



*INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MUSIC LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES
AND DOCUMENTATION CENTRES (IAML)*

*ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DES BIBLIOTHEQUES, ARCHIVES
ET CENTRES DE DOCUMENTATION MUSICAUX (AIBM)*

*INTERNATIONALE VEREINIGUNG DER MUSIKBIBLIOTHEKEN,
MUSIKARKIVE UND MUSIKDOKUMENTATIONSCENTREN (IVMB)*

Music libraries in Armenia

Report of the IAML delegation, 9-15 October 2006

IAML delegation

Massimo Gentili-Tedeschi, IAML President

Ruth Hellen, IAML Vice-president, Chair of Outreach Committee

Local contacts

Gulo Nahatkyan, Director of the Armenian Musicological Library

Ruzan Tonoyan, Director of the National Children's Library

Introduction

This report has been prepared from our observations over five days of library visiting and we would like to thank all those who made our visit so enjoyable and informative. We are aware of some of the financial and other problems facing the development of libraries in Armenia, but feel that we must give a truthful account of our findings. Our recommendations are based on many years' experience in various library sectors.

Outline of the report

1. Scope of the visit
2. Overview of the general state of the libraries visited
3. Focus on the Armenian Musicological Library
4. Possible solutions and development

1. Visits

- Musicological Library (Tuesday, Friday)
- State Conservatory Library (Tuesday)
- Tchaikovsky Music School, Tuesday)
- National Children's Library (Wednesday, Saturday)
- City Library, Av. Isahakian (unofficial visit, Thursday)
- National Library, including the musical division (Thursday)

Meetings

- Spoke at the Librarians' Day hosted by the Minister of Culture and Youth
- Private meeting with the Minister, Mrs. Poghosyan (Tuesday)
- Head of National Library. Mr. Sargsisyan (Thursday)
- Round table with heads of institutions and intellectuals (Saturday)

2. General impression on the state of libraries visited

2.1 Staff

The staff we met were all extremely friendly and helpful. Many are specialists in their own field and are very knowledgeable. This means that library users can expect staff to understand their needs and enquiries.

Most staff, however, will need training and professional development opportunities to enable them to make the best choices as services develop and as access to information technology increases. Attention should also be paid to the morale of staff at all levels, as continuous under-funding of services can lead to a loss of job satisfaction.

Recommendation: Encourage all staff to take an interest in library developments throughout the world and enable music library staff to participate in IAML conferences and visits.

2.1 Buildings

Most of the buildings we visited unfortunately look more like offices or apartments than libraries. They are in urgent need of maintenance, renovation, or even replacement, to enable them to house modern services. In some cases staff are working in cramped and dangerous conditions which would not comply with European Health and Safety legislation.

Recommendation: Seek funds for a rolling programme of renovation or relocation of libraries.

2.2 Stocks (locally known as 'funds') and acquisitions

Books and other materials are generally old and very well used. The impression is that people are very enthusiastic about learning, literature and music, but there is a danger that out of date books will contain outdated information. Budgets, where they exist at all, are minimal and do not allow for properly planned stock selection. Many of the newer acquisitions are provided by donations.

In most libraries, the 'closed access' system is used, whereby readers select books from the catalogue. In the National Children's Library, however, the children are able to choose books and other materials themselves from open shelves.

Recommendation: As space becomes available, maybe through conversion of card catalogues, move towards a system of open access for readers to select at least the more popular and standard books for themselves.

2.3 Equipment and systems

All libraries have some PCs, but these are generally only for staff use. An exception is the public internet facility in the National Children's Library.

The number of PCs is insufficient and automated systems are generally not used for circulation (loans).

Network facilities are often insufficient and mostly rely on dial-up, or slow dsl.

In those libraries where automated cataloguing is taking place, the Aleph system is used. The choice may be questioned as maintenance and upgrading is surely expensive. We understand that some libraries use IRBIS64 for specialist cataloguing.

Recommendation: Consider other options for nation-wide automation software.

