

# IAML 2006 conference in Sydney, Australia

by Brian McMillan  
McGill University

\*The 2006 IAML conference took place at the Conservatorium of Music in Sydney, Australia, from July 1 to 6. Four CAML members attended: Maria Calderisi (retired, Library and Archives Canada); Alastair Boyd (University of Toronto); Terry Horner (University of British Columbia), and Brian McMillan (McGill University). The conference offered a rare opportunity for attendees to explore the Antipodes and, as it turned out, turn their thinking upside down as well.

While changing hemispheres, seasons, and time zones may have wreaked havoc with our internal clocks, we scarcely noticed a change in the weather. Sydney's winters are oddly reminiscent of Vancouver summers. The air was damp and bracing in the cool mornings, but the sun shone and daily highs reached 17 degrees. Nevertheless, locals sported their woolen mittens, scarves, and beanies (toques).

The Conservatorium is situated in the idyllic heart of Sydney's Botanical Gardens in the colonial Governor's converted servants quarters and stables. Within metres of the school are the city's CBD (Central Business District), the Sydney Opera House, the harbour, and several diverse neighbourhoods that

make up the core of this sprawling metropolis. The Conservatorium is at the heart of a vibrant cultural area, too. The State Library of New South Wales, the Museum of Sydney, the Australian Museum, and the Art Gallery are all nearby.

The IAML conference took place in a modern, subterranean wing of the Conservatorium. A broad staircase descending two floors led to four large lecture/recital halls where the sessions were held. During pauses, attendees spilled out into a common reception area to visit the displays and—before the concerts at least—sample a variety of Australian wines (with a salesman ready to take orders – by the crate only!).

The conference itself began with heated debate sparked by the Danish and Norwegian branches' call for modernization. Siren Steen and Ole Bisbjerg explained the five proposals: (1) to convert IAML's journal, *Fontes Artis Musicae*, to an electronic publication; (2) to inject more academic vigour into the conference program; (3) to reduce the frequency of conferences; (4) to introduce e-voting procedures; and (5) to make English IAML's only official language. Discussion was vigorous and a resolution was proposed and accepted at the closing General Assembly to strike ad-hoc committees to discuss the feasibility of the first and fourth proposals. [To view the Danish and Norwegian proposals, visit

---

\* © 2007 The author and The Canadian Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Documentation Centres / L'auteur et l'Association canadienne des bibliothèques, archives et centres de documentation musicaux

<http://www.iaml.dk/eng/iaml-intro.php>.

The IAML 2007 Council minutes ([http://www.iaml.info/en/organization/governance/council/sydney\\_2007](http://www.iaml.info/en/organization/governance/council/sydney_2007)) outline IAML's proposed action.]

This lively start set the standard for wide-ranging and open debate during the rest of the conference. The official program comprised standing committee meetings; sessions hosted by each of the four "Rs": RILM, RISM, RIPM, and RIdIM; papers by international participants; and most significantly, presentations that demonstrated the incredible activity of music libraries and archives in Australia.

The enthusiasm and scholarly insight of Robyn Holmes, Curator of Music at the National Library of Australia (NLA), typified the dynamism of Australian music librarians. Under her leadership the NLA has developed several innovative projects that challenge the traditional concept of music collection, organization, and dissemination. One such project is MusicAustralia (<http://www.musicaustralia.org>), a digital site for integrated music information retrieval supported by the NLA in cooperation with several partners including the Australian Music Centre and the National Film and Sound Archive. The website acts as a portal to all things musically Australian. Its hybrid nature—half archive / half Amazon.com.au—seems uniquely Australian. Here, online visitors can not only print digitized sheet music from the public domain and view archival materials, but purchase and download their favourite Bushwackers album as well.

The following day Holmes provided a fascinating overview of the current state

of Australian music scholarship. She traced the shifts from past practices to the present (with, of course, contemplation of possible future developments) by considering influences from the broader social context: changing funding sources, increased public/private partnerships, Australian education reforms, and new technologies. Like all good presentations, Holmes' paper raised more questions than it answered.

Other Australian sessions focused on unique Australian collections (Scottish Music in Australia; University of Melbourne collections; and the legacies of composers Peter Sculthorpe and Percy Grainger, and L'Oiseau Lyre founder Louise Hanson-Dyer) as well as a plenary dedicated to Indigenous music. Australians seem acutely aware of their troubled history vis-à-vis the country's original inhabitants: the conference opened with an aboriginal welcome on didgeridoo and most Australia-focused sessions began with an acknowledgement of the Cadigal People, the now-extinct tribe native to the Sydney region. Even the architecture reflects this cultural sensitivity. The Conservatorium's new wing, for example, incorporates artifacts unearthed in its construction: a cistern built by convict labour and fragments of earlier Aboriginal habitation.

The aboriginal presence is vibrant in contemporary Australian music life. Cate Richmond of the Northern Territory Library explained how her Knowledge Centre Program aims to strengthen remote aboriginal communities through the collection and preservation of rituals and oral histories. However, balancing Web-enabled

accessibility with tribal laws poses a constant challenge to all involved. At the July 3<sup>rd</sup> concert aboriginal artist William Barton collaborated with several classical musicians in an evening of contemporary Australian chamber works with didgeridoo.

A recurrent theme of the conference was the tension between change and traditional values. Musicologist Malcolm Gillies in his keynote address “From Pencil to Podcast: Maximising Musical Resources” suggested that evolving technologies have forced a major shift in traditional librarian tasks. Now the provision of access outweighs all other duties (selection, conservation, preservation...). Likewise, scholars have seen their research practices revolutionized. Where, he asked, do librarians fit in this new environment?

Later sessions echoed these questions. New cataloguing rules and case studies were considered (“RDA, DCMI, and METS”; “New Catalogue...New Rules...”); the value of marginalized collections weighed (“Research, Music Eclecticism, and the Unsung Press in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”); and the voices of the new generation of music librarians raised (“Strike a Note: We Want to be Heard”). IAML, like its individual members, faces the challenge of redefining itself and reaffirming its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Danish and Norwegian proposals that launched the conference and the reaction they received exemplified this tension between change and tradition. It was inspiring to see colleagues from around the world struggling to shape a vision for the organization’s future.

For Canada, the highlight of the Sydney 2007 conference was its official approval as host country for the 2012 conference. As this event approaches, CAML members will need to increase the branch’s profile within the international organization. The time is ripe to consider how Canada can contribute to IAML’s process of self-definition. Where will Canada be within the global 21<sup>st</sup>-century music library? How best can we reflect this position to our guests in 2012?