The launching of MGG-Onl ine in November 2016 marked the triumphant end of a development process that had begun back in 2000 with the decision to create a digital platform for what is regarded by many scholars as the most important and ambitious musical encyclopedia ever created. The team that undertook this work faced a range of complex challenges. The extraordinary flexibility afforded by the latest digital technology allowed a radical reimagining of the entire information architecture of MGG and yet it was crucial to maintain a tangible connection, both visually and structurally, with the most recent printed edition of the work. Two fundamental areas needed to be addressed: one, at the authorial or editorial level, that enabled a constant process of revision to be undertaken with minimal disruption to the site; and the second, the interface for the user and in particular, the search mechanism. While the editorial flexibility of MGG-Online is not apparent to external users, the excellence of the user interface and flexibility of the search parameters suggest that it is likely to be equally good. There is one other outstanding feature that deserves mention in this context: searches may be made in German or English since the RILM equivalencies sit in the background while an in-built translation link enables the user to navigate the site and read articles in a raft of languages ranging from Afrikaans to Vietnamese. The machine translations, like all of their kind, are highly variable in style and accuracy but provide the non-German speaking reader with a reasonable sense of an article’s contents and the German reader, so inclined, with a potentially rich source of amusement.

Arriving on the home page, the reader is struck by the clarity of the design and the clever way in which the strengths of the database are immediately yet unobtrusively displayed. A simple search text box can be found to the right of the screen beneath which is a brief description of MGG:

Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart (MGG) is a general encyclopedia of music. MGG is encyclopedic in the true sense of that term: it offers in-depth articles on every aspect of music as well as many related areas such as literature, philosophy, and visual arts. MGG Online contains the second print edition of MGG, published from 1994 to 2008, as well as current, continuous online updates and additions.

Four standing items occupy the remainder of the home page: Recently Updated Articles [these are described variously as major updates or minor revisions and are dated], Article of the Day, This Day in History, and Featured Article. In the listed articles, a hyperlink takes the reader directly to the selected article. These four sections serve not only to engage the interest of the visitor to the site and demonstrate the breadth of scholarship that is to be found in MGG-Online, but more importantly, they illustrate the fundamental principle that underpins the venture: that MGG is in a state of constant evolution as it updates, revises, replaces, and commissions new articles as new scholarship emerges.

At the foot of the home page, the user is invited to watch the launch of MGG-Online at the American Musicological Society
(AMS) Conference in Vancouver in November 2016. Video clips of presentations by Laurenz Lütteken, Editor-in-Chief of *MGG-Online*, and Jonathan Greenberg, Product Development Coordinator, are particularly interesting since they discuss both the evolution of the digital project and give a brief demonstration of some of the features of *MGG-Online*.

Returning to the top of the home page, the Browse button to the left of the Search box allows the user to search by Article Titles, Authors, and Occupations. Article Titles may then be filtered by Person, Family, Topic, or Group, enabling the user to focus more closely on specific areas of interest. This function can be extremely helpful in identifying articles in related areas that might not have been obvious to the user in the first instance. For more specific enquiries, the user can enter one or more words in the search box. The Advanced Search menu allows the search parameters to be defined by Works Lists, Bibliographic Lists, Figures, Musical Examples, and Body Text; this may be limited to all articles or to *MGG2* only. The Advanced Search options also include Search Builder, which allows the user to set up parameters using Boolean operators. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, the only functioning operator that appeared on my screen was ‘NOT’ which severely limited the utility of Search Builder. A preview function allows the user to read the beginning of each article in the Results list, and in the full version, it is possible to search for a keyword or phrase within the article.

A number of helpful features assist the user to navigate through the article. Each of the major section headings appears in a box to the left of the main body of the text and a click on any one of these takes the user directly to the appropriate section of the article including the Works List and Literature. The original search word (or phrase) is highlighted in the text and the number of times it appears in each subsection is recorded in the box to the left of the main body of the text. To the right, a second box contains information about the article including its date of publication. A helpful citation link allows the user to paste the bibliographical information into a document. The citation follows *MGG*’s house style and includes the online Web reference as the example below illustrates:

Citation for ‘Lebrun, Louis-Sébastien’

Citation style: MGG

*Select, then copy and paste the citation into your document.*


There is also a link to related articles in many of the major entries.

One of the most useful features of *MGGOnline* is that it allows the user to access other versions of the articles. In the case of the article on Louis-Sébastien Lebrun it is possible to bring up the *MGG2* article of 2003. This is clearly of great use in establishing what changes have been made to the article and identifying the impact of recent scholarship on the subject. The dialogue box also invites the user to access alternative translations or, using a double click, to edit the translated text directly.

A very attractive feature of *MGG-Online* is the capability the user has not just to bookmark articles or sections of text but also to add annotations via a dialogue box. These highlighted sections can be organised into pages in ‘My Notebook’ and even shared
publicly with other users. It is also possible to sort data tables, a marvellous innovation that can save a great deal of time when searching extensive Works Lists for particular categories of work. Other capabilities, such as linking directly to *RILM Abstracts*, are available only if the user or the user’s institution subscribes to that particular database.

Support is available to the user via the Help button. This is easy to navigate and the instructions and tips for the user are admirably clear. It is also possible to contact *MGG* via the Contact Us button. This enables the user to seek technical and Web site support, direct questions and suggestions to the editorial team, and request information or support relating to subscriptions. It is also possible to report typographical or factual errors found in any article via the Report Error button in the Article menu.

All encyclopedias are only as good as the quality of their individual articles but the greatest encyclopedias are based on an editorial policy that encourages and supports a process of constant revision. Every year sees dramatic changes in the contemporary musical landscape as well as the evolution of an increasingly sophisticated and nuanced view of the past. *MGG*-Online is uniquely placed to be at the forefront in disseminating new knowledge about music. The new digital online platform for *MGG* will dramatically increase its use around the world and is to be applauded. This new accessibility to the vast repository of scholarship *MGG* contains will be welcomed enthusiastically by academics, musicians, students, and music lovers alike.

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