# International Council on English Braille

# Music Committee Report – October 2020

## Prepared by Jordie Howell: Chair

## Introduction

As a subcommittee of ICEB, the music committee works to align Unified English Braille to the international music braille code to avoid conflicts and highlight ambiguities. We achieve this through charges which have been agreed upon by our committee and approved by the ICEB Executive. Our work is undertaken via an email discussion list comprising a voting member from each ICEB member country plus several observers who also contribute to discussions.

## Progress on Charges

### Charge 1. Continue work on isolating ambiguities between Unified English Braille and the braille Music Code.

**Item 1.1 Consult with other ICEB committees around relevant discussions or decisions regarding braille music and UEB.**

As UEB has been adopted in all member countries, the music committee’s main purpose is to outline conflicts between the music braille code and to document country variations and formatting differences. Topics have included:

**UEB brackets within a music context.**

As reported in 2018, the committee has found that brackets within a music score are treated differently by member countries. A quote from BANA Music Braille 2015 clarifies how brackets should be treated in a musical context:

“1.3 Three kinds of braille parenthesis markings are used in music transcriptions. Literary (Unified English Braille) parentheses "< "> are employed in ordinary literary context. Music parentheses,’,' are used when parentheses occur within music. Special parentheses 7 7 are used in chord symbols, music headings, and word-sign expressions to represent parentheses appearing in print ...". Additionally, special parentheses are used for bar numbers.”

End of excerpt.

The Music Committee suggests that this will clarify the use of brackets for transcribers, and if necessary a transcriber note should also be added to music scores where context is unclear.

BANA Music Braille Code 2015 has been added to the list of resources from which transcribers in member countries refer. There are aspects that are still under discussion and suggestions put forward particularly by the UK which we will include in future discussions concerning an update of the international Manual of Braille Music.

**Item 1.2 Create a list of Braille music courses/manuals available in UEB to be added to the ICEB website. Differentiate between transcription manuals and courses suitable for the teaching of braille music to children or adult learners.**

We are excited to report that the Music Committee’s webpage now links from the ICEB website. It contains a list of resources produced by member countries in Braille Music and UEB. If there are other resources please inform us so we can continue to add to this page.

<http://iceb.org/music.html>

**Item 1.3 Compile documentation around exceptions to the International manual setting out country formatting differences e.g. the Australian music addendum.**

On the ICEB Music Committee webpage, guidelines and documents that specify how member countries format UEB and Braille music. So far, contributions are listed from Australia, the UK and the US.

### Charge 2. Create a call to action concerning the need to preserve the heritage of braille music only available in hard copy master format, presenting the call and a summary of how to progress this issue to the ICEB Executive.

At the 2016 ICEB General Assembly, the following resolution was passed:

Resolution 3: Preserving music braille presently available only as hard copy

Noting with appreciation the past efforts of many people, organizations and countries;

Reminding all participants of both an historic and continuing legacy of music braille;

Considering criteria for undertaking and outcome of the preservation of music braille;

Recognizing the fact that considerable financial commitment is required;

This Sixth General Assembly of ICEB resolves to:

1. Encourage all relevant member-countries of ICEB, their organizations and agencies, to collaborate (where possible) to facilitate and further the preservation of music braille in hard copy;

2. Request that all sponsor-countries, appropriate organizations and agencies make known to ICEB and relevant committees, their position in respect of preserving music braille; and

3. Call upon all those involved to do their utmost to ensure future generations have access to and use of music braille resources from the past.

We are following progress in the digitisation of braille music scores and encouraging countries to maintain their hard copy resources. There is strong feeling within the committee that hard copy music scores need to be preserved and we encourage countries to work towards promoting these precious resources to borrowers and preserve them digitally.

### Charge 3. Encourage the continued development of the international braille music code through liaison with countries which have active braille Music committees and collate progress.

**Item 3.1 Investigate the possibility of collaborating with the World Braille Council incorporating as much international involvement as possible to commence work on a revision of the International Braille Music Manual.**

At the 2016 ICEB General Assembly, the following resolution was passed:

Resolution 4: Revision of New International Manual of Braille Music Notation

Acknowledging that braille music is the only universal braille code;

Recognizing that there are some elements of music not yet represented in the braille music code;

Acknowledging more work is needed with regard to integration of music braille with Unified English Braille;

This Sixth General Assembly of ICEB resolves to:

Investigate a cooperative project with braille authorities within and external to the International Council on English Braille to update the New International Manual of Braille Music Notation (1996) by Bettye Krolick.

This charged has not progressed. Many of you will be aware of the DAISY Music Braille Project with the goal to “ensure that more music braille scores are available more easily to more blind musicians world-wide”. At the time of writing, this has taken priority for a number of countries involved in this work. The three areas that the project is focusing on are:

Input files need to be as good as they can be at the start

Conversion and mark-up tools need to be accurate & reliable, for agencies and end-users

Good access is needed to existing intermediary files.

