

Conference Reports

The COVID-19 pandemic caused many conference cancellations, while others moved to the virtual environment. Below are reports from five virtual conferences.

New England Chapter meeting of the Music Library Association (NEMLA)

April 17, 2020, Boston, MA (online)

Marci Cohen, Boston University

The **New England chapter of the Music Library Association (NEMLA)**, had just opened registration for its spring meeting, scheduled for April 17, when COVID-19 caused widespread shutdowns. Rather than cancelling the event and recognizing the opportunity to showcase program chair Lisa Wollenberg's fruitful work to a wider audience than those who might have traveled to the Boston Symphony Orchestra's (BSO) Symphony Hall under normal circumstances, the board decided quickly to turn the meeting into an online event. While not the first event to pivot this way, it was among the earliest.

At the peak, the event had approximately 130 participants, twice the usual attendance of our Boston meetings. Normally, the chapter would announce its meetings to the broader Music Library Association community primarily as a courtesy; this time we did so knowing we could attract the far-flung. The attendees included not only current NEMLA members but also former members who had left New England, our music library colleagues across the US and Canada, and even one logging in from Serbia and another from Qatar.

The event required preparation because most participants were new to Zoom in March and April. I hosted and provided tech support for the Zoom meeting in my final act as Past Chair. I offered to do practice runs with all presenters, confirming that they could connect to Zoom, and reminded them to have a phone and phone number handy as audio back-up. With one presenter, we learned together how to share computer audio. I did a sound check with different microphones for the concert performers. I chose licensed music to stream during the meeting down times so that attendees would know their audio was working. After studying Zoom's best practices documentation, I recruited two coworkers as co-hosts to handle tech questions from attendees and to address potential Zoom bombing, but both tasks proved unnecessary.

Although we could not meet at the BSO, Tony Fogg, William I. Bernell Artistic Administrator and Director of Tanglewood, provided opening greetings as the BSO's representative. Next was a panel discussion on library management, "I Have an MLS, Not an MBA!" Nina Davis-Millis,

Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Paul Engle, Brockton Public Library; Ruthann McTyre, Yale University; and Holly Mockovak, Boston University, each presented opening thoughts before taking questions from the audience.

Conveniently, the business meeting did not require any votes from the membership. Officers and committee chairs delivered their reports. Outgoing chair Sarah Funke Donovan could only metaphorically pass the gavel to incoming chair Lisa Wollenberg.

The afternoon started with two shorter presentations. New England Conservatory's Leonard Martin combined his insight as a cataloger with his knowledge of chopped and screwed, vaporwave, and ambient to discuss these subgenres and cataloging issues in dealing with musical subgenres. Aaron Bittel and Jennifer Thom Hadley shared their success stories and lessons learned in hosting public events in Wesleyan University's music library. In lieu of a physical tour, Bridget Carr, Director of Archives and Digital Collections, gave a slideshow overview of the BSO archives.

Setting up a webinar would have required institutional approval, but the ability to immediately schedule a Zoom meeting for up to 300 participants also had the unexpected benefit of allowing full interaction among attendees. With microphones and chat open for informal discussion, we replicated the opening and closing receptions of our in-person meetings, announcing them as BYO bagel and bottle. We took greatest advantage of this for an open session on COVID-19 work, which filled a scheduling gap left by a presentation that could not be shifted online. Members of the program committee moderated the discussion, with participants unmuting to talk and others having a lively chat thread where people shared questions, ideas and resources. Topics included identifying tasks to keep employees productive from home and lessons learned in the switch to teaching information literacy in an online environment.

We held onto our traditional end-of-meeting concert. Father and daughter Joel and Lily Moerschel performed Duo V from 6 Duos for 2 Cellos, op. 156, by Friedrich August Kummer. The best microphone they had available was less than ideal, so the sound was sometimes glitchy, but it was quite moving that we could all still enjoy live music together, even remotely.

By May it was commonplace for live events of all kinds to switch to remote presentation. But in April, as everything was first shutting down, it was uplifting to pull off the meeting and engage so many of our colleagues in meaningful ways.

