

CLASSICAL MUSIC FUTURES PRACTICES OF INNOVATION

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Neil Thomas Smith, Peter Peters and Karoly Molina, *Classical Music Futures: Practices of Innovation*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2024,
<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0353>

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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

9. Roundtable 3: Orchestras in a Changing Climate

*Neil Thomas Smith and Peter Peters with
contributions from Teemu Kirjonen,
Detlef Grooß, Georgina MacDonell Finlayson,
and Jan Jaap Knoll*

Classical music is often seen as a practice that struggles to react to contemporary events. Yet, it does register societal changes, with perhaps the most important being climate change. There is a sense of urgency, as well as a need for concrete action on this topic within the field. Climate change and the measures and policies to address it will affect us all in myriad ways. This chapter discusses how the classical music sector might respond. For instance, orchestras today depend on travel and mobility as a global art form: conductors, soloists, musicians and, of course, the audience rely on emission-heavy travel. What would it mean for the practice if we were to travel less? How would it change?

There is also of course the question of how to respond artistically and creatively, not just organisationally. Attempts are being made for music to help counter, for instance, the imagination gap with regard to climate change, with artists trying to give audiences a real sense of how the actions of humans can have catastrophic effects on the natural world. The emotional power of music to reach and inspire people is being used to counteract the difficulties in imagining what the future will look like. An example is composers and musicians who use climate change data to make music compositions so that people can engage and experience these data in different ways.

There are also the very concrete and practical questions of where to start and the steps we can take as individuals, or students or employees, with regards to this issue. Is creating meaningful change within the classical sector nearly as worthwhile as fighting politically for change in industrial, energy and agricultural policy? And how can you guarantee that changes are not ‘skin-deep’? The spectre of greenwashing – i.e. giving activities a veneer of climate action without making meaningful change – is always present.

The following roundtable began as a part of the online Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music’s 2021 Corona Conversations series, which engaged with major issues in classical music. Centre director, Peter Peters, was joined by four panellists with a stake in the issue: Teemu Kirjonen, general manager of the Finnish Lahti Symphony Orchestra, an orchestra that decided to go carbon neutral; Detlef Grooß from Germany, a violist and also chairperson of the Orchester des Wandels (the orchestra of change), which is a group of musicians from various orchestras around Germany who want to address climate issues; Georgina MacDonell Finlayson who is sustainability manager at the Scottish Nevis Ensemble, Scotland’s ‘street orchestra’, who play in unusual locations and tour extensively around their home country;¹ and finally, Jan Jaap Knol who is the director of the Boekman Foundation, which is the institute for arts culture and related policy in the Netherlands, known for their research in the cultural sector. The Boekman Foundation published a report on sustainability in the cultural sector in 2019, as described in the first contribution.²

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- 1 As mentioned in the Introduction, the Nevis Ensemble folded in 2023 due to financial pressures. Many arts organisations are tackling these issues, as well as those posed by the *demographic problem*, despite their own perilous funding position.
 - 2 Christine Skovbon from the Erasmus University Rotterdam also took part in the original discussion but is represented in the volume by her own chapter.

Culture and Climate

Jan Jaap Knol

Today we will reflect, in different ways, on the three aspects in which culture, including music, can contribute to the big theme of sustainability and climate change. Firstly, we must do our utmost to make our own practices more sustainable. Secondly, there is the question of how we as a cultural sector can contribute to the public awareness of sustainability by telling the story of climate change using the power of imagination. This can range from the most dystopian scenarios to more optimistic ones. The third and final aspect is the design potential of culture: how can the creativity and innovation of artists contribute to designing more sustainable ways of living? As Georgina formulates below, we need to redefine success after all those years when it was about growth: growth of people attending performances, growth of economic resources, growth of touring etc. But if we find ways to redefine our success, we can also stimulate others to rethink patterns in a way that can contribute to a more sustainable and greener world. At the Boekman Foundation, research on culture and sustainability is one of our core themes and I'd like to very briefly discuss some of our work.

