

SOUTH AFRICAN MUSIC LIBRARIES: COLLEGIAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION, AN EXAMINATION

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English Abstract

Music libraries are relatively recent additions to South African library collections and attempts at forming a music library association have been thwarted through a number of financial and historical societal limitations. Consequently, many South African music librarians feel isolated from the field. This paper examines the effects of this isolation and the benefits that closer association for the librarian could bring. Future outlooks for music libraries in South Africa are discussed and suggestions made for a more positive future.

French Abstract

Les bibliothèques de musique sont des additions relativement récentes aux collections des bibliothèques en Afrique du sud. Les tentatives de création d'une association de bibliothécaires de musique ont été contrariées pour des raisons financières, historiques et sociales. Par conséquent, beaucoup de bibliothécaires de musique se sentent isolés du milieu. Cet article examine les effets de cette isolation et les bénéfices que pourrait apporter une association qui rapproche les bibliothécaires. Il aborde des discussions sur des perspectives futures et émet des suggestions afin d'appréhender un avenir plus positif.

German Abstract

Musikbibliotheken sind eine relativ neue Erscheinung im Bibliothekswesen Südafrikas. Die Gründung einer musikbibliothekarischen Vereinigung ist aus finanziellen und anderen Gründen heraus immer wieder gescheitert. Daher fühlen sich viele südafrikanische Musikbibliothekare beruflich isoliert. Der Artikel untersucht die Auswirkungen dieser Isolation und die Vorteile, die ein engerer Zusammenschluss den Bibliothekaren bringen könnte. Er wagt einen Ausblick in und macht Vorschläge für die Zukunft südafrikanischer Musikbibliotheken.

This paper will look at the theme of isolation in music librarianship in South Africa. You may justifiably ask how is it possible for a music librarian in the twenty-first century to feel isolated. After all, this century is defined by communication, which is akin to a heartbeat for survival. So how is it possible to feel isolated within the working environment of music librarianship? This paper will attempt to unpack the notion of 'isolation' in specifically tertiary² education music libraries. The extent to which it is perceived, and possible reasons and responses to 'isolation' will be investigated.

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2. "Tertiary" refers to post-secondary, i.e., university-level, education.

Music libraries began to be established at South African universities in the first half of the twentieth century particularly at the older more established educational institutions. Size and scope of collections varied, with most libraries developing from small beginnings. Bequests of music, development of a 'musical culture', and growing numbers of music students aided in the impetus for development of music libraries. Consequently the music library of the University of Stellenbosch was established in 1934 and the library has developed into one of the largest academic music libraries in South Africa.³ Likewise the W.H. Bell Music Library at the University of Cape Town (UCT) was established in 1943. In 1973 the library moved into a custom designed building adjacent to the SA College of Music.⁴ Today it is one of the most well-established and -resourced tertiary music libraries.⁵ The music library at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal was established in 1972 and in a short space of time, grew so quickly that it is now considered one of the finest music libraries in the Southern Hemisphere.⁶

Another ten tertiary institutions have music libraries which vary in size, collection scope, and location status with regard to the 'parent' institutional library services. The two music libraries which will be looked at in more detail with regard to the notion of 'isolation' are the smaller Rhodes University Music Library situated in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape Province, and the W. H. Bell Music Library situated at the University of Cape Town in the Western Cape.

The geography of South Africa, a country which covers an area of 1.2 million square kilometres⁷, could be a contributing factor in music librarians having a sense of 'geographic isolation'. The traditional tertiary institutions are situated country-wide and the music librarians very far spread and it is certainly my own experience that I feel isolated but it may also be to do with my geographic location. This geographic spread results in the majority of music librarians relying on the opportunity to meet as a formal group once a year at the annual conference of the South African Society in Research in Music. Unfortunately not all music librarians can travel to this conference due to the cost of travel, lack of funding, and staffing complements at the libraries. This collegial isolation together with geographic isolation is compounded by South Africa's isolated position globally. Distance and travel expense are inhibiting factors when librarians seek to travel to international conferences.

