

CLASSICAL MUSIC FUTURES PRACTICES OF INNOVATION

EDITED BY
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13. Futuring Classical Music through Contemporary Visual Art: Innovative Performance and Listening in the Works of the Artist Anri Sala

Noga Rachel Chelouche

In the introduction to this volume, the ‘problems’ of classical music in the present were introduced. One of them is the *museum problem*, according to which the musical performance ‘is trapped in the past,’ completely detached from contemporary issues. While this problem is addressed by musicians through different approaches and innovative projects, a fruitful discussion may emerge if we explore musical performances created within the field of visual art.

Since the twentieth century, sound and music have entered the world of visual art in various ways, through different genres such as sound art, video art and performance art, and through collaborations between artists and musicians. These encounters between music and visual art led to the creation of fascinating multimedia works that include sound and music from different styles and genres. In such hybrid works by several contemporary artists, classical compositions that belong to the category of ‘concert music’ are used and recontextualised.¹ The music in

1 Examples of such hybrid works by well-known artists are *The Forty Part Motet* (2001) a sound installation by Janet Cardiff, based on a composition by Thomas Tallis, and *7 Deaths of Maria Callas* (2020) a performance by Marina Abramovich which portrays the singer through arias from famous operatic scenes. Another fascinating artist who frequently incorporates classical music into her work is Annika Kahrs. Through works such as *Strings* (2010), *Our Solo* (2021) and *Playing to the Birds* (2013) she demonstrates a unique approach to classical compositions and to the concert event.

these cases is modified through various practices, suggesting innovative forms of performance and listening.

This chapter focuses on the alternative performance of classical compositions created in the works of the Albanian artist Anri Sala (b. 1974). Sala studied art in Tirana and then moved to Paris where he studied film and video. In 2005 he moved to Berlin where he lives and works today. Sala works with various media including painting, video, installation art and performance. In his time-based works he investigates relationships between image, sound and architecture. Though a visual artist, Sala uses music as a central element in his works. He manipulates the music according to different contexts and artistic ideas, thus creating unconventional performances as well as a unique listening experience.² This chapter argues that through his works, Sala enables different perspectives that lead classical music along unpredictable and innovative paths.

Throughout the chapter, I discuss three seminal works created by Sala from the past decade: *The Last Resort* (2017), *The Present Moment* (2014), and *If and Only If* (2018). In each of these, a classical Western composition is the point of departure. In my analysis, I compare the experience created in Sala's artworks to conventional performances in the concert hall by focusing on elements such as space and architecture, extra-musical contexts, fidelity to the musical score, and the use of visual means and technology. My argument is that these artworks, in which the music is very dominant, may be experienced as unique musical performances. Moreover, I claim that these works allow the spectator/listener to rethink customary concert hall conventions, which are associated with the classical Western repertoire.

These conventions, related to different parameters such as the performance practices, the dress code, the expected behaviour of the audience, the architecture and seating arrangement, did not come about by chance. They frame the concert as a unique musical event, and

2 One of Sala's major works Ravel, Ravel Unravel (2013) which was made for the French pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale is analysed by Xenia Hanusiak in her article 'The New Sound of Music: Marina Abramovic's Goldberg + Anri Sala's Ravel Ravel'. Hanusiak relates to the new listening experience created in the works of visual artists: Xenia Hanusiak, 'The New Sound of Music: Marina Abramovic's Goldberg + Anri Sala's Ravel Ravel', *Music and Literature* (2016), 1-8.

increase the aesthetic experience.³ However, in the present, they often preserve norms that do not always coincide with artistic, technological and social changes. Steven Walter points out that throughout history, concerts were more dynamic and evolved according to changing audiences. Nevertheless, the classical musical landscape nowadays (which preserves nineteenth century conventions and approaches) offers 'art that, apart from a few interpretative moments of glory, has become a form of historical preservation'.⁴ I claim that artworks from different fields, such as the works discussed in this chapter, allow a dynamic character, and create enhanced musical experiences. Classical compositions that are strongly associated with the traditional concert event are heard through these works in new and exciting interpretations.

The Last Resort

The first example I will examine is an installation titled *The Last Resort* (2017). This site-specific work was commissioned from Sala by the Kaldor Public Art Projects, an Australian organisation that collaborates with international artists and supports artistic projects in public spaces.⁵ The location chosen for this project was the Observatory Hill Rotunda in Sydney. The geographical site of the installation, as in many of Sala's works, embodies political and cultural references manifested through visual and musical means. In this case, the pastoral Observatory Hill, overlooking the bay and the Harbor Bridge, is a place strongly associated with the colonial history of Sydney. It was where the colonists went to gaze at the stars and chart the weather, and as it was the highest point in the new settlement, it became a lookout point to monitor any ships that might be entering Sydney Harbour.

