# ECOLM “Model Users”

## I asked Tim and David:

Imagine I would like to interview two or three (other) "model users" of ECOLM and friends. Who would you suggest?

To narrow things down:

* I'm thinking particularly about people who would find an ECOLM design more useful than either of the other existing categories of resource we've been referring to (i.e. on one side the performer-driven resources like lutemusic.org and on the other the more pure catalogue resources like RISM). So presumably people interested in academic study of musical content (is that a reasonable characterisation?)
* But I am not needing them to be actual, current heavy users of ECOLM themselves (especially given its age and limitations). Perhaps "nexus" people, such as professors whose students might have need of material like this, would be a possibility.

## David replied:

Tim came up with a (very) long list of possibilities, which I’d suggest we reduce to the following:

* Computational musicologist: Anna Plaksin (<annplaksin@gmx.net>). Anna did computational work on vocal music of the period for her PhD, and so there’s obvious musical relevance for these corpora. She’s also very familiar with MEI (she’s on the board). I’ve mentioned this work and the possibility of wanting to talk to her. Anna is German, currently based in Mainz, but her English is excellent.
* Lutenist: Peter Croton (petercroton@gmail.com <mailto:petercroton@gmail.com>). Peter is a performer and teacher (he’s at the prestigious Scola Cantorum Basiliensis in Switzerland). I don’t really know him, but Tim does, and he agreed to be an advisor for a project proposal we put in in Feb about this sort of stuff.
* Musicologists: Irene Holzer (irene.holzer@lmu.de). Irene is attached to the e-Laute project and also as PI in the proposal Peter is advisor on. She specialises in the period, but isn’t a lutenist and reads the notation mechanically (like I do) rather than fluently.

We have other names, but one advantage of these ones is that the people are well disposed to us, so are more likely to be willing to give time happily. On the other end of the lutenist spectrum, you could also talk to either John Robinson himself (j.h.robinson@me.com <mailto:j.h.robinson@me.com>) or Chris Goodwin (lutesoc@aol.com <mailto:lutesoc@aol.com>), who runs the UK Lute Society. They’d represent the more ‘enthusiast’ end of the spectrum.

## What should I ask them?

Interview should allow them to talk generally about the subject, but can prompt with things like

* What would you (or did, or do you) use a service like this for?
* Have you found ECOLM itself to be useful in the past?
* How far are the other, often performance-focused resources useful to you?
* Is there genuine value in this over the existing performance-focused resources? If so, where does it reside?
* What jobs does a computational musicologist / lutenist / musicologist (delete as applicable) hope to accomplish with a resource of this type?

## Contact email text

(Thursday 1st June 2023)

Dear \_\_\_,

I am a software developer working with Tim Crawford and David Lewis (cc’d) on a small study of requirements for an online database of lute music metadata and encodings for scholarly use. The hope is to find a sustainable path forward for the long-standing ECOLM project (<http://igor.gold.ac.uk/isms/ecolm/>) along with some related datasets.

I’m contacting you because I would like to hear an independent [computational musicology / … ] perspective about the uses of such a resource, and [Tim/David] suggested that you might be prepared to offer one. If possible I would like to ask you a few questions (on a short call with David/Tim as available) and get your views about this. I'd be grateful if you can let me know whether you would be happy to talk and, if so, when you might be available during the next week or two.

I hope this is not too presumptuous – of course there is no obligation, and I quite understand if this is not convenient.

## Replies

Anna Plaksin – replied quickly, happy to talk, only Fridays, set up for 10:30 BST on Friday 2nd  
Peter Croton – replied late that day, happy to talk, could do following Friday or Saturday, set up for 17:00 BST on Friday 2nd  
Irene Holzer – no reply yet

## Notes from calls

### Anna Plaksin

(Computational musicologist, Renaissance vocal music)  
Friday June 2, 10:30 BST (about 40 mins)

On general characteristics of a resource like this

* Main thing distinguishing this from performance resources is quality of metadata
* Important metadata include original source, how transcription was done, rationale for the transcription, how much editing took place
* Trust is very important
* RISM widely used for this metadata information and is generally trusted
* RISM might increase coverage of musical content and perhaps become more content-focused, though this is not necessarily a good thing (since it does very well what it does now)
* RISM could link to ECOLM and this is something that one could talk about with RISM
* Not sure how active RISM UK is

