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nkoda

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Title of Product or Resource: nkoda

Product URL: <https://www.nkoda.com/>

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Date of Review: Nov. 17, 2023

Producer/Publisher/Vendor: nkoda

Address: TC Group, Kings House, 9-10 Haymarket, London, SW1Y 4BP, United Kingdom

Email: mike.newman@nkoda.com

Phone number(s): +44 7837 889 067

Producer URL: <https://www.nkoda.com/>

Free Text Keywords: score, music, sheet music, part, app

Primary Category (put an X in boxes that apply):

	Art & Architecture
	Business & Economics
	Ethnic, Gender, and LGBTQ Studies
	General Reference
	Government Information
	History & Area Studies
	Humanities
	Language and Literature
	Library and Information Science (LIS)
	Medicine, Nursing & Health
	Multidisciplinary (or interdisciplinary)
X	Music, Theater, Film Studies
	Philosophy & Religion
	Political Science & Law
	Science, Technology, Computers, Engineering (including Environment), Mathematics
	Sociology, Education, Anthropology, Psychology
	Other

Type of product being reviewed (put an X in as many boxes as apply):

	Abstracting & Indexing
	Aggregator database
X	App for mobile devices



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	Bibliographic tool
	Biography
	Blog or social media
	Data sets
	Discovery tool
	Image database
	Ebook collection
	Ejournal collection
	Encyclopedia/Handbook/Directory/Dictionary
	Library tool
	Newspaper or news source
	Primary source digital content
	Publisher or Organization content /repository
	Reports
	Software
	Statistical database
	Streaming audio/video
	Website
X	Other: Score/sheet music collection

Target Audience (Put an X in as many boxes as apply):

X	Secondary
X	General public
X	Undergraduate (including community colleges)
X	Graduate/Faculty/Researcher

Access (put an X in as many boxes as apply):

	Open Access (OA)
	Hybrid (some OA)
	One-time purchase
X	Subscription

Abstract

nkoda is a robust digital sheet music library and sophisticated user interface for interacting with scores. The resource will be beneficial to students on up to professional artists, creating efficiencies in ensembles, studios, and personal practice. The vast content library sets nkoda apart from other digital score apps, as does the ability to engage an institutional license.

Pricing Options



Pricing for nkoda licenses is based on the number of simultaneous users. There is also an unlimited subscription model based on size of the institution's music department. Contact nkoda for specific pricing information.

In addition to institutional licenses, individuals can subscribe personally at a monthly (\$9.99) or yearly rate (\$99.99).

Product Overview/Description

nkoda is a combination of music content and delivery, including a digital sheet music library and app-based user interface. Together, they make nkoda a valuable resource for serious musicians in a digital world. The content library includes more than 110,000 scores, parts, and texts from many top publishers, including Bärenreiter, Breitkopf & Härtel, Boosey & Hawkes, Durand, Sikorski, Schott, and G. Schirmer.¹ At time of writing, over 140 publishers' content is included in the library, and new publishers are regularly brought in as well. Works from nkoda's digital library can be viewed in the nkoda app (available for iOS and Android mobile devices; Windows and Apple OS desktops).

The nkoda library is intended for a broad audience of musicians. There are many well-known institutional subscribers, including conservatories such as Curtis Institute of Music and the Royal College of Music London, and top-tier professional orchestras including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, and LA Phil.² nkoda would be useful to any avid student or professional who wants to engage with digital scores.

