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### The Database of Recorded American Music

By **Lisa Kahlden**

*[Ed: Links to web pages and/or e-mail addresses which have become inactive since the publication of this article have been enclosed in curly brackets { }. Replacement links have been provided where possible.]*

In the late 1990s, the consumer market for the compact disc, a format which had been a boon to the music industry through the earliest years of the decade, began to show signs of fatigue. At first, the scattered closings of small, independent music stores seemed merely to underscore the dominance of national chains in an increasingly hegemonic market. However, with time it became clear that retailers of every size were experiencing a pandemic decline in compact disc sales. For New World Records—a not-for-profit label dedicated to disseminating important music by American composers otherwise neglected by the recording industry—the dual blow was especially severe. The loss of specialized distribution outlets made it increasingly difficult for New World discs to reach their target audience, while the spiraling revenues of major music retailers curtailed the shelf space made available for lower-volume products.

Accepting that these discouraging trends were likely to continue, New World began to consider alternative means to perpetuate the fulfillment of its charter mission. One possibility presented itself in the Internet. Development of a website began in 1995, making the catalog available online for search by composer, title and catalog number. Site visitors could opt to order music directly from New World or choose from a list of distributors. The liner notes accompanying these recordings were also digitized and made available on the site in Adobe's cross-platform PDF format. The wealth of scholarly information in those notes, combined with the detailed discographies and bibliographies compiled therein, helped make the site an attractive resource for both casual browsers and those with a more scholarly interest.

New World Records also began to refocus attention on its original core

constituency—libraries. Since its inception in 1975, when it was founded as the Recorded Anthology of American Music, New World has enjoyed a warm and reciprocal relationship with the academic community. In particular, university libraries have been the label's greatest source of support. Our catalog has now grown to include nearly 350 titles, encompassing the full range of American concert music, the evolution of jazz, and the diversity of American folk traditions. The work of more than 600 composers is represented on LP, cassette tape and compact disc; many of these composers are on the faculty of universities throughout the country, while more than 240 libraries maintain a standing order with New World, receiving approximately twelve new releases each calendar year. As with many so-called university presses of the recording industry, libraries remained a stable segment of our distribution base through the retail boom of the late 1980s and bust of the mid-1990s, all while serving the public as a reliable resource for materials that elude the marketplace altogether.

In the late '90s, after much correspondence and discussion with librarians and musicologists, it was our conclusion that, in addition to the continued production of new, high-quality recordings of significant music, improving accessibility to recordings was vital. In an environment of highly restricted acquisition budgets and storage space, and of limited library staffing, quantity of material vies with ease of access in determining the value of any resource. As discussed in Jerome McDonough's article "[The Database of Recorded American Music](#)" (950K PDF) in the Fall 2002 issue of *Connect*, it was in this environment that the idea for the Database of Recorded American Music first took shape.

The Database of Recorded American Music (DRAM) is an online digital repository providing university librarians, faculty and students access to an ever-growing catalog of important American music. Since development officially began in 2000, over 300 discs' worth of American music—the entire compact disc catalog of New World Records—has been digitized and made available online. Extensive metadata has been entered for every musical selection in the repertory, including composer and performer; dates of composition, recording and publication; keywords and descriptors; and links (where available) to resources outside the system, including the Library of Congress sheet music archives and the New World Records website. Liner notes have been converted and stored in the Database as fully searchable text, and have been edited down to both the album and the track level.

Librarians are often asked for recordings related to historical events, people, and periods. Prior to the development of applications such as DRAM, these requests were often difficult to accommodate. When requested for recordings pertinent to, say, the whaling industry, there was no effective system in place to identify the New World recording *Brave Boys: New England Traditions in Folk Music* as a source of such music, even if the album was among the library's holdings.

In fact, the original inspiration for DRAM grew from this very example. A music librarian from Indiana University observed that, though they own a copy of *Brave Boys*, the subject heading for this recording was classified simply as "folk songs—New England" in their system. A librarian unfamiliar with the recording itself would be unlikely to notice the album's title track is an old New England whaling ballad, and that the history of such ballads is detailed in the accompanying liner notes.

