Music performance sets provision in the UK: background and vision

Contents

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.

How much music?

- Most groups will rehearse 30-40 weeks a year
- They will stage concerts of approximately 90-120 minutes at least 3 or 4 times a year (some more frequently)
- A Mozart symphony is about 35-40 minutes in length, a brass band piece often about 4-5 minutes, vocal pieces anything from 3 minutes upwards, Handel's Messiah approx. 2.5 hours. Any concert, therefore, always contains a number of pieces of music
- Different repertoire is needed for performance not just throughout one concert, one year, but over a longer cycle – to avoid audience and performer fatigue - with a few regular repetitions, e.g. of annual Messiahs or Christmas carols

Music groups therefore regularly need access to a lot of different printed music.

How many copies?

Instrumental ensembles range in size from duos or trios up to full symphony orchestras; leisure-time music groups have an average membership of 57 (Making Music data, 2016), with choirs, for instance, ranging from a membership of 12 to 250; educational groups have a similar range.

Instrumental groups need full sets of parts (there can be up to 100 in a large orchestral piece, plus conductor's score) for pieces they would like to perform, and up to 250 copies of vocal pieces may need to be sourced for each piece in a concert by a large choir.

When is the music needed?

Leisure-time and educational ensembles of all kinds plan their repertoire and events well in advance, typically 12-24 months.

However, they cannot leave the sourcing of the necessary sheet music till shortly before it is needed because it may then not be available – and they need to be sure of having it at the right moment for their rehearsals.

It is therefore crucial that ensembles are able to book or reserve the printed material they need, in sufficient quantities, well ahead of when they actually require it for the first rehearsal.

There are also peak times in the year, e.g. Christmas, Easter, early summer, when a lot of concerts take place, so demand for printed music fluctuates throughout a year to reflect that, and the usual pattern (except for professional groups) of roughly termly activity.

Leisure-time and educational groups will generally require sheet music for a longer period of time, perhaps 3-4 months – typically they might rehearse a piece for a whole term or half a term leading up to an event – whereas professional groups may borrow or hire just a short time before a concert, for a couple of weeks.

Where will the music come from?
There is a range of sources for printed sheet music. Professional ensembles and the higher education music colleges will very often have their own music libraries of material they perform frequently. The same may be said for some educational and leisure-time groups – over time, they may amass a certain amount of material that they have purchased.

The list below of potential sources is roughly in order of cost to the user.

- Using out of copyright material printed from ISLMP (Petrucci Library) or the Choral Public Domain Library (ChoralWiki)
- Borrowing from other groups, sometimes for a small admin charge
- Borrowing from a public library or higher education institution (e.g. Royal College of Music) or independent charitable music library (e.g. CYML) directly or via Inter Library Loans system
- Hiring from other providers e.g. Chameleon, Ourtext, CoMA, Composers Edition, generally smaller entities with low profit margins and relatively affordable
- Hiring direct from music creators
- Hiring from music publishers
- Buying digital licences from music publishers (e.g. to print 40 copies)
- Buying sheet music from music publishers or retailers

Cost
Not all music is available from each of these providers – e.g. only out of copyright music is available for free on ISMLP and even so people may opt for editions of such music still in copyright which may be easier to read from. New music in particular is quite expensive to hire or buy and is generally only available from music publishers (sometimes only for commercial hire and not for sale at all), unless published by Composers Edition or self-published by the music creator.

As well as these financial considerations, there are artistic imperatives for a balanced repertoire within each concert and over a period of time. Technical ability also needs to be taken into account in the case of leisure-time and educational groups, as well as participants' interests and the need for variety in order to keep them engaged.

It is therefore likely that for each concert, term, annual cycle, a variety of sources for printed sheet music will be used and needed by each ensemble.

And as the sheet music sources vary considerably in price and budgets are invariably limited or restricted, it is *important that all options, from the free to the most expensive, are fully available to each and every group, so they can balance not just their repertoire, but their budgets, too.*

Logistics and transport
Each time an ensemble sources music, these questions arise:

- How do we find out about what music is available from where?
- How do we find out if it's available when we need it, in the quantities that we need it?

