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Proceedings Paper:

Armstrong, Charlotte, Cowgill, Rachel Elizabeth, Dix, Alan et al. (5 more authors) (2021) Towards a Foundation for Collaborative Digital Archiving with Local Concert-Giving Organisations. In: Arthur, Claire, (ed.) DLfM '21::8th International Conference on Digital Libraries for Musicology. ACM, Virtual Conference GA USA, pp. 41-49.

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3469013.3469019>

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Towards a Foundation for Collaborative Digital Archiving with Local Concert-Giving Organisations

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ABSTRACT

The centenaries of former chapters of the British Music Society (BMS), established in 1918, have prompted their governing bodies to take stock of their histories and build on the cataloguing, documentation and preservation of their archival collections. The InterMusE project aims to support this shared instinct to archive by capturing and, crucially, linking different forms of data regarding the musical events provided by three of these local concert-giving organisations, beginning with the digitisation of their collections and with a view to producing a dynamic, open-access digital archive. This paper outlines our approach to establishing a foundation for developing a new kind of digital archive for musicology that is both valuable for researchers, fulfils the needs of the societies and their communities, and sheds light on community music-making on a national and, ultimately, international scale. By carrying out a series of preliminary scoping exercises, including informal interviews and archival-collection assessments, we can compare current archiving and preservation activities across the societies. These conversations bring emerging themes, issues and challenges into focus, raising pertinent questions that will inform our development of transformative tools and techniques for community digitisation projects.

KEYWORDS

Musicology, performance history, ephemera, concerts, archives, digital archives, digitisation, centenaries, co-production, co-creation

ACM Reference Format:

Charlotte Armstrong, Rachel Cowgill, Alan Dix, Michael Twidale, Christina Bashford, J. Stephen Downie, Rupert Ridgewell, and Maureen Reagan. 2021. Towards a Foundation for Collaborative Digital Archiving with Local Concert-Giving Organisations. In *8th International Conference on Digital Libraries for Musicology (DLfM2021)*, July 28–30, 2021, Virtual Conference, GA, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 9 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3469013.3469019>

1 INTRODUCTION

The Belfast Music Society (BeMS), British Music Society of York (BMSY) and Huddersfield Music Society (HMS) share a common point of origin in the foundation of the ‘British Music Society’ (BMS) in 1918 by progressive musical author, educator and organist Arthur Eaglefield Hull (1876–1928). Despite what its name might suggest, Hull’s BMS was dedicated to restoring reciprocal international exchange between British and overseas musicians after the Great War. It was also designed to empower amateurs in organising and promoting their own concert series: Hull believed that, in an industry dominated by commercial interests, amateur musicians were capable of greater independence than professionals in selecting repertoire and artists. Developing a robust supporting administrative framework, Hull helped to establish BMS chapters and concert series in towns and cities across the UK and beyond, some of which remain active today.

BeMS, BMSY and HMS have amassed significant archives over the past century and are now embracing the opportunity to take stock of their histories and document their collections. The Internet of Musical Events: Digital Scholarship, Community, and the Archiving of Performance (InterMusE) is a two-year project funded by the AHRC’s UK-US New Directions for Digital Scholarship in Cultural Institutions scheme. From February 2021 until January 2023, we are working with these three former BMS societies (among other institutions in the UK and US) to capture and link different forms of musicological data, with the ultimate goal of enhancing public access to music-ephemera material by creating a dynamic, open-access digital archive. In doing so, our team – which comprises a team of US- and UK-based university researchers and arts and

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DLfM2021, July 28–30, 2021, Virtual Conference, GA, USA

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ACM ISBN 978-1-4503-8429-2/21/07...\$15.00
<https://doi.org/10.1145/3469013.3469019>

heritage professionals – aims to harness the capacity of digital technologies to enable collaboration and engagement with members of the public as they reflect on their societies’ collective identities, histories and traditions and plan for the future. The digital archive will bring together both professional, archival-quality scans and end-user scanned documents produced using a range of off-the-shelf technologies such as smart phones and swing-arm book scanners. These community-scanned documents may be sufficient for some purposes, but where the need for higher-quality scanning arises, this can be performed on an as-needed basis, augmenting the archive incrementally. The digitised documents will be subject to optical character recognition (OCR) to enable text searching using both manual and automated queries. Most physical scanners and scanning software offer some form of OCR technology; but while this often produces near-perfect results for recent documents with linear text, the decorative fonts and complex layouts of many concert programmes may necessitate a degree of human input – a further opportunity for community members to take an active role in the digitisation workflow. The archive will have the provision to support Linked Open Data, enabling the societies to connect their materials with the records of other chapters and the BMS as a whole. As a result, knowledge of the long-term significance of this extraordinary initiative in the context of post-war music-making and education, as well as ‘everyday’ modernism, voluntarism and cultural regeneration, will be greatly enriched.

