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# Gender Relations in New Music

X

OnCurating  
Journal

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# Editorial

## Brandon Farnsworth, Rosanna Lovell

As audiences left the school gymnasium where Lisa Lim's *Atlas of the Sky* (2018) had just been performed during the Darmstadt Summer Course in 2018, leaflets rained down from the rafters reading "Darmstädter Ferienkurse 2020: 0% of pieces made by white cis-men." The action, one of several by GRiNM during the Summer Course, was meant as hyperbole, urging audiences to radically rethink that deep-seated institution of New Music. Little did we know at the time the irony of our prescience, and the historic developments within New Music in the interim that have resulted in this slogan becoming reality.

We write this editorial in one of the quietest hours in New Music's history, an imposed hiatus from the non-stop circuit of festivals, events, symposia, and so on. Having now lost all momentum, the continuation of any New Music legacy as such will be a deliberate and intentional act by a small, scattered community. The following special issue, *GRiNM x OnCurating Journal*, collects the thoughts and insights of a number of prominent figures within that community who resonate with exasperation towards the status quo we have just departed. Arguing from a number of sociological, empirical, and historical perspectives, and focusing on a number of diverse contexts, a consensus reverberates across these heterogeneous approaches: to have a future, New Music's structures must be radically rethought.

The current moment has created an opening for such new proposals, if only minds are receptive enough, and ideas mature enough to be put into action. In our experiences with GRiNM over the last few years, we have seen the rich abundance of artists, initiatives, projects, and institutions that exist in many different places, manifesting such ideas in their own practice. Already since the group's inception in 2016, we have seen both in our own work and that of others how outcries around issues of gender representation have matured and transformed into more intersectional questioning of structural and aesthetic norms within New Music. Articulating and amplifying these initiatives, many inexplicably banished to the margins of New Music, as propositions for our collective future was not only the focus of our November 2019 conference and now this collaboration with the *OnCurating* journal, but also a central focus of the GRiNM collective as a whole. Our goal here is to shift New Music's episteme—those boundaries of the knowable, the sayable, and the thinkable within New Music—to include marginalised voices and to call for reforms to its underlying ideologies, and its outdated investment in a European monoculture.

Such a focus on knowledge production within New Music reflects what we understand as GRiNM's main act of music curating, and the reason for our choosing *OnCurating* as the site of this intervention. The term 'curator' is increasingly being used as a fresh coat of paint on the artistic directorship of New Music festivals, and usually serves as a veiled attempt at increasing the auctorial power of a select few, whose subjective taste becomes more central than ever. We understand curating rather as enacting a movement of thought, one that is critical, counterhegemonic, and 'new'. It is a means of working at the interstice, an undisciplined approach to knowledge production that tries to subvert existing categories, and an attempted liberation from our conservatory training.

To this end, we present the following issue of the *OnCurating* journal. The first section consists of articles offering additional conceptual explorations and reflections on New Music and the exclusionism of its systems and structures. The second section is made up of reports from the field, describing practices and projects that are reimagining in myriad ways what New Music is, and sharing them with this coming community looking for change. All entries stem from the conference that GRiNM organised at the Zurich University of the Arts in November 2019, having been refined and enriched in the intervening months. As with our conference, this diverse combination of texts reflects the importance of knowledge exchange between people working in different roles in the New Music ecosystem in order to instigate systemic transformation. We thus see this publication as a further act of knowledge transfer and accessibility, understood in the same spirit of coming together as that earlier physical event. Through the publication of these texts, our goal is to reach a wider, less defined group of interested persons locally and internationally, who could for any number of reasons not participate in that momentary gathering. We hope that this asynchronous format underscores the urgency of the questions we raise of New Music, and also that it serves in the eye of this current storm as the most urgent of demands for fundamental, immediate change.

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**Gender Relations in New Music (GRiNM)** is a collective of individuals who work together around issues of gender and diversity in the New Music scene. GRiNM (originally GRID, Gender Relations in Darmstadt) began in 2016 at the Darmstadt International Summer Courses as an open conversation discussing the complex mechanisms that reproduce the status quo in the new music scene. Questions of gender, though central, have since expanded to become about a broader struggle against systematic oppression. The group's activities include gathering data and generating statistics about gender breakdowns at festivals for New Music and raising awareness and promoting discussion on issues of equality and inclusion. As an autonomous, heterogeneous group, it uses institutional platforms, such as workshops and presentations at international festivals and conferences, as well as artistic methods of protest and intervention in order to do this.

**Brandon Farnsworth**, born in 1991, is an independent music curator, and research associate at the Zurich University of the Arts Institute for Theory, where he studied classical music performance and transdisciplinary studies. In 2020, he completed his doctoral degree in historical musicology at the University of Music Carl Maria von Weber Dresden with magna cum laude. He is also an affiliated researcher with the joint Epistemologies of Aesthetic Practice doctoral program of swissuniversities. Recent publications include his dissertation *Curating Contemporary Music Festivals* (transcript Verlag), and the publication *Taking the Temperature: Crisis, Curating and Musical Diversity* for the Ultima Festival 2020.

**Rosanna Lovell** is a musician, educator, performer and radio maker from Australia who has been living and working in Berlin since 2009. In 2018 she completed a Masters at the Institute for Art in Context, Berlin University of the Arts. Her practice focuses on feminist and postcolonial perspectives in classical and new music which she explores through performance, intervention, sound and research. She develops workshops and projects and teaches music. She is part of Freien Radio Berlin-Brandenburg, where she focuses on topics such as music, gender and accessibility in and through radio.

# Articles

# Diversity and New Music: Interdependencies and Intersections

## Anke Charton

The concept of intersectionality, in its widespread use across global academia, is rightfully under criticism if employed within a predominantly white, bourgeois<sup>1</sup> space to govern the integration of a supposed ‘other’ into a pre-existent, biased system. This paper ponders whether intersectional approaches can be a helpful tool to engage, both on a structural and a practical level, with the challenges of diversity in New Music. The challenge starts with the term “diversity” itself, which is, just as intersectionality, another concept currently adapted as an addition to pre-existing, biased structures, as exemplified in economy-driven units of Diversity Management. The dynamic on display is one of tacking something onto a thing, not restructuring the thing itself. As long as “diversity” serves as a divider between those who define and manage it and those who are constructed by the use of the term as an ‘other’, its intended impetus—a more diverse community and more varied accessways to it—is lost.<sup>2</sup> Rather than addressing diversity in New Music, then, I want to consider the possibility of New Music as a diverse ecology.

Intersectionality is a concept that imagines spaces to convey itself. It is dependent on positionality as a place of perspective. In assonance to this, I will draw upon space and situatedness as a framework. My own perspective in this is that of a performance scholar and cultural historian who happens to be cis, white, and queer and has enjoyed education privilege. My aim in this paper is to connect applicable impulses for a more diverse practice of New Music with a discussion of underlying gatekeeping structures that tend to remain invisible and are often tied into the narrative of New Music as constitutive elements. Methodically, I will draw upon an intersectional lens. The paper will thus address intersectional theory, current critical readings of it, and its applicability to music as a field. In a second step, it will employ intersectional theory from a vantage point of Cultural Studies to discuss recent examples in New Music that address intersections of power and gender, race and class, and knowledge and socioeconomic impact.

My own writing, in this, may create blind spots I am not aware of. Addressing issues of privilege from a position of privilege is problematic as a dynamic, just as the terms “intersectionality” and “diversity” quickly become tools of gatekeeping when conceptualised top-down. This paper echoes such structural challenges, since at the root of these pages are conversations that were held in an open tent in the summer of 2018, outside the official structure of an academic conference at the Darmstadt Ferienkurse.<sup>3</sup> A tent is a mobile, temporary structure that is embedded into a specific situation. It is, in Western cities, rarely part of the official infrastructure. A tent in such spaces does not equal a house, or a home to an institution. Rather, a tent is an intervention, a structure without being a fixed structure, unable to be split into neat partitions. The tent at the root of this paper—the Darmstadt GRiNM tent—was a space to talk about diversity in New Music as a community.

My place in this discussion has changed, and my arguments, even if the same, may ring differently: they have moved from being the words of a participant in a tent outside the structure to a keynote at an academic conference,<sup>4</sup> and now to an entry in a peer-

reviewed journal. The simple fact of speaking from another place affects the meanings my words will take on. If positionality is likely to cause blind spots, an intersectional approach to diversity in New Music means to employ a tool that presupposes certain elements (such as categories) and procedures (such as the interaction between those categories).<sup>5</sup> Intersectionality is a grasp on discriminatory realities that, as a choice of methodology, affects the politics of pluralism it discusses, and the realities that may result from it.

If the goal is to enable New Music as a diverse ecology without a hegemonic default setting, the path towards this goal is necessarily a structural one. Attaching formats such as workshops on diversity management or quotas dedicated to members of marginalised groups to the established infrastructures and institutions—festivals, competitions, and music schools—is an effective method to increase surface diversity, but at the same time maintains the hierarchical dynamic between an unmarked elite and the others it designates. A necessary second level of engagement with diversity is then to analyse one's own path in moving through pre-existing musical infrastructures. This allows insights into how one's own steps maintain or enable institutional strongholds, which then may serve as a touchstone in trying for a more diverse and more broadly accessible New Music instead. An unmarked default setting<sup>6</sup> that is not rendered visible as such creates a dynamic that then has to be rectified with diversity politics, such as installing compensation efforts for minorised voices. The core issue, then, is not the perspectivation a structure may carry, but the invisibility of this perspectivation. Despite the promise of newness that resonates within New Music as a designation, professionalized New Music overwhelmingly happens within a pre-existing industry and education system of Western classical music. The "New" in New Music obscures the fact that it is heavily drawing upon prior traditions as a frame of reference—including its roots in white, Western, male, bourgeois thought—and continues many of them. Exclusionist patterns are built into Western classical music in implicit knowledges and networks, while its outward self-narrative merges a supposed universality with a promise of elitism.

To address those blind spots effectively, it is necessary to address them intersectionally. Rethinking, e.g., the position of Western musical heritages in New Music without considering class dynamics will not address the inherent elitism of classical music spheres.<sup>7</sup> Passing over gender will miss how deeply cis male imagery is embedded into musical infrastructures, from degree names and titles all the way to assumed work organisation that often still relies on large blocks of uninterrupted time, spatial privilege, single-author creation, and an absence of traditionally female-gendered care labour. And even including these aspects, others connected to it, such as race and ethnicity with their specific impact of class and gendered labour in different communities, still remain unaddressed. Ableist and ageist positions are likewise unmarked; the regional specificity of intersectional dynamics is so far rarely addressed.

Intersectional analysis encourages the consideration of contexts and their dynamics. It is, as a tool, applicable to a large variety of cultural, geographical, and historical settings beyond its initial roots,<sup>8</sup> yet it was initially formulated not as an abstract concept, but as a reaction to the specific reality black women in the U.S. faced in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup>

Criticism of intersectional theory in recent years has centred on the appropriation of black feminist theory by an overwhelmingly white academic mainstream on the one hand.<sup>10</sup> The dynamic at play is one of a theory being employed by a system against which



it was developed. On the other hand, current criticism of intersectionality has centred on its assumption of pre-existing categories. They would simplify and uphold structures of discrimination through categories of analysis instead of questioning them.<sup>11</sup> This recent shift in intersectionality theory focuses on the creation and dynamic relations of categories using the term “interdependencies” instead of intersectionality.<sup>12</sup> This focus parts with the image of the intersection insofar as an intersection implies a set of a pre-existing, separate markers (the “roads”), which omits the interdependent processes of marginalisation that are part of establishing these “roads” in the first place. Categories, as Lann Hornscheidt argues, do not exist as abstract entities prior to a marginalising reality that produces them.<sup>13</sup>

If we transfer this performativity of categorisation to the music industry, a term such as “composer” can be analysed in relation to the categories it constitutes: Does “composer” make a second term of “performer” necessary, and are they conceived within an unequal dichotomy? Similarly, the wording invites thoughts on whether a categorization as “composer” centres single-author creators who work with conventional notation and whether such a focus then marginalises collective creation, autonomous practitioners, or improvisation, or music cultures that frame authorship differently. It is a matter not as abstract as it may seem, if looked at in relation to college degrees or competition categories that are essential for visibility and professional credit in a global field.

“Composer”, to stick with the metaphor of the road and the intersection for a moment, can be seen as a road that intersects with others: it is a role in professional music that will depend on whether a person has had access to education privilege, which is often tied into socioeconomic backgrounds, which in turn often relates to marginalisation on a basis of race, gender, or disability. The intersection as an interdependent perspective, however, also serves as an inquiry into what constitutes a “road”, how—through what agency—“roads” are being built, and what remains, if we continue with the image, an unpaved stretch of dirt, devoid of access.

Performance scholar Peggy Phelan, in her 1993 book, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, frames the act of seeing as “training careful blindness”:<sup>14</sup> the ability to see something would be established through learning not to see other things.<sup>15</sup> While Phelan is concerned with representational visibility from an angle of psychoanalytic deconstructivism, her question of “how to retain the power of the unmarked”<sup>16</sup> is applicable to the concern of categorisation and invisibility within New Music. The pattern of being able to see one thing by not seeing another is another way to describe the creation of the previously mentioned blind spots.<sup>17</sup> These spots are often inherited through tradition and elite access to it and need to be identified and marked to address the lack of diversity in institutional New Music effectively. In a similar vein, Devon Carbado connects a figure of thought related to Phelan’s conceptualisation of markedness with intersectional theory in his 2013 essay, “Colorblind Intersectionality”:<sup>18</sup> he describes the dynamic of removing discriminations by, often unwittingly, relying on other sets of discriminations. This dynamic is not limited to race and gender, but extends to class and able-bodiedness, to faith communities and sexuality, and, prevalent in music, to theoretical and physical knowledges. Whiteness, maleness, a bourgeois socioeconomic status and able-bodiedness hence need to be marked as a part of intersectional dynamics instead of being treated as unmarked default settings.

It is a commonplace statement that people in general relate to music, yet music is no universal language, despite the self-promotion of the “serious” music industry as a

super-national construction of a freely accessible space governed by affect. The overwhelmingly white, Western, bourgeois framework of so-called classical music is still largely, actively, unmarked and implicates New Music as well. The music industry, as a system of competitions and residencies, masterclasses and recommendations, commissions and royalties, does, in the majority, still not acknowledge its roots in education privilege, gender discrimination, and racial privilege. And attempts to address discrimination often happens, as Carbado points out, at the cost of other intersectional markers: the recurring debate about female conductors, for example, is acted out nearly entirely along a line of white, Western women,<sup>19</sup> with perhaps the exception of Mexican conductor Alondra de la Parra.<sup>20</sup> Region-specific infrastructures and their influence on access to education are likewise not part of that conversation.<sup>21</sup> The classical music industry, as an economy, thrives on situated knowledge set to default. Thus, music professionals—performers as well as festival organisers and musicians who primarily define themselves as teachers—who move within this industry depend on access to this situated knowledge. Gaining this knowledge, through degrees and grants, mentoring and commissions, will make music professionals complicit in gatekeeping to a certain degree. The process of professional formation and validation as a musician within the traditional Western network of institutions signifies an enormous investment of time and money packaged within a narrative of a chosen elite. Professional training will easily govern a life schedule for an ample two decades; a prestigious degree generally equals a tremendous amount of financial debt. The socioeconomic borders of music education are an entwined hedgerow of financial and educational privileges. In addition to the money needed to obtain a degree, implicit, class-labelled knowledge of music and its associated settings function as a major gatekeeper.<sup>22</sup> Family role models, access to concerts and conversations about them and their etiquette, the possibility to learn a (Western) instrument and (Western) music theory in childhood: all these are still biographical staples of many established names in New Music. To level the field, both access to education and the role of informal musical training need to be addressed.

Exclusionist practices that maintain a supposedly universal field of New Music within an unmarked Western, bourgeois setting are often micropatterns of implicit, situated knowledge. They are mirrored in the range of instruments and framework of music theory expected in degree entry exams in Western schools that situate themselves as global. If repertoire pieces are expected in New Music, they are often still tied to a canon of white Western serious music. The unspoken dress codes and codes of grooming when presenting at international auditions and competitions echo the white, bourgeois, binary gender norms of the mid-twentieth century. Unless these default settings are marked and understood within their positionality,<sup>23</sup> the outrage over cases of racial and cultural discrimination and appropriation will continue, in New Music as well as in the classical music business at large, since the established institutions will continue to educate and further homogenic groups that then make the designation of a differing 'other'—without access to dominantly Western knowledge and networks—easy. These broad lines, such as Western/non-Western, easily obscure other demarcation lines of exclusion. An intersectional lens, as easily exemplified by the globalization of the concept of intersectionality itself, needs to be adjusted to cultural specificities. In a European context, a Northwest-Southeast slope of discrimination along ethnic and national lines is central to intersectional debates around structural inequalities, also in the music business. In music education, a similar dynamic applies central European urbanity that presupposes access to unofficial networks and perpetuates power of decision along those lines.

Following, I will present three 2019 cases linked to New Music that illustrate a structural lack of diversity. My aim in presenting these examples is not to identify culprits or present a case solution. Rather, I aim for a focus on the underlying structures that have enabled the situation in question.

In autumn of 2019, two longstanding histories of sexualised power abuse came to a head in the context of the #MeToo movement. Both Dan Welcher—composer and long-term Head of Composition at Butler School of Music at Austin—and Siegfried Mauser—pianist and former Head of the University of Music Munich and of the Salzburg Mozarteum, sentenced to jailtime for sexual abuse—served as ambassadors of New Music, but, more importantly, as influential teachers and mentors. The setting of white Western men in positions of power, the scene of contemporary music and its nimbus of innovation and border-pushing and paternalist teaching infrastructures signal that the sexualised power abuse may not have been individual, but systemic. The abuse—in the cases of both Welcher and Mauser—concerned students and female colleagues in positions of lesser degree-validated knowledge and less privilege of gender or race.

If I return to the question of underlying structures, it is telling that Mauser returned to the headlines in late 2019 because a group of established colleagues in musicology had edited a volume in his honour on the occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. The book counts prominent musicologists, musicians, and composers of New Music among its contributors.<sup>24</sup> The press coverage of the publication and its widely criticized exonerating attitude did not centre the perspective of the abuse victims or the categorisations that had established their lack of privilege. In the case of Welcher, the setting that enabled the abusive behaviour was tied into positively connotated narratives of artistic freedom, mentoring benevolence, and male genius. Taken together, these elements show how the infrastructure of an established professorial position permitted a prolonged sexualised abuse of power, including jokes, slander, touches, and affective labour.<sup>25</sup>

Both cases were only possible within structures of aiding and abetting, where power—in form of connections, recommendations, and grants—could be exercised. They were only possible because colleagues within the same power system, with differing degrees of dependency, looked the other way, time and again. Within an education system where names, filiation, and mentorships carry enormous weight, and where the mentoring situation of teacher and student happens within an economically framed space of creativity and individual development against a backdrop of tuitions and salaries, we may need to find new way to relate to each other before we can truly build towards a diverse ecology of New Music.

My second example is concerned with ethno-stereotyping and its economic implications. While New Music does not have to deal directly with the nationalist and colonialist oeuvre of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries as a repertoire, the mechanisms of othered musical cultures and their appropriation is common practice. To visualise the pattern of fictional Asian women being instrumentalised for white Western (male) profit on a mainstream level, one does not need to look further than Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and its later 20<sup>th</sup>-century retelling in Claude-Michel Schönberg's *Miss Saigon*. Against this established perspective as a background, the case of Larry Clark presents an interesting example. In 2004, Clark—an established white composer and music publisher of so-called 'educational' music—started writing orchestra pieces under the *nom de plume* Keiko Yamada, suggesting the authorship of a Japanese woman. The considerable oeuvre Clark put together under this pen name all referenced

Japanese tropes, including geography and festival culture; he collected accolades and royalties for it. When his alias was found out in the summer of 2019, Clark was blasted on social media. He apologised, citing his picking up a pseudonym as a normalcy in genre-swapping music writing and, in retrospect, a bad idea.<sup>26</sup>

Again, my interest here is not in passing blame and individual choices, but in the systemic structures that made Clark's choices possible in the first place. As Anthony Tan has pointed out regarding "musical cultural objects",<sup>27</sup> engagement with different musical cultures, especially from different and formerly colonised geographies, is commonplace and not necessarily problematic. The issue is the form of engagement that, again, positions an objectified other as defined by the invisible default setting of Western music.

The case of Larry Clark is structurally interesting because it ties an othering in terms of race and gender into economic profit in New Music: it depends on an industry of highly regulated music publishing and royalties. It likewise depends on the lack of diversity that a predominantly white, male bourgeois system has created, which makes an intervention like "Keiko Yamada" even possible. Clark took advantage of emulating a Japanese woman while at the same time enjoying the advantages that come with not being a woman of colour within the Western music industry: he chose to reinvent himself as a composer of orchestral works through an Orientalist alias. To change the structure underlying this case and work towards a diverse ecology of New Music, we do not only need to discuss individual actors, but the system of distribution and authorship.

The importance of distribution and authorship and the roles they build on is highlighted again by the third and final example I consider in this paper. In late October 2019, prominent singer Tanya Tagaq, an Inuit vocalist known for her work with katajjaq style in a variety of international collaborations, went head to head with New York City-based vocal octet *Roomful of Teeth*, a Grammy-awarded formation led by singer, musician, and composer Caroline Shaw. Shaw's acclaimed 2012 composition *Partita*,<sup>28</sup> as Tagaq pointed out, incorporates elements of katajjaq-style singing; a fact that Shaw readily acknowledged. Her ensemble had taken a workshop with Inuit katajjaq trainers and subsequently worked with the patterns and styles they had learned about. Tagaq's issue was not with the implementations of patterns, but with the lack of attribution and remuneration. *Partita* incorporates, in its third moment, Inuit throat singing technique in the form of a katajjaq piece called the *Love Song* that is widely recognisable for listeners accustomed to katajjaq as a specific female duetting setting.<sup>29</sup> The matter is complicated by differing framings of authorship that do not allow the katajjaq piece to be fitted neatly into the Western music traditions of a single-creator score, despite its specificity and recognisability.

The established system of remuneration and the exclusionist patterns of artistic validation written into it are cast into the light by Shaw's reaction, who suggested a reading of all artists names' involved in the creation of the formation's program before their recitals, as a way to give visibility and recognition to the artists who have taught the ensemble. What this reaction does not address, but renders visible, is a double standard of authorship applied to what A. Zoë Madonna (@knightandlisten) in her Twitter coverage of the dispute<sup>30</sup> calls "fine art" opposite "folk art".<sup>31</sup> visibility may be an economic factor, but it does not equal payment.

Again, I am interested here in systemic infrastructures, the inequalities enacted by them, and the narratives that maintain them. In this particular case, the core issue is the framing of payable authorship. *Roomful of Teeth* booked a workshop with Inuit katajjaq artists<sup>32</sup> and then subsequently used the techniques and material they had learned about in their work. Hiring and paying teachers and then going forth and making one's own music based on the education received is at the core of the music business. This business, however, does not exist disconnected from geopolitical and postcolonial realities. If musical authorship and an idea of genius are more readily applied along dividing lines of race, class, gender, and education privilege, then musicians from politically, socially, and economically marginalised communities who operate outside a largely Western idea of single-creator authorship remain excluded and underprivileged. "If you're composing from a place of privilege, and you learn about a marginalized group's musical tradition from a member of that group, who doesn't have that privilege, is it enough to just compensate them for hours worked?" A. Zoë Madonna asks.<sup>33</sup>

It took Tanya Tagaq's international pull to draw attention to this specific case, where the dividing line was not merely one of credit given, but of what credit is given: as A. Zoë Madonna points out, there is a difference between paying an artist one time for a workshop, or paying them royalties as a collaborating artist every time a piece is aired or performed. Likewise, the divide between understanding someone as a practitioner of a tradition as opposed to a musician creating individual works outlines the unspoken default setting of white, Western, bourgeois music against which so many other musical traditions—even within Western, predominantly white settings—are pitted as others.

An international community of New Music today needs to reflect on what is an unmarked default and what is a marked other in its inherited infrastructures and institutions. New Music, set against a tradition to depart from, has and refers to a rich history. But being granted a history of music full of individual actors differs greatly from being located as a practitioner—not a creator—within a supposedly unchanging tradition, as so many indigenous musicians are. Being located outside of history, within a seemingly fixed tradition, makes individual artistic creation invisible. This is a systematic issue of marking musical knowledges in a way that maintains and reinforces hierarchies which are then echoed by a lack of opportunities, salaries, and agency.

To make New Music a diverse ecology will take a cascading approach of interventions to change narratives and positionality to finally change systemic structures. Many New Music professionals are not in positions where they could immediately enact change in biased systems they depend on for their livelihood, often from the outside. Even from the inside, careers in professional music tend to be economically precarious. The guiding principle of diversity work in New Music, then, could be a narrative of sharing as opposed to a narrative of addition. If the impulse is to "add a (marginalized) voice", the question of how to add this voice, perhaps through a bursary or by creating an additional category in a competition, does not go deep enough. The actual question would be, "Why is this voice not part of this group yet, and what would it have taken to make this voice belong from the start?"

In describing the mechanisms of categories and invisibilities outlined in my examples, I have drawn from intersectionality and interdependency theory to point out blind spots in New Music. These are often built into structures and cannot be addressed without

taking contexts into account: engaging with othered musical cultures must consider aspects of class and gender and their socioeconomic implications. Working against sexualised power abuse in music institutions needs to address mentoring narratives and the way they relate to gender and education privilege.

Going forward, based on the focus of underlying structures discussed heretofore, I suggest a multifold approach towards New Music as an accessible, diverse nexus. While structural change may most effectively be implemented by involving groups of differently marked people in artistic and logistical decision-making, there are a variety of micro-actions, many of them economically modest, that work towards a more diverse field of New Music.

Accessibility, from the point of view of an audience, is governed by spatial arrangements that define who has access to a venue and can move comfortably within a venue. It starts with ramps and manoeuvring space, but extends to aspects such as inclusive language and single-stall, gender-neutral bathrooms. It may include a babysitting service during events, or events that are designed to include groups of people who cannot be expected to follow concert etiquette, like small children or citizens with dementia. It may include events in spaces that are not associated with implicit elite knowledge and behaviours. Accessibility is further defined by ticket pricing, by the language(s) used in press materials, by programming and its wording: a typical example is the treatment of musical works by women. Accessibility includes outreach programs and a reflection of their positionality—are they centred around transmitting and preserving elite knowledge, or are they designed as conversations that create a community? Accessibility to a venue as an institution also depends of staff communication and starts with how many people will see themselves represented in outreach personnel and in ushers, if an event is big enough to employ ushers. In the organisation of festivals and competition, acknowledging a positionality is preferable to claiming universality. Just as systems of exclusion are geo-specific, in some communities, race and education privilege may be factors with higher impact, while in others, ageism, rurality, and socioeconomic status may be prevalent. Events should address the regional and communal situation and establish ties to it. Making some events, or parts of them, such as workshops or concerts, digitally accessible connects regionality to internationality. Entry fees, travel costs, and lodging can propose insurmountable barriers for diverse artists and audiences. Allowing for digital sub-formats and streamed entries can increase participation and visibility. If possible, event websites should be available in various languages or be at least linked to an automated translating service. Beyond a local idiom and English as a lingua franca, it is the use of Spanish, French, and Portuguese that addresses musicians from Caribbean, African, South American and Pacific communities as possible participants. On-site translation services, digital in form or aides, increase accessibility. The work towards changing the gender imbalance in New Music needs to address the realities of women from diverse communities: on-site daycare and spaces reserved for changing and nursing small infants are a standard first step. In competitions, the establishing and wording of entry categories can decrease or increase diversity. This extends to admissible forms of notation, authorship, instrument groups, and, if applicable, presented repertoire. It also includes dress codes that should not be implicit knowledge, but explicitly addressed and communicated.

In education, New Music will have to re-evaluate constituting factors in order to address structural gatekeeping. Those include a largely paternalist and elitist mentoring system, education privilege based on class and socioeconomic affluency, unmarked

canon-building and canon knowledge, and a validation system based in notated single-creator authorship. How degrees are named and described factors into gatekeeping just as repertoire choices in admission auditions and expected formats of music in exams. International traditions included in the curriculum and who teaches them, with what faculty standing, is another aspect that can increase or dissolve gatekeeping. On a second level, New Music education needs to be aware that access to a recognised degree extends beyond an education of talent, style, and expression. New Music, perhaps more than any other aspect of institutionalised musical practice, is also rooted in an implicit knowledge of thinking music.

Artistic embodiment allows an intervention into the past to interrogate the historic terms that built traditions of visibility and invisibility and established, with Phelan, a sight dependent on partial blindness. The struggle for diversity within New Music happens on many levels. It cannot be achieved in a sense of possession: it is always, necessarily, a work in progress. What exactly that work is depends on the specific situation and its intersectional challenges.

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## Notes

**1** In this paper, I apply the term “bourgeois” instead of “middle-class” in the vein of Pierre Bourdieu (2010), since the logistics of social and cultural capital and their 19<sup>th</sup>-century conceptualisations are central to the infrastructures of the Western classical music industry.

**2** Sarah Ahmed, “How Not to Do Things with Words,” *Wagadu: A Journal of Transnational Women’s and Gender Studies* 16 (2016): 3.

**3** The 2018 *Darmstadt Ferienkurse* included an event called *Defragmentations*, a conference format on curating contemporary music. The handling of diversity at the event prompted members of *GRiNM* to organize a tent outside one of the conference sites to offer a space for discussion.

**4** This paper is based on a keynote given at the GRiNM Network Conference, held at the Zurich University of the Arts in November 2019.

**5** Joya Misra, “Categories, Structures, and Intersectional Theory,” *Gender Reckonings: New Social Theory and Research*, eds. James W. Messerschmidt, Patricia Yancey Martin, Michael A. Messner & Raewyn Connell (New York: NYU Press, 2018), 115–16.

**6** On the concept of markedness, see Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993); Brin Solomon (@nonstandardrep), “On The Sondheim Birthday Celebration,” Twitter Thread, May 12, 2020, <https://twitter.com/nonstandardrep/status/1260230292301844480>.

**7** For a discussion of patterns from the perspective of first-generation professional musicians, see Jeffrey Arlo Brown, “Die ersten,” *VAN Magazin* 214, August 7, 2019, <https://van.atavist.com/generation-1>.

