Contemplating E-Scores: Open Ruminations on the E-Score, the Patron, the Library, and the Publisher

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Abstract

For several years now, libraries, publishers, and vendors have worked out a means of creating, licensing, and delivering e-books in academic settings. While the art of the academic e-book is perhaps not quite yet perfected, conservatively speaking, today's students and faculty will find and use at least one e-book in the course of their academic career and be more or less satisfied with the experience. E-scores, however, are only now coming to occupy the attention of librarians and not a moment too soon as commercial e-score vendors with subpar quality content manage to meet the functionality needs of most users. Many living composers are harnessing the Internet and cutting out the middle man by offering e-scores in the form of downloadable PDFs. Score publishers are, by and large, still in the early stages of thinking about moving to e-score format (also for personal downloads), and vendors with e-score platforms are negligible. This paper opened the conversation about e-scores to acquisition librarians, e-book publishers, and vendors who typically work outside the music library.

The first half of this paper provides an overview of the current state of e-scores in academic libraries, including what patrons want from e-scores, what score publishers are doing, what libraries are currently able to provide, and, finally, what commercial vendors are already doing. The final portion of the paper briefly reviews responses from the conference session audience. Through this open questioning, it is hoped that readers will come to new understandings of their own work with other electronic materials, while at the same time bring their expertise to bear on the future of e-score development.

There are a host of differences between music libraries and general academic libraries, but for the purposes of this paper let us focus on the differences in how musical readings are used compared to readings in most other disciplines. For nonmusic disciplines, words are the primary means of conveying information. While anyone writing about music certainly uses words, anyone writing music, reading music, and performing music uses musical annotations and the musical score to convey information. Another difference is in how we use the musical score. We analyze it, we write in our own fingerings, we change bowings, we add other visual cues, and all of this we write directly into the score. We do this because looking at a musical score is rarely a one-off occurrence. We read and reread a score from start to finish a thousand times, dissect it into the tiniest fragments until the music is ingrained in our mind, in our fingers, and, I am sure some would say, in our souls. In short, a student musician's typical interaction with a score is far more active than a student's typical interaction with a book. This is expected behavior, and only the most naïve music librarian will expect students to return scores to the library in pristine condition after their jury or senior recital. It is this very personal interaction with the score that I suspect is responsible for the music score's slow entrée into the digital realm. With the rise of digital humanities and completely digital generations now becoming consumers of these scores, things are changing, and they are changing in a way that libraries need to be attending to. Let us begin by taking a look at what critically viable editions are out there for e-scores, and by critically viable I mean good editions with established editorial guidelines. This will be followed by an examination of what active musicians actually want and are using.

The online world is certainly not a complete wash for critical musical score editions. In fact, there are quite a large number of extremely important critical editions available online, including the *Digital Mozart Edition/Neue Mozart Ausgabe Online*, *Chopin's First Editions Online*, *The Chopin Variorum Edition*, and the *Web Library of*

Seventeenth-Century Music. These and several others offer critical analysis of the music and a very well-thought-out edition of the score. Some of them offer searching functionality not possible in the analog world, but the Chopin Variorum truly embraces the digital humanities tradition by making it possible to compare multiple editions of the same work side by side. Of significance here is that personal interaction with the digital score is limited; if a user wants to add those personal annotations to the score that are so important to how we interact with it, they have to download and print the PDF version. Representative of the academic mindset regarding digital editions, one reviewer of the *Neue Mozart Ausgabe Online* wrote in 2011 that:

> …whatever features or advantages they possess, digital editions don't ever seem likely to entirely replace print versions. Printed music remains important and digital versions should not be viewed as an alternative to published editions, but rather as a complement to them. They offer expanded possibilities for both researchers and performers in making a large edition easily searchable and viewable, and in better integrating the important information in the critical report with the music. (Henseler, 2011, p. 599)

In library world, we have several databases that we can subscribe to that would help us become providers of e-scores for any user who wants them. Through these databases we can offer a wealth of scores that students can read online! If, that is, they can sit at the piano with their laptop, scroll down the page, and click through to the next page. Maybe if they had an iPad or tablet they could make it work, but even with that, the state of current academic library e-score vendor platforms takes awkward to a whole new level. What is more, the score appears as a static page on a screen—impossible to interact with, impossible to add personal annotations to. So, perhaps, after all, if students want to use this resource, the best option is to download and print.