In 2019 we surveyed around 250 cultural organisations in the Netherlands, whom we questioned about their attitude and actions when it comes to sustainability.³ From that report, on the positive side, I can say that many cultural organisations are increasingly aware of the need to become more sustainable and there is concrete action, mainly concerning waste and electricity consumption. Honestly, there were not that many activities, at least in 2019, when it comes to the area of public awareness-raising, while we also found that most respondents did not have structural policies regarding sustainability, nor did they monitor their progress in this area. There were three barriers often mentioned here: there was too little money, too little knowledge, and that there was too little time to become more active.

3 Bjorn Schrijen, 'Duurzaamheid in de culturele sector. Steppingstones voor toekomstig duurzaamheidsbeleid', *Boekmanstichting*, 2019, <https://www.boekman.nl/verdieping/publicaties/duurzaamheid-in-de-culturele-sector/>

Given the urgency of climate change, however, these are barriers that we should overcome together. In 2020 we undertook a second research project in which we analysed cultural policy documents of municipalities who are responsible for a large part of cultural funding in the Netherlands.⁴ There again we saw a positive trend in that more and more municipalities pay attention to the subject in their policy plans. Yet, they do it in many different ways and it is often about plans to make buildings more sustainable, as well as involving cultural organisations in the sustainable development of cities, but again with a big variety in ambition and in the concreteness of the proposals.

Now, for 2021, we are working on a new publication on the relationship between the cultural sector and sustainability. We are undertaking this in partnership with organisations from seven European countries, including Finland, Germany and Scotland.⁵ Three points are relevant here. Firstly, it is clear that there are a great many artists engaged in this subject at the moment. To mention a few composers that are well known in the Netherlands, for example: Merlijn van Twaalfhoven is one and also Tim Kliphuis, whose composition *Phoenix Reborn* premiered in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam in 2021. So there is this engagement on the artistic side.

Secondly, although increasing attention is paid to the subject of climate change in public and in policy plans, there is too little institutional attention for it at a national level. Government could address the theme much more explicitly and stimulate targeted energy initiatives in the cultural sector. For example, the creative climate action that is a programme of the Irish Ministry of Culture, together with the Ministry of Environment, is a funding programme for specific cultural activities when it comes to this theme. Creative Carbon, a networking community in the cultural sector in Scotland, is another example. We in the Netherlands miss such a networking community.

4 Bjorn Schrijen, 'Duurzaamheid in de culturele sector. Inspiratie voor toekomstig Beleid', *Boekmanstichting*, 2020, <https://www.boekman.nl/verdieping/publicaties/duurzaamheid-in-de-culturele-sector-2020/>

5 Meanwhile the research is published. Boekman Foundation (2022), 'Towards sustainable arts: European best practices and policies', 14 February 2022, <https://www.boekman.nl/en/in-depth/publications/towards-sustainable-arts-european-best-practices-and-policies/>

This brings me to my third observation: that there is a lot to gain by sharing knowledge, not only nationally but also internationally. So it is important to learn about symphony orchestras from Finland, the Nevis Ensemble, and Das Orchester des Wandels. I hope we can exchange more in the future and we do not need to tour for that.

Towards Net Zero with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra

Teemu Kirjonen

Lahti in Finland is a traditional winter sports city; there is even a ski jumper in our logo, reaching towards a better future. It is a town of some 120,000 inhabitants in the south of the country, roughly one hundred kilometres north of Helsinki. The symphony orchestra is a group of around sixty-seven musicians, plus the administrators, located in the wooden Sibelius Hall.

We launched the project, Carbon Neutral Lahti Symphony Orchestra, in 2015, which happened to be the 150th anniversary of the birth of our national composer, Jean Sibelius. The aim of the project is to try and become the first carbon neutral symphony orchestra in the world by 2025. Although it's only six years since 2015, the world is already a quite different place when it comes to these discussions. Then, it was very exotic that a Finnish symphony orchestra was starting to work on these issues, but of course things are progressing and new projects are starting all the time.

