



Mary Plaine
PRINCIPAL LIBRARIAN

Behind the scenes, she's a key player sans instrument

One of Mary Plaine's early memories is punching the neighborhood bully. "I was four years old, dressed in my favorite red cowboy hat and two-gun holsters," recalls the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra's principal librarian. "I didn't like how he was picking on my little friends, so I decided to do something about it."

The story about the self-described tomboy became family lore and helped shape her life-long penchant for helping others. And that caring heart, plus a whole lot of patience, has certainly helped Plaine in her demanding BSO role. "The librarian's job is to do what we can to help the players feel more comfortable. That might mean enlarging a part for a player if the print is too small, or producing a part with a different pagination to fix bad page turns," says Plaine. "People see us go out on stage at the top of the concert to put the conductor's music score out. But what they don't see is the behind-the-scenes work that involves preparing each individual page of music."

In orchestra lingo, "preparing" a score refers to adding the dynamic, tempo, and style markings that the conductor has requested, as well as the bowing markings for the string parts, which instruct the strings players when to move their bows up or down — on 82 musicians' music scores, that is.

"The work is incredibly detailed and time-consuming," says Plaine. "And then, after the last performance, we have to tear the folders down and file away or return to the publisher all that paper."

Making music, rather than marking it, was how Plaine began her career. She earned a music degree in bassoon from The Peabody Institute, but opted not to pursue that track. "I wasn't passionate about playing the bassoon. People who have never played in an orchestra can't imagine the incredible stress each of the players on stage feels every time a conductor raises his or her baton," she says. "The librarian's job is to do what we can to free the players to focus on the composer's intention and conductor's interpretation to create a truly inspiring concert."

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