

# **Introduction to Braille Music Transcription**

Mary Turner De Garmo

Third Edition

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## **Part 1**

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# Foreword to the 1971 Edition

## The Need for Music Transcribers

Three groups in particular need the services of music transcriber: (1) blind children who attend public schools; (2) blind children who attend residential schools; and (3) blind adult musicians, both professional and nonprofessional.

With thousands of blind children attending regular public schools (some 58 percent) along with the sighted under the integrated program that has been adopted by many states, the need for music transcribers is growing rapidly. For such subjects as English, foreign languages, science, mathematics, etc., there is usually at least one set text. This text may be supplied in press braille through the state, or it may be transcribed or recorded ahead of time by a volunteer. In the music field, however, there is no set text. The individual band, orchestral, or choral part that the blind child may need changes constantly, according to the selections made from time to time by each particular musical director. Without the services of a trained volunteer music transcriber who can turn out this material rapidly, such a child does not have the chance of being able to take his rightful place in the music program that is offered by the school, no matter how talented he may be. Furthermore, he will very likely be unable to study privately with a sighted teacher, if he should so desire, unless the teacher can freely choose the music to be studied. Such freedom can be assured only if a transcriber can be found who is able and willing to provide the scores.

The music transcriber can also serve pupils who attend the residential schools. Although press-braille music is available to them, the choice of material is limited to specific selections that are listed in the music catalogs. In some fields such as keyboard music, the choice is wide; for some instruments the choice is very limited.

The braille music transcriber can also serve blind professional musicians—those who are teaching blind or sighted children or performing professionally in any field of music—by enabling them to broaden their choice of selections and by giving them access to new materials which otherwise might not be available.

In addition to serving the above-mentioned groups directly, the transcriber also can serve them indirectly (and single individuals as well) through the Library of Congress, which tries to provide materials requested by the blind from any place in the United States. This book is designed to train such transcribers, as well as those who wish to work for individuals, so that the national program of providing music for the blind can meet the increasing need.

## Preface to the 2005 Edition

In the decades since Mary Turner De Garmo wrote the first edition of this book, the situation concerning the need for music transcribers has both improved and worsened. The demand for music braille has significantly increased. The means for producing it have become faster and easier. Braille transcribing is now recognized as a profession as well as a volunteer service. The number of available qualified transcribers, however, has declined.

Many states have vastly increased the services that they provide to blind children, and in many cases their legislatures have required that whatever materials are available for sighted children must also be available to blind children in appropriate media. Funds are often available for professional production of music materials in braille, in tape recording, and in large type for children with limited vision.

Use of computers and electronic transfer of computer files has greatly speeded and eased the task of transcribing. Some computer programs have been developed that automatically translate music notation into braille. The advice of trained music braillists is needed by non-braillists who are starting to use the translation programs, to ensure that the result is good music braille. The developers of the programs work closely with certified transcribers to make their programs adaptable for an increasing variety and complexity of music.

The music braille code has been internationally agreed upon. The *New International Manual of Braille Music Notation* contains the assignment of signs and symbols that resulted from the agreement. Many questions of format are deliberately not covered in that manual because among the various countries there are differences of customary usage that do not impinge upon the basic readability of the music braille. *Music Braille Code, 1997*, adopted by the Braille Authority of North America, addresses some of those questions for the countries that BANA represents. This edition adheres to the rules of that code, and it recommends practices that are consistent with those rules in circumstances where no rules are supplied.

At the time of this writing there are fewer than forty certified music transcribers known to be working in the United States. It is fervently hoped that the availability of this new edition of the manual will help attract qualified musicians into learning the transcriber's art, will facilitate the progress of students presently learning, and will serve as a useful reference for active transcribers and all others who are producing music braille by any means.

Sandra Kelly, Music Braille Advisor  
National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress

Bettye Krolick, Music Braille Consultant  
Former Chair, Music Technical Committee, Braille Authority of North America  
Compiler, *New International Manual of Braille Music Notation and Music Braille Code, 1997*

Beverly McKenney, Music Braille Transcriber  
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Lawrence R. Smith, Ph.D., Music Braille Transcriber  
Chair, Music Braille Committee, National Braille Association

# Preface to the 2021 Edition

The world of braille music has been transformed in the fifty years since 1971, when Mary Turner De Garmo's introductory manual for music braillists was originally issued. Then, as now, limited numbers of braille music titles were produced in quantity by braille presses in North America, in England, and outside the English-speaking world. The unique needs of individual requestors, however, were generally met by individual braillists whose transcriptions were produced by hand on a Perkins braille or even with a slate and stylus. Requestors waited for weeks or months to receive such transcriptions, which were sent via free-matter postal mail. Only through the laborious process of thermoforming could copies be duplicated.

