A truly amazing place...

The world of the SBS resource centres

Elizabeth Berky-Peterson

uick — I'm on air in five minutes, and I need some quiet Tibetan monastery music, the sound of a cow being milked, and a mouse squeaking. Oh, and that thing by Bach, you know, the one I had last year, I think it was in November? It goes, 'la-lalala-la-laaa-la, la'. And it has a blue cover. Maybe green.

That is just one of the multitude of requests SBS Resources Centre staff can meet at the drop of a CD cover.

SBS Radio, formerly 3EA (Melbourne) and 2EA (Sydney), is justifiably proud of its resource centres, which house multilingual and multicultural sound and print material. From modest beginnings twenty years ago with a haphazard collection of programmers' personal recordings.

Both radio production centres have survived several moves, and now enjoy modern facilities (in South Melbourne and Artarmon, respectively) under the same roof as SBS-TV, whose producers and editors also form a significant section of library users. The major function of the libraries however, is to serve the needs of the multilingual radio programs which are now heard nationally in 68 languages, and to liaise with studio staff who prepare the overnight allmusic programs.

Library staff share a love of music in its many forms, familiarity with a range of languages, and the skills to help time-pressed programmers find the material they need. Superseding cumbersome card indexes and loan cards, computer databases have been built up over the past six years. At one centre alone it is possible to access via the LAN some 33 500 sound recordings: 320 000 track titles, all fully indexed. The combined collections of both centres currently total approximately 75 000 - 15 000 CDs, as well as 55 000 LPs and cassettes which, although older, are still in demand.

Besides language-specific music, the libraries also hold general collections of classical, jazz, film and 'production' music — short tracks specially composed for use in commercials, voice-overs, and to punctuate current affairs bulletins. Those sound effects, until recently only produced overseas, are now being recorded by local stu-



How about one of these, hot from the mailbag? Elizabeth Berky-Peterson helping two bemused programmers in the resource centre

dios, and authentic Australian noises regularly enhance radio features.

Each mail delivery means expected orders — some long-awaited from troubled parts of the world, as well as 'surprise parcels', promotional CDs from major distributors who are conversant with the music mix that goes into that elusive, special, 'sound of SBS', and debut discs from optimistic individuals who are not

Adding to such a collection is a librarian's delight, but culling it is a nightmare. That old scratchy Armenian song pressed in Lebanon 30 years ago, those wondrously-warped tracks of film tunes from Calcutta, may be the only existing examples of a disappearing genre, and most be conserved, mouldwarts and all. Cataloguing the collection, much of which is in languages other than English, and in scripts other than Roman, is a continuing challenge: Assyrian one day, Tamil the next!

While music forms the larger part of the collection, print resources are vital, as facts must be researched and verified before broadcasting. Newspapers and periodicals — some so obscure that no subscription agent will handle them — keep broadcasters aware of events in their homelands. CD-ROMs now provide further sources of information and recently some programmers have trialed the Internet, which gives access to current electronic versions of major overseas newspapers.

In-house ready-reference material is indispensable, and includes encyclope-

dias, dictionaries, yearbooks, directories and other fact books, particularly relating to the arts/media and population statistics. Interlibrary enquires and loans are increasing, as programmers focus on their role in accordance with the SBS Charter, to increase awareness of Australia as a linguistically and socially diverse nation.

Regrettably, the resource centres are not able to lend material outside SBS, but are more than willing to advise on sources and suppliers of multilingual/multicultural recordings and publications. You are welcome to contact the library managers: Cherrill Magee on (03) 9685 2514, Elizabeth Berky-Peterson on (02) 430 2880 [after 29 July (02) 9430 2880].

And for the frequency of an SBS Radio station near you, check your capital city newspaper, or ring the SBS freecall number: 1800 500 727.