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- 3 In his thorough essay 'A Concert Theory', in which Martin Tröndle relates to the concert as a subject for musicological investigation, these conventions are discussed as part of the evolution of the concert: Martin Tröndle, 'A Concert Theory', in *Classical Concert Studies: A Companion to Contemporary Research and Performance*, ed. by Martin Tröndle (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 11–28.
 - 4 Steven Walter, 'A Manifesto of Concert Culture', in *Classical Concert Studies: A Companion to Contemporary Research and Performance*, ed. by Martin Tröndle (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 329–335 (p. 329).
 - 5 The organisation was established in 1969 by John Kaldor, an art collector and philanthropist. It supports artistic projects that take place in different locations in Australia. The Last Resort was their 33rd project.

The Last Resort is a sound installation that centres on the Adagio movement from Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A major, K.622, composed in 1791. Sala's idea regarding the music was to choose a musical piece associated with the Age of Enlightenment and to give it a different historical context.⁶ As in other of his works, instead of using a traditional recording 'true to the work,' Sala decided to make changes in the music that will convey his ideas. In his words, he aims to use the music as a 'matter that you take by the hand and accompany towards its own future.'⁷ This approach to music as a 'matter' enables the artist to reshape the chosen compositions and make changes, at times quite extreme, in the original score, which in conventional concert practice is perceived as an 'ideal object', realised through repeated performances.⁸

In *The Last Resort*, the changes in the Adagio movement were made according to a literary text chosen by the artist: a private journal by James Bell, a British sailor who made his voyage to the colony of Adelaide, Australia, in the first half of the nineteenth century.⁹ Through the new arrangement of Mozart's music according to this text (as detailed below), Sala intended to bring up the complexity of the period, which involved the ideals of liberation along with the devastation of imperialism.¹⁰ In an interview with the philosopher and musicologist Peter Szendy, Sala mentioned the 'contradiction within the departure point and the receiving end.'¹¹ The departure point in this work is the European Enlightenment represented by the original music by Mozart, and the receiving end is the New World with the rearranged music.

6 Anri Sala, interview with the author, Berlin, October 10, 2018. Mozart was highly recognized with ideals of the Enlightenment. He was a member of the Freemasons (and has several Masonic compositions) and a few of his operas convey notions of the Enlightenment. On this topic see: 'Mozart and the Enlightenment' in Richard Ned Lebow, *The Politics and Ethics of Identity: In Search of Ourselves*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 110-150.

7 Anri Sala, interview with the author, Berlin, 10 October 2018.

8 Lawrence Kramer, *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (California: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 23.

9 The new interpretation of Mozart with the changes determined by Bell's journal was recorded by the Munich Chamber Orchestra. The recording is repeated throughout the installation.

10 Sala mentions that the Clarinet Concerto was composed a short time after the journey of the first fleet to Australia, which arrived in Sydney in 1788 in order to establish the new British colony in the New World. Anri Sala, 'The Last Resort,' in *Anri Sala: The Last Resort*, Kaldor Public Art Project 33, Exhibition Catalogue, 8.

11 Anri Sala in conversation with Peter Szendy, online video recording, Vimeo, 9 March 2018.

Sala’s basic idea for this installation was to imagine a fictional journey of the masterpiece by Mozart on its way to the other side of the world.¹²

Rearrangement of the Music According to the Text

In Bell’s journal, each day of the voyage is described first with a comment regarding the weather and the winds.¹³ Sala picked different weather descriptions from the text and used them to make rhythmic changes in the score. Each description from the text was summarised to create a basic weather condition such as ‘calm,’ ‘breeze,’ ‘strong wind,’ etc., which was then translated into a rhythmic pattern (see Figure 13.1).

	Wind unfavourable or stiff	Off counter and syncopated, different rhythms, in general quarter pulse
	Hurricane	Syncopated /accentuated + irregular metric
	Calm	Tremolo double tongue staccato pulse – triggering the drumsticks
	Breeze (Mozart)	Eighth pulse
	Strong wind	Triolic
	Breeze +	Sixteenth pulse
	Thunder	Combination of different layers
	Gale	Fast kangaroo

#	Bars	Wind Description	Symbol
1	1–8	25 November 1838. Sunday <i>As our Pilot dreads a squall (...).</i>	
2		26 November 1838. Monday <i>It blows fresh and straight in our face so we cannot stir.</i>	
3		27 November 1838. Tuesday <i>Still blows a stiff breeze (...).</i>	
4	9–15 TUTTI	28 November 1838. Wednesday <i>After last nights hurricane we have calmer wind and more favourable.</i>	
5		29 November 1838. Thursday <i>Dreadful hurricane.</i>	

Fig. 13.1 Anri Sala, table of wind descriptions: quotes from James Bell’s journal and their translation into rhythmic patterns used in *The Last Resort* (2017).
© Anri Sala VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023.

