

FileMaker Pro – Easier Databasing for Your Classroom
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We have all had to create a database at one time or another. It could be a marching band roster, an attendance sheet, a music library, or even a CD listing. No matter how you slice it, organization in the form of a table or database is part of education. Many of us have become content with using Microsoft Excel, the all-powerful spreadsheet package that comes with Microsoft Office. But for those of us not interested in tabulations or statistics, there is a more user-friendly and aesthetically pleasing alternative.

FileMaker Pro, developed by FileMaker, Inc., presents the databasing in a WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) format. Existing templates allow you to customize the databases fairly quickly, without the hassles of creating tables, adding and deleting rows and columns, or trying to figure out how to make what you see on your screen presentable to others. While the power and capabilities of Microsoft Excel are not lacking, ease-of-use and efficiency belong to FileMaker. Following are a few examples of how FileMaker Pro can serve as a viable tool to help your program run more smoothly and stay organized.

Music Library – Many band and choir libraries that have been around for any length of time can be found catalogued on a legal pad or a word processor stored on an old Apple II. While I am sympathetic the antique Apple movement, I must admit it is just that...antiquated! If you wanted to search for a piece of music by title, genre, composer, arranger, grade level, or ensemble, would it be just that easy? For some, it could be just that simple, as there are those who are just impeccably organized. Personally, I need a little help keeping myself organized, and FileMaker Pro has helped get the job done. Below you can see an example of my score library, created with FileMaker. Here I can search for a score using the title, composer, publisher, or even grade level of the piece. How did I set it up? I just used one of the existing templates for a collection (in this case a book collection) and edited the names of the fields. If you seek a more advanced library, a little more editing may be necessary.

CD (or recorded music) Library – Somewhere in every musician's contract with the profession is a clause: "I will own hundreds upon hundreds upon thousands of recordings." You all know the one I mean. Need a recording of *Lincolnshire Posy*? No problem. Which recording do you want? Or perhaps your Men's Choir is performing *Sixteen Tons* and you are interested in comparing Rockapella's recording with the original Tennessee Ernie Ford recording. Having the ability to quickly find these recordings requires two things: (1) some organization, and (2) a good database. Lucky for you, FileMaker comes with a Music Library template that allows you to add everything from the album title, to the track listing, and even the medium (for those of us who still use vinyl!).

Instrument Inventory – Keeping track of the instruments in your band room or the robes for your choir can be a hassle. While pad and paper have their place, Excel or FileMaker can certainly speed up your search process. FileMaker, however, can make searching for your instruments by any number of criteria not only easy but allows for a presentable report or printout copy of your inventory. Each time your students return their choir robes, you can mark down with ease if the robes have been dry-cleaned and at the beginning of each year, do a search just for robes that need cleaning. Mind you, Excel is more than capable of handling your various inventories—but in an age when "point and click" is a virtual standard, why stick with standard tables? If you are so inclined, FileMaker even allows you to add images to each record, enabling pictures of your instruments, choir robes, and miscellaneous classroom equipment to aid in the cataloging process.

The applications of FileMaker Pro in the music classroom are virtually unlimited

(marching band uniforms, contact lists, fundraising databases, etc.) Again, that is not to say that ordinary spreadsheet programs are incapable of handling an inventory or a CD database. However, I think its easy-of-use and WYSIWYG interface actually make databasing interesting (dare I say fun?). Admittedly, the \$299 price-tag can seem a bit high. The folks at FileMaker, Inc. have made a free trial version available, as well as an online demo of the software in action. I firmly believe that after giving the demo a look and playing around with the trial version (available at www.filemakerpro.com), you will be able see yourself more organized in a not-so-distant future—and FileMaker may be at the helm!