



Studios and Libraries – Comparing two very different institutions

Rob Thomson

TAFE NSW Wollongong Campus

Abstract:

Initially one might think that there is very little in common between a music studio and a library. At ALIA National Conference in Adelaide I met Ron Haryanto, Manager of Studios 301 who was there to offer the services of Studios 301 in the digitisation of analogue audio for libraries. I had heard recently of the push by the National Archives of Australia and the National Sound and Film Archive to digitise and preserve Australia's analogue sound and film stocks by 2025 and so knew some of the background to the project but Ron highlighted the work that the Studios 301 had been doing with the State Library of NSW and I realised that the problem wasn't confined to National or State institutions. I invited Ron to come and present at the 8th NSW Library Unconference in October in Sydney where he and his engineer laid out some of the problems and difficulties involved in getting audio off reel-to-reel, cassette and DAT tapes and the time restraints for public libraries of all sizes with the 2025 deadline approaching.

Ron issued an invitation to visit the famous Studios 301 so Connie Ross and I went on a tour of their facilities. We wanted to see where the 'magic' of recording happened and the digitisation process.

What I didn't expect to see or be struck by, was the number of similarities and commonalities between music recording studios and libraries.

After subsequent conversations I will be presenting a paper discussing what we have in common and more importantly what we can learn from each other. I will also be proposing that we need to get out and explore more in the GLAM and related creative industries to learn from each other and develop new cross institution conversations and cooperative learning opportunities.



Paper:

This paper I am presenting today arose out of happenstance and a chance encounter at ALIA National Conference in Adelaide last September. At the dinner there were many tables and loads of library people and it was a case of find a seat and sit somewhere. After a bit of a wander around the room I returned to sit with Jo-Ann Bathurst from TAFE Ultimo and Kathy White from Charles Darwin University in Darwin and sat with them at the table. A brief round of introductions followed and I discovered I was sat two seats away from Ron Haryanto Manager of Studios 301.

After some introductions and some general “what do you do? And where do you come from?” questions, the conversation turned to why Studios 301 were at ALIA National. We then had a conversation about digitisation of analogue tapes and Ron said that I should come for a visit to his stand and then later he added that I should come visit the studios, which I thought would be pretty cool. The talk soon ended as the food arrived and then the music and dancing began but I promised to drop in at the Studios 301 stand the next day...which I did!

The following day – following a late night in a French bar in Adelaide – after the morning tea break I did my tour of the vendor’s stands and got talking to Ron at the Studios 301 stand. Ron talked about what they had been doing with the State Library of NSW digitising their oral histories collection and the problem that exists with analogue audio tapes and the looming 2025 deadline to get them converted to digital formats. I mentioned that I had seen the directors of the National Sound and Film Archive and the National Archives of Australia on ABC’s The Mix in conversation

with James Valentine in the Pub Chat segment, talking about the same problem and the need for government to fund it. Ron talked about the gap between what is in the National and State Library collections and that which exists in public libraries and in other collections across the country.

Later over lunch I had a conversation with Holger Aman who was working at the time at the Supreme Court of NSW Library, but is now in London, and mentioned to him that perhaps I should invite Ron to come and talk at the next unconference in Sydney. I ran the idea of curating a number of speakers for the next unconference past Holger to see what he thought of the idea. Whilst the idea of an unconference is to allow the delegates to choose the topics for discussion I had decided to curate the 8th NSW Library unconference by inviting speakers along to talk on specific topics whilst allowing delegates to also choose a range of topics as well. So in addition to getting Megan Tolnay and Melanie Mutch from Librarian's Choice to talk about their initiative, Anna Shelmerdine from the Australian Institute of Music Library to talk about ILL of sheet music and Sally Turbitt and Amy Walduck to talk about using social media for NLS8 planning and collaboration, I decided to ask Ron if he'd come and talk at the unconference.

So I went to see Ron at his stand and explained what an unconference was and how I was planning to run the next one and Ron rather generously offered me the use of Studios 301 as a venue... which was nice... but I had already lined up a venue so I told him I wanted him to come along and talk about what they do and he said he'd come with an engineer and give a talk about what they do and how they do what they do. On 8th October Ron and Owen Butcher, a sound engineer at Studios 301 came and talked at the Unconference and laid out some of the problems and difficulties involved in getting audio off reel-to-reel, cassette and DAT tapes and the time restraints for public libraries of all sizes with the 2025 deadline approaching and giving people the opportunity to ask questions and get more information. After their talk Ron again said I had to come visit and to hurry as their current studios at Alexandria were about to get torn down for more apartments. I promised to visit as soon as I could.

Towards the end of November I contacted Connie Ross, my partner in crime with the unconference, and an ex-student of mine and Library Technician at Rosebank College, Five Dock, and arranged to go and visit the studios. Now Connie is a massive Prince fan while I am just a fan of music in general and all I was doing was visiting the studios to soak up the atmosphere and feel the vibe of history and absorb the knowledge of all that history of the many bands that had recorded there in that space.

It was just going to be a visit. That was all.