Several of our ICEB country organisations are working together to contribute to the work of this project which consists of four main components as taken from the DAISY Music Braille Project website:

“A professional conversion tool:

Supporting the development of an online professional automated music braille conversion tool (MakeBraille-Hodder, from dzb lesen, Leipzig) according to our prioritized sector requirements.

An interactive user tool for blind musicians:

Considering proposals from developers to make improvements to an interactive user tool for music braille for blind musicians, according to our prioritized sector requirements.

Improving standard music file formats:

Recommending improvements to MusicXML and proposing specifications for MNX so that standard music file formats include vital information which we need for effective conversion into music braille.

Improving music engraving practice:

Developing good practice guidelines for engravers (e.g. using the music notation software Sibelius) and trialling these with engraving services to improve the digital score content enabling more effective conversion into music braille.”

### Charge 4. Monitor the growing use of technology in the production and distribution of braille music.

**Item 4.1 Present a summary of the way in which member countries are using refreshable braille display technology and downloadable electronic scores thereby improving access to braille music internationally; discuss and report on software in braille music transcription practices.**

The ICEB Music Committee webpage now lists each country and their developments in technology in both braille music production, distribution and rehearsal practices. In summary, most of our member countries transcribing music use a combination of manual transcription by direct braille input into the Duxbury Braille Translator, and use of electronic semi-automated translation using the Goodfeel Music Translation software. Students and professionals are often requesting materials in soft copy formats for use on refreshable braille displays in rehearsal situations.

The UK is utilizing the MuseScore software and provides the following summary:

UK has worked with MuseScore to improve accessibility of this popular score writing program. In particular, we have seen improvements to:

* The process of beginning a new score (the New Score Wizard)
* The Palettes, allowing users to pick arbitrary musical symbols to add to the score
* Improved speech output (summarising the information to be spoken)
* Support for JAWS as well as NVDA
* Improvements for editing text-based items (such as lyrics, musical expressions, etc)
* Developing braille music export function.

We are excited about the possibilities improved MuseScore accessibility support offers and look forward to further enhancements in the future.

### Charge 5. Promote the teaching and learning of braille music through the investigation of models for the successful promotion of teaching and learning braille music that could be applied locally and/or internationally.

**Item 5.1 Compile a list of braille music programs, key educators or institutions in each country as a reference for members to be added to the ICEB website. Encourage providers and institutions to update this information to keep it current and to promote attendance by international students where possible.**

In 2018 I reported that our focus was to create a central location for information sharing across member countries. Committee members have expressed the importance of keeping up to date with initiatives internationally, particularly those countries with fewer resources to draw on. We now have a list of programs and initiatives listed by country that we will continue to populate. These include braille music camps, intensive music days, and also braille programs that may have a special focus on braille music. We also included the Braille Music Retreat: a collaboration between Australia and New Zealand for adult braille music enthusiasts who wish to come together and sing, perform and record using braille music.

## Conclusion

For some time, the ICEB Music Committee has worked towards the creation of a webpage to summarise the activities that are run in each member country in the areas of braille music tuition, production and promotion. The headings we list currently will continue to be expanded upon, however I am pleased to see contributions from the majority of our member countries. The committee continues to enjoy discussions around formatting and production and it is a great network as well as information sharing for our members. In this time of development through the DAISY Music Braille Project, we will continue to liaise with our members to ensure that country specifications are represented in the new MakeBraille-Hodder software, from dzb lesen, Leipzig in development. It is exciting to think that in time, we will have the ability to download a score and exported in to our own country specifications.

## Committee Members and Observers

Australia

Voting member: Jordie Howell

Observers:

Bill Jolley, Kathy Riessen, Ross de Vent.

Canada

Voting member: Rebecca Blaevoet

Observers:

Ka Kit Tam, Darleen BOGART, Phyllis Landon, Lori Kernohan

Ireland

Voting member: Stuart Lawler

Observers:

Ilka Staeglin, Maeve Smith, Jackie Rooney.

New Zealand:

Voting member: Moya Michalakis

Observers:

Wendy Richards, Maria Stevens. Mary Schnackenberg

Nigeria

Voting member: Jean Obi

South Africa

Voting member: Neels Matthyser

Observers:

Marius Swart, Ntshavheni Netshituni, Christo de Klerk, Pasha Alden

United Kingdom

Voting member: Roger Firman

Observers:

James Bowden, Mike Townsend

United States

Voting Member: Karen Gearreald

Observers:

Frances Mary D'Andrea, Fred Schroder, Judy Dixon