

Lost, lost forever. Australia's music and dance community collections

I am going to focus mainly on community heritage collections, because that is the area in which I work. I would think that most of us who are currently working in the national or state libraries would be focusing almost exclusively on the heritage music of our particular communities, at this particular point in the history of music library collections.

We simply cannot collect everything. That is the premise from which I am starting. Those of us who work with heritage collections have to work out for ourselves what to collect and what not to collect, and we need to collect as much culturally valuable material as we can, always carefully prioritizing.

As far as Queenslandiana is concerned, State Library of Queensland has taken a significant step towards ensuring that music and dance is not lost forever. At the end of 2011 I was recruited into the Heritage Collections part of the library, as Queensland Music Coordinator – sharing the role with a colleague. We are the first music specialist librarians to work in this crucial area which focuses on collecting original, print, electronic, audio and video Queenslandiana and receives the most generous funding – alongside reduced funding for the general collection. Our job is to collect, describe, preserve, and make safely accessible to the public, the history and culture of music of Queensland. I have been in this job now for two and a half years, having moved from the general music collection, which I had been responsible for, more or less, from its beginning in 1984.

I **source** Queensland music materials in all formats for the collection. Of course the simplest way to do this is by regularly perusing relevant publishers, suppliers, and dealers lists. This is the usual way we spend our budget. It involves creating and maintaining communication channels with all suppliers and dealers in the field, as well as with the wider music community. From the wider music community we frequently source valuable material as donations. In fact, we actively seek these donations. We endeavour to acquire new material as it comes out, as comprehensively as possible, but equally important for us as new players in this archival area, is to try also to fill the huge gaps from the past by collecting retrospectively as comprehensively as possible.

We encourage communication in a few ways. I have found that blogging on the library website asking for material in a particular area works well. Organizing music related speakers for events like A Night in the JOL also works well. A Night in the JOL is a public event incorporating guest presentations, question time and a small focused exhibition which provides a good opportunity for networking. We also advertise our collecting drive by putting on performances of our material for the public.

Soon after the restructure that created our new Queensland music role, the library decided that the major exhibition for the following year 2013 should be a music exhibition. This would raise our profile in the music community and advertise and promote our new Queensland music focus. We decided that Queensland bands would be a good choice as it would enable us to incorporate all the different types of bands including rock bands etc. This was a total library exhibition using all the exhibition spaces, and running a huge program of performances, lectures, master classes and educational events. The whole thing was very effective. It hugely expanded our knowledge of our community – particularly the rock and pop community - and its awareness of us.

It still remains a challenge, though, to collect contemporary popular music in an informed way, knowing what to select and what to reject, to truly reflect its place in today's society. We collect, for preference, original material, and if that's not available, the original publishing intention format, whatever that is. We also recommend web sites for inclusion in Pandora.

We also **create** some material for ourselves. During the exhibition an area was set aside for members of the public to record their own short digital stories relating to music. We ourselves conducted several oral history interviews with members of various different types of bands. Most of these interviews resulted in marvellous collections of material coming to us as donations. Since the exhibition we have concentrated mainly on classical musicians, and I have recently produced oral history packages with the Brisbane composer, Betty Beath, and prolific composer Colin Brumby. Renewing my association with Colin Brumby during the oral history process has had a brilliant outcome as he has decided to donate all his manuscripts to us.

We have already produced one recording of Queensland parlour type songs out of copyright which have never been recorded previously – as a joint initiative with Queensland conservatorium. There is interest on both sides in making another recording.

There are many **acquisition** processes that this material goes through to ensure that these collections are not lost to future generations.

We try to negotiate a suitable licence with the donor while we are assessing a collection for acquisition, and before we acquire it. It is important that we negotiate a suitable licence at this stage to ensure that we can use the material for our library purposes. These licences become a type of contract through jointly signing a Deed of Gift form or a Consent and Release form. We usually acquire non-exclusive rights to use material for library purposes, but the ultimate type of licence we really seek is re-assignment of copyright to the library – which is rarely achieved, sadly, but sometimes is granted.