The project will also shed light on the role of music in community life, initially locally, but given the scalable nature of the digital archive, as well as the ability to link disparate collections, there is potential to build a broader picture of community music-making across time and place. Furthermore, the digitised collections will be supplemented with the likes of personal recollections, item descriptions and transcriptions of marginalia, providing additional context and providing almost endless opportunities to contribute to the evolving archive. Indeed, it should be possible to continually enrich the archive we produce by incrementally adding disparate fragments from multiple sources as they emerge and at the behest of contributors. This, we hope, will provide new insights into how the evolving archive can be used as a resource for sharing and eliciting stories.

Our project necessitates a degree of technical expertise and oversight that must be brought into careful balance with the needs of each society, as well as the existing knowledge and skills of its members. To ensure the co-creation of a valuable research resource that is fit-for-purpose for the societies and their communities, a vital first task is to take stock of current collection and preservation activities across the societies and establish their objectives and desired outcomes for the project. In March 2021, we carried out a series of preliminary scoping activities including informal interviews and archival-collection assessments through which we are beginning to build a picture of the current state of play across the three societies and identify emerging themes. This paper outlines several particularly pertinent issues, challenges and approaches that will shape the project as it progresses.

2 DEMOCRACY AND CO-PRODUCTION

InterMusE adopts a deeply democratic approach that centres around the relationships between a variety of stakeholders including citizen researchers, professional (university-based) researchers and amateur musicians, fans and aficionados. The project resists privileging any one of these groups over another in its efforts to democratise digitisation and transform the archive.[6] Public historian Victoria Hoyle challenges the notion of an opposition between the gate-keeping of historical knowledge by academic historians and more democratic, grassroots forms of making public history.[9] Instead, Hoyle celebrates the intersection of public history and professional archival theory and practice as prompting ‘recognition of the validity of different forms of knowledge and history-making’, observing the important role of digital technologies in enabling the circulation, reuse and interpretation of archival materials by a range of individuals and in a range of different contexts.[10] This coming together of professional and public practitioners via digital methods and means is integral to our project: InterMusE seeks both to draw on and develop good practice in co-creation and co-production and, in this sense, there is much that we can learn from related projects.

‘Imagine – Connecting Communities through Research’ was a co-produced research project (funded by the ESRC and AHRC, 2013–2017) that brought universities and their local communities together to explore ‘the changing nature of communities and community values over time’. The investigators use the term ‘co-production’ to describe projects and partnerships involving ‘people who have a direct experience of, or interest in, the research topic [...] working as “co-researchers” alongside academic or other “professional” researchers (people who do research for a living)’. [2] Taking a holistic view of our research and its outputs and acknowledging the mutual benefit of our relationships with these local concert-giving institutions, we (as professional researchers) must similarly recognise and explore our own role as participants in a network that comprises a range of stakeholder groups. There is a need for us to consider how our presence – along with the existence of any preconceptions about our profession within the given institutions – will inform the project’s outcomes. Banks et al. highlight ‘[f]eelings of mistrust towards universities and research projects’ as a challenging dynamic that can arise in co-produced projects, suggesting that ‘[t]ime is needed for people to get to know each other and their organisations, and to develop trusting relationships, where concerns can be expressed and disagreements openly acknowledged’. [2] While such feelings of mistrust may feature less prominently in our project than in more activist-led community development projects with underrepresented and marginalised groups, making time to develop trusting working relationships seems a sensible starting point for any co-produced initiative.

We planned to establish a foundation for trust and reciprocal exchange by conducting informal introductory conversations with individuals from each institution. In order to avoid the development of any perceived hegemonic power dynamics between professional and citizen researchers in our project, these dialogues were conducted as unstructured interviews. Notwithstanding the unique challenges that emerge when conducting interpersonal research during the time of Covid-19, these kinds of interactions can provide

a basis for developing a rapport and fostering a non-hierarchical dynamic between interviewer and interviewee: Jon Swain and Zachary Swire argue that more authentic data is often yielded from unstructured interviews, ‘where less performativity is involved, both from the interviewer and interviewee, and they reduce the “me” and “you” to “we”, so creating a greater ease of communication’.[13] In this sense, they are particularly well-suited to co-production projects such as InterMusE. For Elizabeth Munz, ethnographic interviews (also referred to as ‘informal conversational interviews’) may also prove a useful research tool in the future in that they ‘combine the emic of community members’ insights about their own community with the etic of a researcher’s insights on that same community and its practices’.[11] These kinds of interactions take place within the context of an ongoing relationship between interviewer and interviewee and can enable participants to set the direction of the conversation and thus negotiate power dynamics. As such, they facilitate the co-construction of knowledge and understanding in line with our project’s goals of co-production and democracy.

