

## **Music for performance: materials in public libraries**

In the UK there are many performing musical groups – choirs, choral societies, orchestras, bands etc. Many of these provide opportunities for a vast number of people to be involved in amateur music-making. Those musical rehearsals and performances enrich both the lives of the performers and those of the communities where these activities take place. Groups might have from 20 to 100 or more participants whilst some music festivals involve many hundreds of performers. Over a typical year these groups will perform for audiences of many thousands.

These musicians need sheet music in the form of sets of vocal scores and orchestral parts, which are expensive. An orchestral set can cost hundreds of pounds to buy, or even to hire from the publishers, and 80 copies of say, a carol book for a choral society, might cost more than £1,000. Amateur musical groups will have limited funds, raised mainly from subscriptions paid by their members.

Performance material from public libraries is essential for amateur music-making, but its importance isn't limited to that. Today's music professionals were yesterday's amateurs and students. Future music-making at all levels therefore depends on the provision of music library resources and services today.

### **The rôle of public libraries**

Many performance groups obtain the copies they need from the public library system, which keeps collections of performance sets in various locations. This material is listed in *Encore!*, a freely available web-based catalogue set up and maintained by the International Association of Music Libraries (IAML(UK&Irl)). Although it is often the case that libraries make a charge for the loan of performance sets, this charge is much more manageable for the musical ensemble than the alternatives. Without this support from public library resources music-making within local communities would not be possible and many amateur music organisations simply would not be able to survive.

Many library services are having to make staffing cuts, particularly in back-office areas, and in specialist posts, such as music, where the cut is supposed to have minimal impact. The loan of performance sets may well be regarded by some as 'back-office' work that requires no specialist knowledge, yet all aspects of managing a library of musical performance material requires expertise in the material, the repertory, and the needs of users. The value of such assistance and expertise is widely recognised. The impact of that expertise can be enormous in terms of the benefit to hundreds of performers and thousands in the audience.

Inter-library loan (ILL) is widely used for these performance sets. Indeed, by volume this material is probably now the largest element of the ILL service. Because of this network of interlending, cuts in the service in one area may have implications elsewhere: for example, musicians in Bristol might suffer a poorer service if music resources have been cut in, say, Harrow, Somerset, Yorkshire or Hertfordshire.

### **Resources for young musicians**

Many of our young musicians enter the world of music-making as amateurs. They may play in school orchestras or sing in school choirs, and progress to county-wide ensembles, and other local groups. These are the experiences which lead the best of them to become the next generation of professional musicians. The National Plan for Music Education, published in November 2011, includes the following benchmarks: Key Stages 1, 2, 3 & 4: "Performance opportunities available within individual schools (ideally at least once per term) and jointly for clusters of schools for all pupils (ideally at least once per year)"

Key Stages 2 & 3: “Performance/sharing opportunities available through out of school and/or informal routes”.

The new music education hubs will “have the potential to contribute, for example by engaging children in regional orchestras, bands, groups or choirs”. They will “be able to deliver an offer to children that reaches beyond school boundaries and draws in the expertise of a range of education and arts partners, such as local orchestras, ensembles, charities and other music groups”.

These ensembles will need performance sets. While it is true that some authorities’ music services have their own music collections, they are still likely to need to draw on the resources of the public library collections of performance sets. Cutbacks in educational resources make public library music set provision even more vital.

### **Promoting our cultural heritage**

Performance groups in our cities, towns and villages are an essential element in the culture and well-being of society – particularly in times of economic stress, enabling:

- Social cohesion, social interaction and community bonding.
- Opportunities for children and young adults to get involved in local music-making.
- A chance for people of all ages to develop their potential.
- The opportunity to introduce young people to our rich cultural heritage.

A performance by a local choir or orchestra has the potential to touch a very large number of people as audience – for instance, a choir of 100 often performs to an audience of 500 or more – thereby enabling a large number of people to be moved by ‘live’ music.

### **Drama provision**

We must not forget this important area of cultural provision. Many library services have ‘Music and Drama’ collections with the drama element of the collections benefiting from the skills base of staff in their management and exploitation. As with music materials, play sets have a significant place in the cultural life of the local community and this provision is particularly important in assisting young people in gaining life-skills such as self-confidence, communication, interpersonal and team-building. Like music, community drama is a vital element in our shared cultural heritage.

### **What is needed?**

When resources are scarce there is an ever greater need to develop the most cost-effective means of developing a national network of lending for music performance materials, building on the various collaborative regional schemes that already support this vital part of our cultural life. IAML has made a huge contribution towards this in initiating *Encore!* Rather than close services down, then, this is an opportunity to develop facilities such as *Encore!* into a national infrastructure that provides access to music materials where they are needed, regardless of where they are held. Web-based catalogues, open to all, and electronic communication offer great opportunities to help do this. No single library may have a duty to lead on this, but all libraries have a duty to collaborate and bring this about.