**8** Misra, “Categories,” 117.

**9** In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw published her seminal paper, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,” articulating the particular invisibility of black women in drawing from the theoretical framing of black feminism. Crenshaw analysed how, in legal practice, black women were often rendered invisible regarding their blackness or their being women as sites of discrimination since they were subsumed under the larger labels of either “black” or “female.” See Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1 (1989): 139–67. This pattern was also discussed in preceding, parallel, and subsequent publications by The Combahee River Collective (*Black Feminist Statement*, 1977).

Francis Beale (“To be Black and Female,” *Black Woman Anthology*, 1979), Angela Davis (*Women, Race & Class*, 1981), Audré Lourde (*Sister Outside*, 1984), and Patricia Hill Collins (*Black Feminist Thought*, 1989).

**10** This is an important, but insufficiently differentiated argument that, while it showcases the persistent lack of tenured black scholars in academia, fails to highlight the work in intersectional theory done by scholars of colour in academia today.

**11** Lann Hornscheidt, “entkomplexisierung von diskriminierungsstrukturen durch intersektionalität,” *Portal Intersektionalität* (2014), <http://portal-intersektionalitaet.de/theoriebildung/ueberblickstexte/hornscheidt/>.

**12** Hornscheidt, “entkomplexisierung.”

**13** Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 521–22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893>.

**14** Phelan, *Politics of Performance*, 13.

**15** Phelan cautions that she is concerned with “locating a subject that cannot be reproduced within the ideology of the visible,” which would not be “the same thing as calling for greater visibility of the heretofore unseen.” Phelan, *Politics of Performance*, 1.

**16** Ibid.

**17** Ibid.

**18** Devon W. Carbado, “Colorblind Intersectionality,” *Signs* 38, no. 4 (2013), 811–45. <https://doi.org/10.1086/669666>.

**19** Anke Charton, “Meine Lippen, sie küssen so weiß. Intersektionen von Gender, Race and Class in der Klassikindustrie,” *Jahrbuch Musik und Gender* 12 (2020): 86-87.

**20** Claire Gibault’s *La Maestra* competition marks a shift here with an international and racially diverse line-up for its 2020 inauguration season, including seven out of twelve applicants from South America and East Asia, with the remaining five from Europe and the Anglophone West, see *La Maestra*, <https://lamaestra-paris.com/announcement-of-the-12-selected-candidates/?lang=en>.

**21** See Brown, “Die ersten”; Rebecca Grotjahn, “Playing at Refinement: A Musicological Approach to Music, Gender and Class Around 1900,” *German History* 30, no. 3 (2012): 395–411.

**22** See Brown, “Die ersten”.

**23** See Solomon (@nonstandardrep), “On The Sondheim Birthday Celebration.”

**24** For an overview of the discussion, see Sebastian Bolz and Moritz Kelber, “[Festschrift Mauser| Zum Themenschwerpunkt: Einleitung und Pressespiegel,” *kontrovers musicconn.blog*, December 14, 2019, <https://kontrovers.musicconn.de/2019/12/14/festschrift-mauser-zum-themenschwerpunkt/>; Rebecca Grotjahn, “Alles nur Ironie? Was wirklich in der Mauser-Festschrift steht,” *kontrovers musicconn.blog*, December 14, 2019, <https://kontrovers.musicconn.de/2019/12/14/festschrift-mauser-alles-nur-ironie/>; Franz Körndle, “Tatendräng?” *kontrovers musicconn.blog*, December 14, 2019, <https://kontrovers.musicconn.de/2019/12/14/festschrift-mauser-tatendräng/>.

**25** See the detailed, investigative article by Sammy Sussman, “Music’s perpetually open secret,” *VAN* 144, September 26, 2019, <https://van-us.atavist.com/open-secret>.

**26** For a detailed look at the case and Clark’s own arguments, see Jennifer Jolley, “The Curious Case of Keiko Yamada,” *NewMusicBox*, November 7, 2019, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/the-curious-case-of-keiko-yamada/>.

**27** Anthony Tan, “Out of Context #5: Appreciation vs. Appropriation of Cultural Musical Objects,” *I Care If You Listen*, May 27, 2020, <https://www.icareifyoulisten.com/2020/05/out-of-context-5-appreciation-appropriation-cultural-musical-objects/>.

**28** *Partita* was awarded the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Music, see <https://www.pulitzer.org/winners/caroline-shaw>.



**29** For press and blog coverage of the dispute, see dubuquecello, “What’s mine is mine, what’s yours is...,” *Classical Dark Arts*, November 30, 2019, <https://classicaldarkarts.com/2019/11/30/whats-mine-is-mine-whats-yours-is/> and Jane George, “Acclaimed American choir slammed for use of Inuit throat singing,” *Nunatsiaq News*, October 23 2019, <https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/acclaimed-american-choir-slammed-for-use-of-inuit-throat-singing/>.

**30** A. Zoë Madonna (@knitandlisten), “Piggybacking on @hearnedogg’s response thread to the @roomfulofteeth and @tagaq situation yesterday,” Twitter thread, October 24, 2019, <https://twitter.com/knitandlisten/status/1187428671075827713>.

**31** A. Zoë Madonna (@knitandlisten), “Through those collabs,” October 24, 2019, <https://twitter.com/knitandlisten/status/1187428773454667776>: “Through those collabs, @tagaq’s work was heard by new audiences who were coming to it through the lens of “fine art” rather than the “folk art” that many automatically classify anything Indigenous as.”

**32** See dubuquecello, “What’s mine is mine.”

**33** A. Zoë Madonna (@knitandlisten), “But here’s a question,” October 24, 2019, <https://twitter.com/knitandlisten/status/1187428815796133889>.

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# Explaining Inequalities in the Classical Music Profession<sup>1</sup>

## Christina Scharff

### Introduction

Inequalities in the classical music profession have come on the agenda in recent years. In the UK, there have been a range of initiatives that promote women, musicians with disabilities, as well as black and minority-ethnic players.<sup>2</sup> These and other initiatives have been widely discussed; as Chi-Chi Nwanoku recently observed, “The lack of diversity in British orchestras, and the arts in general, is at the forefront of current debates in the UK classical music industry.”<sup>3</sup> However, research suggests that racial, class, and gender inequalities continue to exist in the field of classical music.<sup>4</sup> Female musicians and players from black and minority ethnic as well as working-class backgrounds face several, and potentially intersecting, challenges, ranging from underrepresentation, vertical and horizontal segregation, and pay inequalities to racialised, gendered, and classed constructions of who counts as an ‘ideal’ musician.<sup>5</sup>

These findings raise the question of why inequalities are ongoing, especially if we consider that cultural and creative workers have the most liberal and left-wing views compared to all other industrial sectors.<sup>6</sup> This contribution provides an answer to this question; an answer that is, of course, not comprehensive, but that nonetheless explores a range of dynamics that contribute to the persistence of inequalities in the field of classical music. Specifically, I draw on wider research on the working lives of ‘artists’ and ‘creatives’ to shed light on factors that are not frequently considered in industry debates about inequalities. In particular, I demonstrate how the precarious nature of work, the reliance on informal recruitment, unequal access to education, issues around parenting, constructions of the ‘ideal musician,’ the gendered politics of self-promotion, and depoliticising accounts of inequalities (re-)produce existing hierarchies and exclusions. By drawing on wider research on the working lives of artists and creatives, this contribution provides an important, broader cultural industries perspective that allows us to understand some of the dynamics that perpetuate gender, racial, and class inequalities in the field of classical music.

### Precarious Work

The working lives of musicians are precarious. Musicians frequently encounter money problems and work insecurity.<sup>7</sup> As a report by the Musicians’ Union has demonstrated, many musicians have portfolio careers, which are marked by low incomes (less than £20,000 a year for 56% of those surveyed), uncertainty, and lack of workplace benefits such as pensions.<sup>8</sup> 65% of surveyed musicians had no independent pension provision, and over 60% reported working for free in the last twelve months. Only 10% were full-time salaried employees, half reported not having any regular employment whatsoever, and the vast majority of musicians (94%) work freelance for all or part of their income. According to the study, around a third (34%) worked additional jobs not connected to their music careers in order to maintain an income.<sup>9</sup>

The prevalence of precarious and unpaid work is a significant barrier to some for getting in and getting on in the classical music profession.<sup>10</sup> Class origin, for example, shapes the experiences of precarious and unpaid work. Being from a middle-class

background and, more specifically, having the ability to depend on one's parents' support, can act as a buffer against some of the insecurities and anxieties related to precarious work.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, experiences of doing unpaid work differ along class lines: whether unpaid work is seen as an inescapable form of exploitation or as providing potential, future career benefits depends on cultural workers' class origin, and disadvantages those who do not have the means to work for free.<sup>12</sup> The prevalence of precarious labour, and the reliance on unpaid work in the classical music sector, risk excluding musicians from less privileged socio-economic backgrounds.

### **Informal Recruitment and Homophily**

Many sectors within the cultural and creative industries rely on informal recruitment, and it has been well documented that these practices disadvantage women, black and minority ethnic workers, as well as individuals from working-class or lower middle-class backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> Instead of formal recruitment methods, reliance is placed "on contacts, on word of mouth and on recommendations."<sup>14</sup> Networking is thus crucial to finding employment in the cultural and creative industries,<sup>15</sup> and this also applies to the classical music profession.<sup>16</sup> As Siobhan McAndrew and Martin Everett have shown in relation to composers and the BBC Proms, network connections are critical for achieving great success in having works performed because they act as pathways whereby 'raw talent' is converted into success.<sup>17</sup>

The reliance on networks, however, tends to disadvantage women, as well as working-class and black and minority ethnic workers.<sup>18</sup> Research on the UK film industry has shown that white, male, and middle-class workers are more likely to enjoy networks that can provide quality work.<sup>19</sup> Access to influential networks is not open to all, but tends to depend on a range of factors, such as educational background, knowing "the 'correct codes of behaviour,'" and having the confidence to talk to people.<sup>20</sup> These factors often privilege workers from middle-class backgrounds because they are more likely to possess the required know-how.<sup>21</sup> Gender also plays a role in terms of access to networks.<sup>22</sup> As Wing-Fai Leung et al. have pointed out, the spaces for networking, such as pubs, may form challenging environments for women, and 'after-hours' socialising is not easily manageable for those with caring responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, networks do not only provide access to work, but also fulfil other functions, such as offering advice or featuring role models.

Linked to the reliance on informal recruitment and networking, homophily also plays a role in excluding female workers and those from working-class and black and minority ethnic backgrounds.<sup>24</sup> Homophily, which describes the tendency of individuals to form networking relationships with those who have a similar background in terms of gender, race, and class, means that exclusionary hiring practices persist, if unconsciously.<sup>25</sup> The importance placed on reputation for securing and distributing work adds to the reliance on homophily in hiring practices. Maintaining a good reputation is key to getting work in the cultural and creative industries and the classical music profession.<sup>26</sup> This makes it harder for cultural workers to raise issues around inequalities because of the "disciplining power of reputation"<sup>27</sup> and the "view that resistance could adversely affect workers' careers."<sup>28</sup> Sexual harassment, for example, often remains unreported because of musicians' fears that their reputation would be damaged if they raised concerns.<sup>29</sup>

### **Education**

Higher Education also plays a key role in fostering inequalities in the cultural and creative industries.<sup>30</sup> Relevant factors include the increase in tuition fees, at least in the

UK, but also apply to processes of admission,<sup>31</sup> as well as the development of social networks.<sup>32</sup> While the UK has had a history of state-funded art and design training, which offered upwards social mobility to hitherto marginalised working-class youth, this has changed and working-class students are now more marginalised.<sup>33</sup> Research has demonstrated the middle-class culture of music education,<sup>34</sup> and documented a lower acceptance rate of women at UK conservatoires, as well as comparatively low numbers of black and minority ethnic conservatoire students.<sup>35</sup>

Notably, early music education seems to be as important as Higher Education in this context. Given the early age at which musicians have to commence their training in order to compete professionally, we (Bull and Scharff) would extend Kate Oakley and Dave O'Brien's argument about the role of Higher Education in fostering inequalities to include early music training.<sup>36</sup> This point is not only relevant in relation to the processes described above, such as the middle-class culture of youth music education,<sup>37</sup> but becomes particularly important if we place music education in a more global context.<sup>38</sup> Erin Johnson-William's research has demonstrated that Victorian music education set in place the very ideologies of social status, class, and race associated with classical music making that still pervade musical practice in Britain and the Commonwealth to this day.<sup>39</sup> According to Roe-Min Kok, the examining boards, which evaluate skills in Western classical music on a scale from grade 1 (elementary) to grade 8 (challenging), were established in the Victorian era and subsequently transmitted to a range of non-Western contexts.<sup>40</sup> Instead of adapting its methods to speak to the specificities of the contexts in which they were applied, the "ABRSM directors seemed to have been contented to transfer its methods, created and practiced in culturally, politically, and economically different Britain, directly into a postcolonial setting."<sup>41</sup> Kok's insightful and critical reflections on her experience of undergoing this kind of early music education in postcolonial Malaysia demonstrates the 'colonial violence' it wrought on young minds. Early music education, in addition to Higher Education, is thus another context that fosters inequalities in classical music practice.

## Parenting

A further issue that is frequently raised in debates about inequalities in the cultural and creative industries, especially in relation to gender, is that of parenting and, more specifically, mothering. Indeed, it is often argued that women are underrepresented in the cultural and creative industries because of difficulties reconciling managing a career with raising a family.<sup>42</sup> Sometimes, it seems that the issue that 'women go off and have babies' figures as a convenient explanation for persisting gender inequalities, thus shutting down other avenues of inquiry and critique which would, for example, highlight the exclusionary nature of informal recruitment practices.<sup>43</sup> Feminist analyses of the role that parenting plays in perpetuating gender inequalities thus face a particular dilemma: there is a need to recognise that women overwhelmingly continue to act as primary caregivers while avoiding re-cementing the link between women and childcare.<sup>44</sup>

Bearing this dilemma in mind, it is useful to draw on analyses that highlight the construction of the 'ideal cultural worker' and how this intersects with gender and parenting.<sup>45</sup> Natalie Wreyford's research on screenwriting in the UK film industry demonstrates that prevalent views of the ideal, creative individual as fully committed and driven have "the effect of excluding anyone with other responsibilities or demands on their time. It is therefore very difficult for women with children to present themselves as ideal screenwriters."<sup>46</sup> As Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton have pointed out, the ideal of the selfish, creative pursuit, which prioritises work over other areas of life, makes it more difficult for women to attain this ideal.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Leung et al.'s

research on the UK film and television industries has shown that it was considered “more ‘rational’ in any given situation to hire a man, because he would be less likely to leave or to take time off.”<sup>48</sup> Due to the association between women and childcare, female creative workers may thus be perceived as less ideal in at least two ways: they may be seen to lack the full commitment required for cultural work and regarded as unreliable because of potential periods of maternity leave.<sup>49</sup> The kind of self required for cultural work—that of a fully committed individual with an uninterrupted career—tends to position women at a disadvantage in the context of childcare. This seems to apply regardless of whether or not they are or will become mothers.

In emphasising the role of constructions of the ideal worker, I do not seek to discount other important factors, such as the predominance of freelancing and the negative impact this has on entitlement to maternity benefits.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, there are also issues related to the flexible nature of work in the cultural and creative industries. While this is frequently lauded, it may indeed make it more difficult for women to carve out the time<sup>51</sup> and space<sup>52</sup> to work while negotiating domestic and caring responsibilities. In her research on female artists, Alison Bain showed that women artists working from home struggled to have an uninterrupted and undisturbed space to work, which echoes Livia Pohlman’s earlier research on gender, creativity, and the family.<sup>53</sup> Gender inequalities in the context of work and parenting are thus not limited to constructions of women as (potential) mothers and caregivers, but also apply to access to maternity benefits and the challenges of flexible work.

### Constructions of the ‘Ideal’ Artist/Musician

Constructions of the ‘ideal’ artist do not only pertain to issues around parenting and mothering, but also intersect with gender in different ways. In her study on screenwriting, Bridget Conor has identified the ideal subject positions for the screenwriter, such as the pioneer, egotist, or fighter, and demonstrated that these masculine figures point to “gendered understandings of heroic, individual creativity.”<sup>54</sup> Prevailing notions of creativity are certainly gendered. “In contemporary Western mythology, the artist is understood to be male.”<sup>55</sup> This myth risks marginalising women from creative processes and roles. In the context of the classical music profession, the association of masculinity with creativity may explain why female artists tend to be overrepresented in supportive roles (such as teaching), while men inhabit roles that are considered more creative (such as composition).<sup>56</sup> Having discussed the association of creativity with masculinity, McAndrew and Everett point out that “male composers accordingly have an advantage because they look like people’s preconceptions of what a composer looks like.”<sup>57</sup>

The ideal, classical musician is not only gendered, but also classed. As Bull has argued, “An accumulative, autonomous, entitled middle-class self [Skeggs, 2003] is both assumed in classical music education, and also *actively formed* through its norms” (emphases in original).<sup>58</sup> This middle-class self comes to the fore in the future orientation of classical music education but also in the way the body is controlled and disciplined. Cultivating restraint, for example, is a key part of classical music practice, but also a cornerstone of bourgeois subjectivity. Through her focus on subjectivity and the body, Bull makes an important contribution, which highlights that the link between class and classical music education is more than just economic: classical music practice in itself is associated with bourgeois traits; in reproducing classical music, we also reproduce classed (and gendered) selves.

Constructions of the ‘ideal’ classical musician are also racialised through an ongoing association of classical music with whiteness.<sup>59</sup> This association manifests itself in

constructions and perceptions of white musicians as creative and musical, and their 'others,' particularly East Asian musicians, as robotic, technical, and lacking "real artistry."<sup>60</sup> According to Taru Leppänen, "Classical music has embraced the idea that music must spring from the musician's self."<sup>61</sup> This self, however, seems to be racially marked as white. As Mina Yang puts it, "Asians have the technique, Westerners have the heart, the soul. The image of Asians as automatons, robots without souls, appears frequently in the Western imagination [...]."<sup>62</sup> I also encountered these stereotypes in my interviews with the research participants, some of who described East Asian musicians as "technically skilled" and yet "robotic."<sup>63</sup> These findings draw attention to the role of race, and specifically whiteness, in constructions of the 'ideal' musician. If whiteness is associated with musicality, and musicality deemed a key marker of good musicianship, then the ideal classical musician appears to be white.

This does, of course, not mean that it is impossible for black and minority ethnic musicians to forge a career in classical music. There are several examples of successful minority ethnic musicians, and Mari Yoshihara's study describes the complex ways in which Asian and Asian-American musicians navigate their racial and musical identities in the wider context of classical music practice.<sup>64</sup> However, the suggested link between whiteness and musicality points to some barriers that black and minority ethnic musicians may face, which, for example, affect the ways their musicianship is evaluated. As a study by Charles A. Elliott on the effects of race and gender on the evaluations of music performers by musician educators has shown, black musicians were consistently evaluated lower than white musicians, even though the musical performance was identical (videotapes of male and female, as well as black and white performers were synchronised to identical performances).<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the same study also showed how gender, and more specifically associations of particular instruments (flute and trumpet) with women and men affect evaluations of classical music performance. This finding resonates with Claudia Goldin and Cecilia Rouse's study on the effects of the shift to blind auditions in US orchestras, which may explain 25% of the increase in the percentage of female players in the orchestras from 1970s to 1996.<sup>66</sup> These studies, as well as the wider research on inequalities in cultural work, highlight the role that gender, race, and class play in constructions of the ideal classical musician.

### **The Gendered Politics of Self-Promotion**

Cultural work is increasingly (though not exclusively) governed by the values of entrepreneurialism, and the field of classical music is not exempt from this trend. This shift towards entrepreneurialism means that the worker

must be enterprising about making herself enterprising; becoming in effect a microcosmic business; developing a strategy, marketing herself, developing 'products', establishing herself as a brand, understanding the market (for herself) and so on.<sup>67</sup>

If workers are businesses that have to be marketed, they have to promote themselves. To use Laurie Rudman's definition, self-promotion includes "pointing with pride to one's accomplishments, speaking directly about one's strengths and talents, and making internal rather than external attributions for achievements."<sup>68</sup>

Crucially, self-promotion is a gendered process and more difficult for female musicians to engage in. Indeed, female musicians have reported that they are reluctant to engage in self-promotion.<sup>69</sup> There are three main reasons for the reluctance to self-promote: first, self-promotion is associated with pushy behaviour that conflicts with normative

expectations that women are modest. Crucially, in making this argument, I do not presume that ‘women’ are ‘naturally’ or ‘biologically’ predisposed to modesty. Instead, I draw on a performative approach to gender and am interested in how gender norms are reiterated through, for example, the association of modesty with femininity.<sup>70</sup> It is in this context that self-promotion and its association with pushy behaviour conflicts with normative construction of femininity. Second, self-promotion is regarded as a commercial activity and positioned as un-artistic. Considering that women have been constructed as the artist’s other (see above), engagement in self-promotion may threaten their already tenuous status as artists. Lastly, the notion of selling yourself may evoke the spectre of prostitution due to the sexualisation of female musicians and the fact that it is mainly women who sell their bodies.<sup>71</sup> To be sure, these gendered dynamics do not mean that female musicians are unable to pursue self-promotion. These dynamics do, however, explain female musicians’ reluctance to engage in self-promotion and suggest that the entrepreneurial demand to ‘self-promote’ is not gender-neutral, but one that is negotiated differently by male and female musicians.

### **The De-Politicising Effects of ‘Inequality Talk’**

As mentioned in the introduction to this piece, there is now more awareness and discussion of inequalities in the classical music profession. This marks an important, cultural shift. Several years ago, inequalities in the classical music profession seemed ‘unspeakable’: frequently made statements pointed out that things had already changed for the better, that merit and talent, rather than individuals’ backgrounds, counted, and that—given existing diversity initiatives—it may indeed be an advantage to be from a minoritized group.<sup>72</sup> This seems to have changed, however. There is not only more open debate about inequalities in the wider, classical music industry, but also amongst musicians.<sup>73</sup> As I have learned in recent interviews with female, early-career musicians working in London, the awareness of inequalities in the wider industry is also audible in interviews.<sup>74</sup> This shift raises the question of the emancipatory potential of ‘inequality talk,’ to use Brook et al.’s terminology.<sup>75</sup> One crucial question is: do common accounts of inequalities promote, or hinder, social change? As I show in detail elsewhere, conversations about inequalities do not necessarily lead to political change.<sup>76</sup> First, inequality talk can become an end in itself, rather than a means to an end (such as political change). Second, a fatalist sentiment can characterise discussions of inequalities, presenting structural change as unachievable. And third, acknowledgement and recognition of privilege, crucial to overcoming inequalities, is not a consistent feature of inequality talk, which in turn risks reinforcing the normativity of whiteness and middle-classness in the field of classical music. These findings caution against overly optimistic accounts of the shift towards a more open discussion of inequalities in the classical music profession and beyond.

Equally important, insightful accounts of unequal power relations can co-exist with an individualist outlook. An individualist outlook is, for example, present in female musicians’ accounts of sexual misconduct.<sup>77</sup> There is now more awareness of the prevalence of sexual misconduct, but the disciplining power of reputation (see above) continues to prevent female artists from reporting. The precarious nature of musicians’ work, linked to the predominance of freelancing, and the reliance on reputation in informal recruitment make it difficult to speak out against sexual harassment. The industry, and particularly the domains where freelance work is prevalent, has yet to offer safe, reliable, and meaningful ways to report and deal with sexual harassment. In this context, women and victims of sexual harassment are left with individualist solutions and may feel that they themselves should stand up against, challenge, or call out sexual misconduct. This, however, is an unrealistic expectation and one that

places a huge burden on those who are adversely affected by sexual misconduct. If there is no collective/industry-wide response to sexual misconduct, those negatively affected by it may only have themselves to blame when they encounter sexual misconduct and feel that they cannot report it. This means that women's alleged empowerment in the so-called #MeToo era may actually have a disempowering effect, as women may blame themselves for being unable to call out, or fight against, the prevalence of sexual harassment in the cultural and creative industries. In addition, and as Catherine Rottenberg has argued, encouraging individual women to speak out against sexual harassment and abuse elides "the structural and economic undergirding of these phenomena, and in so doing help[s] make poor and immigrant women, as well as women of colour, even more precarious and invisible than they already are."<sup>78</sup> #MeToo gained traction when white, heterosexual, and economically privileged women started to speak out,<sup>79</sup> pointing to classed, racialised, and heteronormative dynamics in who gets heard in the struggle against sexual harassment and abuse. The figure of the strong, empowered woman who calls out perpetrators may thus disempower working-class, queer, trans, black and minority-ethnic women in particular ways. These findings and arguments caution against overly celebratory accounts of the recent shift towards a more open discussion of inequalities in the classical music sphere and the cultural industries more generally. Not only may common forms of 'inequality talk' fail to promote structural and political change; as long as an individualist outlook pervades responses to inequalities, feelings of self-blame and disempowerment may occur.

### Concluding Remarks

By drawing on wider research on the working lives of artists and creatives, I hope to have shown that important insights can be gained from a so-called 'cultural work perspective.' Taken together, the findings presented here demonstrate that inequalities in the cultural and creative industries, and the classical music profession, are about more than under-representation or a pay gap. This means that tackling inequalities is not just a matter of increasing the numbers of musicians from 'underrepresented groups,' but that this political work has to cut much more deeply. It is, for example, also about challenging the normativity of whiteness or middle-classness in classical music's educational settings, and in commonly shared ideas of who constitutes the 'ideal' classical musician. Equally important, common working practices, such as the reliance on unpaid work, networking, or self-promotion, have exclusionary effects. As I have shown, these practices are not equally accessible to everyone, but contribute to classed, gendered, and racialised hierarchies. And while I welcome the shift towards a more open discussion of inequalities in the classical music sphere, I used the last section of this piece to strike a cautious note, and to highlight some of the de-politicising effects that 'inequality talk' may have. Discussions of inequalities cannot become an end in itself, but need to lay the groundwork for meaningful, structural change.

### Notes

**1** This contribution is based on Chapter 2, "Documenting and Explaining Inequalities in the Classical Music Profession" in Christina Scharff, *Gender, Subjectivity, and Cultural Work: The Classical Music Profession* (London: Routledge, 2018).

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- 77** Scharff, “From ‘not me’ to ‘MeToo.’”
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# Curating Diversity in Italy: Gender and Ethnic Distribution in Contemporary and Experimental Music Programming

## Valentina Bertolani, Luisa Santacesaria

Curating Diversity is a project created by Valentina Bertolani and Luisa Santacesaria in 2018, aimed at collecting data on gender and ethnic representation in Italian musical programming (concert seasons, concert series, and festivals). As is standard with this type of research, we harvested data from websites of symphonic and chamber institutions rather than submit direct questionnaires to the artists involved in each season. This means we manually and subjectively assigned all categories that pertain to the individual identity of the artists.

Harvesting data makes it difficult to work with identity categories such as gender, because we have to assign a value from an external standpoint, even though we fully support and acknowledge gender fluidity and self-identification. Nevertheless, with our quantitative data we exclusively want to draw attention to a discriminatory practice rather than describe the world in all its facets.

Our working method follows the following criteria:

1. Intersectional approach. In our data harvesting, we decided to consider not only gender but also the ethnic background of the artists involved in the musical programming. It is important to notice the oblivious nature of the discourse on ethnic diversity and race in Italy and the European Union. Italy does not have a clear framework to account for the ethnic diversity of its population, and ethnic diversity is often conflated with migration phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the European Union uses a colour-blind attitude to data collection on demographics.<sup>2</sup> This idea that diversity comes from abroad (particularly from outside Europe) is deeply rooted in the Italian mindset, and it is culturally and socially intertwined with the recent history of Italy becoming a country of immigration after being for a long time a country of emigration and the legacy and erasure of the Italian colonial period.<sup>3</sup> Given this situation, given the act of assigning identity rather than asking for self-identification, and given the fact that with our quantitative data we exclusively want to draw attention to a discriminatory issue to start a deeper conversation with curators to explore possible solutions, we compromised on using binary categories as white/non-white and women/men artists in our datasets. In order to limit the drawbacks of this choice, even though we decided to publish the dataset we created to be of service to the community at large, these shared datasets have no name associated with the categories we assigned. Similarly, we do not single out artists based on the categories we assigned.

2. Acknowledgements of various artistic backgrounds. In our datasets, we include different artistic roles. Differently from concerts in which the identification of roles such as composer, soloist, and conductor is very straightforward, the role identification within contemporary, electronic, and experimental events is extremely challenging. In this second case, our role attribution follows these indications:

- *Composers*: those who create music that can be easily transferred to and performed by others;
- *Composer-performers*: those who create music and usually perform it themselves because asking others to perform their music would require some work in the transfer of knowledge, since the performance is linked to specific practices or sound sources;
- *Improvisers*: those mostly in a jazz/free jazz/free improv environment or when a description of an event directly used the word improvisation;
- *Sound artists*: this is possibly the loosest category. We used it for performers who work with an electronic element and/or in their performance interact consciously with the space they are in, and whose performance is live, as opposed to an installative work (for which we used the category “installation artist”);
- *Soloists*: artists who perform someone else’s music. Soloists are all those whose names are usually mentioned on the webpage of the concert: so, we list quartet or trio members as soloists, as well as chamber or small ensembles in which all performers are listed;

3. Combine quantitative and qualitative research. In addition to the data, we decided to interview the artistic directors of the various institutions on their curatorial choices, management, budgeting, mission, and internal organisation. However, in this paper we are not using the interviews we collected.