Another consideration in this regard is the need for us to engage with a range of participants from each society while also accounting for the probable existence of power dynamics and organisational hierarchies within the institutions themselves. We might address this challenge by establishing small steering groups at each society, comprising volunteers who will act as advocates for the project among the broader membership. The PI attended a committee meeting of one of the societies with the encouragement of the Chair and introduced herself and the project, which was already familiar because the society’s involvement had to be approved before the bid was submitted. There was a great deal of enthusiasm in the response of committee-members, leading to offers to participate in the small steering group suggested by the PI. This raised considerations about representation – potentially the small group would be made up entirely of committee members – and whether it is best to align with the existing structures of the society or to work across them.

While some individuals may opt to participate in steering groups, interviews and oral histories, others may prefer to engage in practical work such as the ‘citizen digitisation’ aspects of the project, producing non-archival-quality images with a mobile scanner or smartphone. Volunteers may also be drawn to cleaning OCR or adding descriptions and transcriptions of handwritten marginalia in concert programmes (see figure 1, for example) in concert programmes to a digitised file. In welcoming different forms of input and engagement, we will be responding constructively to the implications of and barriers to voluntary participation. Banks et al. write that, in co-production projects, ‘[p]eople may make different contributions to the research, involving different amounts of time and effort at different points in the research process. However, all contributions are regarded as equally valuable’.[3] It is imperative, in this respect, for us to be mindful of the enablers and barriers to volunteering among society members, as well as their motivation for participation. We may be able to develop an understanding of these factors through our ongoing conversations with representatives from the societies. Moreover, this will enable us to tailor specific activities to the needs and inclinations of different participants. These might range from incorporating micro-volunteering solutions in the form of small, easily achievable tasks, to creating

specialised tasks that appeal to those with particular knowledge and skill sets. As a result, we hope to foster a crowdsourcing culture that is as inclusive as possible and that encourages broad participation without making unreasonable demands on the time and effort of participants.

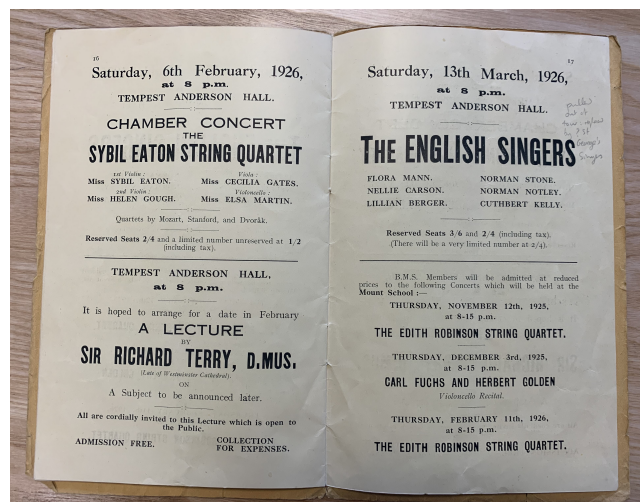


Figure 1: Annotated Season Programme, British Music Society of York, Fifth Season, 1925–26.

Avinoam Baruch et al. identify interaction between coordinators and volunteers as a crucial component in successful crowdsourcing campaigns: they suggest that this interaction must extend to the design of the platform.[4] Indeed, as well as enabling us to build peer relationships with individuals at each of the three music societies, our conversations served as an opportunity to develop a shared vision for the project and its outcomes. Banks et al. stress that in co-production projects such as Imagine, ‘[a] shared aim, purpose and vision takes time to develop and cannot be assumed at the start of a project’.[2] In our pursuit of the intersection of public and professional history-making advocated for by Hoyle, we will need to remain attuned to our own impact on the relationships within the project’s network. We are also concerned with the role of the music societies’ archival collections and performance and meeting spaces in shaping the social processes that have influenced, and continue to influence these concert-giving institutions and their communities. As we move forward, we will further explore our role within this rich ecology and how different points of encounter with these institutions, their historical collections and the people within them will shape our work. Certain theoretical perspectives, such as Actor-Network Theory (ANT), may prove insightful in this regard. ANT is concerned with heterogeneous networks of components or ‘actors’ and the shifting relationships between them. A central tenet of the theory is the ‘necessary alignment of human actors from markedly different practices, not so much to bring specific expertise to the problem, but instead to bring different ways to learn from different actors, human and nonhuman’.[7] Such a perspective may also enable us to garner new insights into the intersection of participatory archiving and participatory design in the creation and ongoing evolution of the digital archive.

