



bobcatsss

BOBCATSSS 2010 @ Parma, Italy

Dates: Monday 25th, Tuesday 26th, Wednesday 27th January, 2010

**Bridging the digital divide:
libraries providing access for all?**

**Digitalisation of LPs – a modern possibility
for the music librarians**

Bálint Bereczki

University of Western Hungary
Savaria Campus
Department of Library and Information Science

ba86@freemail.hu

Abstract: This presentation is dealing with the digitalisation of LPs. It includes the major aspects: the technical background, methods, possible services, the copyrights and the special collections; introduces the Hungarian attitude to digitalisation and the new trends and tools of listening to music.

Keywords:

- Digitalisation
- Music Libraries
- Special collections

1. Introduction

Nowadays the fast technological development gives new opportunities to the libraries. The electronic documents come to the front, digital or virtual libraries have been founded and the habits of information seeking are changing. The digitalisation of the traditional documents is the first step to build a broad cultural network among countries or continents.¹

But first we need an exact method of selecting documents for digitalisation; must determine the criteria that give justification to digitalisation. LPs need special attention because they are released on outmoded material and often contain unique contents.

In my presentation I am dealing with the digitalisation of LPs. I find this topic very interesting because in this project involves much more opportunities than the conservation of cultural heritage. It could be an excellent possibility for the music library to provide new services based on the digitalised documents.

¹ Europeana: a place for inspiration and ideas (<http://www.europeana.eu/portal/>).

2. The starting focus

The starting focus of this project was at the Hungarian attitude of libraries of using their record collections. Through my practices, I realized that libraries do not use their record collections, although they have large and very high valued LPs. Some of these discs are unavailable, some of them are very rare, and some belonging to the Hungarian cultural heritage. Unfortunately, the number of the articles about the digitalization of audio documents is poorly in Hungary and it makes my work harder.

The first (1) problem is the technical support, because few readers don't have a record player at home and listening to the records in the library is usually very uncomfortable. So they can't access the music that they want to listen. The musicological researches are often different, especially in case of classical, folk and jazz music.

The second (2) and the more serious problem is the decay the records, it causes unenjoyable sounds; and of the record players. The material of the Hungarian LPs (a kind of plastic, called bakelit or vinyl) is very vulnerable. Some of the LPs are unusable by the matters of physical injuries; some record players are damaged because their most important components, their pick up systems are worn. These components are very expensive and they are in short supply or rare available. The restoration could be one of the more important areas to the musical librarians, and the solution is the digitalization.

Consequently, some of the Hungarian readers and librarians can't access the contents of the special LP collections. Most of them have a modern habit of listening to music, but especially the older generations have demand for this old way, and librarians should keep step with the new technology. Unfortunately, it's very hard to begin, because the digitalization projects are usually involve the old books and the manuscripts.

The first point of the planning the digitalization of LPs is to make an exact method of selecting for digitalisation; must determine the criteria that give justification to digitalization. LPs need special attention because they are released on outmoded material.

The first criteria (1) could be the “criteria of release”: advantage for the records which weren’t released on modern, digital materials at all.

The second criteria (2) could be the “criteria of popularity”: for the most popular records which were released on CD maybe but don’t belong to the collection of the library. This criterion is special because libraries could spare some money by restoring their issue.

The third criteria (3) could be the “criteria of decay or injury”: damaged discs are preferred. It’s very important to realize these criteria before librarians begin to make their list of the selected documents. If the music library is in short supply of capacity, the second criteria would be the better to start to digitalise their own records instead of buying the new releases. Librarians can use the internet for searching the releases, make questionnaires to estimate the demands and make revision to find the damaged LPs. These procedures can help to write a correct list of records which shall be digitalized in short time.

So the reasons are given for the digitalisation of LPs, and if we have any demands for using the collections in modern formats, we can plan our services based upon the new documents. But first we shall analyze the new trends of listening to music, the new formats of music and the new technical developments, tools.

