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Scorser (review)

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ScorSer

Sergey Korolev

2011-

URL: <http://en.scorser.com/D/Everything.html>

Last visited November 2013

Gratis

Keywords: Electronic media; Music

ScorSer, a website that allows users to search for free sheet music scores, tab and chord charts, lyrics, backtracks, and MP3 or midi files available online, was designed and implemented by Sergey Korolev, a Russian mathematician, programmer, and musician. According to Korolev, the purpose of the site is to provide musicians with the ability to search free music resources without the barriers of language differences. Many of the sources provided have metadata translated by users of the site, allowing musicians to access music that would otherwise be difficult to reach without knowledge of other languages. The entire site interface can also be viewed in more than 35 different languages.

The site can be searched in a variety of ways. For browsing, users can click the tabs at the top of the page to search by composer, instrument, performer, or tag (like duet, sonata, concerto, etc.). For a known-item or multiple keyword search there is a search box on the home page, which can also be initially limited by format. Boolean operators can be used in *ScorSer* searches, although the creator of the site admits that the search engine can only handle two or three terms at a time. Within either a browsing search or keyword search, the results page allows the user to easily add keywords to a query from a word cloud, limit to a format type (such as PDF, ZIP file, Sibelius file, etc.), see popular related requests, or choose from a cloud of recent requests in the user's current searching session.

The *ScorSer* database seems to have very good coverage; many composers and works are represented, including more contemporary classical composers and pop artists. However, the biggest issue with the site is the presence of copyrighted material for free download. While the index is comprehensive, some of the scores seem to be either scanned versions of copyrighted music, or re-creations of copyrighted music in music score software, such as Sibelius or Finale. Scores that are not protected by copyright due to age often link to IMSLP (*International Music Score Library Project*, a free online database of scores that are in the public domain <http://imslp.org>), so users who don't want to risk violating United States copyright laws might want to go directly to the *IMSLP* site to find public domain scores.

For users who are looking for scores, MP3s, and lyric sheets for popular music, *ScorSer* provides a central search engine with fairly strong limiting operations. A simple Google search will often bring users similar results, but with *ScorSer* the search can be manipulated with limiters and added keywords from a cloud of popular requests, allowing users to accomplish more complicated searches quickly. The tool would also be useful for musicians who are looking for a single piece or album in many formats – tabs, backtrack, lyrics, an MP3 recording, etc. – all of which can be found in a single search results list and sorted out quickly using the limiters provided. The fact that the *ScorSer* knowledgebase includes both classical and popular music resources also differentiates the tool from other free music databases online. A wide range of

musical styles is represented in the database, making *Scorser* a good tool for musicians from a variety of musical backgrounds.

One of the most unique features of this database is that many languages are represented in the material, yet users can search in their native language and bring up results in other languages. This is especially important for a database of music, which musicians who speak a variety of languages are able to and may want to read. This feature is made possible by users translating the metadata of material and the creator using an automatic translation tool for the remaining records. The records which have been automatically translated are often less than perfect, but the translation of records is a unique component of *Scorser* and one of its most valuable features.

The homepage of the site is visually clear and easy to understand. The search box is the central point of the page and the tabs for browsing are easily identifiable without crowding or overwhelming the page. Underneath the search box on the homepage, there are also lists of the instruments, composers, tags, and performers with the most hits in the database for browsing users to access directly. For a search that focuses on a particular composer, instrument, or performer, the tabs for searches within these metadata fields run along the top of the page, again without cluttering the page. After a search, the results page is fairly easy to navigate, and the PDF links for scores are very easy to find. The limiters for a search are intuitively located along the left side of the screen and clouds of suggested terms are organized visually from biggest to smallest as they decrease in popularity. The only element of the site that is visually distracting and sometimes somewhat encumbering is the presence of advertisements on the results screen, but these never directly block any site content from being seen.

The help features for the site are limited and not intuitively located – they're found in the About this Project link at the bottom of the homepage. The site provides some suggestions for search strategies in the *Scorser* search engine and the contact information of the creator so users can address questions and concerns to him directly. This tab also includes a description of the project by the creator, Korolev although, because English is not his first language, the text can sometimes be difficult to understand. There are embed codes for links and search box widgets to *Scorser* included here as well, which can easily be added to *LibGuides* or library websites and which look visually appealing when embedded. The site does use advertising, which can be irritating, but the creator explains in the Help section that he must find a way to offset the costs of creating and maintaining the site outside his full-time job. Despite distraction and aggravation the advertisements may cause, they don't slow down the loading time for the site.

There are other websites that provide the ability to search for free music scores, including *Free-scores.com* (<http://www.free-scores.com/>) and *Free-music-scores.com* (<http://www.free-music-scores.com>). However, these sites do not overcome language barriers in their records the way *Scorser* does, and some have an interface that is not in English, making access difficult for English-speaking users. The sites are also less comprehensive in their coverage and fail to provide the easy searching options for both known-items and browsing that *Scorser* does. Nevertheless, for most public domain music scores, *IMSLP* might be a better choice for musicians, as it is much more careful about excluding copyrighted scores and provides a more attractive, advertisement free interface. There are also sites that provide free sound clips, such as *Free Music Archive* (freemusicarchive.org), or free lyrics, such as sites like *A-Z Lyrics Universe* (azlyrics.com), *MetroLyrics* (metrolyrics.com), and countless others. These sites, however, don't provide the convenience of being able to search multiple formats – scores, MP3 files, lyrics – at the same time the way *Scorser* does.

The ability to search *Scorser's* index regardless of language barriers might be the tool's most unique and valuable asset, in addition to its strong searching capabilities and options that allow for intuitive searching and browsing. In addition, the material indexed in *Scorser* is very comprehensive; however, while *Scorser* provides some impressive features, concerns about the legality of using some of the scores found on the site might give musicians and music librarians concerns about using or promoting the site. The best qualities of *Scorser* are overshadowed by the legal issues its inclusion of copyrighted materials presents, and for this reason musicians and other users of the site might avoid the risk of violating copyright by looking for free scores and MP3 files elsewhere.

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