Table 1: Collections overview

	BeMS	BMSY	HMS
Known collection contents	<p>Deposited: Concert programmes (1939–2001), season brochures (1944–2004), publicity materials, correspondence, meeting minutes, funding proposals and grant agreements, annual reports (1934–1991), press cuttings, constitution documents, Da capo booklet and associated research materials</p> <p>Undeposited: Concert programmes and season brochures, publicity materials, accounts, newspaper reviews, funding applications and contracts, employment records, meeting minutes, empty cheque books, concert recordings on CDs and DVDs, correspondence, strategies and policies, audience survey paperwork</p>	<p>Deposited: Committee meeting and AGM Minutes (1954–1982), Honorary Secretary’s correspondence and papers (1976–1985), Honorary Treasurer’s papers (1983–1985), concert programmes and season brochures (1925–2004), York Festival concert programmes and related papers (1976–1984), National Federation of Music Societies magazines, newsletters and bulletins (1964–1997)</p> <p>Undeposited: Concert programmes and season brochures, newspaper reviews</p>	<p>Deposited: Governance records (1920–2010), Ladies’ Committee minutes (1946–1985), annual reports (1988–2010), Music Club Rule Book (1946), subscription records (1943–2004), financial accounts and statements (1959–1990), performance records (1918–1999), publicity materials (1912–1980)</p> <p>Undeposited: Concert programmes (full run 1918–present), newspaper reviews</p>
Location of (known) physical objects	<p>BeMS office (Crescent Arts Centre)</p> <p>Linen Hall Library (LHL)</p> <p>Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)</p>	<p>Private homes</p> <p>Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York (BIA)</p>	<p>Private homes</p> <p>Heritage Quay archives, University of Huddersfield (HQ)</p>
Cataloguing	<p>LHL and PRONI online catalogues</p> <p>Reference lists of the material held at Linen Hall Library (1 for each of the 5 boxes)</p> <p>Reference list ‘BMS files in Crescent Arts Centre’</p>	<p>BIA online catalogue</p>	<p>Single table database of every performance since the inaugural season (1918). 3000+ entries detailing date, artist, composer, work, venue, season, notes, review (Y/N)</p> <p>HQ online catalogue</p>
Existing digital	<p>Word files (exported to PDF for circulation)</p>		<p>Microsoft Access database (single table)</p>

3 THE INSTINCT TO ARCHIVE

As part of our preliminary scoping activities, we have undertaken an archival assessment of each society, partly through our dialogues with the individuals and, where material has been deposited in a repository, through investigation of relevant catalogues and handlists as well as consultation with the archivists and librarians.

The collections of all three music societies comprise a range of materials such as concert programmes and other performance ephemera, subscriber lists, meeting minutes, newspaper reviews and notices, correspondence and financial records. The materials

held have been catalogued, digitised and preserved to varying degrees and using a range of methods and approaches. Some of the physical collections are housed in local archives and have thus been subject to cataloguing and preservation workflows in line with institutional standards. A group of items from each institution is also held by individuals connected to the society. The treatment of this material is of particular interest given the community-focused nature of the InterMusE project. In compiling our initial overview of each society’s collection, we have observed a shared ‘instinct to archive’. The individuals involved in curating, documenting and cataloguing the archival collections of the societies have drawn upon the knowledge and skills at their disposal to catalogue and

preserve. From simple cataloguing processes using word processors, to sophisticated database systems drawing on expertise in library management, the custodians of these collections have taken steps to ensure the preservation of their materials for future use.

