

Open-Access Digital Dissemination of Rare Sheet Music from a Special Collection

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1 The International Music Score Library Project, sometimes called “imslip” is an open-access, digital repository for public domain music scores and parts.

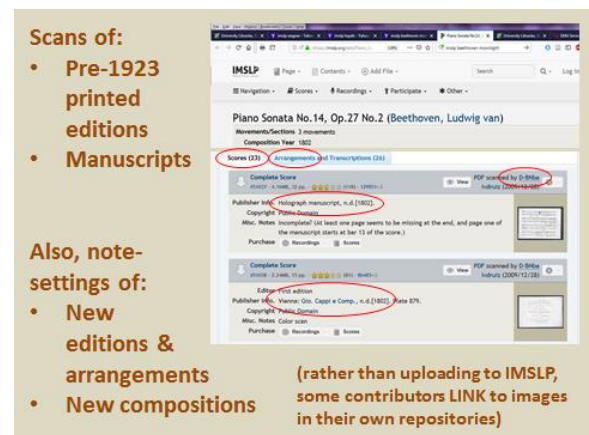
Scores are contributed by volunteers, most of whom are associated with music libraries or archives. The scores are freely downloadable.



IMSLP now has nearly half a million scores, representing over 150,000 different musical compositions. The content ranges from earliest printed music to modern works published under Creative Commons agreements.

2 This repository provides PDFs of scanned imprints, scanned manuscripts, and newly-notated editions or arrangements of older music, as well as PDFs of new compositions by contemporary composers. Rather than uploading PDFs, some contributors prefer to embed links to the digitized materials on servers at their own institutions.

This screenshot shows a part of the long entry for Beethoven's piano sonata, no. 14, better known perhaps as the "Moonlight" sonata (a name bestowed by a publisher, not by the composer himself). IMSLP contains scans of 23 different historical editions of this work, plus 26 arrangements of it for other instruments. With pride of place, at the very top of the catalog list, is the record for **Beethoven's holograph manuscript**. Every score record has complete bibliographic and source information, including the institution where the scanning was actually done, indicated by a library siglum. In this case, the siglum **D-BNba** represents Germany-Bonn-the Beethoven Archive, which owns the manuscript. Right below the 1st catalog entry for the holograph, in the 2nd place, is the record for the very first published edition (by the Viennese publisher Giovanni Cappi). An IMSLP subscriber merely clicks through to open a document. (A non-subscriber clicks through— but must for 13 seconds, and endure an advertisement, before the free download opens.)

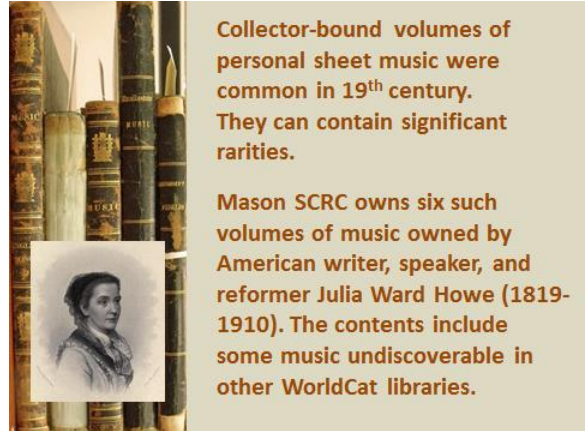


3 Now, about the Mason connection. There she is, pictured: Julia Ward Howe, and part of her personal music collection.

Owner-bound or collector-bound albums of published sheet music were not uncommon in the 19th-century. At George Mason University, we hold over one

hundred items of sheet music owned, played, and bound into six volumes by Julia Ward Howe. You might know her as the poet of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” She was an intellectually brilliant and influential 19th-century American writer, speaker, abolitionist, and reformer. I’m calling her a proto-feminist who did quite not live long enough to see women get the vote. She was also a talented musician of cultivated musical tastes, who loved opera, and played piano even into her eighties. She also edited a short-lived music magazine until the publisher changed it into a business magazine.

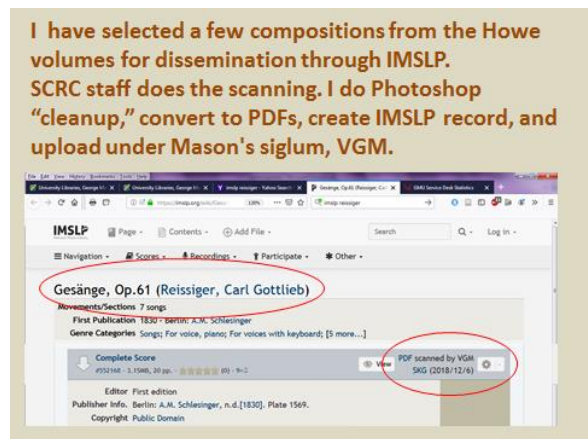
The bound volumes that we own likely contain music she collected and played during her late teens, twenties, and early married years. Some of this sheet music is very rare. A few compositions from the bound volumes were not discoverable in any other WorldCat library, and many were not represented in IMSLP.



