3. Narrative

Enhancing the humanities through innovation. Music Scholarship Online (MuSO) aims to establish a community of scholars to vet digital scholarship in music while simultaneously providing a digital environment for conducting research and supporting new scholarly projects. Before such a community can be launched, however, it is critical to devise a set of guidelines by which digital projects in music may be described, evaluated and then aggregated. The proposed workshop seeks to lay that foundation, which, when enacted, will make MuSO the first research environment to promote digital music projects by offering them a mechanism for peer review based on content, concept and technical design.

Beyond these innovations in digital musical scholarship, the proposed workshop will significantly benefit the digital humanities. Attendees will pioneer a metadata framework, using Resource Description Framework (RDF), that will allow researchers to perform full-text searches and searches for melodic fragments from a single interface. Once in place, these RDF guidelines will allow MuSO to rely on its connections as a member of the Advanced Research Consortium (ARC) to populate its database with content from Early English Books Online (EEBO), Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO) and the Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music (DIAMM). MuSO’s partner, the Single Interface for Music Score Searching and Analysis (SIMSSA) project at McGill University (for more on SIMSSA, see Appendix B), will also provide melodic searching functionality and additional music content. Taking these valuable partnerships together, MuSO will be poised to become the premier open-source resource for scholars to research music from the medieval era to the present day (the current historical scope of ARC).

Environmental scan. Outside of the annual meetings of the International Society for Music Information Retrieval (ISMIR), digital projects in music have received increasing interest. This year alone, the Digital Humanities 2014 Conference and the American Musicological Society Conference include(d) panel sessions and individual papers allotted to digital musical projects, whereas previous years have seen just single music-related papers scattered throughout their programs. In addition, the journal Early Music will dedicate one of its upcoming issues to the theme of early music and technology. Such a marked presence of digital music topics presented at these high-profile conferences and the high level of interest that Early Music’s call for papers has generated indicate a growing trend towards the digital in music scholarship. Despite this, there has been little coordination among present digital projects in music, and there is little structured support for their development, evaluation and dissemination. The proposed MuSO workshop will establish metadata-reporting and peer-reviewing standards that will meet this need, allowing for digital projects in music to be evaluated and aggregated (see Appendix C for a list of projects that could be aggregated in MuSO).

Any aggregator needs robust and descriptive RDF guidelines to assure that researchers may find its digital objects easily. The one presently employed by ARC serves as an excellent model (see http://wiki.collex.org/index.php/Submitting_RDF). In the fields of historical and literary studies, ARC has established itself as a leader in the aggregation and curation of peer-reviewed digital projects (see Appendix D for ARC aggregation practices). Its period-specific nodes (18thConnect, Networked Infrastructure of Nineteenth-Century Electronic Scholarship [NINES], the Medieval Electronic Scholarly Alliance [MESA], Modernist Networks [ModNets] and the Renaissance English Knowledgebase [REKn]) provide valuable peer review from well-respected scholars who specialize in each time period. The success of this approach is undeniable, as the ARC catalog now contains over 700,000 peer-reviewed objects. However, ARC cannot presently offer meaningful peer review or metadata descriptions for musical projects because its overall focus has been on historical and
literary studies. The proposed workshop will therefore evaluate ARC’s RDF guidelines to ensure they are suitable for describing musical artifacts and resources. Well established and respected exemplars for print and manuscript resources like the Répertoire International des Sources Musicales (RISM) and the Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale (RILM) will be used to recommend changes to ARC’s RDF guidelines.

Thanks to the efforts of projects such as ModNets, ARC’s RDF guidelines have evolved to incorporate the metadata requirements of a variety of more modern media formats. The RDF schema therefore needs only minor tweaking, but these changes will significantly advance the utility of ARC nodes and other digital aggregators to the musical community. For instance, the modified RDF schema needs roles that include composers, arrangers, performers and conductors (among others), and it needs to handle music XML files (i.e. Music Encoding Initiative [MEI] and musicXML). In addition to advising ARC, MuSO – acting as a metadata standards body – will make recommendations to organizations such as Dublin Core and the Library of Congress to include information such as record labels and music producers, as well as adequate descriptions of the relationships between musical works (i.e. arrangements, selections and piano reductions).

It is not enough, however, to aggregate digital projects in music without providing them with a method for ensuring their value to the scholarly community. Indeed, the fact that there is presently no method or mechanism for gaining peer review on digital music projects remains one of the most significant barriers to digital researches in music. Like digital projects in any other discipline, digital music projects involve more than simply converting text files (or, for musicians, Sibelius or Finale files) into PDFs. Digital researchers eschew the constraints of the printed page by collating various types of digital media (such as manuscript and score images, XML-encoded scores, recordings and visualizations) to build much richer resources for scholars and performers alike. By recommending a mechanism for peer review and outlining a set of standards for the evaluation of musical projects, the proposed workshop will lay the groundwork for MuSO to provide meaningful peer review to job search and tenure committees, while ensuring its aggregated resources are of the highest academic quality. This functionality will set MuSO apart from other music databases, much like NINES and 18thConnect have distinguished themselves from Google Books and the HathiTrust.

