



# Music expertise and research:

## Position statement on music in research libraries

Throughout human history, music has played a key role in all aspects and stages of life. Musical expression is part of what it is to be human. The International Music Council has recognised this and advocates access to music for all through the formulation of [5 Music Rights](#).

Music Research Libraries make their own specific contribution to implementing these rights; through their services, collections and outreach, music research libraries are fundamental in supporting learning musical languages and skills and creating a sound foundation through access to information.

Music forms part of a wider socio-economic framework. Music education and research are key first steps in ensuring the importance of music is recognised. The impact of music on all aspects of our lives, if duly recognized, will ensure music continues to lead to great achievements, including in areas as wide ranging as economic benefits, health and communication.

Research libraries often cover a range of subjects, including science as well as arts, humanities and social sciences. Various subject strengths come together to create key repositories of human knowledge and information. Music is an integral part of this, yet providing music resources comes with its own specific knowledge requirements. The challenge is that when music is perceived as a minority or niche subject, rather than one of universal relevance, it may be a struggle to identify adequate resourcing. There is a risk that in a world of working across subjects and the development of digital technologies, music expertise is overlooked in creating new structures.

Music holds a unique position in the library context, as it is a language with its own notation system and its own forms of publication. Whether manuscript, print, or digital, notated music comes with its own specific characteristics. Music sources, both notated and audiovisual, have in common that the correct identification of works across a wide range of publishing formats is key and requires particularly specialised creation of metadata in order to enable users to retrieve the information and resources they require.

It is the role of the music specialist to ensure all levels of musical sources and resources about music are made available to all levels of library users with differing levels of information retrieval skills. Subject specific teaching of information literacy is therefore key.

In addition to the ability to read music and having a good understanding of genres, repertoire and musical practices across the world, skills required of the music information specialist include a thorough understanding of publication patterns and rights issues, teaching skills and the ability to advice on requirements of technical information retrieval systems. A music

specialist needs to be able to work with archival and manuscript as well as published materials. An understanding of key concepts of physical as well as digital conservation and preservation requirements is essential to ensure musical heritage is safe and available to current and future users.

The way musical content is produced and collected and heritage is being created has changed significantly over the past decades. In a world where notated music repertoire is increasingly available as print on demand or hire only and where there is a steep rise of self-publication either in print or online only, research libraries have to rise to the challenge of developing new ways of fulfilling their core role of safeguarding musical world heritage in a non for profit research context. The same applies to streaming audio resources, which come with challenging licensing issues that don't sit well with the mission to collect and preserve.

Looking ahead there are so many opportunities for music information specialists to make a real impact and to provide first class services to musicians, to the research community and to our wider society.

“I think the health of our civilization, the depth of our awareness about the underpinnings of our culture and our concern for the future can all be tested by how well we support our libraries.” —Carl Sagan

“There is nothing more difficult than talking about music” - Camille Saint-Saëns