An Introduction to MuseScore

Many of you will have heard of or used the proprietary music notation software, Sybelius. While Sybelius is most probably the de-facto standard for music notation, it isn't free and for some the monthly or annual subscription fee can be prohibitive, particularly if you're likely to use it infrequently. You may then be interested to hear that there's a free open source alternative to Sybelius that for the occasional user can provide a good alternative. It's called MuseScore and is available to download, for free, from https://musescore.org/en/download. It's available for both Windows and Mac - and Linux for that matter. As with any download from the Internet, make sure to virus check the download before installing.

Once you've installed MuseScore, you'll open the program and the *start centre* will open. Any existing scores will be shown, but you'll also see the **Create New Score** option. Click on that and you'll see a dialogue asking for the title of the piece, along with composer and some other information about the piece's provenance. Fill in the title and anything else that you think necessary and click **Next**.

Once your score has a name, you're asked to choose a template, or if you select the **General** option you have the option to choose instruments. Select this option, and under **Strings-Plucked** there are two options for **Classical Guitar**, the second one including Tablature. For the purposes of this article, I'm going to select Classical Guitar (no tab), so select that and click **Add to Score**. If you're working on a duet, you can click the same again to add a second staff.

Clicking **Next** allows you to chose the key signature, and **Next** again will allow you to set the time signature, the number of measures (bars) and the tempo. Clicking **Finish** will now show you the empty score with the the number of measures you selected, with all the bars comprising rests.

Note Input Mode and Normal Mode

This is where the real work begins. A key concept (no pun intended) with MuseScore is the distinction between Note Input and Normal mode. Note Input allows you to add notes of various durations, and normal mode allows you to perform other tasks such as adding repeats/voltas, changing the pitch of a note, switching to another voice, adding slurs/ties or copying bars and pasting them elsewhere.

Note Input is started by pressing the **N** key or clicking the **N** symbol on the toolbar next to the various note lengths. The first rest in the bar should now show a blue background indicating that you're working on voice 1.

The next thing to do is to select the note length. This can either be done by clicking the note icons on the tool bar, or by using a number. **6** sets the length to a minim, **5** is a crotchet, **4** is a quaver and **3** is a semi quaver, with lower and higher numbers either shorter or longer as you would expect. Once a note length is set, it is used until another number is entered. To enter notes, you type the letters **A-G** as required. You'll hear the note being played by the program. A rest is entered by pressing **0**.

For example if you typed **5 C D E F**, you would end up with 4 crotchets in the first bar (assuming 4/4 time). If you then type **4 F G A B,** the first two beats of the the next bar would contain four quavers.

If the note is in the wrong octave, press the **CTRL** and **Up/Down** arrow to more the note up or down an octave. On their own, the up/down arrows will move the note a semitone at a time.

To use a dotted note value, type a **dot/full stop** after the note length. For example if we were now to type **4 . A B,** you would end with two dotted quavers and a semiquaver rest to complete the four beats in the bar.

All of the notes described so far could be entered in one go using:

N 5 C D E F 4 F G A B 4 . A B

An exercise for the reader - what would:

N 5 CDEC CDEC EF 6G 5EF 6G

Give you? (Hint mon frère s'appelle Jacques)

Chords
At some point a simple one note melody won't be sufficient and you'll need to add other notes to form chords. This can 't be done by typing note names. Instead it's necessary to use the left/right arrows to select the note that you want to make part of a cord, and then click the line or space of the note you want to add. You can adjust any mouse imprecision by using the up/down arrows.

Voices
Chords are one thing, but voices are another. To add a second voice to a piece, exit note entry mode by pressing **N**, click on the first note/rest of the bar you want to start adding the second voice to, type **N** again, but then click the voice number on the tool bar (2, 3 or 4 as appropriate). Voice 2 shows up as a green highlight, and voices 3 and 4 are orange and purple respectively. You can also use **CTRL-ALT-2** etc. to select voice 2.

Once you're sure you have the correct voice selected (check the highlight colour) you can add the notes in the same manner as you did for voice 1.

Stem Direction
By default, MuseScore will pick the stem direction it thinks is most suitable. If you add a 2nd voice, the stem directions of each voice automatically switch as necessary. You can however invert the stem directions by selecting the note with the left/right arrows and pressing **X**.