Furthermore, institutional isolation is experienced due to the perceived relationship between the main or 'parent' library and the branch or departmental music library. This relationship will vary from institution to institution and covers all aspects of provision of resources, access to information, housing of the collections, policies, management, staff training, and collegial support. This relationship can vary on a continuum between a nurturing, supportive and developmental relationship to an exclusionary, non-supportive, and inhibiting static relationship.

Julie Strauss, the music librarian at UCT said there was full support from the main library for the music branch library in terms of library resources, staff training, and co-

3. http://library.sun.ac.za/eng/about/gen_History.htm. University of Stellenbosch, accessed 19/06/08

4. Musiker, R. 1993. Directory of South African Music Libraries, SAMLA Johannesburg. Pg. 32.

5. <http://www.lib.uct.ac.za/music/index.php?html=/music/muslibhist02.htm&libid=36>. University of Cape Town, accessed 3/04/08

6. <http://library.ukzn.ac.za/Container.aspx?printversion=1&ID=759>. University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, accessed 19/06/08

7. <http://www.southafrica.info>. South Africa Information, accessed 8/07/08

operation. However when it came to secondary resources, for example furniture and equipment, the branch libraries sometimes got pushed to the end of the queue. She indicated that the degree of isolation depended on the structure within each individual organisation, commenting that there was a sense of inclusion into the subject librarian structure at UCT. Strauss also mentioned that the UCT Library Director supported her regular overseas attendance at the American MLA (Music Library Association) annual conference thus encouraging professional growth and exposure to new technologies with benefits for the library.⁸

Rhodes University is thought of as one of the top universities in South Africa yet has a small student base, thus the Music Department has remained small and consequently the music library has not developed into a large, established branch library housed within its own building but is housed within the teaching department of Music and Musicology.

The Music Department at Rhodes University was established in 1923, making it one of the oldest music departments in the country. Initially the music collection grew from a small research collection based within the department. Radloff comments, "I assume that there was some kind of library at that time as no institution will not try and develop some sort of research entity."⁹ The first chair of Music and Musicology, Friedrich Hartmann, was appointed in 1939. He was followed by George Gruber and Rupert Mayr. All three prestigious Austrian Heads of Department supported the establishment of a more formal and well resourced library. Initially the library consisted of a room in the department and was staffed informally by a junior lecturer and senior students. The department then moved to new premises in the Beethoven House in 1977 and the library had more space and the first library assistant was formally appointed. A growing collection and increased student numbers, necessitated enlargement and renovation of the library in 1999. The then Music Department Head, Professor Christine Lucia was the driving force behind this development. It was at this point that the first professionally qualified librarian was appointed, albeit part-time.¹⁰ The present library is situated centrally in the music department and is a vibrant research and musical meeting point. The library today is thus more established and meets the needs of staff, students and the wider community. However the Rhodes Music Library exists as one of the smaller tertiary music libraries in SA in terms of resources, staffing, space and student numbers and the library remains department-based and falls under Rhodes University Library Services in respect of policy and service provision. The resulting institutional library relationship has tended to be an isolating one with, for example, a previous main-library policy of not cataloguing scores, non-professionally trained and non-specialist staffing up to the year 1999, and reliance on the academic music department to provide most equipment, housing of the library material, IT hardware, internet access, and staffing. More recently there has been more support for making the collection accessible electronically and for providing professional staff.

From the above discussion it appears that the more formalised and established the tertiary music library is, the less isolating is the relationship between the music library and the main library services. Other factors can also contribute to the 'isolation' of a tertiary music library such as: the quality of the overall library management and directorship; personas of the various staff involved; the extent to which the library is professionally staffed;

8. Julie Strauss transcript: Cassette 101 30th May 2008

9. Dr Tim Radloff transcript: Cassette 103 10th June 2008

10. Dr Tim Radloff transcript: Cassette 103 10th June 2008

and the fact that music is a subject specialization with specialised library materials and specific needs. The specialised music library is often considered 'different' and thus sometimes ignored and/or misunderstood by senior library personnel. The fact that music has its own 'language' in score notation also requires a specialised knowledge and this, too, can be a barrier to communication between music libraries and their 'parent' library institutions.

