

# **Future provision of recorded music in public libraries Position statement**

## **International Association of Music Libraries (UK & Ireland)**

IAML(UK & Irl) exists to represent and promote the interests of music librarians, libraries and their users, music-related archives and music information providers throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland.

Music has a key place in today's society with 73% of the population listening to music at least once a week (as compared with 77% who enjoy leisure reading and 68% who surf the internet)<sup>1</sup>. Music can speak to all cultures regardless of verbal understanding; listening to it is one of the most accessible and emotionally powerful of activities that appeals to and is enjoyed by all sections of society.

Further, music is immensely valuable in the broadest of educational senses, in that it has its own unique and universal language that can cross cultural, educational and language barriers. The skills developed in doing so have been proved to benefit other aspects of learning, both by children and adults. The diversity of our multicultural society and traditions is reflected in a myriad of musical styles. Giving access to this range of material helps engender communication and understanding across all boundaries. If listeners are stimulated to learn and perform music itself then there are huge potential benefits in developing further social skills and personal confidence. Provision of recorded music through music libraries undoubtedly provides a stimulus to the retail industry which is incredibly important to commerce. The economic returns to the UK from the music industry are around £5bn a year (2008)<sup>2</sup>.

The essence of music is the musical sounds themselves and it is recorded music that captures these sounds. As such, IAML (UK & Irl) strongly recommends the continued provision of music audio materials forming part of the core cultural offer provided by libraries. Public libraries support well-being, spread knowledge, contribute to learning and skills and help to foster identity, community and a sense of place for people of all ages, backgrounds and cultures. The provision of recorded music as part of the library service contributes to these. Public libraries must be able to continue to provide access to a broad range of good quality music recordings in the most appropriate format. Recorded music must not be regarded as primarily a source of income that can be abandoned when the income stream falls. Its place within a library collection must be on the basis of its cultural and educational value rather than the economic return it may provide.

Technological change is bringing new challenges in library service provision, not least in the field of access to music materials. The explosion in online access via streamed and downloaded music files through providers such as Naxos and Alexander Street Press provides exciting new possibilities of making recordings available to music lovers. One can envisage a future where online access becomes the main means of listening to music, but until then, it is important that existing collections in traditional formats such as CD are maintained in order to support both the continuous public need and appetite for material which is so heavily used and enjoyed and the breadth and depth of choice characteristic of all good collections. These collections are a vital reminder that the best features of the traditional service (eg

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<sup>1</sup> Office of National Statistics: Lifestyle statistics 2007/08:Gender <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=1659&Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=326> (viewed 13 January 2011)

<sup>2</sup> Keynote Market Research Report: Music Industry 2010). <http://www.keynote.co.uk/market-intelligence/view/product/2324/music-industry/chapter/3/industry-overview> (viewed 13 January 2011)

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choice of performance, quality of recording, access to sleeve notes) must not be lost with technological change.

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Music librarians have the expertise to select appropriate collection items and are in touch with users' needs so are ideally placed to help shape the development of future services. IAML (UK&Irl) believes it is important that during these changing times, the quality of the public library service is maintained with properly managed CD collections, but looks forward to working with the industry in the formation of new access and business models. Public library music audio services of the future must continue to play the important role that they do at present in support of the cultural, educational and economic life of the nation.