When second hand material is received by the library it immediately goes through **Quarantine** to test for bugs and mould and other types of damage. After Quarantine, it goes to either Preservation Services to have its condition strengthened and corrected, or straight to cataloguing, or, if it is original material, comes to us for boxing or enveloping and describing. The archival forms of housing – mylar, envelopes and boxes - in which we have to house delicate original materials are very expensive, and reasonable compromises are sometimes necessarily made, but these compromises do threaten the long term survival of the materials they house.

Conservation work is frequently required to strengthen fragile hard copy items. Of course all our collections are housed ideally in optimal conditions for their long term preservation. Sometimes, depending on the copyright situation, items are recommended for digitization, but the rate of digitization is not keeping up with eligible items. Very few of our sound recordings are yet converted to Broadcast WAVE files, mainly due to staff and funding inadequacies.

For all our energetic efforts to acquire collections before they disappear, we also have to **describe** them if they are collections of original materials. If they are printed materials we pass them on to be catalogued by our music cataloguer. If they are original materials we have to describe them ourselves, using archival principles. In this way we create finding aids which help researchers to find the exact material they are searching for. We make these finding aids as complete as is appropriate for the material. The finding aids always include relevant biographical information and the provenance of the item as completely as we can achieve. If we do not adequately describe our material it might as well be lost, albeit in a public collecting environment. A collection of original materials might contain a variety of materials including letters, clippings, certificates, music scores, recordings in a variety of formats, etc. We use the EAD (Encoded Archival Description) framework to do either a series, item or box listing depending on the nature of the material.

It is important also to **promote** our collections. We attend as many music events, festivals and conferences as possible, which is always not enough. The classical music world is easier to monitor than the pop/rock world – or jazz, or country music, or folk music etc, - because most events are advertised in the mainstream media.

Also, we encourage high profile musicians and researchers to work with our collections. For instance Robert Forster from The Go - Betweens is working on one of our collections at the moment – finding photos for his forthcoming book on the Go - Betweens being published in London shortly. The creator, who donated this photograph collection to us, is one of the ones who actually reassigned copyright to the State Library – so it's simpler for Robert to use these photographs in his book, as the number of permissions he must acquire is reduced. As he searches for what he wants, he is identifying the people in all the photos. These researchers often reveal treasures amongst our collections which have been overlooked at the point of entry going back over the library's history of over one hundred years. We are then able to describe these collections more fully through our catalogue and website, so that future researchers have more thorough access to our collections. Discovery by researchers usually occurs when they are working on the original materials collections. It also prevents important information being lost as time passes. We encourage visiting researchers to blog about our material also. They are encouraged to make contributions to the John Oxley blog. This is a way we hope to enlarge and develop our community of interest around us. It has been proven to encourage further offers of valuable material for the collection.

We present frequent public programs highlighting parts of the collection, as well. We present concerts, lectures, interactive panel discussions, and other programs to introduce the public to the collections, but also to spread the word about the importance of preserving our cultural heritage. Donations are frequently offered to us after these events.

We need, as regularly and frequently as possible to appear on radio and television programs to talk about the importance of what we are doing, and we need to encourage reporters to write about us.

Challenges:

New Queensland publications, including sound recordings, are supposed to come to the library via **legal deposit**. That sounds good and straight forward, but in fact it rarely is like that. It requires constant monitoring and chasing up, and necessitates a constant vigil to hunt down new publishers and record producers, as the music business is constantly evolving and changing and includes a large number of small players. Often publishers that have been identified and contacted to set up legal deposit, simply do not comply with the provisions, or abandon their commitment after a short time. What about electronic legal deposit? I think there are already moves afoot to change the Copyright Act to allow legal deposit of electronic materials for the National Library, but I think this is currently not happening. In Queensland the Act already allows for legal deposit of electronic materials. It does not mention born digital materials but we think the wording allows us to collect born digital materials as legal deposit also. However, so far we have not had the resources to set up the necessary structures to harvest born digital music materials in this way. It remains an ambition. However, we need to commit to acquiring the material now, one way or another, and with urgency, to avoid huge gaps in our documentary heritage in the future.

