

## **RAMH2: What services do, or will, users want, or need, or expect?**

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In its original print form *Resources of American Music History* served an invaluable purpose. It brought together a wealth of information about collections of primary source material that was formerly either locked up in the files of repositories or scattered among a wide range of publications and other information sources, and made it available in an easy to use form that was available in reading rooms of most major libraries across the country, and the world. At that moment it was up-to-date and authoritative. Of course it is now 28 years later and although we can still marvel at the wealth of information it contains and the work that went into producing it, we can now also recognize that in its printed format it also served to “lock up” information, at least from our current networked and Web 2.0 perspective. Some comparisons between the printed version and the proposed online version, although obvious to us all, are probably worth enumerating:

1. Printed books are not easily updated; online publications can be continuously updated.<sup>1</sup>
2. The printed volume exists primarily in library reading rooms rather than the offices and homes of its users; online publications can be made available almost anywhere.
3. Although scholars would know about the resource and would direct their students to it, most other users would probably only use it at the direction of a reference librarian. RAMH2 has the potential to be used profitably by anyone interested in music.
4. Users of the printed volume have only one view of the information, with indexes to provide targeted access by name, genre/format, subject, etc. Users of the online version can potentially have a number of different views of the data, with a number of different types of indexes for keyword searching and browsing (and combinations of the two).
5. Reference works (and card indexes) have actually always incorporated user feedback, usually in the form of penciled annotations by curators and librarians. In the online world we can not only easily update the information, but empower users to add their own observations, corrections, and additions.

I will revisit a number of these areas in the discussion that follows, but first we need to address a fundamental question: who will use RAMH2?

### **Identifying the User**

As noted above the users of the original RAMH were probably mostly scholars and specialist librarians with the skills to both find RAMH and interpret its contents. I use the term “interpret” intentionally here, for to make best use of RAMH the user probably needed a fair bit of specialist knowledge already. There are a number of reasons for this. First, the descriptions of holdings vary greatly in style and depth. It is not always easy, for instance, to determine whether a repository’s collection of sheet music and ephemera—so important for the study of practical music making in the US, and the social history of musical life in general—is significant or not, compared with that of another repository that may also be on the scholar’s list of possible

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that in the past when one applied for grant funding to produce a printed reference volume it was often for a “one off” work, without necessarily expecting updates. In the current environment it is expected that a sustainability plan be included, with the expectation that the online publication will continue to be an ongoing, developing resource.

resources. The prose description of a repository's collections probably holds clues for the scholar that would not be obvious to other users. Experienced scholars develop a sixth sense that allows them to ask the right questions, and sometimes find things in collections there were unknown even to the curators! And despite best efforts the terms used to describe materials are not uniform across collections and are open to interpretation by users.

In its online version RAMH can be open to all, and potential users will come from a wide range of backgrounds and will be looking to use the resource for any number of different reasons. One of the tasks of the RAMH2 project team will be to identify groups of potential users and to identify their needs so that appropriate services can be provided. Although the site will be available to all, potentially, no resource can meet the needs of all its users equally well. The site design and functionality should serve the primary user groups as well as possible, without denying valuable services to as wide an audience as possible.

It will be possible to meet the needs of many more users online than in print in two different ways: by providing different views of those services (e.g. basic search versus advanced search) and by layering data views (e.g. viewing basic repository information versus viewing detailed online finding aids). The audience for RAMH2 should be everyone with a serious interest in music research in its broadest sense. Here "music research" can include high school students working on a class project, a research assistant at a publishing company seeking rights information, an individual looking for evidence of his or her grandfather's musical career, a scholar writing a book on a specific genre, person, or place, and a casual web browser with an interest in American music in general.

For the actual contents of RAMH2—that is, what is actually stored in the database and content files—the needs of the expert scholar should be the guide. The quality and quantity of data needed to meet the needs of the expert scholar will easily meet the needs of other users, as long as their needs are also kept in mind during the design of the database and design of user interfaces. The differences are going to more in the manner in which data is presented than in the type of data. For instance, to use the example of sheet music, a scholar may well be interested in technical information about a sheet music collection: dates covered, publishers and regions of origin, publication formats, whether the repository has variant issues of publications, and collection provenance information. A user with a less scholarly interest in sheet music can certainly be just as well served using this data as long as it is presented in a user friendly interface with easy-to-use search options.

