Music libraries in the UK: a vision for the future

1 Introduction

The vast majority of musical groups – leisure-time vocal and instrumental groups, educational ensembles for under-18s in school or outside, professional ensembles – use sheet music to sing or play from.

What is needed?

- *a lot of different printed music for thousands of events, in order to balance artistic and technical considerations, for both players/singers and audiences*
- *a large number of copies for some groups, e.g. choirs of 200+*
- *bookings 12-24 months ahead; loan periods of typically 3-6 months*

The list below of potential sources is roughly in order of cost to the user.
- Out of copyright material printed from IMSLP or Choral Public Domain Library
- Borrowing from other groups
- Borrowing from a public library, higher education institution, independent charitable music library directly or via Inter Library Loans system
- Hiring from small relatively affordable providers
- Hiring direct from music creators
- Hiring from music publishers
- Buying digital licences to print from music publishers
- Buying sheet music from music publishers or retailers

It is important that all options are available, so ensembles can balance budgets as well as repertoire.

2 What is the problem now?

The interlinked ecosystem of providers has worked well over decades. But **in the last 20 years, challenges have arisen for the largest and most cost-effective provider, the public library network.**

1) **Budget cuts by local authorities have meant s**taff reductions, removal of Inter Library Loans, closures; or **sudden significant price increases** to loan charges to reflect true cost, alienating users who would be able and prepared to pay cost-recovery prices

2) **A lack of political understanding** about the interconnection between this service, a thriving community music scene, and the benefits of engagement in music; and that each individual registered to the service represents an average 400 beneficiaries in the community

3) **Lack of awareness amongst potential users** of these services

4) **Lack of online or up to date catalogues of available material.** Most libraries will have a list of available music material online. Some libraries also promote their material via another database, *Encore21*, currently funded by the UK & Ireland branch of the International Association of Music Libraries

5) **Lack of information on how to access material, once located.**

6) **Lack of digital/automated systems for booking and paying for material.** Many libraries do not allow requests for multiple copies and none work for advance reservations up to 2 years ahead.

7) **A regional and national feast of differences** means **these services are not accessible.**

3 What could the future hold?

It is our vision that…

… every music group in the UK should have access to printed music to rehearse, perform and develop to the best of their abilities and to fulfil their ambitions…

… so that their participants, communities and audiences can draw down the associated benefits of active engagement with music…

… and in such a way that the provision of such facilities or services is sustainable in the long term for not-for-profit providers such as local authorities and charities.

What does access mean for users?

- *Affordable loan prices*
- *UK-wide online catalogue with real-time information on availability*
- *Single browsing copies or repertoire information for pre-booking research*
- *Advice in various formats (online, telephone, in person)*
- *Sufficient numbers of copies of a particular musical work*
- *Material from all across the UK, accessible locally (via library or direct delivery)*
- *Material in a good enough condition to use*
- *Stock that is constantly reviewed and renewed*

What are the benefits for performers, audiences and communities?

- *Enhanced social capital (reduction in loneliness and isolation, building of networks)*
- *Health and wellbeing benefits:*
    - *Physical health, i.e. singing proven in research to help manage COPD and other chronic conditions*
    - *Mental well-being, e.g. music shown to improve mental health of participants and help with stress reduction*
- *Skills development (personal, e.g. soft skills such as confidence, teamwork, collaboration, technical skills, e.g. sight-reading, performing in a group)*
- *Contribution to Levelling Up agenda:*
    - *Connection across different demographics (age, culture, socio-economic etc.) in communities*
    - *Place-making, e.g. educational and leisure-time groups influence individuals/families and businesses moving to an area*

What does sustainable mean?

- *Financially, i.e. at least at cost-recovery/break-even*
- *Locally available suitable space for storage and access*
- *Automation of administrative tasks to reduce need for manual input*
- *Digitally available UK-wide catalogue(s) facilitate user research*
- *Accurate online information on available providers and access to their material*
- *Self-service portal incorporating real time availability, booking/reservation facility, Inter Library Loans requests, payment gateway*
- *Investment in renewal of material and additions to collections to reflect needs and tastes of groups and audiences, and to include a diversity of composers and works*

4 How can we reach this promised land?

- Develop IAML's Encore21 database or the IT system created for Nottingham Performing Arts Library Service (NPALS) to include all UK material, access information to stock-holders and a user-focussed self-service portal; or commission and create a new system and portal covering all these requirements
  - *Requires initial financial investment; running costs covered by charges*
  - *Requires cooperation from all authorities with set/scores holdings*

- Explore ways of integrating services and resources on a national basis, with a national structure for loan charges and loan periods, allowing for local variations, to facilitate user planning
  - *Requires cooperation from all authorities with set/scores holdings; who would lead this?*

- Safeguard material when a local service closes, with a depository of last resort which will also manage the collection and make it available to the public
  - *Requires alignment with British Library strategic aims and detailed negotiations*

- **Governance:**
  - *Create a steering group*
  - *Identify and apply for funding* to support initial investment into making provision sustainable

- **Lobbying and advocacy:**
  - Articulate alignments with Libraries Taskforce & leading organisations (eg. British Library)
  - Regular and consistent quantitative and qualitative data collection to support advocacy
  - Develop a standardised way of measuring return on investment (including social capital)
  - Promotion of services and outreach to potential users

- **Practically speaking:**
  - Ensure stock is added to in line with users' needs and monitored for condition/renewed as necessary
  - Make advice available to users – online, via email and telephone, from specialist staff
  - Explore other services a music library could provide, e.g. reference materials, promotion, space
  - Provide training/information to library staff on music, promotion/marketing, current/potential users
  - Provide training/information to users on use of online resources; where to find music

5 Organisations

IAML (UK & Ireland) is a branch of the International Association of Music Libraries and represents members working with music and music information provision in libraries and other institutions in the United Kingdom and Ireland. More information can be found here: https://iaml-uk-irl.org/

Making Music is the UK's association for leisure-time music, with 3,800+ groups in membership, comprising around 220,000 hobby musicians. Find out more here: www.makingmusic.org.uk

Music Libraries Trust supports and funds the education and training of music librarians, and research projects related to music libraries, librarianship, bibliography. https://www.musiclibrariestrust.org/

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