CLASSICAL MUSIC FUTURES
PRACTICES OF INNOVATION

EDITED BY
NEIL T. SMITH, PETER PETERS,
AND KAROLY MOLINA

https://www.openbookpublishers.com

Any digital material and resources associated with this volume may be available at https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0353#resources.

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-073-6

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-074-3

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-075-0

ISBN Digital eBook (EPUB): 978-1-80511-076-7

ISBN XML: 978-1-80511-078-1

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-079-8

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0353

Cover image: Jean Pierre Geusens, *Focuss22* (2017)

Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

1. Roundtable 1: Whose Future?

Neil Thomas Smith with contributions from Maria Hansen, Kirsteen Davidson Kelly, and George E. Lewis

This chapter looks at approaches to urgent issues around equality, inclusion and diversity within classical music today through the lens of this volume's main theme: the future. As Bull and Scharff state, 'musical innovation does not necessarily lead to social change, but can still entrench existing inequalities'.[1] As touched on in the introduction, these 'existing inequalities' have been identified in fundamental facets of the classical tradition, including its reliance on a restricted canon, the image of genius to which only white males belong, and the entirely intentional and explicit exclusions that women and people of colour have faced in musical, as in many other, spheres of operation in Europe, North America and beyond. These broader themes are not the topic of the conversation here, but they are an important backdrop to this conversation.

The discussion covers three arenas in which efforts to increase representation in terms of gender, race and – to a lesser extent – class are well underway, though with significant steps still to take for parity to be achieved. These are: music higher education, community projects undertaken by orchestras, and festivals of new music. Each author provides a snapshot of the issues at stake in these different areas of

1 Anna Bull and Christina Scharff, 'Introduction' in *Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession: New Ideas for Tackling Inequalities and Exclusions*, ed. by Anna Bull, Christina Scharff and Laudan Nooshin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0353.01

classical music practice, showing distinct challenges but also important areas of overlap. There is common ground in the attempt to broaden the profile of the students, participants and practitioners active in their various spheres and, in so doing, there is an implicit challenge to one or other of the tenets of classical music culture described above. Belief in 'excellence', for example, in contemporary music – that festivals will simply perform the best music – does not sit well with so-called affirmative action. Yet, the fact that the profile of composers is so restricted calls into question this assertion of excellence in the first place. A similar dynamic is at play in music education. Broadening participation, therefore, is not just a challenge of funnelling more people through the same conduits,[2] but presents fundamental questions for classical music practice. The discussion below originally took place as part of the Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music's 2021 symposium that considered 'the Future'. The panel consisted of Maria Hansen, chief executive of ELIA, a Higher Education network; Kirsteen Davidson Kelly, formerly creative learning director of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, now chief executive of the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland; and composer, improviser and scholar, George E. Lewis, who is the Edwin H. Case Professor of American Music at Columbia University.

In some ways our desired future is uncontroversial: all of us want a future in which everyone can reach their potential, a future in which all people are able to play and listen to all kinds of music and to make music part of their lives, throughout their lives, yet the route to this utopia is not so clear and requires critical reflection on the present, and on the structures in classical music that have been taken for granted for so long.

2 What is memorably described as 'add women and stir' in Roberta Lamb, Lori-Anne Dolloff, and Sondra Wieland Howe, 'Feminism, feminist research, and gender research in music education: a selective review', in *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning: A Project of the Music Educators National Conference*, ed. by Richard Colwell and Carol P. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 648–674: p. 666.

3 Key Issues in Conservatoire Education

Maria Hansen

ELIA is a globally connected European network of higher arts education institutions: we have 260 members, all of whom are art universities, art academies, or faculties of arts practice within larger universities. We are rooted in Europe but also have a sizable global membership. ELIA covers all disciplines of art practice, which makes us different from discipline-specific networks like the Association Européenne des Conservatoires (AEC), which many of you will know well. ELIA aims to provide a dynamic platform for the professional development and exchange of our members: talking about the future is what we do all the time. In fact, together with the AEC, we are currently part of an EU-funded project called FAST 45, which envisions higher arts education in 2045, together with partners from the arts education sector and the private sector.

Our work at ELIA is informed by a number of strategic priorities that are developed with our members, and the topic of diversity and inclusion is central to this. Discussions with colleagues at conservatoires and at the AEC confirmed that the topic of diversity and inclusion is complex but also central to their work.[3] I have three points to share from these amazing conversations: firstly, a key aspect of improving diversity and inclusion is the repertoire played and the context within which it is played. These are the two aspects that the AEC is addressing together with the higher music education sector. What is that body of work we call classical music? What is not part of it? Well, female composers to name only one category must be better represented but unearthing unknown composers through decolonization is another. There are already some great examples of this.

