

## Feedback on Online Chopin Variorum Edition trial website

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### General responses

- This is a fascinating snapshot of how digital technologies for music representation so far developed primarily for archival purposes can be adapted to create a musicologist's (or more generally musician's) workbench. As such it is piloting not only an invaluable resource for studying Chopin's music, but potentially a means of studying music in general – perhaps with application beyond music, too.
- I got a sense at the workshop that significant aspects of functionality are constrained by available browser technology (i.e. Internet Explorer technology – the system doesn't work properly with Mozilla Firefox, which I first tried!). For a pilot project like this it's excellent that the browser approach enables anyone to access the materials straight away. But I see the full project as a serious resource for people (probably music professionals) who want to make serious use of it, and who in my opinion would be happy to download software in order to benefit from increased functionality (or speed).
- It seems to me that the 'superimposition' approach (as described in the project documents) is so much affected by graphic layout that it isn't really worth pursuing as long as the system is a purely graphic one. (The superimposition tool would be excellent for identifying discrepancies between different states of the same plates, but that seems too narrow an application to be really worthwhile.) At such time as it were possible to incorporate meaningful musical representations as well (e.g. with a reliable OMR routine linking the graphic images to a 'base representation'), it would be possible for the system to generate 'logical superimpositions' (i.e. identify elements of variance between editions, graphically represented through different colours or whatever), which might be very powerful. But that probably goes beyond currently available OMR technologies. All the same, if there were a pilot element within the second phase of this project (see below), it could explore this – for instance, creating and linking logical-musical representations manually for one or two pieces, so that the resultant functionality could be explored (in the hope that one day OMR technologies will catch up!).
- While the system could be used by performers creating 'their own' editions, I don't think it needs to support fancy cut-and-paste processes or whatever for this purpose. I suspect that most such performers would actually work by annotating their own hard-copy edition, or just possibly writing it out from scratch (or if they were technology savvy and had a large monitor, maybe they might run a notation package in a separate window). Again, if the system should in the future incorporate meaningful musical representation, then the idea of allowing people to create 'their own' edition and export it to a note processor or whatever would be more practical. I don't by the way see that there are ethical issues in giving performers the ability to do this; they may misuse the system (i.e. create postmodern collages celebrating discontinuity!) but you are no more responsible for that than the inventors of the web are for pornographic sites. Just as long as you don't include a 'randomize' command that chooses bars at random from different versions....
- Scope: does one aim to include every known edition? Apart from the labour involved, this might test the interface beyond the bounds of reasonable usability. It would seem more sensible for the proposed second phase of the project (i) to restrict the main system to manuscripts and 'early editions' (whatever exactly that means!) while aiming to cover as much of the Chopin repertory as possible, but at the same time perhaps (ii) to pilot 'vertically' comprehensive coverage of one or two pieces.
- It is very appealing to imagine a similar kind of comparative browser system for recordings, which could be a separate system (different sound recordings aligned to a common base score representation – though of which version!!) or could be all part of the same system. This would minimally depend on identification of beginnings of bars in all the included sound recordings, in the same way that the current system includes identification of bars in the scores, meaning that you could go directly to the same bar in different recordings (hopping from recording to recording or from score to recording); that

could be achieved by employing students to mark the bars. But that might be rather backward-looking: a more sophisticated approach would be to use an algorithm (such as that being developed at CHARM by Andrew Earis - IRCAM have also developed one, but it is not publicly disseminated) to identify each attack, in which case one wouldn't be limited to the beginnings of bars; if a later version of the score browser incorporated a musically meaningful representation of the music (see above), then both graphics and sounds could be linked to the common 'base representation'. (I'm imagining that OCR and attack identification routines would be run at the time you generated the database.) In a way I'm not convinced that this necessarily belongs within the same project, because – I suppose – most of the graphic representations are likely to be irrelevant to most of the recordings. (How many different variants are clearly represented in the recorded repertory?) One could therefore try to develop the recording browser as a separate but parallel project. Or maybe this, too, could be piloted for one or two pieces within the second phase of OVCE, with a view to fuller development in a possible third phase?