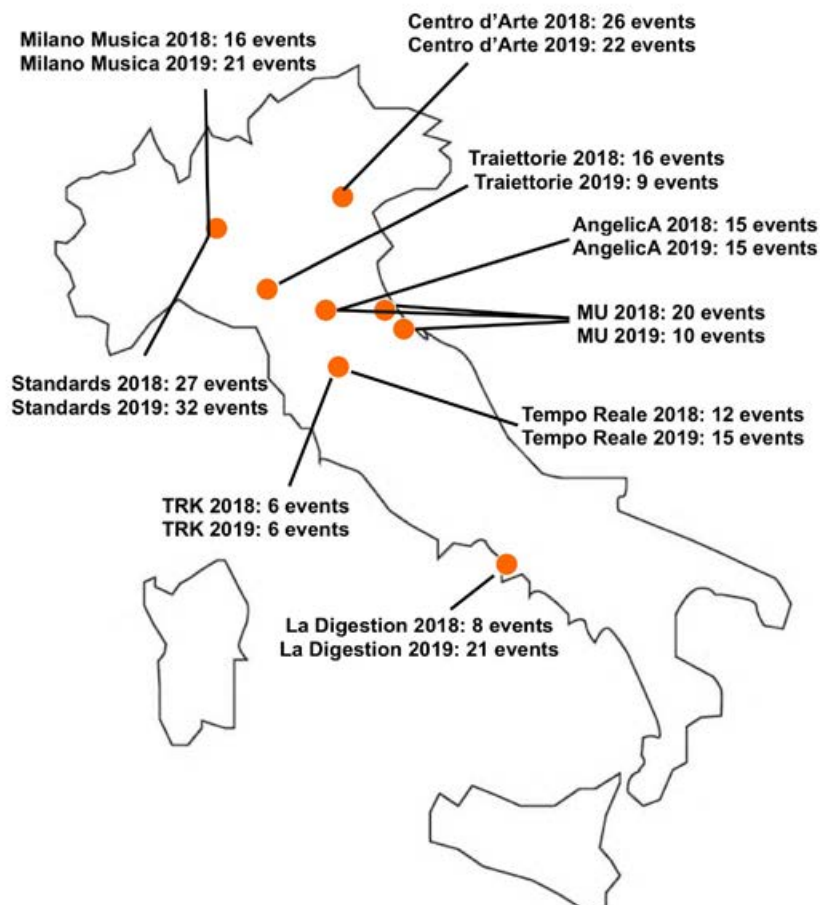


fig. 1: Geographic distribution of analysed institutions

Our investigation began by analysing the programming of the 2018-2019 chamber and symphonic seasons in Milan and Florence.<sup>4</sup> For the research we are presenting here, we decided to examine five of the main Italian contemporary music festivals and four independent experimental music concert series and collect data about their 2018 and 2019 programming for a total of 297 concerts and 1,354 single entries in our dataset.

**Angelica** is a concert festival active in Bologna since 1991. Its programming is mostly devoted to historical experimental music and free jazz.

**Centro D'Arte Padova** is a concert series based in Padua, first held in 1945. The series is mainly focused on the free jazz scene, sometimes moving towards electronic and experimental proposals. The curatorial board is formed by three people: all jazz experts and one musicologist.

**La Digestion** is a festival based in Naples and dedicated to experimental music, resulting from a collaboration between the cultural association Phonurgia and the Morra Foundation. The curatorial team is formed by three musicians and one artist. The festival first took place in 2017.

**Milano Musica** is a festival of contemporary music founded in 1992. It normally takes place in Milan between October and November. Every year, the festival is dedicated to a different contemporary composer. 2019 was dedicated to Luca Francesconi, 2018 to György Kurtág; since its foundation, no edition of the festival has ever been dedicated to a woman or ethnic minority composer.

**MU** is an independent organisation and an artistic collective focused on sound, active since 2016. The curatorial team is formed by three musicians and one artist. MU's concert series is scheduled in different venues between Cesena, Ravenna, and Bologna.

**Standards** is a space for art and music based in Milan, born in 2015, with the aim to explore the relationship between sonic and visual cultures. Standards has scheduled live performances, exhibitions, workshops, artist residencies, and public presentations. The curatorial board features a team of seven people with different artistic backgrounds, from music to architecture and media arts.

**Tempo Reale Festival** is a contemporary and electronic music festival first presented in 2008 and organized by Tempo Reale, centre of musical research, production, and education founded by Luciano Berio in Florence in 1987. Its programming is mostly focused on historical and contemporary electronic and electroacoustic music, featuring both prominent and emerging composers and sound artists.

**Traiettorie** is a contemporary music festival programmed since 1991 in Parma. Promoted by Fondazione Prometeo, Traiettorie's musical programming is mostly focused on the twentieth-century Western avant-garde and its legacy.

**TRK. Sound Club** is an experimental music concert series based in Florence, as part of the programming of Tempo Reale. The series has been ongoing since March 2016, with approximately one event every month. The curatorial board features a team of musicians and musicologists, all part of Tempo Reale's staff. The concerts are held at Galleria Frittelli, a contemporary art gallery in Florence.

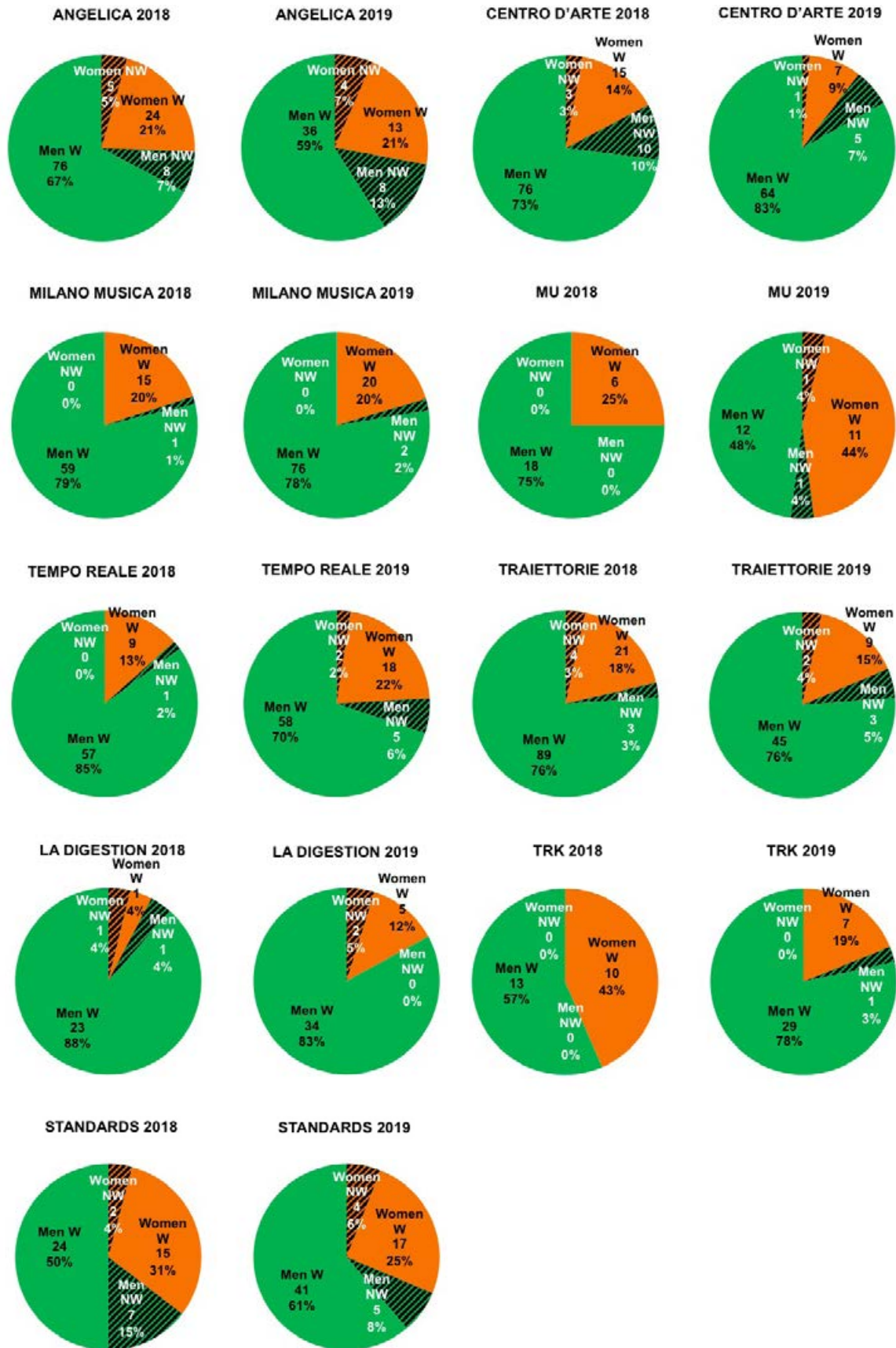


fig. 2: Distribution of ethnicity and gender in each season (all roles included)

Fig. 2 offers a synoptic view of the programming choices of all these institutions in terms of ethnic and gender diversity in each organisation for two years in a row (2018 and 2019).

These charts illustrate the ethnic and gender presence featured in each venue in both years. The data include many of the artistic and creative roles at the core of the programming (e.g.: soloists, composers, installation artists, etc.).

Although all are involved with contemporary music, these institutions have a difference in ethos that we needed to acknowledge in analysing our data. Thus, we split them into two different groups:

- 1) Group 1. Institutionalised group of contemporary music festivals:  
Angelica, Centro d'Arte, Milano Musica, Tempo Reale Festival, Traiettorie.
- 2) Group 2. Loosely structured experimental music concert series:  
La Digestion, MU, Standards, TRK. Sound Club.

This division is based on the following criteria:

- Public funding. While the activities of Group 1 are supported by public funds at the national and local levels,<sup>5</sup> those of Group 2 are mostly sustained by private funds and public funds at the local level.<sup>6</sup>
- Identity. With the exception of Centro d'Arte (which is a concert series featuring concerts spread throughout the year), all the entities of Group 1 are music festivals, whereas all the entities of Group 2 (with the exception of La Digestion, which is a festival) have programming that spans most of the year.
- Tickets. Group 1 has on average more expensive tickets than Group 2. Group 2 tickets are sometimes connected to associative fees.
- Organogram/Staff. The entities of Group 1 have a more structured and pyramidal organisation and more people involved in their staff, while Group 2 is mostly made of teams with few people collaborating as peers. Moreover, curators working in Group 2 are on average younger than those working in Group 1 (30-40 years old in Group 2 vs 50-60 in Group 1).
- Venues. While the institutions of Group 1 can program their events in both conventional venues (i.e. theatres, concert halls, etc.) and unconventional ones (i.e., flexible spaces, art spaces, etc.), the entities of Group 2 schedule their events mostly in unconventional venues, reconfiguring them every time according to the different requirements of the performances.

There are some considerations we would like to add concerning programming choices. Group 1 includes in their programming events aiming at reinforcing historic literature of a specific repertoire. Group 2 focuses instead on contemporary sonic research linked to both historical experimentation but also hybridisations with video art, improvisation, sonic studies and other arts on a more regular basis. Indeed, their events are not necessarily concerts but can also be installations, performances, projections, etc., and they stress the boundaries of traditional concert forms with a broader range of professional roles.

When artistic directors and curators choose specific musical programmes for concert series and festivals, their choice influences the reception of the works presented—and, consequently, of their authors. This means the artistic and curatorial choices, especially



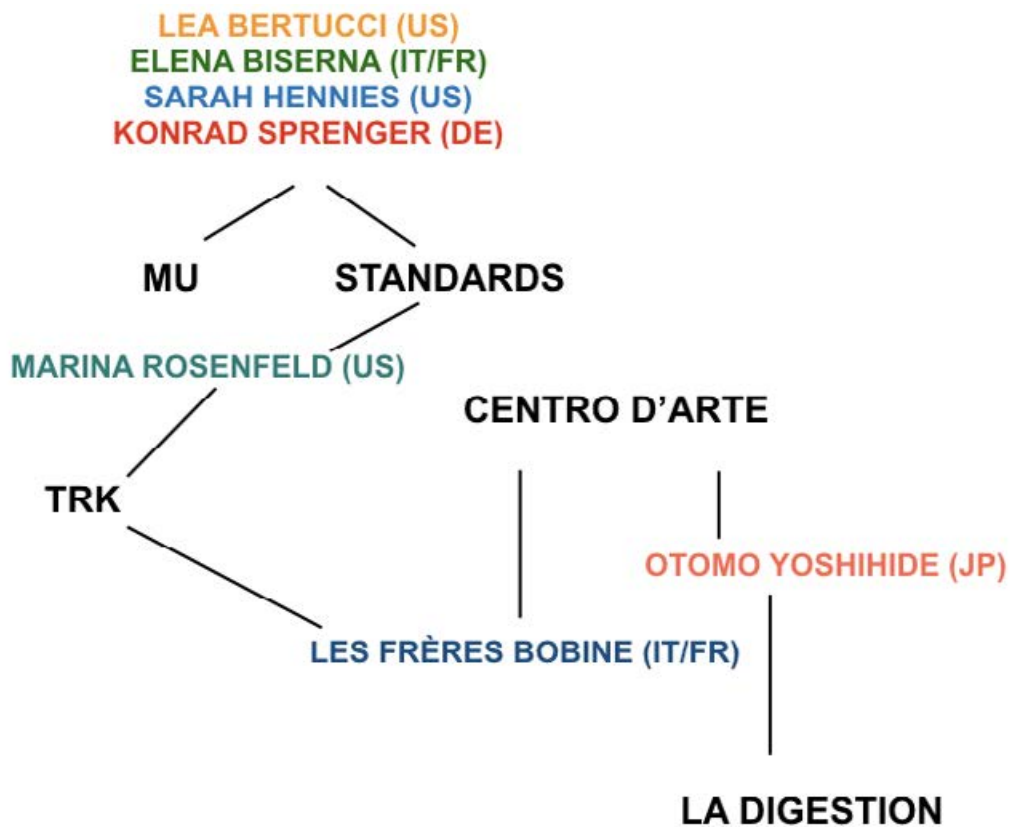


fig. 3: Tour 2018 (international artists)

in this case of contemporary and experimental music festivals/concert series, actively contribute to the formation of the musical canon. For example, festivals like Milano Musica and Traiettorie feature programming that is strongly linked to the twentieth-century Western avant-garde and its legacy: programming works by not-yet-established composers, they are actually contributing to forming the new musical canon. The same can be said for AngelicA and Centro d'Arte, which focus their concerts on historical experimental music, free jazz, and the present-day legacy of these musical movements, and for Tempo Reale Festival, whose programming is mostly devoted to historical and contemporary electronic and electroacoustic music. It is precisely in the curatorial choices that concern the new music that reflection on gender and ethnic representation can lead to important results in the future, so that the new canons will be more inclusive and also more flexible and open to diversity.

Occasionally, different concert series share the same performance—on consecutive or close days—by international artists, thus promoting their mobility within the Italian musical circuit (see fig. 3). This improves the economical sustainability of single performances presented in institutions (especially those of Group 2) that are constantly struggling due to low budgets. If we look in detail, it is interesting to notice how two institutions like Standards and MU shared four international artists in 2018. This is for several reasons: relative geographical proximity (the artists can easily reach the two venues in a few hours); close artistic and human relationships between the curators; and solidarity in terms of economic sustainability. All these factors create—especially between institutions of Group 2, economically more fragile—strong connections that also improve the creation of a cooperative musical scene. Concerning the soloists, here is a list of the most frequently recurring names during the years 2018-2019 (all included in the programming of Group 1).

NAME	ROLE	NR OF CONCERTS	DETAILS
Alvise Vidolin	sound director	8	3 Centro d'Arte 2018 5 Centro d'Arte 2019
Massimo Marchi	sound director	7	1 Milano Musica 2018 6 Milano Musica 2019
Simone Beneventi	percussions	6	1 Traiettorie 2018 2 Milano Musica 2018 1 Centro d'Arte 2019 2 Milano Musica 2019
Matteo Polato	sound director	5	1 Centro d'Arte 2018 4 Centro d'Arte 2019
Francesco Giomi	electronics, synth	4	3 Tempo Reale Festival 2018 1 Tempo Reale Festival 2019

fig. 4: Most recurring performers (2018+2019)

We can observe how the two most recurring roles, in these two years, are those of sound directors (due to the large presence of electronic music works in the festivals/concert series). The list also shows how some artists are particularly linked to specific institutions (e.g.: Alvise Vidolin and Matteo Polato to Centro d'Arte, Massimo Marchi to Milano Musica, Francesco Giomi to Tempo Reale, of which he is also the director); this could be explained by geographical proximity and strong artistic relationships between artists and curators forged in previous years. Moreover, Milano Musica has a special programme of residencies for musicians that includes a certain number of performances in the frame of the festival; this is why, for example, the festival scheduled four concerts between 2018 and 2019 featuring percussionist Simone Beneventi, who is in residence there (from 2018 to 2020) together with his trio ZAUM\_percussion.

Obviously, this reiterated presence of the same small pool of soloists and performers in different concert series reinforces an artistic circuit that becomes a point of reference for the performance of a specific repertoire. Similarly, the reiteration and stronger visibility of certain gender and ethnic categories can also influence the normative biases in that role for future generations.

While there are some noticeable differences between institutions and years of programming (fig. 2), fig. 5 shows that there is great consistency in ethnic and gender density across different years. Despite the fact that the two groups of institutions might seem very different with actions informed by an incomparable ethos, their ethnic and gender density is very similar. Independent venues have a slightly higher percentage (about 6-8 points) of white women in their event series. Obviously, we do not consider these figures sufficient to claim that independent venues show more awareness towards programming women. Both Group 1 and Group 2 have a lot of work ahead to become places of equity and promotion of the artistic voices of non-white artists.

Fig. 6a shows the distribution of different roles across event series in Groups 1 and 2. Fig. 6b shows the distribution of gender and ethnicity between roles in both groups. Fig. 6a demonstrates how different the two groups of series are. Indeed, institutions in Group 1 rely for the most part on the traditional concert-related roles of "composer" and "soloist" (accounting for more than three quarters of the artists involved in the series). Conductors are also relatively rather present, if one considers that these

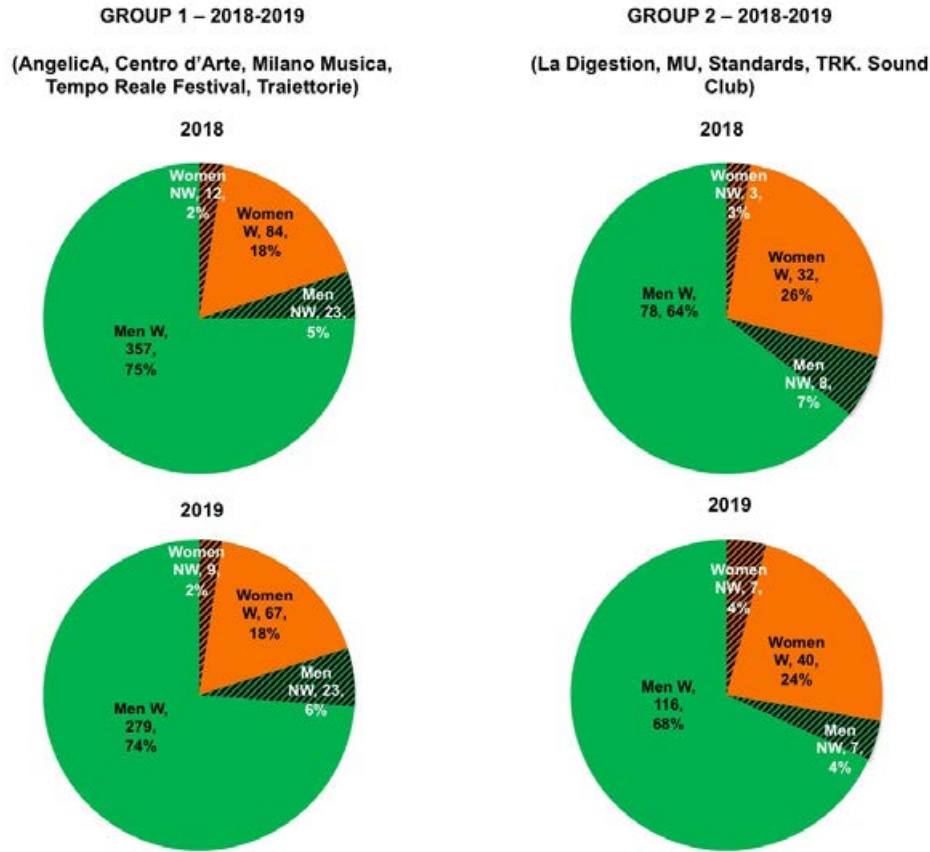


fig. 5: Distribution of ethnicity and gender in institutional and independent venues (all roles included)

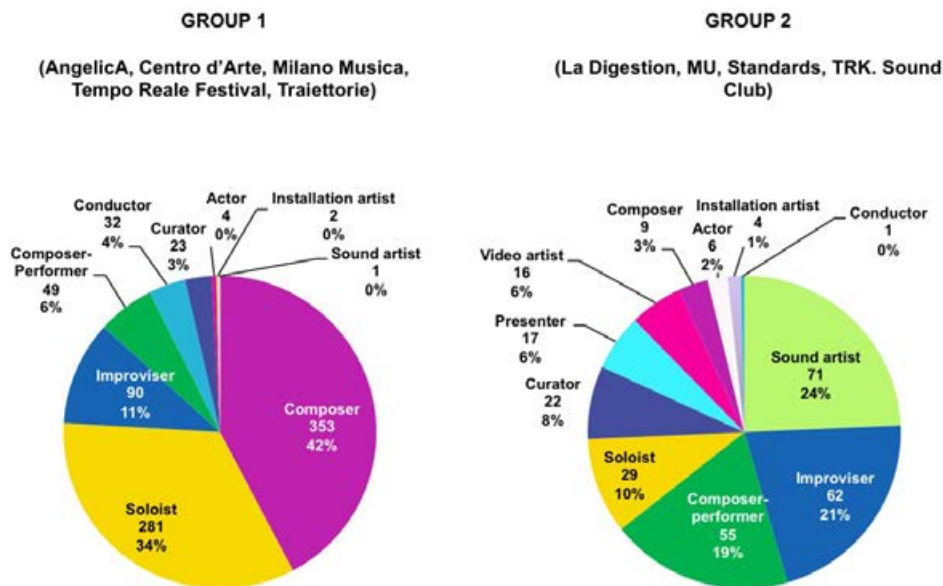


fig. 6a: Role distribution in group 1 and group 2 (2018 + 2019)

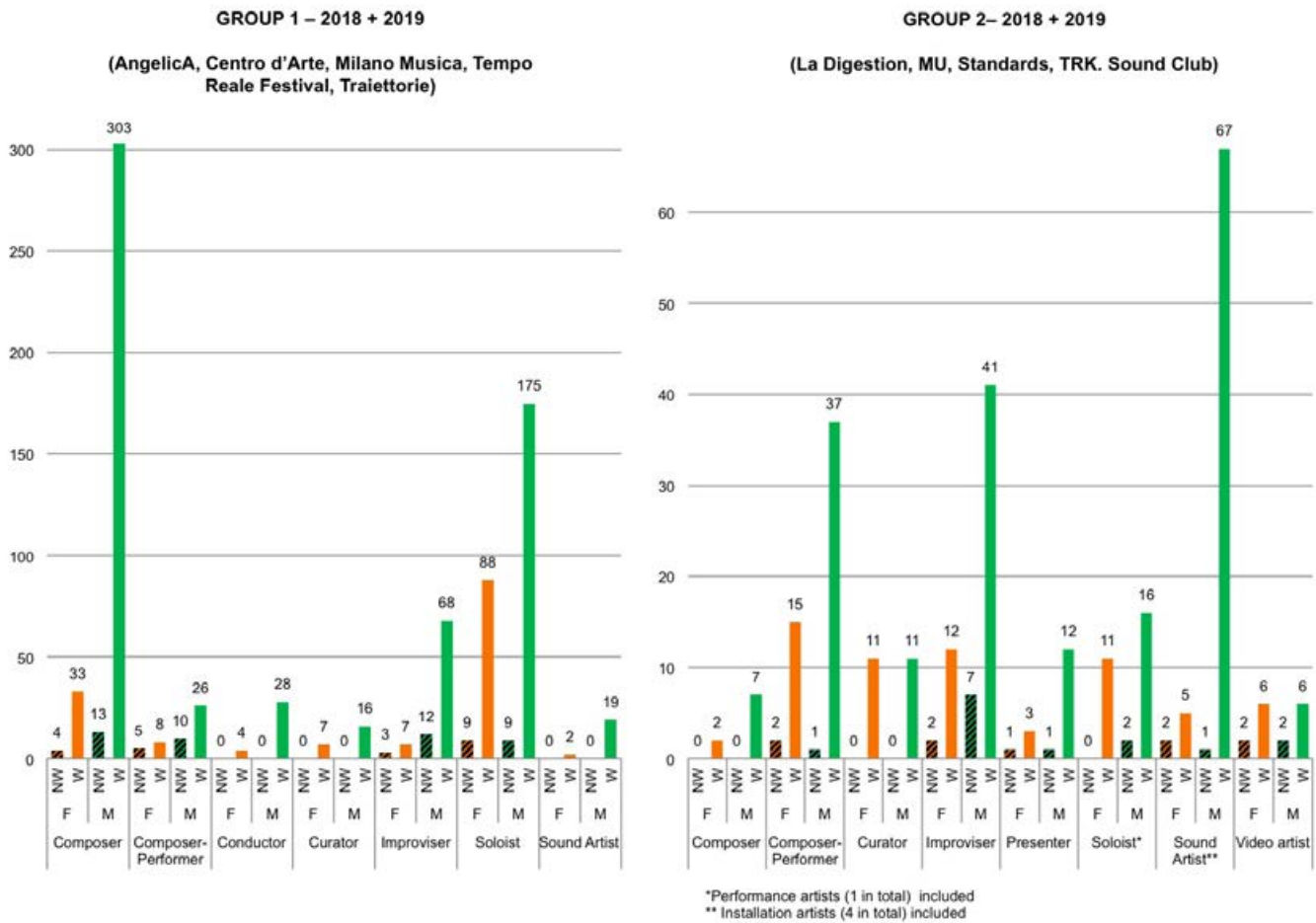


fig. 6b: Distribution of ethnicity and gender in relation to roles

festivals and concert seasons work within stringent budget limitations, and events with larger ensembles and orchestras are rare. Conversely, Group 2 sees traditional roles of composers and soloists relegated to the margins, and sound artists, improvisers, and composers-performers represent the core programming of these concert series as a whole. Nevertheless, even with such a different distribution of artistic roles, the tendencies of gender and ethnic diversity for each role are very similar in both Group 1 and 2.

Chart 7 divides living artists in any role in both Group 1 and 2 according to their activity time frame. Activity time frames are assigned with twenty-year intervals (from 1960s to the present, from 1980s to the present, etc.). If someone has been active in a professional way, even just at the end of that twenty-year period, they will still be included in it (e.g., someone who published their first recording in 1999 is in the “1980s-now” group) and it has nothing to do with the person’s date of birth. Similar to all other data dimensions, this category has been assigned through our research using online resources.

In particular, chart 7 shows the worrying prospect that new generations of artists are not necessarily bridging the gap between genders in any significant way. See, for example, the case of sound artists: we see that women are 0% in the timeframe “1980s-now” and 8% from “2000s-now”. Composers go from a 17% presence of women in the category “1960s-now” to 11% in the category “1980s-now” to 18% in the category “2000s-now”.

The only categories that see a meaningful improvement are those of composer-performers and soloists. Composers-performers go from 19% women in the category “1980s-now” to 37% in the category “2000s-now”. This can have many causes, but one of these might be a biased attribution of this category on our part (i.e., we were less inclined to assign these artists in the category of sound artists or composers due to internalised biases of what a composer/sound artist should look like, thus removing women from categories that are traditionally assigned to men and creating a new hybrid category where they are overrepresented). We want to make clear that we explored this possibility and reflected on it, and we do not think this is the case. However, even if we merge the categories of “composer-performer” and “composer” or “composer-performer” and “sound artist”, the new statistic would still look grim and with no meaningful improvement across time frames.

For what concerns soloists, we can see an improvement from 10% of women in the category “1960s-now”, to 27% in the category “1980s-now”, to 40% in the category “2000s-now”. This seems to be good news. In reality, we have no way to say if it is, yet. It might also mean that it is harder for women to have a lifelong career in music and that more women might quit at some point, privileging teaching or less travel-intensive careers. In the case of soloists and instrumental performers, a category that sometimes relies on traditional circuits and artist agencies and might not provide full control on the use of the performer’s image in photo shoots, the gender discrimination might also be coupled with discrimination based on age and physical appearance.