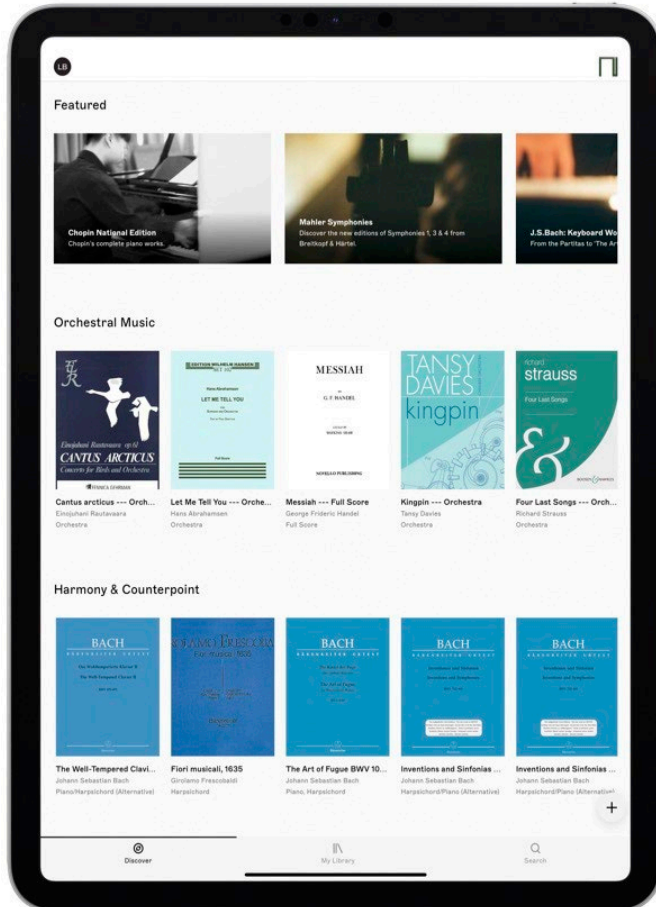
The markup layers and sharing features make nkoda particularly beneficial to those wanting to add their own annotations. One example of this is a student marking a piece they are learning with layers for annotations for different recordings they study, notes from an instructor, notes from a masterclass, harmonic analysis, structure, and so on. These are easily turned on or off as appropriate for study and during performance. An excellent use of the sharing feature would be distributing bowings or other performance notes throughout a section. Musicians can easily imagine several other potential use cases like these, made possible by the combination of licensed content and interface.

User Interface/Navigation/Searching

¹ Publishers <https://www.nkoda.com/publishers>

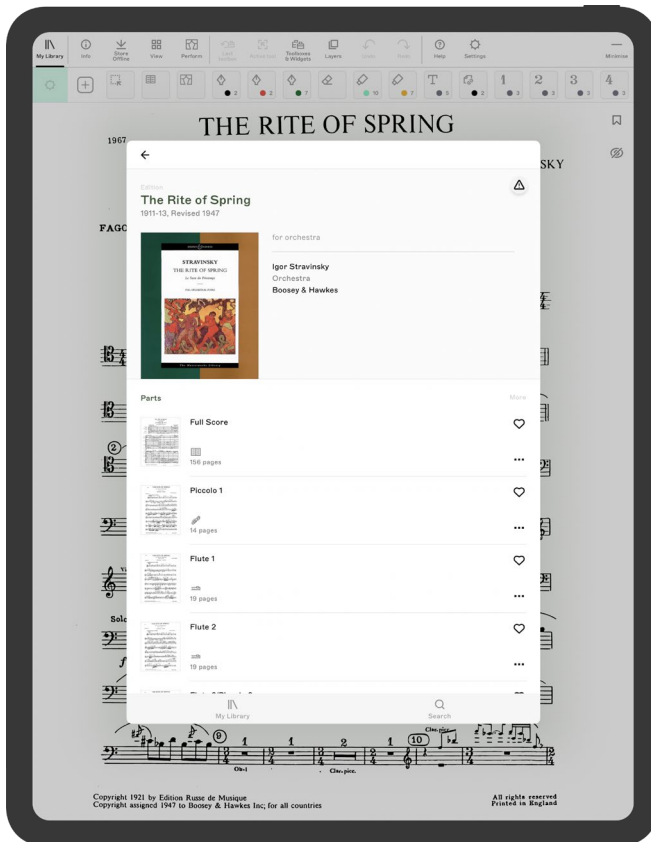
² Institutional Subscriptions <https://www.nkoda.com/institutions>