In some parts of the rearranged score, if the text indicates calm weather, the music will sound very similar to the original Mozart in triple metre. In different parts, where a chosen quote indicates the instability of the weather, the music will sound unstable and dynamic, with changing

12 Sala, ‘Anri Sala: The Last Resort’, p. 8.
13 The importance of the wind for the journey is one of the reasons Sala chose a concerto for a woodwind instrument.

rhythms and alternating time signatures. The rhythmic alterations in the Adagio movement have influence on other musical parameters of the piece, which now sounds 'relocated' after its journey: the changing rhythms as well as moments of silence that do not exist in the original piece directly affect the symmetry and fluency of Mozart's balanced phrases. The melodic lines are now disrupted by stops and time signature changes, which create frequent accelerations and decelerations. The image of a journey through the ocean becomes very clear in the revised concerto, which sounds as if it is 'carried' by the winds and unpredictable waves. Unlike any traditional performance or recording of Mozart's music, the well-known masterpiece sounds alternately familiar and unpredictable, as intended by Sala:

My intention was to subvert Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, its flow as a whole, its gravity and its pace, in order to produce the perception of a concert that has travelled a long distance, endured the high seas of journey, making it to another shore, although not necessarily in the original form intended by its creator.¹⁴

Although the fragmentation in the revised movement derives from ideas related to this specific installation, it is a repeated theme in Sala's art. Fragmentation, or rupture, as Sala refers to it, is an essential part of the rearranged music in different works. For example, in his film *1395 Days Without Red*, it is the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony that is played non-continuously, and in the video *If and Only If*, it is Stravinsky's *Elegy for Solo Viola* that undergoes time manipulations. Sala mentions that, to him, 'continuity is not a given [...] in the west there is less disruption in the narrative, fewer earthquakes in the system of values.'¹⁵ According to curator Natalie Bell, and as expressed in different texts and conversations with the artist, the discontinuity and the feeling of rupture goes back to Sala's life in Albania, where he experienced many rapid political and cultural changes. The rupture created by artistic means (and through the music, in Sala's case) is thus related to historical and political complexities.¹⁶ Regarding *The Last Resort*, these complexities are beautifully described by Ross Gibson:

¹⁴ Sala, 'Anri Sala: The Last Resort', p. 8.

¹⁵ Anri Sala in conversation with Peter Szendy.

¹⁶ Natalie Bell, 'Eluding Language, Escaping Time', in *Anri Sala: Answer Me*, ed. by Margot Norton and Massimiliano Gioni (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 2016), pp. 52-65 (p. 52).

Upside down in the Observatory Hill Rotunda, under the wheeling stars that have witnessed every persisting moment of Sydney's time – pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial – Sala offers not a perfect jewel of leavened rationale but rather a warped disturbance of Mozart's crystalline sonic intricacies. He has troubled the predominantly melodic settings that normally govern the serene and symmetrical piece, transposing its soothing rectitude into a percussive tempo-tattoo so that we hear and see instead a stutter utterer that never settles into a stable pattern and that sounds more bellicose and intemperate than regular and melodious.¹⁷

It is important to mention that the historical and political contexts which Sala brings forth do not exist in his works as 'fixed ideas', as mentioned by critic John McDonald.¹⁸

Colonialism in this case, becomes a part of the narrative of the work through its contradiction with the Enlightenment - represented by Mozart's original concerto. Sala combines the different elements – the space, the music, the text and the visual means – in a way that does not emphasise these notions as clear categories. Instead, it portrays them by moving between order and disorder, noise and silence, synchronization and asynchronization.

Other than the duality of Enlightenment and colonialism presented in this work, an implicit duality is created through the juxtaposition of natural forces and human rationality represented by a masterpiece from the Age of Enlightenment. In a review of the *The Last Resort*, McDonald writes about the wind as a natural element that contrasts with the Enlightenment: 'Letting the wind dictate the tempi [...] enacts a struggle between nature and culture, between the Enlightenment dream of perfect control and understanding, and the unruly interruptions of the weather.'¹⁹

In the interview with Szendy, Sala refers to the notion of natural elements, such as the winds in this work, and points out that he is interested in 'the journey that accompanies the music to its becoming. And very often its becoming could coincide [...] with an element of nature.'²⁰ Regarding the natural elements that affect the music, he

17 Ross Gibson, 'Bumpkin Calculus', in 'Anri Sala: The Last Resort', pp. 26-35 (p. 32).

18 John McDonald, 'Review: Anri Sala's The Last Resort, an Exemplary Work of Public Art', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October 2017, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/review-anri-salas-the-last-resort-20171017-gz28qw.html>

19 Ibid.

20 Anri Sala in conversation with Peter Szendy.

proposes an aleatoric approach, applied to a pre-existing classical composition: 'I wanted to include another will besides the will of the composer, a *force majeure*, something that overtakes the will of the creator.'²¹ Szendy also describes the original presence of nature in *The Last Resort*: 'The breezes and trade winds are omnipresent, but implicitly; they manifest themselves through the traces that they leave on what they have transported, carried, damaged or worn out.'²²

Rearranged Music: Examples

Let us briefly examine some examples of the actual changes Sala made in the new score according to Bell's text. As well as the addition of time signatures, the relation between the Solo and the Tutti parts is also altered. This can be demonstrated with the opening bars of the second theme of the movement (see Figure 13.2), in which the theme played by the clarinet originally starts, together with the orchestra, on the first beat:

Fig. 13.2 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Clarinet Concerto in A major (1791), Adagio, beginning of 2nd theme, mm. 17-20, CC BY-SA 4.0.