2.4 Reports on specific libraries

National Children's Library

The concept of a national children's library was unfamiliar to us, but we were impressed with the services and organisation of the library, with the relatively good conditions and with the splendid staff.

There is a public internet service and IT teaching is available. The listening room contains facilities for playing CDs and DVDs as well as LPs.

Stocks of books and other material are “tired” and there is a need for constant new acquisitions.

Children using this library are the adult library users of the future, so the systems and services which they learn here should be continued into adult libraries.

National Library

The building appears, sadly, to be no longer fit for purpose as a 21st century library. Some renovation is taking place, but much more is needed.

There are some very interesting rare and historical books housed in a separate reading room. Extra storage space means that many of the more standard books are housed in better working conditions than in some other libraries, but the distance between the stacks and the reading areas is considerable.

The music division has a very difficult location on an upper floor. It appears to have minimal and outdated equipment and is in need of new acquisitions.

Only users over 18 are allowed to use the library and, as is normal with a national library, no loan facilities are provided. This is a problem for music, which has no language and age barriers, and must be available for loan in order to study and practise music.

Conservatory Library

Given the minimal acquisitions budget, this is a reasonable library for the use of the students and staff. There is a great need for modern scores and for music literature in German, French and English. In common with other libraries, some operations are rather old-fashioned (for example the closed access system). Catalogue automation is taking place. There seems to be little room for expansion.

Tchaikovsky Music School Library

The musical standards in this school are very high. It is a pity, therefore, that the library has to rely on donations from friends and teachers to increase its stock. There are no recordings to help students learn about performance practice.

City Library

As our visit here was unofficial and unannounced, it would not be fair to draw definite conclusions. The appearance and arrangement of the interior, however, is in line with our general comments above. If, as it appeared, no lift (elevator) is available, people with disabilities are prohibited from making full use of the services. In spite of our unexpected arrival, staff were very helpful and welcoming, which indicates a willingness to provide as good a service as possible within the circumstances.

3. Armenian Musicological Library

3.1 Building

This library, in two separate spaces on the ground floor of an apartment building, is in an extremely bad physical condition. The lack of space means that stock is housed in cramped conditions, with shelving stacked far higher than is safe. Staff therefore work in hazardous conditions. It is astonishing that the library can function at all, thanks to staff doing the best they can in such circumstances. The conditions (including damp) are damaging the stock, therefore there is a high risk of cultural heritage being lost. We urge a speedy solution to this problem.

3.2 Holdings

Much of the stock is historical and very interesting. Most of it, however, is kept in poor conditions. The acquisitions budget is minimal. Several collections of donated material have been identified in various countries, but we question the wisdom of sending new items while there is no space for expansion and when storage conditions are so bad.

3.3 Staff

The staff members are knowledgeable and enthusiastic; this is of great value to library users, particularly for music.

Catalogue cards are still produced by handwriting on paper. This is an example of staff doing their best to solve the problems with in-house, mostly artisan, solutions.

3.4 Users

In common with all music libraries, users are of any age. They range from scholars to students, professionals and amateurs.

A loan service is provided; this is vital to enable practising and performance as well as home study.

3.5 Equipment

A small number of PCs is available, but there is no local network and internet access relies on dial-up connections. There is no computerised catalogue or circulation system.

Listening equipment is minimal and generally very old.

Staff who repair and restore books have to use old and sometimes home-made equipment. A grant for new equipment was withdrawn because of the poor condition of the library. If a national centre for restoration of all library materials were to be established, the library could make use of this for some items. There is, however, still a need for some in-house restoration to take place, particularly for simpler repairs. Music materials are often needed at short notice so sending more popular items away for restoration may make them unavailable for too long.

