



[Picanto.ca](https://www.picanto.ca/en/) <https://www.picanto.ca/en/>

Audiovisual streaming music service. Canadian Music Centre, 2022. Accessed December 7, 2022. [System requirements and supported devices: Available on an internet-connected device via the website. 0.5 Mbps Minimum Broadband Connection Speed required. Google Chrome: 50 & above. Firefox: 50 & above. Internet Explorer: 11. Edge: 35 & above. MAC Safari: 9 & above. Android:

Device screen size 4.5 inches (11.43 cm) & above. iPhone 6, 6S, 6S+, 7, 8, X and iPad Air, Air2, Pro.]

**Reviewed by: Trevor Deck** (University of Toronto) and **Kyla Jemison** (University of Toronto)

The past two years have seen the music industry turned on its head, with the COVID-19 pandemic forcing musicians worldwide to find new ways to share their music and make a living beyond the traditional avenues of live performances and touring. This incredibly tumultuous period set the stage for the creation of Picanto.ca (<https://www.picanto.ca/>) a new audiovisual streaming service highlighting the works of Canadian composers. Initiated in October 2021 by Canadian composer and electric guitarist Tim Brady in collaboration with the Canadian Music Centre and Le Vivier (<https://levivier.ca/en>), Picanto.ca<sup>1</sup> seeks to “nurture, support and showcase Canadian creative talent at home and abroad,” bringing together “a world of new and uncommon music from diverse genres through music-video offerings, documentaries, educational videos and live-streaming events.”<sup>2</sup>

The platform currently hosts 280 live recorded performances by over one hundred different performers across numerous genres, including jazz, electroacoustic, choral, chamber, opera, and orchestral music. Canadian Music Centre CEO, Glenn Hodgins, notes that Picanto.ca’s aim is to celebrate what might be considered ‘niche music,’ as opposed to mainstream rock and pop.<sup>3</sup> In

<sup>1</sup>The platform appears to use the names “Picanto.ca” and “Picanto” interchangeably. In this review, we will use “Picanto.ca.”

<sup>2</sup> Ashley Boychuk, “Picanto: Discover. Listen. Play,” Canadian Music Centre. October 13, 2021, <https://cmccanada.org/introducing-picanto-ca/>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Rowat, “Does ‘Niche’ Canadian Music Need Its Own Video Streaming Platform?” *CBC Music*. October 13, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/music/does-niche-canadian-music-need-its-own-video-streaming-platform-1.6200689>.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

addition to the genres mentioned above, Picanto.ca also allows users to browse content by Indigenous and inter-cultural composers and performers, which helps to highlight the works of Indigenous artists such as [Raven Chacon](#) and [Anthony Mcnab](#). Picanto.ca also plans to expand its offerings to include documentaries, music education videos, and livestreams. While the platform's chief purpose is to celebrate Canadian music, Hodgins notes that they are aiming for 66% Canadian content to allow for international participation.<sup>4</sup>

Artists have the choice of making their works either freely available on a non-exclusive basis or exclusively available via a pay-per-view model. As of October 2022, all of the content on the site is freely available. Nonetheless, Picanto.ca plans to add pay-per-view content as the platform matures. Under this model, 75% of revenues earned from pay-per-view fees will be paid directly to the legal owner of the videos (i.e., the artist or production company), while Picanto.ca will retain a percentage to cover a portion of ongoing operational costs. Artists will also receive royalties via SOCAN.<sup>5</sup> There is no cost associated with submitting videos to Picanto.ca, and artists retain full copyright and ownership of their works, making the platform an excellent option for artists interested in expanding their audience and increasing their online presence within the Canadian music scene. Notable acts that have contributed performances thus far include Vancouver's [Black Dog String Quartet](#), Toronto's [Soundstreams](#) productions, and the [Vancouver Inter-Cultural Orchestra](#). Hodgins' future plans for the platform include the possibility of a jury selection process to help curate content and the securing of grants to aid creators with production costs.<sup>6</sup>

In a recent conversation,<sup>7</sup> Hodgins noted that Picanto.ca is currently looking for additional funding opportunities to continue the growth of the platform. Few new videos have been added to the site since its launch in October 2021. Canadian libraries can support the continued growth of the Picanto.ca by highlighting this valuable resource on their websites. Furthermore, if the pay-per-view model becomes viable, libraries could support Picanto.ca through a subscription model. (Currently, however, the plan is for pay-per-view content to be available only to individual subscribers.) Academic institutions could also help by becoming content providers. We discussed the possibility of a student video submission competition as well as general outreach to encourage students to contribute their works and performances to the platform. Picanto.ca has already established collaborative partnerships with UBC's Chan Centre and the Queens University's Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts, and many other academic institutions across Canada have the live-streaming and recording infrastructure in place to generate new content for the platform. Hodgins emphasized the benefits Picanto.ca offers its contributors: by serving a centralized database for

---

<sup>4</sup> William Littler, "Is There Really a Canadian Music? With Its Digital Platform Picanto the Canadian Music Centre Provides an Answer," *Toronto Star*, October 15, 2021, <https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/music/opinion/2021/10/15/is-there-really-a-canadian-music-with-its-digital-platform-picanto-the-canadian-music-centre-provides-an-answer.html>.

<sup>5</sup> "Help Centre," Picanto.ca, accessed October 17, 2022, <https://www.picanto.ca/en/faqs/>.