At the very beginning, a Master's thesis was done at the local university by Pilvi Virolainen in which the carbon footprint of the orchestra was calculated and examined. It was not only the orchestra's activities but also the activities around us: the audience, the concert hall, the recording company etc. The idea is that carbon neutrality is achieved by 'first identifying the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the functions. After this, the identified functions are changed to low emission operations and finally the remaining greenhouse gas emissions are compensated.'⁶ So, first examine, second reduce, third compensate. The five principal burdens are transport, energy, recording,

6 Pilvi Virolainen, 'Sinfoniaorkesterin hiilijalanjälki. Case: Sinfonia Lahti', 2015, <https://lutpub.lut.fi/handle/10024/117794>

acquisitions and spin-offs. On the first, our input has been quite limited lately as an orchestra, as we have not been touring during the Covid era, but we can encourage our own people and those in the audience to use greener solutions when coming to the concerts and to the workplace.

For me as the manager of the orchestra it was very important that, from the very beginning, the whole organisation was committed to this. This can't be the kind of project that management just imposes. The whole thing started by having a workshop for the whole orchestra and we discussed these themes and brainstormed ideas. By the end of the day, we had the idea that we could become the first carbon neutral orchestra in the world. Are we in or are we out? We had a vote, and the result was unanimously 'yes, we are in'. We want to be an active part of society, not just a kind of isolated artistic palace, appearing once a week with great symphonic programmes. One thing that has been a real delight is that, when we have had less active periods, the musicians themselves have been asking 'what more can we do?' and that is a really good sign of their commitment.

I'll give a couple of brief examples of our work. Firstly, we had a 'green button' initiative so when people were buying tickets from the web there was a button with which you could donate money to certified projects in order to compensate for travelling to the concert. Secondly, we worked with Sibelius Hall, our wooden hall. There this year the heating became carbon neutral and hopefully the electricity of the whole place will be carbon neutral next year. The waste management has been carbon neutral for some time and food outlets are also taking action. Thirdly, the orchestra has a longstanding relationship with the Swedish record label BIS and they started their BIS eco pack (cardboard packaging) in 2019. In 2019 for the annual day for the orchestra we planted 6,000 spruce trees and this is a good example of the way organisations can have events that are fun but also beneficial. It was one of the best recreational days the orchestra has ever had.

I think the most important area of work at the moment is the reduction of paper usage. So, this has come down enormously now the rehearsal copies of the sheet music are distributed digitally and of course we are examining, for example, reducing handouts and trying to figure out the best way to do brochures digitally. Concerning transport, which is the biggest category of emissions, we are trying to be involved

in the discussions externally to make it easier for the audience to come to the concerts. At the moment, if we encouraged our audience to come to our concerts by bicycle, and say 400 of them did so, we would be in great trouble because we don't have any places here at the Sibelius Hall to park the bicycles!

When we started in 2015 of course we wanted to be a reference hopefully locally, maybe nationally or even internationally. What happened in Lahti surprised us however, as the local ice hockey team, the Pelicans, decided to become the first carbon neutral ice hockey team in the world. They did a similar kind of survey and had our project as a reference. Internationally, it has brought attention to the orchestra, winning the Classical:NEXT Innovation Award in 2018.