Music librarians in South Africa have a fairly long history of endeavours to organise collectively in the work place, and the question arises as to why music librarians have felt the need to organise and associate with one another? Was it because of a sense of 'collegial isolation'? In attempting to answer this question the history of past associations and a more recent professional grouping will be discussed.

One of the first formal attempts was the formation in 1982 of the first Southern Transvaal branch of an Interest Group for Music Librarians (MUSLIG), Membership was likely racially defined for white music library workers as the new grouping was established under the auspices of the then-South African Institute for Librarianship and Information Science (SAILIS) (now the Library and Information Association of South Africa, LIASA). The rationale for establishing the branch was to forge contact between music librarians via regular meetings and a newsletter in order to improve the quality of collections and the services offered.¹¹ The MUSLIG report for 1985/86 noted that, despite reduced membership, meetings were held and importantly a Workshop on Music Libraries was held in 1986 where co-operation was a key topic of discussion. Challenges posed by this workshop encouraged investigation into the possibility of forming a national Division within SAILIS.¹² The chairperson sent out a letter in October 1986 stating the 'time is ripe' for a fully-fledged national division where all involved in music librarianship should work for a common purpose, and to this end at least twenty professional music librarians were required in order to implement this exciting idea.¹³ In 1987, MUSLIG was reconstituted as a National Association called SAMLA (South African Music Libraries Association), with members working towards solving problems shared by music librarians and the formation of new regional branches.¹⁴ In 1988, SAMLA enjoyed growing membership, was affiliated to SAILIS, and a very successful first congress of seminars and papers was held in September at the University of Cape Town with approximately forty participants.¹⁵

SAMLA continued to be active in the intervening years and by 1994 the association had 70 members nationwide: 40 individual and 30 institutional. It is interesting to note that SAMLA's activity appeared to reach its pinnacle in 1994. Publications, research presentations and local and international collegial activity all attest to this. However, the SAMLA report of 1995 indicated a subtle downward turn in the fortunes of SAMLA. Overall membership was down 40% (from 70 to 42 members) and the branches were tending to be run on more informal lines. It appears that SAMLA was not immune to the period of political uncertainty and changes occurring in the mid 1990s in South Africa. SAMLA was aware of the significance of the political debates of that time and at a SAMLA open meeting in

11. Geldenhuys, D. 1982. The Founding of an Interest Group for Music Librarians. *SAMUS*, 2, p. 53.

12. Walton, R. B. 1986. Music Libraries Interest Group Report 1985/1986. *SAMUS*, 6, p. 123.

13. Walton, R. B. 1986. Letter to Music Librarians from MUSLIG. [Letter] (Official communication, 15 October 1986)

14. Walton, R. B. 1987. South African Music Libraries Association (SAMLA). *SAMUS*, 7, p. 122.

15. Walton, R. B. 1989. South African Music Libraries Association (SAMLA). *SAMUS*, 8/9, p. 113.

August 1995, Clare Walker, Vice President of SAILIS, gave an address on 'The Changing Scenario in South African Librarianship'.¹⁶

In 1996, Ruben Musiker, the chairperson of SAMLA stated, "SAMLA experienced a watershed year in 1996 and reached the cross-roads, so to speak, of its sixteen-year existence".¹⁷ In the SAMLA report of 1996 he went on to explain how the profession of librarianship, like the country itself, was undergoing major transformation. The SAMLA National Executive Committee thus decided that SAMLA could no longer continue to exist as in the past. It was felt that SAMLA would not be disbanded but suspended and should wait the formation of the new national umbrella library organisation which would bring all librarians together under one association where division on racial lines would come to an end.¹⁸

It took nine years for South African music librarians to resurrect associational activity. Although music librarians continued to work and communicate informally there appears to be no indication of any formal meeting or activity in the literature.