Using ARC as a model (for example, see 18thConnect’s peer-review standards in Appendix E), the MuSO workshop will pioneer standards and a methodology for reviewing digital music projects. Because MuSO will be the first discipline-specific node in ARC, workshop participants will need to agree on a mechanism that will allow a musical review to be undertaken alongside the preexisting period-specific review in ARC. Participants will also need to recommend an XML standard for the ingestion of text-only musical objects. These steps will ensure that music projects can take their place among other digital humanities projects by providing authoritative discipline- and period-specific evaluations for digital music projects (see Appendix F for a draft workflow).

History and Duration of the Project. Timothy Duguid (the founder of MuSO) was first confronted with the concepts of data aggregation and digital peer review while working as the research assistant for ARC. Through working with ARC and the project directors of its participating “nodes”, Duguid became convinced that music scholars needed (and still need) similarly structured support for the development and dissemination of their digital projects.

In April 2014, Duguid attended the spring ARC Meeting, where he presented the idea of MuSO, and it received the unanimous support of ARC leadership. This was followed by a meeting in July between ARC and MuSO’s partners, where it was agreed that MuSO should seek appropriate start-up funding. Also in July, Duguid submitted a position paper to Early Music on the importance of digital peer review, which the journal has accepted for its upcoming special issue on technology and early music (see Appendix G for details on this article).
Work Plan. There will be two outcomes of the workshop. (1) A working RDF schema derived from ARC's present RDF guidelines that incorporates the recommendations of workshop participants. This RDF format will be used for aggregating all digital projects used by ARC nodes, including MuSO. (2) A draft of digital peer review standards that will be implemented in MuSO and published in the project white paper and in a relevant journal.

As shown in Appendix A, the workshop will begin by considering the question, “What do music scholars need in a digital curator and search mechanism?” Participants will have been asked to prepare ahead of time a list of features they want to see in a music aggregator, and these will provide the foundation for the discussion. Laura Mandell, the director of ARC, will then give an overview of ARC and the ARC RDF schema as a template and example. This will be followed by a break-out session, during which participants will be divided into three groups, each led by an ARC representative, and the participants will identify the most important metadata needs for music researchers by using the digital projects of workshop participants as test cases. The results will then be combined into an official list of recommendations for changes to ARC's RDF schema.

The second day will begin with a presentation by Laura Mandell on digital peer review and the varying practices utilized by ARC's “nodes”. Following some discussion, Liz Grumbach, ARC Project Manager, will walk workshop participants through case studies of ARC's peer review process. With this introduction, workshop attendees will spend the afternoon discussing the appropriate peer review procedure and standards for digital projects in music, and these standards will be published in the project White Paper and as part of a journal article that will act as a follow-up article to the one on peer review that will appear in Early Music.

The technological needs for the workshop will be straightforward: whiteboards and projectors for note-taking and display. The Initiative for Digital Humanities, Media and Culture at Texas A&M will serve as host, providing or coordinating the necessary connections, equipment and space for the meeting at the Memorial Student Center at Texas A&M (see http://msc.ucenter.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2013/09/MSC-Rent-Rates-9-27-13.pdf, room 1403 at Level 3 rate).

Staff. The workshop will bring together four constituencies: (1) ARC leadership, (2) Digital project directors in music, (3) Music librarians and (4) Music encoding specialists (See Advisory Board listing for the list of participants, including institutional and digital project affiliations, and Biographies section for more on each participant).

The project director for the workshop, Timothy Duguid, is a research fellow at the Initiative for Digital Humanities, Media, & Culture at Texas A&M University. He has participated on a number of digital projects, including the Wode Psalter Performing Editions and the Letters from Exile. Liz Grumbach will provide technical support as the present ARC Project Director, guiding the project so that MuSO will be poised to join the ARC community. Laura Mandell is the Director of ARC, and as an expert on digital aggregation and peer review she will advise MuSO on best practices.

Final Product and Dissemination. Both the RDF recommendations and the peer review standards will be incorporated into the White Paper for the NEH website. Prior to the workshop, a website for MuSO will also be created by the project director and hosted on the web servers at Texas A&M University that will advertise the project and act as an initial repository for the project's outputs. The modified RDF framework will be posted on the MuSO website and submitted to ARC for consideration. Upon its acceptance by ARC, the modified RDF schema will be implemented in the ARC database and published on the ARC website (see Data Management Plan for more specifics on the ARC database).

The draft peer review standards will be published on the MuSO website, and they will be reported in a second journal article that will follow the article that has already been accepted by Early Music.