3. New trends of listening to music

Today the cassettes or the LPs don't belong to the most popular tools of listening to music. The digital audio encoding formats are the most popular ones for two advantages: their usage is more convenient and can be easily shared on the internet.²

The newest trends of listening to music are with the mp3 players, like Ipod, the products of Apple, and various types of portable media players.³ These tools are able to store and play digital media formats, not music only. They have access with the music-download sites, so music lovers can reach their favorite songs or albums anywhere. Mobiles are integrated with media players, so we can find an mp3 player in almost every teenager's bag. It follows that the most popular music formats are not the conventional, analogue audio documents, slowly they will be replaced by the digital media.

The digital formats have one very big advantage. They can be easily shared on the internet. Nowadays there are no limits, people don't have to wait for a song, it's easy to search, and they can listen to it immediately. There are so many sites that dealing with share media, the bigger and the most famous is Youtube.⁴ Another important advantage is the easy and practical usage, because there's no need for any additional tools like walkman, or discman. The media players are getting smaller and smaller and their touch screen system permits comfortable handling.

The keywords of the new habits of listening to music are:

- Multimedia
- Mp3
- Instant access

² Burkart, P. (2008). Trends in Digital Music Archiving. *Information Society*, 24 (4), 246-250.

³ Conhaim, W. W., Page, L. (2005). iPod Sprouts Successful Changes in Media Landscape. *Information Today*, 22 (3), 25-26.

⁴ Ayres, P. (2008). YouTube for fun and education. *ALISS Quarterly*, 4 (1), 15-18.

- Online connection
- Multimedia player
- Sharing audio and video files
- Comfort
- Easy usage
- Integrating the new techniques to the mobiles and other tools

Music libraries need to open to the newest trends by planning and making on-line services, sharing their special collections. Digitalisation could be a good method, a basis of the new way.

4. Process of digitalization

The method of the digitalization of LPs is very simple. The necessary assets are not special at all. Librarians need a computer with a vinyl ripper (for example RIP vinyl 4.3 from Wieser Software) and a sound editor (for example Free Power Sound Editor or Sound Editor of Nero) programs, cables to conjugate, and a record player. The only problem point is to get the special cable that fits to the output of the record player. The outputs have various types, there isn't any standardized cable that connects to all types of record players.

There are several digitalisation methods of LPs, librarians can do it on their own choose from different procedures, but the basic steps are always the same, so I would like to introduce the basic steps.

In brief, the process has three main steps. Firstly, librarians play the LP and start the ripper (or editor) program to make a sound file. When the first side of the disc ends, they save the file, and make another record file of the second side. The second phase is the editing

process of the sound file by setting the volume, cutting the tracks or making fade outs. There are many possibilities to make a professional valued song file, but libraries must learn the basic editing functions at least. After this the next step is to choose the extension of the file, the format of the audio. The most popular and practical format is the mp3 format nowadays, but the wav, the mp4 or the wma extensions are often used. Finally, the third step: writing the CD, DVD or uploading to the homepage of the library.

These tools can be found almost in every library. It's enough to use a medium category pc, and the needed softwares are often freeware. Furthermore, there is not any need for a special project group to do the digitalization process, because it can be done by the music librarians themselves. During the first period, librarians can do their work, because this part of the process doesn't require special attention. Certainly, project groups can be formed for producing a high quality result, members must know all about the editor programs, the opportunities of editing songs and they have to be interested in the multimedia applications.

In my opinion every technical condition is given to begin the digitalization of LPs in the Hungarian libraries. It is a problem that some of the music librarians don't have any education to accomplish the process, but fortunately these methods are very easy to learn. After this process, libraries can plan their special services with their special digital collections. In short, there are six arguments, which show the relevance of digitlisation:

- The LP collection will be usable for everyone, the technical limits will disappear
- The LP collection will be protected against injuries
- The library will use its own documents, restore them
- New readers, group of users
- The library will be competitive
- More spaces for storage

5. Potentiality services

There are many potential services that can follow from the digitalisation process of our LP collections. We can provide these documents online or the traditional way. These two possibilities are the starting point, how to institute our special collection.