There are three main navigational areas of the nkoda interface users will encounter: Discover, My Library, and Search. Discover is a browsing feature that uses playlists (this is a term used by nkoda for curated sets of scores, not audio playlists) to share works promoting a featured publisher or related to the user’s musical interests. As a new publisher is added to the nkoda library, one will likely encounter playlists featuring their scores in support of this announcement. Customized browsing suggestions are based on user input when first creating an account with nkoda. Users have the opportunity to identify their instrument(s) or voice part, ability level, group size (i.e. solo, chamber, or large ensemble), and genres of interest. There are also options for additional roles to be selected, including conductors, teachers, and parents. The Discover page will suggest works to users that match those various metadata points. These are helpful ways to introduce new works to professionals and students alike looking to expand their repertoire.



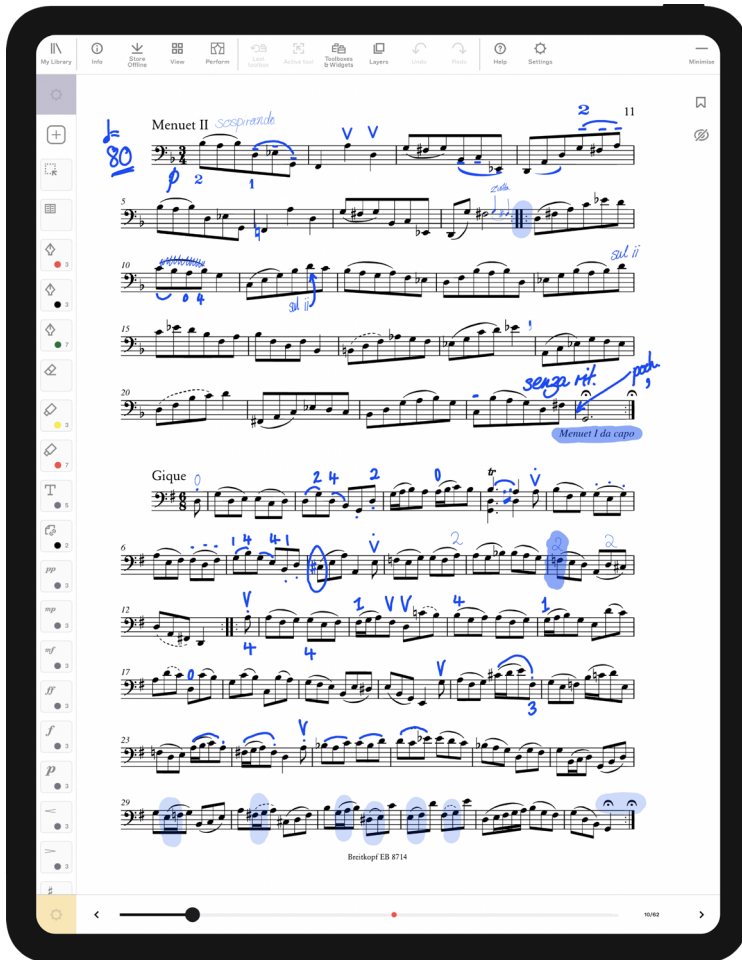
The Search area is straightforward and effective for those looking to find known works. Composer/artist is the primary entry point to search. As one types, suggested terms (composers) help facilitate this process. If “Bach” is typed, for example, Johann Sebastian Bach is suggested first, which may be considered a best bet, followed by C.P.E. Bach and other Bachs the user was

respectively less likely to be searching for. Once the composer is selected, a list of scores appears which shows a cover image for the edition, the title of the piece, composer, instrumentation, and the option to tap a heart icon to add the piece to My Library directly from this title list. Once a title is selected, scores and parts (if applicable) are available.



My Library collects scores the user has selected. It functions effectively as a general repository for everything the user wants to see again (Editions/parts) or can be sorted into user-created Playlists. My Library also features a Recently Played section, which does exactly as one would hope by showing scores the user has recently viewed, and Annotations, showing any scores the user has marked for study or performance.

