1900.
- 54 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.
- 55 Notation & paleography.
- 58 Editing.

**Theory, analysis, & composition.**

- 60 General.
- 61 Rhythm, meter, & tempo.
- 62 Tuning, temperament, & scale structures.
- 63 Harmony, counterpoint, & voice-leading.
- 64 Form & genre.
- 65 Sound color, texture, & register.
- 66 Style analysis.
- 67 Structural analysis.
- 68 Computer & electronic composition.
- 69 Melody & motive.

**Pedagogy.**

- 70 General.
- 71 Preschool, primary, & secondary schools.
- 72 Colleges & universities.
- 73 Conservatories & other professional training
- 74 Music education for amateurs.

**Music & other arts.**

- 75 General.
- 76 Dance.
- 77 Dramatic arts.
- 78 Poetry and other literature.
- 79 Visual arts (including iconography).

**Music & related disciplines.**

- 80 General.
- 81 Philosophy, aesthetics, criticism.
- 82 Psychology & hearing.
- 83 Physiology, therapy, & medicine.
- 84 Archaeology & anthropology.
- 85 Engineering & sound recording.
- 86 Physics, mathematics, acoustics, architecture
- 87 Sociology
- 88 Linguistics, semiotics.
- 89 Printing, engraving, publishing.

**Music in liturgy & ritual.**

- 90 General
- 91 Jewish
- 92 Byzantine & other Eastern
- 93 Catholic
- 94 Protestant
- 95 Buddhist
- 96 Hindu
- 97 Islamic
- 99 Other.

---

\*\* There are some numbers in this sequence that are unused at present.



that once seemed all but inaccessible. To be relevant in today's world a global perspective is required, and, thanks to its founders and sponsoring organizations, RILM has always had this perspective and has built up a deep international file.

On the other side of this coin, the growing ease of communication around the world has aided RILM's efforts to establish new national committees, improving our global reach, which is on course for further expansion into parts of the world where coverage has been weak. Those parts of the world whose music research has been virtually unknown or unrecognized in the West, and, indeed, in most places beyond their own cultural reach, pose particular challenges to RILM. But opportunities to finally understand and represent the research output of such regions are within reach, and RILM is working hard to build procedures to ensure its inclusion in the database.

Not that today's global perspective and improved communication have helped countries to understand and appreciate each other on all levels; far from it. In spite of the shrinking sense of the world and the greater ease of communication, there obviously continues to be much contention and lack of understanding between countries and cultures. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the RILM project in the context of today's global reality is to demonstrate a model for close and successful international collaboration. Projects like RILM and all the R projects (Répertoire International des Sources Musicales, or RISM; Répertoire International d'Iconographie Musicale, or RIDIM; Répertoire International de la Presse Musicale, or RIPM)—which defy these problems and promote understanding, cooperation, and respect, and indeed are founded on these ideals—are more important than ever.

These ideals are at the very heart of the RILM project and as such, they are reflected in database policies as well. From the beginning, RILM records have included accurate coding for all the languages that appear in the database, even in the days when this was difficult and required painstaking efforts. All of the data has been converted to Unicode, with the result that all languages present in the database can be accurately represented online with their full diacritical markings and non-roman scripts. Furthermore, RILM has recently added new bibliographic fields to our editorial database for non-roman characters; publications in Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Korean, Hebrew, Arabic, and more can be displayed and even searched in their original character set in the RILM database. A recent development is the

inclusion of abstracts in the original language of the material, side-by-side with its English translation, wherever it is possible to do so.

Because of its international coverage, the researcher can find out in RILM if someone is working on a similar topic of interest in his or her own country, or abroad, whether it be in the U.S., Europe, Brazil, Israel, Japan, or South Africa. RILM serves people working on a topic limited to their own culture or their own national history, as well as those doing transnational work. And because all abstracts are in English (as well as in the original language of the publications, in some cases), even if researchers find publications of interest to them in languages they cannot read or publications they cannot locate, if they can read English they will learn something about the published research on their topics.