In August 2005, a small number of music librarians gathered in Cape Town for the first South African Music Librarians' Round-Table which was hosted by the music library at the University of Cape Town.¹⁹ Julie Strauss, a music librarian at UCT, was instrumental in re-establishing this local initiative for music librarians. The South African Society for Musicology was holding their annual conference and it was a good opportunity for music librarians to meet around the subject area. Sessions and paper presentations were arranged for the librarians at their Round-Table and they were also able to attend the Society's conference and meet and network with music academics and professionals. The music librarians subsequently decided to meet annually and to call the group 'Music Librarians Interest Group of Southern Africa' (MLIGSA). The group remains independent as is not affiliated to the national library association, (Library and Information Association of South Africa, LIASA). A 2007 proposal to become a sub-section of SASRIM (South African Society of Research in Music, newly formed in 2006), was turned down probably because the newly-formed society was fearful of setting a precedent of sub-sections with future possible fragmentation of the society. However Strauss indicates that music librarians are welcomed at the SASRIM conferences and the society acknowledges the value of the attendance of librarians.²⁰

The newly established and independent Music Librarians' Interest Group has been key in re-establishing communication between South African music librarians. Innovations and common problems can be shared and the librarians have an opportunity to meet in person at the formal annual meeting that is arranged to coincide with the SASRIM conference. The group's informal e-mail list and ready support from colleagues has hastened communication. These recent initiatives have greatly reduced the feelings of isolation that South African music librarians have been experiencing.

The question arises as to whether music librarians in South Africa have organised collectively over the years because of a sense of perceived isolation or because of specialised subject needs? I would argue that it is a combination of both. It is likely that specialised

16. Musiker, R. 1995. South African Music Libraries Association (SAMLA): Review of Activities in 1995. *SAMUS*, 15, p. 78.

17. Musiker, R. 1996. South African Music Libraries Association (SAMLA). *SAMUS*, 16, p. 90.

18. Musiker, R. 1996. South African Music Libraries Association (SAMLA). *SAMUS*, 16, p. 91.

19. WH Bell Music Library, 2005. South African Music Librarians' Round-Table. August 2005. [Leaflet]

20. Julie Strauss Transcript: Cassette 101 30th May 2008.

needs and problems were not addressed by the national library associations, thus necessitating the need for a music library grouping or association. In addition it is likely that mainstream library services viewed music libraries as 'different' in the sense of music libraries 'speaking another language', i.e., a language of music notation and audio collections that require specialised processing. Thus music librarians had some sense of isolation within the library profession and thus made moves to associate with other music librarians.

The benefits of collegial contact, at both local and international level, for South African music librarians cannot be underestimated. Strauss comments on attending the MLA conference, "the experience is just mind blowing . . . in terms of theoretical knowledge, practical examples, and networking, it is enormous . . . apart from learning how to do things differently, you also get the opportunity to realize we are on track in terms of technology. That kind of confirmation is important . . . I think it is very easy to start feeling 'But oh! In South Africa we don't have this and we can't do that' and if you attend it puts everything into such a different perspective."²¹ Thus attendance at conferences equates with continued professional development with benefits for the associated library, and may also lessen perceptions of isolation in the workplace, geographic isolation and even technological isolation.

Another aspect of perceived collegial isolation has to do with the training of music librarians and how individuals act in the work place. Music Librarians who have received quality training and education appear to feel more motivated and involved with their profession. Julie Strauss at UCT who reinitiated associational activity, a music list serve, and email grouping is an example of an inspired and dedicated music librarian who received very good library training at the then-Potchefstroom University. Her love of music and musical training is also key to her work in the music library. She strongly believes that one's sense of isolation may be lessened by the manner in which one acts professionally.²² Thus a librarian who actively seeks out professional development, new library initiatives and technologies, and communication with colleagues is less likely to feel isolated in the music library work place.