So, of course, we need to examine our daily operations so that they become more carbon neutral but one very important issue in this whole project is to raise awareness of climate issues. In 2021 Lahti was the EU green capital and a good example of how the EU green capital organisation has utilised the orchestra can be found in their commission for a new work from Finnish composer Cecilia Darmström called *ICE* (which also stands for 'In Case of Emergency'). The piece was premiered in a square in central Helsinki via video from the Sibelius Hall, and there were a number of large ice cubes brought to the square which melted as an installation. There was also a possibility to hear the work in situ as a recorded loop. The names of the cities that are most urgently in danger when the sea levels rise were written on the ground so that the water from the ice cubes flushes these names away. It was impressive, although the ice melted quicker than expected, though that of course only highlights the emergency. If and when we become carbon neutral, it does not make as much difference as a factory or other huge polluter. It is because of this that I want to point to the importance of raising awareness. At the same time, we have to take care of our own field as well and we have tried to examine our daily operations that have an environmental impact.

Orchester des Wandels

Detlef Grooß

Orchester des Wandels means Orchestras of Change. Society is changing, the climate is changing and we have to go with and shape the change. We started in Berlin ten years ago. The Staatskapelle Berlin first did something very similar to what the Lahti Symphony Orchestra did with ice cubes, as well as putting on climate concerts to raise money for environmental projects, such as planting trees. We are now an organisation with members from thirty-three different orchestras in Germany who come together and put on events. It is not the official orchestras but only the members as private individuals who take part: it is a grassroots movement.

A few years later, in 2020, we gathered many more members and orchestras to build a really Germany-wide organisation. We asked ourselves what the role of culture is and what the role of theatres and orchestras can be in this situation, as well as considering how we can make the strongest impact on this theme in society. As cultural institutions we have a very different role to factories or companies, as Teemu states. We are so much more visible in society. For example, in my theatre we sell 350,000 tickets a year, so that has a huge potential impact and if we do things differently and if we communicate our message, it can influence the whole of society.

Our first thought was that this really had to be a positive approach. When talking about culture and environmental impact we get into a corner where it seems that we are the problem, but I deeply believe that culture is not the problem, rather the solution, because culture itself does not destroy the environment. It gives fulfilment without having to go shopping or engaging in consumerist culture. Culture can work against consumption, and over-consumption, which is one of the most pressing problems of our time. We thought about how we can approach this and we said that, rather than wallowing in how bad everything is, we must go out and act.

When we thought about what an orchestra could do and what we could do together, we isolated four main issues, four columns for our work. The first thing was to put the protection of climate and the environment at the centre of what we do. Everything was considered in

relation to our cultural mandate. Secondly, we wanted to use our formats to push this issue in society, then we could collect – and we do collect – a lot of money for environmental projects. The third thing is caring for our own carbon footprint and the last, and probably the most important thing, is what we are doing now: networking and communication. If we act as a whole scene together then we have a chance to shape the change and not to react to what comes from politicians.

Our biggest environmental project at the moment is reforesting a 700-hectare rainforest in Madagascar. Why Madagascar you may ask: it is because the wood that makes the black pieces on violins and cellos is made of ebony, which grows there. Ninety-five percent of the surface of Madagascar has been deforested. This has occurred for many reasons but partly because of the hunger for ebony for instruments, so we wanted to send a signal and heal this wound a little bit. We are doing a development project in north-east Madagascar and we are working together with the people there and giving them the ability to establish sustainable agriculture, for example by buying cacao plants and vanilla plants so they don't have to eradicate the forest. We also show them how to reforest the original wood, not only the ebony but the original wood ecosystem. We also do regional environmental projects here in Germany. We're just planting flowers in the garden of the theatre to be used by insects and bees. It is a very small thing, and only costs about €200, but it's going to have a huge impact and be very visible. Through this, it has a big influence on the city and society.

We also care, of course, for the CO₂ footprints of our orchestras. We do a lot of studies and workshops with all our member orchestras and theatres. We have a green manual for how you can create an environmental strategy; we have a green touring guide that came out in 2021.⁷ How can you, if you're touring with the orchestra, limit your emissions? One recent example is the Munich Philharmonic: they just rebuilt their instrument cases and they are saving €100,000 a year in transport costs because they are more efficient. Even when you are flying, there is a lot you can do. We also plan on establishing a carbon offsetting platform.

