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Open Access to Music Research in Sweden – the pros and cons of publishing in university digital archives

Presentation by Peter Berry at Nordic Music Academy Libraries Conference, Reykjavik 2008

I would like to thank professor Steve Dillon and my colleague Per Åke Qvick for reading my notes and making valuable suggestions. A special thanks to my friend Steingrímur Jónsson.

I am going to tell you about some events in my professional life during the recent half year and I prefer to do it in a rather informal manner. I hope that is all right with you. I will try to add more structure at the end of my talk.

Let us get right into the meat of things, i.e. what happens right now, in my relationship with open access on the internet at the Academy of music, which is a part of Lund University.

As I am saying this we are about to publish our first student paper with video links on the Internet. I have just realized that what looked like a problem was not a problem or perhaps an entirely different problem.

By the way, that paper deals with cultural differences. The author is describing how he tries to teach a choir to sing well known Scandinavian folk tunes as if they were songs in the Balkan tradition. A number of video clips describes the process, a rather frustrating experience for the conductor and the choir, it seems. [<http://theses.lub.lu.se/archive/2008/06/11/1213184657-31056-207/krstic.pdf>] The next paper with video links is a study of how to play Inca flutes, the quena and the siku.

Let me to return to my story. What I thought was a simple technical, computer, problem, i.e. connecting a paper with video links to the internet and registering it in our local digital archives – something that should be possible to do in a hour's work – turned out to last for months, involving the teaching staff, the technicians and myself. These contacts were mostly maintained by intermittent e-mails – it was rarely possible to meet eye-to eye. This and similar experiences has convinced me that publishing on the internet often is a matter of communication and organization and not always a matter of legal or technical issues.

In the particular situation I described the best solution seems to have been very simple, but nobody saw it, understood it, cared enough about it or acted on it. The best solution seems to have been to use links that the student already provided in his paper, links to our local internet or server. The problem was, is – I am not quite sure – that this server is not open to the public, its contents are not freely accessible. Why, remains to be investigated at this time.

I would like to offer some advice as to what librarians should think of when we get involved in publishing on the internet and how we shall share these experiences, hopefully to build some kind of network where we can exchange hard won knowledge.

My concern today is librarians at music libraries, primarily in a university setting, and the process of providing documents produced by our very own institutions on the internet. I would like to make the limitations of my study clear. My deal with

1. Material provided by your own institution
2. That will be freely accessible on the internet, so called open access
3. Where material equals multimedia – sound, images, videos – the media environment that performing arts libraries live in.

First, I would like to say a few words about my own position. I am a university librarian, a student of the humanities and social science, educated in the United States in the 1970's. Currently, I work as a consultant to the office of the Faculty of fine and performing arts in Malmö, that belongs to Lund University.

I realize that many fine music libraries are public libraries. Unfortunately I know little of your experiences in the area of open access to music but I would like to become more familiar with your perspective. It goes without saying that we have mutual interests.

I am a librarian and a musician and I am also writing about music. I am sure many of us here are involved in music in many ways, as librarians, as makers and/or interpreters, students and enjoyers of music. I am not a technician, I am not a lawyer, I am not a professor and I am not a university administrator. I think I also share this with many of you. So, I think my perspective, in the context of open access, is shared by many of you who have gathered here today.

One way to find out how to deal with an issue, such as open access, is to ask colleagues, and I have done that, so far only in Sweden. Most music libraries in Sweden, belonging to large universities, are connected to universities' digital archives or publication databases. The level of involvement in the planning and development of open access differ depending on local organization – some libraries live in a highly centralized organization, others in a less centralized. In my own organization, Lund University – which I will dwell on since I know it better – there is a central library network office that is very involved in the administration and development of digital publishing.

At the moment, we, i.e. primarily the office of our faculty, are involved in setting up and improving our university digital archives, the Lund University Publications (LUP), in a way that will permit input from artistic institutions such as our Academy of music, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Academy of theater. It is obvious that the old kinds of digital archives consisting of written text do not permit a description that covers issues at hand for us, foremost multimedia.

Right now, my concern, as seems to be the case at most other universities in terms of multimedia production, is student papers with video clips or sound attachments, to a lesser extent theses on Master or PhD level. Libraries are also involved, but less so, in the publication of material that is primarily music, i.e. concerts and performances of different kinds. However, distribution of music, without links to text, becomes an issue less for the library and more of a concern of producers and technical staff and developers on the university level. My experience is that there are a lot of meetings and discussions of these issues and, partly because these are recent developments, many are involved without the knowledge of others.

I have experienced open access as a new thing for us librarians. We used to be simply librarians, then we became information specialists, information architects, cybrarians – what not. Instead of working as librarians we got involved in system maintenance, teaching, and now publishing. I am basically

positive to this development – possibly with the exception of librarians becoming teachers – but I see complications, like I am sure all of you do.