- How do we reserve or book that music?
- How do I pay for that music?
- How will that music get to us and back to its owner?

Artistic considerations

At times the musical director of a group will have clear ideas about what work and what edition of a piece of music they would like to use. But not always. So they generally look for answers to four questions:

- Where do I find out about repertoire? (e.g. I need another 15 minutes of music by a French composer for a full symphony orchestra in order to finalise my concert programme)
- What edition of a work is the right one for this ensemble?
- Is the piece I'm considering at the right technical level for my ensemble?
- Is it fun/interesting/challenging, depending on the artistic goals for the term or year?

Generally, they find the answers via various online fora (e.g. Association of British Choral Directors' Facebook group) and databases (e.g. Musica International, Making Music's Music Bank); by browsing actual or virtual copies of conductor scores; and by asking experts, e.g. music librarians.

2 What is the problem now?

This interlinked ecosystem of providers and advice networks has worked well over many decades for all kinds of ensembles. But **in the last twenty years, various challenges have arisen, in particular for the largest and most cost-effective provider, the public library network,** which had, until now, supplied thousands of groups across the UK with an enormously varied repertoire of music for performance, delivered to a library near them. According to Making Music data (2015), 45% of leisure-time music groups' music is (or was then) sourced from a public library.

1) Chief amongst libraries' challenges have been **budget reductions by local authorities**. As music set provision is not a statutory duty, it has often been one of the first targets for cuts.

2) **Cuts** take the form of…
   a. staff reduction (no more dedicated staff and/or no staff with musical knowledge). For the user this means
      i. more difficult access in general as library staff are multi-tasking;
      ii. no more availability of musical advice;
      iii. gradually deteriorating material, as non-specialists are unable to gauge the level of quality needed for the material, are not able to understand what is a necessary part of a set (e.g. ALL violin parts for a symphony – or else the whole set becomes useless), and/or what how repertoire could or should be refreshed.
   b. removal of Inter Library Loans facility for music. For the user this means
      i. removal of access to a wide range of repertoire: no single library could hold enough variety and quantity of material to service groups in its area over years
      ii. removal of access to large enough quantities of copies of music (e.g. 95 copies of Handel's Messiah: a common request, unlikely to be available in one collection).
   c. closure of the service and this often means
      i. disposal of material through sale, donation or into a skip, thus lost entirely to local user
      ii. a drastic reduction in material available locally in sufficient quantities for users
      iii. loss of local heritage as many collections were partially built up by donations from music groups in the area.

3) **A lack of political understanding** has been a challenge, with local and national policymakers and budget holders not aware of the complexity of interconnections between this service, a thriving community music scene, and the physical and mental well-being of participants and audiences.

a. Looking at numbers of registered users for libraries would suggest perhaps 25 (Bristol) to 165 (Surrey) individuals with an interest in this service. But those individuals represent one contact point for a group with an average 57 participants (Making Music data, 2016) which performs an average of 3.4 times a year to mean audiences of 175 per concert, meaning therefore an **average 2,000 beneficiaries per 25 registered users. Impact is different and needs to be measured differently from that of an individual registered with the library to borrow books.**

b. There's a **lack of awareness of the benefits of engagement in music**, whether as an audience member, young person in education or adult hobby musician. Recognising these benefits, including increased social capital, skills development, well-being and place-making, can underpin a cross-departmental rationale for investment in this service

4) **Sudden and significant price increases to loan charges** have been one way many public libraries have reacted in relation to music set provision when they've had to implement cuts rapidly.

a. Most libraries have **traditionally not charged what it actually costs to provide the service,** have been subsidising it and **have not updated their charges regularly, in some cases not for years.**

b. When they therefore try and create a breakeven situation at short notice and with little consultation, they alienate users and remove access for many groups, especially if those users had budgets and planning already in place for the coming 12-18 months.