Anacrusis
Not all music has the same number of beats in the bar, and often there's an anacrusis in the first bar and the last bar has a lesser number of beats to compensate. In order to change the number of beats in the bar, exit from note edit mode (**N**), make sure the voice highlights are not showing, **right click** on the bar that you need to adjust, and select **Measure Properties**. Adjust the Actual Measure Duration to the required values, and click OK. This is generally best done first before adding notes,

Slurs and Ties
To add between two notes, exit from note edit mode, click on the left hand note that is to be tied, and either click the tie icon on the tool bar, or press **+**. For a slur, select the note in the same manner as for a tie, but type **S** instead.

Fingerings
On the left hand side of the screen you should see a column labelled **Palettes**. One of these palettes is the Fingering palette. If you click the little arrow it should expand to show a number of fingering options. These include left hand, right hand and string numbers. To associate a fingering with a note, exit from note entry mode, click on the note to add the fingering to, then click one of the left/right/string number values as required. Annoyingly, it's

necessary to click the note head each time you want to add another value, e.g. string as well as finger to use.

Staff Text
Staff text allows you to add various text to the staff. It's to be found in the palettes section, under text. Some items have specific effects on the playback function, e.g. Swing will play the quavers with a swung rhythm. Other such as the general Staff Text allow you to add any thing you like. Like fingerings, it's necessary exit note entry, click the note to attach the text to and the select the text item from the palette. If using Staff Text, double click on the text that gets added, and you will be able to overtype with your preferred values. Staff text is quite handy for indicating the left hand position, VII etc.

Dynamics
Like Staff Text and Fingerings, exit note input, select the note to apply the dynamic to and click the required F/P etc. from the Dynamics palette.

Barres
There isn't any specific way to indicate a Barre and where it should be held down. However the **Lines** palette has a **Staff** line which does a pretty good job. As is hopefully familiar by now, exit note input, select the note where the barre begins, and chose the **Staff** entry from the **Lines** palette. If the barre needs to extend over a few bars, click on the text, and click/drag the end line to where it needs to go. To change text from the default *Staff* text, use the inspector window on the right change the text to something more suitable, e.g. CVII.

Bar lines / Repeats / Coda
Simple repeats (with the same ending) can be added by clicking on the bar line, and then choosing the required repeat bar line from the bar lines palette. Repeats can also be added using the **Repeats/Jumps** palette, which also includes various CODA symbols, and text such as D.C. al Coda etc. As with other palette types, you select the note that the coda/symbol/D.C. applies to and then choose from the palette.

Voltas
Working with different endings requires that the two endings bars are entered one after another as you would expect. A repeat bar line is then added to the end of the 1st repeat, chosen from the **Repeats and Jumps** palette. The bar(s) of the 1st repeat then need to be selected. The best way to do that is to click on an empty part of the first bar and **Shift click** on the last bar so that all the bars of the 1st repeat have a box around them. With these bars selected, choose the **Prima volta** line from the lines section. For the 2nd ending, select the bar(s) in the same manner but this time select the **Seconda volta** instead.

Adding and Removing Bars
Bars can be removed by selecting the bar (as described in Voltas above) and using **CTRL-DEL** together. Adding a bar requires selecting the bar in a similar manner, but then use right click, add, insert measures or insert one measure. Alternatively use **INS** or **CTRL-INS** together

Clearing a Bar, Copying and Pasting Bars
To clear a bar or bars, removing all notes and replacing with a bar rest, select the bar as preciously described and press **DEL.** To Copy and Paste bars, select the bars, then either use **CTRL-C** to copy, or right click, copy. Select the bar into which the copied bar(s) will be placed and then either use **CTRL-V** or right click paste to replace the contents of those bars.

Playback
You'll notice a triangular play back symbol on the tool bar. Click this and MuseScore will play you score to you. You can enable or disable repeats or add a metronome to the playback.

Printing and Saving

None of the above is worth doing unless you can actually produce printed output. MuseScore is able to save the score in its .mscz format, which for the technically minded is a zipped XML file and thus potentially portable to other programs. With regard to printing, use **File, Export** from the main menu to save a PDF file which you can then print or distribute however you see fit.

More Help

Hopefully some of the above may help you get started with MuseScore. For the definitive help, see the website https://musescore.org/en/handbook. The major "gotcha" I found was with switching voices and getting to grips with the difference between note input and normal modes. Once those principles are understood, you may find yourself re-scoring your favourite pieces to reduce the number of pages etc., or just to tidy up those horrid old photo copies.

Below is an example of one I did recently (out of copyright naturally). I still haven't learnt to play it. Unfortunately, MuseScore does not make you a better guitarist or allow you to skip practice.