

All that jazz: exhibitions, partnerships and promotion



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Richard Jones talks about the Barbican Music Library's lively programme of exhibitions, building a persuasive case for using exhibitions to build partnerships and expand your audience.

AS the environment in which libraries operate grows ever more challenging, with increasing competition for the public's attention coupled with sectoral retrenchment, librarians are having to strive to find ways of retaining customers as well as reaching out to new ones. Over the past few years, the staff at Barbican Music Library, part of Barbican and Community Libraries (a section within the City of London's Culture, Heritage and Libraries department), has developed a successful programme of exhibitions by forging partnerships with prominent individuals and organisations within the musical sphere.

Exhibition space

The space that is offered to exhibitors comprises up to six alarmed, glass-topped cabinets, behind which is situated a row of

display boards. The cabinets have housed rare and valuable items, most notably Malcolm Arnold's Oscar for his soundtrack to *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (necessitating a comprehensive insurance policy). Many of the exhibitions, which usually run for a period of two months, have been accompanied by evening events. A listening post can be used to feature recordings which complement the exhibits, and a comments book gives customers the opportunity to record their feedback.

The exhibitions programme is based around five themes:

1 To celebrate important anniversaries

As well as celebrating notable dates in the history of leading music-related organisations, we aim to mark important musical anniversaries, such as musicians' births and deaths. Wikipedia's *Year in music* pages have

Visitors engaging with the *All that Jazz* exhibition. Photo © National Jazz Archive



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proved to be a useful aid in discovering this information, although of course it is always advisable to consult a range of sources. The next step is to identify individuals or organisations that may hold materials suitable for a display, e.g. relatives of musicians, biographers and scholars, composer societies, or music publishers.

Since 2012, we have collaborated with Lady Solti and Paul Campion (author of *Ferrier – a career recorded*) to mark the centenary of the births of the eminent conductor Sir Georg Solti and the contralto Kathleen Ferrier. The Britten-Pears Foundation and The Delius Society curated exhibitions to commemorate important anniversaries for the composers Benjamin Britten and Frederick Delius; and our partnership with the Royal Philharmonic Society (RPS) resulted in a display to mark the organisation's bicentenary. Later this year we will be partnering with one of London's foremost orchestras to celebrate a milestone in its history.

These collaborations ensure that our cabinets contain interesting and visually appealing items such as composers' letters, original scores, artefacts, and photographs. Two of the exhibitions were featured on BBC Radio 3: the tribute to Sir Georg Solti was picked up by *Music Matters*, and a discussion of the Royal Philharmonic Society's display was held on an episode of *In Tune*.

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2 To promote specific genres of music

One myth that still lingers around public libraries is that they only stock classical music, as evidenced by the occasional request for 'modern music' by which the customer can mean anything from Bellowhead to Brubeck, or the Rolling Stones to Rihanna, as opposed to the works of 20th century classical composers such as Stockhausen or Penderecki. We have found that

an effective way of countering this notion is to include a range of musical styles in our schedule, something which has been made possible through collaborations with the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), which champions the English traditional arts, and the National Jazz Archive, the UK's national repository for the written and printed history of jazz. The NJA's most recent display, *All That Jazz – the Golden Age of British Popular Music, 1919-1950*, was featured on both BBC Radio 2 and Jazz FM. These exhibitions enabled us to highlight our own holdings of folk and jazz CDs, and suggestions for purchase provided by both organisations enhanced our stock.

Popular music has been represented courtesy of two exhibitions featuring Pete Frame's iconic Rock Family Trees, which formed the basis of a series of BBC documentaries in the 1990s, in partnership with the well-known author and journalist and his organisation, Family of Rock. These were organised by our Principal Library Assistant, Michael Southwell, who also curated a number of displays on the subject of various rock and pop genres by drawing on his own extensive collection of vinyl and memorabilia. Music Hall in London, a collaboration with another section within the Culture, Heritage and Libraries department, London Metropolitan Archives (LMA), documented

The NJA's previous exhibition, *The Story of British Jazz*. Photos © Michael Southwell, unless otherwise stated





Photo © National Jazz Archive

the history of this rich theatrical tradition by exploring the lives of some of the leading artistes and highlighting the impressive venues in which they performed.

3 As a means of outreach

The City of London is a unique local authority and, whilst it contains fewer than 10,000 residents, it attracts in the region of 360,000 commuters during the working week. On the eastern fringes of the Square Mile lies a large Bangladeshi community with whom we were keen to engage, something that was achieved as a result of Michael Southwell having a contact in that area – artist and spatial designer, Saif Osmani. His display traced the history of Bangladesh, whilst exploring the role music plays in defining national identity, and contained a number of musical instruments including the UK's largest ektara, a one-stringed instrument popular with Bangladeshi folk singers. An evening event was held in the Music Library to showcase both traditional and modern day Bengali culture through storytelling and drama, as well as performances from singer-songwriter and sitarist, Shama Rahman, and her band.

4 To contribute to the Government's health and well-being agenda

Barbican and Community Libraries' staff play an active role in supporting, and participating in, the health and well-being agenda, and we were keen to make a contribution in a musical context. This resulted in a collaboration with the British Association for Music

Therapy (BAMT), the professional body for music therapists in the UK, whose display presented a visual history of this clinical discipline through original documents, music scores, letters and influential publications. CDs in the library's listening post gave further insights into the role of music therapists, the training they undergo, and the potentially life transforming effects of the work they do. To complement the display, an event was held in the Music Library, which was attended by some of the leading experts in the field.