The number of South African library training institutions has decreased over the last two decades with closure of both professional and para-professional schools due to declining student enrolment. Perceptions of a lack of jobs and the erroneous notion that librarians would no longer be required in the internet era, together with rationalisation and restructuring of tertiary institutions have all led to a decline in students. At a time of increasing societal information needs and educational library services, the South African National Council for Library and Information Services plans to investigate the imminent closure of library schools while also looking at appropriate curriculum design. Tertiary institutions are experiencing a shortage of library professionals. Members of the UCT Department of Information and Library Studies note "Academic libraries are getting very worried right now at their inability to fill technical services posts, the real reference service posts, the cataloguing posts and so on . . . the cataloguing population is old and grey and retiring. Even existing library schools don't all offer things like catalogue training anymore. So they are not able to fill these positions."²³ It is interesting to note that some

21. Julie Strauss transcript: Cassette 101 30th May 2008

22. Julie Strauss transcript: Cassette 101 30th May 2008

23. Karin de Jager and Mary Nassimbeni transcript: Cassette 102 30th May 2008.

tertiary libraries are actively promoting the profession. For example, the UCT Library homepage has a link which leads to an invitation to new graduates to consider librarianship as a career. It is hoped graduates are inspired by the profiles and interviews of the young library professionals who are featured.

Fewer librarians coming into the market place could negatively affect the number of employed music librarians, leading to increased isolation. It would be of great benefit if more music graduates choose music librarianship as a career. Current music librarians need to play a more active role in promoting the profession, making young music graduates aware that libraries are an area where they can use their skills. Internships where selected music graduates work in a music library while studying for a library qualification is one option that could ensure a future supply of trained music library staffing. UCT Music Library recently implemented the successful internship of a senior music student who now has a post in the music library.

There is no specific training for music librarians in South Africa. Most library schools only broadly refer to the cataloguing and housing of music scores and audio-visual materials. Library students learn the basic principals of librarianship and then if employed in a specialist library they 'learn on the job'. It is also preferable for individuals to have musical training, a love for music, an interest in academia, and a passion for libraries and what libraries stand for. The UCT Department of Information and Library Studies offer the possibility for students doing their music degree to do the Higher Diploma in Librarianship along with their music degree. A member of the department states that, "although we don't offer any specific training in music librarianship, we have over the years encouraged people to become music librarians. . . . We are aware of the intricacies of music cataloguing and curating in the broader sense and we have over the years encouraged specialization".²⁴ Unfortunately the UCT Department of Information and Library Studies faces threat of closure, and so could, by 2010, be another statistic on the closure list of library schools in South Africa.

In conclusion, what is the future for music libraries in South Africa? In part it is a bleak future with threats of shortages of professional staffing, a lack of 'parent' institutional support in some libraries, threats to future funding, and increased costs of materials, made worse by present world economic woes and political instability in Southern Africa. However South African music librarians need to move forward positively and the associational regrouping of music librarians in 2005 and increased opportunities for collegial communication at the local level is very encouraging. Innovative ways of attracting young people to the profession are a positive start but more needs to be done. A proactive personal approach, the seeking out of innovative methods and attendance at local and international conferences all combat any feelings or experiences of isolation, and help consolidate the profession of music librarianship. In service training where a library school sends a teacher/trainer to train and assist music librarians on the job could be a future strategy for professional development.

Many of the issues discussed are common to music librarians the world over, and are we all not in fact isolated simply because we work in the specialised field of music and music libraries? Where the United States developed the MLA and it has proved to be more than just a place for librarians to meet and more as a place for librarians to use each others' knowledge for the better development of their collections and information services,

24. *Ibid.*

South Africa needs to mature its own music library system to this level. Annual meetings, local meetings, list serves, and internet communication all serve to bring music libraries out of their isolated areas, and into a larger collective of knowledge and power. Countries like South Africa, on the cusp of bringing their music libraries and music librarians together can use local and international forums for exchange of information and for library and personal professional development, and in so doing combating isolation in the music library workplace. Conversely national and international music library associations need to promote the special needs and interests of music libraries while also lobbying institutional or main libraries to take cognisance of the special needs of music libraries/librarians and to support them accordingly.

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