- 21 Richard Jinman, 'Anri Sala's The Last Resort Transforms Sydney's Observatory Hill Rotunda', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 October 2017, <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/anri-salas-the-last-resort-transforms-sydneys-observatory-hill-rotunda-20171002-gysqht.html>
- 22 Peter Szendy, 'Aeolian Reflections (Mozart Exposed to the Winds)', in 'Anri Sala: The Last Resort', pp. 14-25 (p. 14).

What we see next in Figure 13.3 (the same bars as they appear in Sala's revised score) is a quote that, according to the table of weather descriptions, follows the instruction: 'Off counter and syncopated, different rhythms, in general quarter pulse.' The clarinet part, which originally starts on the first beat, is now shifted and delayed. This shift is heard clearly in the installation.

Fig. 13.3 Anri Sala, excerpt from the score of *The Last Resort*: Based on Mozart's Clarinet Concerto in A major, Adagio, mm. 17-23 © Anri Sala VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023.

After a few bars, a new quote appears: '6 December 1838. Thursday. The fine breeze yesterday, which gradually veered round to northwest.' Following the table, this quote indicates calm weather, which returns the music to Mozart's order. The clarinet is not playing in this passage, but the theme played by the first violin section and the flutes returns in its 'right' place, starting on the first beat.

This imperfect version, suggested by Sala, creates an unusual way of listening to the original parts of the music, which become far less predictable. This innovative reworking of Mozart's well-known music is not heard in its original flow, but rather as a collage in which unbalanced,

and less harmonious parts appear alternately with moments where the original order returns.

Visual Means in *The Last Resort*

In addition to the rearranged score, the visual means in *The Last Resort* create another significant change in the music, specifically regarding the orchestration. The recorded music is heard through loudspeakers concealed inside thirty-eight snare drums that are hung from the ceiling of the rotunda. Instead of the passive sitting in the concert hall, aimed at focussing the audience's attention on the performers,²³ the spectator/listener hears the music while walking around underneath the source of the sound. Each snare drum has a pair of drumsticks attached. Inside each drum, there are two loudspeakers: one propagates inaudible infrasounds that vibrate the drumheads and move the sticks, and from the other one, the rearranged music is heard.²⁴ Sala enlarges the orchestra by using a whole section playing in correspondence with the recorded music, reacting to its vibrations.²⁵ This new percussion section suggests an interesting juxtaposition between the classical orchestra and the snare drum, which is Sala's modern addition to Mozart.

Two kinds of dialogues are created in the installation. The first is between two sources of sound: the recorded music heard from the speakers and the live drumming, which is a reaction to it. The second dialogue is between a typical classical ensemble of the eighteenth century and the snare drum, which was considered both a folk and military instrument, but was less common in compositions for the classical orchestra.²⁶

23 On the gradual process of focusing the audience's attention in concert halls see Christian Thorau, 'From Program Leaflets to Listening Apps', in *Classical Concert Studies: A Companion to Contemporary Research and Performance*, ed. by Martin Tröndle (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 61-80.

24 Peter Szendy, 'Aeolian Reflections (Mozart Exposed to the Winds)', p. 16.

25 Another example for the juxtaposition of live and recorded music is Sala's work 3-2-1 (Serpentine Gallery, 2011), where the saxophonist Andre Vida reacts with live improvisations to the video work Long Sorrow, which focuses on the free-jazz playing of saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc.

26 Rey M. Longyear, 'The Domestication of the Snare Drum' in *Percussionist* 3 (1965), 1-2.

Another important parameter that dramatically changes the work, compared to a standard performance of classical music, is the active and immersive listening experience created by the unique design of the installation. The modern concert hall enables an attentive listening by creating a passive and silenced audience. As described by Lewis Kaye, 'traditional musical performance, and the practice of architectural acoustics, tends toward privileging a single, well-defined source transmitted to an undifferentiated mass of passive, silenced consumers'.²⁷ In *The Last Resort*, as in other installations by Sala, the sound design enables unconventional listening which involves movement and changes the conventional separation between listener and performer.

