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RISM Library Sigla

Since 1964, the International Inventory of Musical Sources (Répertoire International des Sources Musicales – RISM) has published catalogues with descriptions of the musical source material nowadays held in libraries and archives in almost every country in the world. From the very beginning, the institutions holding any particular source have been indicated by a code identification. These RISM library sigla make it possible to name the respective places – sometimes a large number of them – concisely, without having to cite very long institutional names. The identification codes consist of upper case letters, which designate the country and city, together with lower case letters standing for the respective institution. The country code is separated from the other details by a hyphen. For example: F-Pn = France, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la Musique. In the case of private collections, the entire name of the owner is added to the city code: I-PEbattisti = Italy, Perugia, Biblioteca privata Renzo Battisti.

These library sigla are administered in a database at the RISM Zentralredaktion in Frankfurt on the Main.

The drastic political upheavals of recent decades have produced changes to the names of countries and frequently even of cities and libraries. These changes have always been incorporated into the database. They mean however that some of the sigla which were used in the earlier RISM publications are no longer valid. To provide help in such cases, a comprehensive index of all library sigla was published for the first time in 1999. This index indicates the current equivalent of sigla which are no longer valid: RISM-Bibliothekssigel. Gesamtverzeichnis, München und Kassel: G. Henle und Bärenreiter 1999. It also gives information about stocks which have been transferred to another institution for safe-keeping (depositum). For example: D-DBk (Dp. in: D-WÜd) = Deutschland, Dettelbach, Katholische Pfarrei (als Depositum in: Deutschland, Würzburg, Diözesanarchiv – “held for safe-keeping in the diocesan archive in Wuerzburg”).

The RISM library sigla have by and large gained acceptance internationally with librarians and musicologists. They are now used in numerous publications like the new edition of “Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart” or in the New Mozart Edition (<http://www.nma.at>). Researchers also predominantly have recourse to them in their writings.

Each year, the RISM Zentralredaktion in Frankfurt receives on average inquiries about some 70 institutions which do not yet have a siglum. In these cases, the Zentralredaktion consults with the respective country group and then assigns a new siglum. At the present time the database includes some 6,600 library sigla from 66 countries, and therefore provides a comprehensive overall world-wide view of where musical source material is held. The current situation is made known regularly on the new CD-ROM of the series A/II: “Musikhandschriften nach 1600“ (“Music Manuscripts after 1600”) and in the online version at NISC (<http://www.nisc.com>). RISM strives constantly to facilitate the work of its users by providing more ways of accessing information. In this spirit, since the middle of 2006 the revised Complete Index of Library Sigla can also be viewed as a PDF file on the RISM website (<http://rism.uni-frankfurt.de>). The file will be up-dated every six months and will contain links – where these are known – to the Internet sites of libraries.

So that users can acquire information independently and at first hand, the RISM Zentralredaktion tries to extend the list by as many links as possible to websites of libraries and archives. It would help a lot if you would let us know about new website addresses, and especially about changes to existing site addresses.

Within the framework of the RISM series C, an index, arranged by country, of libraries with stocks of historical music material has been published (in cooperation with the Publication Committee of the IAML, the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres). This index contains a detailed description of each respective library and particulars of music stocks held there. It will obviously take some time to bring this information fully up to date. In the meantime though, the comprehensive index of RISM sigla will provide current information at least in respect of the names and sigla of libraries.

In order to be able to keep the database fully up to date, the RISM asks urgently to be informed about any corrections and additions. The assignment of new sigla may be requested at any time.

Please direct any enquiries to: RISM-Zentralredaktion, Sophienstr. 26, D-60487 Frankfurt am Main, Fax: ##49-(0)69-70 60 26, E-Mail: rism@ub.uni-frankfurt.de.

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