Music Research in the Digital Age: IAML-IMS Plenary Session

Remarks: Virginia Danielson

The View of a Librarian

I would like to put three points on the table for our discussion that I think advance digital research in general. I speak from my years as a music librarian at a music research library, but also from my more general position as a library director at a research university.

- First, the importance of close collaboration among librarians and faculty, which is simply key to making anything work.

- Second, the advancement of academic technology as a key enterprise in our institutions and the desirability of locating this enterprise in the library.

- And third, the development and location of centers for digital scholarship and how we might all work together on these.

For about twenty years now, the role of librarians has involved teaching students and often faculty alike what online resources are available for any given issue, how to use them and, increasingly, how to make them work together. Our resources come from anywhere extending from Wikipedia to licensed and restricted data. The librarian as computer jockey rather than "bookmarm", and the

librarian in the classroom rather than behind an imposing desk has become the norm as we confront the issues posed by this session: escalating costs, difficult licensing terms, poor sorting tools in online catalogues, and the rush to establish centres for "new" research.

For a long time now I have been paid to look for institutional answers to questions such as these and my responses reflect that inclination: what might work for most of us most of the time?

One key is collaboration: certainly librarians have been participants in the research process for hundreds of years and I tend to think that this closeness of librarians to faculty is particularly characteristic in music libraries. However, in our current situation it is the only practical way forward. If a librarian understands the research interests of faculty, it will be easy to follow the students' and to tailor expensive products to a constituencies' real needs. For this to happen, librarians need to be recognized and comfortable presences in the research community. I would argue that they do not work in libraries so much as in faculty offices, seminar rooms, student-interest groups, and other intellectual gatherings. It is the knowledge, usually acquired in chance conversations, that guides us through our work together: it is one thing for me to tell you that I am interested in Arabic song in the twentieth century, and quite another

to mention that I'm thinking of a new book on music during World War I that might trigger a connection in a librarians' mind with other World War I resources. It is these conversations we must foster in order to direct our resources and control our costs, and actually make use of what we have. Faculty have played a nominal role in the publishing process for many years. Now we are seeing some publishers, such as Oxford, bring faculty into the process of developing (and, one hopes, testing) online products, surely a good idea for the greatest good.

Academic technology needs to be directed by educational technologists with quick and developed understandings of the requirements for specialized research. The days are gone when a single IT department can manage everything from the Oracle products required in the finance office to ProTools for work with music. Efficient and effective licensing and having the equipment to best use the software is key to actually using online sources in creative ways. Educational designers are helpful to our students in producing their creative work. At New York University (NYU), these specialists are located in the library to great good effect. The software and hardware are as critical to research as are books and scores; specialists are readily available to help with both; and, in

general, we avoid the problems of technological silos and multiple, different licenses for the same software.

Finally, the matter of "centres" for digital research, long a favorite of engaged faculty who wish to highlight a research area, often interdisciplinary, and often engaging a diverse group of specialists. Like the old dedicated seminar rooms, centers can be truly special places. But they do draw down not only reserves of money, but also of space, perhaps even more valuable. In Abu Dhabi, we have put our Center for Digital Scholarship in the library, capitalising on where the equipment already exists and the technologists already work. Basic investments have already been made in a space that is already interdisciplinary. They can be augmented in new ways that can also be shared. This Center does not entirely supplant departmental labs, but has quickly become a faculty favorite for experimental, interdisciplinary work. While we have the luxury of a new building, it is worth noting that both NYU in New York and Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana chose retrofitted space in their main library for digital research centres, and the University of Calgary plans to house all new interdisciplinary work. The questions I am asking here are what can we share? what can we combine?, and how can we make use of what we already have in place to foster new work?