Having been commissioned by the society to carry out research into its history as part of the centenary commemoration activities, one individual, a self-confessed ‘hoarder’ and long-time archival enthusiast, detailed the process of documenting the society’s collection by creating a series of inventory lists, each one pertaining to the contents of the five boxes of material held at a local archive. The boxes contain season brochures, paperwork, press cuttings, programmes and so on. One of the lists contains a note that reads: ‘In general, this listing follows the current ordering in the box, though by its nature, some pieces may move, or may have moved, around!’ The individual has also collated a chronological listing of all the season brochures in the collection for reference purposes. This document contains the instruction ‘[u]se in conjunction with the inventory of each of the five boxes (one in each box)’, demonstrating the individual’s intention that the list be used by other researchers. Although the lists have been created in Microsoft Word, the individual explained that they always convert the document to PDF before sharing it, joking that this is a preventative measure so that the list’s users ‘can’t meddle too much’.

Another participant is the holder of a postgraduate qualification in library and information management, with expertise that has been an undeniable asset to their society. They have created a Microsoft Access 2000 database containing over 3000 entries, including the date, artist, composer, work, venue and season of every performance since the opening season, along with additional notes and a record of whether the performance was reviewed or not. The notes include corrections of any errors in the programmes (for example ‘Programme correction: Brahms Op 51 No 1 is in C minor, not major’). The individual has also created physical addendums that are attached to the programmes so that the hard copies match the database record. Having only taken a short database module as part of their MA programme, the participant described compiling the resource as a ‘massive learning curve’ and a ‘huge undertaking’ requiring considerable personal investment.

4 ACCESS VS SAFEGUARDING

During an initial conversation about one of the society’s archival collections, one individual expressed conflict over the decision to formally relocate physical objects in their society’s collection to a library. They explained that while libraries and archives offer particularly appealing homes for the material in terms of ensuring availability and accessibility to the public, where there may be limited resources available at the location to organise, catalogue and safeguard the physical material, items may go missing. However, where safeguarding is well resourced and procedures and workflows are in place for the preservation of physical content, access to the materials is more restricted and as such, the collection will likely be less usable by researchers and other stakeholders.

This predicament encapsulates some of the issues bound up with the tension between access and safeguarding, a challenge for which digitisation provides a partial solution. By creating a digital archive and, crucially, ensuring compliance with IIIF standards,

these materials can be brought together, shared with and linked to similar resources while also safeguarding against physical loss. Moreover, a digital document can exist in countless different places and contexts at once and, by association, is accessible to a greater number of people. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that digitisation does not provide a comprehensive and robust solution for safeguarding and access. The creation of digital material is, by its nature, the creation of another resource to be stored and preserved, one that is still at risk of digital loss as a result of obsolescence. Digital formats will inevitably age and documents will need to be migrated to new formats in order to be preserved. We have several project partners and advisory board members who are at the forefront of digital preservation, such as the Hathi Trust, British Library and Open Preservation Foundation. We will draw on their expertise in order to ameliorate some of these risks, for example by following and advocating for ‘good practice’ guidance on the use of standardised file formats (especially W3C formats designed for longevity) and digital copy security (combining decentralised local ownership and centralised copies/archives). Of course, these methods will need to be brought into careful balance with the preferences of our stakeholders, including society members and citizen researchers and archivists. This is particularly important in light of existing conflicts between safeguarding and public access to materials.

5 OWNERSHIP VS SUSTAINABILITY

A similar tension can be found when considering how the societies can maintain a sense of ownership in their collections while ensuring their sustainability into the future. Individuals from all three societies described being gifted archival material by members of the public whose deceased friends or relatives were involved with the institution. This more informal passing down of material demonstrates the high value placed on the items by the community and suggests a sense of communal ownership or collective responsibility for their preservation. One participant was given a shoebox filled with over 200 newspaper cuttings including reviews, previews, flyers and so on. The society’s collection also includes a full run of concert programmes dating back to its inaugural season. The programmes have been saved and collected by individuals closely associated with the society, leading the participant to suggest that preserving the society’s history and legacy has been an important consideration for many years: ‘someone knew even at the beginning that it was worth saving’. The historical meeting records of another society reveal a similar desire to take stock of and preserve the institution’s legacy. The minutes from a committee meeting on 9 May 1961 include the following note: ‘Dr Summers said he wished there was a list of all the Programmes performed over the years and was promptly proposed as Archivist and the Secretary promised access to the Minutes for the purpose of the preparation of such a History.’[1] The continued existence of this shared desire to collect and preserve is reflected in the decision of all three societies to deposit portions of their collections into an archival repository, while other items are (perhaps more precariously) held in offices or private homes. This begs the question, how much material is being held unknowingly in private homes and how much is at risk of being lost or destroyed? Much of the UK population being confined to

their homes as a result of national restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic seems to have led to a surge in ‘decluttering’ that may have rendered material like this (that is bulky and ephemeral) at risk. Moreover, without archival workflows in place to safeguard the physical material, material held in homes or offices is arguably at greater risk of being lost or destroyed by flood or fire, or even being disposed of when tidying and decluttering.

