

Musical Score Representation and Retrieval in Digital Environments:

A Critical Review

The article I chose to write about for my review involves musical scores and retrieval in digital environments. Tolare et. al (2024) analyze the relationship between musical archives and how they are indexed, depending on what kind of database or archive they are (academic, public, et. cetera). While I was impressed with the effort put into documenting how many ways musical scores can be organized, and how other music librarians have studied this organization, little solution was offered.

This is largely attributed to the non-standardized language in musical archives and thematic catalogs, however, Tolare et. al (2024) did not offer any personal suggestions or attempt to index this information in any way, shape, or form. Instead, they relied on the previous work of others, particularly Dubnjakovic (2009). Tolare et. al (2024) relied so heavily on the work of Dubnjakovic (2009) that I sometimes felt as though I were reading something from her scholarly work instead of Tolare et.al (2024).

If I were writing this article, my approach would likely have been to design my own thematic catalog or archive style which could thus be attributed to all musical databases, or the information literacy of musical search. Even a small attempt to use the systems that Dubjakovic (2009) and others suggested would be a better use of the time spent on this article than simply stating what was previously said.

Digital musical archives are essential in the modern day for people to find and listen to music, whether it be a program such as Spotify, Bandcamp, Soundcloud, or even an academic or public collection, yet little to no attention seems to be paid to resolving the lack of musical education that is the clear source of this inconsistency. Even suggestions, such as embedded librarians or Digital Asset Managers (DAMs) for corporate collections would have been a helpful

thought process for resolving this issue. None of these factors were mentioned; the article failed to provide any consistency aside from a rehash of the statistics others had aggregated.

I too am sorely undereducated in musical theory and notation, and I am sorry to say that this has not been part of the Music Librarianship class curriculum I have been taking. It seems overwhelming to rely on my previous high school music knowledge or self-taught musical skills to attempt to complete a thematic catalog or other digital music archive. Concerning Dubnjakovic (2009), I was pleasantly surprised to learn that she has so many compelling theories and practices in musical archives. While I have heard some limited information about her skills and knowledge, this article, to its credit, opened my eyes to the width and breadth of her expertise.

The final note I would like to share is that while this article was about digital music archives, it didn't mention much about transferring physical objects into the digital realm, which I realize is an important subject in this class. The arts and humanities should be put into heavier focus in primary and secondary education, and the defunding of these so-called humanities in favor of STEM is incredibly frustrating. I shouldn't take out my frustrations on the writers of this article, as the issues lie in other places entirely that are no fault of Tolare et. al (2024).

If there were a standardized system of teaching the humanities as there are for Math, English, and other core skills and these classes were offered consistently in every school, perhaps the state of higher education in music (or art and design for that matter) would not be so dire. The remaining question is whether the wealth of musical knowledge online could ever be consistently standardized under these conditions. If Dubnjakovic (2009) could not immediately find a lasting solution, who would be able to? A truly skilled and seasoned music professor and professional could only develop a cursory solution as of 2009. I did not read any other pieces of Dubnjakovic's literature, outside of this article, and the lectures provided through Canvas. Therefore, perhaps this assessment is a bit short-sighted.

References

Tolare, J. B., Fujita, M. S. L., & de Castro, F. F. (2024). Musical score representation and retrieval in digital environments. *IFLA Journal*, *50*(2), 408-415.

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Dubnjakovic, A. (2009). Navigating digital sheet music on the web: Challenges and opportunities. *Music Reference Services Quarterly*, *12*(1-2), 3-15.