

MUSIC INTERLENDING - SOME NOTES AND A LOT OF ISSUES (Birmingham 1998)

"Music is silly! I hate music!". While Leonard Bernstein had his tongue in his cheek when he wrote that, I suspect it's a sentiment that many librarians sympathise with when confronted with trying to supply printed music and sets of performance materials through the interlending system. Why does music provoke this reaction? - why can it be such a difficult material to handle? It is because the problems inherent in music materials cause a lot of the difficulties experienced with the interlending of music before the process even starts.

Because music is an international product it can be very difficult to identify the exact piece or version that a borrower is seeking. A piece of music may have alternative titles in several different languages; it may be an extract from a larger work. If it is a well-known piece it will almost certainly be issued in several different editions by different publishers and in a variety of arrangements for different combinations of voices and/or instruments. A good example of this is Bach's famous 'Jesu joy of man's desiring' which is currently available in the UK alone in 66 different editions and versions including arrangements for a military band, a saxophone quartet and one for 12 handbells!

Even when a piece of music has been identified correctly, more problems occur because what the borrower asks for doesn't match the entries in the catalogues the librarian is using to locate the item. 'Jesu joy of man's desiring' is quite helpfully listed under "Jesu..." in most RLS's vocal sets catalogues, but many library catalogues list it under its AACR2 uniform title of 'Cantatas; no. 147, Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben. - Wohl mir, dass ich Jesum habe'.

Like many specialised subjects, music requires an expert provider if provision is to be successful. The research for the 1993 Library and Information Plan for Music found that many problems with the successful supply of printed music stem from a lack of trained, specialist music librarians and where specialist staff are not employed to manage music services, the evidence is that users' demands are not being satisfied or that the burden of this role is being passed to other authorities. This situation has not been helped by the effects of local government reorganisation over the last two or three years where there are now a significant number of small unitary authorities without any music staff, expertise in music, catalogues or even music collections.

Do these things matter? Is music interlending that important anyway? The scale of music interlending between libraries in the UK the majority of which is for sets of vocal scores and orchestral parts, has been estimated as totalling three million items a year, and in a snapshot survey of sets issued for use during September and October 1997, IAML(UK) [UK Branch of the International Association of Music Libraries Archives and Documentation Centres.] found that 23 public libraries alone had issued 6000 vocal sets made up of more than 136,000 vocal scores.

One of the reasons the interlending of music sets is so successful is the number of catalogues which have been produced. The second edition of the British Union Catalogue of Orchestral Sets was published in 1989 by BLDS in co-operation with

IAML(UK), with a supplement published in 1995. BUCOS lists more than 10,000 different orchestral sets held by 68 public and academic libraries throughout the UK. Vocal sets are listed in catalogues published by SWRLS (1986), LASER (1989), NWRLS (1995), and by WMRLS, EMRLS and NRLS (all 1997). While Scotland and Wales have only a handful of vocal sets collections and Ireland has none at all, the most important omission from this list is AYHLS which at its regional music library at Wakefield has one of the largest collections of performance sets in the country.

Over the last five years a considerable amount of effort has gone into trying to produce a national catalogue of vocal sets. LINC, IAML(UK), CONARLS, and in particular WMRLS and its Director, Geoff Warren, have been key players in trying to create a national vocal sets database, not least through the WMRLS DFPLS funded "Access to Vocal Sets" project (see FIL Newsletter Issue 25, June 1997). Unfortunately further progress has been halted by the disappearance of central funding, but IAML(UK) is continuing to explore alternative strategies. Lottery funding has been considered but rejected and plans are currently underway to investigate the creation of a national database along lines similar to those of EARL's MagNet collaborative serials service.

Perhaps the issue that has caused most concern in music library circles over the last decade (apart from the lack of any progress in automating BSDS's Music Library catalogue) is that an increasing number of libraries now charge other libraries for the interloan of music sets. This has meant that many libraries which do not charge, now refuse either to borrow from or lend to those that do charge. This situation was exacerbated a few years ago when Kent, which has a very important collection of music sets, opted out of the sets interlending system completely and started to lend its sets directly to choirs and orchestras wherever they were based in the UK. A further issue which irritates some music librarians concerns libraries who borrow sets free of charge through the interlending system but then impose a loan charge when they lend those sets to their own borrowers. Such changes to the music interlending system have caused considerable concern at national level as many library authorities feel that this piecemeal fragmentation of the music interlending system is damaging the whole fabric of interlending throughout the country.

To end on a more upbeat note, one of the latest JISC eLib projects is called Music Libraries Online. The aim of this project is to link the OPACs of all nine UK music conservatoire libraries, using Z39.50, to create a virtual union catalogue for music materials which will be available via the world wide web. Music Libraries Online started in January this year and the importance of this project for the interlending community at large is that one of its essential elements is to incorporate an interlending system with requests placed through an email interface. As another aim of the project is to investigate the possibility of adding the music catalogues of public and academic libraries to the network, and as BSDS has expressed an interest in participating, it can be seen that if this project is successful it could revolutionise the interlending of music materials in the UK.

Malcolm Lewis