

I started volunteering at Music Broth (MB) in October 2021. I had applied to volunteer with Sound Lab, but they had got back to me saying they were inundated with offers of volunteering, and suggested I try MB. I attended an induction day, and, in addition to meeting other existing and potential volunteers, I met Jen, Ingrid, and James, the staff of MB.

I had never heard of such a thing as a musical instrument library, and the concept intrigued me. Since I started volunteering, I have been steadily learning the ropes under the tutelage of Ingrid and James. I can now process a new item complete with its description, label, and picture onto the MB system inventory (if it's a guitar, and it's obviously in good working order, if not I'll probably have to ask Ingrid or James questions).

Volunteering at MB has been good for me. The atmosphere is relaxed, and the staff are friendly and a good laugh. Sometimes people arrive and start to play instruments, and film things. Other people turn up donating instruments which are weird and wonderful, like travelling guitars. There are many unusual instruments in the library, such as mountain dulcimers and baroque lutes.

I have learned about musical instruments in a number of ways while operating at MB. Some of the techs show us subtle details on models of guitar which are tell-tale signs of the relative build or component quality, or joints in a guitar's neck which suggest it is a professional instrument. Sometimes an instrument comes in, which, when you research it, turns out to be something you never thought about; for instance, I never knew what soprano saxophones were until I processed one at MB. I have since discovered that the saxophone family ranges from the piccolo sax – the highest in pitch, to the subcontrabass, some of which are over seven feet tall.

I have met many other musicians among the staff and volunteers of music broth, and, being an amateur musician myself, we talk at length about music – tunes we like, bands we like, what we think about music. Sometimes a volunteer will spontaneously pick up a guitar and give us a tune.

As you might imagine, being an amateur musician who has played guitar for yonks, I am quite happy to go to MB and assist Ingrid and James with processing items, or moving and loading stuff, or anything else. I am surrounded by guitars and other instruments, and amps, and other amateur musicians. It is also the case that twiddling with guitars and other instruments keeps me from twiddling my thumbs.

I have said to James that one of the reasons I like volunteering at MB is that it supports community. Community spirit is fading in society, and any individual, group, or organization that supports it takes the edge off the worst excesses of the social system, and that is fine by me. I think a musical instrument library like MB is a blooming marvelous idea.

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