# "Come Together, Right Now": Discovery and Interoperability for Born-Digital Music Scholarship

Timothy Charles Duguid
tim.duguid@glasgow.ac.uk
University of Glasgow, United Kingdom

Elizabeth Grumbach
egrumbac@tamu.edu
Texas A&M University, United States of America

## Summary

Music scholars have unprecedented access to an ever-growing digital corpus of music-related content, as libraries and institutions continue to digitize their holdings at an extraordinary pace. Yet, access to and discovery of these resources is problematic for music scholars. In 2016, the Music Scholarship Online (MuSO) project was awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, Office of Digital Humanities to begin forming a community of music scholars to address these issues. This short paper will present the results of the planning meeting and further work done to address the social and technical issues impeding the interoperability, discovery, and access of born-digital music scholarship.

## Proposal

Music scholars have unprecedented access to an ever-growing digital corpus of music-related content, as libraries and institutions continue to digitize their holdings at an extraordinary pace. Of course, curators describe digital content in ways that best suit their collection's needs, using a variety of metadata standards such as MARC, Dublin Core, and LIDO (just to name a few). Despite the obvious benefits to such flexibility, interoperability between digital collections has proven difficult, forcing music scholars to navigate between several interfaces and platforms in order to locate research materials. More importantly, access to these resources is limited to scholars already aware of their existence.

Platforms such as the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA), Europeana, and HathiTrust are working to solve these issues by aggregating digital collections into single catalogues, therefore making collection holdings accessible and interoperable. These platforms and others like them are adept at aggregating a variety and breadth of content (including, for instance, audio recordings, encoded content, musical scores, photographs, manuscripts, and printed texts) relevant to a variety of disciplines. The structure of these aggregators are heavily reflective of the library collections that make up the bulk of their data. But, unlike the discrete digital collections themselves, these platforms bring together information about holdings and digitized materials from diverse institutions, borders, and economies in order to make them discoverable in new ways.

However, there is a host of content consistently left out of even the best and most extensive music catalogues and digital aggregators: born-digital scholarship. This new model for of scholarly knowledge production has motivated humanities scholars to consider how digital catalogs and collections should evaluate and make visible new forms of scholarship. When Jerome McGann introduces the DPLA in 2011's "On Creating a Usable Future," he locates our humanities crisis not only in the evaluation of digital scholarship, but also "the sustainability of born digital resources and the work they support" and forging paths to make new forms of scholarly knowledge production "a general institutional practice" (182). To make digital scholarship an institutional practice, we must consider not only our social infrastructures (promotion and tenure), but the technical infrastructures that allow discoverability and interoperability - two concepts that are crucial to making our work visible and accessible across audiences and publics. For digital scholarship in music, no aggregators, platforms, or institutional ventures currently ensure that born-digital scholarship is widely discoverable and therefore accessible.

Music Scholarship Online (MuSO) is a community of scholars dedicated to resolving these issues, thus providing greater access to born digital music scholarship. It began in 2015 as a Digital Humanities Start-up Grant funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, in which music librarians, music encoders, and musicologists gathered to discuss issues surrounding aggregation and peer review for born-digital music scholarship. Participants in the planning meeting came together to ask and answer "What do music scholars need in a digital curator and search mechanism?" Ultimately the team chose to follow the model of the Networked Infrastructure for Nineteenth Century Electronic Scholarship (NINES) and the other

members of Advanced Research Consortium (ARC). In 2016, MuSO officially joined ARC, a federation of virtual research environments that coordinates several thematic and period-specific aggregators, like MuSO, into a catalog "containing resources spanning the bulk of Western civilization, from the medieval period to the early 20th-century" (Grumbach and Mandell, 3).

This short paper describes the present metadata prototyping efforts of the Music Scholarship Online (MuSO) project. Arguing that it is unnecessary for digital project teams to generate preservation-quality metadata, this paper describes how MuSO is working with ARC to generate a metadata schema for discovery that is lightweight and therefore a better option for digital projects facing constrained budgets and limited timescales.

Beginning with a brief introduction to the unique challenges facing born-digital projects in music, the paper then presents the history of MuSO and its initial phase, in which the basic metadata guidelines and peer review processes were developed. Afterwards, the paper reports on current efforts to build a prototype schema for MuSO: a discovery-level metadata standard for digital projects in music. It shows how the MuSO and ARC leadership teams have worked together in examining present aggregators of music resources such as the the Digital Archive of the Beethoven-Haus, the Digital Image Archive for Medieval Music, and the Juilliard Manuscript Collection, as well as well-established catalogues such as *Répertoire Internationale des Sources Musicales* (RISM) and *Répertoire Internationale de Littérature Musicale* (RILM). It reveals the similarities and differences between the metadata standards of these resources, and then it identifies the most significant elements for discovery-level metadata.The paper then concludes by comparing these elements with those present in the musical holdings of multidisciplinary collections such as the DPLA, Europeana, and the HathiTrust to ensure that MuSO's lightweight metadata schema accurately captures the level of description needed to work within the multidisciplinary ARC catalog.

If born-digital scholarship is to become general institutional practice, the methods of discovery for that scholarship must be familiar to all humanists: all of the multidisciplinary, multilingual and international scholars that our institutions serve. The authors will therefore present findings concluded from an examination of the current MuSO Metadata recommendations as decided by the MuSO community alongside existing multidisciplinary metadata schemas. By investigating the push and pull between discovery-level

metadata and preservation-level metadata, this short paper reports our efforts to ensure that Music Scholarship Online effectively describes the born-digital scholarship it intends to aggregate.

## Bibliography

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