Once a user has selected a score, the magic of interacting with the sheet music digitally can begin.



Scores can simply be opened and viewed, but the interface allows users to add layers of markup to meet their needs as they study pieces. The app has toolboxes for common markings by instrument family: piano, strings, winds, brass, percussion, and conductor. Even the basic toolboxes (most come in basic and advanced) are comprehensive, including markings such as dynamics, bowings, breath marks, and accidentals. Size and color of markings can all be customized, whether for symbols or pens and highlighters. Toolboxes can be moved around and docked on different sides of the page, hidden from view, and customized. Scores can be downloaded for offline access when wifi isn't reliable, and performance mode allows you to focus just on the music with only page-turning functionality enabled.

Each area of the interface is visually appealing and easy to use. It is no wonder nkoda was awarded Best Publisher User Experience (UX) Award for 2021 by OpenAthens.³

³ "OpenAthens Prize is Music to nkoda's Ears," *Research Information*, no. 113 (2021).
<https://www.researchinformation.info/news/user-experience-prize-music-nkoda-s-ears>



Sheet music, digital or otherwise, presents inherent challenges for accessibility. nkoda is clear that they want all users “to feel welcome and find the experience rewarding”⁴ and is working to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level A. Many of the criteria required for Level A have already been met. Criteria regarding recorded audio and video do not apply to this resource. Other criteria, such as the ability to pause self-advancing carousels, are works in progress.

Critical Evaluation

It is hard to find fault with nkoda’s product. It does not encompass all scores by all publishers that a user might want to study or perform. It wouldn’t be reasonable to expect that of a resource, and if such a tool existed, the cost would likely be unattainable for all but the most elite institutions. This limitation is overcome by the ability to upload, annotate, and share PDFs of other content. Applicable performance rights still apply, and this should not be considered a means to overcome copyright restrictions. However, for scores the user owns in print, they can be scanned and used digitally alongside digital nkoda content.

Another consideration is the end-user’s technology of choice. A small tablet would not be appropriate for reading and practicing from scores any more than musicians would want to take a printed score to a copy machine and reduce its size. The bigger the screen you view nkoda with, the better. That is the nature of sheet music and not a flaw with the resource; in fact, the interface allows a variety of adjustments to be made to score layout, such as showing one, two, or four pages at a time and the ability to maximize size by screen height or width. They have also been thoughtful in enabling multiple ways to turn pages, whether that’s tapping on the edge or corner or connecting a Bluetooth pedal.

The toolboxes and widgets for the score interface are extensive. To get the most out of them, the user does need to spend a bit of time tinkering and becoming familiar with how to select and apply them, or how to hide pages of text so that they don’t appear in performance mode. A user would not expect to sit down with any other advanced tool, such as Adobe products, and have instant facility using its many features. Basic, essential functions are intuitive, from page turning to writing with a digital pencil to add bowings and fingerings.

Libraries have become accustomed to licensing access to content rather than purchasing it in perpetuity. This is the case with scores in the nkoda library, as access lasts for the licensed term but no longer. Because the musicians using these scores will rely on the content and their personal annotations, institutions should enter into a license with their musicians’ expectations for continued access in mind. (Imagine the reaction of a student preparing for their senior recital only to find the nkoda license terminated and thus their access to material for their recital suddenly withdrawn.)

⁴ nkoda Accessibility Statement <https://www.nkoda.com/legal/accessibility-statement>



Competitive or Related Products

forScore is another well-regarded digital sheet music interface. Although it is the most closely-competing product, there are foundational differences—the most essential being availability of content. In nkoda, users have access to licensed scores without additional cost. With forScore, users can discover scores for purchase from third parties. As forScore isn't a content library, it doesn't offer institutional licensing in the same way as nkoda but provides educational discounts for bulk purchases of the app.⁵

Some forScore features are not available in nkoda, particularly embedding audio or using a native metronome for practice. Its strength is in the interface for annotating and interacting with scores in a variety of ways.⁶ The nkoda interface, however, is available on Android and Microsoft devices while forScore is limited to Apple products.

nkoda stands apart from the crowded field of score-reading apps for its content library and institutional subscription model. Most are direct-to-consumer only. Those that offer content without additional purchase are much more limited, for instance including public domain works. Other apps for score reading continue to be released, but some existing apps include Henle, Newzik, Piascore, and Playscore.