Increasing levels of technological ability by individuals is also beginning to affect acquisition processes as a growing number of composers are beginning to self-publish online. There are some composers like Jeremy Beck and Adam Fong who make it fairly easy. In my bibliographer role, all I have to do is send a line to our acquisitions team asking them to purchase a score from this URL. They will have to download the score and, since our institution does not have a server to store this on that patrons can access, they will also have to print it out on preferably acid-free paper that is 8.5 by 14 inches. In this case, the score may need to be printed single sided for some pages and double sided for other pages, and then either bound or placed in a pam binder with a pocket for loose leaf pages, but the binding method cannot be determined until we see the score paper. In short, what begins as a seemingly simple purchase quickly turns into an elaborate project.

At least there are vendors like J. W. Pepper who are facilitating self-publication for composers. J. W. Pepper's new service, MyScore, essentially allows composers to upload their scores to the Pepper database so acquisition librarians can easily find and purchase them at a nominal fee. They even go a step further by offering a web-based service, e-Print, making it possible to download a file of the score and print it out. Given the problems with audio digital downloads, there have been some questions raised about whether libraries can use these digital downloads of scores without special licensing in addition to the first sale doctrine, but this question remains largely unanswered and unexplored.

Let us not forget, we are talking about e-scores here. Yet in all four instances discussed so far, the scholarly edition, the e-score database, the downloadable files of the self-publishing composer, and a vendor's self-publishing service, we ultimately printed them for use, thereby utterly defeating the original intent and taking the "e" out of e-score.

There are some professionals out there whose work really is intended to be used in digital format. Take, for example, Kiniko Ishizaka's Open Goldberg Variations. While a PDF of the score is still available for download and printing, it is also possible to imbed the score and accompanying audio on your own web site and, significantly, to

view and even annotate the score on an iPad (Bayley, 2012, p. 40). While we have a fantastically print-oriented system for providing patron access to e-scores, it is this last part of Ishizaka's Open Goldberg Variations that is most significant and representative of an already existing need, desire, and market for truly digital scores.

This need is made readily apparent in the trade literature produced by actively performing and teaching musicians. Recall the 2011 assessment of the future of the printed score in the review of *Neue Mozart Ausgabe Online* and now compare that to a reflection on the same topic in 2009 by Mario Ajero in the trade publication *American Music Teacher*. Ajero suggested that paper music scores will:

> probably not [disappear] in the immediate future. However, a paradigm shift will occur due to a couple of factors: More musicians and educators will realize how much digital sheet music technology improves the efficiency of their daily workflow. In addition, the demand for digital downloads of musical scores will increase to the point where publishers should offer their libraries for purchase and download where musicians can work with them on a variety of devises and displays no matter where you go. (Ajero, 2009, p. 59)

You can see the discord here between the scholarly view; the view which libraries tend to participate in; and the realities of the professional view, a view that often has wider representation among our users but which takes second place to the scholars. As early as 2002, choral director James Daugherty was imagining and looking for an electronic score interface that would allow his singers to see the score online with his personal annotations and score markings with specific sections linked to multimedia diction practice units and audio samples (Daugherty, 2002, p. 71). Not much later, columnist George Litterst compiled a list of advantages digital sheet music offers its users:

- "the ability to replace an entire room full of print materials with a single, *handheld* device;"

- "search, highlighting and *annotation* features;"

- "copy-and-paste…;"

- "readability in low-light conditions;"

- *"hands-free* reading;"

- *"audio-interpretation* of the text…" (Litterst, 2010–2011, p. 50; emphasis added).

A survey of its client base by the company MusicNotes.com also suggests that people want to go to one source to find their music rather than jumping from library catalog to one database and then another and another. It is the commercial companies like MusicNotes.com, though, that are able to offer their customers everything on this wish list. How, you might ask, do they make musical scores available? The same way many of our database vendors started out, by making out-of-copyright first editions available. To make the scores more compatible with tablets and to meet the interactive needs of today's music professionals in training, companies like MusicNotes.com take it a step further by re-engraving the first edition. So not only do users have first edition scores already rife with errors and the subjects of romanticized imaginings of how the music ought to be rather than how it really is to begin with, but new errors have plenty of opportunity to enter the score in the re-engraving process. In short, quality is something performers are increasingly willing to sacrifice in order to gain the advantages offered in the digital environment by companies like MusicNotes.com. There is another problem with this model besides quality, namely, all the works in their catalog are old! There are no late twentieth and twenty-first century composers in their catalogs. In all fairness, Alexander Street Press has been able to make agreements with some publishers to gain access to these later composers, but their offerings are still rather limited and, frankly, do not include most of the modern composers common to the music curriculum.

