Non Print Legal Deposit at the German National Library

When Rupert Ridgewell asked me to discuss non print legal deposit, I was thinking of e-books or digitally distributed audio first. Because frankly, non-print music scores are not as much in our focus as the other mentioned kinds of media are.

One reason for this can be found in the fact, that especially the bigger publishing houses that are situated in Germany (Breitkopf & Härtel, Bärenreiter, Schott, Edition Peters) are not really going for it in the same way as book publishers do. There are few or less publishing houses distributing their works in standard formats as PDF. Which is mainly – it occurs to me – to prevent theft:

Which is making sense: hardly anybody would think of printing and giving away a volume of the harry potter series he bought as pdf. On the other hand, there sure is a risk that a choir master would rather not buy the 2-page score of the same choral work 70 times for all his singers. He would simply copy the one issue he bought.

Another reason is, that there seems to be no current industry standard when it comes to the provision of metadata. While the biggest part of the community of e-book publishers in Germany have agreed on using ONYX or JSON, even big publishers of musical scores still work with excel spreadsheets. Though, from what I have heard, there might be a tendency to work with ONYX 2.1 in the future.

However, the German Music Archive does have approximately 6.000 non print scores which we received as PDF – most by smaller publishers and private composers, but also by slightly bigger players like Sikorski (273 units) and Ricordi (135 units). With small publishers and composers, these numbers are slightly increasing. Their media is often published non-print only, so we do focus on acquiring them.

But the path the bigger players are taking – and I am sure that goes for your countries just as well –, is the development of complex application programs for your tablet computer with highly enriched content and coded score material that can probably be used offline, but stays inside the app and cannot be downloaded.

Most of these apps work as subscription models: you pay on a regular base and get access to the whole catalogue online, use all the perks of XML-based augmented sheet music, download fingerings and additional expressions by other users, watch masterclass videos, and so forth.

I am convinced that this development will grow a lot over the next years. And therefore I am also convinced, that the German Music Archive has to deal with these applications one day. Today, though, it seems like we are still in the beginning of the era of digital scores. Musicians holding their iPad instead of printed paper is only slowly becoming a more common sight.

In fact, I do believe that databases with digital music scores are highly attractive for two user groups: Amateurs, who like to try out different works and features, and the professionals behind the stage: stage managers, conductors, and staff working for theaters and concert houses will be delighted to find all kinds of scores quickly and easy to access. For quite a long time, non-print scores will be an addition to printed scores on the market, but not necessarily supersede them.

Many of the apps I know don’t provide the same amount of bonus material for all kinds of instruments and settings, but focus on a certain niche, like choirs or piano solo. And since a lot of technical and intellectual effort is required to enhance the scores with promotionally effective bonus material, it’s usually the popular works that are enriched with audio and video. If it’s about rarer pieces, it might be harder to find what you were looking for.

But this will change quickly, I’m sure. The big, established publishing houses who have the development capital to design multi-functional apps, are trying to grow quickly enough to create some sort of gravity: The bigger their platforms get, the more smaller publishers join in, the wider and more attractive the platform becomes.

And we are, therefore, in contact with publishers of non-print scores. There is a lot of movement on this market.

* Notafina used to look quite promising a few years ago, but struggles a lot today.
* Nkoda seems to have maybe the widest range of repertoire of them all, and offers mainly scans of printed scores – which means that optical recognition methods of text (OCR) and music (OMR) cannot be applied. With their abonnement they are trying to win back the users who would otherwise simply use the IMSLP Petrucci database.
* Tido tries to convince its customers with all kinds of very clever features, gadgets and bonus material.
* Newzik’s approach is that it organizes the scores you upload yourself.
* And Henle Music Library only offers scores by its own publishing house.

With Tido, for example, who are currently busy with creating an edition customized for libraries, we’re planning to install one or two tablet computers with Tido’s application in the German Music Archive where you can explore the app while playing the piano, for instance. This way, Tido can collect information about the users‘ needs and wishes for their program, and we can learn more about what user groups would be likely to work with apps like that. Of course, we’ll enjoy the positive side effect of adding a new form of interactive musical usability to our reading rooms.

Right now, however, this collaboration is delayed for legal reasons, since we have to ensure not to privilege one market participant. That’s why I cannot share any experience in that field with you, yet.

There are very different contenders with a very different range of artists as well as a very different portfolio of services. They all want to create a platform that offers as much music as possible in an easily accessible way while minimizing the risk that the data can be stolen. What’s missing is a universal and international standard for files and metadata, one that every publisher and every distributor can use.

There is a German database called IDNV, International Database for Printed Music & Musical Products. Via this database you can search for music of all kinds of publishers, and often order scores as PDF. But even if it’s called ‘international’, it seems to focus on the German speaking market. If this database had a proper front-end with which you can display musical scores, it could become for the printed music market what iTunes became for the CD: A platform on which every publisher could easily join in.

But for now, we are watching the market and see in what direction things might develop. And to find out what our users want and need, we are working of ways to provide some of the mentioned apps to them. However, installing programs like Tido or nkoda in our library for the users to explore and work with its functions does not equal legal deposit, of course. Using the legal deposit on non-print-scores applications and providing them to our users seems to be a most delicate matter.

That is, because as a library/archive that set oneself to store, preserve and protect its stock for all eternity, we cannot simply implement a live database whose content is constantly shifting and changing. Content, that is not only increasing, but with the risk of scores being deleted, too. Let alone to create a runtime environment that guarantees that there will be access even after operation systems, hardware und data formats have changed or ceased to exist.

Every musical score that is published in Germany, we must receive by law. But that doesn’t have to include additional features within one certain application program, as long as the music is on the market in printed form as well. Today, almost all musical scores published non-physical, are also published printed. So, as long as we keep on collecting the printed version, we are not missing out anything.

Therefore, when it comes to non-print music publications we follow the policy of ‘wait and see’ for the time being – always on the condition that the publishing houses in question release their scores physically as well.

Let’s see how the market develops, what systems get bigger and what disappear. We will keep in touch with the publishers and are open to speak about metadata formats and APIs.

Also, what we do for some time now, is scanning the indexes of printed scores, OCR-readable. This data is part of our catalogue and can be accessed online by everyone under a creative commons zero licence even outside of the library.