So we arrived, met Ron and the staff and were shown through the studios and the mastering suites and the sound engineer's booths and the sound engineering area with their racks of equipment and old play back equipment and tapes players and ancient audio paraphernalia. We saw the 2 grand pianos in Studio 1 and the 72 channel mixing desks in Studio 2 and had a great afternoon. Everyone was lovely and generous and happy to share their knowledge and stories...and there were lots of stories!

Connie and I finished our tour and talked outside and then Connie left to go home and I went for a drink before I headed for home. As I sat and thought back on the tour and later reflected as I drove home to Wollongong (which for those not familiar with NSW geography is about an hour and half's drive south of Sydney) I was struck by the similarities between studios and libraries.

I started my library working life in a special library at BlueScope Steel Research Library back in 1992 but since 2010 I have been teaching the Diploma course at TAFE in Wollongong and one of the things that that change has allowed me to do is to step back from my somewhat specialised view of libraries to encompass a wider view of the library industry as a whole. I get to see a wide

variety of libraries from the State Library to specialised collections like art gallery, law, music and museum libraries as well as academic and public libraries.

The visit to Studios 301 revealed that whilst we are very different industries we also share many similar things. We like quiet – and while I know libraries are no longer quiet, there is an expectation that even in a noisy library there will be a quiet nook somewhere. In studios, they are soundproofed and standing in them when we visited they are incredibly quiet spaces. I think in hindsight that it was the quiet that struck me most. In order to create music which is often loud and raucous, they need the quiet spaces in order for that noise to be recorded.

We both thrive on technology and are burdened by the need to sometimes cater for obsolete technologies and redundant hardware. We both cater for collaboration and creation. As Seán O’Faoláin, acclaimed Irish short story writer, once said, “the most important books are not those that are in the library but those that come out of a library.” Music recording studios are the place where musicians and sound engineers collaborate to produce the fantastic sounds and music we all love.

We have both been digitally disrupted. Studios 301 is the last of the large format recording studios in the southern hemisphere. The building we visited has been demolished (to make way for yet more apartments) and they are in the process of building a new suite of studios. The huge 72 channel mixing desks are still being used but also a lot of digital recording and editing is being done on computers. Music is being composed, made and played on computers.

Libraries went through digital disruption early and have made it through and are now, in the words of Kate Torney, CEO State Library of Victoria, Libraries are no longer the disrupt-ed but are now the disrupt-ors. The recording and music industry was hammered by digital disruptions especially

in regards to illegal downloading of music and that experience then impacted on the publishing industry who didn't want books and journals to be subjected to what had occurred in the music industry. This has then impacted on e-lending with some publishers not being made available on OverDrive for instance. The rise of Open Access has, in some way, been a reaction to the reluctance of publishers to engage with digital platforms.

As I just said, I know that libraries are no longer quiet places but we create zones of quiet in our sometimes noisy libraries but the noise of libraries also reflects the fact that we have evolved from repositories of long dead forests of dusty books to places where creation, creativity and collaboration can happen. Libraries, as we all know, have undergone quite massive changes in just the last few years...let alone the past 25 years. We change and continue to evolve and perhaps it could be argued that we do change and adaptation as well as anyone.

Music recording studios are also evolving. The new studios that Studios 301 are building which are nearing completion will be the most acoustically quiet studios on the planet let alone in Australia or the Southern Hemisphere. In building something new they have gone for creating something incredibly quiet. It will have 2 brand new recording studios, suites of mastering studios and sound engineering booths, digital recording abilities for the transfer of analogue tape to digital formats and collaboration and writing rooms for musicians and lyricists to work in and fine tune their craft. Like libraries they will continue to evolve and adapt and become more than what they were, as we have done.

We both also suffer from that phenomenon of people thinking that they know what we do, but usually what they think we do is a fraction of what we actually do, or are capable of.

Both the library industry and the music industry also suffer from speaking a “different specialised language”. We are, as I once said at the 2013 Library Technicians Symposium in Canberra, “very good at preaching to the converted” as in we are great at talking amongst the library industry, in symposiums like this and at conferences and to our patrons, suppliers and users...but we are terrible at “evangelisation” to those outside of the “congregation of Library industry people and users”. The music industry is also saddled with the same problem. So when it come to them talking to us, or vice versa, we - and they – struggle to use the “right” or perhaps, appropriate language.

This has been highlighted in the conversation they are having with libraries in regards to getting the urgency of the message of the audio digitisation deadline across. Libraries, archives and cultural institutions are – even if some are not aware of it – in a race against time to digitise their precious audio collections before the media of the 20th Century becomes unplayable and turns literally to dust and is lost forever. The 2025 deadline is looming but getting the message across has been a challenge.

We cannot afford to lose the oral histories we have so carefully created, collected and curated. As an industry we must get on the 2025 bandwagon or we will lose them forever.

