

The Music Man (and more) Man

Grover Baker has music knowledge and library skills

by Diane Hughes

photo by Darby Campbell

Grover Baker's office shows his love for music: from the music-themed clock on the wall to the trumpet on the bookcase to the vintage turntable just behind the desk, his musical inclinations are evident.

As head librarian for the Center for Popular Music (CPM) from 2006 to 2013, Baker developed a comprehensive knowledge of the that music collection. He spent seven years in collection development, acquisition, and cataloging, becoming deeply familiar with MTSU's musical assets.

But now, in addition to music, his job encompasses much more.

In August 2013, Baker became visual and performing arts librarian at James E. Walker Library. Dean Bonnie Allen thinks Baker is perfect for the job.

"Grover is not only a music scholar and fine librarian, he is a musician," says Allen. "The combination of academic credentials with his experiences as a performer allows him to relate well with the students and faculty that make up the programs in the visual and performing arts."

Baker's duties include serving as subject specialist and liaison for the music, art, theatre, dance, and recording industry disciplines.

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That means you might see him helping a Music major find an important piece of music or helping a Theatre student find a certain play.

“Grover is a primary force in clearing away difficulties for students and faculty searching for print scores, recordings, or historical information in the arts,” says Allen. “Technology has yet to replace his calm, easy manner and his librarian skills.”

Baker knows music, but he admits he is less familiar with dance and drama.

“It is a challenge,” Baker says. “One thing that’s helpful is that the same style periods in music apply both to art and dance. A lot of the early genres and forms of music are tied into dance forms. The same thing with art. It’s helped that I started out in architecture and had architectural history courses.”

Baker also spent 10 years as music and education services assistant in the library at Belmont University—experience that serves him well in his present position.

“Since my background was in music and not education, having to provide help for education students gave me experience working with an area that I wasn’t particularly familiar with. I think that’s helped me to be a little more comfortable with some of my current subject areas that aren’t particularly my forte, like dance,” he says.

Growing up in Inglewood and nearby Goodlettsville, Baker sang in church choir, played trumpet, and took piano lessons. With an interest in art and drawing, he enrolled at the University of Tennessee–Knoxville to study architecture.

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“I found out quickly that wasn’t for me,” he says.

Baker returned to music and earned an undergraduate degree at Belmont University and a master’s in church music from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Though he planned to earn a doctorate, teach, and conduct a university ensemble, he was encouraged to first get teaching experience.

Back at Belmont, he began work on a master’s in education and—as fate would have it—took a job at the university library. That job changed Baker’s mind and his career course; he dropped out of the program at Belmont and enrolled in UT–Knoxville’s online graduate program in information sciences. He completed the degree in 2006 and landed the position at MTSU’s world-renowned Center for Popular Music that same year.

Last year, when Baker moved into his new position at Walker Library, he inherited the Howard Music Library and the Education Media Library. Formerly housed in the McWherter Learning Resources Center, the collection found a new home at

Walker as a result of Dean Allen’s desire to streamline access to materials for students and faculty.

Baker recently moved his office from the second to the first floor of the library.

“That puts me closer,” he says. “When I’m coming in and out and I see a student looking, I’ll ask if they need help.”

One of Baker’s goals is to shape the library collections “so that they fit the curriculum.” He is continually working with professors from various departments to find out exactly what they are teaching.

“I’d like for Walker Library to be the first place [students and faculty] think of when they need something,” says Baker. “My goal would be if someone comes up with a list of things that they think we ought to have, that they would come to the library and find that we already have it.”

With Baker, students in the arts at MTSU seem assured of having access to all the study materials they need . . . and so much more. [JEWL](#)