Other Versions of *The Last Resort*

Although this work is the result of a site-specific project exhibited first in Sydney, it has also been exhibited in New York (at the Marian Goodman Gallery), in Moscow (at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art), in Luxemburg (at the MUDAM Museum), and in Houston (at the Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University). As opposed to the generic concert hall, the different spaces and locations of Sala's installations enable modifications to his original work. Each space has a different architecture and acoustic conditions, which affect the construction of the installation as well as the listening experience created in each specific exhibition. For example, in Sydney, the installation was located outdoors, next to Sydney's harbour.²⁸ In Moscow, by contrast, it was located indoors, in a 9.5-metre-high atrium. Another important variation in the version of the work exhibited in Moscow was the inclusion of a live ensemble (the Studio for New Music ensemble) that joined and played next to the installation at the opening of the exhibition (see Figures 13.4 and 13.5). The ensemble surrounded the audience and played Sala's version of the Adagio. The same music that was recorded for the installation

27 Lewis Kaye, 'The Silenced Listener: Architectural Acoustics, the Concert Hall and the Conditions of Audience' in *Leonardo Music Journal* 22 (2012), pp. 63-65 (p. 64-65).

28 An excerpt from the installation in its first version in Sydney is available on YouTube: Anri Sala: The Last Resort/Kaldor Public Art Projects, Sydney online video recording, YouTube, 30 October 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeFNzhQ_n7I

was performed live this time and heard alternately or in parallel with the drums.



Fig. 13.4 Anri Sala, *The Last Resort* (2017), installation and live performance, Garage Museum for Contemporary Art, Moscow. © Ivan Erofeev, Anton Donikov.



Fig. 13.5 The soloist, located above the orchestra. Anri Sala, *The Last Resort* (2017), installation and live performance, Garage Museum for Contemporary Art, Moscow. © Ivan Erofeev, Anton Donikov.

In any version of *The Last Resort*, the installation may be experienced as an innovative musical event. The traditional concerts, as described by Lydia Goehr, are ‘transitory sound events intended to present a work by complying as closely as possible with the given notational specification’.²⁹ In this case, as in other works by Sala, the multiple versions suggest

29 Lydia Goehr, ‘Being true to the work’ in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 47:1 (1989), 55-67 (p. 55).

versatile performances of the music, which keeps going through modifications according to the changing venues and the given context of each event or exhibition.

The Present Moment

A work that deals with similar themes in a different way is Sala's 2014 work *The Present Moment*.³⁰ This work is charged with historical tension created by the chosen composition and the space where the work was first exhibited. It is a video and sound installation commissioned by the German project 'Der Öffentlichkeit—Von den Freunden Haus der Kunst' (To the Public—From the Friends of Haus der Kunst) that explores the relationship between art and the museum as a space of public culture.³¹

I will focus on its first exhibition, which took place at the museum Haus der Kunst in Munich. Nowadays, this is a museum for contemporary art, but originally it was built by the Nazis in order to display what the party considered 'Great German Art'.³² The building remains in its original design, which features the neoclassicist German architecture that characterised Nazi buildings. The work was installed in the central hall, formerly known as the Hall of Honour (Ehrenhalle). This hall was used for speeches at openings of the Große Deutsche Kunstausstellung (Great German Art Exhibition) held in the building between 1937 and 1944.³³ In contrast to the monumental architecture of the space, Sala chose a chamber music composition for this project. The choice of this genre, which is associated with the act of conversation and social activity among musicians, creates a contradiction with the

30 There are two versions of this work: *The Present Moment* in D and *The Present Moment* in Bb. They are independent versions; each one focuses on the D notes and the Bb notes, respectively. The two versions were also exhibited simultaneously as a single installation at the New Museum in New York and at the Instituto Moreira Salles in Rio de Janeiro.

31 Okwui Enwezor, 'Foreword', in *Anri Sala: The Present Moment*, Exhibition Catalogue ed. by Patrizia Dander (Cologne: Walther König, 2015), pp. 11-15 (p. 11).

32 Anri Sala and Massimiliano Gioni, 'Guided by Voices, Lured by Sounds: An Interview', in *Anri Sala: Answer Me*, ed. by Margot Norton and Massimiliano Gioni (New York and London: Phaidon Press, 2016), pp. 80-96 (p. 96).

33 Patrizia Dander, 'Notes on *The Present Moment*', in *Anri Sala: The Present Moment*, Exhibition Catalogue ed. by Patrizia Dander (Cologne: Walther König, 2015), pp. 44-54 (p. 44). For more information about the Ehrenhalle, see Sabine Brantl's article 'On the History of the Former "Ehrenhalle,"' *Ibid.*, pp. 83-85.

hierarchical arrangement of the space, which was originally used for propaganda.³⁴

The musical piece chosen as a point of departure for this work is the string sextet *Verklärte Nacht* (*Transfigured Night*, 1899) by Arnold Schoenberg, whose work was considered 'degenerate' by the Nazis. This is a post-romantic piece to which, as detailed below, Sala applies changes that allude to the later Schoenberg and his twelve-tone system. This composition is an instrumentalisation of a poem of the same title by the German poet Richard Dehmel. It was composed as a single movement by the young Schoenberg, who was then pushing the bounds of tonality without fully over-reaching them, with the piece starting in D minor which transforms to D major.

