

# **CIMCIM, the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Musical Instruments of the International Council of Museums**

## **Recommendations for the Application of Accession Numbers: 1995**

This text has been prepared by the Conservation Working Group of CIMCIM

Suggestions from the Conservation Working Group of CIMCIM. There are several methods used in different museums to apply accession numbers to instruments such as punching, engraving, applying self-adhesive labels, applying paper labels by gluing them to the object, attaching labels with threads, wire or rubber bands, writing the numbers in ink onto the object and, possibly the newest method, using bar codes. These methods have been discussed among the members of the working group from the museological and conservation point of view. The results are the following:

### **What are accession numbers for?**

- For identification of objects in the museum. This identification must not depend on a single person.
- For identification of objects outside the museum building (i.e. objects on loan). The owner of the object must be easily identifiable.
- For identification of objects in case of loss during transport or theft etc.

### **Where to apply accession numbers**

- It is useful to agree upon a fixed place for every type of instrument, as for example:  
Keyboard instruments: under the bottom of the case in the middle of the extension of the keyboard; stringed instruments: inside the pegbox or at the tailpin/endpin; wind instruments: inside the bell or on underside of its rim.
- The number should be readable without opening the instrument or taking it apart.
- It should be obvious (as a deterrent to thieves), but at the same time must not disturb the outer appearance. The size of the number should be in reasonable relation to the size of the object.
- If the object consists of more than one piece, every piece must be marked with the accession number. These numbers could be written on a hidden place.

### **How to apply accession numbers**

The accession number should be applied in the least harmful way for the object. It is obvious that there cannot be one proper solution to all cases. Our suggestion:

- With fade-resistant ink (black: chinese ink made of carbon and albumen; white: light-resistant white) written directly onto the object. The number could be covered with a layer of shellac or acrylic resin (i.e. Paraloid B-72), which is more resilient.
- Hanging labels in addition to the written number, tied to the object with strong cotton thread. The label should be of acid-free cardboard, the number written with fade-resistant ink.

- For those objects where one cannot apply the number directly we suggest a piece of textile with the number written on and sewn to the object.
- In some cases, i.e. very precious and thus very endangered objects, there might be a need for an irreversible, but from the conservational point of view, less acceptable method. One suggestion is to engrave or punch a special identification sign on a hidden place. This sign should be known by the authorities.

**Certain methods should never be used:**

- Those where one has to rely on technology in order to read the number; technology changes too quickly and has too many failures (bar codes, etc.).
- Self-adhesive labels; they get lost and the adhesive harms the objects.
- Paper labels glued to the object: they may damage the object and may become detached and lost.
- Hanging labels, if not used in combination with a number written on the object.

The above recommended suggestions have a long tradition and until now have given the best results, but it is still necessary to do research on the literature upon this theme. The working group also intends to make contact with ICOM Security. We encourage our members to send in information, their ideas and experiences regarding the application of accession numbers. The material will be collected and discussed, with the aim of producing recommendations for our members.

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