In a new situation, such as publishing, you are bound to meet people in new arenas, in new capacities, capacities that they also may not be sure of. In this context, I have sometimes been surprised at the feeling of territoriality I have encountered. But, we all have new roles, and I can deal with this. I have also been welcomed in this new capacity and I have felt becoming a part of something new and exciting, that we can develop together.

As a librarian, my main concern, as I see it, is with the free flow of information. Open access, or digital public archives, was, I believe, created with that purpose. But a snake lives in the garden of Eden and it is citation analysis, i.e. different ways of using publishing to measure performance of institutions, to distribute money and to control their production. A problem, particularly for us who are situated at the outskirts of the humanities, is that the hard sciences decide the ways that we in the humanities should describe our activities – not only a problem as regards publications of course.

Citation analysis, meaning measuring performance by the number of quotes your work receive in peer reviewed journals, is obviously no good in our environment. There are those who feel differently... Using ways of measuring quality have become a highly political issue in Sweden and for Swedish universities. We cannot avoid this, and we cannot choose another way. We have to try, I believe, to influence performance measurements so that they somehow will reflect our activities. But we shall not forget that we are different.

I would like to turn to the perspective of the “maker”, the producer of texts, video, music, images. What does a system like university administered digital archives offer me as a musician or artist or researcher that would make me choose this avenue to distribute my work? Where do I reach the largest audience, my audience? What is most readily accessible? YouTube, MySpace, weblogs, etc or university archives? The answer seems clear – not the university digital archives. One could say that our archives are safer, that material stored here will survive earthquakes or/and internet turbulence. However, I think it will be difficult to convince our users to think of the university archives as the best way to make their work public. I am sure there is room for several ways of distribution, for instance a combination of university archives and open internet services like YouTube. Perhaps this is true particularly regarding traditional academic work, where the main interest is preservation, not development and dynamics.

I would like to sum up with the help of Steve Dillon and his colleague Andrew Brown. Dillon, a professor at the Queensland University of technology, has written several books and articles about learning and music and the use of the internet. Dillon and Brown argue that the following issues are essential dealing with questions about technology and how we relate to it in the field of creative arts. I have touched on these issues in my talk more or less. Some of them concern us more as librarians, others as artists. We should keep both perspectives in mind.

These are the issues:

1. Representation - a matter of the author or artist being satisfied with the representation of his work on the Internet. Is it a fair description, possible to recognize as the work of this

author? Does it create the intended impact? It has so far not been an issue for us in Malmö since we are so new on the arena of open access.

2. Ethics and rights – i.e. who sees and owns the work. As you know copyright is the subject of a heated debate. It is a complicated matter and I have avoided it here, partly because I am not familiar with legal matters, it is not part of my background – I will have to rely on experts – partly because I suspect that it should not be what concerns us librarians most. I do not think we can make much of an input here and I also think there are other issues that perhaps are more important in terms of what decides our relationship with technology in the creative arts. These issues have to do with organization, bureaucracy and communication.
3. Implementation – what technology is used, who has the skills and access to this technology, what are the local policies. As I mentioned in the beginning of my talk, this is the starting point. It is when we want to publish our first document with multimedia links that we might encounter our first frustrating experiences of open access publishing. “Why does this not work?” “Who knows?” “Where is he?”
4. Access and control – this is a very important issue - does the university have systems and policies that allow you, i.e. the researcher or artist, to connect with your community, or is it possible that the university makes it more difficult? I think there is a problem here and it has to do with the contradiction between free flow of information and music and the use of digital archives to evaluate the work of contributors, to distribute funds to them and in the end, in some way controlling their activities.

I would like to suggest the following advice to librarians involved in open access:

1. Consider informal, open and public means – investigate the use of blogs, YouTube and the like – stay informed; influence decision makers
2. Act strategically in contacts with your own administration, faculty and other decision makers and interest groups; examine their policies and remember your role as librarians in the free flow of information.
3. Cooperate – connect with other people involved in open access and share your views

Miikka Salavuo of the Sibelius Academy writes in a recently published study that distributing and discussing one’s music on web sites have become a common practice for today’s young musicians. I believe this is where we find the clues to the future, also for old musicians. I think the future on the web swings. I think it is full of creativity and energy, full of good things. However, some people take to the idea of open access as if they belonged to a fundamentalist sect. Open access is just soooo good. I do not want to make the mistake of blind belief – but I cannot help being attracted by the inventiveness and promise of web solutions to act out your music. Are we perhaps seeing the development of a new folk music in the sense of a people’s music? Wouldn’t that be lovely. And I think music libraries should be part of this development.