Installation Structure

The music in the installation is heard through nineteen loudspeakers grouped in different locations in the hall.³⁵ In two spots, at the entrance and at the end of the hall (marked by letters A and D in the layout of the installation on the right side of Figure 13.6), the loudspeakers are hung in a semi-circular shape (see installation view on the left side of Figure 13.6). This arrangement refers to the seating of the ensemble members in the video projected at the last part of the installation.³⁶ The work consists of four parts that lead the listeners through the hall and through different soundtracks, each one exploring a transformation of the original sextet. The music gradually wanders through the loudspeakers, creating a path of sounds that ends with a video projection. At each phase of the work, one or two sections of loudspeakers are active. Sala describes the general progression of the work as

a journey of sounds that saunter through the hall before they eventually end up in a film hidden at the very end of the space [...] the focus of *The Present Moment* is a chamber-sized composition and the journey of its ensuing sounds across a large public space.³⁷

34 Ibid., p. 45.

35 In this part, I give a description of the D version of the installation, based on the catalogue from the exhibition at Haus der Kunst.

36 'The Present Moment, ANRI SALA,' in EstherSchipper.com, <https://www.estherschipper.com/exhibitions/156/>

37 Sala and Gioni, 'Guided by Voices, Lured by Sounds,' p. 96.

A fundamental element of this work is the space, along with the sound that travels through it. Curator and art critic Okwui Enwezor described it as a ‘choreography of sounds’ that leads the listener through the journey of the composition.³⁸ Music’s temporal dimension, which is explored in different works by Sala, is especially emphasised in this installation: Schoenberg’s composition travels through the hall with its original development determined by the composer and with constant transformations suggested by Sala. Thus, as the music travels through the space, the inherent quality of music as an art that unfolds through time is physically perceived.

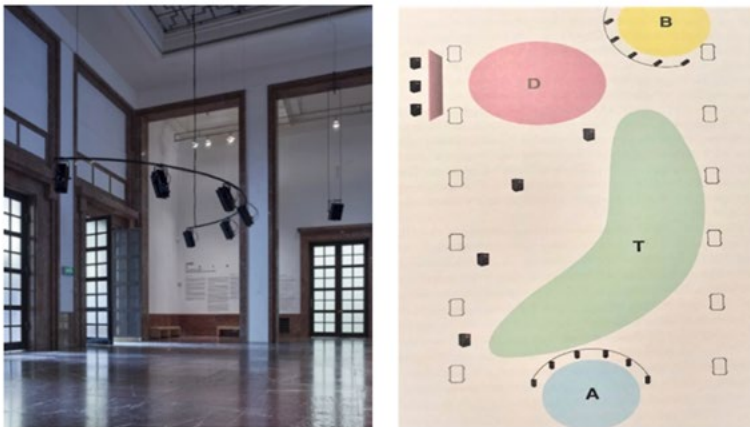


Fig. 13.6 Left: Anri Sala, *The Present Moment (In D)* (2014), Haus der Kunst, Munich. © Jens Weber. Right: Physical layout of speakers and projection of *The Present Moment (in D)* at Haus der Kunst.

Musical Transformation

The progression of the installation, which dictates the spectator/listener’s movement in the space, is based on Sala’s idea of leading the musical piece on a fictional journey to its nonconventional future. In this case, the point of departure is the post-romantic original, and the destination is an imagined dodecaphonic version of it. Sala’s idea regarding Schoenberg’s music was to gradually isolate specific tones from the piece in a process that refers to dodecaphonic rules: at the

38 Enwezor, ‘Foreword,’ p. 12.

first point (A), the original sextet is heard. Then, Sala applies the basic rule of the twelve-tone series. He does this by filtering notes that repeat themselves before the eleven other tones are played. In the T part, with its four loudspeakers, the music is heard with its revised serial version.³⁹ Then, in the B part, another metamorphosis occurs as each tone that made it through the elimination now repeats itself with the same rhythmic values until the next tone of the series appears. Finally, in the D part, in which the film is projected, the music goes through one last transformation: the series is reduced only to repeated D notes. These Ds are gradually isolated from the original piece, and eventually they are repeated according to the rhythmic patterns of *Verklärte Nacht*.⁴⁰ The process is perhaps easier to comprehend with Sala's description of the musical journey:

Upon entering the hallway where *Verklärte Nacht* is played, solitary notes from the appearance of each new tone in Schoenberg's score and brief musical gestures are released and drift across the space, as if expelled from the main body of the music. As these reach the far end of the hall, they accumulate and play repetitively, seemingly trapped in a dead end, a space where acoustic memory is condensed.⁴¹

As mentioned above, at each phase of the work, one or two groups of loudspeakers are active. This means that the different stages described here do not occur exactly one after the other but in different combinations and in a nonlinear process of four phases, carefully planned. The process ends with the D repetitions played by the sextet, which the spectator/listener can now see in the projected video. At the same time, the original composition is heard from afar as it is played in the A section (located at the starting point of the installation).⁴²

39 In this part, each tone is heard four times, once through each speaker. In the recording of this soundtrack, the notes are actually played quickly one after the other, without digital intervention.