On how to get there

* Critical annotation of (existing) transcriptions may well be possible if some information about the sources exists
* E.g. lutemusic.org “doesn’t look too bad” in terms of crediting sources
* Tuning information still an issue
* Perhaps RISM could query metadata from these existing resources and it could be gathered from there

On what computational musicologists want

* Simple website, small search function, facets – “musicologists love facets”
* In practice they tend to ask for complex search mechanisms but then actually do simple searches and don’t care so much about search power
* But being able to reduce search results (through facets!) would be valued
* Typical process – query the database, get anything from a small subset to “everything”
* Download and load into Python or R (music21, Humdrum with R) for content analysis
* (In her case) looking at things like vocal ranges and their relationship to key, or rhythmic content
* Looking at changes through time is difficult because date is unreliable – do we know where the date information came from? For manuscripts, who copied them and where, when, for what purpose?
* Does ECOLM even need to solve problems like that, or can metadata/library quality problems be handled in a RISM record that points to the ECOLM data?
* (I asked whether users would have an expectation that e.g. RISM might have more up to date metadata than the resource itself) – Perhaps, they are used to thinking of RISM as “authority data”

Other notes

* RISM was (she thought) designed using MARC XML and continues to do that internally
* It is now managed using their MUSCAT tool and it exposes JSON-LD as the normal thing
* Remarked that she was unsure about the status of lute tab in MEI and knew little about tab formats but presumed Tim/David would know all about that anyway
* “All we ultimately need is a good API to query”

Other sides considered good examples

* DIAMM, Digital Image Archive of Medieval Music <https://www.diamm.ac.uk>
* Josquin Research Project <https://josquin.stanford.edu> “created because two people were arguing about things and wanted a resource to refer to”, a powerful motivation

### Peter Croton

(Lutenist and lute teacher)  
Friday June 2nd, 17:00 BST (about one hour)

Did not appear particularly familiar with ECOLM, tried it quickly while on call and first check (a Dowland piece) worked quite well for him.

On provenance and editorial metadata

* Which original source? Whose transcription? What editorial decisions? Extremely important
* Although times have changed, and where formerly edition information was published along with recordings, now the “accompanying booklet” is often unseen by listeners
* Still, students are expected to be able to provide this information to support their performances

On the Gerbode site lutemusic.org

* Used a lot – huge amount of music, very readable due to use of Fronimo for modern transcriptions
* Unreliable – you don’t really know what’s in it, pieces have mistakes, pieces are changed without notification – no editorial records for many pieces – inconsistent
* This is a huge problem, would greatly welcome something providing similar “modern versions” with reliable editorial commentary – he works from facsimiles but having edited copy alongside is very valuable
* No clear links between composer hierarchy, source hierarchy, facsimile hierarchy – not clear that one could reconstruct any of this information after the fact
* Would have to compare every note anyway to check reliability of transcriptions
* “Extremely valuable but very inconsistent”

Other people and projects of interest

* John Griffiths – LaVihuela.com – “just fabulous” organisation – mostly does not contain music (at least not in modern tablature) but good musicological information and clear
* Highly recommends speaking to John Griffiths
* Two big editorial projects coming up, new editions of complete works of John Dowland and of Francesco de Milano – at some point in next couple of years there will be new scholarly editions, will they also be online?
* Reference to e-Laute project (Kateryna Schöning) and to Basel Lute Days (September last year) which I believe Tim and David both attended
* Reference to Francis Knights at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge, former editor (?) of Early Music Magazine, working on “computational analysis and musical style” book – style analysis from digital databases
* Aside that not many pieces are actually directly attributed to John Dowland so a lot of attribution is already based on style – Dutch (?) chap called Andre (?) is stirring the pot by trying to attribute a lot more
* Reference to Paul Kieffer and lute sources database at earlymusicsources.com – indexes 1400+ sources with links to IMSLP and other external sites with facsimiles
* Howard Mayer-Brown book “Printed music before 1600” (pub 1965) – is John Griffiths working on digitising this?
* Big message is “everyone work together!”

