

Nineteenth century concert programs in a digital research environment; the case of Felix Meritis

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From the mid 1990s there has been an upsurge in intellectual interest in the history of European musical life from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. In the resulting research, concert programs have provided source material for many areas of inquiry, ranging from the development of repertoire to socioeconomic aspects of concert life, ideologies about music and to codes of behavior in the concert hall. The book *The Great Transformation of Musical Taste* by William Weber (2008) on the transformation of musical taste in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is definitively the most notable of these studies. Not only because it achieved critical acclaim, but also because it is based on thousands of concert programs. Unfortunately all this information was never structurally assembled in a database that makes the content of these programs available for future research.

A few projects aimed at digitalizing concert programs have tried to accommodate this need. But they are mostly the result of library structures, resulting in catalogs that make concert programs queryable by means of meta-data but do not provide a sufficient data structure for the actual content of these documents. In our opinion this limits the research potential of these resources for analyzing the structure and the evolution of concert programming significantly. As a consequence we have chosen a different digitization strategy for our own project.

Supported by funding through the CREATE program of the University of Amsterdam we were able to digitize a large part of the nineteenth century concert programs that have been preserved for the concert hall of the society Felix Meritis in Amsterdam, prior to the establishment of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw in 1888 by far the most prestigious venue in Dutch musical life.

We have entered the data from the concert programs in a SQL database in which we defined separate fields for all elements (names of composers, compositions, genres and musicians, etcetera) that can be found in concert programs. These elements are grouped in ranked program items, so that the original order of the program is preserved and consequently can be subject to analysis. For

identifying persons and works we matched verbatim entries against external resources like the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP), Wikidata, VIAF and the Dutch Biography Portal. Identification has been done in batch by using string comparisons, which reduced the need for item by item identification to a large degree.

The data will be made publicly available through a web interface in the course of 2016. We will use RDFa and popular ontologies such as schema.org and FOAF to turn these data effectively in linked open data. In our presentation we will discuss the main design issues of the digitization process. Finally we will showcase the potential of this resource to address relevant research questions about the development of musical genres and the historical evolution of concert programming.