Sharing musical experience might be more important than a flawless performance. That means that taking performance out of the safe setting of the concert hall into the imperfect realm of the outdoors and the city is part of the answer at the conservatoire. This requires changes to the curriculum and many conservatoires are already addressing this,

3 The following benefits from discussions I, Maria, had with Stefan Gies from the AEC and also colleagues from Codarts in Rotterdam and Trinity Laban conservatory in London. So, thanks to Hans Leenders and David Bahanovich for their help (Codarts is an arts university in Rotterdam that specialises in music, dance and circus).

sometimes sending their musicians for weeks into cities to work together with artists from other disciplines and creating unexpected new work for new audiences. This is the case with the incubator program at Codarts in Rotterdam and also a new neighbourhood orchestra in The Hague.

The second point concerns the identity of musicians: they are being educated for a very specific role, like playing in an orchestra. Yet they are not being educated to become artists as citizens, nor artists as innovators. I've come across quite a number of conservatoires that are addressing this issue, now focusing on enabling musicians to figure out what their contribution to society could be for themselves.

Finally, and for me most importantly, conservatoires are part of an ecosystem that starts at the youngest ages and goes through secondary school into higher education, to work life and beyond. Every part of this ecosystem has to be part of this movement that will create a more diverse and inclusive classical music industry. In an ecosystem, everyone has to take care of each other and to relate to what is around them. I think, once you open up to that, certainly in the larger communities but also in the smaller ones, there are so many parts that you could connect to: the schools, the community centres. I think once you open up your mind, it's easy.

In Rotterdam, for instance, there is a music coalition of local music institutions, including the orchestra and Codarts, who are working together to improve access to music-making for children. We know it matters where a kid went to school and what opportunities they got at school. Trinity Laban has an intake of forty-three percent from state-funded schools, which is considered high. This, according to them, directly results in a much higher inflow of students from a BAME background, seventeen percent to be precise. They're embracing this challenge: it takes a lot to coach these kids through the pipeline in all sorts of ways and at the end they may have very different goals to playing in an orchestra. It takes teachers that understand this, with contact between student and teacher sometimes running for decades. Here lies a big challenge as many of you know: I asked everyone who their heroes were in this kind of 'ecosystem thinking' and I will just call out a few: the Kinshasa symphony was mentioned but also the Sphinx organisation in the US, which I know and admire. In the UK there is the Chineke! Orchestra.

My final thought is that sharing and moving together, across borders, in this is essential: learn globally, act locally. In my business, and in yours, every teacher matters.

Co-Creation in the Community

Kirsteen Davidson Kelly

I want to give you a whistle-stop tour of a recent Scottish Chamber Orchestra (SCO) project in the community and some of the thinking that underpins our community work. The SCO is an orchestra based in Edinburgh, which receives direct funding from the Scottish Government and has a remit to provide music to the entire country. This project is part of a community residency, which is a multi-year project in a specific Edinburgh neighbourhood, Wester Hailes. This community residency project was originally conceived as a series of school projects, but a local youth forum provoked us to engage with adults as well. So, we put out an open call for a series of 'music and visuals' workshops, leaving the framework as open as we possibly could so that the process and the output could be co-created.

The team consisted of a composer, a workshop leader, three SCO musicians and a visual artist. The initial aim was simply to articulate and amplify the experiences of local residents. The participants who came to the project didn't know each other beforehand. Some came from just having picked up leaflets in the community, some found out about it via social media, others were prescribed the project by their doctor or community link worker.

The group decided that they would create a piece to reflect a day in the life of Wester Hailes. They used a graphic in the workshop space of a twenty-four-hour timeline and at each session they explored just one window of time, working with the question 'what did you do today?'. Between the workshops, the participants used phones and cameras to capture sounds and images exploring their local environment and their everyday activities. As part of the process, the group went on visits to the Fruitmarket Gallery in the centre of Edinburgh and to SCO season concerts. The result of this process was that the composer and visual artist curated an audiovisual installation, capturing snapshots of daily life through found sound and workshop recordings, film and original music. The title *Incredible Distance* came out of conversations within the workshops.