Now, three years later, a librarian or student with access to DRAM might enter the word "whaling" into a keyword search field (see fig. #1).

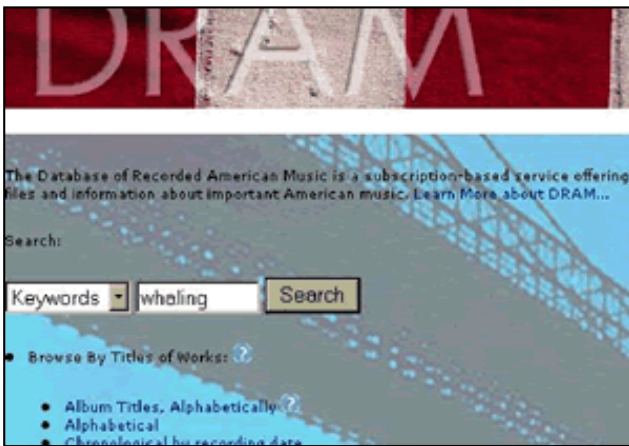


Figure #1

This search produces a list of every recording in the New World catalog to which that keyword applies (see fig. #2).



Figure #2

Clicking through on the title track brings up a screen which shows detailed information regarding the composition, performance and recording of the piece (see fig. #3).



Figure #3

A click on the "Listen to" link will open a Real Audio stream of the song, allowing the user to hear the piece as many times as s/he wishes while reviewing the accompanying liner notes and lyrics (see fig. #4).

continued farming and subsisting as a sideman through all his working life. His wife's family, the Tiltons, were an inn on the sea, and Gale first began learning his ballads and songs from them. Gale spent much of his time poring over old logbooks in libraries and museums. This research, together with the songs of the singing Tiltons, produced the wonderful collection *Songs the Whalers Sang*. Gale's singing style reflects that of his sources ("Now here's the way Welcome Tilton used to sing that one . . ."). Occasionally he will add a simple guitar accompaniment, but only when appropriate.

"Brave Boys" (also known as "The Greenland Whale Fishery") is one of two distinct versions of this ballad sung in his wife's family. I have decided to include this one because its melody is less common and it appears to be the older of the two. Joanna C. Colcord points out that "it arose in the British, not the American whaling trade, probably in the latter part of the eighteenth century, and in the earlier British versions, the ship's name, the *Lion* [is] preserved" (*Roll and Go*, Indianapolis, 1924).

It was eighteen hundred and thirty-nine, on the fourteenth day of May,  
 When we weighed our anchor and set our sail  
 And for Greenland bore away, brave boys,  
 And for Greenland bore away.

Figure #4

In another example, a search of "All Composers, Songwriters and Performers" on "Foster, Stephen" reveals five titles in the New World catalog in which he is listed as a direct artistic contributor (see fig. #5).

**ALL ARTISTS** The Database of Recorded American Music

Home | Titles | Albums | Artists | Performers | Composers & Songwriters | Descriptive Terms | History | Playlists | Logout

**View Works for Foster, Stephen**

Your search produced 5 results. Displaying All :

Name	Role	Ancillary Title
Foster, Stephen	Composer	<b>A Storm in the Land: Music of the 26th N.C. Regimental Band, CSA</b>
	Composer	<b>The Early Minstrel Show</b>
	Composer (Source)	<b>George Hart's Quick Step</b>
	Composer	<b>Old Uncle Ned</b>
	Composer	<b>Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming/Annie of the Vale</b>

Your search produced 5 results. Displaying All :

Home | Titles | Albums | Artists | Performers | Composers & Songwriters | Descriptive Terms | History | Playlists | Logout

Figure #5

However, a scholar interested in further research might run a second search of the system, this time limiting the results to mentions within liner notes. This search reveals 66 results, some of which offer links to pertinent resources outside DRAM (see figs. #6 & #7).

ances noted in more recent times by one and/or century, etc.

