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Choral Public Domain Library (review)

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Choral Public Domain Library

ChoralWiki Community

URL: http://www.cpdل.org/wiki/index.php/Main_Page

1998-

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Gratis

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The *Choral Public Domain Library* (CPDL) is an online portal of free downloadable choral music scores, texts, and translations. CPDL was founded in 1998 by Rafael Ornes, minister of music at Valley Presbyterian Church in Portola Valley, California. The project was transferred to a Wiki platform in 2005 and became an official tax-exempt charitable organization in May 2010. The goal of the site is to provide users with free, easily accessible choral music that is distributed legally, as well as a platform for discussion within a music-loving community. The Wiki platform of CPDL makes it much more community-oriented than other choral music sites. Scores and texts are contributed by volunteers, many of the site's functions are volunteer-run, and some financial support is generated through donations from the site's users. In keeping with its community focus, CPDL offers a community portal that lists news, events, and activities, and a bulletin board made up of forum pages covering topics such as sheet music requests and site operation issues.

New content is constantly being added to the site. At the time of this review, the CPDL includes more than 17,874 music scores, representing works by over 2,372 composers. In addition to making available public domain works, CPDL allows composers to submit their own works and make stipulations on their performance rights. One of the goals of CPDL is to provide access to rare or obscure choral scores, which is a great benefit to library patrons who are unable to access these scores in their library's collection due to their fragility or rarity.

The homepage of CPDL, while not particularly aesthetically pleasing, is easy to navigate and provides useful information quickly. In addition to the search box, the homepage provides links to CPDL news, music scores appropriate to the current season, most recently added scores, and links to pages that have been translated into other languages. The site has a robust Help function that is driven by strong community support and is centrally linked on the home page. Users who cannot find the answer to a question can also use the community forums to ask for help.

The search function of CPDL is somewhat limited depending on the obscurity or complexity of one's search. The main search bar allows users to search by Exact Match, which looks for that string of words in a page title, or by Keyword Search, which searches the full-text of entries in CPDL without attempting an exact match. The Help page warns users that the search engine doesn't recognize strings of three characters or fewer, which can make some searches difficult. However, because results include standardized metadata like genre, voicing, and language, as well as text from scores, searches can be done using these terms fairly successfully.

The CPDL also provides a more robust searching mechanism called the Multi-Category Sheet Music Search, which allows users to search using a variety of criteria such as genre, number of voices, musical era, language, or part of a title. While this search option allows for more sculpted searching, CPDL creators warn users to "use this method modestly, as use of it is somewhat more intensive on CPDL's servers than the simple search". I found when using this search function that employing more than two or three limiters usually brought me no results, so users might be better off just using the less complicated regular search and sifting through results. At the time of this review, CPDL is undergoing testing to present a new kind of search that combines results from CPDL and the sheet music repository IMSLP (*International Music Scores Library Project*) (<http://imslp.org/>). This kind of search could prove very beneficial for users, providing results from two large repositories of sheet music at once.

While the searching capabilities of *CPDL* show some strength, the browsing functions seem to be much more useful. Scores can easily be browsed by composer, or by composer subcategory such as nationality/ethnicity, era, whether the composer is living, or specifically by women composers. Scores can also be browsed either by title or more broadly by era, sacred or secular, voicing, or accompaniment. Texts or translations can be browsed by lyricist, text, language, or many other categories.

Results of a search in the musical score index include both scores in various formats (PDF, notation files from Sibelius, external sites) and MIDI files. Each entry provides valuable information about the piece such as the voicing, genre, meter, language, and instrumentation. Occasionally accessibility is compromised when a score is only offered in notation file format, such as a Sibelius score, and users must have the proper music notation software to view the file.

As with any online provider of free music, *CPDL* faces the responsibility of ensuring that copyright laws and regulations are met in distribution of scores. *CPDL*'s documentation clearly lays out the steps the site's volunteers take to meet copyright requirements. All uploaded works to *CPDL* must be public domain or submitted by the composer(s) with appropriate permissions. *CPDL* copyright license applies to all scores and texts on the *CPDL* server, and it allows users to "download, print, copy, and distribute a score freely". It should be noted that some scores in *CPDL* reside on other websites and are merely linked to the *CPDL* portal. These sites have their own copyright regulation standards, so users should exhibit caution in using these scores and be aware of their country's copyright laws.

While there are some limitations to *CPDL*'s searching capabilities, the site provides users with a strong source of free choral music scores and texts that are easily browsable and legally downloadable. For those musicians looking to find a piece that matches accompaniment or voicing criteria, or is from a certain composer or music era, *CPDL* would serve as an excellent resource for obtaining appropriate scores quickly. The community-based Wiki format also allows for discussion and input, adding a discursive dimension to this sheet music portal.

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