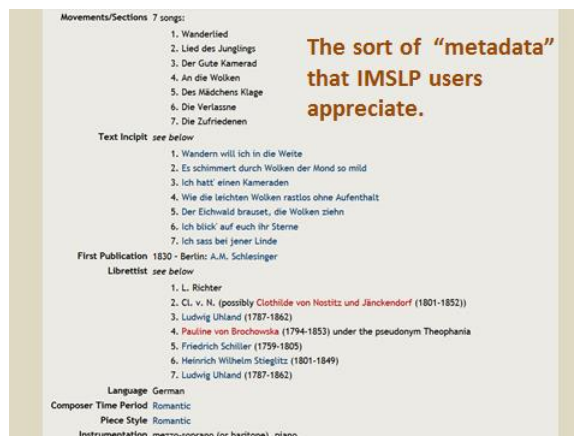
4 One of the volumes contains a large number of Lieder, German art songs, by Dresden composer and conductor **Carl Gottlieb Reissiger**, an important figure in his time and place. Many of these songs were NOT represented in IMSLP, at least not during my initial reconnaissance in 2015. **I decided to learn the process by which an institution contributes such rarities to IMSLP, and get a few of ours into this repository.**

Special Collections staff does the scanning and provides me with high-resolution images. I clean them up a bit in Photoshop, and convert to multi-page PDFs. I research the publication history and determine who the lyricists were. I then create the IMSLP record and upload.

Shown here is part of the record for one such contribution: a set of seven **Gesaenge (songs), op. 61**. They were published in Berlin by A.M Schlesinger; there was no date on the imprint, which is typical of 19th-century European music. I found it—1830—using a particular online musicological tool, “Hofmeister XIX.”. Notice the scanner siglum **VGM** for us at George Mason... and the contributor **SKG** for me! I contributed two sets of Reissiger songs (14 songs, 48 pages worth) in 2015, then returned to the project last fall with a library school intern to contribute three more sets, another 48 pages. Over the past summer I concluded the scanning and cleaning of selected Reissiger imprints totaling 56 more pages, and am now completing the research on publishing history and lyricist information needed for the final batch of uploads.



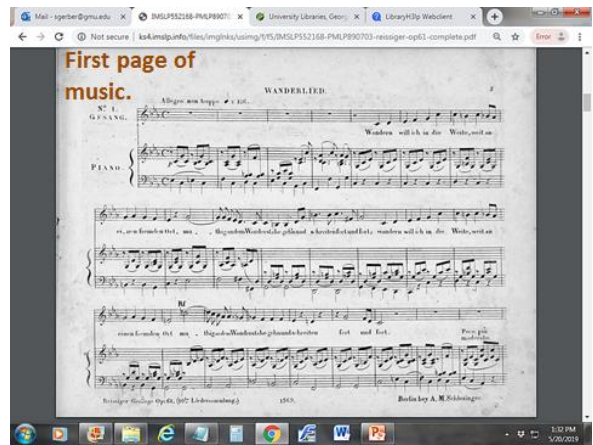
5 Creating a record for an IMSLP contribution involves adding certain data that musicologists and performers find helpful... such as the **titles** of the songs in each set, the **text incipits** for each song, and the **poets** whose texts the composer used. IMSLP's internal wizardry will link author names with any other instances in the database. Inasmuch as this is a well-vetted "wiki" type operation, other contributors sometimes supply useful information on the identities of poets.



6 When an IMSLP user clicks into the link to our uploaded copy of those seven Gesaenge op. 61, the PDF document will be available for reading, and downloading, printing, and performing. Here is the title page for this set of songs – a riot of different type faces... [read the German words] ... Gesundheit! and...



7 ... and... here is the first page of music (out of 23 pages), the opening of the first song of the set, “Wanderlied” or Wandering Song. It’s in a melancholy minor key—this is not a happy wanderer! In the first stanza the forlorn singer takes his trusty walking stick to venture far, far away, to some distant land, far away from that tree over there under which he confessed his dreams to her, but was rejected! Typical romantic-era poetic sentiment; by a poet known only as “L. Richter.” No one in the IMSLP community, so far, knows who he or she was.



There are 51 of Reissiger’s Lieder in Howe’s albums – enough to fill up two or three vocal recitals or CDs. I’m making sure that the previously unknown ones from our collection will now be easily accessible to musicians and musicologists worldwide.

8 TO CONCLUDE: This project illustrates open-access, digital dissemination of primary and out-of-print historical music repertoire for scholarship and performance. There is no real need for dedicating and maintaining space on a secure server for these images at the university.

This project illustrates open, digital dissemination of primary and out-of-print score resources for scholarship in music history and biography, without the need for populating and maintaining a server for these images at the university.

This could be practical for any library that holds rare musical materials in its special collections unit.

This could be practical for any library that holds rare or unique public domain scores in its special collections, and can be done intermittently in bits and pieces. “Bits and pieces” corresponds exactly to how I plug away at this initiative, inasmuch as I have lots of higher-priority items on my librarian’s plate.

So, this effort represents Mason Libraries’ small contribution to a giant digital library of music scores.

Thanks for listening!