One interviewee described feeling conscious that the material in their possession would be safer if deposited with a local archive, but confessed that they were hesitant to part with it (an understandable predicament, having spent many years working with the material). Interestingly, they also remarked that, to their knowledge, the papers pertaining to Hull (founder of the BMS) were destroyed by an ‘act of God’. Of course, depositing the material in an archive provides a solution to the problem of physical safety, but might digitisation enable us to go a step further by ensuring that the delicate balance between ownership and sustainability is maintained? The same individual acknowledged that the ability to access the digitised material from their home would ease their reluctance to part with the physical copies. This suggests that a digital archive might enable the individuals to retain ownership and autonomy over their material while ensuring its preservation and sustainability into the future. Our hope is that the associated linking of material from other, related societies will enrich the societies’ understanding of their shared heritage and increase their sense of belonging in the broader context of Hull’s BMS. Moreover, given our project’s emphasis on the principles of collaboration and co-design, the society will gain renewed ownership in their materials as a result of their participation in creating the digital archive. In terms of sustainability, the benefits are twofold: digitisation has clear implications for long-term accessibility, but if digitising these collections encourages the custodians of the material to deposit it in an archive with conservation and preservation procedures, the project also has a part to play in the future of the physical material.

6 INACCURACY AND BIAS IN THE ARCHIVE

While the digital archive created during the InterMusE project will constitute a valuable resource for researchers, the very ‘liveness’ of live musical performances often means that they leave only a faint trace of the historical record, even in modern times. While musicologists have used some types of performance ephemera to capture the nature and identity of musical events, sources are regarded as ephemeral and can be tantalisingly incomplete, confusingly inconsistent and tainted by bias. Members of the project team have addressed this topic in earlier work on London concert life (for example, see <https://inconcert.datatodata.com/>). One participant reflected on their experience of these issues while working with their society’s collection:

The programmes don’t always represent what actually happened. Even newspaper reports, depending on who they were written by [...] There are different sorts of angles. [...] ‘Truth will out’ is what a digital archive, hopefully, would maintain!

Related to issues around inaccuracy and particularly bias is the potential for social and political history to shape archival collections. Regional social history and its associated politics will play a

crucial role in the development of a digital resource that meets the needs of its users both within and beyond the societies in Belfast, Huddersfield and York. BeMS is a particularly interesting case study in this regard. Our initial scoping suggests that the region’s difficult history may be perceived as looming large over the society’s preservation activities and the use of and interest in the collection in Ireland. One individual suggested that the creation of a digital archive will have ‘UK-centric’ relevance given the society’s relationship with others in England. They also suggested that some stakeholders may be reluctant to engage with a ‘British’ institution. The society was founded as a chapter of the British Music Society in 1921 amid a political landscape already characterised by division. 1921 also marked the year in which Ireland was partitioned by the Government of Ireland Act 1920. As one individual explained, there have long existed tensions between the society’s origins in Hull’s vision and the broader institution’s British roots. This tension is encapsulated in the renaming of the society in the 1980s to reassert its role as a mainstay of Belfast’s cultural landscape, despite the explicit internationalism of Hull’s originating vision. These socio-political tensions resonate today:

Even sometimes when I go back and write about [the society], I feel slightly embarrassed and I don’t want to emphasise the ‘British’ Music Society when I’m trying to bring everyone on board.

As researchers, our acknowledgment of the presence and function of these attitudes is vital, particularly given the community-centric and democratic nature of our project. As the project progresses, we seek to understand how socio-political events and related changes in public taste and opinion have been reflected in trends in concert programming, design of marketing and ephemera, and community engagement. In each organisation, we ask, who is being included, who excluded, and what is happening structurally to produce these outcomes? What can historical data tell us about the role of community politics (including inter-generational politics), patterns of migration, and geopolitics in maintaining and building audience engagement with cultural institutions? In addressing these questions, we hope to unearth new insights into the powerful role of musical events past and present in defining human communities across the globe.