### Full-page screens

- Although intended to locate the specific item in question, the asterisks are visually confusing, not least because it's not always easy to see at a glance which system they belong to. As discussed at the workshop, this could be tidied up so that there was just a uniformly located indication that there is/are annotation(s) in a particular bar – but this has the disadvantage that the user has to open up a window before discovering that the annotation (e.g.) refers to the hand s/he isn't interested in (and then close the window). Therefore I'm not convinced that getting rid of the asterisks is really the best solution. Possibly if they were bright red, say, they could be located right on top of the note(s) concerned, rather than in the adjacent white space as is generally the case at present, which might help with the visual confusion I referred to. That might be distracting if you weren't interested in annotations, but then that is why you have the show/hide annotations feature.
- When you're alternating between the 'Versions' list and the full-page display (whether returning to the former through the 'back' button or by clicking 'Versions'), it might be nice if the version entry you've just been looking at was somehow visually identifiable (e.g. was different colour, as is usual with links), to remind you where you are. Though maybe this is something that applies more when you're clicking around rather than doing serious work with the system!
- I noticed an apparent broken link at Stirling copy of Op. 28/4 (<http://puffin.cch.kcl.ac.uk/ocve/apps/image.jsp?versionKey=22>).

### Juxtaposition screens

- The left-hand excerpt on the second line down always seems to be out of place when you open a juxtaposition window (or reset the display).
- The present speed of display (working with broadband) impedes developing a rhythm of work – you have to wait each time you go backward or forward.
- As agreed at the symposium, the title bars are very visually distracting because they are vertically aligned with the music – and you are normally examining the score fragments vertically rather than horizontally. On the other hand, I can see the practical problem in aligning the title bars vertically at the side of the excerpt! Could a possible solution be that the titles appear when you mouseover?
- When getting rid of extracts I don't want, I hide them, then pile the title bars into a disorganized heap which I then have to sort through to find (and show) a particular one. It might be neater if, when you hid them, the bars in question disappeared altogether; you would click somewhere to get a 'restore' window in which the different sources would be listed, and you'd click on the one you wanted.
- I'm not sure about the way the images fade when you don't have the cursor on top of them. It's good for knowing where you are in terms of operating the software, but bad in terms of scanning visually up and down, which after all is basically what the juxtaposition

interface is for. Maybe the suggestion above that the title bar would appear when you moused over it would be the solution.

- Because one tends to work vertically, and because I'm using a laptop, I have to scroll up and down a lot. That can't be helped, but (i) it would be nice if one didn't have to scroll back to the top to go one bar forward or backwards (right-clicking would be ideal, provided the display didn't jump back to the top as at present), and (ii) it would be nice if one could zoom in or out (but maybe that goes beyond browser technology).
- I note that one runs out of space on the 'page' (can't scroll further down) after four or five vertically superimposed images. Is there any way round this?
- One doesn't want to make the system unintentionally complicated, but all the same if it were possible to display, say, up to four-bar phrases in the juxtapose window, aligning them vertically, then I think this could be a much-used format: scanning between different versions bar-by-bar is fine for a copy-editing approach, so to speak, to identifying differences, but when one's working 'musically' one may want to think in terms of larger units. My thinking here (as above) is that often you'll want to work with just four sources, say, arranging them vertically (which at present wastes a lot of screen space). Indeed one could even think of this as a separate kind of display, with the different sources lined up vertically so that you could scroll horizontally through the whole piece – but of course, it's unlikely that the different versions would line up at all nicely, so maybe in practice there wouldn't be so much advantage over working with single bars.
- Ideally the display at the top would contain all bar numbers so you could jump (as in JSTOR for example) – imagine using the system to compare the eight occurrences of a particular phrase in a composition, and each time having to either jump to the next bar eight times or (what I suppose one would actually do) go back to a full page and forward to the next occurrence. Just selecting bars 2, 10, 18 etc. would be much quicker.

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