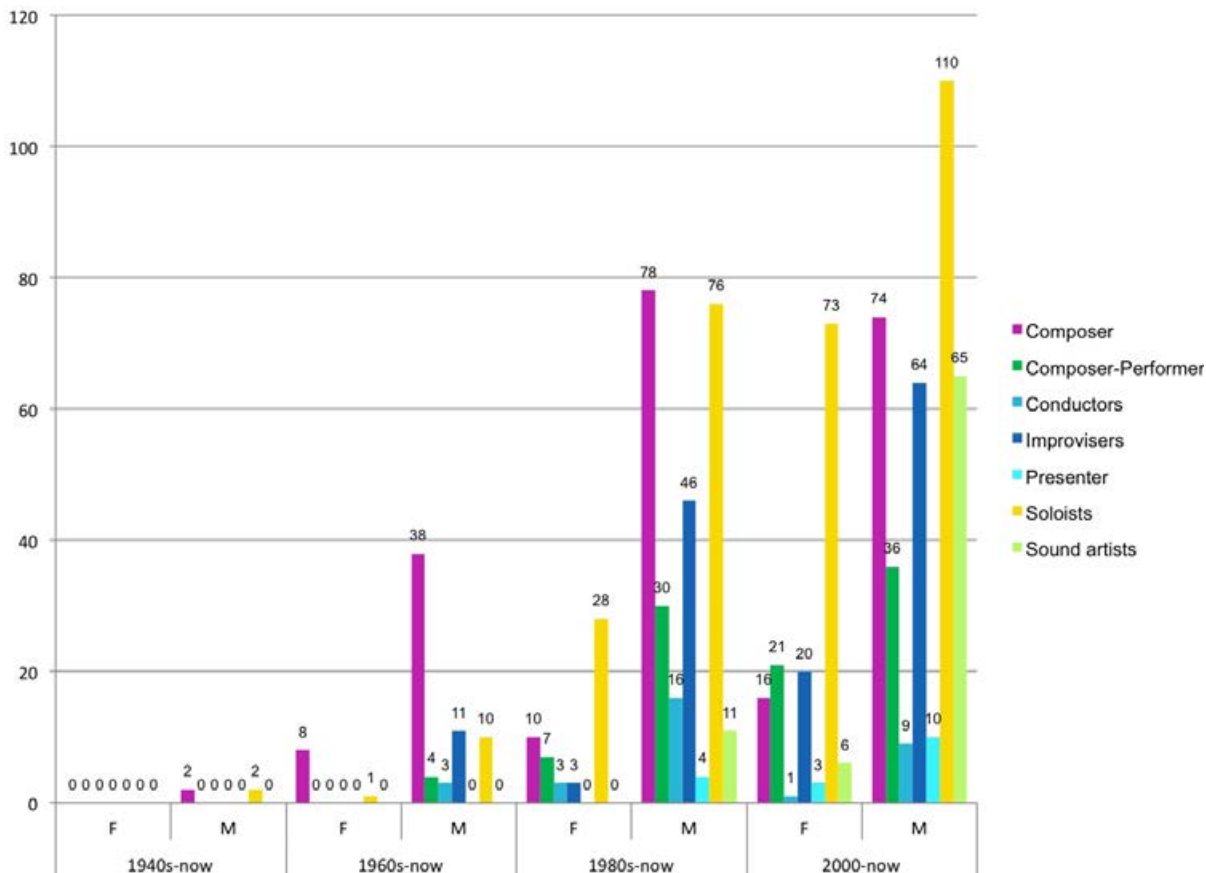


fig. 7: Distribution of gender and years of activity in relation to roles

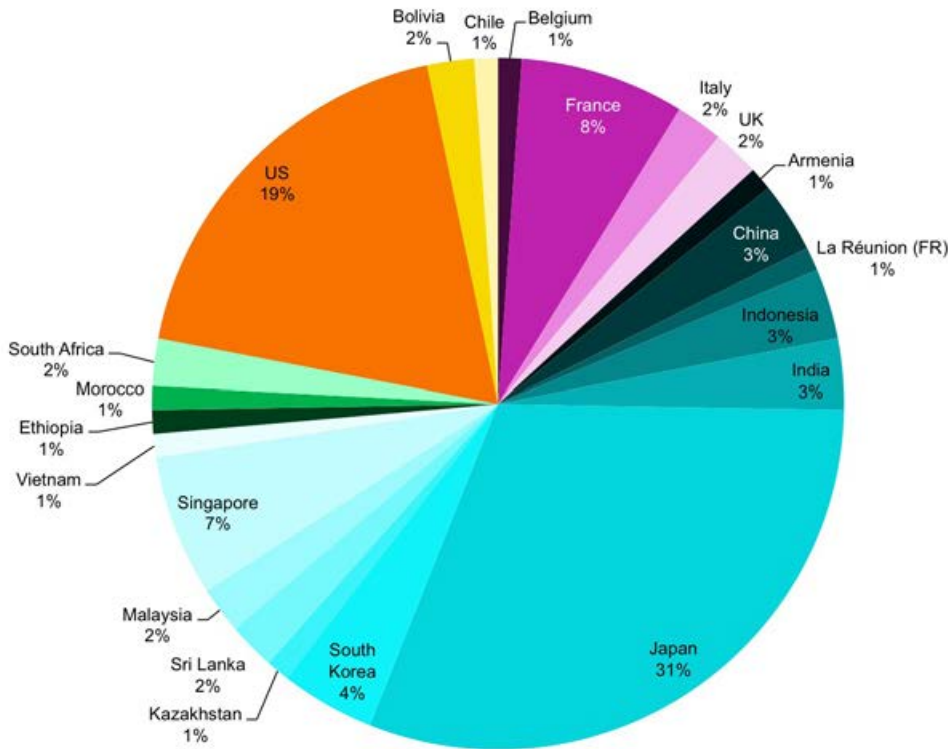


fig.8: Geographic origins of non-white artists

Chart 8 supports the initial claim that ethnic diversity is often coupled with migration and with foreignness. Indeed, artists from all European countries together account only for 13% of ethnic diversity in all these series. It is also worth noting that most of these European artists moved to Europe during their formative years. It is undeniable, then, that in Italy there are still strong barriers preventing the musical world from welcoming voices from Italians of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

## Conclusions

While the project started only recently, and we pursued it independently in our spare time, without any support (economic or infrastructural), we have:

- published two datasets and one report on chamber and symphonic music in Florence and Milan;
- presented our research at two international conferences;
- published the dataset related to this text;
- we are working on an article with our qualitative data on the chamber and symphonic scene in Milan, which will be part of a volume published by Routledge in the coming months.

In total, we covered twenty-one institutions active in Italy for a total of 657 events, for which we considered not only composers but also all other music-related roles involved (adding up to more than 2,000 individuals). With this groundwork data available almost entirely online, we hope it will be now impossible to hide or deny the blatant gender- and ethnic-based discrimination within the music industry. And now what?

While we have been writing this article, live performances stopped virtually everywhere due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Live performances in Italy have now been suspended

for almost five months. Every music worker (musicians, curators, performers, technicians, etc.) is dealing with the consequences of the pandemic personally, physically, psychologically, and economically. In the midst of all these challenges, our plea to end discrimination and re-emerge with more inclusive programming might seem insensitive, if not completely disconnected from reality, to most music organisers and artists. Yet, the ripple effect generated in Italy by the Black Lives Matter protests and the ensuing conversations (re)started about the country's colonial past as well as the inadequacy of its broadly accepted colour-blind approach (justified by meritocratic discourse) make our plea to the Italian musical world timelier than ever. There is no solution that fits everyone, except one: stop avoiding the problem.

But what is next for us, Curating Diversity? At this point we do not plan to collect more data. However, we would like to find partners that are willing to reflect *together* with us on solutions. We are happy that during our interview with Standards we felt we found this was somewhat possible, and we are hopeful for the future.

However, we also need to grow and improve our methods, mapping discriminatory practices in a way that is more respectful of personal identity. Our binary classifications were unsatisfactory for us, and we can barely imagine how problematic and triggering they might be for some members within the community we are trying to reach and support. Thus, we would like to modify our methodology in a radical way. Possibly, we would like to explore how to move to smaller datasets within communities that are willing to participate in surveys. In order to do so, we do not only need to partner with an institution but also an infrastructure to be able to keep sensitive data safe and to assure anonymity at the level wished by participants.

Finally, and more importantly, we will continue to engage in direct and non-academic conversations with every event organiser, musician, curator, and artistic director we can get hold of to expose them to uncomfortable questions that are rarely asked within the musical industry in Italy at the moment.

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## Notes

**1** Lilla Farkas and European Commission. Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, *Data collection in the field of ethnicity: Analysis and comparative review of equality data collection practices in the European Union* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017), 23–24. See also Italian National Institute of Statistics, *Indicatori demografici anno 2019*, [https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/02/Indicatori-demografici\\_2019.pdf](https://www.istat.it/it/files//2020/02/Indicatori-demografici_2019.pdf), presenting again the parameter of migration as the only one hinting to the diversity of the population.

**2** Farkas and European Commission, *Data Collection*; Ryan Heath, “Brussels is blind to diversity,” *Politico*, 12 March 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/brussels-blind-to-diversity-whiteout-european-parliament/>. The conflation population diversity/migration is also evident in the statistics available from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, where one can browse statistics by diversity (age, gender, and disability) or population (where once again only migration and migrant integration is mentioned): See Eurostat, “Browse statistics by theme,” accessed 22 April 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/browse-statistics-by-theme>.

**3** Valeria Deplano, “Senza distinzione di razza? Razzismo in controllo nel discorso pubblico italiano tra anni Cinquanta e anni Settanta,” *European South* 1 (2016): 95–102.

**4** Concerning our analysis of the 2018-2019 Milanese chamber and symphonic seasons, see Valentina Bertolani and Luisa Santacesaria, “Diversity in Italian music program-

ming: symphonic and chamber music programming in Milan,” *The Routledge Companion to Women and Musical Leadership: The Nineteenth Century and Beyond*, eds.

Laura Hamer and Helena Julia Minors (London: Routledge, forthcoming). See the data published for the 2018-2019 chamber and symphonic concert seasons in Florence (<https://curatingdiversity.org/firenze/>, last accessed 19 June 2020) and Milan (<https://curatingdiversity.org/milano/>, last accessed 27 June 2020)

**5** These institutions are publicly funded at the national level through the “FUS–Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo” (Central Fund for the Performing Arts) of the MiBACT–Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo (Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism).

**6** The only exception is the case of TRK. Sound Club, which is included in the programming of the research centre Tempo Reale and is supported by the same funds.

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# What Do Audiences Want? Data-Informed Curation for Diverse Audiences in New Music

## Gina Emerson

Debates around diversity in the field of new music tend to focus on figures such as the composer and the performer. Less consideration has been given to the people who come to receive their work, those taking in the concert from the audience's perspective. New music or 'contemporary classical music' as I typically prefer to call it,<sup>1</sup> can be considered to have a particularly strained relationship to audiences. In a recent interview study with contemporary arts attendees, new music was viewed as the most isolated contemporary art form, with audience members finding little point of reference for the genre, in comparison to film, visual art, and theatre.<sup>2</sup> In their study on new music audiences at three European festivals, Katarzyna Grebosz-Haring and Martin Weichbold report that these institutions "reproduce social inequality", in that it is predominantly an educated elite that attends and that educational concerts or similar efforts do little to re-shape the composition of the audience.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, 62% of CCM institutions in the UK who participated in a survey on audience development ( $N = 36$  institutions) reported that their audience numbers had either remained the same or declined in the past year.<sup>4</sup>

Knowing more about existing audiences' experiences with new music and what they value about it is an important step in healing this rift and bringing new audience members to this music. In this article, I outline a concept of *data-informed curation*, proposing how curators and institutions can use audience data to help them understand how audiences approach new music and to develop more open, inclusive atmospheres around attendance. I report an overview of findings on tastes, demographic factors, and concert experiences from a recent new music audience study, conducted as part of my doctoral research at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Hamburg. The study is the first of its size specifically on the audience experience of new music. I conducted surveys at twelve new music concerts in collaboration with the Ulysses Network for contemporary music.<sup>5</sup> 1,428 audience members took part in the survey across ten different European

countries. The overall aim of the study was to offer a multidimensional view of audiences' experiences, covering a range of aspects including demographics and motivations to attend new music concerts, perceptions of the genre, and audiences' aesthetic experiences in the concert hall, as well as institution-audience relationships and classical music audiences' views of CCM (via a smaller survey of three classical music audiences with 670 respondents).

### Audience Demographics

The core audience for new music across the European contexts in the study is from an elite, highly educated sector of society, one with a very high level of general cultural participation. Over a third of audience respondents attend more than 21 live music events a year. Within this core audience, however, there are several different forms of engagement with new music taking place, from very committed attendees with a professional interest to more occasional, socially motivated visitors. The average age of the sample was 48 years, older than that for most pop audiences and younger than the typical average for a classical music audience. There is also often considerable heterogeneity in age in comparison to other musical genres: findings from the present study and from existing research point to a mix of younger and older audience groups for new music.<sup>6</sup>

Musical expertise was a key divider between the twelve concerts, with some audiences being comprised almost entirely of new music experts (most likely composers and performers of this music) and other contexts in which non-musicians and amateur musicians were strongly in the majority. Musical expertise furthermore emerged as a significant predictor of frequency of new music concert attendance; this means that the higher someone's level of musical expertise, the higher the number of new music concerts they attend. This result expands upon existing findings that have tended to emphasise the importance of general education and its relationship to new music concert attendance.<sup>7</sup>

## Audience Tastes and Perceptions of New Music

As mentioned above, unlike other musical genres, new music appears able to appeal across age groups. Its often ‘classical’ forms and instruments attract older audience members familiar with that musical heritage, whereas elements of how it is presented and its connection to electronic music or experimentalism in other genres was found to be of interest to younger attendees.

At the event with the youngest average age in the sample, an installation at the Ultima Festival in 2018 (average age = 33 years), audience members listened to pop/rock, hip hop, electronic dance music alongside classical music and new music. In general, under 35s were more omnivorous in their musical tastes, not only reporting that they listen to a greater number of different genres regularly (4 to 5 different genres as opposed to 2 to 3 for over 65s) but also more readily crossing traditional ‘high/low’ boundaries in their tastes.

Respondents were asked for their associations with the term “contemporary classical music” and were offered a list of fifteen words to choose from, along with the option of adding their own free-form associations. The audience members largely reported positive perceptions of new music, associating the art form first and foremost with experimentalism (the term “Experimental” was chosen most frequently, accounting for 13.2% of all responses to this question), but also with unpredictability and as a source of inspiration.

Newcomers to new music (respondents who indicated that the survey concert was their first new music event) chose the words “Difficult”, “Strange”, “Different”, “Boring”, and “Unpredictable” more frequently than returning attendees. The 18-24-year-olds in the sample more frequently chose the term “Elitist”, indicating an impatience with the current status of new music among younger audience members (who are in general also more likely to be new music professionals in this sample). The 201 free-form responses to the association question brought many additional dimensions to light. In particular, associating new music with newness and innovation or with the purpose of rethinking and pushing boundaries was prevalent among the free associations. It was furthermore apparent among these responses that new music is a musical form that has developed contrasting views around itself. Many sets of opposites were found among the 201 terms: “relaxing”/“tension”, “valuable”/“meaningless”, and “non-emotional”/

“moving”, to name a few. Contrasts in the perception of the complexities of new music emerged alongside this. For some, such music is “cerebral”, “rigorous”, and “profound”, for others this complexity comes across as a “dissonant cacophony” or is associated with incomprehensibility and even being “exhausting”. These differing views on the same facet of new music indicate how there are tensions around the meaning of new music and whether it should be created or presented with a broader audience in mind or whether artistic experimentalism should always be prioritised.

These insights into perceptions and tastes around new music led me to describe this musical form as a “high art subculture”. Younger listeners combine it with or come to it via musical genres more clearly related to subcultures (e.g. hip hop or electronic dance music); it has evident insider-outsider dynamics between audience groups, and it is relatively frequently associated with being critical or “different”, existing in contrast to the classical music “mainstream”. However, it clearly still operates within the structures and institutions of high art.

## The Audience Experience: Receiving Different Repertoire and Concert Formats

Existing research on new music audiences has tended to omit discussion of the actual experience of live new music in the concert hall. Exceptions to this include studies that have worked closely together with composers to analyse audience members’ understanding of new works and research that has looked at audience participation in new music,<sup>8</sup> as well as a small number of music psychology studies that have explored the reception of live atonal or improvised music.<sup>9</sup> The results from the Ulysses Network study develop a number of these ideas. This looked at audience experience in general and by musical expertise, at the aesthetic experience of works of new music and at the reception of different concert formats. While first-time attendees did report positive experiences at new music concerts, they felt significantly less informed about the music and less communicated with by the performers than returning attendees, providing mean ratings for these dimensions that were below the sample average. New music experts displayed a tendency to be significantly less satisfied than groups with lower levels of musical expertise, reporting below average satisfaction. This marks out their status as connoisseurs who feel comfortable expressing dissatisfaction. That less experienced audience members perhaps do not feel able

to critique a new music concert experience speaks to how this is often considered a specialist genre. Making concert experiences more welcoming for newcomers could mean creating an atmosphere in which expressing criticism or discomfort does not feel intimidating.

Four patterns in aesthetic experience across all the works surveyed emerged. Pieces with some form of extramusical element (audiovisual feature, audience participation) or for which the performers were known to be familiar to the audience were received more positively than other works, or more intensely, depending on the atmosphere of the piece. This points strongly to the importance of the ‘framing’ of musical content: the reception of new music is evidently very context-dependent, a similar finding to Jutta Toelle and John A. Sloboda.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, tonality as a musical feature was perceived as enjoyable and emotive but less of an aesthetic innovation. Thirdly, new works by young composers were perceived as more original than those by more established composers. Finally, more complex, denser works fared poorly in terms of enjoyability and creating an emotive experience. This point connects these insights to the debates on whether composers have pushed musical language too far, beyond the limits of audiences’ music cognition, and whether this matters.<sup>11</sup>

### **Data-Informed Curation and Building Democratic Relationships with Audiences**

The data on audience tastes, perceptions of new music, and experiences discussed here provide many insights that can feed into the curation and planning of new music events. I propose that institutions and actors in the field of new music could benefit from listening to audiences through practising *data-informed curation*. Whilst more common in the fields of health and education,<sup>12</sup> data-informed decision-making is becoming more prevalent in the arts.<sup>13</sup> Forms of participatory decision-making are also receiving greater attention. Research on theatre and dance audiences by Jennifer Radbourne, Katya Johanson, and Hilary Glow has assessed the impact of practices such as programming via audience polls, offering ‘work-in-progress’ showings of new productions, and gathering feedback on them and building an “artistic counsel” of audience members and cultural experts.<sup>14</sup> The authors illustrate how these forms of democratic curation allow novice audiences to have their opinions on the quality of artistic work listened to, rather than prioritising and valuing the views of the expert or critic.<sup>15</sup>

Which data or feedback sources are potentially available to curators of new music, and how can they be usefully implemented to inform decision-making? Data sources could include audience research carried out by academic institutions as presented here, booking data from ticket sales, insights from social media and newsletter subscriptions, as well as data or feedback collected directly by organisers from their audiences. All of these enable curators to gain a clearer picture of their audiences’ behaviours (e.g. do they book early or late and do they attend with others?) and interests (e.g. what other types of music or other art forms are of interest to them?). However, the option of collecting audience data as an organisation is the most informative and most likely to be applicable. While longer online or in-concert surveys will be able to provide more detail, postcards handed out to audience members after a performance or short, informal interviews can be sufficient to gain a sense of the audience’s perspective. Offering any type of forum for exchange alters the usual dynamic of the audience as the silent receiver, democratising their contact with new music. Since knowing more about audiences is the key to engaging more fruitfully with them, it could become an aim in the field of new music to systematically pool audience data within specific cities or scenes (see, for example, cross-art form “Audience Finder” function from the UK organisation, the Audience Agency<sup>16</sup>).

As for the curation of new music specifically, I wish to sketch out two more specific ways in which audience data could be used effectively. Firstly, data on audiences’ tastes and the extent to which these represent omnivorous taste patterns could lead to innovative ways of combining genres in curation. Curating across genres is likely to bring new, curious audience members to new music via other musical forms that are more familiar to them. Collaborating with institutions that present other forms of contemporary art (visual art, dance, theatre, film, etc.) would be another means of bringing together different groups based on data on cultural interests. Such data could be used as the basis for an “audience exchange”,<sup>17</sup> in which collaborating institutions ‘swap’ audiences for an event, offering a ticket discount or other form of incentive to encourage participation. The experiences can then be talked about in a guided discussion between audience members and curators or artists.

In a second model, more continuous audience feedback could be used to reduce the risk of trying out more ambitious, larger, or more unconventional event formats

or programmes that might be aimed at attracting an audience group new to new music. Behind-the-scenes experiences, such as the work-in-progress showings described in Radbourne, Glow, and Johanson's work,<sup>18</sup> could be a way of testing the waters with this production or this new audience group, allowing organisations to assess whether they are likely to come along to the final event or recommend coming to friends and family. Opening up the creative process in this way has been viewed favourably by audience participants in other studies.<sup>19</sup> For unconventional formats, for example, set-ups that do not involve seating, it is also important to consider aspects of accessibility and whether there could be potential physical barriers to participation.

Whichever strategy is being applied, when implementing data, curators should aim to map out a plan of how the data will inform decision-making. At which steps in the process of curation will audience data or feedback be most useful and relevant? If working in a team, there also needs to be clarification over who will be responsible for inputting, managing, and processing data according to the relevant data protection guidelines.

### Final Thoughts

The concept of data-informed curation for new music that I have sketched out here is intended to open up a conversation on the value of the audience perspective in this musical form. I do not wish to suggest that audiences' views and tastes should be the only influence on programming decisions, nor that 'fulfilling' audiences' needs should be the aim of new music programming. Considering the audience response could simply lead to more sustainable and egalitarian relationships with listeners and could even offer more precise ways of breaking expectations of an artistic experience in some instances. Being intentional about curation and about using available audience research and data can only serve to strengthen organisations presenting new music. It does not always have to be 'about' the audience but, given that a lot of new music is created and performed in publicly funded contexts, it is definitely time to create room for dialogue and exchange with the wider public.

### Notes

**1** I follow musicologist Sarah Collins in finding that terms such as "new music" and "contemporary music" have "a pretence of neutrality while in fact being intensely ideological," in that they imply that newly composed music in the Western art tradition can be the only truly

new music. I find that this undervalues the contemporaneity of pop music and other styles, but I will adapt to terminology used in this special issue and use the term "new music" here. See Sarah Collins, "What was contemporary music?: The new, the modern and the contemporary in the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM)," in *The Routledge Research Companion to Modernism in Music* (London: Routledge, 2019), 57.

**2** Stephanie E. Pitts and Sarah M. Price, *Understanding Audiences for the Contemporary Arts Sector Handbook* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2019),

<http://www.sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk/uaca/handbook/>.

**3** Katarzyna Grebosz-Haring and Martin Weichbold, "Contemporary art music and its audiences: Age, gender, and social class profile," *Musicae Scientiae* 24, no. 1 (May 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864918774082>.

**4** Sound and Music, *The Audience Development Survey 2015*, January 2015, <http://www.soundandmusic.org/ads2015>.

**5** Formed as part of the European Union's Creative Europe programme in 2012, the Ulysses Network is a group of the following thirteen new music institutions: Impuls (Graz, AT), the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (Tallinn, EE), Snape Maltings (Aldeburgh, GB), IRCAM (Paris, FR), Opus XXI (DE/FR/AT), Gaudeamus Muziekweek (Utrecht, NL), IEMA (Frankfurt, DE), Flagey (Brussels, BE), Divertimento Ensemble (Milano, IT), Time of Music (Viitasaari, FI), Darmstadt Summer Courses (Darmstadt, DE), Royaumont Foundation (Royaumont, FR) and the Ultima Festival (Oslo, NO). The pilot survey took place at the Impuls Festival in February 2017, the twelve surveys were conducted at each of the remaining institutions in 2017 and 2018.

**6** Grebosz-Haring and Weichbold, "Contemporary art music and its audiences"; Deutsches Musikinformationszentrum, Themenportal Konzerte & Musiktheater, s.v. "Konzertpublika – Sozialstruktur, Mentalitäten, Geschmacksprofile" (Concert audiences – social structure, mentality, taste profile), by Hans Neuhoff (2008), [http://www.miz.org/static\\_de/themenportale/einfuehrungstexte\\_pdf/03\\_KonzerteMusiktheater/neuhoff.pdf](http://www.miz.org/static_de/themenportale/einfuehrungstexte_pdf/03_KonzerteMusiktheater/neuhoff.pdf).

**7** Henriette Zehme, *Zeitgenössische Musik und ihr Publikum. Eine soziologische Untersuchung im Rahmen der Dresdner Tage der zeitgenössischen Musik* (Contemporary music and its public: a sociological examination in the context of the Dresden contemporary music days), (Regensburg: ConBrio, 2005).

**8** Melissa C. Dobson and John Sloboda, "Staying behind: explorations in post-performance musician–audience dialogue," in *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience*, eds. Karen Burland and Stephanie

Pitts (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), 159–74); Jutta Toelle and John A. Sloboda, “The audience as artist? The audience’s experience of participatory music” *Musicae Scientiae* (April 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1029864919844804>.

**9** Examples of such music psychology studies include Gina Emerson and Hauke Egermann “Gesture-sound causality from the audience’s perspective: Investigating the aesthetic experience of performances with digital musical instruments,” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 12, no. 1 (February 2018): 96–109; Roger Reynolds, “Epilog: Reflections on Psychological Testing with The Angel of Death,” *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 22, no. 2 (2004): 351–356.

**10** Toelle and Sloboda, “Staying behind.”

**11** See Fred Lerdahl, “Cognitive Constraints on Compositional Systems,” *Contemporary Music Review* 6, no. 2 (1992): 97–121; David Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

**12** See, for example, Nutley et al., “Moving data off the shelf and into action: an intervention to improve data-informed decision making in Côte d’Ivoire,” *Global Health Action* 7, no. 1 (2014); Young et al., “Adopting and adapting: school leaders in the age of data-informed decision making,” *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability* 30, no. 2 (May 2018): 133–158.

**13** Audience Agency, *Data and Insight Reports*, n.d., <https://www.theaudienceagency.org/products/data-and-insight-reports>; Leila Jancovich, “Great art for everyone? Engagement and participation policy in the arts,” *Cultural Trends* 20, nos. 3-4 (November 2011): 271–279; Price et al., “Spontaneity and planning in arts attendance: insights from qualitative interviews and the Audience Finder database,” *Cultural Trends* 28, nos. 2–3 (2019): 220–238.

**14** Jennifer Radbourne, Katya Johanson, and Hilary Glow, “Empowering Audiences to Measure Quality,” *Participations* 7, no. 2 (November 2010): 360–379.

**15** See also Sabine Boerner and Sabine Renz, “Performance Measurement in Opera Companies: Comparing the Subjective Quality Judgements of Experts and Non-Experts,” *International Journal of Arts Management* 10 no. 3 (2008): 21–37; Abigail Gilmore, Hilary Glow, and Katya Johanson, “Accounting for quality: Arts evaluation, public value and the case of ‘Culture Counts,’” *Cultural Trends* 26, no. 4 (November 2017): 282–294.

**16** <https://audiencefinder.org/>, last accessed 1 July 2020.

**17** Stephanie Pitts and Jonathan Gross, “Audience exchange: cultivating peer-to-peer dialogue at unfamiliar arts events,” *Arts and the Market* 7, no. 1 (May 2017): 65–79.

**18** Radbourne, Johanson, and Glow, “Empowering audiences to measure quality.”

**19** Jonathan Gross and Stephanie Pitts, “Audiences for the contemporary arts: Exploring varieties of participation across art forms in Birmingham, UK,” *Participations* 13, no. 1 (May 2016): 4–23.

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# New Music: Towards a Diversity of Practices

## Sandeep Bhagwati

### 1

#### New Music as an Overcommons

In Europe, the notion of “New Music” as a deliberate rule-changing aesthetic dates back to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, when some French church musicians ignored a papal decree outlawing certain developments in church music which were deemed to be excessive in many ways. Not only did they continue to write this music, they also boldly declared it to be an *Ars Nova*: an articulate, self-awarely progressive alternative to the established sacred tradition (called *Ars Antiqua* from now on). *Ars Nova* music became fashionable amongst French nobles—and since then the incitement to never look back, to break new ground, to expand the zone of aesthetic combat became one of the central auto-narrative metaphors of European music-making.

Such articulate rebellions took hold in the European mindset at a time when the warring kingdoms of this Northwest Asian subcontinent were still a cultural, political, financial backwater to the rich and storied Asian civilisation in which the Byzantine Empire, the Yuan Dynasty, the Mamluk and the Tughluq Sultanates, the Golden Horde, the Ilkhanate, and the Chagatai Khanate were the major players. The concept of a learned rebellion against an established form of music-making thus became important to European musicians at a time when being a Byzantine, Mongol, Arab, or Mamluk artist came with much more historical awareness, theory, significance, and resonance than anything the powerless Church of Rome or the uncouth warrior courts of Europe could hope to offer. The *Ars Nova* impulse was thus a doubly minoritarian move: an apostatic music style in a culture at the margin of the civilised world.

Making a new kind of music was thus from the outset correlated with a keen sense of being marginal—and with a macho narrative of openly defying the established discourse, of flaunting conventions, of rebelling against the status quo. The militaristic overtones of this attitude have persisted deeply into the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s avant-garde movements and its notion of advanced musical technique and aesthetics.

The self-image of being minoritarian often comes with a certain insouciance towards and an unwillingness to acknowledge the marginality of others. This may explain the surprising and enduring reluctance of many New Music makers to even acknowledge that their own field has a problem with diversity and gender equity: to a scene that sees itself in a permanent struggle to be heard by those in power, the insinuation that it might be exclusionary can appear as just another ploy to weaken its purpose—from this perspective, the call for diversity may be shrewdly ‘unmasked’ as a diversionary, oppressive tactic of the powerful cultural mainstream. This is indeed a sentiment I have heard in many variations from my colleagues in the new music profession: “We are a small and beleaguered community, our calling is not to represent averages but to promote visionary art. Considerations of diversity will inevitably lower our quality standards and thus endanger our *raison d’être*.”

Quite obviously—and such a sentiment shows it—the *Ars Nova* type of newly made music has never been marginal in the sense of being oppressed or unseen. When Alexandra T. Vazquez argues that, “Music has always been a nurturing, shifting ground for the undercommons of the Enlightenment,”<sup>1</sup> invoking Stefano Harney’s and Fred Moten’s powerful notion of the “undercommons,”<sup>2</sup> she explicitly excludes “New Music” from that argument: “When [music] is taken up as a primary object of inquiry, it can be made alien and technical. Some attempt to make a property of it. Such are the consequences of abandoning it to experts.”

And indeed, the *Ars Nova* type of newly made music in most cases cannot be part of the undercommons—for it has always been an integral part of what one could call the overcommons: an informal rhizome of elite artists, academics, and activists that reinforces existing social dynamics by over-accentuating them. For overcommons thinking, it is not enough to have inequality and competition in real life—the arts must be even more competitive and ruthless than society at large. It is not enough to aspire to the ecstasies of the moment; one must aspire to eternal truth. It is not enough that music-making satisfies the aesthetic desires of a certain

community, it must enshrine universal aesthetic relevance. It cannot be content with competence; it must demand extreme virtuosity. And when it comes to negativity, New Music cannot simply be about sadness or loss; it must be about utter devastation. It cannot be about creating a voice; it must be primarily about the unspeakable.<sup>3</sup> Overcommons thinking is a thinking in hyperbole—and it is dead serious about it.

Just as the rebel musicians of the historical *Ars Nova* had been prominent and powerful men at the courts of their time, the rebels of New Music have rarely displayed a raging desire to topple the existing social order. They were quite content when the opera house, the symphony orchestra played their new pieces instead of some older ones. The anti-establishment posturing of New Music has always been more part of a court intrigue between the highly favoured and the slightly less favoured than a call for a revolution of the masses: playing the marginal was a tactical enactment that could be abandoned once the desired position of privilege had successfully been secured. And in modern societies, the position of this music often is indeed one of privilege: many public and private sponsors fund New Music-making with patronage, opportunity, and recognition, allowing it to build lasting institutions and inhabit the academy. That the music itself still does not command the interest and adulation of the general public allows this overcommons to re-use the narrative of marginality to suss out new support: New Music has always been an institutionalised top-down rebellion.