7 Orchester des Wandels, <https://www.orchester-des-wandels.de/erste-schritte/>

We are collecting data on the use of paper. We are trying to develop a sustainable digital music stand. Using an iPad for reading music is not sustainable for many reasons but especially because an iPad is not made for this purpose, so it is capable of doing thousands of other things you don't need. It's also just not big enough, it's just not stable enough for everyday work. They will break and so we are working on a music desk with a big simple screen, where you can exchange every part and do not have to throw the whole thing away after three years. It would only be capable of showing music.

One further campaign that we are now undertaking is asking our audience if they come by bicycle or public transport and, if they do, they will get the programme as a podcast for free. This is called 11.5 minutes and we state that if you use public transport, you need 11.5 minutes more to travel, and we donate this podcast to you to make up that time. Perhaps the most important thing, though, is networking. We have to overcome this basic attitude of competition in orchestras and work together. It's very honourable to want to be the first green orchestra but it's even better if you share your experience with all orchestras. This means cultural, environmental and sustainability issues require teamwork. So we find partners, we partner together with the thirty-three orchestras and we are really working together and sharing our knowledge. We liaise with politicians and scientists and, because we are so big now, we really get the best scientists in Germany.

At present, Orchester des Wandels is just eight people contributing their free time, though we are looking for a foundation to create one support position. But what this means is this organisation is indeed central, so we just organise, we connect the people, we suggest the ideas and once in the year we put on a concert with all our members. Our systems are strong now and we get people conducting and playing solo with us who are at an amazing level. It's really crazy who's asking us to play but it only works if we have an organisation committed to putting these issues front and centre.

Green Travelling with the Nevis Ensemble

Georgina MacDonell Finlayson

Nevis Ensemble is Scotland's Street Orchestra. We are a forty-piece orchestra that goes on tour four or five times a year, giving concerts everywhere from airports and train stations to care homes and refugee groups. We also do pop-up performances on the streets, in supermarkets, libraries, and we've even performed in places like the top of Ben Nevis, Scotland's highest mountain, as well as way out on the islands of St Kilda on the west coast of the country. Our mission is to remove the barriers that classical music sometimes has in being truly accessible to everyone, everywhere. So that means that we take orchestral music to people wherever they are. In parallel with our orchestral work, we run a number of community-based projects, working with different groups of people, including looked-after children, older people living with dementia, those experiencing homelessness and adults with learning disabilities. We have partnerships with voluntary and third-sector organisations which are nurtured to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalised in society do not miss out. Recently, we've had projects working with survivors of domestic violence and young carers, where they worked with composers and songwriters to write new music reflecting their experiences.

At the core of our work is a desire to contribute to a more equal and sustainable society and environmental sustainability is a key component of that, and in practical terms, we aim to run the ensemble in the most sustainable way that we can. We're lucky in that we're a young organisation, established in 2018, so sustainability has been on our minds from the word go. The main challenge is in our touring. We take music to people all over Scotland, so the orchestra is travelling on one coach. However, for instance, we plan our tours in a circular route so that we're not doubling any miles and really reaching as many people as possible.

We are currently exploring other ways of being able to tour that are completely zero carbon. So, for example, we've done a tour on bicycles in Glasgow. Obviously that doesn't take us quite as far as travelling to some of the more remote parts of Scotland but we are still able to reach a lot of the communities in Glasgow, to whom we previously took the

coach. That is something that we'll explore more, especially in urban areas, as well as touring using public transport, even using public transport not just as a journey to get to a place but also as a location for performance in itself. In team meetings we've discussed the idea that transport itself, if we're going on public transport, or stops on the way, can also be a location for performance, for making music and engaging an audience, whether they expect it or not.