4. Potential for development

This library is almost unique. As well as serving its users, it serves as a methodical centre for the music departments in all libraries and this function will be increased as the library develops further. The library could play an important role in the documentation of musical Armenia in the following ways:

- Create a register of Armenian music libraries and music collections
- Establish as a centre for the national catalogue of music, linked to RISM (Répertoire International des Sources Musicales).
- Establish as a national office for RILM (Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale)
- Create an additional function as a music documentation centre (MIC) for contemporary Armenian music
- Develop as a centre supporting music education. For example, a publishing facility, linked to the State Order, could be established to produce up to date educational material in Armenian, as most material in libraries is in Russian and very old.
- Play a role in the international arena, representing Armenia as an ambassador in the musical world

Premises

The library urgently needs new premises as any significant development is impossible in the current space. There are three possible options:

- a. Stay in the same building
- b. Move to another building
- c. Merge with another library

We believe that solving this problem should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Youth. A location must be chosen, deadlines and a starting date set out, and funds raised. In considering these three options, the third (c) is only included because the possibility was mentioned by the Minister.

a. Stay in the same building

One advantage is that users will continue going to the same place. This will, however, not attract new users. If the service is better, users will follow the library. We understand that an expansion option has been proposed. Unfortunately, the space proposed will do no more than alleviate the seriously overcrowded conditions for the current stock. It will give no room for expansion and therefore donations from abroad will find no space. The expansion will also make road access to the library more cramped.

The current space is split into two unconnected areas. Physical continuity is important, so if the library is to stay in its current location consideration should be given to making the whole ground floor of the building available.

The general condition of the whole apartment building must be resolved to avoid problems in the future. Consideration must also be given to the temporary relocation and continuation of the service during what must be extensive and long-term renovation.

b. Move to a new building (recommended solution)

Advantages:

- The space can be completely prepared according to the needs of the library before moving the stock.
- Services can be presented in a new way.
- New services can be better developed.
- The identity of the library is preserved.
- Staff and public have a safer environment without cramped and high shelving.

Requirements:

- Enough space for safe stock storage and expansion
- Flexible space to provide better conditions for staff and users
- Good light, cabling, IT

Accessibility:

- Central, or easy with public transport
- Car parking
- Access for disabled people (lifts, ramps etc)

We understand that a building has been identified which would make far more space available. Yet another option could be to construct a new, purpose-built library, perhaps nearer the centre of the city; the costs may not be significantly greater than reconstruction of an existing building and would enhance both the services and the reputation of the Ministry.

Depending on the location and the cost, the current premises could perhaps continue to offer a lending service as a branch of the Musicological Library.

c. Merge with another library

Advantages:

- Partial sharing of costs for acquisitions procedures and buildings maintenance. However, cost-sharing of electronic resources no longer needs to rely on libraries being in the same building, as consortium negotiations based on all the libraries in one country are now possible.
- Possible expansion of roles and users if two “complementary” libraries are merged.
- Possibility of shared events and reading spaces.

Issues:

- All the other libraries work differently and provide services for different user groups.
- There would be a possible loss of identity for each of the libraries, with the problems of managing and compatibility of missions, needs and rules for users.
- All libraries need better premises, so a much larger new space will need to be found.

This solution, therefore, is not recommended.

Conclusions

The Armenian Musicological Library is unique in Armenia and there are few similar libraries in other countries. It should act as an example of good practice in other countries within and outside the region. Its role must be preserved and developed if the Armenian musical heritage is to be preserved and made more accessible. We believe that the only way to achieve these aims is to preserve the library as an independent institution and to ensure that its building, location and facilities are tailored to providing up to date, long-term specialist services.

IAML contribution

IAML is ready to give help and advice by:

- helping fundraising through letters of support for bidding processes
- supporting training of music librarians in our own countries or in Armenia, remotely or locally, if funding and facilities are provided
- maintaining contacts with music librarians in Armenia
- facilitating donations of books, music scores and journals from other member countries, as funds allow

Useful links

<http://www.ifla.org/VII/s8/annual/cr02-arm.htm> (IFLA report on Armenia libraries, 2002)

http://www.farusa.org/newsevents_newsroom.asp?p=18 (Conservatory library funding)

*Massimo Gentili-Tedeschi & Ruth Hellen
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