Now in 2021, computerization has facilitated the whole process of transcribing, duplicating, and disseminating the music. As soon as the braille music file is created by the transcriber, it can be transmitted to the braille reader, who can read it on a braille display or as an embossed hard copy. Particularly noteworthy is the ever-growing BARD archive, a collection of thousands of braille music titles which are instantly accessible to the braille-reading patrons of the Library of Congress, Division for the Blind and Print Disabled.

The community of music braillists has also been growing and diversifying. As recently as 2005, when the second edition of the De Garmo textbook was issued, music braillists were a relatively homogeneous group of mature musicians. Since then the number of certified music braillists has grown to include men and women of all ages and various backgrounds, including participants in prison braille groups. At the same time the community of braille music users has grown to encompass brilliant young singers and instrumentalists as well as seasoned performers and teachers. Excellent teaching materials continue to be developed and disseminated so that the braille music system can be understood and enjoyed by these readers, who daily rely on braille music at home and in the studio, in schools and universities and churches, and on the concert stage.

Furthermore, the braille music system itself has grown and changed. The adoption of Unified English Braille has affected the literary portions; the 2016 braille formats apply to preliminary pages; and, most importantly, the 2015 BANA braille music code has clarified and updated many aspects of the transcription process. While transcriptions from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries will always remain valid and legible, current transcriptions must incorporate the updates.

The third edition of the De Garmo textbook has been prepared in response to all these factors. As a braille music user and a teacher of blind and sighted braille music students, I have often felt overwhelmed by the challenges of revising and updating the text. More and more I appreciate

Mary Turner De Garmo's pioneering work as well as the thoughtfulness and creativity of the 2005 revisers. For guiding me and finishing the project, I humbly thank my collaborators, Christina Davidson, Kathleen Cantrell, and Dr. John Hanson. We also thank the many brailleists and braille music readers who generously volunteered their time in proofreading, evaluating, and beta testing each chapter of our work. As we have read and incorporated the numerous recommendations, I have constantly asked myself: "Why didn't I think of that?"

Because this is an introductory book, we have resisted the temptation to comprehensively treat advanced topics such as figured bass, music theory textbooks, chant notation, operatic format, obsolete procedures, and unique features for various instruments (harp, accordion, percussion, bowed strings, and plucked strings). We simply hope that what we have chosen to include will be truly helpful to the many sighted brailleists—and the many braille music readers—who are studying braille music on an amateur or professional basis. The preliminary sections and first twenty-eight chapters introduce single-line instrumental and line-by-line vocal formats. To complete the book, the remaining chapters present bar-over-bar keyboard and ensemble formats.

I am most grateful for the privilege of participating in this project.

Karen Gearreald

# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we highlight the collaboration of Christina Davidson, professional music copyist and certified braille music transcriber, who has devoted countless hours to clarifying the text, reorganizing the information, preparing the music examples, and preparing the layout and complex graphics of this publication. Christina, affectionately known as Tina, passed away in January of 2022 after a courageous battle with chronic illness. We honor Tina by remembering and emulating her generosity, her excellence, and her joyful musicianship.

The editor, John Hanson, not only guided us in proper revisions, but also prepared the front matter and index to this edition. His background in working with the production of the 2005 second edition as past head of the Music Section of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress, was an invaluable contribution to this project.

Among many others who have assisted in the revision process, we acknowledge and thank especially Kathleen Cantrell for her work with the braille components throughout; Kimberly Morrow and Jeanette Kutash for their hours of braille reading and comments; and the many students who beta tested each chapter.

Finally, we are grateful for the assistance of Jennifer Dunnam of the National Federation of the Blind, as well as Tamara Rorie, Braille Development Officer at the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, Library of Congress.

## Resources

### *Braille Formats: Principles of Print-to-Braille Transcription, 2016*

For available versions and variations, consult the website of the Braille Authority of North America (BANA). Downloads are available in both BRF and PDF formats. Online, an HTML version can be accessed. Hard Copy: American Printing House for the Blind: [www.aph.org](http://www.aph.org); 1-800-223-1839. Print Catalog number 7-09653-00 Braille Catalog number 5-09653-00

### *The Rules of Unified English Braille, Second Edition, 2013*

(see BANA home page for links and updates). UEB Rules and Guidelines are available in the UEB page of the International Council on English Braille (ICEB website). Also available from the National Federation of the Blind website.

### *Music Braille Code, 2015*

Developed under the Sponsorship of the Braille Authority of North America. American Printing House for the Blind, P.O. Box 6085, Louisville, Kentucky 40206-0085. MBC 2015 is available in PDF and BRF formats from the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled/ Music Materials. Hard Copy available from: American Printing House for the Blind ([www.aph.org](http://www.aph.org)) 1-800-223-1839. Print Catalog number 7-09651-01, Braille Catalog number 5-09651-01.