Another problem is the incomplete collection of **web sites**. We need a legal deposit web archive. At present web sites are selected for Pandora by library staff around Australia. Permissions are sought for all the sites, which is very time consuming, but

also a large number of sites, when approached for permission, do not respond. Is it really necessary to get permission to archive the free web? As it is we will be losing important sites forever. Every couple of years Pandora does a full collection of web sites ending with au. There is no collection of web pages not ending with au however, of which there are many important sites. In the couple of years between the full collection of web sites, many sites would be taken down. This represents a loss. Another point to remember is that Pandora, whilst not comprehensive does allow for public access, whereas the web crawl of the au domain, whilst being comprehensive, does not allow for public access due to copyright.

Preservation of heritage materials is not straight forward either. We are currently encouraged to make digital copies of everything and even to consider the digital copy to be the archival or preservation copy. The hard copy is often regarded as the access or backup copy now. Is this good for preservation? How long will digital files last? How about Broadcast WAVE files to which we are currently being encouraged to convert our analogue, and increasingly our digital sound recordings? Are we sure these formats will outlast the hard copies we are relegating to outdated duplicate status?

As I mentioned previously, most music libraries are still not collecting **born digital content** – neither scores nor recordings - mainly because it is hard to preserve and there are rights and file format issues. This does not mean we have got nothing. We probably all have some born digital content, such as scores, recordings, oral histories etc. But most libraries have not really embraced this type of collecting, and to collect contemporary music adequately, both scores and recordings, as they are produced, we need to work out effective strategies as soon as possible. We need to commit to digital collecting with urgency now to avoid huge gaps in our documentary heritage in the future. I think we are not engaging with the community enough to have effective two way information exchange. Having said that, I am sure we are all engaging with our music and dance communities to the best of our abilities, given the restraints put upon us.

Even libraries that have the money to copy their CDs and mp3s as Broadcast WAVE files for **preservation** (not access) are not faithfully reproducing the original version of the work, which, usually, is the one sought by heritage collecting institutions. The original version of the work is the Master File which most recording bodies will not give away. Libraries such as ours will then collect the original publishing intention. This is usually the CD or mp3 formats made from the master file for sale to libraries and elsewhere, but these formats both suffer loss from the original due to compression. Also mp3s have different codexes. There are lots of them and probably no institutions would have the technology to be able to preserve all of them. Also migration of files is still not reliable. Reliable digital preservation is still fluid and remains an issue. Consequently we need to keep and preserve the hard copy also. These CDs and mp3s might then be copied as Broadcast WAVE files for preservation, whilst acknowledging that this is still a fluid area. The Broadcast WAVE file copy cannot be used for access due to copyright protection, which means that the hard copies must be kept also for access.

What about collecting the large amount of local material which comes out on Utube, Twitter and Facebook? State Library of Queensland has an agreement with a few people like local politicians, the premier, certain Brisbane City Council projects etc to collect their tweets. Likewise with Utube we have certain permissions, but not with Facebook. I do not think anyone in Australia would have such permissions from Facebook.