c. **There is not generally an issue with setting charges at cost-recovery – groups would, on the whole, still be able to afford those charges** more easily than they would be able to hire or buy all their music from music publishers (market research undertaken by Nottingham Libraries)

5) **Lack of awareness amongst potential users** of these services. Libraries have not traditionally included staff who are communications or marketing specialists and therefore music sets services are some of the best kept secrets in some local authorities. Where this has changed because controversial change proposals have suddenly highlighted the service or where the library has invested into promotion, an increase in use has been noticeable (e.g. Norfolk, NPALS)

6) **Lack of online and/or up to date catalogues of available material.** Most libraries will have a list of available music material online or available digitally in some way.
Some, but not all, libraries also promote their material via another database, *Encore21*, currently funded and hosted by IAML (UK & Ireland), a branch of the International Association of Music Libraries, which holds data on more than 90,000 performance sets of music from at least 95 libraries. It has just been moved to a web-based system which allows libraries to have easy access for adding entries or editing their holdings.
However, this database requires holding libraries to have staff with time and musical knowledge to update details of the material held by them regularly. This has recently been a challenge due to reduced staff numbers and the fact that many of the staff now in charge of these collections are not music specialists. The database is also funded entirely by membership subscriptions from IAML (UK & Ireland), which is not a sustainable solution.

7) **Lack of information on how to access any available material.** Links on Encore21 to libraries are often not specific (e.g. to a general library page, for instance Cambridgeshire), hampering user research. Also a number of listed libraries do not lend via *Inter Library Loans (ILLs)*, so finding out that copies of a work are held by Buckinghamshire, e.g., may be no help to the end user from outside the county, as they will not be able to access this material since Buckinghamshire discontinued Inter Library Loans in 2014. Library staff use Encore21 for information on where stock is held, but it does not have information on real-time availability or any indication as to how or whether stock is available directly to a user, or via a library service, or not at all outside the local authority area of the stock-holding library.

8) **Lack of digital/automated systems for booking and paying for material.** Although most libraries now have quite sophisticated systems for reserving individual books, many do not allow requests for multiple copies and none work for advance reservations up to 2 years ahead, which is crucial for ensembles.

Bookings and reservations for performance sets therefore mostly involve manual processes, emails and telephone calls, adding to the financial (i.e. staff) burden on local authorities providing such services.

In addition, ILLs for music operate only manually through a staff member with the musical understanding, knowledge of other libraries with sheet music holdings, and the time to communicate with them to ask about their stock and availability. There is no UK-wide system, and any library is therefore only as good as the personal knowledge of the current staff member in charge of sheet music (who may not be a music specialist and may be deployed elsewhere in a library service, depending on need, sometimes at short notice).

ILLs can also represent an actual cost to a library because the way transport is accounted for between authorities does not reflect the real expense of moving heavy music, and means the library lending to another authority could be incurring net costs of no benefit to their own residents, clearly not a situation any local authority can justify these days.

Payments for this service and materials are frequently not coded separately by local authorities, meaning they actually do not have a clear oversight of the income from music sets provision (and therefore of the actual net cost to them).

9) **A regional and national feast of *differences*** in terms of library catalogues, reservation and bookings systems and rules, payment gateways, loan charges and what period they are for, etc., exist across local authorities, meaning this is truly a postcode lottery service. Due to the paucity of easily available information, it is entirely down to the tenacity and ingenuity of music directors, music librarians (where they still exist) and volunteers running groups to track down the sheet music they would like to perform. **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 all stock-holders and a user-focussed self-service portal; or commission and create a new system and portal covering all these requirements
  - Encore21 lacks any self-service portal features but has UK-wide coverage; it can now be updated by the holding libraries directly, and is based on an open source library management system
  - NPALS' system offers self-service ordering and has now been running and been improved over six years, covering two counties (Nottingham/shire and Leicester/shire) and about to be used in a third neighbouring one, so it is tested and user-friendly. However, it is not UK-wide or designed to work across multiple collections and authorities. It uses custom-built software which currently does not include the capacity for standardised terms for description of items or the import of bibliographic records from another system (data merge).
  - Neither offers information on who can access what stock and how (e.g. directly or via ILLs)
  - ***Requires initial financial investment; running costs covered by charges***
  - ***Requires cooperation from all authorities with set/scores holdings***

