

# Is the CD dead?

## Compact disc collections in Public libraries:

**A talk prepared by Margaret Whittaker and presented at The International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres (IAML) (Australian Chapter) 2019 Conference held in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia from Wednesday 2 October – Friday 4 October, 2019 entitled **Beyond the Beat: Taking music libraries to our users****

It is a well know fact that music fuels the mind and as a result fuels our creativity. If Public Libraries are to take their role of freely giving people opportunities for personal creative development and as a result enrich society, the provision of music resources is essential.

**The IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto** <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s8/unesco/manif.htm> states :

*The primary purposes of the public library are to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure*

*Access to works of the imagination and knowledge is an important contribution to personal education and meaningful recreational activity*

*Funding for technology Public libraries must, whenever possible, make use of the new technologies to improve their services and provide new ones. This means a considerable investment in various kinds of electronic equipment, and a reliance on this equipment for the delivery of services.*

For at least the last decade it has been said that digital is the future of music and physical music is dead. Yes, CD sales have been falling for years, starting with the debut of the iPod , iTunes, and commercial streaming services in the early 2000s. However, statistics have proven the reality that sales of physical music on compact disc, have so far failed to be eclipsed by digital downloads or streaming in the way that many predicted.

Recent research has shown there is still demand for CDs by music fans that prefer to listen to a physical copy of their favourite albums without making the jump back into vinyl, which is experiencing a resurgence. They still like seeing the artwork and reading the brochure notes. Many are older listeners who prefer to load a CD on their player, car stereo or home-theatre systems. For the serious listener CDs are technologically superior to P3s/streaming audio in sound quality, which is why they prefer to use them.

At live concerts of all types of music, it has been my experience that, CD sales are alive and well as the queues of people waiting to buy to buy a memento of the performance are usually long. “Is it imperative to have a CD?” asks Dan Baker, marketing director for Disc Makers. “If you’re an independent artist, it kind of is.”

**ANNIE ZALESKI** a Cleveland-based journalist who writes regularly for The A.V. Club, and has also been published by Rolling Stone, Vulture, RBMA, Thrillist and Spin, says ...operating under the premise that streaming is now everyone's default illustrates a big (and classist) presumption: that everyone can access or pay for streaming service subscriptions. Reliable and affordable broadband internet access, which is necessary to have steady access to streaming platforms, still isn't available in many rural areas. A January 2018 Rolling Stone feature on country rap (or "hick-hop") noted that artists in this genre still sell physical records. "This fan base of lower-class country folk haven't all evolved to the digital world," says one country rap artist, Big Smo.

*Despite the number of songs available on streaming services like Spotify, some notable albums may still be missing in artists' back catalogues. (Christian Hartmann/Reuters)*

There is also the problem that some streaming services only use certain record labels and so the best performances of works are not always available as indeed there can be a problem with the inaccessibility of rarities particularly the missing albums in artists' back catalogues that are substituted by "greatest hits" packages

Spotify may actually be making it more challenging for artists to earn a decent living especially for niche acts, so the making of CDs will still continue.

So, if we can assume that the production of CD recordings will continue, but in a reduced capacity, it is probably safe to say that there will still be library customers who want to borrow from a CD collection. However, it does seem that the future usage in libraries for compact discs will largely be by people who don't use the internet often or at all.

#### **CD Audience will predominately consist of**

- Those with low level technical skills
- Disadvantaged people who can't afford internet access at home and are unable also to afford to pay for streaming services
- People who want to listen to 'best' or particular performances
- Audiophiles who want CD quality audio
- Those looking for something that isn't available on streaming services
- Those who like the physical CD and the accompanying booklet/notes etc.
- Those who live in areas where internet access is limited or non-existent .

On this basis it is therefore, in my opinion, imperative that public libraries still have CD collections offering popular material along with scope for customers with specialist requirements in conjunction with what is being offered by emerging technologies.

Other music lovers will presumably use streaming services as their main source of listening and there will be some who will use both methods.

Based on my continuing research into music resource provision in public libraries which I commenced in 2008, as a result of receiving an **ALIA** Study Grant Award ,and my continuing involvement with **IAML** , I have developed a **collection development plan** for music listening resources, as follows.

### **POLICY for COLLECTING MUSIC LISTENING RESOURCES in public libraries**

The music recordings collection aims to provide a wide range of music appropriate to the needs and interest of the user community and to accommodate a broad variety of listening interests by various means.

#### **Content & Scope for Compact Discs**

**This collection should mainly be directed at the audience as described above and tailored to suit their needs.** Proper selection planning will ensure that quality, not quantity, is purchased in all music genres.

- Hard copy collections need to be downsized and no bulk buying of remainders or sale CDs should happen.
- Preferably selection should be done by music specialists who know their communities.
- Ideally the programs for major performances for the following year in cities and towns should be gone through as they are published (usually in the last 3 months of the year) and CDs ordered. People like to listen to what they will hear live before the performance.
- Generic brand performances of all music genres should not be purchased e.g. Neil Diamond songs sung by the Tiffany singers.. This also means no multiple copies of music such as Vivaldi's 4 seasons. Only the best will do.
- Depending on the size of the Library Service minimal copies should be purchased.

The CD collection should consist of a range of recordings of

- selections of the latest popular music and musicians from all genres .
- highly recommended recordings of standard works as reviewed in music journals, magazines and on the internet.
- recordings of works of the indigenous people of the nation
- composers and performers of significance to the nation /city/town and visiting artists
- local artists
- Recordings of works being performed in the entertainment venues of the nation /city/town
- Compact Disc format from smaller labels who would not be found on streaming services
- Customer requests

## Online Services

Since streaming has become more prevalent on the consumer market, libraries have wanted to provide those services for their users as this should be an important part of the library's evolving mission.

The provision of services which enable customers to download and/or stream music on any compatible device and in their own home, is essential if libraries want to continue to provide relevant music resources. However, very few digital providers will actually license their content to libraries, so the selection is pretty slim.

**Subscription services** which are specifically designed for libraries such as **Freegal Music** and **Hoopla** ( in the USA ) are becoming commonplace and while they do not offer the perfect solution for various reasons , they certainly give libraries an entry into the competitive digital world.

Public Libraries should also certainly consider subscribing to **databases** such as :

**Naxos Music Library** an Invaluable resource for universities, music schools, public libraries, schools, music professionals and collectors as **It** offers streaming of individual tracks or entire CDs from over 650 record labels and can be searched by composer, work, genre or label. <https://www.naxosmusiclibrary.com/home.asp?url=%2Fdefault%2Easp>

**Music Online: Listening for Public Libraries** is a product of Alexander Street- a Proquest company. It claims to be the most comprehensive and highest quality streaming audio collection to support the teaching, research, and enjoyment of music. It provides public libraries with streaming access to over 670,000 tracks and is growing monthly as new recordings are added. <https://alexanderstreet.com/products/music-online-listening-public-libraries>

Another service which public libraries could look at initiating is **the provision of local music online**. An innovation of the **Seattle Public Library** is **PlayBack**, the Library's online collection of recordings by local bands and musicians which enables library users to enjoy a diverse mix of homegrown Seattle music. Anyone with a library card can stream albums for free, and download and keep the music at no charge. <https://www.spl.org/books-and-media/music/playback>

In conclusion:

The public library has long been a model for how to make sure that it's not just the wealthy who can afford to have access to music and the arts. It is therefore of the utmost importance that we continue to play a key role in providing resources for the enjoyment, study and performance of music and support the vibrant diverse musical life and heritage of our communities and ultimately our nations.