### Irene Holzer

(Musicologist, mediaeval music)  
Friday June 9, 15:00 BST (about 45 mins)

Was not previously familiar with ECOLM, tried it out for the purposes of our conversation.

I found some of her terminology harder to follow than the other two.

On ECOLM

* Tried searching ECOLM for German titles, e.g. “mein”, found only one song but was pleasantly surprised to find German tablature there
* Site quite old fashioned, works in “quite a linguistic way”, could be made more user friendly. Not obvious how to begin

On use of a resource like this

* Currently working mostly with German resources
* She would probably more often start with composer or source search – titles can vary too much because of e.g. historical variant spellings
* Commonly starts with RISM or Cantus (a Latin chant database) – but obviously not for tablature
* Uses facsimile editions but “grateful for any transcription” – particularly “diplomatic” transcription – I didn’t know this term but I gather it means as faithful as possible to the facsimile without editorial interventions
* Manuscript transcription much harder to read than diplomatic (?) – I’m not sure I have written or understood this correctly (aptly, since I am working from a manuscript transcription…)
* Would have high level of trust in ECOLM transcriptions “because by Tim Crawford”
* But always checks and rechecks with facsimile so casual or heavily edited transcriptions are ok as well. The one thing she doesn’t really need nowadays is the critical notes explaining editorial decisions (I think this was one thing Peter Croton said he cared a great deal about)
* Particularly interested in translation from tablature to staff – difficulties with tuning and counterpoint – other work with Tim involved doing this in both directions though that is ambiguous
* Is MEI as a common format for tablature as well viable yet? MEI Friend is a nice utility
* If a database included unreliable transcriptions, would like to be able to correct them herself – correction history
* “Every new database leads to new questions” so having another source is good almost in and of itself

On e-Laute

* Suggests talking to Kateryna Schöning (Peter Croton also mentioned her) and/or to David Weigl (and of course I know him)
* e-Laute has idea of “big interactive database” with videos and the like – professional (mentions Marc Lewon) and amateur, some tension between those possibly
* Working on translating French-German-Italian tablature?
* Hoped to do big crowdsourcing push – not necessarily what you want for research
* If there are similar pieces to ECOLM then would be nice to link
* But it may be the best thing with respect to e-Laute is to just wait and see what it actually is that they end up making

### Discussion with Tim & David

Friday June 16th

Misc notes

* Trying to “face all users”, not just those of ECOLM (DL in response to my observation that nobody I had spoken to had used ECOLM but all gave the impression that if you just described it to them, they would say yes that would be useful to me)
* Sea change from relying on editorial notes to having facsimile editions digitised – but things not digitised are also important – middle ground being raw-ish PDFs (TC in response to my observation about Peter considering editorial notes crucial but Irene dismissing them)
* ECOLM tried to encode “state” – unchecked input, first edit, second edit, published – but ended up having to bump up a load of stuff to published because of the reality that nobody would edit it any further and so nobody would see it
* Gerbode site – complaint from Peter that it changes without notice – could track this upstream (poll it to version control) – problem is that changes invalidate any derived state as generated by computational musicologists for example
* Want document-document similarity across these collections but that is effort wasted unless there are stable identifiers (ties in to above point)
* In the past, for e.g. ISMIR submissions, have simply worked on “files on a filesystem”
* Abstract accepted for MEC discussing these issues (TC)
* Looking for sustainable solution for “all these resources” without compromising what RISM is for
* Can’t change any of the players in the game – can perhaps provide evidence – “what is possible, given that?” – small steps (DL)
* Talk to Laurent Pugin at RISM – want to be RISM-compatible at every level if possible
* Have looked at getting metadata from ECOLM into RISM – probably best to continue to assume that RISM is “just an index” but how to turn an enthusiast resource e.g. Gerbode into something RISM-compatible?
* With < 2000 pieces in ECOLM it is possible to imagine RISM indexing them individually but not so for the larger more casual resources
* Expose the data, catalogue its provenance, then people can help improve it, but note of caution – much of it is still ruled out as primary source for RISM – potentially later on as performing editions – “characterise the nature of the edition” and make other versions