DAISY Music Braille Project:

Q1 update 2020

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We hope that you are all keeping safe and well in these difficult times.

We don’t know how many of you are receiving emails at the moment, but thought you might like an update to keep connected with project activity.

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# 1. With thanks to our funders for 2020

We’re very grateful to the following agencies who are making this year’s activities possible:

* CNIB
* DAISY Strategic Development Fund
* MTM
* NLB
* Norwegian Association of the Blind
* Nota
* ONCE
* RNIB
* SBS

# 2. No music braille project meeting in Madrid in June 2020

It will come as no surprise that due to worldwide Covid-19 restrictions there will be no WBU/DAISY/ICEVI meetings in Madrid in June, so we will no longer be hosting a Music Braille Meeting on 24 June. We are considering the best way to share progress with you all and get feedback on our activities/plans, which might include sending out electronic updates, possibly with a DAISY webinar (see below) rather than running a virtual meeting. We will be in touch again when we have concrete proposals.

# 3. Your help is needed to confirm various country standards

A separate message will follow in the next week or so to ask specific countries to confirm various standards. This is so that Hodder can check/implement defaults for each country, which you could change if you needed to. Your help will be gratefully received, and thank you in advance.

# 4. Requirements for interactive end user tool

**Aim:** At least one improved interactive music braille user tool is available for blind musicians to independently read, write, convert and explore music in accessible ways, in education, for work and leisure.

**Update**: Thank you to those who completed our requirements survey for additional features needed in an interactive user tool for music braille. The prioritized requirements report will be shared with you all, and developers will be invited to respond – though of course, it may not be possible for them to respond quickly, given the current global situation.

# 5. Improved music file format standards

**Aim**: Music file format standards (e.g. MusicXML 3.2 and MNX) have been improved via W3C to include our requirements, generating better conversions through our tools.

**Update**: We continue to send proposals and examples to W3C, discuss and view changes on GitHub, and receive notes from their Chairs’ meetings about what they’re considering and are able to implement. We’re hopeful that future releases will include at least some of our proposals, but we will have to wait and see.

We have also written a guide for agencies and end-users on finding good quality MusicXML files, and checking them for suitability for conversion into music braille. This is attached to this email if you’d like to review it, and comments are welcome.

# 6. Improved music engraving practices

**Aim**: Music engraving practices are more standardized, generating better conversions through our tools.

**Update:** For agencies who need a digital version of a print score to convert into braille via MusicXML we wanted to locate a reliable engraving service. The goal is for the engraver to create a digital file of a score which contains the level of MusicXML content we need for effective conversion into music braille. The Sibelius engraving guidelines we prepared have been useful at teaching the engravers what is required, and for checking the quality of their output. We have conducted a trial in India, and are currently trialling in China and in Russia, and are close to being able to propose a suitable workflow when using outsourced engravers.

# 7. Professional music braille conversion tool - Hodder development at dzb lesen

**Aim**: At least one improved tool is available for rapid professional, accurate and automated music braille transcription which produces global formats and is linked to a production workflow. Note that this does not remove the need for skilled music braille staff.

**Update**: Whilst development and related work on Hodder has recently slowed down while we all adjust to our new situations, Quarter 1 work from January to March has progressed well.

Our focus for January to June 2020 is on track with a couple of amendments in brackets:

1. Improvements to musical notation conversions/bugs.
2. MusicXML import improved.
3. Proposed (not proven) implementation into production workflow.
4. Basic support documentation in 1 (not 2) language other than German.
5. An implementation proposal for Bar-Over Bar in Hodder, agreed by the sector.

What’s been done:

* An independent IT audit of Hodder, and accessibility checks, helping us to identify any areas needing extra effort/support.
* Improved the Hodder interface to make it easier to use, with an improved look and feel whilst retaining its accessibility.
* Functional improvements to conversions, and various bugs have been fixed.
* Numerous MusicXML import improvements made, with a new MusicXML import report, which identifies any issues with the file which might make conversion difficult.
* SMuFL symbols, content and text have been implemented.
* The ability to upload (and order) multiple files and file types (e.g. MusicXML, capx) in a single zip file for conversion is now possible.
* The ability to convert multiple (and ordered) files from a zip file is now supported, and capx files can be split into pieces and supported as containers.
* A symbols key list of varying levels of detail, and a pronunciation guide to foreign characters can be included near the start of the braille score.
* A guide to finding and choosing good MusicXML files suitable for conversion into music braille has been prepared, ready for review (see attached).
* A guide to musical terms in British English and American English has been written (see attached).
* Support documentation, user guides and videos are steadily being prepared in German and English, including an overview presentation showcasing what Hodder can do.
* Proposals for Bar-over-Bar implementation are almost ready to share.
* A bug and issues tracker is successfully being used, and backups are being made.
* Integration into agency workflow is delayed, as agencies were about to implement a new version of their workflow tools, and lockdowns, but initial proposals are ready to progress when agencies are ready.
* All resources should all be ready by mid-summer for people to review/trial if we are all able to continue working reasonably effectively during lockdown.
* We are adjusting the Q2 workplan/timeframe according to our availability during lockdown. We anticipate a slow-down in productivity, which may require an extension to the timeframe for delivery, but will not increase costs.

# 8. Related news

## a. DAISY weekly webinars

DAISY is now scheduling free, weekly 1-hour webinars on accessible publishing and reading. This is in response to multiple challenges faced by conferences around the world due to Coronavirus, as well as feedback from the wider DAISY community expressing interest in online training resources:

<https://daisy.org/news-events/news/free-webinars/>

## b. Blind pianist's transcription project helps improve music access

Our music braille technical consultant, Haipeng Hu, was interviewed over several days for a special feature in the English newspaper, China Daily, highlighting the issues faced by blind musicians regarding music braille, and how he, and the DAISY project, are working to make scores available:

<https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/30/WS5e813a5ea310128217282da1.html>

## c. Automated summary tool for talking scores

Outside of the project, Peter Marchant (UK) has created a tool for talking scores to automatically produce a summary and identify repetition / patterns in the score, which might be useful/of interest to our activities with music braille – do have a look:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6w7pnJFypk>

## d. Papers from the Music Engraving Conference, January 2020

We weren’t at this event, but documents related to the Music Engraving Conference 2020, held at Music University Mozarteum, Salzburg, January 2020:

<https://gitlab.com/MusicEngravingConference/2020>

## e. Do you have music braille news to share?

I’ll happily collate other news from around the sector and send it out – just drop me a line by 29 May.