Seeing New Music as an integral part of an overcommons is the foundation of my argument on diversity in this paper. It is why I do not believe in counting heads when it comes to diversity and why I think that proportional representation is a smokescreen argument that hides deeper fault lines in the way our societies deal with diversity.

## 2 Representation as a Trap

Many discourses around gender and diversity focus on statistics, on counting bodies: how many women, how many “people of colour”, how many X or Y are represented in a certain setting. This can be an important focus, especially if you want to raise awareness for a statistically significant and enduring imbalance. Such a focus also helps to energise those who feel underrepresented and disadvantaged, by supporting their felt reality with the numbers that can serve them to confront discrimination deniers.

But in voluntary pursuits such as music, unequal representation is usually not a solution to a problem specific to that particular pursuit—it is, rather, an indicator of another problem elsewhere. Musical traditions are not state institutions with pervasive powers over life, death, and quarantine. One can engage with them—or not. And just like all other voluntary pursuits, those attracted to it flock to it—and those that are not, do not. Imbalances of all kinds (geographic, gender, social class, skin colour, religion, etc.) are only to be expected in such a situation. These imbalances become virulently problematic, however, when they are structural, enforced, and ideologised—and thus hinder or deter talented people from another demographic than the majority that upholds this particular tradition to pursue their interest in this tradition or to get recognised for their contributions to it.

The most proximate reason one could give, for example, for the fact that not many women or Muslims (or people who are both) attend and graduate from university composition seminars is that not enough women or Muslims apply to them. This problem may be momentarily assuaged (but not permanently solved) by selecting more women or Muslims for the seminars to achieve proportional representation in the seminar itself. The real problem, however, seems to be that not enough women or Muslims choose to even enter this course of study—and the reasons for this may lie in any combination of 1) in the social image of written music composition as a white, male, Judeo-Christian pursuit (with a concomitant rarity of role models and teachers outside this demographic); 2) the macho overcommons cut-throat atmosphere of new music seminars and festivals; 3) the lack of a sustainable career path—which privileges those with significant family resources; 4) viable and more attractive or more familiar alternatives (e.g., Hindustani art music in the case of musicians from India). Not all of these reasons are necessarily instances of systemic marginalisation or exclusion—they can also imply agency on the part of those who choose to simply not respond to an unattractive offer and decide to seek their education elsewhere.

The unique problem for New Music lies in the fact that the kind of music taught in these composition seminars has for a long time laid claim (and sometimes still does) to a definitive, universally acknowledged moral and technical superiority in musical matters, and that its overcommons narrative of expertise and elitism has tended to discount the essential validity and relevance of other musical practices for the cultural future of

humanity (they do not do it for less). When Pierre Boulez admitted that he both admired the musical traditions of Asia for their perfection and, in the same breath, pronounced them dead,<sup>4</sup> he declared a future without any music that did not have its roots firmly in eurological musical thinking—and in this speech act, he condemned all other musical practices of the world to imminent oblivion. For too long, many in the field of New Music did not see anything fundamentally wrong with this pronouncement; even if they were attracted to other traditions, they liked them in a rather nostalgic manner: they would have loved to hear them *before* they were polluted by European music, when they were still “authentic”—thereby assuming that the contemporary state of these musics is some kind of illness, that their current hybrid practices are expressions of decay. For a long time, it has seemed self-evident to many in academia and the New Music scene that any music outside of European modernity had to be moribund. Any interest it still held had to be museological in nature.

Exclusion from the future is real suppression—or rather, it would have been, if Boulez and his peers then or now had had any actual power over the future of music. But they did not: the ideas about New Music that assume its inherent superiority must be regarded more as propaganda than policy, more aspiration than analysis. What nevertheless remains real, however, is the institutional, financial, and discursive clout that New Music-making has enjoyed in some regions of the world. With this clout, its proponents try to exercise some control over the inevitable flow of music into the future—and try to influence its narrative.

One of the tools for this control has for a long time been representation—first in the form of tokenism (where individual artists are taken to represent an entire culture/tradition/country that normally lies outside of New Music’s normal population), and now in the form of statistical representation. Both seem to be traps, but while tokenism has been deconstructed by subaltern and postcolonial studies many times already, the jury still seems to be out on statistical representation.

### TRAP 1

#### **Statistical Representation can promote both liberation and oppression**

Representation compares percentages in a reference population with percentages in the focus group. When comparison shows a large sector of the population to be underrepresented, militating for equal representation can indeed have a liberating and emancipatory effect.

But what happens when a small sector of the population is perceived to be overrepresented in the group? Perceived overrepresentation of Jews in the arts, journalism, and finance has been one of the most persistent anti-Semitic tropes, and I have heard similar observations expressed with regard to queer artists. So, statistical representation can—and often is—put to work both ways. It is not a panacea.

Moreover, who decides on the reference group?

Representation as an argument works most convincingly with gender—the general distribution of gender does not wildly vary between any general population samples. But the same method is not so clear-cut with ethnic or skin colour or cultural populations. Should a festival in Aix-en-Provence proportionally represent Chinese musicians in Aix vs. non-Chinese musicians in Aix, or Chinese *people* in Aix vs non-Chinese People in Aix, or Chinese *musicians* in France/Europe/the world with non-Chinese musicians in the same sample, etc.? Such questions are obnoxious precisely because they are indeed legitimate—and thus can be (and often are) used to distract and deflect from the issue at hand. Discussions about the statistical reliability of any number can trap us in fine mathematical sophistication, when our real concern must be about awareness and counter-action.

### TRAP 2

#### **Turning representation into a discriminatory act**

While many emancipatory impulses arose from situations of formalised exclusion (women, race, queer, postcolonial), other impulses protest the (in)visible systemic societal, economic, moralistic residues (or causes) of formalised exclusion in situations of formally established equality. Recent debates have, moreover, introduced concepts of self-identification and dis-identification,<sup>5</sup> primarily of gender and aesthetics, to express and claim subjective experiences of exclusion and marginalisation.

One of the inherent conundrums of cross- and intersectional emancipation is the question of a moral hierarchy between these different histories of exclusion. If there is a hierarchy—do we then not repeat the same discriminatory classifications that we wanted to abolish on this level? And if there is none—how do we then assess how relevant each of them is to any given diversity context? This can lead to curious situations: Afro-American musicians observing quite naturally on a panel in Germany that all musical genres are always expressions of race—a term and a means of categorising



people that German public discourse studiously avoids because of its Nazi overtones. Or: Indian classical musicians describing rampant misogyny in their own music tradition and praising Western music for its openness to female performers—to the visible discomfort of their postcolonialistically woke European audience. Whataboutism of any hue can find ample grazing ground in this quagmire terrain.

Surprisingly often, I have heard representation being touted as a way out: one could assess the relative importance of emancipatory agendas by their proportional importance in the population or in history. Apart from the statistical problems outlined in Trap 1, this hierarchisation by numbers presents us with an emotional and moral impossibility: musicians know that the resonance and the emotional impact of a sound does not depend on its statistical frequency but on its relational connections within a complex stream of events. Likewise, the different emancipatory agendas cannot be quantified, they can only be parsed—like a polyphony in which everything that happens in one voice influences all the others, and where background and foreground constantly shift in complex entanglements of relevance and urgency.

### TRAP 3 Counting heads becomes a problem of identity

People, especially artists, are not necessarily representatives of a statistically definable group. In a famous passage of his book *Identity and Violence*,<sup>6</sup> economist Amartya Sen describes how “the same person can be, without any contradiction, an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a vegetarian, a woman, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theatre lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings out in space whom it is extremely urgent to talk to (preferably in English).”

If diversity is viewed as a matter of counting heads or bodies, how do we account for the many gradations of gender that have been introduced to this debate? And with increasingly complex biographies that span the globe, how do we curtail those into a statistical category? Under which diversity category do we count a heterosexual composer born in India, half part of a local minority and half foreigner, who went to school in different parts of Germany, studied music in Austria, Germany, and

France, is now is an artist-researcher in Quebec, an ensemble leader in Berlin and in Pune and a poet everywhere. Do we go by name (Indian), religion (none or several), training (eurological concert music), everyday language (Dengliçais), passport (German), or taxes (Canada)?

Add to that the observation that many artists become artists precisely to redefine their ascribed identities, or to disidentify with certain aspects of an identity they grew up into—and it becomes clear that simply counting heads here is an oversimplification of reality—which seems to be born out of a desire to domesticate and control the discourse on diversity, not to promote it. In *New Music*, representation by numbers all too often is a handy way of going through the motions, to not address the harder questions about diversity.

Not-belonging to a statistically definable grouping can be precarious in *New Music*, too. Universal and open-minded aspirations notwithstanding, its funding, its attributions of respect, and its support networks still rely on articulations of belonging: for any sustained resonance of your work, it seems to be supremely important that you and your work can be claimed by or attributed to a lineage, a community, an aesthetic school, a place, a city, a country. It is important to note that such incorporations do not have to be correlated to the artist’s own sense or absence of identity—they are, by definition, social personas that others concoct around the artist. Not always, though, are they unwelcome: indeed, many artists surf on such attributed identities throughout their careers, some even sincerely believe in their own. Others, however, evade these re-possessionings of their biography; they have become what in another text I have called “Native Aliens.”

“Native Aliens are curious creatures: they are always alert, master the lingos of many locales, have learnt their implicit, unspoken codes, and thus can move and feel like the locals [...] We Native Aliens can fit into many places, and each may sometimes feel just like home to us—and yet, at the same time, uncannily alienating. And we, therefore, are always aware how this native intimacy relates to a wider, alternative world [...] to be a Native Alien does not mean to be free of the desire to belong, nor to shun the pleasures and amenities of a home—but it does mean: to not be a home-addict. For we have observed how ‘belonging’ so often will slide into vicious addiction: how it must be enjoyed in moderation. The loneliness of Native Aliens is that of the sober guest reveling with drunken friends—ready to

blend in and enjoy the fun, but always on edge for when the mood turns sour, prepared to leave the feast at any hour.”<sup>7</sup>

Try to proportionalise that!

### 3

#### **Towards a Diversity of Practices**

It is obvious that the institutions championing a heavily subsidised art form such as eurological New Music are not capable of changing their *modus operandi* overnight. In organisations centred around a specific artistic praxis, diversity can perhaps indeed only be perceived as a question of bodies and personnel.

All musical practices are somewhat unbalanced in their personnel makeup—as mentioned above, belonging to them, interacting with them, learning them is not pervasive in the same way citizenship is. Accidents of geography, gender, aesthetic fads, role models, political questions, etc., influence the complexion of any tradition’s roster of practitioners. Many artistic practices have indeed become gendered and differently hierarchised—and this often according to the value system in their home culture. In Japan, aesthetic expressions involving textiles, pottery, furniture-making, etc., are part of the traditional artistic mainstream, and we thus know of many male artists, while in the West, the same activities are rarely considered to even be artistic—they have largely become associated with female practitioners,<sup>8</sup> and have therefore often been classified as crafts. Or is it the other way around...

In music, the social hierarchy between composing, conceptualising and theorising music on the one hand and playing and organising music on the other also shows strong evidence of gendered art-making, where women are much more visible as players and organisers than they are as composers and theorists—roles that, as a matter of course, are also more esteemed, even if that esteem rarely translates into money.

Similarly, musical practices are heavily hierarchised in the current academic climate: Eurological musicking is at the top (the most ‘advanced’ music), while so-called “primitive/ethnic” musicking is the most backward, and all other practices are positioned somewhere in-between. Then: Western music is supposedly universal (anyone can learn it), other musics are frequently ethnicised (you must have this music in your blood) or at least portrayed mainly as generators of identity. Such curious hierarchies and their resulting sense of empow-

erment directly influence who thinks of themselves as a potential composer, and who therefore dares apply to a university seminar in composition. Especially if the music you know best is not on offer...

We, therefore, do not only need more diverse heads and bodies of our kind encroaching, infesting, infiltrating, investing old and existing institutions: we actually need new kinds of New Music institutions—ensembles, networks, festivals, academies, venues, summer courses—which are built not around one or a few particular, historically and geographically circumscribed practices involving newly made music, but on an explicit acceptance of and active interest in a rich diversity of practices.

Such practice-agnostic artistic institutions would acknowledge the fundamental artistic equity (not equality) of all practices, regardless of their gender, social, and ethnic connotation and regardless of their place in the aesthetic hierarchies of the West. It would view “new” practices equivalent-in-principle to “traditional” practices. And it would understand hybrid practices (inter/trans-disciplinary, inter/trans-traditional) as emerging “new” practices, not as a series of individual ephemeral “tradition-less” experiments that have to make their case anew each time.

The conceptual framework, the practical logistics, and the aesthetic complexity around such institutions seems to be mindboggling—much more strenuous, obviously, than choosing a few Latino and Iranian women composers for a festival program that otherwise remains within the audience’s white, Western expectations. But here, I take solace in the most prototypical Euro-logical music institution: a symphony orchestra comprises instruments that came from Central Asian horse cultures (the string instruments), from Central European metal cultures (brass), from Asian and African percussion and from West Asian river cultures (reeds), etc. It is a very expensive multi-rooted community of instruments that needs an inordinately high number of highly specialised musicians who practise and rehearse almost every day and who must train at expensive universities. And all this for jobs at an institution that despite attracting mid-size crowds cannot usually sustain itself—for all orchestras heavily rely on sponsors who replenish their sizeable deficits season after season. If someone were to pitch the idea of an orchestra to funders today, no one would see such an enterprise as viable, neither logistically nor aesthetically. And yet it exists—and its existence also is a living

example of how heterogeneity of origin and purpose can nevertheless come together in an inclusive format—and in the process give rise to a new kind of world-making through sound.

All arts, and especially music, have deep roots in a history of elitism, discrimination, and exclusion. We are rapidly becoming aware that our present world is one of incontrovertible diversity, but as musicians and cultural workers we still struggle to give this insight shape, meaning, purpose—and nonchalance. I believe that, in order to do that, we cannot count on representation—because we would perpetuate categories, divisions, and discriminations that increasingly lose relevance for our lives. Rather, we must learn quickly how to let newly made music arise from a diversity of practices.

In 2013, I set out to do precisely that with three ensembles based on a diversity of musical practices, in Montréal, Berlin, and Pune. These are still early days, but the first run of experiments in such wildly heterogenous ensembles seems promising. It would be time for festivals and venues to engage with such kinds of post-exotic project—not as curiosities, not as an “orchestra of minorities”, but as a matter of course: as a first step into an inclusive and diversified future of music-making.

## Notes

**1** Alexandra T. Vazquez (Princeton U, Prof. of African American Studies), *Listening in Detail: Performances of Cuban Music* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2013), 94: “Music is often relegated to anecdote, used to fluff one’s prose, or made to propel a decided-upon argument. When it is taken up as a primary object of inquiry, it can be made alien and technical. Some attempt to make a property of it. Such are the consequences of abandoning it to experts, of leaving it at the door of the conservatory in the middle of the night. And yet, for all attempts made for its quarantine, it does not stay put. Because of music’s capacity to be many places at once, it walks through the academy’s walls. Josh Kun writes, ‘music does not respect places precisely it is capable of inhabiting them while moving across them – of arriving while leaving.’ Like a stealth party guest that can be at once there and not there, any space is irrecoverably altered by music’s traverse. Even if it is undetected and erased, corralled and controlled, music turns up in locations, disciplines and archives without a proper visa. Music has always been a nurturing, shifting ground for the undercommons of the Enlightenment.”

**2** A distributed social layer of activists, artists, and academics that provides the educational resources for necessary structural societal change, see: Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Wivenhoe, 2013).

**3** The trope of voluntary and heroic mutism, of refusing to communicate, of withholding intelligibility that runs through new music is a particularly insidious expression of privilege: only those who feel naturally entitled to have a voice may refuse to speak—and still expect to be heard!

**4** “The music of Asia and India is admirable. It has reached a certain level of perfection. But otherwise it is dead.” This is quoted as a personal conversation in: Jean-Claude Eloy, “L’autre versant des sons: Vers des nouvelles frontières des territoires de la musique ?” in *La Musique et le Monde, L’Internationale de l’Imaginaire, nouvelle série 4*, ed. Françoise Gründ (Paris: Babel, Maison des Cultures du Monde, 1995), 193-231.

**5** José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

**6** Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), xii-xiii.

**7** Sandeep Bhagwati, “On Native Aliens,” in *Seismographic Sounds - Visions of a New World*, eds. Thomas Burkhalter, Theresa Beyer, Hannes Liechti (Berlin: Norient Books, 2015), 119-121.

**8** Just recall Oskar Schlemmer’s infamous remark on Bauhaus textile artists: “Wo Wolle ist, ist auch ein Weib!” (Where there is wool, there is a woman, too!)

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score formats that allow musicians to interact with their environment and audiences in real time.

# Reports

# Structural Rigidity as a Barrier to Diversity

## Serge Vuille

I am the artistic director of Ensemble Contrechamps in Geneva, a group of twenty classically trained new-music specialists. I would like to start by acknowledging the privilege of sharing my experience with diversity on this platform. I am a white middle-class cis male, and I have enjoyed many of the privileges this entails throughout my life, and now as artistic director of a 1.5m Swiss francs per year institution.

This report is based on a talk I gave as part of the 2019 GRiNM Network Conference in Zurich, and I'd like to thank Susanne van Els, Valentina Bertolani, Julia Eckhardt, and Bnaya Halperin-Kaddari for their contributions and questions during the presentation, which have informed and helped to clarify this text.

The report addresses the issue of diversity within contemporary classical music. I'm purposefully avoiding the term "new music" because it encompasses too many forms of music which I will not be discussing. I do dislike the term contemporary classical, but for the purpose of this paper the negative associations do help illustrate some points. We should acknowledge this heritage, as most of the institutions for contemporary classical music function and are funded following much the same process as the traditional classical ones.

### Context

Contrechamps presents a series of twelve main productions in Geneva, a few smaller co-productions, and three to four of our programmes go on tour nationally and internationally each season. I have been director since 2018, and the first season I curated for the ensemble has just closed—incomplete due to COVID-19.

This first season achieved a 50/50 gender balance for composers and conductors; this figure reflects both headcounts, the number and duration of pieces, and the resources allocated to projects. Achieving a 50/50 gender balance may be problematic or simplistic in various ways, but I do believe it is a decent starting point and a reasonable ask, which in my opinion could be achieved with immediate effect for all organisations. With Contrechamps, it was achieved by reconsidering, if modestly, the traditional production models (being open to different timelines and composer-interpreter relations) and opening up composition commissions to artists with a strong interest in acoustic instruments, but little or no knowledge of musical notation.

The response to the season from guests, artists, musicians, and audiences has been overwhelmingly positive. Audiences grew by over 50%, and while we did not collect further data, we observed that there was an improvement in diversity and a lowering of the average age among those attending our performances in Geneva. This year, we will take more care to capture demographic information about our audiences. We were pleased that our previous audience continued coming, and the majority within this group were positive about the new formats and content we developed. Interest from co-producers and festivals increased locally, nationally, and internationally, and with it the number of planned performances almost doubled in a year for the ensemble. I am

confident that no harm was done to the image, success, or artistic standing of the ensemble by striving for, and achieving, gender balance in these two areas.

Although I am proud of this starting point in addressing diversity as part of Contrechamps' programme, juggling the constraints of production models and funding requirements whilst maintaining artistic integrity has been a real challenge and did involve serious compromises. Diversity in aesthetics and practices goes far beyond gender identity and often requires us to rethink the process.

### **Making New Work**

The main barrier I identify for diversity within contemporary classical music is the structural rigidity of many institutions, specifically around the models for commissioning and producing new work.

Composition commissions mostly exist as a pre-defined format, which I can summarise in this way:

1. A group commissions a piece, setting its duration, number, and instruments of the players, and clarifying the possible use of technology.
2. The composer creates a score, usually delivering this to the group one to three months in advance of the performance.
3. The interpreters practise and rehearse the work—sometimes with the composer present. Rehearsal time for one composition typically varies between three to eighteen hours.
4. The work is premiered, and all too often will not be performed again by the commissioning group or anyone else.

This format creates barriers to diversity because it requires specific skills and experience from the composer that can almost only be acquired within the context of higher education (conservatoire or music university), including the detailed knowledge of how classical instruments work and how to produce a score. It also requires a willingness of working at a distance and independently from performers until the last few days before a premiere.

One could argue that this specific way of making music requires certain skills and that other ways of making music require other skills. This statement is true, but it is also problematic as the overwhelming majority of funding for music goes to institutions that function in this particular way. It is my understanding that artistic practices that do not fit into this model have historically not received such generous funding: all the music groups and ensembles I can think of that have been able to develop and become financially sustainable function as a modified version of the classical orchestral model.

### **It Has to Look and Behave Like an Orchestra to Be Funded Like an Orchestra**

Contrechamps is a new music organisation with a budget of 1.5m Swiss francs per year, two thirds of which comes from public funds. While this figure is dwarfed by the budgets of most classical orchestras or opera houses, it is larger than most new music organisations in Switzerland. It is my understanding that the ensemble is funded somewhat like an orchestra because it looks and behaves somewhat like an orchestra, and that it has a 40-year funding history. The fact that it is dedicated to creating new music and championing recent work or that it strives for diversity perhaps does not really play so much of a role here.

While funding guidelines often focus on content and, more recently, diversity, it is my experience that projects following the orchestral model, and its union-backed rates, have the best chance of securing support. It seems that artistic and diversity concerns remain secondary to the documentation of the budget. In fact, it has been my strategy, since long before I joined Contrechamps, to translate performers' fees into 'orchestral rehearsals' in funding applications, even when the rehearsal process did not follow this model, to give the applications the best chance.

### **Pressure Attached**

In return, with the level of funding that Contrechamps receives, one feels that there is an expectation from its musicians, audiences, and funding bodies to deliver the full orchestral experience: written music, frontal concerts, dinner jackets on stage, and all the classical rituals of no clapping between movements, etc. As a relatively young director in a relatively established institution, I do feel pressure not to change too much.

There are not any actual procedural barriers preventing me from trying an entirely new model, but too sharp a turn may risk losing the trust of musicians and partners and even seriously damaging the institution. I consider that reflecting on the production model with the artistic content is part of my job description; that said, it is often hard to know how and whom to ask for advice going forward, and it is easy to feel lonely and overwhelmed in the process. This might explain the feeling that, ultimately, I need to go carefully, step by step.

### **Alternative Models**

Some ideas come to mind for how we might turn new production models into sustainable practices. Working with fewer people for longer periods of time or making fewer productions each year but performing them more often could be roads to follow. There would be a risk for the ensemble, however, as this drives us away from the orchestral format—and its recognised funding model. The ratio of 'production costs' and 'musician salaries' within the global budget could be forced to change, to the disadvantage of musicians, and there is a risk that we might see productions becoming smaller and smaller, potentially limiting their impact and reach.

I feel there must be a diverse, fundable, producible, sustainable, ecological, professional model with artistic integrity out there! For now, it all comes down to a balancing act. Building an artistic profile and funding history can take decades for an ensemble, and can be eroded in a far shorter time. Time is required to experiment and find bespoke models that actually work with some level of pragmatism.

### **Case Studies**

I would like to share three practical attempts to address diversity in practices within Contrechamps, adjusting the production model and funding strategies to respond to artistic imperatives.

#### **1. Research, premiere, record**

Contrechamps recently experimented with a new model, working on a new large-scale commission (25 minutes of music for 22 players) that was developed in staggered steps over the last year. The composer first spent two weeks in the venue where the piece will be performed and recorded in order to compose specifically for its acoustics. She then spent two late-night sessions with six musicians recording material to inform the composition. The work will be first performed at the end of the summer, a full year after the first residency, and will subsequently be recorded for a portrait CD. The main



benefits of this process have been the space and time made for real experimentation, allowing for outcomes that were not anticipated at the start, and the opportunity for a more personal relationship to be developed between players and composer; the level of investment from all parties also perhaps led to a shared urgency to see the project succeed. Such a long and engaged process did, however, cost double that of a traditional commission of this scale. We were able to apply for and receive specific funding to allow for it to happen. This model can be helpful to work with composers who work with a collaborative approach, or who would like to go out of their comfort zone.

## **2. Commission in stages**

Next season, we will be testing out this model of commissioning in stages. We have commissioned a composer to write a 30-minute work in this way: first, a 10-minute work for six players will be performed as part of our 2020-2021 season, then a 20-minute work for twelve players will be premiered as part of the 2021-2022 season, some eight months later. The process therefore includes two collaborative stages (in preparation for the writing of each piece) and costs the same as two commissions of 10 and 20 minutes, but since both are presented in our concert programme, there is no issue with allocating the necessary budgets. This model reduces the number of composers involved in commissions over these two particular years, but it will give the best chances for the work to succeed and give us time to promote it. We have already secured a second performance for both works together. This model can allow us to work with experienced musicians who have a hybrid practice between written and improvised music for example.

## **3. Alternative scores**

We have worked and will continue working with composers who do not usually produce scores. Their process for composing can be cognitive or empirical, and the work is fixed once the rehearsal process is over, but it does not exist in the form of a conventionally notated score to be transmitted to others. Talking with the composers or music-creators of this kind, I found that the most important element for them was not rehearsal time with the whole ensemble but, rather, the possibility of collaborating over a period of time with someone who is used to writing scores and who is able to help translate their ideas onto paper. For some, meeting a few instrumentalists individually ahead of the first rehearsal also responds to a need. By introducing a moderator into the process, we are able to transcribe the music into a form that is easily and quickly read by our musicians. Despite its limitations, musical notation is an extremely efficient, detailed, and condensed way of transmitting information, and one that classically trained musicians are extremely fast at decoding. Using a moderator in this type of situation can really help bridge the gap in communicating musical ideas with little complication or cost, and allow us to work with artists who don't normally work with musical notation.

## **In Conclusion**

I believe that strong institutions are important as part of a healthy cultural ecosystem, and that they have the potential of providing the basis for sustainable cultural and artistic practices. I do, however, also believe that publicly funded art institutions have a duty to lead the way in societal changes and that demonstrating the fulfilment of this duty should be one non-negotiable condition for receiving funding. Many large music institutions are mirroring and reinforcing a conservative system—for example, perpetuating a strong composer-conductor-interpreter-audience hierarchy with patriarchy as the default model: I do think they should be directed to make immediate and substantial changes towards a more progressive societal model, or risk being

defunded. Having strong and diverse music institutions will not only benefit society, it will also benefit music and the arts.

I find the orchestral model to have many qualities, and it can allow truly unique work to be created and performed. I also believe 'analogue' instrumental music still has a lot to contribute to the musical discourse. Working with a large group of highly trained instrumentalists remains an inspiration and an aspiration for many—including, in my experience, those who are offered such an opportunity for the first time. Making this environment more flexible, open, and diverse is possible and is urgently necessary if we want our musical practices to thrive.

As a director of Contrechamps, I want to create alternative spaces and support the artistic needs for diverse voices within the context of a highly professional ensemble of specialist musicians. I acknowledge the fact that real diversity will only be achieved once enough diverse profiles are awarded directorships of the kind that I currently hold. Making space for this to happen and supporting diverse voices in this career path will be the next step for me. In the meantime, I am grateful for the many works and collaborations that have happened in the last year alone—they have been a constant source of inspiration for me on artistic and human levels. It is my personal experience and belief that a diverse musical scene is more meaningful and fulfilling for all.

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**Serge Vuille** is a Swiss programmer, curator, percussionist and composer active on the contemporary and experimental music scene. He developed an open and engaged vision of today's music with the Kammer Klang series, as well as with the percussion and electronic ensemble We Spoke, for which he was the artistic director for 5 and 10 years respectively. In April 2018 he took over the artistic direction of the Ensemble Contrechamps, where he continues to develop, enhance and contextualise contemporary instrumental music and creation. As a musician, he plays with the London Sinfonietta, Ictus Ensemble, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the Martin Creed Band. As a soloist he performs in festivals such as HCMF in Huddersfield, LCMF in London, Schubertiades, SMC in Lausanne, Musikpodium in Zurich and Drusk-omanija in Vilnius. He regularly collaborates with composers, performers and artists in the creation of new works and composes concert music as well as multimedia pieces that are presented in Switzerland, Europe and America. He teaches experimental music and coaches the percussion ensemble of the Royal College of Music in London. In addition, he regularly gives masterclasses and workshops both at the Birmingham Conservatory and for dance students at the Manufacture in Lausanne.

# An Ariadne Thread

## Julia Eckhardt

In 2015, the dramaturg Leen De Graeve and I undertook research looking into the influence of gender on music and musical lives. This took place at Q-o2, an arts laboratory and workspace for experimental music and sound art in Brussels which I co-direct and where collective research into sound-related questions is one of our main endeavours.<sup>1</sup> The project was not only sparked by the conversations with many of our artists in residence (of various genders)—in which I was particularly intrigued by the combination of urgency and secretiveness which I sensed around these issues—but also very much by my own experiences and doubts as a woman in the field of sound and music. This research and the following project, which included a festival and two publications, fundamentally changed my perspective regarding my profession as an artist in the experimental music field, and at the same time had a considerable influence on our organisation. In hindsight, the initial survey feels like the beginning of Ariadne's thread, with many subsequent questions and insights to follow; driven by a curiosity to dissect and expose what music is really made of and about, how it is connected to its maker and the situation in which it is made, and ultimately in what way making and listening to music are political acts.

We developed a written survey which over 150 people from various corners of the musical field and the world responded to, with almost as many men as women, as well as many non-binary people taking part. The testimonies were vivid and intense and spoke about discomfort in navigating the field, but also about thoughts and doubts on the conditions of the relation between gender identities and music itself. Many interesting reflections were aired, such as art as a reproduction of a normative society represented by the notions of work and authorship; the undisputed and apparently neutral presence of the male body and connected qualities; the institutions and places in which sound art is learned and for which it is created; the spirit of the field as competitive and hierarchically structured; the confusion between culture and nature; the canon and the lack of diversity in role models. The most controversial were questions about possible connections between gender and music itself and despite the acknowledgment of a connection between music and the personality of its maker, the thought of this also extending to gender provoked a lot of confusion and resistance. The generosity and vivacity which we heard in the testimonies in general led us to the decision to make them into the imaginary conversation which became the book *The Second Sound—conversations on gender and music*.<sup>2</sup>

The testimonies had revealed clear and burning questions, but showed at the same time a considerable lack of knowledge around the topics raised in the survey, which also strongly resonated within me. Consequently, I decided to continue the thread and open the notion to a larger experimental research setting about gender, voice, language, and identity. I wanted to turn to theoretical thought for answers on the one hand, and to artistic work situated at this intersection on the other, which resulted in a festival and the publication *Grounds for Possible Music*.<sup>3</sup> The book is a reflection on how the making of music is related to reality and ideologies, on which foundations musical decisions are taken, and how these factors then fall into the listeners ears. It seemed important to map out that this is a general issue of cultural representation, which does not only affect those who are excluded.