40 Peter Szendy, 'The Bent Ear', in *Anri Sala: The Present Moment*, Exhibition Catalogue ed. by Patrizia Dander (Cologne: Walther König, 2015), pp. 69-80 (p. 70-71).

41 Anri Sala, 'The Present Moment (in D)', in *Anri Sala: The Present Moment*, Exhibition Catalogue ed. by Patrizia Dander (Cologne: Walther König, 2015), p. 17.

42 Szendy, 'The Bent Ear', p. 72.

Visual Means in *The Present Moment*

This work, in its first version exhibited at the Haus der Kunst, is a video and sound installation but it takes a while before the music is joined by the main visual element (the film). In the first phases of *The Present Moment*, sound dominates. Another visual dimension that exists throughout the whole work as it was exhibited in Haus der Kunst is the lighting: the different phases of the installation are characterized by different levels of light that are gradually dimmed. Eventually the video becomes the source of illumination, with the other lights switched off.⁴³

The video projected at the end of the installation focuses on the physical gestures involved in playing the music. It appears in parallel with the last transformation of the composition, where only the D notes are repeated (see stills from the video in Figures 13.7 and 13.8). This repetitious texture is overlaid with images of bow movements, hands and elbows. As in other works by Sala in which he focuses on the physical act of sound production, here too the physical gestures involved in the act of playing the music are visually emphasised.



Fig. 13.7 Anri Sala, installation view of *The Present Moment (In D)* (2014), video projection added in the last phase of the revised music. Haus der Kunst, Munich.
© Jens Weber.

43 Dander, 'Notes on The Present Moment', p. 48.

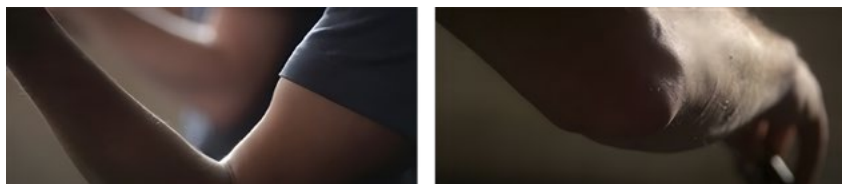


Fig. 13.8 Anri Sala, *The Present Moment (In D)* (2014), Haus der Kunst, Munich
© Anri Sala.

The sextet by Schoenberg is heard through Sala's work in a new version that consists of multiple soundtracks, starting with the original composition, which is gradually transformed. This transformation suggests an unconventional execution of the post-romantic piece in a dodecaphonic version. Whereas in many of Sala's works the musical changes are determined by what can be categorised as extramusical ideas, in this case the musical changes lie in the music itself: a modern composition technique is applied to an earlier piece composed in a different style. As in *The Last Resort*, here too the progression of the composition and the sound design of the installation enable an alternative listening experience, which consists of movement as the spectator/listener walks through the hall and follows the travelling sounds.

If and Only If

The last work I will briefly discuss is *If and Only If* (2018), a video work based on Stravinsky's *Elegy for Solo Viola* (1944). The *Elegy*, which is composed mostly in a two-voice texture, is played by the soloist Gérard Caussé, who is filmed with a second protagonist: a garden snail that makes its journey from the lower end of the violist's bow to the tip. The film is nine minutes forty-seven seconds in duration, approximately twice as long as the original musical piece. Sala aimed to synchronise the music with the journey of the snail. Thus, in order to gain time, he made some modifications to the original score: the first consists of splitting the two voices in specific parts and playing each voice separately, and the second consists of repetitions of notes, which the soloist plays when the snail does not move.⁴⁴

44 Anri Sala, interview with the author, Berlin, 10 October 2018.

Figure 13.9 is extracted from the score used by Sala. It is Stravinsky's original score, notated in red and blue according to the division of the two voices. This part, as it is played in the film, demonstrates both the manipulation of voice splitting and the repetition (these manipulations are heard but not written in the score). Bar 11 starts with the two voices played simultaneously. The notes B-flat and D are still played together as a harmonic interval, and from that point, only the upper voice (starting from the B-flat half note) continues independently until the end of bar 14. Then, the music goes back to where the voices split in bar 11, and the lower voice is played, starting with the coupled eighth notes of D-flat and E-flat (end of bar 11), which are repeated twice before moving on to the next bar. Eventually, the two voices are played together again in bar 15:



Fig. 13.9 Igor Stravinsky, mm. 11-15 from the *Elegy for Solo Viola*, score used by Anri Sala for the film *If and Only If* (2018) © Anri Sala VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2023.