Such issues cannot be brought to light by simple text-searching of digitised programmes, but there are additional means of gathering and linking additional data to enhance the historical record. Beyond digitising the society’s collections, we intend to combine archival materials with personal recollections, annotations of item images and oral histories. This kind of material has been collected by several recent projects, such as The Listening Experience Database (<https://led.kmi.open.ac.uk/>), a project that brings together crowdsourced data about people’s experiences of listening to music from a range of cultures, periods and genres into a searchable, open-access database. Such material may provide a means for addressing inaccuracies and bias in the collections by providing additional context and information not documented in ephemera or reviews pertaining to a particular performance. Of course, recollections are susceptible to influence by bias or the development of gaps or alterations in memory over time. Nevertheless, they constitute

a potentially meaningful form of mediation between the likes of programmes and reviews.

BeMS, BMSY and HMS all serve communities that have a significant stake in the societies' histories simply as a result of the length of time they have given in service to the institution. For example, the post of President of BMSY has been held by Francis Jackson since 1973. The now 103-year-old organist and composer is a beloved figure both within the society and in the city's wider musical life. Similarly long-serving members can be found across the three societies. These individuals are a valuable source of information and recording, transcribing and summarising their personal recollections and oral histories is one means by which to preserve their experiences alongside (and as an extension of) the physical materials. Personal recollections also constitute a form of commemoration. To mark its 75th anniversary in 1996, for example, BeMS published a limited-edition 'informal history' booklet, including a collection of personal recollections of past and present members of the society.[5] Elsewhere, during the BMSY committee meeting attended by the PI, members were eager to suggest individuals who would have interesting memories to contribute and whom we might approach as candidates for oral histories and interviews. We are eager to combine interviewing methods with other forms of personal recollection, for example, inviting crowdsourcing participants to add memories to digitised material in the form of annotations. We also intend to enable the upload of relevant self-digitised documents that people may have in their homes (such as photographs and annotated programmes). A successful example of this kind of crowdsourcing model can be found in the Oxford Great War Archive (now integrated into Europeana), which invited the submission of items relating to the war to form a significant, pan-European public digital archive of the First World War as lived experience (projects.oucs.ox.ac.uk/runcoco/casestudies/gwa.html). Because participants will be able to choose the materials they wish to upload and annotate at their own behest, this solution lends itself to a more organic form of personal remembrance and reflection, as well as intergenerational communication.

7 COLLABORATION AND COMMEMORATION

With their centenary seasons falling between 2018 and 2021, BeMS, BMSY and HMS find themselves at an apt moment for institutional and collective reflection. Geoff Cubitt writes that '[a] commemorative occasion [...] is a social occasion. It calls on members of the community to participate in – or at the least, to witness – the articulation of whatever element in the past is being evoked.'[8] In this sense, he argues, 'commemorative activities help to elicit a sense of social connectedness.'[8] The commemoration of the BMS centenary and its associated opportunities for reflection have been both complicated and compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic. HMS, for example, had an unbroken record of performances since 1918 (documented in a complete run of programmes and related materials), but in 2020, they were forced to suspend their concerts in light of national lockdown restrictions (see Figure 2).

The past twelve to eighteen months have blurred the concept of live performance, the very foundation of the planned commemorative activity for these societies and, indeed, the backbone of the



Figure 2: Concert cancellation notice on the Huddersfield Music Society homepage (<http://www.huddersfield-music-society.org.uk/>).

BMS's mission back in 1918. However, the pandemic has taught us that physical isolation need not necessitate social isolation and, as both a social activity and a point of reflection, commemoration can take on different and perhaps unexpected forms. Having been postponed in light of Covid restrictions, BMSY's 100th concert season, for example, is now due to take place in 2021–22, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the society. Alongside the creation of their digital archive, this perhaps constitutes an equally, if not more meaningful form of commemoration. Commemorative activities also have the potential to offer significant social benefits. In fact, when asked about the appeal of a digital archive to their society and its community, one participant suggested that the act of creating or contributing to the digital archive might be even more meaningful than the archive itself.

Digital platforms have become increasingly integral to our consumption of live music, as well as our social interactions. This project explores how concert-giving bodies can reflect on their identity through the creation of a dynamic digital archive. As well as bringing communities together, commemorative activities can also play an integral role in establishing social groups and networks,

whether such activities take place in person or not. Drawing on the example of a national anniversary, Hiro Saito suggests that ‘mutual awareness that other members of the nation in other places are marking the same occasion helps to produce feelings of group membership and solidarity among individuals’.[12] In addition to the potential for a renewed sense of ‘togetherness’ in spite of physical distancing, our project opens up opportunities for expanding social cohesion beyond discrete institutions. Our conversations with individuals at each society revealed that for most, the societies’ shared point of origin in Hull’s BMS was unknown. As such, this sense of community and solidarity is not only relevant within the individual institutions, but also between the societies in relation to the broader history of the BMS. Societies were, for example, founded in Melbourne, Sydney, and several communities in New Zealand, raising questions about the meaning of shared ‘Britishness’ and the performance of ‘Britishness’ in a postwar colonial context. Further to the collections of BeMS, BMSY and HMS, the British Library and Royal College of Music library collections contain publications produced by the BMS for circulating news and ideas between chapters (such as annuals, congress reports and bulletins). These too will be digitised in order to provide an international context and a counterpoint to the work of individual chapters, thus enriching their sense of shared history and identity.