A number of theorists have helped to underpin these considerations, among them: Lucy Lippard writes about the necessity to accept the identity of the maker into the artwork and observes female artists refraining from doing this by leading a double artistic life;<sup>4</sup> Susan McClary develops the idea of music as a language, a currency for exchange through which a community of people chooses to communicate, and discusses how musical conventions have the power to stimulate or repress certain tendencies in such a community.<sup>5</sup> McClary shows how society and politics are always mirrored in its music and how historically this is an ongoing negotiation between the existing idiom at hand and the possibility to process and actualise it; Marcia Citron writes about the tremendous power of the canon, “because it creates a narrative of the past and a template for the future,”<sup>6</sup> where the idea of non-functionality as the highest cultural standard has existed since Enlightenment, symbolised by the author and the oeuvre; Sara Ahmed highlights the importance of orientation in a world of things and spaces, in which those for whom this phenomenological world wasn’t designed need more time to make it their home—the pay gap being only one of many annoying consequences;<sup>7</sup> and Hannah Arendt, for whom making art is an act of appearing in a shared world and therefore inherently political.<sup>8</sup> All of these writers also make clear that art and understandings of art are subject to changing times and as such are dynamic, which stands in clear contrast to the traditional self-understanding of the musical field as abstract and unpolitical, unconcerned with human interdependencies and other earthly matters.

### Quality and the Responsibility of Judgment

One notion which I kept tripping over, without really noticing it at first, was the concept of quality. It stayed present yet quasi invisible all along—like a chameleon, changing colour and meaning constantly. I started to notice it as an argument which was brought up in order to deadlock requests for diversity, for example, when curators would state that a 50/50 male/female gender quota would lead to a decrease in the quality of their program. I am convinced of, and have also experienced, quite the opposite, but to date have not been able to generate a coherent argument from this subjective feeling.

At present, speaking about quality in music seems to be simply a way to divide music into categories of good and bad, without ever asking for whom, in what situation, and in what function or at what purpose? Being so indistinct, it holds the power of a myth, for which no justification is necessary. The original meaning of the word quality—character, disposition, particular property or feature, kind, relation—seems to have gotten lost, mutating from a designation of specificities to an instrument of generalised binary division.<sup>9</sup> This relegates any Other to the function of the confirming opposite. Replacing the thought of ‘quality’ with ‘qualities’—in a plural sense—could be a first step in subverting this dualistic worldview: when there are at least three components, mutual relation dynamics create a fluid equilibrium.<sup>10</sup>

A dynamic or fluid approach to ideas of quality does not, however, mean refraining from judgment. For Hannah Arendt, “The capacity to judge is a specifically political ability [...] to see things not only from one’s own point of view but in the perspective of all those who happen to be present. [...] Judging is one, if not the most, important activity in which this sharing-the-world-with-others comes to pass.”<sup>11</sup> For her, a special responsibility is incumbent upon the spectators, who in contrast to the actors, have the necessary distance from the happenings to be able to make meaning out of them. Judgment and taste are a common way in which we read the world together, and refraining from them is a manifestation of indifference, rather than of tolerance, and will therefore keep the status quo in place.

The composer Éliane Radigue made a similar reflection in an interview which I did with her for a recent publication, where she explained the importance of availability, which she keeps emphasising, when working with musicians:

Listening is the method for obtaining this availability [...] which is the openness towards what sounds are telling us. [...] It's the quality of the listening one brings to sound that makes it perceptible; it's the listening that makes it our own, according to the quality of our attention. If you open your body and your mind to listening with an active attitude, you will draw out very specific things. The condition for listening is obviously different according to the point in time, according to one's state of mind. That's the mirror effect, it's a reflection of one's state of mind in that moment. There exists a means of listening to any sound and making music of it.<sup>12</sup>

With this approach to music and its emphasis on the responsibility of the listener, it is possible to re-define the paradigms of quality through deliberate decisions—by taking into account the person behind—or better in—the music, and the situation in which it was made, by constantly questioning the criteria, and by acknowledging the importance of intuition.

### **What's Next: More Questions**

For the organisation of Q-o2, exposing our work to the mechanisms of disparity was beneficial. It opened us up not only to a bigger variety of practitioners, but mostly also to a wider range of aesthetics, formats, and content—to many lovely discoveries. Still today, we take the 50/50+ percent gender quota to heart, using it as a fact-check, because when there is little time it is tempting to fill vacancies with those who are at hand and/or the most visible. Thinking differently has naturally also diversified the programme on other levels, along with the slow change in thinking within society. Also, for myself as a musician, knowing more has had a freeing effect. But this isn't the end of the thread—more indistinctness and unresolved questions remain as persistent blind spots in the field of experimental music in general and resonate into our relatively protected orbit at Q-o2.

Being aware about the concept of intersectionality is important, but it's often misused. In her keynote during the GRiNM Conference, Anke Charton made clear that intersectionality is foremost a concept of dynamic, and not of static, addition: parameters are in interaction, but are not exchangeable.<sup>13</sup> Something that is rarely mentioned, but very important for our small-scale work at Q-o2, is the parameter of geography: we have to bridge the tension which exists between international visiting artists and a local community with whom we share our daily life. On both levels, the mechanisms of in- and exclusion function differently, and consequently our world-to-share—including the diversity we seek—is different to that of a large international festival. A powerful divider between these two worlds is language. Especially with the recent increase in specialisation and academisation in the field of new music (another indistinctness...), not only the general use of English but also the way it is used can be intimidating. Sometimes I feel that a pre-emptive move may be taking place here: since space is being made for diversity within music, the power hierarchies are shifting to the discourse surrounding it.

Another important tool for in- but also exclusion is the spaces inhabited. Music is always made out of interrelations with and for social spaces, made by and for people who share a reality. And it's not easy to enter such spaces from another reality, as Sara

Ahmed writes: “For bodies to arrive in spaces where they are not already at home, where they are not ‘in place’, involves hard work; indeed, it involves painstaking labor for bodies to inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape.”<sup>14</sup> The spaces of new music are mostly quite well subsidised, and old ideas resonate within them about why this is justified. Still, most of us in this field are both representatives of otherness as well as of the status-quo, and it seems to me important to be aware of and live with this tension, as artists as well as organisers. It is a balancing act, and I sometimes sense a vague fear: Who is the composer when s/he is a listener? How much control are we, practitioners of new music, truly ready to give away?

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## Notes

1 www.q-o2.be.

2 Julia Eckhardt and Leen De Graeve, *The Second Sound – Conversations on Gender and Music* (Brussels: umland editions, 2017).

3 Julia Eckhardt, *Grounds for Possible Music* (Berlin: Errant Bodies, 2018).

4 Lucy Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Feminist Essays on Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995).

5 Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

6 Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 1.

7 Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2006).

8 Hannah Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture,” in *Between Past and Future – Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 197-226.

9 “Quality | Origin and meaning of quality by Online Etymology Dictionary,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed 17 June 2020, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/quality>.

10 See also: Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

11 Arendt, “The Crisis in Culture,” 221.

12 Julia Eckhardt, *Éliane Radigue – Intermediary Spaces/Espaces intermédiaires* (Brussels: umland editions, 2019), 49.

13 Anke Charton, “Default, Debug, Decolonize: Thoughts on Interseccionalidad and New Music,” in *Defragmentation – Curating Contemporary Music (Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik, vol. 24: Schott, 2016)*.

14 Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, 51.

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**Julia Eckhardt** is a musician and curator in the field of the sounding arts and at the intersection of composed and improvised music. She is a founding member and artistic director of Q-O2 workspace in Brussels, for which she conceptualized different thematic projects such as Field Fest, Tuned City Brussels, Interpretations., the other the self, //2009// - what do you make of what I say, DoUndo/Recycling G, Abstract Adventures, De Tijd is Rond, Speling. As a performer of composed and improvised music she has collaborated extensively with composer Eliane Radigue, next to other artists such as Phill Niblock, Pauline Oliveros, Jennifer Walshe, Wandelweiser-composers, Rhodri Davies, Taku Sugimoto, Manfred Werder, Angharad Davies, Lucio Capece, Manu Holterbach, Anne Wellmer, Carol Robinson, several of them being represented on recordings. She has been teaching and lecturing at Lemmens Institut (Leuven), Transmedia (LUCA Brussel) and La Cambre (Brussels). She is author of *The Second Sound*, conversation on gender and music, together with Leen De Graeve (umland), and of *Grounds for Possible Music* (Errant Bodies).

# Unfamiliar Sound in Familiar Places: Creating Site-specific Performances in Hong Kong

## Sharon Chan

*Atlas* (2018-2019) was a series of site-specific performances created by composer Charles Kwong for the project *Our Audible City*. The aim of the project was to create a new musical experience outside concert halls, where the physical characters of the chosen spaces would become an integral part in the creation of the music. The series took place in six locations across Hong Kong. In each performance, musicians were positioned in space across the different sites, and some were given instructions to move around at specific moments. The positioning and motion of the musicians were designed according to the sonic and physical environment of the sites. While some audience members were registered to attend the performances, some were just passers-by who ran into the situations. In either case, the audience experienced an unexpected soundscape in familiar locations. The project's intention was that each spectator would develop a unique and individual aural and mental experience during the performances.

### Performance Locations

*Atlas* took place in the following locations:

#### ***Atlas 1: Tai Kwun***

**30 June 2018**

Formally the Central Police Station, Central Magistracy and Victoria Prison, Tai Kwun is currently a revitalised heritage site for the arts.

#### ***Atlas 2: Peng Chau***

**4 November 2018**

A car-free outlying island located at the southwest of Hong Kong.

#### ***Atlas 3: The Courtroom at the Savannah College of Art and Design Hong Kong***

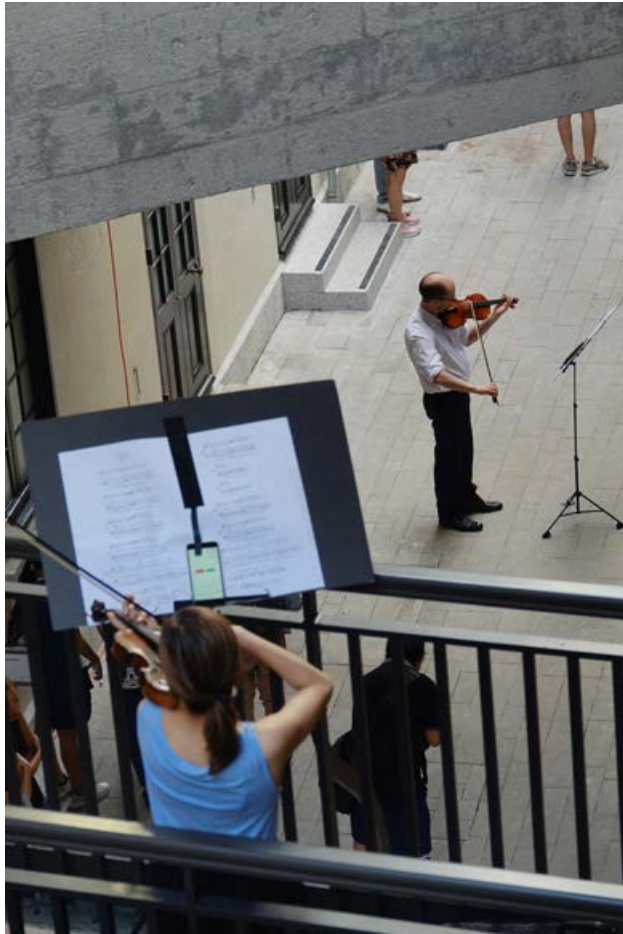
**26 January 2019**

The campus of SCAD Hong Kong is formally the North Kowloon Magistracy Building. This performance took place in the Courtroom, where the original structure of the room, including the magistrates' bench, bar table, witness box, defendant's dock, and public gallery, is retained.

#### ***Atlas 4: The University of Hong Kong***

**9 February 2019**

This performance took place at the University of Hong Kong in two parts. The first part is an outdoor performance held at the podium where the *Pillar of Shame* is placed.<sup>1</sup> Part two was held inside the University Museum and Art Gallery. In this performance, the same piece of music was performed in these two unrelated venues, exploring the relationship of space and sound, and to reflect on our ways of listening.



Charles Kwong, *Atlas 1*, 2018. Photograph by Cheung Chi Wai.



Charles Kwong, *Atlas 2*, 2019. Photograph by Maxmillian Cheng@Moon 9 Image.



**Atlas 5: Tung Lin Kok Yuen****23 February 2019**

A majestically beautiful Buddhist nunnery and monument.

**Atlas 6: Haw Par Music****26 October 2019**

Formally known as Haw Par Mansion built by the founders of the legendary ointment brand, Tiger Balm, in the 1930s, the building is one of the few surviving specimens of the Chinese Eclectic style architecture in Hong Kong.

**More Than a Place**

Creating site-specific music means the physical features of the places, such as their spatial arrangements, resonances caused by the building materials and structures, as well as the environmental sounds are regarded as the fundamental elements of the performance works. These physical descriptions, or requirements, for each venue provided the compositions with the functionality and meanings of a map. Thus, the more particular the features of a venue are, the more difficult it is for these musical pieces to be transferred to another space. While the specificities of the sites supply the works with compositional materials that can hardly be replicated elsewhere, making each performance a unique sonic experience, the performances provide the possibilities to conceive the sites as something more than a place.

Taking place in a former magistrates' court, *Atlas 3* made use of the historical background and the symbolic significance of the site as the creative point of reference. Five musicians were placed at the magistrates' bench, bar table, witness box, and defendant's dock, respectively. The position of the musicians and the use of metronomes controlled carefully by the musicians indicate the seemingly well-defined roles the musicians represent. The performance then evolved into an exploration of the complexities surrounding law and justice when the musicians exchanged their positions, and the metronomes in different tempos began to intersperse with one another. Gradually, the musicians initially placed at the magistrates' bench, bar table, and witness box withdrew from the *mise-en-scène* while still playing their instruments, and entered the custody cell located one level below the courtroom, with only the clarinettist from the defendant's dock remaining, now occupying the magistrates' bench. The performance ended with the clarinettist putting down his instrument, and slowly but steadily banging the gavel repeatedly. Behind him was a television live broadcasting from the surveillance camera in the custody cell. By incorporating the historical aspect of the site into the work, *Atlas 3* transformed the symbolic significance of the site, being the place where authority of the adjudication was held, into a musical experience that allowed open interpretation and plural perspectives.

The finale of the series, *Atlas 6*, was held in the three-storey mansion, Haw Par Music. In this performance, twelve musicians were placed in different spots inside the mansion. As soon as the audience came into the building, the multi-origin sound sources served as a hint to the audience that the performance could not be viewed by only staying in one spot. As soon as they started to walk around the space, going up and down the stairs, each audience member became an active spectator of the performance, using their own individual capacity to select, interpret, compare, and make connections to the performance. Being a heritage site, the space itself has its own cultural and historical narrative. It is up to the audience to relate what they see to the music, or to totally ignore the artefacts surrounding them. Therefore, each individual attending the performance had his/her own unique experience during the



Charles Kwong, *Atlas 3*, 2019. Photograph by Maxmillian Cheng@Moon 9 Image.



Charles Kwong, *Atlas 4*, 2019. Photograph by Cheung Chi Wai.



Charles Kwong, *Atlas 5*, 2019. Photograph by Cheung Chi Wai.



Charles Kwong, *Atlas 6*, 2019. Photograph by Maxmillian Cheng@Moon 9 Image.

performance. They make their own aesthetic judgement based on their intelligence, knowledge about the space, and personal experience with different kinds of music performance.

*Our Audible City* was the first site-specific project that the Hong Kong New Music Ensemble has produced since its formation in 2008. The project evoked great interest among the audience, workshop participants, and the artists involved. Personally, the performances of the *Atlas* series have led me to the discovery of the ways we perceive music; and how listening as a human activity can be a unique individual experience where the audience is given the freedom to associate and dissociate what they see in the performance with what they have seen and experienced elsewhere. As a producer, this project is an inspirational journey that re-evaluates our understanding of the structure and relationships between performing (acting) and viewing. The structure between the two may not, and should not, be oppositional, just as what Jacques Rancière expressed in *The Emancipated Spectator*, namely “[a]n emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators.”<sup>2</sup>

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## Notes

**1** The *Pillar of Shame* is an eight-metre-tall statue created by Danish artist Jens Galschiot in 1997 to commemorate the victims of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre.

**2** Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (New York: Verso, 2009), 22.

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# The Quick Fix: Thoughts on Chance and Community in New Music

## Kajsa Antonsson, Anna Jakobsson

“What are the structures that enabled this situation?”<sup>1</sup> This is a question that still echoes in our minds after listening to Anke Charton, Assistant Professor in Theatre at the University of Vienna, who opened Day 1 of the *GRiNM Network Conference 2019* with a keynote on intersectionality as an approach to recognising diversity issues in new music. In her presentation, Charton talked about how new music inescapably draws on and moves within “sections of situated knowledge” and encouraged us to ask ourselves—being, as we were, practitioners together in a space by reason of discussing diversity in new music—what this knowledge looks like, and what it admits. She expressed the impassibility of diversity being something other than a practice; how we *move* through a space, since diversity as an attachment to an otherwise unmoving infrastructure “only reinforces the default lines” of an assumed new music, which emerges where situated knowledge falls short.<sup>2</sup>

Konstmusiksystrar has worked for inclusivity within the contemporary music field in Sweden since 2014. Being a network for women, transgender, and non-binary composers, we are experienced in being the attachment to concerts, festivals, and the like: a quick fix to create temporary change in the name of gender equality. We also have experiences of having to re-evaluate our methods when our situatedness has been staring us in the face. How we are situated is nevertheless a perspective on an intersectional approach, and recognising where you fall short is the only way to move forward. For Konstmusiksystrar, becoming more aware of our position in an intricate system of practitioners, audience, organisers, and spaces for music has meant a necessary push into the realm of curation. In reflecting on this, inspired by her repeatedly asked questions, we echo Charton’s words: “What are the structures that enabled this situation? What is the set-up in which such a thing could feasibly happen?”<sup>3</sup>

Konstmusiksystrar was established in 2014 by composers and sound artists Marta Forsberg and Lo Kristensson, who at the time were students at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. The initiative was

triggered by the low representation of female composers at the 2014 Young Nordic Music Festival in Malmö—a festival for composers under thirty years of age with a connection to the Nordic region. Astounded that only six out of thirty-five composers participating with pieces in the festival were women, they turned to the festival’s production team who answered that, “There are no female composers applying.” As a reaction, an email was sent out with the purpose of listing names of young female, transgender, and non-binary composers active within the Swedish contemporary music scene, and to encourage them to apply to open calls, festivals, and music programs; to engage with contemporary music where representation of non cis-male composers was considerably lacking. The list of names would be distributed to concert and festival organisers, as well as published online, and in this way serve as a handy tool for anyone struggling to find non-cis-male composers to program, or for those who maintained the belief that there are none.

The mapping project quickly grew into a manifesto.<sup>4</sup> Konstmusiksystrar would strive to be a room where women, transgender, and non-binary people could be in the majority and change current structures within contemporary classical music (CCM) by standing together. Up until this point, KVAIST, the Swedish Association of Women Composers, had been the only association working in pursuit of gender equality within Swedish CCM, with the primary goal of increasing the number of compositional works by women in the Swedish repertoire.<sup>5</sup> A vital part of KVAIST’s work is to provide statistics on Swedish orchestras’ and opera houses’ repertoires. In this way, they create an important, easily accessible overview of what the gender representation looks like on these stages.<sup>6</sup> In addition, KVAIST educates music institutions such as orchestras on gender perspectives in repertoire-building. They uncover works by female composers from the past, encourage institutions to perform them, as well as commissioning new pieces composed (and performed) by women.

Because the backbone of the majority of the institutions that KVASt was working within still belong to the classical music monoculture, who gets to be a composer and how much space they are given still resonate. The composer's profession is by tradition a lonely one, and although outdated in terms of who it represents, it seems like the societal need to sustain myths like the Singular Genius in order to legitimise artistic practices is as accurate as ever. Having seen and experienced ourselves how the canon of being the best is a pressure that influences your aesthetic choices and what space you dare to take with your music already at a young age, Konstmusiksyrstrar have focused on building a more tolerant atmosphere where the pressure to act according to these ideals is off already from the beginning. Undoing the notion that there is only room for one ("woman") composer became an important part of our original practice, and we applied this dialogue in workshops and courses for teens and young adults exploring sound. It has since influenced the network's practices and grown into a philosophy of a community sharing each other's successes.

In 2007, the cultural funding system in Sweden saw a major structural change when the government decided that state funding would only be given to institutions and festivals that have fifty-fifty gender representation in their program. This has since worked as obligatory guidelines for Swedish music institutions, putting pressure for more equal programming. There has also been what you could call "a feminist boom" in the Swedish music field in recent years, with movements like #metoo enabling feminism to become a social stakeholder in central parts of the Swedish cultural scene. Rather quickly after the network was founded, we experienced the craving of music institutions who were in great need of a more "diverse" program. They wanted to collaborate with us in order to do the box-ticking necessary to meet the requirements for a gender-equal repertoire. This was, of course, a beneficial position for Konstmusiksyrstrar. We got access to venues that had not previously been open to us, as the network was, after all, founded to increase the representation of non-cis-male composers. At the same time, we often felt uncomfortable, since we repeatedly found ourselves in the role of "poster girls," promoting gender equality in the name of institutions that would program Konstmusiksyrstrar along with another ten concerts from their usual, canonical repertoire.

The opportunity to work with established music institutions also raised questions with regard to how we

should select works for the collaborations that we entered. How could Konstmusiksyrstrar choose one member over another to be featured with their music in a sound booth at the Stockholm Concert Hall, or to perform their work at the Swedish Museum of Performing Arts? We thought hard about what we could do in order to present the music of our members without reproducing the discriminating structures we opposed. From an early age, music students learn to compete with one another and to view our fellow colleagues as possible threats to our own success. To break with this toxic pattern, we came up with the idea of working with a lottery and using chance in the selection process when we put out a call for works directed to Konstmusiksyrstrar's members. By using lottery as a method, we could feel confident in the transparency of our curation process if someone were to ask about how the selection of works had been made. This, however, soon turned out to be a risky way of working, that occasionally put both Konstmusiksyrstrar as curators and the participating artists on the spot.

A turning point in our curatorial work was the reflections we made after a chilly evening in Stockholm when we had participated in a festival that was seemingly sceptical about our ways of working. We had accepted a slot in the programme to, as usual, give a number of composers from Konstmusiksyrstrar's list an opportunity to perform their music. All works had been randomly chosen from the open call—which the composers were aware of—showcasing a mix of experience where some were quite new to the field and others had had more exposure. That the line-up was the result of a random selection was announced to the audience at the beginning of the concert. Following a panel discussion earlier that day, where Konstmusiksyrstrar's ideas of chance as a method for more solidary programming was met with scepticism and doubt that it could ever result in something other than low-quality art, the thought of how our members were going to be received at the concert felt very discouraging. The fact that what we were advocating in terms of togetherness between practitioners was reduced to a question about quality made us recognise the limits of our knowledge, as our perspective did not extend very far beyond our roles as composers. To question how we define quality was a way for us to work towards more solidarity in our field, but we were insisting on presenting our findings in spaces where people were not prepared to discuss them with us. We realised that in order to create any lasting change, we had to include the institutions, audiences, performers, and whoever else was present in the

dialogue we already had going with the composers. This insight created an urge to extend our work on chance and apply our methods outside of our network of members.

“In thinking about curatorial practices aiming at a greater diversity of people and works selected, the first task is not to identify the ‘other’. The first task is to identify through what practices the other is marked as such.”<sup>7</sup>

From 2018 to 2019, Konstmusiksyrstar conducted the preliminary study *In the Service of Chance* to examine chance and randomisation as a method for music curation. In the project, which was funded by the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, we approached chance as a thought model for various experiments around music production and curation, together with a number of different practitioners in the wider contemporary music scene. When we started to ask people about their curatorial practices, it became apparent from their different answers that music curation is a complex process. When running an institution, you make thousands of choices at every turn. Using chance can be a way to expose the power of habits, routines, and priorities that affect everything from what kind of coffee you will drink during your next meeting to which person you will employ—and, of course, what music will be programmed for the next concert season. In this sense, chance becomes a way of playing with the limits of situated knowledge. What kind of decisions are “unmarked” to the extent that we do not even think of them as decisions?

At first, there were many who misunderstood the purpose of the project and thought that our goal was to create chaos. They feared that we wanted to replace entire orchestra productions with completely random events on the main stages of the concert halls. Our intention was never to force people to work with chance exclusively. Instead, we tried to encourage them to think about their curating processes as a number of choices and asked them to pick *one* that they could imagine giving up to chance. It did not necessarily have to be the choice of composers *per se*; it could be the choice of venue, the order of the works in the program, or at what time or which day of the week a concert would be performed. Our hypothesis was that if you continue to do what you usually do, but leave one of the choices up to chance, it would probably be enough to make the outcome very different.

The result of one of the collaborations of *In the Service of Chance* was a concert that we arranged together with Mimitabu, a contemporary music ensemble of freelance musicians based in Gothenburg. Mimitabu works mainly with time-limited project grants, and often collaborate with composition students at the Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg. We spoke with the artistic leader of the ensemble, Johan Svensson, about the challenge of attracting new audiences to CCM concerts. He expressed his concerns about their audiences seldom extending beyond the ensemble’s own community of colleagues and music students. Gothenburg is a small city, in numbers as well as in area, and this sparked the idea of randomly picking a number of people living in Gothenburg and inviting them to a concert with Mimitabu. The lottery was made through an app connected to a database of Gothenburg addresses that was created for this specific purpose. The app selected one hundred and forty people to whom we sent physical concert invitations. We put a lot of effort into making the invitations look neat, and the members in the project group signed them by hand to make them more personal. It was important to us that the people who received the invitations would feel like they had been chosen to be part of an exclusive “once-in-a-lifetime” event. Out of the one hundred and forty invitations sent out, three people accepted. One person replied a couple of days after the concert had taken place and said that he had lost the letter in his pile of unopened mail. The initiative, however, had moved him to tears and he was honoured to be a randomly chosen citizen of Gothenburg.

The concert took place in April 2019 at Cinnober, a small black box theatre in central Gothenburg. The three people who had accepted the invitation each brought a friend to the concert. In addition to them, the audience consisted of a few other people who had all been informed of the particularity of the situation. On the previous night, the ensemble had performed the same programme for the usual, paying audience. We could all feel that the atmosphere at Cinnober was quite different. None of us had been quite sure what to expect. When the audience members arrived, we served them sparkling wine and appetisers, something that we had promised in the invitation. Before the concert started, we presented Konstmusiksyrstar and *In the Service of Chance*. A person in the audience asked what contemporary music was, and to provide an example, one of the project group members gave a spontaneous presentation on the development of the twelve-tone method. The fact that somebody dared to ask the

million-dollar question, “What is contemporary music?” became an icebreaker and opened up a dialogue between all of us present in the space.

When it was time to enter the auditorium, we felt nervous. We worried about things like the pieces being too long, and the hard, wooden benches in the space being uncomfortable to sit on for the whole concert (we offered everyone cushions). When realising that the audience actually seemed to enjoy the performance, the tension left. It was obvious that the ensemble made a particular effort to make this new audience feel welcome, and the musicians and composers took turns introducing the music since the genre was unfamiliar to them. After the concert, we got a lot of feedback from the invited audience members, who all agreed that it had been really useful to get these personal reflections as keys to the different pieces. In presenting her piece, *In My Volcano Grows The Grass* (2017-2018), composer Michelle Agnes Magalhaes shared a short reflection on what contemporary music meant to her. She described the scene as a small community of people all over the world sharing risks together. The audience is part of this risk-sharing, which is what keeps the field alive and makes the practice of this art form so exciting. One person in the audience pointed out that it sounded scary, and received the encouraging response: “Things that we don’t know can be scary. But they can also be beautiful because we are just discovering and seeing new things that we didn’t imagine before.”<sup>8</sup>

Reflecting on the success of the experiment, we realised that we had, albeit on a minimal scale, managed to reach Gothenburg as a community, and made them feel part of the contemporary music scene. One of the people invited to the concert offered the suggestion of making use of the local media for the process of inviting audiences, in order to create more anticipation around the project and reach a larger number of people. Michelle Agnes Magalhaes’ speech on the importance of a strong, yet inclusive community was a much needed reminder of why we, as young composers and curators, have maintained an interest in CCM at all. We ourselves are co-creators of the myth that CCM would be more difficult to interact with than, for example, pop music. While Konstmusiksystrar had been so focused on problematising the rooms in which we had been working in recent years, the encounter at Cinnober reminded us about the subversive potential of our art form and that it has the potential to be shared and enjoyed by a lot more people. The outcome of our experiment—and of the *In the Service of Chance* project

at large—clearly showed the fragility and progressiveness latent in each of the spaces through which we are moving, and that a push out of a habitual orbit can sometimes be enough to trigger it. The performers in Mimitabu also agreed that we had been part of something special at Cinnober. Johan Svensson put it nicely when he said that the entire ensemble had experienced the concert that night with new eyes and new ears.

Rather than asking “Is applying chance in selection processes a long-term solution to diversity?” or “Who will I include with this method?” what was great about the *In the Service of Chance* project was how chance became a question about our default modes and practices. It made apparent the relationships between all of the actors involved, and it inspired a dialogue that showed how risk-taking and caring is involved on all sides. While chance is not the only methodology Konstmusiksystrar uses, this early programming experiment was central in developing our group’s self-reflection about our position in contemporary music, and our relationships to a wider community.