If we follow the new trends, we shall choose the online way. If the library has intranet, via the collection could be used, the problems of copyrights could be reduced. All availabilities of web 2.0 create new dimensions to using the digitalized files. By using the new functions of the web, we can make this service better. To defend the special collection, a password must be added to all readers.

An excellent model of the online way is the Virtual Gramophone: Canadian Historical Sound Recordings, a growing multimedia project of the Library and Archives Canada. Their website devoted to the early days of Canadian recorded sound, the 78 rpm records, which are older than LPs. A database relieves the researches easier, complete descriptions can be used, which includes the basic data of the release. The biographies complement this exact website with information about the performers.⁵

The traditional or the simple way of this service doesn't use the internet to share. The collection will be written to CD or DVD. The audio documents could be lent, if this possibility is permitted by the publishers or copyright law.

Before starting our special services, we shall analyze the demand for. The SWOT and the PEST analysis are very important to make. The economical, the technical and the social factors confirm the viability of these services. If the strength of the library includes high LP collection, digitalization is an excellent possibility.

⁵ The virtual gramophone: Canadian historical sound recordings (<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/gramophone/index-e.html>).

Our new services could be very popular for every kind of readers. Musicians, music teachers and music lovers will be more even satisfied. Musicological researches become easier and more comfortable. Rare discs of classical music can be served in higher quality; teaching of music could be more interesting.

I would like to present another idea, how to recycle LPs, when they have been digitalised already. Exhibitions could be held, to show the old habits of listening to music to the younger generation. It could be a very interesting program for little children, when they want to go an organized library-visit with their teacher. The Retro style is very popular nowadays, and LPs and record players belong to the Retro tools.

Unfortunately, as I pointed out earlier, the Hungarian digitalization projects give advantage to books and manuscripts and librarians usually have a negative attitude towards digitalisation. It will be a very long procedure to begin the digitalization of LPs in Hungary. The most difficult point of digitalisation is the law.

6. Problems

The Hungarian copyright law doesn't permit full service; they may freely publish their digital collection in their closed network only.⁶The exception is education; colleges could lend their collection for helping the studies of students. In the library of the Savaria Campus, librarians began a digitalisation project to restore their most important analogue documents. They digitalised some classical music, by using various titles from various discs, although there is growing demand of digitalisation of VHS tapes.

The Hungarian law permits to make copies of the documents in the libraries, but it doesn't permit to lend them. It only gives an opportunity to use them on spot.

⁶ The homepage of National Audiovisual Archive of Hungary (<http://www.nava.hu/english/nava/legal.php>).

Most of the Hungarian LPs were released by the Hungaroton record label. Hungaroton was the only record company from the 50s to circa 1989. Now it begins to re-release their most popular discs remastered on CD⁷. Libraries are being forced to buy the new releases by the law, and it's a very expensive resolution.

A liberal approach initiated by the librarians could be a good answer to this question. Libraries should join with each other to show the demands for digitalization of LPs. Together they can achieve their intentions, attest the justification of this method. They should contact with the copyright organizations like ARTISJUS in Hungary. Past summer on Katalist, one of the mailing lists of Hungarian librarians there was an interesting debate about digitalisation, some good and new ideas were discussed. It could be the starting point of the liberation process.

Finally, I would like to quote Péter Benjámín Tóth, a Hungarian jurist, who is engaged in the copyrights in the library:

“The copyrights are very variable nowadays; they are changing faster like ever before.”⁸ It's a positive idea, and I hope digitalisation will be a useful service in the near future.

7. Summary

To sum up, digitalisation of LPs could be a new way for musical librarians. It will be an important method to restore the old collection of records and provide it online or the traditional way. Maybe the Hungarian attitude will change soon, copyrights will be more acquiescent. The digitalisation of the traditional documents is the method to preserve our music treasures and cultural heritage, so it's one of the most current challenge of librarianship.

⁷ The homepage of Hungaroton Records (<http://hungaroton.hu/>).

⁸ Tóth, P. B. (2004). A digitalizálás és a digitális közzététel szerzői jogi vonatkozásai. Retrieved from <http://www.artisjus.hu/opencms/export/download/aszerzoijogrol/digitalizalas.pdf>