In order to adequately serve a range of users it will be necessary to define various groups to be served by RAMH2. A first cut at this list could be formulated at the upcoming RAMH2 conference, with further refinement as user needs studies are undertaken. Although curators of collections can provide a list of current user groups, an increasing number of our users are off site. Also, as more information and services are provided online the more likely it is that our user base will be diverse and geographically more distant. A good way of defining groups may be to define them according to the type of information they may be seeking:

1. A scholar writing on a specific composer, performer, or place.
2. A scholar examining performance practices within a community.
3. A researcher for a film company looking for period-appropriate music in the public domain.
4. A student performer looking for something interesting to play on a recital.
5. A social historian in Norway looking for evidence of Scandinavian influences in popular American musical culture.

6. A high school student looking to illustrate a paper on life in C17th United States with appropriate material.
7. An author writing a book on what it means for music to be “American.”

Consideration of scenarios such as these will allow us to focus in on the needs of RAMH2 users.

## **User Needs**

The most desirable way of assessing the needs of users is through a formal needs assessment study, which would be undertaken as an integral part of the RAMH2 project. Although the project team are likely to have good instincts in this area—especially those who serve as curators of and reference providers in archival collections—it is always instructive and surprising to learn firsthand what is important to our users.

A user needs survey assumes that the users of the service have been defined somehow, perhaps through the definition of groups of possible users as described above. The easiest way to reach some of our primary user groups is through membership organizations such as the Society for American Music, the American Musicological Society, and the Music Library Association. As noted in the application for the RAMH2 planning grant, a number of discussions and meetings have already taken place at which there has been considerable enthusiasm for this project. It should therefore be quite feasible to obtain more formal feedback on user needs from these audiences to assist in the design of the user interface and services to be provided.

A significant group of users will be curators and other staff of the repositories themselves. Hopefully they will be fully invested in the project, ready to provide all the initial information needed for a successful launch, and willing to continue to be involved by providing additional information and corrections as needed. They will also be using the resource to find relationships between their own collections and those of other repositories with a view to describing those relationships and perhaps establishing links within RAMH2 itself. This could become one of the defining aspects of RAMH2: that it becomes **the** place for all repositories of significant musical resources to report online and become a clearing house for the reporting of new collections, significant finds, and general exchange of information.

## **User Services**

The results of a user needs study will allow the RAMH2 team to define a set of services that will serve the needs of the principal users of the site—scholars and others undertaking research in archives, museums, and other repositories of material documenting American music—as well as the broader community of researchers seeking information about the primary resources of American music.

“Browse” and “Search” are the two principal “services” offered by an information resource such as RAMH2. Browsing is usually based on controlled terms, such as names, subjects, genres and formats, where a pre-established set of terms is used in order to collocate all entries with common values.

Browsing works well when terms are drawn from vocabularies that are appropriate to the material being described and at a level of detail that makes retrieval neither too limited nor too

voluminous. A number of the structured data fields suggested by Jenn Riley in her position paper, “Metadata Issues for RAMH2,” could be subject to authority control and easily indexed and browsed, including names, topical subjects, and geographic places. Elements such as resource type and form/genre would also be controlled, but would probably be best used in a search as a limiting element. Dates ranges are also valuable limiting elements, but could also be used to generate timelines or date-based clusters of materials.

Searching usually implies searching for keywords, either within a single field or across a number of fields, or across the record as a whole. Many bibliographic services provide two types of search, the “simple” keyword search and the “advanced” Boolean search. The simple search could be across the entire record, target the most significant descriptive elements, or allow the user the option to target one of more fields. Most simple keyword searches assume an implied Boolean “AND” between terms in the search. In addition to a simple keyword search many services offer an “advanced” Boolean search in which keyword searches on different fields can be combined with the AND, OR and NOT operators.

The *Film Literature Index*<sup>2</sup> illustrates this search/browse/Boolean combination very nicely. The simple keyword search allows the user to choose between searches by keyword (i.e. the entire record) or by production title or by person. The advanced Boolean search provides three search boxes and seven(!) different indexes to choose from, along with limits by year, format, document type, language, and whether the item was peer reviewed or not. This is a less than perfect model for RAMH2 however as the data we will be dealing with will be less uniform and have a much higher proportion of unstructured data. The *Sheet Music Consortium*<sup>3</sup> provides similar searching and browsing service, but limits browsing to titles only. The principal reason for this is that the data is harvested using the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH) and other fields were not available reliably from all the participating data providers. The degree to which metadata is consistent across repositories is something to be considered if OAI-PMH were to be considered as a means of ingesting data into RAMH2.