## Notes

**1** Anke Charton, “Diversity and New Music: Interdependencies and Intersections” (keynote, GRiNM Network Conference 2019, Zurich, CH, November 14, 2019).

**2** Ibid.

**3** Ibid.

**4** The full manifesto can be found (in Swedish) on Konstmusiksystrar’s website. See “Manifestet | Konstmusiksystrar,” Konstmusiksystrar, accessed 11 June 2020, <http://konstmusiksystrar.se/manifestet/>.

**5** KVASt stands for Kvinnlig Anhopning av Svenska Tonsättare, and was founded by composer Karin Rehnqvist in 2008. KVASt is open to members of all genders and backgrounds that sympathizes and wants to act in accordance with the association’s goals. See “About Kvast | KVASt,” KVASt Swedish Association of Women Composers, accessed 11 June 2020, <https://kvast.org/om-kvast/>.

**6** The last statistic report was published in Fall 2019, and made by KVASt in collaboration with the Swedish Composers Council. The statistics are based on three different categories: new and older music, Swedish and foreign music, and gender (man/woman). For the full report see “Statistik | KVASt,” KVASt Swedish Association of Women Composers, accessed 11 June, 2020, <https://kvast.org/verksamhet/kunskap-och-metoder/statistik/>.



7 Anke Charton, "Default, Debug, Decolonize: Thoughts on Intersectionality and New Music," in *Defragmentation: Curating Contemporary Music*, eds. Sylvia Freydanck and Michael Rebhahn, Darmstädter Beiträge zur neuen Musik (Mainz: Schott, 2019), 66.

8 Michelle Agnes Magalhaes, live concert recording of "solo/duo/trio: Mimitabu at Cinnober," 12 April 2019 (Gothenburg: Cinnober Teater, 2019), WAV file.

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**Anna Jakobsson** (SE) is a creative producer and (artist-)researcher based in Stockholm. Her practice expands over the fields of contemporary music, opera and theatre and is distinguished by an interest in feminine narratives and non-hierarchical working methods. Anna's work often explores different modes of audience participation and she wants her work to be both gentle and challenging in once. She holds a MA in Performance Practice as Research from the Royal Central School of Speech in London. Anna also studied stage directing at the College of Opera in Stockholm under the supervision of prominent stage director Kasper Holten, head of the Royal Danish Theater (Det Kongelige). Since 2017 she is the creative producer of Konstmusiksistrar (Sisters in Contemporary Music), a network of artists, producers and educators working to increase the representation of women, transgender- and non-binary people in new music. 2018-2019 Anna initiated and produced Konstmusiksistrar's preliminary study *I slumpens tjänst* (In the service of chance), funded by the Swedish Art Committee Society. The study examined chance and randomization as methods for music curation and involved a large number of organisers and institutions within the Swedish contemporary music scene. 2019 she curated the project *Am I the only one? A correspondence with Clara Schumann* in collaboration with Konstmusiksistrar. The project was initiated to celebrate the memory of composer Clara Schumann's 200nd birthday and included a commissioned piece written by five women composers as well as a staged concert with The Swedish Wind Ensemble in Stockholm. As part of her work with Konstmusiksistrar, Anna currently holds a two years-long residency at Transit Stockholm together with long-term collaborator composer Rosanna Gunnarsson.

**Kajsa Antonsson** (SE) is a freelancing composer and producer/project manager. She finished her BA in composition at the Academy of Music and Drama in Gothenburg in 2019, and spent her last BA year as an exchange student at Universität der Künste in Berlin. She works acoustically and with electronic media. Kajsa is interested in how sound is relational to a body and how bodily presence as a social and sensory aspect shapes experiences of music. Her works often seeks to decentralize the audible aspect of a sound or in a piece with the aim of acknowledging social and sensory forces that works in pursuit of the illusion of music's autonomy. Kajsa has worked with ensembles such as Curious Chamber Players, Mimitabu, 40f, Faint Noise and the Great Learning Orchestra, and participated as composer and performer in festivals such as Vorspiel/CTM, Crescendo Musikfestival, Svensk Musikvår and Young Nordic Music Days. In 2019 Kajsa was nominated chairperson of Svenska Stiftelsen Ung Nordisk Musik and she co-produced the Young Nordic Music festival 2019 in Piteå. Since 2015 she is a member and producer in Konstmusiksistrar (Sisters in Contemporary Music), a Swedish network for women, transgender and non-binary composers. Together with the network she has worked on a number of projects such as *In the Service of Chance: a preliminary study in music programming*, and represented the network in panels, conferences and festivals such as GRiNM Network Conference 2019, Young Nordic Music Days and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival. Together with composers Kajsa Magnarsson and Madeleine Jonsson Gille she co-led the experimental sound ensemble KS Rock 2017-2018.

**Konstmusiksistrar (Sisters in Contemporary Music)** is a network for women, transgender and non-binary composers and sound artists within contemporary music. It was founded in 2014 by composers and sound artists Lo Kristensson and Marta Forsberg. All 155 members are published on the network's website and the list is growing steadily. The list is the backbone to the network and is available as a tool to any organizer who struggle to find non-cis-male composers to program. To speed up the process towards an equal music scene, Konstmusiksistrar organizes workshops, lectures, concerts and festivals, and participates in the public debate on issues of gender equality and music both in Sweden and abroad. The network

works according to the philosophy that the successes of other composers should also feel like your own. By promoting togetherness between composers, Konstmusiksysterar wants to reduce the competition and elitism that characterizes the contemporary music industry. During 2018–2019 Konstmusiksysterar conducted the preliminary study *In the Service of Chance* to examine chance and randomization as a method for music curation. Since then the network has continued to examine curation as a way of problematizing notions of quality in music production, and challenge the hierarchical social structures within the Swedish contemporary music scene. In 2019 Konstmusiksysterar received Framtidens Musikpris (Music Prize for the Future) in the category Möjliggörare för Ungas Komponerande (approx. “Artistic development for young composers”).

# FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ : Collective Feminist Activism Within and Beyond the University

Stellan Veloce, Rosanna Lovell,  
Lucien Danzeisen

*If music and musical practice are to be considered current as an institutionally recognizable art form, it is precisely these institutions (from music schools to university music departments and conservatoriums) that have to deal with the society in which we live, by which we are deeply influenced and which we help to shape. Artists must be active agents in shaping the world we live in.<sup>1</sup>*

*A feminist approach is for all genders and is not only about quotas and representation, but it is also about how we think about ourselves as composers and ensemble players and organizers and helps to rethink the way we interact with each other.<sup>2</sup>*

FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ is a participatory and non-hierarchical project which began in 2016 and which deals with the topic of feminism in contemporary music production from various perspectives. FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ was born out of a collaboration between faculty, employees, and students of the Berlin University of the Arts and the “Hanns Eisler” School of Music Berlin. In its current form, the group consists of alumnae\*<sup>i</sup> as well as students enrolled at the university.

FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ functions as an open collective with a relatively stable core group, which new people can join at any time for as long as they wish. The levels of involvement within the collective can vary from taking part in a seminar for one or more semesters, to proposing new directions for FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ or getting involved in organising future activities. Since we see our activities as a service for the whole institution, we make sure that organisational and coordination work in the group is compensated, even if only minimally, by resources allocated through university funding.

Since 2017, FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ has offered various kinds of meetings, activities and group events within the university framework. The simple goal of FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ has been to give space and visibility to issues around gender diversity and music, while simultaneously maintaining a feminist-oriented option within the range of seminars offered by the music departments at Berlin universities.

This modus operandi has consolidated over time, mostly due to very practical reasons: operating inside an institution has real benefits regarding the use of space and access to resources. Our activities are offered as official seminars that students can receive credit for, which gives us a certain credibility within the university structure. Also, the university itself can be considered as a closed society and in this way provides a finite sense to the scope of the activism which we undertake. For example, a possible goal of the group could be “trans inclusive paperwork for students” instead of “equal gender representation in the German new music scene”. The first one appears as a much more realistic goal for a group such as FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_, and its implementation could contribute to a situation where the establishment of the second is more attainable.

As alumnae\*<sup>i</sup> we have direct experience and therefore understand the context of the institutions in which we are working, as well as knowing what we would like to change or have found to be missing in the institutions during our own studies there. While being supported by and represented in the university, it is very important for us to keep our events open to everyone who is interested, not just those already involved in the academic context or who have institutional access through their studies. We operate in quite an independent way and our courses are offered as electives, so in this way external participants can easily take part. It remains a challenge to invite others through diverse channels and to reach out to a greater variety of potentially interested people. This said, we are very pleased that since the beginning, FEM\* \_ MUSIC\* \_ has welcomed external practitioners and musicians as well as students from other faculties of the university to our events and seminars.

The first event organised by FEM\* \_ MUSIC\* \_ was a discussion series which included four panels, focusing on the topics of collectives, activist field work, musical practices and working with the archive. It took place at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, and included guests such as Jennifer Walshe, Kaffe Matthews, Holly Herndon, Kirsten Reese, Julia Eckhardt and others.<sup>3</sup> This series brought together professionals, students, teachers and those interested in music from beyond the university. The discussions that took place during these meetings highlighted issues that had already become clear in other critical music circles in regard to education and professional activity. Topics included the often raised and hotly debated argument around notions of quality and the exclusionary formation of the musical canon.

The following FEM\* \_ MUSIC\* \_ activities have mostly focused on research and open reading groups. In the summer semester of 2018, we pursued our questions around the canon and music history in the seminar FEM\* \_ MUSIC\* \_ ARCHIVE. This was followed by FEM\* \_ MUSIC\* \_ PLAY, a collaboration project between the group and stage design student Lea Aigner. We developed a model of a concert hall, which included a stage with both a piano and an archive of women composers from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The model is amplified through recordings of works by the composers which could be heard through speakers and headphones. It was exhibited during MEHRLICHT!MUSIK 2018, and for each festival event we curated a different concert program, accompanied by a printed program in which we also positioned the work:

We understand the model, similar to an architectural design, as a concept that points to the future and at the same time reveals gaps in the current concert canon, as well as in instrumental teaching, the examination of music within research and academia and the archiving of art and knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

The model, as a visual installation which made tangible the representation of key issues within contemporary music practice, proved to be a popular format which garnered much attention and continues to be exhibited in different settings.

In the two subsequent semesters, we followed our desire to spend more time working with texts and developed a reading group with FEM\* \_ MUSIC\* \_ READ and FEM\* \_ MUSIC\* \_ ReREAD. Anybody interested could join, with the group choosing what to read and what to listen to together. In order to make the selection of texts easier for the group, the core group would bring a list of possible texts connected with queer and feminist perspectives in music to the seminar. Out of this, we developed a bibliography or reading list of key texts. We think a lot of interesting, inspiring voices are forgotten or excluded from the curriculum and that a lot of knowledge is not passed on within the

institution, instead favouring a self-reproducing model of musical practice, one which is supported by established literature. We wish to expand the kinds of texts and ideas that music students come into contact with during their studies to include more diverse approaches.

In 2019, we released a publication to document what FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ had achieved. This was made possible by our successful application to the funding program DIVAversity from the Women's Office of the Berlin University of the Arts. The book includes texts by former guests as well as members of the group and provides a summary of our three years of activity, including notes and photos as well as a reading list. This was important to us, considering how activism can be connected to one generation and that information and activities such as these have the tendency to be forgotten and therefore not be passed on to future generations. We wanted to make our work visible and accessible to those who were not able to take part, as well as to enter it into the official archive of the university by having a book in the library. We also hope that it serves to inspire further work around feminism in music departments in other universities.

We continue in 2020 and have planned a week-long meeting called FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ : Gather. With this project, we want to host a camp-like meeting to give space to music making, as well as give time to new projects and ideas from the participants. Those involved include students from music and other departments along with music professionals, musicians and others interested in feminism. In order to put together a program in the least hierarchical way possible, we have decided to implement an online platform developed by BLATT 3000's Andreas Dzialocha called Hoffnung3000. We think that self-organising and decentralising decisions regarding the program can be a great first step in order to foster in all participants a sense of caring about the event and to help make everybody feel actively involved in the prosperity of the gathering. People of all genders are welcome to join, as feminism is an issue everyone should be involved in.

Academia continues to be the main space in which the canon of contemporary music is imparted to composers and instrumentalists. A university degree seems to be the most tangible divide between those who are likely to be programmed by curators of contemporary music and those who are not. Universities are therefore important institutions when thinking about future music compositions; not only who composed them, but who they will be performed by, and for whom. We hope that by creating an open space centred in the university, and by also inviting in those who are not enrolled or teaching, we can slowly help to crack this open. Moreover, we think it is incredibly important to include trans-feminist and queer perspectives in discussions on and in musical practice within the formative period of higher education, which shapes future practitioners and therefore the music that we hear.

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## Notes

**1** Lucien Danzeisen, "Über FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ " (About FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ ), in *FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_*, eds. Merle Krefeld, Lucien Danzeisen, Rosanna Lovell, Evelyn Saylor, Stellan Veloce (Berlin: Verlag Universität der Künste, 2019), 20.

**2** Stellan Veloce, "Feminist samples for my past self, a student of composition (remix)," in *FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_*, eds. Merle Krefeld, Lucien Danzeisen, Rosanna Lovell, Evelyn Saylor, Stellan Veloce (Berlin: Verlag Universität der Künste, 2019), 21.

3 A more detailed description of the four events and the panellists who took part can be found in our publication and on our website, <http://femmusic.eu>.

4 Merle Krafeld, "Programmheft", in *FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_* eds. Merle Krafeld, Lucien Danzeisen, Rosanna Lovell, Evelyn Saylor, Stellan Veloce (Berlin: Verlag Universität der Künste, 2019), 61.

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**Stellan Veloce** is a Sardinian composer, performer and cellist living and working in Berlin. They compose pieces for acoustic instrumental ensembles as well as working on installations or performance pieces focusing on timbre, repetition and sound densities. Veloce works or has worked with collaborators from different disciplines like composer Neo Hülcker, dancer/choreographer Sheena McGrandles, visual artist Kyle Bellucci Johanson among others. Occasionally they work as a touring band member or in the studio in the pop music sphere. Most recently with Peaches and before with Kat Frankie, Dear Reader, Kenichi among others. They are co-founder of the collective and online platform Y-E-S.org and part of the group Fem\*\_Music\*\_ . After completing a degree in cello performance, Veloce studied composition at the Universität der Künste Berlin and at the California Institute of the Arts.

Rosanna Lovell is a musician, educator, performer and radio maker from Australia who has been living and working in Berlin since 2009. In 2018, she completed a Master's at the Institute for Art in Context, Berlin University of the Arts. Her practice focuses on feminist and postcolonial perspectives in classical and new music which she explores through performance, intervention, sound and research. She develops workshops and projects and teaches music. She is part of Freie Radios Berlin-Brandenburg, where she focuses on topics such as music, gender and accessibility in and through radio. She is part of the collectives GRiNM and Fem\*\_Music\*\_ which both deal with questions of gender and diversity in music.

Lucien Danzeisen is a composer and artist. Lucien took part in 'The Young Composers Project' (Künstlerhaus Boswil) and completed their bachelor's degree in composition (Josef Kost, Michel Roth, Bettina Skrzypczak) and piano (Yvonne Lang, Marc Hunziker) with a minor in harpsichord (Bettina Seeliger) at the Hochschule für Musik Luzern in the Department of Classical Music. From 2012-2014, they were based in Basel. They completed their master's degree in composition at the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler Berlin with Hanspeter Kyburz in 2018. They are currently teaching at the UdK Berlin as part of FEM\*\_MUSIC\*\_ , and are a member of the Insubordination Meta Orchestra in Geneva. Lucien has given concerts in Switzerland, Germany, Finland, Poland, France, and the Czech Republic, and focuses on composition and free improvisation.

# Diversity in Higher Music Education: An E-mail Interview with Camilla Overgaard and Susanne van Els

## Camilla Overgaard, Susanne van Els

Camilla and Susanne are members of the Strengthening Music in Society project of the AEC (Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen). Camilla recently obtained her master's degree from the Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus in pop/jazz guitar, while Susanne has had many years of experience working in education after a very satisfying career as a classical musician.

They were interviewed via e-mail by Brandon Farnsworth and Rosanna Lovell of GRiNM in response to their manifesto for the future of music education.

**How do the practices and continuities in music education from early learning through to university level shape the music scene of performers, composers, etc., that we see today? And in considering this, how could we see the field of education as a site for radical change with the possibility for lasting impacts in the music we see performed?**

**Susanne van Els (SvE):** Classical music education is built on (early) specialised training. Talent is mostly defined as a given physical and mental condition, and qualities like resilience and persistence are used in the context of technical achievement. Having a musical soul and a deep creative connection with the mystery of classical music, and developing knowledge and understanding is, of course, not just helpful but essential in the long process of mastering an instrument, but in music education this seldom manifests into a meaningful connection. It is such a pity when there is a lack of creativity and contemporaneity in classical music education. For musicians, for audiences, for music itself. The remedy is to change the balance from re-production to making, also within the setting of a conventional classical concert.

All art is contemporary. Music, which is defined by time—real time, the here and now versus as well as united with eternity—is extremely contemporary;

Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> is different every time it has been performed over the past 200 years. All art is both a confrontation and unification of the individual with the collective. When listening to Bach's *St Matthew Passion*, a piece almost 300 years old, the deepest individual pain and joy are perceived in an awareness of collective human connection. Therefore, all art is societal.

**Camilla Overgaard (CO):** The wide variety of different practices within music education undoubtedly shape the multiple existing music scenes in many different ways. More concretely, I believe that the master-apprentice model, which has been and to a large extent still is very dominant within music education, shapes performers especially. The idea of studying with a master to one day eventually become one yourself, can in my opinion be quite repetitive and thereby potentially influence the image of what a musician is in the music scene as well. The opposite could of course also be true, if practices within music education encouraged diversity and ownership amongst musicians from early learning through to university level.

By articulating and nuancing the stereotypical and often hierarchical image of what it means to be a musician, I believe that the field of education can catalyse change in the music we see performed—and more importantly, who feels they can/have the right to perform it.

**How do conservatories and music schools need to be organised in order to foster musical diversity? What structures are needed, and what are the biggest challenges faced in realising them?**

**SvE:** Structures are important, but mindset is key. However, one remark about structures: when designing curricula, programs, courses, pedagogic approaches, etc., without changing assessment—for both entrance and graduation—accordingly and fundamentally, nothing happens.

## MANIFESTO

The world of music, and specifically classical music, has a strong tendency for heroism and hierarchy. Leading images in classical music are not just looking very much alike, they also support narrow and limiting ideas about how success is achieved.

There is a need for all the other narratives to be told and displayed, there is a need for young musicians to be empowered when following their dreams.

We see the possibility of education which gives students the opportunity to find out what success means to them.

Welcoming different role-models of successful careers will make conservatoires open to a more diverse community as well as change methods and relations towards more inclusiveness.

2019, Camilla Overgaard & Susanne van Els

Camille Overgaard and Susanne van Els, *Manifesto for the Future of Music Education*, 2019.

I see a conservatoire as a learning community: students, teachers, staff, visitors, audience, and professional partners meet in order to learn, both individually and collectively. A conservatoire is an institute for learning, but it could also see itself as a place of learning: anyone entering the building should take on a curious, open attitude. Everyone is continually developing, and together we develop the profession and our artform. The concept of a learning community is helpful in contextualising the master-apprentice model, which is a very valuable asset in music training. One of the blind spots in most classical music education is that it is so focused on the individual, whereas the job is collaborative—and a general misconception is the idea of the ‘audience’ as passive consumers instead of the community that we, musicians, are part of, both while performing and creating. A change in mindset that would foster diversity is to see students as active, researching artists. It would give them agency over what they do and keep them connected with why they want to do it. This could change conventional approaches towards ideals, which in classical music are quite hierarchical

and heroic. Students need to be given broad options to choose from, not just in the study programme, but also regarding assessment, because they are working towards what success is to them.

**CO:** In order to foster musical diversity in conservatoires and music schools, I believe it is important that diversity is embedded at all levels within the institution. In my opinion, diversity in music originates from diversity of people, and therefore it is important that conservatories become accessible to a broader range of people. Becoming more accessible is challenging, since it means that existing structures inevitably have to change in order to embrace different kinds of musicians—an example could be changing the entrance exams or assessment criteria at conservatoires. This would very likely lead to a discussion of what or who defines quality, when the goal is musical diversity. How diverse do we really want it to be? How much are we ready to change?

I also want to emphasise the importance of giving students the possibility to choose part of their curriculum



themselves. Musical diversity is also fostered by encouraging students to be curious and to expand their musicianship in new ways, for instance, by taking subjects from other departments.

**Susanne, how do you help students free their thinking like this? What do you think needs to happen in conservatoires to foster this kind of approach? What kinds of new narratives and images do we need to present in music education?**

**SvE:** Realigning the art of classical music-making towards the component of *making*, from juvenile training and during the 10,000 hours, is essential. This will keep young musicians connected to their creative side, and it will most likely encourage them to retain a broad scope. *Range*, which is part of divergent thinking and interdisciplinary work, is essential when working in the contemporary world, and for musicians this means being able to connect and to collaborate whilst also being specialised. One of the most important qualities for teachers is generosity. Inviting students to not just become better than them, but to also be different. Encouragement is a tool from parenting that is most welcome in teaching as well—being there. Process over progress, with ‘joy and belonging’ being keywords for everyone involved. Teachers are active, researching artists, too, and together with students they shape the learning community. Interestingly, narratives of great musicianship are all around us, in real life; for example, Yo-Yo Ma says about learning to improvise while connecting musicians from East and West: “Perfection is not very communicative.” Fighting conventional archaic, male images in classical music means replacing internalised stories of individual heroism with real life stories about companionship and citizenship.

**Camilla, what has this process been for you as a student? What struggles have you faced while pursuing your interests in the conservatoire setting? What kinds of new narratives and images do we need to present in music education?**

**CO:** Firstly, my path at the conservatoire has been a winding road. My bachelor’s degree is in music education with classical guitar as my main instrument, whereas my master’s degree is in pop/jazz guitar and song writing. This journey has involved a lot of frustration and a feeling of not really fitting in anywhere, although despite this it has also kept me searching for new possibilities. In hindsight, I think it is because I do not

define myself as either a classical or pop/jazz guitarist—I am somewhere in-between the two, and I have found this mixed identity quite difficult to develop in the conservatoire setting. The challenge for me has been having my musicianship split into categories by subjects and departments. To some degree, this is necessary to structure an education programme, but the negative consequence is that we might get stuck inside these categories and not work across or between them. A classical guitarist is considered one thing and a pop/jazz guitarist another, and to some extent this is true, but to me this does not help build an artistic identity. I believe that artistic identity originates from *why* we do what we do, is expressed in *how* we are doing it and eventually manifested in *what* we do. The focus is often only on the *what* in the conservatoire setting. This led me to search for my *what* when I should have been searching for my *why*. If we shift the focus in music education from *what* to *why*, I believe that new narratives and images will emerge.

**We are starting to see some really interesting thinking and research about many longstanding issues in the conservatoire. How do you imagine a closer interaction between fields of practical (instrumental) and academic (research) study in music departments at universities?**

**SvE:** Similar to most structures, conservatoires seem to be not very receptive to change. Every now and then I find myself with colleagues saying, “If we could start a new school now...,” and our dream expresses the same kind of freedom that can be experienced in a jam session. The only answer that I can think of, both for this situation and to the question, has to do with connection. Academic subjects could have a large practical component, and the reflective, researching part of the main subject area could have more exposure. Quality assurance outcomes could be discussed together with all stakeholders. Transparency is a great connector: Why could students not be given an insight into institutional financial decisions? What if we acknowledge that students understanding how they are being graded is an important factor in learning? Is it really effective that students only work in cohorts that are arranged by levels? What I am trying to say is that binary or hierarchical thinking is not helpful, and that the only way to connect valuable insights, wonderful people, and different perspectives is through practical daily practice, on the floor. Just do it.

**CO:** The very first thought that comes to my mind is that it may be beneficial to imagine a closer interaction between people first and fields second. Approaching the question from this angle, I would suggest that a way to enhance interaction could be by developing collaborative projects out of common ground. When different fields are compared or discussed, naturally the focus tends to be on their differences rather than their commonalities. Shifting the focus to these commonalities could potentially help to create this common ground and thereby foster interaction between people from different fields of study. Ultimately, interaction is about sharing knowledge, and I believe that this is done best when people create something together. This is why I imagine that developing collaborative projects with a very hands-on approach could be a way to foster interaction.

**Thinking of what we have been discussing so far regarding diversification and intervention in the conservatoire, can you briefly state your vision for the future of the conservatory system in Europe? Where does this take us as classical music creators and educators?**

**SvE:** I have seen how students take on the challenge of quality learning once control has been replaced by trust. This position, for educators, is not about withdrawing; it means stepping in and being there, actively providing guidance, taking the risk of doing instead of telling, taking responsibility together. For students, it means designing their learning pathway and their own future in art.

Allowing diversity always includes letting go, of hierarchy, of status, of secured positions and visions. This is scary. But how else can our artform develop and play a role in contemporary societies? We cannot just teach history. We can teach quality while relating to what young professionals, children of their time, are creating. Classical music touches on everything which is human, and it is the most sacred place I know. Being a musician is the best way to spend your life. It is demanding and exciting, but most of all it is a blessing to be able to speak in and for your community with an artistic voice. Diversity is a rule of nature, and inclusion is a mission for artists. If anything, let conservatoires be places of joy and belonging, mini-societies for experimentation, thinking, and playing while being aware of context, place, and time.

**CO:** I do not feel that I can put forward a general vision for the conservatory system in Europe, but what I will work for and hope to see in the future is a closer connection between the conservatoire and society in general. In my opinion, building this connection requires a change in mindset on all institutional levels, which comes from many of the things that have been brought up throughout this interview and that are also reflected in our manifesto above. Like asking ourselves why we do that we do, encouraging curiosity and breaking down the hierarchical structures that stand in the way of diverse and nuanced learning, as well as putting music in the hands of the people. I believe that such a change will enhance diversity and innovation and create new areas of work for musicians to benefit both the musicians themselves and society in general. Therefore, as a music creator and educator, I dedicate myself and my work to curiosity, to lifelong learning, and to supporting others in following their dreams.

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**Camilla Overgaard** is a guitarist and songwriter who specialises in the acoustic guitar. She holds a bachelor's degree in music pedagogics, with classical guitar as her main instrument, and a master's degree in pop/jazz guitar and song writing from The Royal Academy of Music in Aarhus. She is highly engaged in representational work both as former chair of the students' council and of The National Council of Music Students and as a board member of the Danish Musicians Union. Camilla is involved in a variety of different projects combining elements from classical and folk music and has collaborated with both actors and architects. In March 2019, she released her debut EP "Det er ganske vist!" with her interpretations of fairy tales by the famous Danish author Hans Christian Andersen. Since 2018, Camilla has been part of the AEC SMS-project as a member of the Student Working Group and as co-chair of the Entrepreneurship Working Group. She works to combine social entrepreneurship and music with the aim of empowering vulnerable groups in society. In relation to her master's thesis "*Meeting in Music - Facilitating empowerment and sense of ownership through musical activities with vulnerable groups*," Camilla initiated two projects, one in a refugee centre and the other in a community centre, exploring how meeting in music can contribute to strengthening the personal resources of people who are considered very vulnerable, help foster intercultural understanding and build social relationships.

Susanne van **Els** (1963) is one of the leading musicians of her generation. She performed as a soloist and a chamber musician, and she ran a most entrepreneurial life in music, combining her own ensembles and projects, like a series of artistically fresh solo CDs, with travelling the world with the Schönberg Ensemble, doing advisory and policy development work whilst undertaking adventurous collaborations with the other arts.

Significant composers like Louis Andriessen wrote new viola works for Susanne. Her recording of Ligeti's viola sonata for harmonia mundi won both the Diapason d'Or de l'Année and the Deutsche Schallplattenpreis in 2009. After this truly satisfying international career, she started to work in higher education. She was the head of the classical music department of the Royal Conservatoire The Hague. She was responsible for the interdisciplinary projects and joint curriculum at ZUYD Faculty of the Arts. For these institutions, she developed relations with international higher education partners, a.o. in China. She led the European Opera Academy and is currently working on an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project for new opera-making and training. She is involved in new initiatives in the arts, and she does policy advice, coaching, and accreditation work. Susanne is a member of the Learning & Teaching working group of the Strengthening Music in Society project of the Association Européenne des Conservatoires. She performs forward-thinking work on assessment and curriculum development in higher music education—a recent article in a publication of the Centre of Excellence in Music Performance Education is “How (not) to teach.”

# What's in the Repertoire? Statistics for Danish Symphony Orchestras, Operas, Ensembles and Music Festivals 2015 – 2018

## Sine Tofte Hannibal

Which music is on the programme of Danish orchestras, choirs, operas, ensembles, and festivals? How diverse is the repertoire which is presented to the Danish audience, regarding the proportion of male or female composers, Danish or foreign composers, or new music versus earlier classical music? These questions were the starting point for a report on Danish repertoire statistics, released in 2018, which aims to give an overall and concrete understanding of the profile of the composers who were being played by Danish ensembles and at festivals at that time. At the time of writing, we have just started to collect data again on the repertoire from the concert seasons 2018/2019 and 2020/2021 in order to bring the statistics up to date, and to continuously nudge the classical music environments in Denmark towards taking diversity and gender balance seriously in their concert programming and taking on the responsibility of nurturing musical environments with equal opportunities for all.

The institutions included in the statistics are all supported by public funding on a governmental and municipal level and are therefore expected to present a varied repertoire which is relevant to as many as possible. Diversity and especially gender balance have been a strategic focus in the political work of the Danish Composers' Society since 2016 and nudging is precisely the tool that gives inspiration to our work and is the underlying basis of our different activities, initiatives, and projects.<sup>1</sup> In brief, we believe that if we shall succeed in creating a change in the classical music environments, it is crucial to shed light on patterns, routines, and unconscious bias as a starting point for discussing and suggesting ways to change these and do things differently. Initiating dialogue, debates, and seminars is one approach, releasing statistics on repertoire is another one. From now on, we plan to update the statistics every year and release them online in order to ongoingly be able to show the state of diversity in the repertoire. Every fifth year, we intend to publish a printed version showing repertoire statistics five seasons in a row in order to show whether diversity has actually improved or not.