As a result of the two voices being played separately, we clearly hear each one as if it is part of an independent melody. Although all the notes are played, the two-voice texture sometimes disappears throughout the work. In this way, and also by means of repetition, the soloist gains time and adjusts himself to the movement of the snail.

In Sala's film, Stravinsky's solo piece becomes a speechless 'dialogue' between Caussé and the silent snail that determines the progression of the *Elegy*. The two are making the journey together, the snail to the end of the bow and the musician to the end of the piece. The result is a unique performance of the *Elegy*, created by adding another participant that is mute yet very dominant.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The performance of a soloist in the context of a dialogue also occurs in Sala's work *Ravel Ravel Unravel* (2013), first exhibited at the 55th Venice Biennale. The composition in the centre of this installation is Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*, which is performed by two soloists instead of one. The two pianists go



Fig. 13.10 Anri Sala, *If and Only If* (2017) the exhibition AS YOU GO (2019), Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin © The author, 23 April, 2019.

Different Exhibitions

If and Only If is another example of how Sala's works may be experienced in various ways through different performances. The film has been shown in several exhibitions so far. One took place in Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris in 2018 and had the same title as the film. In this exhibition, Sala used works from different media (paintings, sculptures, films), where 'each work explores in its own way and with the means of its medium, the impact of a singular action – i.e. a manipulation – on an existing situation, composition or object.'⁴⁶ In this exhibition, another film was projected in a different space. This film, entitled *Slip of the Line* (2018), has the same duration as *If and Only If*. During the exhibition, the two films were projected in parallel, and the result was that the Elegy (heard

in and out of synchronisation, creating another layer of interaction added to the traditional soloist-orchestra relation.

46 'Anri Sala: If and Only If' in GalleriesNow, <https://www.galleriesnow.net/shows/anri-sala-2/#>

in one space) functioned both as the central element of *If and Only If* and as a sort of a soundtrack of the second film, *Slip of the Line* (screened in another space).⁴⁷

Another solo exhibition where the work was exhibited was AS YOU GO, at the Castello di Rivoli Museum for Contemporary Art. In this exhibition, *If and Only If* was part of a film made of three video works: *Ravel Ravel* (2013), *Take Over* (2017), and *If and Only If* (2018). The film was projected in parts of the exhibition on two screens, which created a corridor where the spectator/listener could walk (see Figure 13.11).



Fig. 13.11 Anri Sala, *If and Only If* (2018) the exhibition AS YOU GO (2019), Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin © The author, 23 April, 2019.

The projected film consisted only of music-based works, so the result in my experience as a visitor was an alternative concert: I could remain in the same place and watch/listen, and I could also move in the corridor and feel totally immersed in sound and image. In addition, the video moved forward not only in time but also in space. As it moved from one room to the other, I could decide whether to follow it or not.

The consistent movement of the films may 'walk' the spectators through the exhibition, but they may also remain in one space while the films move – an option that allows interesting moments of music that are unsynchronised with the image. The fact that the films are screened repeatedly enables exploration of all options: the audience may experience this 'concert' once from a certain distance while facing the screen, and again by walking in-between the two screens. They may

47 Anri Sala, interview with the author, Berlin, 30 October 2018.

also walk with the moving image or remain still and wait for the film to come into view again.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have addressed the ‘museum problem’ by exploring artworks from the field of visual art in which a classical composition is a central element. I argue that different artworks, as the three cases discussed here, have the potential to create new possibilities and enable an extended musical experience that does not conform to the concert hall conventions.

Each work discussed in this chapter demonstrates a classical Western composition which is heard and performed in a unique and untraditional manner. I described the original contexts added by Sala to the musical works and showed how historical, political, social and artistic contexts led him to the uncommon practice of changing the original musical scores. I demonstrated how the revised compositions are heard in Sala’s works (usually recorded, and sometimes also performed live) in combination with the visual means that enhances the musical experience.

Sala’s works are displayed in spaces such as museums and galleries (or outside in locations chosen for site-specific works such as *The Last Resort*). The architecture of each space, as well as the sound design (an essential element in Sala’s works), create an immersive and more active listening experience, different from the standard concert-hall experience. Heard as a part of an installation and in the context of a visual art exhibition, the music surrounds the listeners, who may explore different possibilities of movement or stillness. The traditional listening experience is also modified as a result of the nonlinear course of the exhibition: unlike the traditional concert, the music in each work is heard repeatedly, and visitors may walk in and out at any time. In addition, the juxtaposition of different music-based works at the same exhibition creates moments in which the different compositions are heard simultaneously, suggesting a fascinating auditory experience.

In the three works I examined, the music does not function as a soundtrack to an artwork or an exhibition, but rather, as part of a hybrid work in which it is combined with different media such as video, installation, and performance. Sala’s approach to classical music, as a

dynamic creation that enables transformations, brings forth interesting perspectives regarding the future of classical music. I find his works inspiring for both musicians and musicologists, as well as for the listener, who might discover new ways to appreciate and interact with classical music today.

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