**De Boatmen's Dance**  
**Emmett, Daniel Decatur**  
 Composition date: 1843

Sheet Music available from:



Danforth, Percy: Performer. *bones*  
 DiSanto, Peter: Vocal. *Lead*  
 Heumann, Matthew: Performer. *tambourine*  
 Mark, Brian: Bassitone  
 Smith, Roger: Bass (vocal)  
 Tufo, Vincent: Performer. *fiddle*  
 Van Yeersbick, David: Tenor  
 Winans, Robert B.: Performer. *banjo*

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80330-1  
 NYUB11465103-01  
 NYUB11577289-01  
 NYUB11956991-01

[runtime: 02:03] [Listen to 2.90MB MP3, 192kbs] [Add][Edit War--Civil and Otherwise]

Blackface minstrelsy had its beginnings in the 1830s, when minstrel musical acts appeared as interludes in an evening's theatrical entertainment or as one act in a circus. In 1843 four performers banded together in New York and put on the first

Figure #6

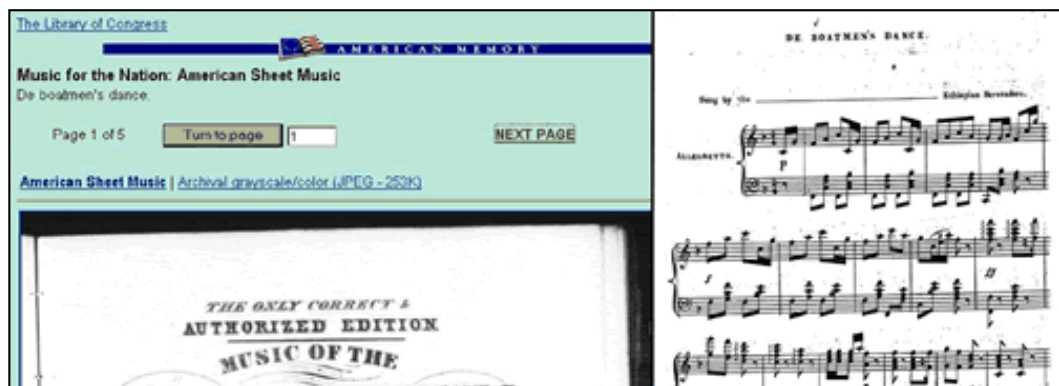


Figure #7

Having once located material of interest, it is also possible to create a personal collection, or Playlist, to which one may return during future sessions. Clicking on the "Add" link shown in Figure 6 automatically adds this composition to a Playlist titled "War—Civil and Otherwise," which was created by this author as a repository of songs from various generations of American conflict (see fig. #8).

Browse Playlist "War--Civil and Otherwise"	
Title	Composer
De Boatmen's Dance	Emmett, Daniel Decatur
Tenting On The Old Camp Ground	Kittredge, Walter
American Vicar of Bray	Traditional
Grafulla's Favorite Waltz	Grafulla, Claudio S.
Mother, Is The Battle Over?	Roefs, Benedict (attrib.)
Dixie/Bonnie Blue Flag	Emmett, Daniel Decatur

Figure #8

The decision to create this database was driven, in no small part, by the expressed needs of the community, and we continue to work with that community to improve it. However, there are limitations to what we can accomplish given the legal complexities. Intellectual property challenges have prevented us from making every title published by New World Records fully available. While a system of royalty compensation has been fully developed and deployed, permissions for some material in the repertory are still in negotiation. However, more than 95% of New World material released on compact disc is "active" in the Database as of this writing, and will remain accessible to faculty and students on the NYU campus throughout the Spring 2003 semester.

New World has also initiated production on two additional recording labels' content, the catalogs of Albany Records and CRI. We expect to activate some music from these labels in the Database throughout the spring months, and to make the rest available, in whole or substantial part, by the beginning of NYU's 2003 Fall semester. This will more than triple the amount of content in the Database, providing over 1,000 hours of American music online to students and faculty of the University.

We encourage you to access the Database of Recorded American Music (using your NetID and NYUHome password), and welcome any comments you might have regarding the system. And we hope you will check back with it in the future, as we continue to add content and features in an effort to create an ideal resource for both scholarly research and personal pleasure.

#### **Database of Recorded American Music:**

{<http://dlib.home.nyu.edu/dram/>} Replacement URL: <http://dram.nyu.edu/>

#### **New World Records:**

<http://www.newworldrecords.org>

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#### **Author Biography**

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