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Our display area has become a vibrant space which captures the attention of customers as they enter the premises, thereby encouraging them to explore the Music Library further.

5 To support artists who use the theme of music in their work

We have promoted a number of artists by providing them with a platform to showcase their work: Caroline Tate's *Trees and their music* combined acrylic, photographic images and collage to create paintings linking specific trees with a particular composer and composition; a collection of *Most Wanted* portraits by mixed media artist Louis Sidoli explored the subjects of fame and popular culture; and a series of paintings on carved wood created by Tom Hughes incorporated images of the tuning pegs found on stringed instruments.

A rotating loan agreement has been arranged with the artist, Morgan Howell, whose oversize 3D paintings of classic vinyl singles from his SuperSizeArt series are highly sought after – many of them have been purchased by the original artists including Ozzy Osbourne and Neil Diamond. These are displayed next to the library's listening post.

Rewards for our library

1 Our display area has become a **vibrant space** which captures the attention of customers as they enter the premises, thereby encouraging them to explore the Music Library further.

2 The **library's profile has been raised** through exposure in both the local and national media and this, combined with the

debate our exhibitions have stimulated on social media, has attracted new customers both online and in person. Sometimes our publicity has produced unexpected results: through our inclusion in the City of London's *Culture & Heritage Guides* our Music Hall display was picked up by a number of Blue Badge Tourist Guides who organised tours for groups of senior citizens.

3 Many of the organisations with whom we have collaborated possess a large following or membership, thereby guaranteeing a high level of interest in the evening events that we have hosted on their behalf. These occasions provide the perfect opportunity to **introduce a new audience** to our services, some of whom then take out library membership.

4 Working in partnership with prominent figures presents opportunities to generate **additional revenue** via the sale of publications and tickets for events.

5 A successful exhibitions programme can help to focus the **attention of senior managers** on your service, something which is particularly important in the current climate. Appearances in the media, evidence of partnership work, and positive written feedback from customers (one of our displays garnered over 21 pages of comments!)

demonstrate the value of your work.

6 Exhibitions positively impact on **wider social outcomes** such as health and well-being, e.g. the BAMT exhibition raised public awareness about the benefits of music therapy. Additionally, associated events and talks offer volunteering opportunities for local communities.

7 Whilst one-off partnerships with external individuals and organisations bring many gains, in particular the sharing of expertise and the pooling of resources, the benefits are greatly magnified when they evolve into **lasting associations**: these enable you to keep abreast of developments in a particular field of music, as well as facilitating more extensive and wide-ranging collaborations.

Rewards for partners

Our partners have also reaped many rewards: a display area in one of the UK's pre-eminent public music libraries situated in the Barbican Centre, Europe's largest multi-arts and conference venue; a knowledgeable staff who are on hand to answer enquiries from customers throughout the duration of their exhibition; access to the country's network of music libraries through our membership of IAML (UK & Ireland);

publicity through a number of channels including social media, events guides, and City of London press releases; and written customer feedback which can be submitted as evidence of outreach when preparing a Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

Enriching cultural life

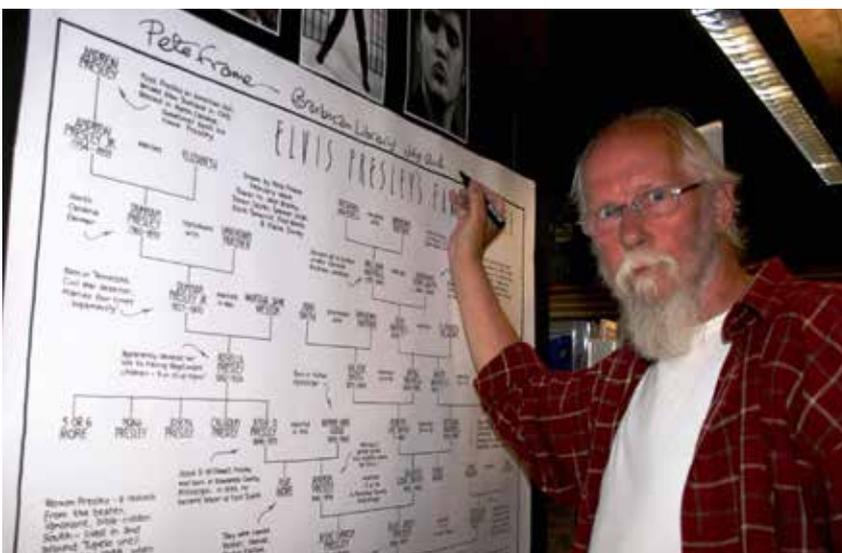
The development of our exhibitions programme has presented us with plenty of challenges along the way, and large amounts of staff time and effort have been consumed by the process. However, these factors are far outweighed by the benefits, not only for our customers and the Culture, Heritage and Libraries department, but also for individual members of staff: this work has provided opportunities for personal and professional growth, the chance to work alongside leading musical figures and organisations, and the satisfaction of being involved in a project which has enriched the cultural life of the City of London. [7]

**This article is a revised and extended version of a presentation given at the 2014 IAML (UK and Ireland Branch) Annual Study Weekend at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge. (IAML is the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres.)*



Above: Lady Solti viewing her tribute to Sir Georg Solti.

Below: Pete Frame signs one of his Rock Family Trees.



Above: GSMD students perform at an NJA event.



Above and below: BAMT's Music Therapy exhibition.

