



Position statement on music in archives

Music is a universal language, an essential part of being human. Music benefits all of us. A world without music would be both culturally and economically poorer.

Music libraries, archives and documentation centres play a crucial role in fulfilling humanity's need for music, yet their services are often under threat.

Music archives document not only musical works, but cover all cultural aspects of music. They document how music informs the social and cultural lives of people, both past and present.

Music archives exist in many different types of library. They can be part of national libraries, research libraries or academic and public libraries, as well as museums, performing arts organisations such as orchestras or opera companies, broadcasting companies or documentation centres. Personal archives are often created by individuals over the course of a lifetime and later acquired by institutions or trusts. The archives of performing arts companies record their day to day activity; they are a significant part of the companies' heritage and history, and play an important role in supporting both their current activities and future planning.

Music archives preserve a range of documents. These might typically include notated music, stage direction scores, audio-visual recordings of performances, photographs, correspondence or sketches, as well as items like notebooks, concert programmes, lecture notes, newspaper cuttings and other such ephemera. These might well exist in a range of formats, both physical and digital, with some requiring specific equipment to enable access.

The holdings of music archives are highly specialised and require subject knowledge and musical as well as archival skills.

Unfortunately, it is often the case that archival materials relating to music can be found in a context where subject expertise is minimal or lacking, or, conversely, where subject expertise exists without concomitant archival skills.

The wide range of possible formats forms a particular challenge in resourcing and making archival collections accessible. Predominantly print- or text-based environments could, for example, struggle to find resources to deal with sound recordings and notated music, in particular their physical and digital preservation.

Music holds a unique position in an archival context. It is a language with its own system of notation and publication formats which contribute to realising music in

performance. Every stage of the process which brings music to life generates many types of resources that presuppose appropriate archival processing. Music expertise enhances quality of service, facilitates correct appraisal, and ensures more efficient access to the resources through the selection of appropriate metadata.

Archival expertise is fundamental to the choice of correct preservation policies for the resources from the moment of their creation.

An ideal balance of music and archival expertise increases the impact of music archives in the context of the collection policy and mission statement of a library and the institution within which it is housed, and contributes to the realisation of the archives' research potential.

“Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning”. (Universal Declaration on Archives, adopted at the General Assembly of ICA Oslo, September 2010).