- Develop a national structure for loan charges and loan periods, allowing for local variations in price and lengths, but aligning the structure, to allow an integrated system and facilitate user planning
  - Challenging due to the independence of local authorities

- o Fewer regional hubs (e.g. as developing in the East Midlands) or a national hub (led by British Library) could be a way forward

  - o ***Requires time and effort; who would lead this?***

- Safeguard material when a local service closes, with a depository of last resort which will also manage that (probably regularly) growing collection and make it available to the public

  - o Initial conversations have taken place with the British Library with regard to space in Boston Spa

  - o ***Requires alignment with British Library strategic aims and detailed negotiations***

5 - Organisations and reports

IAML (UK & Ireland)

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

Making Music is the UK's membership organisation for leisure-time music, with over 3,800 groups comprising around 220,000 hobby musicians across the UK. This represents around 28% of leisure-time music groups in the UK. Find out more here: www.makingmusic.org.uk

Making Music has been working closely over the last seven years with a number of local authorities providing music sets services including Nottingham, Leicester, Norfolk, Bristol, Somerset, Dorset, Surrey, Yorkshire, Sussex, Trafford, Westminster, and more, helping facilitate solutions that work locally.

Reports:

1) Music Libraries Trust survey report December 2020

2) Keeping Performance Live Arts Council England December 2019

3) Income Generation for Public Libraries (including Nottingham case study) May 2015

4) Joining the dots – a report on music library provision in the South West, April 2017

6 – A summary of recommendations from all reports

The governance way forward:

- ***Create a steering group*** of all interested parties to work together on solutions focussed on delivering what users and their communities need

- ***Explore ways of integrating services and resources on a national basis***

- ***Identify and apply for funding*** to support initial investment to make such integration possible, e.g. feasibility study, so that provision of music sets in the medium-term becomes sustainable, including an available last resort space for services which close down, achieving full cost-recovery and independence from funding other than from users

Lobbying and advocacy:

- Articulate alignments with the Libraries Taskforce strategy, with other leading organisations (British Library, Libraries Connected, CILIP etc.), with other specialist collections

- Regular and consistent quantitative and qualitative data collection to support advocacy

- Develop a standardised way of measuring cost and return on investment (including social capital) so local authorities and other providers are clear on their contribution, if any

- (Better) promotion of existing services including via programme acknowledgements and outreach to potential users

Practically speaking:

- Need for consistent and coordinated charging structures (not necessarily the actual price, but the structure, e.g. per copy/per month)

- Development of digital self-service portal for users to reduce need for staff intervention (crucial to ensure provision able to break even whilst maintaining affordable charges)

- An up-to-date regional and/or national online catalogue of all material available to users (ideally with responsibility for updating dispersed amongst libraries/hubs, so that it is a small continual task, rather than one large one which then needs separate financial support)

- An up-to-date register of how and where stock is available, i.e. directly, only via a library etc

- Ensure stock is added to in line with users' needs, including repertoire, number of copies or sets etc. (so continuous investment is needed, albeit if there is greater sharing nationally, this could be targeted and cost-efficient)

- Ensure stock is monitored for condition and renewed as necessary (again facilitated by pooling and coordination of resources)

- Make advice available to users – online, via email and telephone, from specialist staff

- Explore other services a music library is or could be providing, e.g. reference materials, promotion of groups, meeting/performance space, chamber music/individual musicians' needs

- Provide training/information to library staff on:
- Music (including, for instance, highly acclaimed training from IAML)
- Promotion/marketing
- Current and potential users

- Provide training/information to users on:
- Use of online resources/technical support and issues
- Where to find music/current providers (e.g. resources provided by Making Music)

Created by Making Music, IAML, Music Libraries Trust
March 2022