# International Council on English Braille Eighth General Assembly

# Report of the Music Committee

# May 2024

## Chair: Jordie Howell

## Introduction

In the last four years, we have seen a great improvement in music translation software and to this end, a significant increase in global collaboration around braille music. This is in large part due to the DAISY Music Braille Project and the creation of the two new software packages: MakeBraille aimed at organisations and the Sao Mai braille music translator aimed at individual users. In line with this, MuseScore has markedly improved accessibility features, most exciting is the incorporation of direct braille input and live braille music translation.

From an English speaking perspective, I feel now is the time to ensure that:

1. Our guidelines for formatting in every member country are up to date and;
2. We continue to communicate around areas of music not currently covered by the New International Manual of Braille Music and BANA Music Braille 2015.

## New Committee members

In January 2023, we welcomed two new members to our list. A new Australian observer, Christina Christensen, a highly proficient transcriber from Vision Australia, and our new US representative, Bill Mccann, developer of the Dancing Dots Suite of Products. I thank Karen Gearreald for her time and contributions to our committee.

We also welcomed a new UK representative. Melanie Wren, a very experienced transcriber at RNIB. Thank you to Clare Gailans for her contributions on behalf of the UK.

## Position Statement

The Music Committee has published a position statement endorsing the three major publications used in member countries for the production and teaching of music braille internationally. These are:

* Music Braille Code 2015, developed by the Braille Authority of North America (BANA),
* The New International Manual of Braille Music Notation (1996), and
* Introduction to Braille Music Transcription by Mary Turner De Garmo (2005).

We hope this is of some help for teachers and transcribers wishing to learn braille music.

## 2020 Resolutions

The music committee submitted two resolutions to the ICEB seventh General Assembly in 2020 which directed committee discussions. Here is our progress:

**Resolution 4: Preserving Music Braille Presently Available Only as Hardcopy**

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 Seventh General Assembly of ICEB resolves to:

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;

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

Call upon member countries and agencies to invest time and resources into the digitization of hardcopy music braille, sharing knowledge of new technologies and expertise, to ensure future generations have access to and use of music braille resources from the past.

At the 2022 Mid-Term meeting we enjoyed a very informative presentation from Katherine Rodda, Music Section, National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) describing the processes, pros and cons of digitising music from hard copy to electronic braille.

In our committee discussions, I asked members to report on their use of the following products to produce braille music scores:

* MakeBraille: Daisy Music Braille Project
* Musescore 4
* SMB Sao mai Braille music Translator
* Goodfeel suite of products.

New Zealand reported that they use the Goodfeel suite, and also MuseScore 4 and Sao Mai Braille. Moya Michalakis wrote “in both cases, I use the braille as a skeleton transcription to paste into Duxbury, and add or alter things by six-key entry.

* For music ocr I use SharpEye on my computer, or Music Scanner app on my iPhone to create an xml file, and find MuseScore the easiest for editing the xml.”

In Canada, they tested the MakeBraille software in the past couple of years, with the use of Capella Scan 8 and Capella 8. Ka Kit Tam explained that “the results and accuracy was similar to other programs, i.e. if we could produce a perfect music xml file, the translation is good, with minor formatting adjustments. But we do not have the resources to produce a clean music xml file, hence the usage of the program for production is still only limited to the testing stage.” This also applies to the GoodFeel software”.

In the transcription department at RNIB (UK) they largely manually transcribe but on occasion use translation software with the intention of increasing this over time. Melanie Wren reported “we use Capella scan 9, Capella 9 and Makebraille and also Musescore and Goodfeel”.

Jackie Rooney, the music transcriber in Ireland contributed as a user of the Dancing Dots suite of products. She uses SharpEye to scan files and the Lime output Files which GOODFEEL then translates. She says “this is the easiest and most productive method of providing music braille on paper that is required for our students to date. There are some things I may need to add into the transcription for example:

* I use the method of using the right hand and left hand symbols (dots 4, 6 & 3, 4, 5 and dots 4, 5, 6 & 3, 4, 5 respectively) so I do need to add these in to keep it clearer and more understanding for the student.
* Chord symbols or lyrics. (I don’t think Musescrore 4 can do this either at the moment.)