### **The Origin of the Statistics**

On 18 May 2017, the Danish Composers' Society hosted the seminar "Repertoires in Balance—A Summit About Music." The meeting was between decision makers in the Danish classical music scene. The cause behind the initiative was the desire to create a qualified debate on how to get Danish festivals, orchestras and ensembles to program more music by female composers. The current reality was and still is that Danish orchestras and ensembles are performing much more music by male composers than by female composers, Danish festivals for classical and new music are programming many more compositions written by men than by women, and the music of German and Austrian composers takes up a significantly larger amount of space in the statistics than music by Danish or other, e.g. Nordic, composers.

# Total national overview

Season: 15/16, 16/17, 17/18      Total: 294.191 min.

## 1. Distribution of men and women

- Music composed by men: 96,4%
- Music composed by women: 3,6%

Music composed by men: 283.706 min.  
 Music composed by women: 10.486 min.



## 2. Distribution of Danish and foreign music

- Music by Danish composers: 18,0%
- Music by foreign composers: 82,0%



GER	20,2%
DAN	18,0%
ITA	14,7%
AUT	11,1%
RUS	9,1%
FRA	6,2%
GBR	6,2%
USA	3,4%
SWE	1,6%
CZE	1,4%
ISL	1,0%
FIN	0,9%
NOR	0,9%
HUN	0,8%
OTHERS	4,6%

## 3. Distribution of contemporary and older music

- Music composed after 1985/86/87: 24,4%
- Music composed before: 75,6%



Premieres	3,3%
1985/86/87-	21,1%
1950-1984/85/86	4,9%
1900-1949	17,4%
1850-1899	24,7%
1800-1849	11,4%
1700-1799	13,9%
1600-1699	2,1%
1400-1599	1,1%
Before 1400	0,03%

## 4. Distribution of men and women, contemporary music

- Music composed by men: 85,8%
- Music composed by women: 14,2%

85,8%  
14,2%

## 5. Distribution of men and women, older music

- Music composed by men: 99,9%
- Music composed by women: 0,1%

99,9%  
0,1%

Dansk Komponistforening, *Total national overview of repertoire statistics, 2018*: excerpt from *Repertoire statistik for danske symfoniorkestre, operaer, ensembler og musikfestivaler* (Copenhagen: Dansk Komponistforening, Edition Wilhelm Hansen, SNYK and Edition-S) translated into English by GRiNM in collaboration with Sine Tofte Hannibal.

This is not only the case in Denmark. This tendency is reflected in most other countries, e.g. in Sweden, as documented in repertoire statistics completed in 2014/2015 and again in 2019 by the two Swedish composers' societies: FST (Society of Swedish Composers) and KVAST (The Association of Swedish Women Composers), and in Norway in 2019 by the Norwegian Society of Composers. The Danish repertoire statistics emanate from the summit held in Copenhagen, where the first Swedish repertoire statistics were taken as a direct role model. The statistics report was initiated by the the Danish Composers' Society along with the publishers Edition Wilhelm Hansen and Edition S as well as SNYK (the Secretariat for Contemporary Music) and is supported by Musikforlæggerne (Society of Professional Music Editions in Denmark).

### **Content and Procedure**

The statistics include Danish music institutions and are divided into the categories of symphony orchestras, operas, ensembles, and festivals. The statistics contain information about the music that has been performed during the last three seasons: 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18. They outline the proportion of new music versus earlier classical music, Danish music versus music from abroad, as well as music by men versus women composers—all categories are calculated by the number of minutes each music receives.

The three-year timeframe was a necessity, not only to give a snapshot of the current situation at that time, but also to look into if this was a tendency in the music scene and to also see if the numbers change over the years. The title, composer, gender, nationality, length, year of composition, and date of the performance of each piece was notated as a reference. Furthermore, it was also noted if the piece was performed as a premiere. If a work was performed in multiple concerts, it appears more times in the statistics. However, a composition was only noted as a premiere one time.

### **What Did the Statistics Indicate?**

Three years ago, we had the feeling that only a relatively limited part of the history of music was taken care of in Danish concert halls, and that not least the music of professional women composers rarely found their way to the repertoire. But sensations are not proof enough in themselves.

After the summit, we were convinced that we needed data and a clear picture of the classic music repertoire, if we wanted to engage with the executives and gatekeepers who set programmes and decide what repertoire the audience should experience, about whether or not it is an image we reconcile with, or if there is a need to change this image.

And still today the statistics speak their clear language—there is a need to change the picture:

- Only 3.6% of music in the repertoire of Danish orchestras, ensembles, opera houses, and new music festivals from 2015 to 2018 was written by women. 18% of the repertoire was Danish, 20% was German, 14.7% was Italian, and 4.4% of the repertoire was Nordic.

- Only 1% of the symphony orchestras' repertoire were first performances, in other words newly written works, over three seasons.

- Over 50% of the works were written in the period between 1800 and 1950, and only 11% of the total repertoire from 2015 to 2018 was written within the last thirty years.

If we take the relationship between music written by women and men, then it is not good enough that just under 4% of all classical music performed by the established orchestras, ensembles, opera houses, and at festivals is written by women. That equates to a total of 10,486 minutes of music, while 283,706 minutes of music during the period were written by men.

The picture in Norway and Sweden is very similar to the Danish one, as the statistics from Norway show that 3% of the music is written by women, and in Sweden the most recent statistics show that 6.4% of the music in Swedish concert halls is written by women. When it comes to Nordic repertoire, 6% of the repertoire in Norway was written by composers from other Nordic countries, and in Sweden it was only 3.4%.

### **Arguments for Status Quo and Tools for Change**

I see several actions going on internationally trying to change the image, and in Denmark we see an increasing awareness and recognition that, as a manager, artistic director, ensemble leader, or promoter in 2020, you must work with diversity—both for the sake of those who create the music and whose stories and works also deserve to be brought forward, and for the sake of all those who need to hear and experience the music and the stories. One thing is to recognise it and talk about it, another thing is to do it in a way that makes a real change now and in the future. It takes courage and will to think outside of the box, spend extra time on familiarising oneself with what works are out there and to dare program a different and to the loyal audience a possibly unknown repertoire.

Several arguments defend the lack of action taken on changing the picture and imbalance that the Danish statistics mirror. Below is a partial list followed by suggestions for tools to turn these arguments into action.

#### **Argument One:** “There are not so many professional women composers.”

Within a national context, there might be a grain of truth in this—14% of the members of the Danish Composers' Society are women. But that is just in Denmark. And as today's classical music field and the labour market of composers is international—just over 80% of the repertoire in Denmark of the last three seasons was written by foreign composers—it does not make sense to explain the lack of women composers in the programmes with the lack of women composers in Denmark.

There are several recognised and talented women around the world who write both orchestral and chamber music, operas and electronic music and make sound art and performance.

### **Tools**

#### **1. Finding the music from the past and the present:**

Two databases prove this and offer a great deal of inspiration to artistic directors, conductors, and ensemble leaders looking for music by women:

- The Swedish association KVASt, which deals with women and new music, has a database of close to 2,000 works written by women from a wide range of countries, extending from Hildegard von Bingen to the present day;

- Donne – Women in Music is a website and database presenting more than 6,000 female composers and offering articles, daily portraits, and lists of works by the composers in the database.<sup>2</sup>

A variant of Argument One is that there are not so many works written by women—the databases of KVASt and Donne in Music are proof of the opposite. And regardless of the fact that there are more men than women composers in Denmark, i.e. for historical reasons, there are enough works to choose from.

## **2. Commission new works by women**

One concrete tool for increasing the number of works by women for the future is to commission new works by women composers.

The statistics show quite clearly that the percentage of music by women is a lot higher when it comes to music written within the last thirty years. Also, the ensembles and festivals that play a high amount of new music and regularly commission new works have a bigger proportion of works written by women in their repertoire than those that do not. And that number is fortunately increasing, and I see more and more ensembles using this tool and prioritising to commission works by women.

For instance, on a national level over three seasons, 14.1% of the repertoire from within the last thirty years was written by women composers. On the contrary, music written over thirty years ago is 0% when it comes to music by women—it is simply not in the repertoire in Denmark today.

## **Argument Two**

An argument about artistic quality almost always pops up as a defence when you ask an orchestra, ensemble leader, or artistic director why a programme does not include works by women: “For us, it is primarily a question of artistic quality,” many answer. But how can one speak about what artistic quality is, if one has almost never put works by women in the repertoire? Or, put another way: how can you claim that what you program is quality and what you exclude is not, if the repertoire from season to season is more or less identical?

Furthermore, audience research show that diverse programming creates better and relevant concerts and attracts a larger audience, as you offer more opportunities of relating to the music being performed.

### **Tools:**

#### **1. Music by women in the programme:**

A simple tool for creating more diverse and gender-balanced programmes is to commit oneself to always include works by both men and women in a programme, unless there is a curatorial reason for not doing this that one can defend.

A highly estimated orchestra manager from Sweden has used this tool for years with success. If a conductor suggests a programme exclusively with music by men, he asks if they can suggest a work by a woman as well. And as he said, “The vast majority can, they just hadn’t thought of it.”<sup>3</sup>

#### **2. A 50/50 target:**

Another tool could be to set a 50/50 target in the repertoire in terms of composers. I have met festival directors in both Iceland and Norway who work with this target when planning their festivals, and they did not find it hard to reach their target as long as they spend time searching for composers in other circles than where they would normally look.



A reflection, though, is whether a 50/50 target will really change the structures that make it so that music by women rarely finds its way to the repertoire. Obviously, overall representation is growing, and it is a statement and a message that creates awareness and is easy to sell. But does 50/50 programming alone really create better opportunities for women composers in terms of gaining more recognition, better career conditions, more visibility, and more commissioning tasks? And does a 50/50 goal seriously affect the perception of what artistic quality is and what sells tickets and lends prestige?

It is important that we pay attention to and address the underlying and more subtle, but nonetheless very strong, structures and barriers to real diversity and equal representation in the repertoire, and that women composers really get the same access and recognition as their male counterparts. When organising a concert, the composition of works is one thing to take into consideration. Something else is the timing of the concert and the place of the concert in the programme, the location, the audience you want to reach, and the issue of broadcasting on radio or television. There is a big difference between an opening concert and a lunch concert, a concert on a Saturday night and on a Monday night, and a concert at a large venue and a school concert.

Opening night at a festival is a prestigious event, to which you often invite press, important partners, and other gatekeepers, and work hard to sell as many tickets as possible. A school concert does not have the same prestige and does not necessarily receive the same attention, even though it is at least as important and meaningful.

**Argument Three:** “We do play music by women and more unknown composers, but we also have to sell tickets.”

After we released the report in 2018, a couple of the ensembles whose seasonal repertoire appear in the statistics complained to us that they perform much more contemporary music as well as music by women than the statistics reflect. These detailed concert programmes just did not appear on their website or in their seasonal brochure, as they were performed as school concerts, lunch concerts, or the like.

But what signal do you send to the outside world, if in your festival programme—regardless of a goal of 50/50—you do a big opening concert exclusively with music by men, while works of women figure in the festival's smaller concerts. Or if, as an ensemble, you launch a seasonal programme where you only present programmes for concerts with ticket sales, while family concerts and school concerts are not mentioned in the programme? And that the programmes for which you sell tickets are traditional classical concerts with works by well-known deceased composers, while more recent music and works by women and lesser-known composers are played at family concerts and school concerts without printed programmes as documentation and dissemination to the outside world and thus stored away for the public?

It signals that you do not count music by women and lesser-known composers as equal, and that artistic quality and what you expect will sell tickets and generate attention is the well-known music you usually put on to the programme. Therefore, I suggest that when working with a 50/50 target, a couple of other tools could justly be used in addition to this.

**Tools:****1. Question the notions of 'a prestigious concert,' 'good' and 'quality':**

All music in a programme should ideally be treated equally. Try to question the common narrative about which composers and works lend prestige and sell tickets, and dare put the other and unknown stories and worldviews on the programme. Only then do you really start a movement towards change, where you give even more artists access to the repertoire and to the concert halls, while at the same time making yourself relevant to a larger and wider audience.

**2. Set up diverse programming committees:**

A diverse group of people when it comes to age, professional backgrounds, artistic and programming skills, gender, ethnicity, musical taste, etc., will automatically bring more different views and tastes to the table than a more homogeneous group when planning a festival programme or a concert season. There is a good chance that you will end up with a different programme to what you normally put together and with more options for a diverse and new audience to become curious and interested in attending the concerts.

This audience might have a different view of what is good and interesting, and first of all feel represented and experience being able to reflect themselves in the worldviews that make up the repertoire.

**Representing the Present...**

Representation is about visibility—about showing and being seen—and thus also about the right, the power, and the privilege of deciding who should be made visible, and what stories we as audiences should reflect ourselves in. It is about role models, and also within the classical music fields in Denmark we need to make the palette of role models bigger, more colourful and diverse than it is today. In general, the classical concert halls could and should present many more different stories about our modern lives in which the broader population can see themselves reflected.

Children and young people who are interested in creating music, and who might have a composer inside their stomach, should meet living professional composers who can help them redeem and develop their talent and support them in realising a dream of living from writing music. Preferably, they should be exposed to as many different composers and role models as possible, in order to be able to meet someone with whom they can bond with artistically, and who can make them believe that a career as a professional composer is possible for them, too.

Composers are also women. They are not just white but have roots all over the world. Composers also make electronic music and build their own instruments. They write nodes and make video. They work with sound, but also with images, materials, with the body, movements, and words. When programming concerts, directors and managers should continuously think about how they can help enlarge the palette of composer role models with their work and, not least, make it broader and more diverse, so that children and young people in the future do not think that a composer is a dead white man, but that it is one who works with sound and creates music in myriad ways.

### ... and Shaping the Future

In relation to supporting the development of classical music in Denmark towards more diversity, educational environments—music schools, MGK (musical foundation courses), and conservatories—play an important role. The programmes at music academies to become a composer must also be able to embrace a diverse approach to what classical music can be when young people choose to apply. As it is today, access to the academies is very narrow, and the entrance exams are organised based on a specific and very classical view of what music is and what one needs to know to be admitted to the composition studio.

The number of Danish students in composition around the country is declining, and there are only a few women studying composition. The question is whether one way to change this could be to broaden access to the studies—not by lowering the bar, but by opening up the definition of what a composer can be and creating several different types of entrance examinations and auditions. Experience from the UK, for example, shows that giving more opportunities and entries to programmes attracts a greater talent base.<sup>4</sup>

Women and men must have equal opportunities and access and must be recognised for what they do. Both women and men must be visible in the repertoire. Audiences should not only see and hear the works of men, but also see and hear the works of women. And we should all see that women as well as men can make a career as composers and artists and put their presence in the world into music and art. It takes time to seriously think in new ways and do things differently, and it takes courage to be curious, to give up control and the right to define, and to be open to what is to come. And first of all, you have to open your eyes to the fact that the world can look different, that life can be lived in other ways, can be experienced differently and reflected in stories other than one's own.

Hopefully, there will come a day when repertoire statistics are no longer needed, where diversity is a matter of course in any festival and where the proportion of music written by women is closer to 50% than to 4%. But in 2020, it is still crucial to find and actively use tools to curate this part of our age—women's take on their age—so that also the women's presence, contribution, gaze, approaches, tastes, and experiences help to write the story of the present time that posterity must spring from.

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### Notes

**1** We are inspired by the “Inclusion Nudges” change methodology developed in 2013, see Tinna C. Nielsen and Lisa Kepinski, “Inclusion Nudges,” <https://inclusion-nudges.org>.

**2** See “About DONNE,” Donne in Music, accessed 11 June 2020, <http://www.drama-musica.com/AboutDonne.html>. See also a list of all works composed by the women in the database, “The Big List,” Donne in Music, Accessed 11 June 2020, <http://www.drama-musica.com/TheBigList.html>.

**3** Stefan Forsberg, “Repertoires in Balance – A Summit About Music” (Seminar, Copenhagen, DK, May 18, 2017).

**4** Sound and Music ([www.soundandmusic.org](http://www.soundandmusic.org)) has worked seriously with changing the wording and structure in their different artist programmes and applications in England, and have seen a major shift towards a much more diverse group of applicants.

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**Sine Tofte Hannibal** is the general manager of the Danish Composer's Society. Gender equality, diversity and the meeting between audiences and live music are topics that she continuously focuses on and work with in the Danish Composers' Society and within the field of new music. She has a background as project manager for festivals and ensembles for experimental music, projects that engage children and young people in music, and as facilitator of Nordic and European networks on audience development.

Recently, she took the initiative in the Danish Composer's Society of making comprehensive repertoire statistics on live classical music in Denmark. The statistic showed that less than 4% of the live classical repertoire in Denmark is written by women. She is also actively involved in developing strategies on diversity and gender equality within ECSA, the European Composers and Songwriters Alliance, as well as coordinating an initiative within the Nordic Region focusing on career possibilities for professional women composers. Sine Tofte Hannibal holds a MA in Modern Culture from the University of Copenhagen.

# A Discussion with Dahlia Borsche

## Dahlia Borsche

**Brandon Farnsworth:** There seems to be more buzz in contemporary music/New Music in Germany in the past couple of years towards trying to diversify. At least acknowledging that these issues are important, if not doing something about it. In general, from your perspective, could you put a finger on why this has become such a buzz word?

**Dahlia Borsche:** I have been asking myself the same question for a long time. This is a pretty negative answer actually, but the German scene is under pressure, they are fighting for their existence and acknowledgment. They know that they have to deal with this to survive, at least those aiming at the next generation do, because the pressure comes from outside and from inside at the same time. All the other contemporary art practices are dealing with this, but once again German contemporary music scenes are set apart. However they cannot ignore that this is an important issue nowadays. The younger generation is also putting some pressure on them, as you [ed.: GRiNM] are for example, along with lots of younger composers and musicians who raise this topic. If you want to keep a connection to the next generation, you have to deal with the topics that are important to them.

**BF:** Do you also think it has to do with the fact that directors have been in their positions for so long? They get these directorships essentially for life...

**DB:** Yes, it is the biggest benefit of German contemporary music and the core problem at the same time, and I do not know any other country with this funding system. If you are in a position for the rest of your working life no matter what you do, then there is no challenge, no motivation to keep up with developments, to think anew and reflect on your own practice. It is also a generational problem, because especially for older people, gender diversity is just another topic, so to say. They learned things in a certain way, and it massively affects their self-conception to think about it differently. For younger generations, it is not such a big deal to think about gender not as a fixed category; for example, the first thing I hear my students say is what pronouns they use, which has become so normal. But for white men over sixty, they just do not ask these kinds of questions. Now they are forced to, but it is not something they have learned about.

**BF:** You have a background working with transcultural musicology and also working with CTM Festival which has been engaged in these issues for a long time. What is your experience working within the 'legacy structure' of New Music at the DAAD? How do you perceive this register change, this code shift?

**DB:** It is always nice to change perspective and face a new challenge. 'Legacy' is the right word, as it is all about conserving and connecting to a certain tradition within the long history of the DAAD. This program has existed since 1963, and the DAAD can be proud of its history, which encompasses a who's who of the avant-garde, not only in music but in the other art forms and art practices. This is something I am willing to connect to, but it is a difficult balance between connecting to that legacy and shifting to new visions and urgent changes.

The major issue I have faced is being confronted with hierarchy in so many dimensions, even within my own team, which I was not used to, as CTM and all the other teams I have worked in before were not as hierarchical. Also, this very strong Eurocentric idea of knowing that *this is contemporary music*, along with the ignorance of so many other practices, has been an issue. Coming from CTM, I had another perspective, and many of my new collaboration partners talked in another language about global music cultures and their horizon.

**BF:** What is your vision for a diverse music scene? What would it look like in this city?

**DB:** Maybe the city is too big—Berlin is very diverse anyway. What I would like to foster at DAAD is an exchange based on challenges, rather than inviting international people who are repeating the same structures that we have here, even though they, of course, come from another country and bring their own culture, approach, and perspective. What is more interesting for the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin programme is to invite people who bring a completely different understanding of what contemporary music can be, on the same level of excellence and reach and quality, since the DAAD is about supporting excellence. But there are so many voices around the world who could bring different music practices to Berlin that are a

challenge for musicians and composers here and add something new to what we already know. This is my vision for the programme, to challenge our view of contemporary music with diversification in terms of actual global perspectives.

**Rosanna Lovell:** Many countries have certain goals in regard to diversify that need to be addressed to get funding from the major government arts funding body. Do you think such an approach could accelerate change in Germany? Would this pose challenges to the DAAD programs and its infrastructure?

**DB:** I do not think it would affect the DAAD programme or my specific work that much because we are trying to focus on diversification anyway. It is a difficult question, and I cannot really tell if it would be positive or negative because it is always both. But since we are so far away from gender equality, or a global view of contemporary music and acknowledgement of music practices beyond Europe, it is really important to have these top-down institutional tools that force people to talk about these topics. As I said at the beginning, the scene is under pressure from the outside, too, because these are State decisions. Diversification is something the Federal Republic of Germany wants to happen, which is important. We need to bring these topics to the surface—we still have a long way to go! The negative effect, which we can see now, is that then queer people, female composers, people of colour, whoever is in focus, tend to be exhibited and tokenised. It is a fig leaf—if curators invited one queer artist, they just put them on stage and feel that they do not have to deal with that issue any further.

**RL:** It is a bit of a tick-the-box kind of thing.

**DB:** Yes. Diversity—check. And this is what is happening in some of the major German New Music festivals. International artists come and are presented with no communication, no mediation, no introduction, for either the audience or the artists, and this is not working. It is not enough; it is not what we are aiming at.

**BF:** What steps have you been taking concretely with the DAAD to diversify the people that are selected for that programme?

**DB:** The first one was a simple step. We did not change the selection process; people can still apply and then they get selected by an international jury. The step was rather that I chose new jury members. It was as simple as that. As soon as there are people in the jury who

know global music practices, they can judge respective applications because they can put them in perspective. Last year, there were three former jury members, I re-invited them, and three new ones, so it was really interesting to watch their different approaches and how they judged the applications. One of the three artists who got the fellowship for this year was first pushed away because there was no score, and some jury members did not understand what they were seeing on screen; it was just something electronic. They did not have the background or understanding of these music practices, so they would rather just put it away because they cannot judge it. Therefore, it was really helpful to have other people on the jury who could say very smart things and really put it in relation to the other applications.

I also wrote a letter to the jury members telling them about me and my colleagues' vision for the programme, that we are aiming at gender equality, diversity, and a really global perspective. Of course, it is an independent jury, and I was not involved during the decision process. But I thought it was important, so that they would be encouraged to make a decision that was related to those topics. Rather than thinking that a musical practice was not that good because it is not really like traditional New Music, and so maybe it is not expected here, I wanted to tell them that that was actually something we are also really interested in.

Other steps to diversify the people that are selected for the programme will take more time. The most diverse, global, and gender-sensitive jury can only choose from the submitted applications. Thus, we have to promote the programme in regions and contexts where it is not known yet, encourage female and queer artists, and attract applications from other backgrounds. Last year, I travelled to several festivals to present the programme. In addition, I am collaborating with local experts who could function as multipliers.

**RL:** Talking about the jury selection process and how people get selected leads to this question of organisations or collectives that do not fit into the application structures of the DAAD. Is there any way that you are trying to change structural elements within the DAAD or is this still a challenge?

**DB:** You have to take a long perspective for this kind of change. But it is definitely something that we are thinking about. How can we manage to legally invite collectives, for instance? We cannot only do it by trying to work around the rules, e.g. inviting one person from

the collective with this fellowship and the other ones as collaborating artists. Changing the rules to enable this is difficult because it involves not only the Artists-in-Berlin programme; the rules for fellowships are the same for all of the DAAD, which is a massive institution. Our needs for the Artists-in-Berlin programme are different to those for the rest of the DAAD concerning academics and students, and it is a challenge to mediate these different interests.

**BF:** All these issues bring me back to the question of audience. I wonder about this tension between bringing in different kinds of artists to serve an audience who is already interested in experimental music, and bringing in artists from certain countries who also speak to a local audience in Berlin who would not normally come to a DAAD concert. Are you programming different kinds of music for the same audience, or do you see this as also opening up the audience and the concept of what the whole DAAD exchange is?

**DB:** Absolutely, diversification should happen in the audience as well, this is as important as the diversification of the artists. This is much easier with this programme than I thought; it is actually one of the more minor challenges I am facing with diversification. There is a big pre-existing audience which just trusts the programme, this DAAD Artists-in-Berlin brand, and know that it therefore has to be an excellent artist, no matter who is in my position, or directing the department, or if they know the artist already or not. The branding really works.

I also tried to open up our events to other audiences, which I thought would not be as easy, but I just had to open the door and they were almost rushing in! We try to reach out to different audiences in many ways with various kinds of promotion, addressing the gallery neighbourhood and younger people, student programmes or through think tanks between students and our artists. Collaborating with different people from diverse scenes in Berlin, not only with the big institutions, but reaching out to other collaboration partners and also the free scene (*Freie Szene*), the audience diversified quickly. Since we are not allowed to generate any income because we are a publicly funded institution, all our events are for free, which of course makes them even more attractive. I also find it very important to mix audiences and not try to schedule events so that this one is for the white, old, New Music people where it has to be a proper concert situation and they have to sit and face the stage, another one is for the club audience,

and a third is for the Turkish neighbourhood community... but rather to curate events that enable people to meet each other who might not have met without the event.

**BF:** My next question is about your selection process at the DAAD. What is the relationship between programming or selecting for a local community, and the possibility for artists to interact with that community, versus the importance and status that artists have within their home country or musical tradition?

**DB:** There has to be a balance, of course, but the importance of the artist in their local context is a major factor in the decision process. Many times, the Berlin audience does not even know the name of the artist who is invited. But in this person's local context, they are a very influential musician, composer, or sound artist. It is very important to grant accessibility and visibility for these practices, and then I think that automatically it is something that is interesting also for the German audience. It is a question and also a decision we make, to say what is interesting for the Berlin audience, and a lot of people would answer this in different ways: some would say they would prefer someone who they can collaborate with easily, or who speaks their musical language, but there are also enough people who would rather really want to learn something new, and are curious about experiencing musical practices that are different to theirs.

**RL:** Following up on from that, you mentioned already the lack of mediation some artists experience. What kind of mediation do you think is important and what efforts do you make to mediate or situate or contextualise their work?

**DB:** We are in this lucky situation that we have so much time with the artists. Our award residents are in Berlin for a full year, which gives us a lot of time to introduce them and their context in many ways. We write a portrait text before they come, which is presented on our website, and then we try to introduce them not only by presenting their art or music, but also with different talks and discourse events. We set up this series of interdisciplinary talks last year called *Common Ground*, where we invited fellows from our different departments to present their works in process, and to exchange and talk about their ideas, doubts, and struggles. It was really informal, so people could just get into a conversation with the artists to ask questions and learn more about their work, not this on-stage presentation of a

shiny finished piece where there is a big distance between the audience and the artist, but more like a studio visit. The artists on stage try to figure out their common ground, or frictions, and this is also what the audience does afterwards in the discussion; it works well and the audience really appreciates it. In other words, we are trying to offer communication in manifold ways, and unlike festivals, we have time.

Time is not only important for the Berlin audience to find out about the artist, to get in touch and to understand and follow up and all that. It is also important for the artist who comes to Berlin, because it takes time to understand, to build trust for them to open up and to really report on also their struggles and their local context and not just presenting an image—this artist persona which they learned to present for official events. Time is the crucial factor.

**RL:** Our last question is in relationship to the current situation we are in doing this interview, where there is no chance of assembly or travel, and all musical communities are currently virtual. The name DAAD itself—Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst—interestingly does not actually imply physical travel, but rather service or exchange. How has the situation changed for you and your artists given the current situation? Does it create any opportunities that were unexpected? Beyond that, what do these virtual networks and communities also build or open up for you in your thinking?

**DB:** I wish I could tell you some more positive examples! What is really positive at least is that we can see how relevant art practices are in general, how relevant social gatherings are, and how there is just no possible way you can substitute a live concert situation. Everything I do in my job, and that I have always done while programming and curating, is about bringing people together in one room, that is the essence of my work. There are a lot of ways that I can still keep up—of course, we are in close contact with all of our fellows via Zoom, having meetings and discussions, and trying to reflect on the situation. But the musical experience is just not a digital thing, it is impossible. It is good to see that, and feel that everyone understands this is so important to us. We cannot be replaced; the digital world cannot replace the real world. It is really important to have a resistant attitude towards Silicon Valley, who wants to replace humans as much as possible with robots and algorithms. Humans are okay if they can keep up with the pace of a robot, but at best they

should be replaced. It is super nice to have these music practices really working against that.

On the other hand, of course we can foster exchange on digital platforms. Right now, the DAAD is spending some money on people who cannot travel, so they can do something in their local context. Hopefully, it can all move around the world again at some point, and the outcome of these local actions can also be transferred to Berlin. What is also really important, and the benefit of a big institution like the DAAD, is that we are not forced to produce anything. We are never forced to schedule events, we are not a concert venue—we are a residency program, so we can give our fellows and the artists we collaborate with time to reflect, which is so important.

I see so many freelance artists right now who are producing like crazy, bedroom productions and online concert streams and all that; it is just not leading anywhere. There is such an overload of digital production, just because people are so scared that they will get lost in this situation, which I totally understand. Our fellows will not get lost, because they are in a safe haven, they receive a high stipend, they are in safe surroundings, and there is no pressure to produce at the moment. They can just sit and breathe. We also try to slow them down, try to foster this reflection on what we really want to change. Obviously, none of us want to go back to the normal that we came from, but it is important to take this opportunity, and this privilege we have right now, to think about the situation we want to live in after the pandemic. What do we have to do and what is our reach, what can we do to end up there?

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**Dahlia Borsche** is a musicologist and curator. In 2019, she took on the position as Head of Music at the DAAD Artist-In-Residence programme. Dahlia Borsche was active as a promoter, DJ, coordination manager, and producer (CTM Festival Berlin, Labor Sonor, et al.). From 2014-2019, she co-curated CTM's discourse programme. As a musicologist, her most recent engagement was at Humboldt University's Chair for Trans-Cultural Musicology in the Department of Musicology and Media Studies. Her research interests focus on contemporary and transcultural music processes, thereby expanding traditional discipline boundaries to the fields of sound, urban and cultural studies.





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