Mountain-Plains Chapter of the Music Library Association: Two Perspectives

14-15 May 2020, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK (online)

Christine Edwards (University of Central Oklahoma) and Ellwood P. Colahan (University of Denver)

In the middle of May there is always a particular meeting that we look forward to – the **Mountain-Plains Chapter of the Music Library Association**. Our merry little group is composed of members from thirteen American states and the Canadian province of Alberta. When the meeting was set for a return to Oklahoma this last year, my home state, I happily volunteered for the programming committee. Little did we know at that time how unconventional this meeting would turn out to be!

As COVID-19 swept into North America, it became increasingly obvious that an in-person gathering was not going to be possible for May 2020. Travel was restricted, funds were withdrawn from departments, and anxieties rose. No one wanted to fully cancel, but no one was sure how to go fully online either. There were few examples to follow and Zoom bombers were making headlines. Despite the growing pile of ‘what ifs,’ we chose as a committee, and with the approval of the Board, to move forward in pursuing a completely virtual MPMLA meeting. As a bonus, because the program would cost nothing to host, we were able to offer free registration to all attendees, boosting our numbers to something unseen in many years.

Here are some of the lessons we learned along the way:

- 1. Choose the platform that the majority of your planners are familiar with, so they can provide tech support**

There are multiple options for online meeting platforms. We chose Zoom because that was the platform with which we were most accustomed, and because Ellwood Colahan (Woody) was able to use his school account to host. We assigned monitors for each session, then held practice sessions for the monitors to ensure we knew how to troubleshoot and answer any questions that arose. We also offered practice sessions with presenters, which was especially helpful for those who had not used Zoom. This also allowed us to test audio and video components beforehand and decide on best practices (e.g., “use computer sound” and muting your own audio as a presenter).

- 2. Change of platform does not necessarily equal change of program**

Since our call for proposals had already been out, we decided on an extension in light of the new information. We had alternative options for posters (though none were submitted) and we discussed how our planned key highlight panel session on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion could still be accomplished. After the brief CFP extension, we planned a program similar to what would have taken place in person. We shortened the days and altered start/end times to accommodate time zone differences, but otherwise the program was reflective of previous years. We even hosted an evening performance by the award-winning University

of Central Oklahoma Jazz Ensemble in collaboration with the School of Music and with some excellent video-editing skills.

3. Recognize that there is more that you cannot control, than you can control

On Day Two of our meeting, a storm system came rolling through Oklahoma right about the time our Diversity panel was set to begin. Since these panelists were scattered geographically, each using a different connection, there was a chance at any moment the storm could eliminate their online presence. Luckily, there were no problems, but we communicated this chance upfront and you could see videos gradually darken as the storm clouds snuffed out any natural lighting being used by Oklahomans.

4. Virtual attendance is something we should be regularly offering

Free food is always a draw to events, but it turns out free registration is even better! The MPMLA 2020 meeting attendance was more than double what we would typically have in person. While free registration may not be sustainable, we must consider virtual attendance options post-COVID. Now that we know a virtual conference can be accomplished successfully, we can make allowances for different circumstances in the future. It also provides the opportunity for participation on a larger scale, including those outside the region, or even the continent.

In the end, it was an extremely successful program. Communication was key, as in most situations, to ensuring that success. We tried to keep the spirit of an in-person meeting by allowing time for socializing, joining with each other at mealtimes, and including the UCO Jazz Ensemble performance. Moving online was the right decision for this time, and yet we look forward eagerly to the day that we can again gather and enjoy each other's physical presence once more!

Christine Edwards

Graduate Studies Librarian

Performing Arts Liaison

University of Central Oklahoma

MPMLA 2020 was successful beyond our expectations. We definitely missed our traditional pre-conference dinner and all the other usual opportunities to socialize. Our chapter covers the largest geographical area and has probably the smallest membership of any MLA chapter. Our members are a close-knit and supportive group that look forward to catching up on each other's personal and professional lives. We tried to partially make up for the lack of in-person contact by opening the Zoom room early and keeping it open late; some folks took the opportunity to spend a little time checking in and hanging out with each other.