Lime also helps with other small problems easily e.g. missing articulation”.

In Australia, I can report that Vision Australia is testing the MakeBraille software. There are still areas of improvement particularly when transcribing vocal music with Australian country formatting conventions. We have two new staff members who are getting up to speed but have expertise in coding and also typesetting in Sibelius. Lots of potential for semiautomation but I feel it will be quite a process. From a personal user's perspective: I use Goodfeel as an accessible and quick way of converting Music XML files to braille for rehearsal situations. For vocal music there is editing that I need to do with line breaks at the point of punctuation rather than at a barline, often mid-word. I have a conductor who regularly produces quick xml files for me to sing at a day or two notice, and Goodfeel does the job nicely with my post-editing on a braille notetaker before embossing. I use my braille notetaker in rehearsals if the time schedule is tight also.

In summary, it appears most member countries are incorporating music translation software into their workflow. Although a skeleton of a score can be produced this way, there is still need for manual intervention by an experienced braille music transcriber to format and add articulation or other signs that the software has missed.

**Resolution 8: New International Manual of Braille Music Notation**

Whereas, braille music is the only universal braille code;

Whereas, there are some elements of music not yet represented in the braille music code;

This Seventh General Assembly of ICEB therefore resolves to:

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

In 2022 I reported that I held initial discussions with the ICEB Executive and the Braille Authority of North America (BANA) regarding funding for this project. I also received quotes from Vision Australia and RNIB for the production of such a document. I then devised a timeline and work practice for the project. Then we identified a number of people who would like updates on further progress or to be involved directly.

The Daisy Music Braille Project under the direction of Dr Sarah Morley-Wilkins, initially had scope to take on the coordination of updating the NIM working group. She was very pleased that the UK had provided such a detailed and comprehensive list of signs and concepts not covered by the current manual. We thank Roger Firman for collating this, and it will serve as the basis of our future work. Unfortunately the time commitment for this project proved too great for the Daisy Music Braille Project and further information will be presented in a paper by Sarah at this assembly. Dr Sarah Morley Wilkins is seeking people interested in assisting with the update. Please indicate your interest, or whether there are braille music specialists in your country and we will pass these details onto Sarah.

## Discussion on clefs

In summary: most feel that clefs are necessary in examination material, but not for general music learning material/scores.

## Conclusion

Although we have come a long way with braille music transcription, there is still scope to collaborate internationally. As English speakers, I’d like to see further communication regarding formatting given there is increased material exchange with the music publishers network.

## Committee Members and Observers

### Australia

Voting member: Jordie Howell

Observers:

Christina Christensen, Bill Jolley, Kathy Riessen, Sky de Vent, Scott Erichsen.

### Canada

Voting member: Ka Kit Tam

Observers:

Jen Goulden, Natalina Martiniello, Darleen BOGART, Phyllis Landon, Rebecca Blaevoet, Phyllis Landon

### Ireland

Voting member: Stuart Lawler

Observers:

Ilka Staeglin, Maeve Smith, Jackie Rooney.

### New Zealand:

Voting member: Moya Michalakis

Observers:

Anja Gibbs, Stephen Bolton, Wendy Richards, Maria Stevens. Mary Schnackenberg, Leyna Coleman

### South Africa

Voting member: Neels Matthyser

Observers:

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

### United Kingdom

Voting member: Melanie Wren

Observers:

Clare Gailans, Roger Firman, James Bowden, Harry Cox, Matthew Horsepool

### United States

Voting Member: Bill McCann

Observers:

Peter Jonas, Karen Gearreald, Frances Mary D'Andrea, Fred Schroder, Judy Dixon