All of this demonstrates how RILM reflects the changing world of music research. What might not be as obvious is how music research changes RILM. The scope guidelines have been revised in tandem with these changes, and so have many specific policies and practices. Indexing, for example, is continually being adjusted in recognition of disciplinary changes. Developed originally for a print index, RILM indexing is complex and vocabulary-rich. Concepts are arranged in strings, and each string is a hierarchical sequence of keywords or phrases, each field further modifying or narrowing the previous one. While the trend in bibliographies is toward simple keyword indexing, RILM has stubbornly maintained the richness of its indexing, which offers many more points of access to the data. Moreover, it is clear that the relationships between concepts and terms that are embedded in these strings can be powerful for online searching. RILM's vendors are enhancing the use of this hierarchical indexing system, leveraging the power inherent in it more and more, so that users can harness it for their own research needs—browsing it, expanding it, or narrowing it, all at the click of a mouse.

While the indexing system has remained the same, specific indexing policies are constantly under review. For example, concepts that used to be indexed under the old headword “folk music” are now found under “traditional music”, “folklore”, or specific place names. “Culture and music” used to suffice for concepts dealing with contextual issues of culture, but research in this area has evolved into many different subspecialties and methodologies; this headword no longer adequately represents the field, and now concepts that used to be placed there are indexed under a wide range of possible headwords, including “cultural studies”, “anthropology”, “sociology”, “cultural policies”, “politics”, “urban studies”, “syncretism”, “transculturation”, and others. New headwords enter the RILM thesaurus as changes in the

discipline dictate. Recently introduced terms include, for example, “diaspora studies”, “urban studies”, “genre studies”, and “electronica”.

RILM has benefited from being able to change along with the disciplines it serves and with technological advances as they come along, resulting in an ever-more-useful database for music researchers. RILM’s usage statistics reflect how those doing research on any musical topic have increasingly come to rely on it. Today the RILM database is searched hundreds of thousands of times every month by students, scholars, musicians, and researchers around the world, a number that is growing quickly each year.

In spite of all these changes, RILM is still, at its core, that 43-year-old abstracted bibliography that was developed to index a library’s print resources. Now that more and more information is available online, can it really hope to continue to thrive and be relevant for researchers? Not only does current evidence suggest a resounding “yes” to this question, but it is likely to resound ever louder in the future, because the demise of the high-quality, deeply indexed, abstracted bibliography is not around the corner. If abstract and index databases were needed for library holdings, they are absolutely essential for the world of information now available to us. Before, RILM was a way into a library’s printed holdings; now people who need information have not only their local library holdings and whatever is available through interlibrary loan, but the entire contents of the Internet at their disposal. The need for bibliographic control is more urgent than ever.

But what about full text? As more and more information is available in searchable full-text versions online, what use will RILM be? The answer is clear: The more full text becomes available, the more necessary RILM will be. When full text repositories were few, searching them by keyword could work. Depending on how broad the search terms were, relevant results could be obtained without too much difficulty. But as the amount of full text online explodes from terabytes to yottabytes of information,<sup>3</sup> bibliographic control of that material will be significantly more necessary than it was for a library’s print resources, as keyword searching will lead only to frustration. Broad searches in full-text sources already yield impossibly large data sets because of the huge amount of uncategorized hits that result. Depending on how narrow the search is, relevant results can still be obtained, but there is an inverse relationship between the amount of full text available online and

---

<sup>3</sup> 1 Yottabyte = 1.024 Zetabytes, 1 Zetabyte = 1024 Exabytes and 1 Exabyte = 1024 Petabytes... Finally 1 Petabyte = 1024 Terabytes.

the possibilities of searching it effectively with keywords. RILM's own plans for the future will result in more powerful and easier searching for users, and since records are now and will continue to be linked with full text sources, RILM will be an important filter for sifting and controlling this increasingly complex fund of information.

Still young and thriving at 43, indeed, RILM's future looks bright.