But, in compensation for the lack of in-person contact, we had greater participation than we may ever have had in one of our annual meetings. There were 96 people registered for the meeting in total. Not everyone was online at the same time, but we regularly had 30 or more participants in a session, which is more than our chapter has seen in quite some time.

Our program was as varied as usual: a balance of presentations on library practice and historical musicology, with a number of papers on diversity-related topics and music in the American west. We always welcome high-quality student work, and that ingredient was part of our mix this year as well. Two elements of our program were unusual and added great richness to the conference experience. First, Holling Smith-Borne and Matthew Vest from the MLA Strategic Planning Task Force conducted a pair of focus group sessions of members' views on the national organization. I believe all of us appreciated this opportunity to be heard in a thoughtful way. Second, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion panel allowed us to explore a number of ideas and perspectives not ordinarily presented at our annual chapter meeting.

As Zoom host, I was concerned something might go wrong at the last minute, but the two-day meeting went off without a hitch. An added bonus was that the online format made it a snap to record and archive the presentations. All the sessions for which presenters gave permission are posted online and linked from our meeting website:

<https://sites.google.com/view/mpmla2020/program>.

This year's conference introduced us to a way of meeting as a chapter that we will continue to take advantage of post-COVID.

Ellwood P. Colahan

Music and Performing Arts Librarian
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Teaching Music Online in Higher Education

15-16 May 2020, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (online)

Kevin Madill, UBC Library

Teaching Music Online in Higher Education (TMOHE) was a research-informed, virtual conference geared to higher education audiences. The conference, held May 15 and 16, 2020, was sponsored by the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (Melbourne, Australia). Delegates from around the world gathered to share ideas about creating effective and meaningful online learning and performance experiences for music students. Conference content included keynote presentations via live stream (or recording), academic presentations, live stream discussions, and live stream workshops offered through the communication platforms Zoom and Slack.

TMOHE was structured as three forums, each opening with a forty-minute presentation by a keynote speaker, followed by a brief question period. Dr. Andrew King of Hull University, delivered a talk about “Online Music Education: Understanding the Challenges.” Dr. Jennifer Lock of University of Calgary addressed “Traversing the Online Learning Landscape: Embracing Opportunity in Designing Robust Learning.” Dr. Carol Johnson from Melbourne Conservatorium of Music presented on “The Global Landscape of Online Music Classes Prior to COVID-19.”

Highlights from the poster presentations included several teaching faculty from the INTERMusic Workshop, Milano Conseratorio, who offered insights into online music instruction developed over four years of teaching virtual music performance workshops. Of note was their work implementing an online shared platform for distance learning dedicated to performance practices. Jesper Anderson of the Royal Danish Academy of Music spoke about the challenges he had experienced providing synchronous distance learning in higher music education as traditional music teaching is mediated through video conferencing technologies.

Although the conference did not directly address the needs of music librarians, it provided a helpful introduction to the context and challenges of music education within institutions of higher learning consequent to the global pandemic along with useful information for librarians to pass to teaching faculty, particularly those faculty moving to online conducting and ensemble work. I appreciated the advice of several conference presenters who used this opportunity to caution those less experienced with teaching virtually that online teaching requires some adjustment. We should hesitate to judge ourselves and our capacity for online music instruction from immediate experiences related to the global health crisis. Successful online music instruction requires time, patience, and practice, qualities we already know relevant to good musicianship.

A note of appreciation to Dr. Carol Johnson and Dr. Brad Merrick, Conference Co-Convenors, for their work planning and coordinating the conference as well as guiding the virtual presentations.

**Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) 2020 Virtual Conference
21-23 May, 2020, Montreal, QC (online)
Rebecca Shaw**

The 54th annual conference for the **Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC)** took place virtually from May 21 to 23, 2020. Originally scheduled in Montréal, Québec, the organizers initially opted to cancel the conference due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they later reconsidered and elected to offer the conference in an alternate, virtual format. This waived the necessity of travel arrangements, hotel accommodations, and conference rooms, so ARSC was able to offer its

annual conference at no cost to the participants. As a result, they experienced record-breaking numbers with 917 attendees from 30 countries.

