

Remixing the Library: Revolutions Per Minute with ‘Sounds of the Stax’

Marilyn Clarke



**Discovery Services Librarian,
Goldsmiths, University of
London**
m.clarke@gold.ac.uk

Andrew Gray



**Academic Services Librarian,
Goldsmiths, University of
London**
a.gray@gold.ac.uk

The possibility of the possibility dawned on me as I sat in a session at the ILI2017 conference. Vinyl-junkie librarians mixing their passion for music with their work. Across the sea in Ireland at the University of Cork,

the Shush Radio Show transmits music and connects to its customers via the airwaves. They engage in a new way, an innovative and inspiring way. As librarians we are always seeking ideas to attract our users, trying to keep up with new technologies and trends. Not many though are using radio to do this.

I must have been grinning from ear to ear as bumping into one of the presenters later on, he said I was the perfect attendee – wide eyed with enthusiasm and excitement. Fueled by this idea, and knowing I had a willing accomplice in my equally music-obsessed colleague Andrew; I shared the idea with my director who loved it too. Now to approach the Goldsmiths Student Union’s internet radio station, Wired Radio.

The idea it seemed arrived right on time: the station was about to make a call out for new shows. Andrew and I scoped out our vision for a library radio show on a weekly one-hour slot:

- Tie-ins with events on campus, e.g. conferences, talks, exhibitions, courses, etc.
- Guests from the library, the College staff, Alumni, and the local community.
- Updates on enhanced academic skills sessions.
- Explore and share our own music archives.
- Broadening the learning of students by integrating music selections with College events, world events, special days, etc.

We applied and got accepted out of over 100 applications – we were thrilled! It was a Thursday and we were to present our first show the following Monday. With only a quick five minutes overview of the radio studio set up on the Friday, we were in

the hands of the gods. ‘Sounds of the Stax’ was about to become a reality.

For us this radio show is an exploration into how we can use radio to serve our users, and how music could be a means to do that. It’s putting a new element of joy into how we work with our students, while being able to explore our own creativity in the workplace. We see the show as a way to contribute to the student experience through the collective sharing of music and its ability to bring people together. It is also something our colleagues can enjoy too; listening out loud in the open plan office, or more intimately on their headphones.

Our first show was a ‘Soundsystem Special’, a tie-in with the Sound System Outernational Vinyl Weekender showcasing UK sound systems, as well as the Let’s Play Vinyl photography exhibition held in the Professor Stuart Hall building. I’d attended the weekender and shared my experience of building a speaker with my 12 year old daughter, as we played Jamaican sounds from our record collections. We pointed users to library resources on soundsystems and music of Jamaican origin.

Subsequent shows have focused on International Women’s Day, Welcome Back wellbeing at the start of Spring term, Academic Skills tutoring with the Academic Skills Centre manager, the role of the Subject Librarian, the Subject Librarian as academic, our Special Collections and Archives Curator’s role, LGBTQI+ History Month, and the practice and practicalities of being an artist today with one of our Alumni.

The shows consist of very informal interviews and a selection of tracks from both us and from our guests. On

one show we featured the WRPM collection (Women’s Revolutions Per Minute) - a collection of recordings of music performed, composed and produced by women. It was set up in 1977 as part of the Women’s Art Collective in London, promoting festivals of music by women as part of the Women’s Liberation Movement.

In order to communicate with the managers at Wired Radio we had to join their closed Facebook group. This was our main means of getting help with the studio equipment – for example, sometimes we were not sure if we were ‘on-air’. If presenters wanted to swap slots, or cover empty slots then this would also happen via Facebook.

The show is archived on Mixcloud so that we can promote it after the live instance. We use Twitter and Facebook to share the show with our users and listeners. Each programme is advertised with a picture of one of us hiding behind a record sleeve, most times directly aligning the choice of image with the theme of the show. On Mixcloud we outline each show and give bios of our guests, and list the artists we have played on the shows. On average we are getting at least 45-50 listens on Mixcloud per show.

While learning to use the radio studio sometimes proved a tad challenging, we soon got used to being behind the microphones and taking on the roles of radio presenters. As both of us are DJs we have vast amounts of music at our fingertips and for the most part play vinyl. We’ll face the playing digital challenge one day soon!

For us it’s a great extension of what we do as librarians and also allows us to be creatives at work in ways we hadn’t yet explored, or even imagined,

knowing we are surrounded by amazing creative talent within a world renowned College. Also, this experience gave us insight into ‘development’ opportunities for the students at Goldsmiths in radio, and, simply having an outlet from their studies is really beneficial.

At the moment we’re reapplying for our slot come the new academic year. The experience has opened our eyes to how we as librarians can bring more of our diverse skills to our jobs to:

- Connect the different university communities.
- Do something creative as part of our work.
- Align with the mission of the library.

We invite you to explore exciting new ways of engaging with your talents at work, and broadening how we reach, attract and retain our customers.