#### *Additional Examples for Comparison*

It may be useful to examine two additional well-known online information resources for comparison. These sites are quite different one from another, but each includes features that are possible models for incorporation into RAMH2.

*Archive Finder*<sup>4</sup> is a directory of collections of primary resource materials in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. *Oxford Music Online*<sup>5</sup> is a portal and searching interface to online versions of Oxford University Press reference works in music, including *Grove Music Online*, the *Encyclopedia of Popular Music*, the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*, and the *Oxford Companion to Music*. I will extract a few features from each of these with comments on how they might related to RAMH2.

#### Archive Finder

Archive Finder is a subscription site published by ProQuest which shares similar searching interface with a number of other ProQuest products. It features two distinct searches, for

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/reference/fli/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://digital.library.ucla.edu/sheetmusic/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://archives.chadwyck.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>

Repositories and for Collections. In her RAMH2 position paper Jenn Riley suggests a similar hierarchical structure for RAMH2, with the addition of a layer for Institution.

There are three types of search: 1. a quick search box that search both repositories and collections, or either one separately or both; 2. repositories search; and 3. collections search. The ProQuest search is distinctive in providing the ability to browse terms for insertion into a search box for a variety of different elements, both controlled and free text. Browsing of controlled headings is extremely useful when combined with a search, but browsing through uncontrolled keywords can be tedious.<sup>6</sup>

Although Archives Finder is at first glance a possible model for RAMH2 there are some significant differences. Of course the major one is the general nature of the product: descriptions are quite brief and limited to information gleaned from front matter of finding aids and other sources. And although the product claims to provide links to online finding aids I found it very difficult to find any.

Two features that I expect will appear in RAMH2 in more sophisticated versions are the ability to update information—here via an online form<sup>7</sup>—and the ability to create a personal account and save records for later reference.

### Oxford Music Online

Oxford Music Online is best known to us as the home of Grove Music Online, but it also provides integrated access to three other reference works, most significantly the Encyclopedia of Popular Music. The publications can be searched together or separately, and an integrated results set is returned. The data on which the site is built is highly structured, especially in the case of Grove Music and the Encyclopedia. This is best demonstrated by looking at either the advanced search screen or the browse content screen. In the box in which the publications are selected it is possible to display and select from the hierarchies of content in these two publications. The hierarchies are quite different as befits their content: the subsets within jazz in the Encyclopedia for instance are quite detailed (there are 15 different subsets for jazz under genre for instance, from “acid jazz” to “death metal” via “jazz (soul).” The hierarchy under Grove Music is completely different, and is much more modest. The subsets (for which read “controlled vocabulary”) in the Encyclopedia are entry type, era, country, and genre, and in the New Grove they are of a topical nature, such as historic periods, and terminology and concepts.

On the advanced search screen we see how the data is searched across all the publications. The limits across all the publications are to “full article text,” “entry title,” “bibliographies,” “contributors,” and “works lists.” These are the elements which are common to all four publications. There are also biography and bibliography searches across all the works, and discography and videography searches for the Encyclopedia only.

It is clear that metadata choices drive the search and retrieval possibilities. The way in which the text and metadata for these four publications—the New Grove and the Encyclopedia in particular—is structured and the controlled vocabularies are used drives the way in which search and retrieval is handled. Some search options can be integrated, but others have to be offered as limits on the search publication by publication.

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<sup>6</sup> This “keyword browsing” functionality is a common feature across the ProQuest Chadwyck-Healey products.

<sup>7</sup> <http://archives.chadwyck.com/infoCentre/submit.jsp>.

Under “Tools and Resources” there are additional paths into the New Grove, under timelines and topical guides. These are less likely to be of use to the advanced scholar, but are certainly of interest to the general reader and casual browser, and perhaps the masters or doctoral student studying for comprehensive exams! Guides such as these might be considered by RAMH2 to provide ways into the data for the general reader and scholars-in-training.