Before moving on, a brief digression must be made for a note about visual music and computer music. By this is meant music that integrates audio and visual elements or that is generated through directed computer interaction. Problems abound with these genres, but I believe, though, that thinking about e-scores now may lead to solutions for dealing with these mixed media scores and computer music. Now back to the topic at hand.

Why should we be concerned? Because most libraries are not set up to handle truly digital music scores in a meaningful way that meets the needs of our users. This means we are failing our mission to support teaching, learning, and research needs of our faculty and students. This means we are failing our mission to serve as repositories of our cultural heritage. This means our goal of being leaders in technology for higher education is not being met. This means that the commercial industry will become, and is already becoming, the primary means of distribution and consumption for these resources, and, I believe, they will do so at great social and cultural costs. This is why academic libraries need to be concerned. This is why we need to begin taking action.

This is a conversation that is starting to take shape within the music library community, but there is a problem—we are music librarians, most of us identify what to buy and where to buy it from, arrange our facilities to meet the space needs of our patrons, provide music reference services, and do specialized cataloging. We do what most of you do, that is, we rarely actually place orders with vendors, we are only sometimes informed about developments in bindery processes (although, I strongly believe we should be regularly informed and informing this process), we are rarely involved at the ground-floor level of library IT infrastructure and digital repositories, at this moment we are also not positioned to work with publishers and vendors on balancing licensing rights with practical uses of their material. Needless to say, we cannot find and implement a solution on our own. This needs to be a collaborative process, and I want to invite all of you to become involved in this process right

now. So let me again highlight the main problems here again:

- Users want to access e-scores in the electronic environment;

- They want to access scores on their handheld devices (such as iPads and tablets);

- Musicians, researchers, and performers alike actively engage with the score on a very personal level, meaning the ability to annotate and otherwise mark up the score is vital;

- Performers require hands-free page turning capability;

- Professional musicians want one-stop access to a digital score library;

- Composers are increasingly self-publishing in digital formats (we only spoke about PDFs, but I imagine there will be many more options in the near future with the development of a music XML currently underway and just about completed);

- Scholars and educators want quality scores seamlessly integrated with critical text, multimedia teaching tools, and audio.

In my ideal world, my library would have its own digital environment in which it could store and provide access to digital scores through a well-developed user interface for our patrons that meets all of these requirements, but such a development is quite unlikely. Towards the end of the presentation, audience members were asked to discuss their ideal, its barriers and solutions, as well some of the problems e-scores present to people working in technical services and acquisitions beyond those already mentioned. In short, they were asked to dream big and then get practical.

The discussion was lively and engaging, producing several interesting ideas. Many noted that they had not thought about e-scores in such depth before, but they were indeed concerned about the advancements being made in the commercial

sphere compared to the academic sphere. One audience member, who was a unit coordinator of an academic library acquisitions department, noted that the scenario described for dealing with self-publishing composers was something that she would only ask her staff to do in exceptional cases but was not a process she or her department were prepared to begin doing on a regular basis. Another audience member noted that discovery layers could potentially solve the problem of searching multiple databases and enable an experience that closely resembled one-stop shopping. The most intriguing discussion came out of a question regarding usage rights, namely, would a student be able to perform from an e-score or would the student have to seek additional licensing solely for performance. The answer to this question is not always clear to students and librarians even with physical scores but it was noted that the digital realm may offer some answers. The solution proposed was to make the act of accessing a score by a click prompt a pop-up rights and usage notice that the user must acknowledge before being directed to the score.

This discussion marks a starting point in the dialogue between music librarians, vendors, publishers, acquisition librarians, and other nonmusic librarian professionals. Remarks from the audience will be shared with members of the music library community, carrying the work that must be done forward, moving us closer to fulfilling our mission and responsibilities to our patrons.

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