THE MUSIC ENCODING INITIATIVE
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ABSTRACT

The Music Encoding Initiative (MEI) is a community-driven effort to create a commonly-accepted, digital, symbolic representation of music notation documents. The aim is to establish the design principles and the technological and representational requirements that will enable the discipline of musicology to take full advantage of digital technologies. Therefore, MEI strives to create a semantically rich model for music notation that:

- accommodates the encoding of common Western music, but is not limited to common music notation;
- is designed by the scholarly community for scholarly uses, but does not exclude other uses;
- provides for the common functions of traditional facsimile, critical, and performance editions;
- has a modular structure that permits use dependent on the goals of scholars; and
- is based on open standards and is platform-independent;
- employs XML technologies; and
- permits the development of comprehensive and permanent international archives of notated music as a basis for editions, analysis, performances, and other forms of research.

Additionally, the goal is also to provide guidelines and tools that can be widely used by libraries, museums, and individual scholars to encode musical scores for research, teaching, and preservation activities. MEI has the ability to manage complex source situations and will dramatically improve the search, retrieval and display of notated music online, benefiting music scholars and performers. Because of MEI's software independence, the data format defined by the schema also serves an archival function.

Several academic projects are already using MEI: the Danish Centre for Music Publication at the Royal Library in Copenhagen uses XForms and MEI for its catalogue of the works of Carl Nielsen, the DiMusEd project employs MEI for digital editions of medieval music notated in diastematic neumes, the Edirom project uses MEI in the development of tools for preparing and distributing digital scholarly editions. In addition, several higher education institutions include courses that include MEI.

The MEI Council, an international group of scholars, technologists, and educators representing a broad range of musicological, theoretical, and pedagogical interests, establishes the goals and oversees the operation of the MEI organisation. The Council was created through funding to the University of Virginia Library and the University of Paderborn from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation) and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In May 2010, the Council officially released the MEI model, which is free and available for download at http://music-encoding.org. The site also offers tutorials, examples, and experimental software for MEI conversion – more will be available in the near future. Information about the future of the project and how to get involved are also on the site.