A current trend, which I can see as a threat to the long term availability of our collections, and ultimately to the loss of some of our collection material, is the restructuring which is taking place in all our libraries at the moment, which has implications for the **security** of our valuable collections. We have situations where general staff are replacing specialist staff in providing access to valuable heritage collections in reading rooms. The staffing of these reading rooms is being increasingly reduced to reduce costs. Situations are arising where one staff member is in charge of a large reading room with inadequate lines of vision. This staff member is often required to leave the desk area – normally adjacent to the door – to assist people on a continuing basis throughout the shift. Heritage, rare and valuable items are usually not stamped and tattle taped, and can walk very easily. This material is in danger of loss if it is accessed in inadequately staffed reading rooms. This needs intelligent monitoring and structuring. It is actually illegal to neglect these collections, and inadequate care contravenes the relevant acts. Just as an example, the Libraries Act 1988 (Qld) states that the Library Board is to “control, maintain and manage the State Library to enhance, arrange and preserve the library, archival, and other resources held by it and to exercise administrative control over access to the resources”. Heritage collections are usually worth a huge amount of public money, and library administrators have a duty of care to look after them properly. There is probably a good case for locked reading rooms when it comes to heritage materials, with staff responsible for activating a door release button, when all the issued material is returned.

There is also a good case for **access** by reader’s ticket only. Collection items can also be lost simply through miss-shelving – not usually by library staff, but often by readers with access to open access material. Should valuable heritage materials be available on open access? This is not only a problem with open access material. It is a greater problem with flimsy items of original material. If they get put back in a wrong box, the item can be virtually permanently lost. It is important to allocate one item at a time, which is not always practicable. Certainly one box at a time is critical and often staff time is required to guarantee that items are in their assigned place after use, and not lost to future researchers.

However, obviously, the material we collect has better hope of long term survival than the material we fail to connect with. How do we get the message out around the country that we need to preserve our cultural heritage? Maybe there needs to be a cultural material register of some kind where materials held in private collections are listed – even perhaps treated, organized, catalogued and described by library’s such as the National and state libraries, but left in private hands if the owners so wish. Maybe eventual ownership might be controlled through wills. Material is currently sometimes willed to us rather than donated at the time. This is not a fool-proof system however. A very well known jazz musician and historian living in Brisbane promised us his substantial and culturally valuable archive containing all sorts of material relating to his long career in jazz. It contained posters, flyers, programs, recordings, newspaper clippings, as well as letters and other personal material. He chose to will it to us rather than give it to us there and then, and informed us that it was his intention to leave his collection to the State Library in his will. Then, some time later, unexpectedly, he had a heart attack and died. We decided to leave the family to grieve for a month before contacting them about the collection. When we did contact them we found that the family had dispersed the collection to anyone and everyone interested and there were only some books left which were not even about the local jazz scene. He had not got around to putting it in his will, even though that was his intention. I felt sorry about it not only because the collection was lost to researchers of the future, but it was also dispersed against his wishes.

So how can we guarantee the long term survival of valuable heritage materials in private collections? We know that there are valuable materials held by associations, historical societies, galleries, and museums, as well as in private homes. This is part of what is known as the distributed national collection. In Queensland, the State Library supports the network in different ways, realizing the importance of local collections. To encourage them, we do a lot of training in how to handle heritage collections properly - from sourcing important local materials, digitizing them, and making them accessible - and in how to use social media such as Facebook, Flickr, Twitter and blogs, to advertise their material. Usually when we offer these training packages in regional areas, fifteen to twenty people enrol. In Queensland a couple of years ago, Museum Development Officers started going to collections across the state - into galleries, museums and some libraries - asking what their collections hold, what the key themes are, and the actual number of items. Their aim was to produce a significance statement of heritage collections. It was also to be a mapping exercise of the heritage sector. The library wanted to work with the MDOs to produce a map - based on Google Maps - of all the heritage collections in Queensland, attached to their location. However, the MDOs were uninterested in this, and now their funding is likely to be discontinued anyway, so the project has stalled. However, the State Library is providing funding for outside organizations to digitize their heritage materials. This funding is not theme based. It covers everything. We have encouraged a collective understanding of collections, but this has not produced a long term sustainable union catalogue idea. Through all these processes, I'm unaware of any music heritage collections out there in Queensland. I know there are some. Could the libraries, museums, galleries and associations out there perhaps enter their material directly into Trove? We're investigating this idea now.