<sup>6</sup> Rowat, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Phone conversation between Trevor Deck and Glenn Hodgins, October 25, 2022.

music aficionados to discover contemporary artists, the website can be a powerful promotion and marketing tool. Interested artists, groups, and institutions can easily [register](#) as a content partner. More details are available on Picanto.ca’s [FAQ page](#).<sup>5</sup>

In terms of overall usability, the website is generally intuitive and pleasant to navigate. The homepage offers a number of different categories to browse, along with a prominently displayed search box. Users have the option of signing up for a free account, which offers the ability to curate one’s own ‘favourite list’ as well as create playlists. There is also an option to receive notification of new releases and livestreams. It is not necessary to sign up for an account in order to access the videos. Some videos use the platform’s own video player and are hosted on the site itself, while others are embedded from outside websites such as YouTube. Playback was smooth on both locally hosted and embedded videos during our exploration of the site. While many of the videos can also be found on external websites, such as sites for the individual ensembles or festivals, it is nonetheless valuable to be able to browse the content on Picanto.ca, as it provides the creators greater exposure and allows users to discover new repertoire, composers, and performers.

Unfortunately, browsing via Picanto.ca’s Explore menu appears to be the only effective way to discover performances on the platform. Due to its inconsistency, Picanto.ca’s metadata does not facilitate an effective search experience. Metadata, as CAML readers know, is especially important for digital collections because it is the primary way users discover materials. Picanto.ca and music libraries across Canada would mutually benefit from the establishment of MARC records and metadata standards to facilitate searches and allow libraries to include links to performances in library catalogues.

Field Name	How many records used this field?
Release date	18/50
Title of composition	42/50
Duration	48/50
Category	50/50
Instrumentation	50/50
Copyright holder	48/50
Producer	47/50
Composer	48/50
Publisher	14/50
Performer	18/50
Co-creator	8/50
Copyright year	16/50
About performance	48/50

Table 1. Metadata field names and occurrences

We examined fifty performances – approximately 19% of the Picanto.ca collection – and evaluated the metadata for each video. From this sample, we listed the metadata fields used in some or all of the records. Table 1 lists each field name and how many records, out of 50, made use of the field.

From this analysis, it is clear that only the “Category” and “Instrumentation” fields are mandatory or at least consistently used. Notably, these are the only two fields that use standardized vocabularies. Looking at the data in these fields, however, shows that their use is not well defined. Of the ten records with the instrumentation of “Orchestra (15 or more musicians),” five use the category “Orchestral,” while the other five use “Chamber Music,” “Inter-cultural,” and/or “Jazz/Improvised Music.” The category “Chamber Music” includes performances of chamber ensembles as well as solo performances. There is another category, “Vocal/Choral,” but several works with the instrumentation of “Voice” are marked as “Chamber Music.” This scattershot approach to designating category and instrumentation leads me to suspect that there is no guide on how to assign these terms. The fact that only one instrumentation can be assigned is also problematic, as many performances involve instruments of various types and/or voices.

All other fields appear to be free-text, allowing for any format of content. While in some contexts this makes sense – “About performance,” for example – in others, it demonstrates the lack of standardization in the metadata. “Copyright holder,” “Producer,” “Composer,” and “Performer(s)” fields are most commonly filled in with one name, but the lack of standardization becomes especially evident when there are multiple people who hold those roles. Some records use commas to separate names, while others use an ampersand or the word “and.” A few records include the instruments of each of the performers after their name. Some use the name of the ensemble in one field and the name of the individual people in another. This lack of consistency makes it difficult to effectively search for a particular performer or composer.

Most surprisingly, only eighteen records included any information in the “Performer(s)” field. As musical performances, one would suspect that every performance would include a performer. Information in the “About performance” field often provides information about the performers, though that information is not commonly added to “Performer(s).” In fact, the “About performance” field hides a great deal of information that could be added to other, more structured fields. Many records contain information about the date of performance and co-creators (including filmmakers, choreographers, and editors, for example) as well as performers. A significant number of works also lack a title in the “Title of composition” field, including several works noted as “Chamber Music.” Each of the videos of these performances has a title, presented above the metadata, but that title is not included in the metadata for the piece.

The search options on the Explore page further emphasize the difference between structured and unstructured metadata. While there are selectable options for Category, Instrumentation, and Duration (divided into broad categories), filtering a search by Performer, Creator, Composer, Producer, or Presenter asks the user to search text. This search is much more effective than the

search bar at the top of the page, though its approach is still confusing. While a search for “Andrea” in the top search bar returns no results, a search for “Andrea” as a performer returns two results, both of which list an Andrea among the composers and in the “About performance” notes. A search for “Melissa” reveals similar results, returning two results that do not include a Melissa among the performers. Confusingly, searching for an ensemble that we noted as being included in a “Performer(s)” field, Third Coast Percussion, returns no results. From these confusing results, we are forced to assume that the metadata does little to inform the search results. Using a standardized vocabulary to describe the people involved in the performances would allow faceted searching and, we hope, more effective documentation of contributors in these fields.

This analysis of the existing metadata structure of Picanto.ca demonstrates how the platform could be improved through collaboration with information professionals. The basic premise and stated goals of Picanto.ca directly align with the strategic aims of music libraries across Canada. Just as the Canadian Music Centre has served as a central partner of Canadian music libraries over the past sixty-three years, Picanto.ca has the potential to serve as a central audiovisual digital repository for Canadian music for many years to come. While Picanto.ca is still in its relative infancy, it could grow into an invaluable resource to Canadian music libraries and the Canadian music community more broadly. It is very much in the best interest of music libraries across the country to help foster this growth and support the continued development of this promising platform.