Renaissance and Reformation
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Rotem, Elam, ed. Early Music Sources

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The early modern period was one that saw a number of important developments in music, including how it was played, noted, and understood. This website focuses on musical sources from the late Middle Ages onwards, hoping to provide simple access to these texts as well as contextualization and further information. The site consists of a "Sources Database," an "Iconography Database," YouTube videos discussing aspects of early music, and English translations of neglected sources in early music. This last feature is particularly important and noteworthy, providing an English-speaking audience with access to sources that have never before been translated and that can form the basis for future research. The website also contains further databases of lute music collections and pieces based on the Romanesca progression, a list of secondary sources on the basso continuo, as well as a font that can be downloaded to emulate the way music was printed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The databases are not hosted on the website server but rather hosted externally on Awesome Table (awesome-table.com), limiting the sustainability of Early Music Sources.

The Sources Database allows users to search 2,042 entries that concern early music. Where possible, a link redirects the user to digitized versions of manuscripts or texts. The documents cover different types of texts ranging from original music from the late fifteenth century to secondary literature from the twentieth century. The entries are searchable by year, place, author, title, publisher, type (article, book, manuscript), and category (basso continuo, partimento, rhetorics, etc.). In general, the interface is intuitive to use, and the categories are useful.

While the Sources Database is a helpful tool, there are several issues, especially a lack of standardization in place names. For example, "Nuremberg" also appears as "Norimberga," "Nurimberga," and "Nürnberg." This means that a user looking for sources printed in Nuremberg will either have to try many different spellings of the same place name or scroll through the whole database. The former is impossible due to the unpredictability of early modern spellings, and the latter is all but impossible due to the size of the database.

Adding separate sections for the source wording and the category wording could help with this problem. This also means that users without much prior knowledge—students, for example—are likely to draw erroneous conclusions from the data, as they may not be aware of the different spellings. Similarly, from a user perspective, the fact that one can only search for precise dates limits the usefulness of the Sources Database (though it is possible to search by century in the Iconography Database), and the fact that the data cannot be downloaded and single entries cannot be shared limits its utility even further. For example, mapping the data in the database or using them for machine-based research that relies on quantitative data is impossible due to these issues.

The selection of material is also problematic. The database combines modern secondary literature, modern editions of sources, and digitized versions of sources. Due to a lack of documentation, it is not clear how these different materials were selected. In other parts of the website, however, such distinctions are made: a separate section on basso continuo contains 307 secondary sources on this topic, while 1,455 entries in the lute music database contain at least some indication of selection criteria. The general lack of documentation is the most serious issue with the Sources Database: there is no indication of how the information in the database was gathered, how or if it was checked or compared with other sources, how categories were conceived, or what the process for the building of the database was. Even the definition of "early music" employed throughout the website is not clear.

The Iconography Database contains 174 images that depict early modern music-making. The database contains a variety of genres, including depictions of musicians and musical instruments on altarpieces, woodcuts, and in paintings. They are categorized according to author, date, title, instrument(s), and a set of categories related to the activities or items shown, such as "tuning," "fingering," or "partbook." This database is also searchable, and the option to search by instrument is particularly useful for scholars working on a particular instrument in the period. However, as with the Sources Database, there are some issues that restrict the utility of the Iconography Database. For instance, no further information is given on the selection or identification of the instruments and categories. And as the images are not hosted on the database and only links provided, there is no further information on licensing and copyright. The decision to only link to images also leads to a mix of illustrations, some of them leading directly to an image, others to a page containing the image, and others

still to a cropped image that does not include the whole illustration. In the last case, it is especially problematic when the original source is not clearly identified and only part of an illustration is used. Some of the links are also not working. Nonetheless, the wide variety of images identified in the Iconography Database is impressive and can provide important pointers for future research.

The website as a whole is aimed at scholars of early music as well as musicians. The YouTube videos also contain much practical information on topics such as "Reading from Partbooks" and "Intabulating Vocal Music." Others offer more detailed analysis of specific aspects of early music. The videos contain numerous footnotes and appendices, making them a valuable resource both for scholars new to the topic and those already familiar with aspects of early music. The videos are arranged in the same database style as the Source Database and Iconography Database, and they are informative and entertaining.

The website is run by Elam Rotem without any institutional funding or backing. The databases provide a useful overview of early music, and although their utility is limited due to a lack of standardization and documentation, they will be useful to anyone looking to gain a general idea of the scale and kinds of publications on this topic. And for scholars already familiar with the topic, some of the website's content provides fascinating in-depth case studies.

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