When we're out on tour we have established protocols and practices to make sure that we are being sustainable in what we're eating and how we're doing things on the bus: we recycle our waste, for example, and in this – and much else – our musicians are really engaged with these protocols. We have actually run two public-facing campaigns over the last two years to try and highlight for our musicians and our audiences what it is we can do to be more sustainable. In 2019 we toured the Outer Hebrides, which are the islands in the north-west of Scotland, and for this we ran a campaign called 'Green Nevis'. This was an online social media campaign in which we wanted to highlight and embed awareness of what arts organisations, musicians and individuals can do to be more sustainable. We partnered with a number of green-leaning organisations such as Scottish Water, Save Some Green and Nevis Sport. These companies helped us through sponsorship and we were able to highlight the work they're doing, but also provide our musicians with some resources to use on tour, as well as in their own lives away from the orchestra. We were very public about this on our social media and it led to some interesting discussions with audience members. It highlighted some of the small things we can be doing but it also set up a premise for our musicians being really engaged in everything that we're doing on tour: each little action amounts to us reducing our waste and being as environmentally conscious as we can be.

At the beginning of 2021 we ran another campaign, '#100DaysOfGreenNevis', which was essentially inspired by the musicians' practice trend called '100 Days of Practice' where you practise a little bit every single day, reflecting on the process and how it becomes habitual. As musicians, we're really good at doing things every day. We had a group of about thirty to forty musicians – as well as board members and trustees – picking an action for one hundred days. These ranged from going vegan, reducing plastic, to walking or cycling five hundred

miles to raise money for charity. We had people doing more creative things like writing little songs on environmental issues that were really accessible and which we put out online. We had a number of people performing daily improvisations on endangered species and sharing these online with short videos and there was quite a lot of feedback from that with people saying: 'Gosh, I just didn't realise quite the scale of it'. On our website you can see the history of everybody posting about what they're doing.

That's us as an organisation: what we've been doing and how we've been engaging our musicians and our audiences. But we also recently set up the Scottish Classical Sustainability Group. We felt like it was time for classical music organisations in Scotland to come together to discuss the climate crisis on a regular basis. So, this group now contains about forty organisations, including large orchestras, festivals, individuals, smaller ensembles, duos and we also have representatives from the Association of British Orchestras, Creative Scotland (the Scottish arts funding distribution body), Creative Carbon Scotland, and the Musicians Union. We're making sure that our discussions are really tied into a more global and national discussion. We have met regularly for about a year and within that year we produced our Scottish Classical Music Green Guide, which came out in July 2021.⁸ This is an in-depth document in which we try to cover as much ground as possible: everything from buildings, touring and digital emissions, to programming and accessibility. It will be a living document that will change with the times. As we know, the world is changing very quickly.

What has been a recurring theme in our discussions with Scottish organisations is how we deal with international touring because it is such a big part of what we do as orchestras and what we do in classical music. I think one of the key takeaways is reimagining how we define success as classical music organisations. At the moment, a lot of success is judged by the scope of our international outreach and there's a certain glamour associated with international touring as, for many, there is a huge amount of economic benefit and revenue that comes from that. But in the times that we're in, and the crisis that we face, I think international

8 Creative Carbon Scotland, Scottish Green Classical Music Guide, <https://www.creativecarbonscotland.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/SCSGG-2021-FINAL.pdf>

touring really has to become a thing of the past: not entirely, but it has to be on a level that is sustainable. This presents a really exciting opportunity to reimagine our business models so that we're not putting economic gain and growth first. We shouldn't think that we measure our success by the tickets, the audiences, the places we visit and that it all comes down, in the end, to economic gain.

How does this square with our budget and financial projections? I think what we need to be doing is reimagining these so we're thinking with a de-growth mindset. There's definitely a movement in the UK and Scotland that we emphasise success not in terms of GDP but rather in terms of people and planet and on social and environmental qualities. This is a really exciting opportunity to focus on the people in our local area. I'm talking about Scotland here but similarly across the world we can put people and their local communities first. From there we collaborate internationally in interesting ways that aren't just another international tour.

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