Purchase & Contract Provisions

Standard licensing terms are available on nkoda's website.⁷ The content is licensed for access rather than ownership, so an institution retains access only for the duration of the licensed period.

Content in the nkoda score library doesn't allow for interlibrary loan. Scores cannot be downloaded or printed. Working with printed scores is beyond the scope of nkoda's intended purpose, and limiting use to authenticated users protects composers and publishers' rights.

Currently, records do not interface with library catalogs. Search and retrieval are accomplished through the app. There is a MARC record project underway that should change this in early 2024.

⁵ Educational pricing. <https://forscore.co/educational-pricing/>

⁶ David MacDonald, "The Best iPad score reader for Most People [2023 update]," *Scoring Notes*, May 31, 2023. <https://www.scoringnotes.com/reviews/the-best-ipad-score-reader-for-most-people/>

⁷ Institutional License Terms and Conditions <https://www.nkoda.com/legal/institutional-licence-terms>



An admin portal provides libraries access to anonymized data on their patrons' usage and turnaways if applicable. Statistics are available for: edition/part title, composer, publisher, instrumentation, time spent (in seconds), report ID (user), and last usage date.

As nkoda Limited is a UK-based company, "The courts of England will have exclusive jurisdiction to settle any dispute or claim in connection with the [institutional license agreement] (including any of these Standard Terms)."⁸

Authentication

Many standard authentication options are supported, including IP Range/EZ Proxy, Shibboleth/OpenAthens, Google/GSuite single sign-on, and email domain registration. They have a customized authentication option for German Public Library customers as well as opportunity to adapt to other libraries' specific systems and needs.

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⁸ Ibid



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About the Author

Ginger H. Williams serves as Dean of Library Services at Fort Hays State University’s Forsyth Library in western Kansas. Williams earned an MLIS from Florida State University, MEd in Educational Leadership from Valdosta State University, and BA in Letters from the University of Oklahoma. She is a board member for Humanities Kansas and chair elect of the Kansas Council of Academic Library Deans and Directors. Her research interests include academic library mentoring and middle management. She is a violist, an alto, craft beer lover, and book club member.

Scoring

The composite score should be an arithmetic average of the four scoring categories.

Composite Score:	4.5	nkoda is a well-crafted, enjoyable resource for musicians. It is recommended for institutions with strong music programs who are eager to implement digital tools in their practice.
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Content:	4.5	The digital collection of scores, parts, and texts is excellent and includes many highly regarded publishing houses and a variety of genres. There is strong coverage of standard repertoire. Breadth and depth of content are strong and increasing as new publishers are incorporated. With so much diversity of instrumentation, styles, periods, ability, and so on, it would be nearly impossible to please all musicians even with a solid collection.
User Interface/Searchability	4.5	Interface is something to love about nkoda. Exploring the library through discovery



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		(browsing) or searching is simple and effective. Suggested works take into account an individual's instruments and abilities. Interacting with scores is endlessly flexible, including annotation layers, performance mode, offline viewing, sharing with colleagues, options for page turn functionality, and many other features. It is clear that the tools have been built by and for musicians.
Pricing	<i>n/a</i>	Institutions should contact nkoda for pricing information.
Purchase/Contract Options	4.5	There is a great deal of flexibility in the simultaneous user or unlimited access models to meet different types of institutions' needs. Direct-to-user individual subscriptions are also available at a reasonable price. This could allow individual faculty or studios to test the resource if desired and advocate for it from solid ground. The nkoda team makes the consistent impression that they will work with institutions to find a licensing structure that suits them.