Dear MuseScore developers and users,

After many other and simpler transcriptions, I took a great pleasure in the transcription, from its original score published in 1947, of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s second piano concerto, Op.18. This is not complex music (I mean, except for the pianist, who is really working hard!!!), in terms of harmony, but very efficient in terms of emotions.

MuseScore is becoming a fantastic tool, and let me first warmly congratulate the development team, who has made a tremendous work.

I would like to take this opportunity to give feedback based on my personal experience (this score, but also contemporary music, which I transcribe from living composer’s manuscripts). I work on a powerful computer (Intel i9, 32 Gbytes of RAM, 2 Tbytes of SSD as main storage, and NVIDIA GeForce RTX 4080). OS is Windows 11, French. As I don’t have – yet! – a MIDI keyboard, everything is made with mouse and keyboard (French).

I worked on this score with MuseScore 4.1 and up to 4.4 version.

Among positive points, let me highlight:

* Very good stability of the program; mainly manipulation of slurs pose problem, as you may already know (systematic crashes occur when you handle one, not by its handles, but its shape)
* Ergonomics:
  + The program is very well organized (better to my point of view than Finale, which is now – surprisingly – abandoned by its creators)
  + Tool palettes are very well thought
* Extraordinary richness and intuitive use of (numerous!) musical signs
* Versions 4.x and 4.4 have brought major improvements with:
  + Coloured measure subdivisions to better position dynamics indication (hairpins or other)
  + Possibility to differentiate sound levels according to voices (this is very useful for Rachmaninoff’s piano part, which has often several voices, even within one hand staff)
  + Much easier manipulation of arpeggios among two staves, and in general rather easy change between staves for piano (CTRL + MAJ up and down arrows, only slurs are sometimes a bit difficult), etc.
* To my point of view, MuseScore sounds are of great quality, including articulations, even if the dynamics should be improved (for instance piano pianissimos sound like if you turn a volume knob rather than playing really pianissimo)
* Automatic horizontal alignment between hairpins and neighbouring velocity indications is also a great improvement
* Zooming in and out with the mouse wheel is very fast and reliable (never any crash)
* PDF export is very fast and of excellent quality

But of course, “The more you have, the more you want”… So let me now focus on points that require improvements, to my point of view, with a “Liste à la Prévert” as we say in French, hoping this will be useful for developers and users.

* Probably the most urgent is the copy/paste. For obvious reasons (complexity and length of this work), I worked with 3 different files, one for each movement. Merging those 3 scores into a unique one has been very painful. As you already know, MuseScore does not tackle appropriately time indications:
  + Time signature changes are not considered (this is a long-lasting bug, which should be corrected urgently)
  + Tempi indications are also not copied for most of them
  + More surprisingly, “ral.” or “alarg.” are copied, but not “a tempo” or tempi indications, etc.
  + Measure bar separations are also ignored (double bars for instance, inside a movement)
  + Markers along the score (for instance numbers in squares at the top) are also ignored
* For practical reasons, I work in continuous horizontal layout. Consistency between this mode and the page mode should be improved: slurs, piano pedal signs are not positioned coherently
* I also noticed a significant difference of time for saving in page mode or continuous horizontal mode (particularly significant with large scores). Perhaps continuous horizontal mode could be further optimised.
* Piano pedal signs should be put systematically below the left-hand staff and horizontally aligned, even if for practical reasons, you chose the right hand as a reference for their duration (and you should avoid creating an artificial supplementary voice at the left hand to define them)
* Some space should be added below those pedal signs, to prevent clashes with the staff below (in my case first violins)
* “Una corda” and “Tre corde” should be added to the piano pedal palette
* Please enable much slower arpeggios: in slow movements you would like them to be slower, and the current max indication is “2”; increase this value
* Please enable manual breaks inside a measure: if you have a very long “ad lib.” phrase with grace notes, you would like to easily break the measure, without creating artificial and irregular measures (with painful cut-and-try) to feed in a page
* Trill playback should be improved (it would be interesting for instance to add a knob to tune their speed, including accelerando and rallentando), and grace notes after a long trill are generally ignored
* I also work for a living composer, who has very complex music, and one great improvement with trills would be to add, as a grace note between parentheses, the second note (which can be above or below the main one): interval indication (major or minor second, etc.) is often insufficient. I manually add those grace notes, but of course, their playback is incorrect, and it is tedious…
* As I said, sounds are excellent; please add spiccato for chords. Also in their articulation palette, “arco” would probably be more useful than “normal”
* The coloured subdivisions of measures are a major improvement; perhaps CTRL + mouse to stick to a subdivision would drastically ease the vertical positioning of hairpins, “cresc.”, etc.
* It would also be interesting to add a flag on parties to show or hide them at the very beginning of the score: in this work, there are only a few measures at the end of the first movement where cellos are split (first half being in arco, second half in pizz., so you cannot put them in the same staff); I had thus to create a second staff for cellos, which should not appear at the beginning, contrarily to other instruments, even if they appear later in the movement
* Another wish, in particular for people working for contemporary music, would be to consider horizontal direction as absolute time (in seconds), enabling you to superimpose vertically in the same amount of time different time signatures for various instruments. Another way would be to enable superposition of different time signatures for different instruments, with different speeds (so that, after some time, you recover a vertical alignment). I understand this is a rather specific topic, but as Finale is now more or less abandoned, I am afraid that MuseScore will become the reference tool for living composers (I never used Sibelius). I don’t know what the reaction of music editors will be, who were – at least in France – very often asking for Finale native files.

Et un raton laveur ! (for non-French speakers, please refer to Jacques Prévert’s “Inventaire” poem!).

So, in conclusion of this long post, “Long and successful life to MuseScore!!!”.

Thank you very much for your enthusiasm and quality!

Pascal Garin