1. I have a dual existence as performing arts librarian and researcher. I recently had grant funding to set up a research network, Claimed from Stationers’ Hall, investigating Georgian legal deposit music in British libraries. Thousands of scores still survive silently in the stacks – we’ve been investigating what survived, where, and how it’s documented. [54]
2. Legal deposit is the shadowy cousin of copyright. It’s like a by-product of the copyright process, in Georgian times serving both as evidence of registration at Stationers’ Hall - and safeguarding the country’s creative output for future scholars. Sadly, not all publishers did register their work - and not all libraries kept the music they were entitled to! [59]
3. There’s a degree of interplay between my two roles – inevitably, my experience as a librarian affects my approach as a researcher, and vice versa. I like to think that readers benefit from insights I have gained through research, whilst I myself have acquired historical understanding to place today’s copyright in context. [52]
4. Whilst my research into legal deposit music is firmly rooted in the late 18th and 19th centuries, it does mean I feel on safe ground explaining to borrowers why old music is not available on inter library loan from the British Library! (I’m also an enchanting dinner companion when it comes to talking about historical stuff.) [57]
5. Now, music’s made up of twelve notes in an octave and eight steps in a scale; similar melodic shapes recur in different pieces, so there have often been legal battles about who wrote what, and what came first – look in JSTOR and newspaper databases! The Claimed From Stationers’ Hall blog lists a few such cases on the bibliography page. [60]
6. Perhaps because I arrange music myself, I’m intrigued by literature about musical arrangements. For example, Caraffa once wrote a tune, Rossini then used Caraffa’s tune in an opera, and Adams wrote a set of variations on it. In terms of intellectual input, whose was it? Adams’ creative effort was not insignificant. This publication would not exist otherwise. [58]
7. Rossini was prolific AND popular. There are also hundreds of arrangements of his early 19th century arias. His correspondence discusses ownership of orchestral parts in theatres, and licences to perform, but he’s silent regarding other people’s arrangements. I’ve read that Italian and French copyright was less advanced than in the UK – maybe this explains his silence. [57]
8. I’ve recently added to my skillset with a Postgraduate certificate in Learning and Teaching. My teaching is usually information-literacy related, but knowing that students and teachers often find copyright dry and restrictive, I’m interested in learning any pedagogical tricks to make the topic more meaningful. Queries arise frequently, providing informal teaching opportunities.[53]
9. For us librarians, knowledge of copyright is an essential requirement, even if readers don’t always appreciate our pearls of wisdom. As a counterbalance to copyright’s restrictions, I feel that more people should know about the ALCS – the Authors’ Licensing and Collecting Society, which actually pays out to authors – it’s my best discovery of 2019! [55]
10. Our challenge is how to inform, without appearing pedantic. We librarians tend to be caricatured as fussy and rule-bound – it’s dangerously easy to appear so! I’ve been looking for unusual angles to approach copyright questions, to convey the message that copyright is based on fairness for both creator and user. And I think I’ve found something! [57]
11. As it happens, we were discussing successful library social media campaigns, when I remembered a controversial musical work by John Cage, called “Four Minutes Thirty Three Seconds”. I wanted a gimmick, and in this piece, the performer sits, prepares their instrument, then does *[PAUSE]* nothing! The music is the ambient sound – the sound of silence. [54]
12. I wondered if it could be performed in a library. We’re a conservatoire, and we don’t just perform concertos, plays and ballets – we also offer a degree in Contemporary Performance Practice, which pushes all the boundaries. For example, Anna, a student on this course, did an entire performance in our library showcase. This photo was shared on social media. [60]
13. 4’33” is certainly off-the-wall and edgy enough to intrigue the punters. In our busy working library, where our performers are sometimes a bit excitable, a performance would ensure 4’33” of calm, reflective silence. A bit like this: [38 words + about six seconds]
14. Various instruments can be used in performances of the piece. The more I thought about it, the more I wanted to stage it. It would engage the readers, and make the library look innovative by creating live performance during opening hours. Unlike the “Get it loud in libraries”, out-of-hours concept, we’d do the opposite! [55]
15. Luckily, I investigated further before I got carried away. I read an interview in the Telegraph where Wombles composer Mike Batt talked about the litigation caused by his description of silence BETWEEN two tracks on his CD, as a performance of 4’33”. The settlement was substantial. Far from being a gimmick, it hinged on intellectual property. [57]
16. To me, it’s reminiscent of Hans Christian Anderson’s story, “The Emperor’s New Clothes”! I turned to our discovery layer, where I found David Seymour’s article discussing whether 4’33” was even music – a conundrum that has perplexed generations of audiences! The author cited Cheng Saw, who had written debating its originality, “protectable expression”, and “uncertainty of subject matter.” [58]
17. So it seems to be like the notices in china shops – “look but don’t touch”. The published score has blank lines and spaces. You can study and discuss it, but possession of the score doesn’t mean you can perform it publicly. If you even invoke the title, as Batt did, then you may get into hot water. [58]
18. If you desire total silence – find an anechoic chamber. For myself, I decided it was too risky to think of staging 4’33” in the Whittaker Library. But maybe I’ve found a hook for talking to students about copyright, because it’s clearly an excellent vehicle for discussing intellectual property – so long as you don’t perform it live! [57]
19. Even as I wrote this, a lecturer assured me in conversation that it was okay to copy a whole piece of copyright music. If we could engage with all readers on the high-level issues: what’s at stake, what copyright protects, and why appropriate licences are needed for performances – then hopefully they’d better understand the need for legislation. [58]
20. Whether you’re a musician or not, in the time it’s taken to deliver this Pecha Kucha, we could have collaboratively performed 4’33”, with time over to discuss its originality, “protectable expression” and “uncertain subject-matter.” But never mind – at least we haven’t breached Cage or his publishers’ copyright - which would have been embarrassing at today’s event! [56]