As part of the continuing conversations I have been having with Studios 301 I have been to their recording studio at Pymont to record a podcast with two of their sound engineers which looked at how libraries and music recording studios can learn from each other and have a more productive dialogue going forward. We talked about the perception of libraries with the general public, the digitisation process, the opportunities for the recording studios and libraries to collaborate and the different ways information is made available and accessed. It was a huge thrill to be a part of their move into podcasting and I hope I have contributed well to the conversation on your behalf.

One thing visiting the recording studios has told me is the need for us to get out of the library and to go and talk to the creatives like the sound engineers and music producers and start to have conversations and explore what we have in common and see how we can work together. So my challenge to you, is to look around your area, your city, step outside of the normal conversations we usually have with other libraries and other library people and go out and seek the creatives and engage with them.

This will be a challenge as despite being an integral part of the GLAM industry, the opportunities outside of the peak bodies for people like us within the GLAM industry to get together and have conversations and explore areas of collaboration and opportunities to learn from each other are limited at best. I am not aware of any cross-GLAM events or social gatherings apart from the GLAM New Professionals social gatherings that have happened in the past in Sydney. I do note however, that there is a proposal for a GLAM-wide joint conference in 2020, so that is something to look forward to.

In 2014 the CSIRO published an Innovation Study that looked at the challenges and opportunities for Australia's Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums and in the executive summary it said: "The GLAM sector faces enormous challenges in the next decade arising from the massive pace of change in its operating environment; challenges it can only face effectively by collaborating across the sector, beyond organisational and disciplinary boundaries."

The report identified and recommended four strategic initiatives:

MAKING THE PUBLIC PART OF WHAT WE DO

This initiative aims for a deep transformation, both in the professional disciplines in the GLAM sector and in the organizations' relationship to the public. While participants acknowledged a profound rhetorical shift in GLAMs to address the needs of an active, informed public, especially through the use of social media, many felt a deep reluctance within the sector to let go of the traditional position of authority among curators, librarians and archivists and a simultaneous reluctance for organisations to become genuinely more porous to outside contributors and collaborators. This initiative, involving a fundamental shift to open access, open sharing and greater collaboration with the public aims to effect this shift.

BECOMING CENTRAL TO COMMUNITY WELLBEING

Take the acknowledged role that GLAM institutions play in the wellbeing of individuals and communities and make it a deliberate and central part of each organisation's purpose and vision. The focus is on both the value of the physical spaces as community centres, but also on the role the collections can play in fostering community memory, sense of self and pride, to the economy, and to community health and resilience as our population both ages and becomes more diverse.

BEYOND DIGITISATION – CREATIVE REUSE

Shift the conversation from the difficulties of digitisation to possibilities of creative reuse. Much of the sector is caught between the massive scale of the collections and the expense of digitisation, on the one hand, and the varied difficulties around copyright, moral rights, cultural rights and orphan works on the other. Many participants perceived the need to transition from a "push" to a "pull" model where publics are engaged from the beginning and help pull through digitised content based on specific needs, which shapes the form of digitisation and allows for creative reuse. Digitisation is about preservation, use and reuse to build cycles of creativity in which new or reshaped digital objects join the 'collection'.

DEVELOPING FUNDING FOR STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

With the expected constraints in support from government, there is a need to transform the basis of funding towards philanthropy, partnerships with the corporate sector and direct support from the wider community. While government must continue to play its part and fund basic infrastructure, the sector critically needs to find ways to fund big, strategic initiatives that reposition organisations for the digital era. Corporate support is likely to be tied to short-term projects with specific outcomes, but there are also opportunities for greater use of philanthropic foundations to support longer-term strategic and collaborative initiatives.

We are now almost halfway through that next decade and the collaboration between and across the sectors, beyond organisational and disciplinary boundaries is still seemingly in the planning stages. I am asking us to do even more, and go even further, to step beyond just talking to our sisters and brothers in galleries, archives and museums and talk to the music, arts, events, staging, performance and other creative industries, It is, I agree, a big challenge. But it is a challenge that we collectively need to engage in. There is a lot that we can learn from the museum sector – and the archives and galleries sectors and there is expertise that we have that they can learn from us. Outside of GLAM circles there is so much we can learn from other creative industries...and so much that they can learn from us.

The conversations with Ron and the team at Studios 301 has enriched me and contributed to some of the units I teach and therefore, hopefully, has enhanced the students and in time, hopefully, the libraries that they will venture out into. The conversations have been two-way conversations so whilst I have been learning from them, they have also been learning from me so together we grow in an understanding of each other and of the industries we represent.

It is these types of conversations and opportunities for collaboration we need to be engaging in and having. It is for the betterment of us as individuals, of us as an industry, of us as a part of the GLAM industry but more importantly, for the communities we serve and for their wellbeing and for the collaborations they will have and the content that they will produce in the future from the collections that we have curated. Collectively, as members of the Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums sector we need to continually emphasise the role of culture in creating a civil society, emphasise the significance of data and digital literacy and its implications for creative industries, advocacy for the value of culture, and clarification to the wider community as to what GLAM is and does.

Thank you.

References:

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GLAM-PEAK Digital Access to Collections: <http://www.digitalcollections.org.au>