

**Online Chopin Variorum Edition User Report**  
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November 2004

As a scholar whose work centers around philological and editorial issues in the music of Chopin's contemporary Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (and, to a lesser extent, Fanny Hensel and Robert Schumann), I have been interested in the initiatives of the Online Chopin Variorum Edition since I first learned of its existence. The invitation to join the Musicological Team of the OCVE Philadelphia conference represented an especially valuable opportunity because it not only offered a chance to discuss philological, textual, and editorial issues with a distinguished core team, but also because it relates in many ways to issues in the oeuvres of Mendelssohn, Hensel, and Schumann. My "user comments" should thus be understood as emanating from this perspective (with its obvious risk of bias toward German ideas). For purposes of this report, my comments are organized into four groups: general; musicological and textological; philological; and technical observations.

### *1. General*

By definition, the OCVE promises to contribute substantially to widespread awareness of what Jeffrey Kallberg has described as the Chopin "Problem". One issue discussed by the Musicological Team is that of eventually enhancing the likelihood of performers acting on this awareness by either creating their own eclectic texts, moving beyond the usual sets of standard editions, or using an increased understanding of Chopin's notational decision-making to inform the readings. It is only to be expected that at this fairly early stage in its existence the OCVE website provides little evidence of a desire to reach out to performers (although a diligent performer could navigate through the annotations and mark his/her music as desired). I hope, however, that the ideas proposed during the team's admittedly free-wheeling discussion will be considered for future application. My own preference is that images of the individual bars or passages in which variants occur would be linked somehow to a corresponding file in a user-friendly music-notation software, so that users could save their own composite files for an eclectic text comprising (for example) bars 1–4 from **C<sup>F</sup>**, bars 5–7 from **E<sup>1</sup>**, etc., and ultimately print this composite file for use in reading at the keyboard.

### *2. Musicological and Textological Observations:*

The project (in particular, the technical team) has done a simply outstanding job of addressing the textological concerns discussed. I would eventually very much like to see some provision for a Wikipedia-like set of user-generated commentaries, notes on performance, etc. The site as it currently exists promises much in the way of accommodating this potentiality. (A parallel idea might be that of a moderated chat-room or list-serve.) In addition, there should be links to short blurbs identifying (for example) Dubois, Julian Fontana, Stirling, Tellefsen etc., and explaining the essentials of their relationship(s) with Chopin and/or his publishers. Where available, the surviving correspondence and other chronographic evidence relevant to a given edition should be available. Finally, I would be especially interested for the site to include links (perhaps with audio clips) identifying some of the instrument(s) that were most likely to have been used for the given sources. This feature would be useful because of the considerable differences between various French, Viennese, and English fortepianos in the mid-nineteenth century. At the very least, this feature would be useful for those who believe (as I do) that performers (including Chopin, writing at the piano) respond subtly and intuitively, but significantly, to the tactile, timbral, and structural features of individual instruments; that these responses affect performers' technique; and that cognizance of the idiosyncracies of instruments and of performance technique can affect composers' decisions concerning notation, voicing, phrasing, fingering, etc. (The textual variants in Mendelssohn's keyboard music – especially the organ music, in my experience – align beautifully with these circumstantial factors.) Finally, a newsletter (such as that provided by the Digital Beethoven-Haus Bonn) would probably be useful in generating sustained usage.

### *3. Philological Comments*

First, a small point: for my purposes, I believe that in most instances the word "copy" as it currently

appears would be better replaced with “exemplar.” (My preference is that copy refers to a textual state rather than a physical item.) In addition, some users might find a physical description of the source helpful. The site already provides information concerning provenance, but understanding of the nature of the witness’s testimony is often well informed by information concerning its physical properties and disposition (*Albumblatt*, item in a posthumously assembled miscellany, loose leaf, second recto of a bifolio, etc.). When information concerning incidental markings (page numbers, foliation, etc.) is available that should be provided as well.

More broadly, without granting undue privilege to the work-centered techniques and reflected in conventional stemmatics, it would be useful if the site could provide the option of stemmae for those users who wish to consider text lineages. The information provided need not be consistent from one composition to another. This sort of taxonomical (rather than textual) stemma might take the form of a broad classification according to origin and function, such as:

- I. Sources produced during Chopin’s lifetime
  - A. Autograph and holograph sources
    1. Sketches
      1. [Sketch A]
        - (1) [physical features]
        - (2) [context: physical features of manuscript, other works on same leaf, folio, etc.]
    2. Drafts
      1. [As above]
    3. Complete manuscripts
      1. [As above]
    4. *Albumblätter*
      1. [As above]
    5. Presentation manuscripts
      1. [etc.]
  - B. Apographs produced during Chopin’s lifetime
    1. French
    2. English
    3. German
  - C. Editions
    1. French
    2. English
    3. German
- II. Significant posthumous sources
  - A. Manuscript
  - B. Print

Alternatively, it might take the form of a textual stemma that is retro-linked to the text as represented in the various sources (for example, a reference to source **E**<sup>1</sup> in a stemma might link to the image file(s) for that witness).

#### 4. Technical

I experienced no problems at all with substantive matters of the presentation: the images were consistently clear, well marked, and easy to navigate and use. I do feel strongly, however, that the images should provide the full page rather than simply the portion transmitting and immediately surrounding the *Notentext*. In addition, since physical dimensions can affect many aspects of the notation (and thus also the text itself) as well as providing clues concerning source lineages, the images should also provide an objective means of identifying the physical scale. (For example, compare the OCVE’s reproduction of the first page of the Prelude Op. 28 No. 20 from **F**<sup>1</sup> with the counterpart image on the University of Chicago’s page.)

There are also numerous minor operational difficulties: the “Note Tree”, some annotations, and the link to the *Thesaurus Musicarum Italicarum*, for example, do not work.

### *Conclusions*

This is an outstanding scholarly initiative possessed of extraordinarily potent implications for a wide variety of future users: performers/editors of Chopin’s music, scholars concerned with his compositional processes; performers and scholars concerned with editorial and other interpretive issues of nineteenth-century music; performers and scholars concerned with the music of other composers; performance-practice scholars; historians of print culture; and so on. Its potential for bringing together these generally (and unfortunately) disparate communities is strong. And the resourcefulness and technological proficiency of the technical team are exemplary.