8 CONCLUSIONS

Having established the foundational knowledge and relationships for collaborative digital archiving with these three BMS societies, our next step is to begin digitising and uniting their collections. Given the text-heavy nature of the concert programmes and other materials held by the societies, Phase One of the digitisation will focus on text, with later phases involving multiple passes through the data to add additional information. This approach aims for initial breadth (that is, a larger body of lower-quality information on a wider subset of materials), followed by multiple passes to improve quality and detail. This is in contrast to other approaches that aim for completeness at the expense of a much slower rate of providing useful information. A multi-pass approach is also more compatible with involving a greater diversity of participants in the process of digitising and providing metadata.

While the concert programmes and administrative records of the BeMS will be experimentally co-digitised with volunteers from the society, those of the BMSY and the HMS will be brought together at the Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York (BIA) to produce a set of high-quality IIIF-compliant scans. The digitised archive of each chapter will then be developed in close collaboration with its members and audiences in ways that model deep community engagement. In part, we are able to draw upon the expertise of project partners such as the Hathi Trust and the British Library in carrying out these different kinds of digitisation work. However, we also intend to find new ways of working with community data, especially for the stories that connect and inform raw physical or digital materials, such as oral histories, annotations, and so on.

In addition to this focus on Hull’s BMS, we will work with Krannert Center for the Performing Arts (KCPA) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Established in 1969, KCPA

is similar in age to BIA (est. 1953) and both are hosted by higher-education institutions with a deep commitment to social inclusion, from the University of Illinois’ land-grant status (<http://bit.ly/UOllandacknowledgement>) to the University of York’s roots in Quaker philanthropy. KCPA’s intensive performance programme presents and nurtures artists and artistry from diverse cultural backgrounds, fostering an inclusive culture that champions education, research, public engagement, and innovative cross-academy collaboration. Complete programme books and associated ephemera related to the KCPA’s performance history and its relationship with both community and campus survive in KCPA’s own archive and digital repository, while the BIA holds an archive of concert programmes, season brochures, and other documentation relating to performances in campus concert spaces since the early years of the University’s foundation. Like KCPA, BIA supports and expands its host university’s socially inclusive cultural endeavour, collecting and preserving archives and making them widely available for research to all people – digitisation and investment in digital infrastructure is key to its mission of widening access. The extensive performance-ephemera collections and related structures and resources at these organisations thus present an excellent opportunity for an international comparison of the impact and influence of higher-education institutions on local and regional cultural life in a transatlantic context.

The digitised resources from these disparate institutions will be used as a basis to create a diverse set of proof-of-concept prototypes to demonstrate data use in many different ways by many different stakeholders for many different purposes including scholarship, teaching and public humanities. Taking the ‘long view’, we ultimately seek to understand the present through the past: by applying aspects of machine learning and artificial intelligence to the capture and analysis of local performance data from inter-related archival materials through time; by inviting and accumulating layers of crowdsourced memories among different generations responding to selected artefacts; by exposing hidden patterns and trajectories in musical data spanning a century of social and political change; and by applying the insights gained to enrich the experience of live musical performances mediated by digital technologies. Reflecting our project’s wide-ranging and holistic aims, the InterMusE team brings together the diverse and complementary expertise of colleagues from digital humanities, cultural-historical musicology, performance history, computer science and human-computer interaction, librarianship, archival theory and practice, and heritage and cultural industries. As such, our initial scoping activities have brought into focus diverse issues, opportunities and challenges for our project and, moreover, they highlight our project’s potential to offer insights and methodologies both within and beyond the humanities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The InterMusE project (February 2021 – January 2023) is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of their UK-US New Directions for Digital Scholarship in Cultural Institutions scheme (AH/V009664/1).

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Belfast Music Society, British Music Society of York and Huddersfield Music Society for their invaluable partnership and contributions to this work.

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