We displayed the installation at the Royal Scottish Academy and at the Fruitmarket Gallery, both in the centre of town, as well as at WHALE Arts, which is where we were running the project. The installation took

the form of a twelve-minute film with a hand-drawn score: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifJWXjeGu7s. This included written text, snippets of conversations that happened during the process.

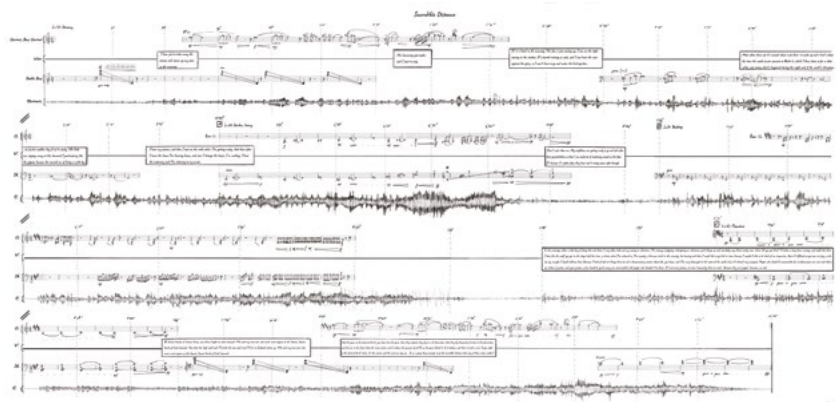

Fig. 1.1 Score of Incredible Distance.

We also displayed four images. These were accompanied by miniature sound representations of what participants deemed to be iconic Wester Hailes sounds. SCO musicians recreated the participants' recorded sounds for the piece.

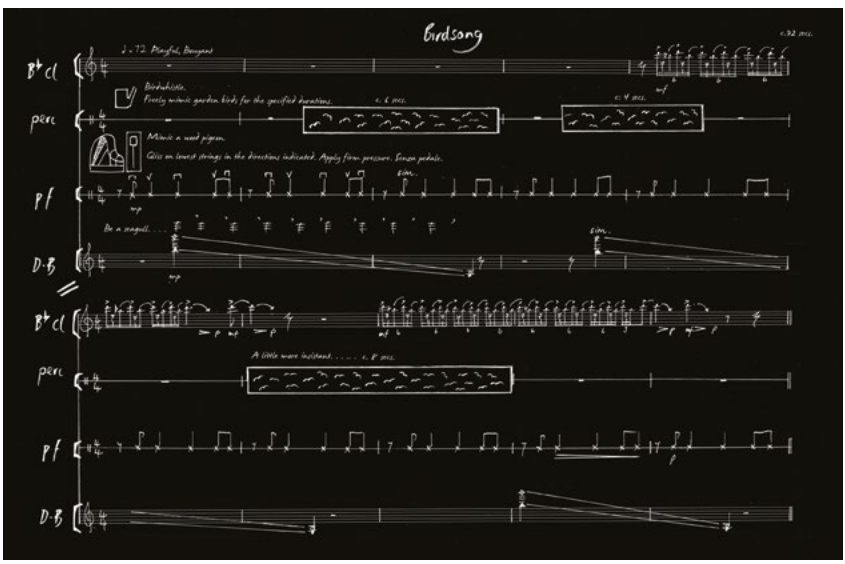

Fig. 1.2 Iconic Wester Hailes sound: Birdsong © Laura Baxter.

There is a particular kind of thinking and set of principles that underpins this inclusive work. I think we're continually needing to evolve our understanding of the civic role of funded organisations, our role in sustaining individuals and communities and our role in developing the art form. We focus on work that pays equal attention, and gives equal value, to both process and output, and we use co-created practice all the time. We treat music-making itself as a shared practice and a communicative tool and we deliberately create connections in order to unlock meaning. We share idea-generation and decision-making processes, and we understand that co-creation can be really messy, uncertain and challenging but, when it's done well, it is really innovative and rewarding for everyone involved. What we're doing is creating meeting points: we go out to people in their homes, and we invite them into ours. I mean this fairly literally in the sense that we are obviously going out to communities and welcoming people into our performance spaces, and I also mean it in the sense of the types of artistic process we use, which explore different perspectives, different types of music, different meanings, different processes.

It's really essential that we train musicians, and we include composers, in this collective practice – collaborative approaches and understanding co-creation – because it is difficult. It does take a lot of work and you need to grow teams very carefully in order for these things to be successful. So, in our community residency work, we link with all sorts of higher education institutions, we have students from, for example, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the University of Edinburgh who come and work on projects with us quite often as part of their course.