### *Item Level Description and Digital Collections*

In their position papers both Jon Dunn and Jenn Riley discuss the possibility of capturing item level metadata for RAMH2 and point out the extreme technical difficulty and expense of such an undertaking. I share their concern and agree that this should be out of scope for the proposed project at this time, and probably for ever. Given the nature of the subject the materials we are interested in exposing are housed in libraries, museums, historical societies, collections of individuals, corporate archives, and numerous other types of repository. Encoded Archival Description (EAD) and Describing Archives: a Content Standard (DACS) are probably the standards used across most significant repositories (what percentage?), but even trying to capture and work with those would be a huge task. Besides, it is the nature of finding aids to vary in detail, with some providing no folder or item level data at all!

Wherever possible **links** to both online finding aids (which may or may not have folder or item level detail) and digital collections should be provided, as well as to any other online forms of information that might be available. Although RAMH2 will not provide searching at the item level, it should provide access to these online discovery tools where they exist. (In Jenn’s metadata list this is the “References to online version of materials” element.)

Digital collections are also an area that needs some careful thought and management. As with online finding aids—which in many cases will provide links to digital content—we will not harvest the item level metadata or content, but the existence of a digital collection derived from a physical one, in part or in whole, should be part of the metadata record and could drive some interesting services. I would recommend that contributors and compilers be encouraged to include information about the availability of digitized content in order for users to be able to limit their searches to those collections. Although this would not be a great benefit to advanced scholars, who presumably wish to get a complete picture of what is available, it would be of great value to students of all levels, from high school to graduate students, who lack the time or resources to travel.

A major benefit of providing some services around digitized content—initially probably simply a link from repository and/or collection level records to the digitized collection—is that it provides the user information about the digital materials in a broader context than even the hosting institution can probably do. For instance, a search on a given name may return a result set that contains a number of geographically distant collections with digitized correspondence of that person. The user now has information from each of the repositories about the collections, along with access to the digitized content through links provided by RAMH2. This collocation and contextualization will be one of the most significant benefits of RAMH2.

## “American” Music

Before wrapping up I would like to note a paper that appeared in *American Music* in 2003; Amy Beal’s “The Army, the Airwaves, and the Avant-Garde.”<sup>8</sup> Besides being an interesting and important contribution to our understanding of US influence in European musical life after the war, Beal’s work is notable for the archives from which information was drawn in the course of her research. They included:

Berlin Philharmonic Historical Archive, Berlin  
 Elliott Carter Papers, Paul Sacher Archive, Basel  
 Henry Cowell Papers, Music Division, New York Public Library, New York  
 National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD  
 Historical Archive, Südwestrundfunk, Baden-Baden  
 Historical Archive, Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Cologne

Clearly these German archives would not be obvious repositories for information about American Music. I am also reminded of work done by Horst Weber and Manuela Schwartz, who scoured our libraries for information on émigré musicians living in the US in the 30s and 40s for their book *Quellen zur Geschichte emigrierter Musiker 1933-1950* (Sources relating to the history of emigré musicians 1933-1950).<sup>9</sup> This volume is a detailed accounting of the contents of US archives containing materials on European composers and performers living and working in the United States after the Second World War.

It will be difficult to define what “American Music” is and where the appropriate materials reside. Although database space limitations will not be an issue, with the possibility of online self-reporting of collections by repository staff clear scoping guidelines will be a necessity.

## Final thoughts

When we meet there will be plenty of scope for discussion of the appropriate searching and other services that RAMH2 should provide. I have not discussed Web 2.0-like services here, but that is certainly an area for brainstorming and experimentation. At the very least we should be thinking about users providing feedback (corrections, additions, comments) that curators and editors may wish to use to update the core data. We should also be thinking about users having the ability to save information for later use (the “shopping cart” concept), and sharing information somehow (a forum or blog?). Although I would caution against implementing Web 2.0 features without good reason, where it is clear that there will be benefits these options should be explored.

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<sup>8</sup> Amy C. Beal, “The Army, the Airwaves, and the Avant-Garde: American Classical Music in Postwar West Germany,” *American Music*, 21/4 (Winter, 2003), pp. 474-513. Available from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3250575>

<sup>9</sup> Horst Weber, Manuela Schwartz, eds. *Quellen zur Geschichte emigrierter Musiker 1933-1950* (Munich: Saur, 2003).