The organizers, including program chair Terri Brinegar, worked closely with presenters to accommodate their different requirements, and the resulting conference featured live, synchronous presentations via Zoom and pre-recorded sessions available for streaming via their website. Live presentations were scheduled in the program and were followed by question sessions. Attendees submitted comments and questions via Zoom's question and answer feature, which were moderated and read aloud to the presenters by the chair of each session. Presenters who opted to pre-submit video recordings of their presentations did not have the same live question and answer sessions with their viewers, but were encouraged to include their contact information, should someone wish to reach out.

Following the conference, all presentations—both live and pre-recorded—were made available via Aviary, a publishing platform for audio and video content. Live sessions include recordings of the question period. All recordings include auto-generated captions and transcripts.

The live conference spanned three days and featured 14 presentations in eight chaired sessions; an opening plenary; a virtual tour of Nauck's Vintage Records, one of the conference sponsors; ARSC committee meetings; and the ARSC annual business meeting. Five other presentations and one poster session were pre-recorded. Topics ranged from the historical to the technical. As the conference was originally scheduled to take place in Canada, conference submissions included presentations focussed on Canadian performers, collections, and recordings. Alexei Michailowsky spoke about the vocal techniques of Patsy Gallant; Laurent Bellemare discussed his work on the Montréal Gamelan Archives; and Matthew Barton discussed recordings from Edmonton's Ukrainian community. The opening plenary celebrated "100 years of Radio Broadcasting on Montréal" with guests Anja Borck, Alain Dufour, Denis Couillard, and Mariana Mejia Ahrens.

Understandably, due to the short time frame in which ARSC pivoted from an in-person to virtual conference, they were unable to offer everything that they had initially planned. Not all presenters opted to participate in the online format, and special offerings like workshops, tours, orientation and mentoring programs, and exhibits, were largely omitted from the program. Breaks, while still included in the schedule to allow viewers to brew a cup of coffee and mitigate the effects of "Zoom fatigue," were no longer opportunities for networking and socialization, but a chance for presenters and session chairs to sort out technical difficulties prior to the following session.

With more time to plan for next year's virtual conference, scheduled for May 2021, I hope that ARSC will find ways to incorporate workshops and networking opportunities into their program, and maximize on the opportunities of a virtual event. I, for one, am eagerly anticipating what I might learn next year.

Music Encoding Conference (MEC)

27–29 May 2020, Tufts University (online)

Emily Hopkins, Yaolong Ju, Juliette Regimbal, and Martha Thomae

The 2020 **Music Encoding Conference (MEC)** was originally going to be hosted at Tufts University in Boston, with Anna Kijas serving as Organizing Chair and Richard Freedman as Program Chair. As with so many events in the spring of 2020, the decision to host an all-virtual event had to be made quickly. Several people from the Music Technology Area at McGill attended, and a few of us wrote up some notes that we have compiled into a review. Yaolong Ju and Martha Thomae are PhD candidates at McGill University and Juliette Regimbal is a recent graduate (B. Eng. 2020) employed as a developer for the Single Interface for Music Score Searching and Analysis project (SIMSSA) Project, and they all participated and presented their papers. Emily Hopkins is the SIMSSA Project Manager and was on the MEC Organizing Committee in 2016.

In order to make the conference accessible to participants who were now spread across many different time zones, the conference schedule was revised to have shorter, compact and engaging days starting at 10 am eastern daylight time. As a result of both the virtual format and the decision to eliminate registration fees, more people than ever were able to participate: 188 participants attended — more than double the number from last year.