I know there are small collections out there, such as the Sunshine Coast Jazz Society collection which we already hold. This collection is just a box of flyers, posters etc - with some membership lists. However, I just do not have enough time to source collections in regional areas. I am pretty sure there would be many little collections like this of valuable heritage material which is at risk right now of being lost forever.

Currently we are working together with the Sunshine Coast Council to analyse the role public libraries and councils can play in collecting heritage materials in their regions, by working with local independent groups and trying to develop actual strategies. Our practical view is that heritage material of interest should be collected locally. But this is not happening, which is a problem. So efforts are being made to ensure the long term survival of these valuable materials, but so far they have not been successful.

Another great problem in this electronic age is collecting **material of significance** as it is being produced, and filtering out the less desirable. For us we collect what is popular - because these items have significance for cultural memory. What music do people remember at key moments in their lives? For most people this is the popular music of the day - and the actual quality of the music has little relevance in this context. We tend to acquire recordings that make it into the biggest and most patronised record shops, as well as a couple of iconic shops that specialize in independents. We also buy recordings from local recording studios which have their own labels, as we use the expertise of the staff in these studios as a sort of selection process. Given that they are experts in their area, we believe that what they choose to record has merit and that they will choose not to record uninteresting material which might not sell. This is the best we can do - given our staffing level.

We use a very broad brush in collecting Queensland classical music also. Mostly, we buy comprehensively from AMC, Wirrapang and a few specialized and self-publishers. We also peruse the sales catalogues of some second hand dealers.

The picture is not rosy for general non-heritage music and dance collections held in Australian music libraries. In fact it is very grim. My understanding is that libraries are being asked to focus more and more, even to the point of exclusively, on the music from their local area/state, and that funding of general music collections has been reduced to very minimal – in terms of both materials being acquired and staffing levels. Music materials have been, and continue to be, weeded from library collections, particularly if they are not catalogued and if they are not displaying adequate use. Is it time to consider international collaborative collecting – or more simply at least national collaborative collecting - of general music materials? We do have collaborative collecting of heritage materials – through the State Library collections of statiana.

Are Australia's music and dance collections being lost forever? Some are, undoubtedly, despite our best efforts. We can only do the best we can. In this short presentation I hope at least that I have raised some points we need to think about.

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Some of the major collections we've acquired recently are:

- The Queensland Symphony Orchestra archive, including personal papers, letters {some very interesting in which members of the orchestra rate conductors) programs, flyers, sound recordings, photos etc.
- We also acquired the Letty Kats collection containing many music scores, personal papers, sound recordings, etc. Letty Kats wrote the music for the film A Town Like Alice. (show photo)

- Queensland Ballet collection containing photos, programs, flyers, letters etc from, mainly, the Charles Lisner years.(Forerunner to the Queensland Ballet)
- Kerry Smith collection containing a substantial recordings collection, photos, letters, certificates, contracts, programs, flyers from a teenage prodigy violinist who went on to have a national and international career as a concert violinist, and who was born and still lives and teaches in Brisbane.
- The Brisbane Folk History collection of folk music in Brisbane and surrounding regions since the 1960s.
- We have also acquired some marvellous collections from rock and pop musicians before, during, and after the Queensland Band Culture exhibition. These continue to be offered to us.
- The Dane Corey collection is a comprehensive collection of materials collected by a man who danced with a Brisbane amateur ballet company for many years. The Colin Brumby collection including manuscripts of his works, as well as computer printed works which have never been published. He's still writing about 4 works per week.
- The Queensland Ballet collection up to the end of the Charles Lisner years.
- Currently, I'm negotiating to collect the Queensland Youth Orchestra historical materials, compiled and collected by an historian who is writing the QYO history.

All of the collections I've just mentioned came to us as donations. Of course there are many more than this.