I think one of the privileges of being a performing arts organisation that is core-funded by our government is that we do have a reasonable amount of time and resource to support these kinds of processes. We need to spend time in the room, we need to spend time with community partners understanding people's needs and the needs of the community. We need to get to know how to tread carefully, if you like, around what sensitivities there might be.

I think some of the tensions will be about bringing different practices together. So, for example, you can have a composer who is very highly skilled in working through a brief and working in great detail, organising and controlling material. And then you have a workshop process which

is really messy, and nobody knows what's going on, where the purpose is largely to share information and to create human relationships. So again, you have to take care of those processes.

I hope I showed a little bit in that project in Wester Hailes what I mean when I say the outcomes of that project were not set: we didn't predict that we would be installing such an amazing piece of audio-visual art in a city-centre gallery. That came about because the process worked so well and the artists worked together so well, and the outcome was so beautiful.

For the artists, it extends their practice. It makes them think about it in new ways; it's innovation by default. For participants we had some very rich feedback and we had quite a bit of media attention around that particular project. The feedback basically said that they were blown away by how they were treated, how they were included, how they were part of the process and what it did for them. One participant said, 'I've lived in Wester Hailes for forty years and it was like an albatross around my neck until you came along … this project has made me look at the whole place with new eyes …we've all started to blossom as individuals.' Well, you don't get much better than that I suppose!

I thought I would finish this up with a quote from Nina Simon, who expresses it very well in her book, *The Art of Relevance*. She says that we are 'living in the creative tension between evangelising for the things you care about and listening with interest to what others care about. It's about radiating the inside out and inviting the outside in.'[4]

Steps Toward the Decolonisation of New Music Festivals

George E. Lewis

In a recent article of mine on decolonisation in new music I provide eight practical, albeit admittedly difficult steps toward forestalling what I see as the kind of impoverishment and devolution of the field that is resulting from the recirculation of the stereotype of exclusive whiteness

4 Nina Simon, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2016), eBook, part 5.4.

around classical music's self-image.[5] My basic question in this article was 'what would a decolonised curatorial classical music regime sound like?' Well, to some extent we know what it would *look* like: Okwui Enwezor was the first non-white curator of the famous contemporary art festival, Documenta 11, in 2002. This version of the festival presented contemporary art as 'a network in which New York, Lagos, London, Cape Town and Basel are all more or less equally important to a contemporary canon... as opposed to some centres being exotic margins and others more genuinely contemporary.'[6]

There's really no reason why festivals and other important institutions that support new music couldn't do the same. So why don't they do it? Sara Ahmed has written that institutional whiteness is about the 'reproduction of likeness'.[7] For her, institutions are kinship technologies. For me, music, genre, race, gender and kinship are often co-present, and the naturalisation of these kinship-like discourses become obstacles to change. So my first step would be to move beyond kinship and invest in new populations.

Secondly, we might want to give up on meritocracy. Some ensembles, granting organisations, and festivals in the US have always achieved greater gender and racial diversity, while others have never given an award to or programmed the work of an Afrodiasporic composer. These decisions are always portrayed as being based on merit, but in fact there really isn't any such thing as the best composer. The impact of many years of essentially fake meritocracy – as well as decades of curatorial commissioning and academic employment and admissions decisions proceeding from what theorist bell hooks has called 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' – has resulted in whiteness becoming a form of unearned equity with a complementary *disinvestment* in other segments of the new music community.[8]

---

5 George E. Lewis, 'New Music Decolonization in Eight Difficult Steps,' *VAN Outernational*, https://www.van-outernational.com/lewis-en (English), https://www.van-outernational.com/lewis (German), https://www.van-outernational.com/lewis-fr (French).

6 Anthony Gardner & Charles Green, 'Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the "Global" Exhibition,' http://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/post-north-documenta11-and-the-challenges-of-the-global-exhibition.html.

7 Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 38.

8 bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 84.

I'm totally with Maria Hansen when she recommends talking about the diversification of school music programmes, and I'm thinking in particular about the production of composers in this case, even more than the production of performers. I'm thinking how university composition programmes, such as the one that I am currently the head of at Columbia University, are really (to use a US sports metaphor) like the farm teams for new music composers. So, if those cohorts are not diverse, the field experiences a kind of sensory deprivation in terms of what is being offered musically.