Timothy Duguid opened with a keynote about digital humanities pedagogy titled “The forgotten classroom? Bringing music encoding to a new generation”, describing barriers people face in adopting digital methods in the classroom. (His keynote presentation is available at <https://music-encoding.org/conference/2020/keynotes>.) Duguid discussed the ways in which over-emphasizing particular tools can derail progress, and critiqued the idea that new college students are somehow “digital natives”. While students may use computers more today than in previous eras, they are “just as reticent as other generations when it comes to curly brackets and angle braces.” Duguid emphasized the importance of introductory tools such as web applications that can function as a digital sandbox with some boundaries—too much open-ended access can just lead to overwhelm and dead ends.

The first “slam” session followed the opening keynote. In previous years, participants delivered 20-minute presentations followed by 10 minutes of questions. The virtual format instead featured a rapid series of three-minute slam presentations delivered live on Zoom, followed by a discussion of all the papers in different Slack channels. Given the reduced time for presenting, papers were made available prior to the actual conference to facilitate discussion. The three-minute slam seemed stressful for some presenters, who rushed or were cut off at the time limit. Slightly longer time slots or pre-recorded presentations (with live discussion in Slack) may have helped to alleviate some of that stress but overall, the format was an engaging way to get an overview of the research.

For the discussion on Slack, three papers from each session were grouped together by themes. As a result, there were a few different channels in which conference attendees could participate after each slam session. Slack channels preserve comments in chronological order, but because replies can either be posted to the main channel or through a comment thread, it was sometimes challenging to follow conversations. However, the written record of discussion and questions was very helpful, and it made it easier for all co-authors to participate in discussion. Guidelines to encourage participants to tag people in responses and make better use of threads could have made it simpler to follow conversations. There was a lot to keep up with, but it was a very engaging part of the conference.

The second day had a similar structure to the first, starting with Estelle Joubert's keynote on "Traversing Eighteenth-Century Networks of Operatic Fame". (Her keynote is also available at <https://music-encoding.org/conference/2020/keynotes/>.) Joubert and her team look at important players in the development of the canon as a "network problem", visualizing operatic fame at <https://operacanon.io/>. Funded by a SSHRC Insight grant, this project uses a graph database to examine connections between different contributors to the eighteenth-century opera scene, discovering "hubs" and "influencers" in their interface. Joubert was highly selective in which sources were added to the database, focusing on particular research problems rather than exhaustive coverage. Joubert emphasized that publications, not the database, are the end product.

Previously, MEC has had a pre-conference day with workshops, and an unconference day at the end where different interest groups (IGs) meet. The workshops this year were very well-attended, with many more people present online than would have fit into rooms used in previous years. The "Introduction to Music Encoding Initiative (MEI)" workshop served as a good introduction for MEI newcomers. The other two workshops focussed on "Developing Verovio" and "MEI Metadata". Both were well-organized and engaging. "Developing Verovio" guided participants through Verovio basics, and then provided a guided example in which everyone could participate by using Visual Studio Code's Live Share plugin to actively join in and edit code during the session. The "MEI Metadata" workshop provided an introduction to the basic parts of the <meiHead> element which stores metadata in MEI. Presenters provided a step-by-step overview for encoding the metadata for a particular piece, offering exercises and solutions for each step of the process. The workshop also introduced some more specialized parts of metadata encoding related to the FRBR model.

Especially noteworthy this year was the formation of several new IGs. Groups established before this year's conference focussed on the encoding of mensural notation, metadata, and neumes in MEI, and now five new IGs are forming around digital pedagogy, linked data, music analysis, Turkish music, and modal notation. Some combination of no fees, increased attendance, and the Slack platform increased participants' ability to have preliminary discussions in a group without the need to immediately schedule a meeting and find a room. It was easier to take an active role, organize meetings, and make suggestions.

Regimbal, who attended her first MEC in Austria last year, observed that the most notable thing about this year's conference was how similar it felt to last year's. The structure and tools were different, but the essential elements of learning about new research and collaborating with fellow attendees remained intact. Given the increased attendance and enormous enthusiasm for new IGs this year, it is safe to say that MEC2020 made the most of the situation and made this year's conference very worthwhile. It is also encouraging to know we are all still eager to make progress in this area, even when the venue is our homes, and the menu is whatever is already in the fridge.