Another thing would be the internationalisation of music curation decisions. There's really no reason why major music institutions that tout themselves as international should continue to present all-white concert programmes, juries, faculties and the like. At the Ensemble Modern's November 2020 symposium on Afro-modernism in Frankfurt, one of the presenters was Björn Gottstein, then director of the Donaueschinger Musiktage, one of the most important in Europe and around the world. He said 'Well, I'm kind of part of the accused' or 'part of the problem', being a white man and a director of a European music festival, which in fact has programmed very few composers of colour in the past decades. Actually, there were in fact zero until 2020, at a festival that is a hundred years old.

So, one way around that might be to engage curators from non-majoritarian ethnicities, genders and regions that could allow audiences to hear a greater range of aesthetic and methodological directions. This is what they do at Documenta, for example, or what happened at Tanglewood's Festival of Contemporary Music 2022, where four curators created a programme that placed an unprecedented diversity of aesthetics, genders, ethnicities, and musical directions on the festival's table of contents. What we need now are new experts and new expressions of expertise.

Finally, I think a change of consciousness might be required. I've suggested that a mental envelope of creolization would allow contemporary music to think about a new 'we'. There is such a thing as inclusion, but the reason for including people is because you excluded them before. Why did you exclude them in the first place? What empowered you to enforce judgements regarding inclusion? And if race, gender, or other characteristics are part of the reasons for exclusion,

this obviously has to be investigated and countered. Doing this sort of creolization is part of a technology of inclusion that would allow contemporary music to move beyond this celebration of a whiteness-based diaspora toward becoming a true world music that recognises historical, geographic, cultural and methodological cross-connections. The aim is not only to achieve diversity, but really, a new complexity that promises far greater creative depth.

I've been hearing about the irrelevance of classical music for most of my life. But I think there are some changes in the air. For one thing, throughout all the time we've been hearing about this irrelevance, people have continued to compose, people have continued to perform, people continue to produce things – and not all of it is supported by major institutions. People have made all kinds of grassroots efforts because they seem to find that there's something about this community and this music that they deem important.

Now the big issue, though, is that most of these people don't want to support exclusively whiteness-based diasporas. They don't want to be involved in the celebration of that, and people feel poorly when, in order to enter in a field, you have to give up your own identity, or you have to go through some sort of looking glass, a kind of 'decontamination filter' that winds up destroying who you are. Well, no one wants to do that, and I could see how that would result in people saying 'well…'. You see, when you do that – I don't care whether you do it in classical music or what happened in the eighties in jazz where people started doing that – the smart people leave and then the field devolves. I felt that my little eight steps were an attempt to forestall and counter that devolution.

The usual sort of binaries, this versus that, don't really work anymore because all of these fields, including classical music in my view, are inexorably becoming creolized. They're interpenetrating, so that there's no purity anymore. So people who are looking for that are generally going to be disappointed when they don't find it. So in this case, because classical music has asserted a purity narrative for so long, maybe that's a problem that could be fixed. I saw that my little end of it was to think about Afro-diasporic composers and the seemingly near-total absence of these people from institutional narratives, from books, from articles, and from critical reflection. It seemed at odds with what I was seeing in the community and in the world.

When you see these discrepancies, that's what I found there: a hole that could be filled. You can't fix every hole, but I felt that I could fix this one because I knew enough about it and I had some tools that I could bring to bear. I'm happy to help other people on fixing up the rest of the building.

References

Ahmed, Sara, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012). https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822395324

Bull, Anna and Christina Scharff, 'Introduction' in *Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession: New Ideas for Tackling Inequalities and Exclusions*, ed. by Anna Bull, Christina Scharff and Laudan Nooshin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

Gardner, Anthony and Charles Green, "Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the 'Global' Exhibition," *OnCurating*, http://www.on-curating.org/issue-33-reader/post-north-documenta11-and-the-challenges-of-the-global-exhibition.html

hooks, bell, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2014). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315743226

Lamb, Roberta, Lori-Anne Dolloff, and Sondra Wieland Howe, 'Feminism, feminist research, and gender research in music education: a selective review', in *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning: A Project of the Music Educators National Conference*, ed. by Richard Colwell and Carol P. Richardson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 648–674.

Lewis, George E., "New Music Decolonization in Eight Difficult Steps," *VAN Outernational*, https://www.van-outernational.com/lewis-en (English), https://www.van-outernational.com/lewis (German), https://www.van-outernational.com/lewis-fr (French).

Simon, Nina, *The Art of Relevance* (Santa Cruz: Museum 2.0, 2016), eBook, part 5.4. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159032X.2017.1346166