CLASSICAL MUSIC FUTURES
PRACTICES OF INNOVATION

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14. Changing Rooms: A Diary of Spatial Innovation

Neil Thomas Smith

This is an exploration of attempts to innovate concert spaces. The aim is to contribute to efforts in appraising, and sensitising ourselves to, their musical possibilities. Already a hot topic in attempts to innovate the classical music concert, the pandemic has seen an unprecedented (if enforced) explosion of experimentation in this area, whether online, outdoors, or in unusual buildings. What we have learnt from these experiences is far from clear. Indeed, vacating the concert hall may simply make people desperate to return. This chapter presents a diary of unconventional concert spaces, two pre- and four post-pandemic. It explores the effects of spatial innovation, providing insights for the future of performances outside the concert hall.

Evaluating space in concert settings poses distinct challenges, in particular the difficulties of isolating the space itself from other elements of performance. In a chapter that attempts to get closer to what space can mean to the concert experience, it is important to realise that there can be no direct comparison between particular spaces. All the elements that go into concert experience – occasion, time, individual performance, audience; not to mention the vagaries of listeners' moods and the complexities of their trajectories – mean that even the same piece in a different space (the most seemingly direct means of comparison) cannot give an incontrovertible sense of how space acts on performance, though such circumstances may well be informative. Performers, after all, are in constant dialogue with the space in a feedback loop that can have radical effects on their interpretation. No violinist would play Bach Sonatas in a deadly dry 'black box' auditorium as they would in a boomy cathedral.

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Many scholars of sound and space are also keen to stress the two-way relationship between space and sound. It is not a pre-existing container for sound to fill.[1] Rather, as Georgina Born argues, space '[a]s an artefact of musical or artistic practice' is 'both *produced* and *transformed*.'[2] This poses challenges when choosing an analytical approach that is open to such subtleties, yet it also makes clear how important is the connection between space and musical experience as an object of study.[3]

Some of the performances explored below are themselves set up as concert formats with an explicitly spatial theme: outdoor performance, for example, or performance in two locations in the same evening. The traditional Western concert experience is fractured in these events, which makes them more revealing as regards the influence of spatial dynamics. Part of the power of the traditional Western concert as a ritual is the way its parts mutually support one another: for example, the canon as a collection of works worthy of complete attention is enforced by separation between audience and musicians, the prohibition of bodily movement, busts of great composers and artists (and patrons), and the hermeticism of the hall. Hennion describes the 'immediacy' of the concert as the 'paradoxical result of a lengthy sequence of mediations', which are not only spatial but also temporal, in that the audience must put themselves 'in the right frame of mind' via a 'series of different stages, none of which can be ignored'.[4] Tampering with this well-established sequence can have unexpected consequences for the concert as a social, as well as musical, event.

1 C.f. Nigel Thrift, 'Re-animating the place of thought: Transformations of spatial and temporal description in the twenty-first century' in *Community, Economic Creativity, and Organization*, ed. by A. Amin and S. Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 90-119; 'Understanding the Affective Spaces of Political Performance' in Emotion, Place and Culture, ed. by L. Bondi, L. Cameron, J. Davidson, M. Smith (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2016), pp. 79-96.

2 Georgina Born, 'Introduction – music, sound and space: transformations of public and private experience' in *Music, Sound, and Space: Transformations of Public and Private Experience,* ed. by Georgina Born (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1–69 (p. 20).

3 This can be seen in the various disciplinary angles from which the question of music and space can be approached. For example, by historians, architects, acousticians, geographers, anthropologists and musicians.

4 Antoine Hennion, 'Music Lovers: Taste as Performance' in *Theory, Culture & Society* 18:5 (2001), 1–22 (p. 13).

From a spatial perspective, it is hard to penetrate the important questions of changing spaces for musical performance when presented with the smooth exterior of such traditional concerts. Thinking about how the sound intersects with the concert hall begins to stray too easily into criticism of performance, or the well-worn descriptions of their acoustics as 'warm', 'dry', 'uneven', or 'lively'. Acoustic criticism of this nature already assumes an acoustic ideal, based on nineteenth-century models.[5] It does not leave much room for different acoustic characters that are in themselves unique or unusual. Gieryn states that buildings 'do as much to structure social relations by *concealing* as by revealing, and therein lies their distinctive force for structuring social relations and practices.'[6] Concert halls are superb examples of this concealment, while events that break the mould provide more purchase for probing the music-space relationship.

The questions of space in performance are not just of theoretical importance. This is an area that is being explored by a huge number of arts organisations. The concert hall is an 'institutional' arts space and, as such, carries with it certain baggage: high art, disciplined silence, little participation. The majority of classical institutions are aware of this and have used space as an explicit means of trying to open up the concert experience. These attempts often link alternative spaces with a sense of *informality*: a more relaxed attitude that is open to different people. This is a significant reason behind orchestras in parks, contemporary music in nightclubs, and pop-up performances in train stations and shopping centres.[7] In fact, space is often one of the first resources that organisations draw on in order to give a sense of excitement and innovation to their projects. While this can be effective, and the intentions are admirable, it might also be too easy a fix: changing space alone is unlikely to achieve the goals of improving classical music's reach and demographic appeal. Concert-hall discipline is not just in the concert hall but in the habits and practices

5 See Darryl Cressman, *Building Culture in Nineteenth-Century Amsterdam: The Concertgebouw* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

6 Thomas F. Gieryn, 'What Buildings Do' in *Theory and Society* 31:1 (2002), 25–74 (p. 38). Emphasis in original.

7 Julia Haferkorn, 'Dancing to another tune: classical music in nightclubs and other non-traditional venues', in *The Classical Music Industry*, ed. by Christopher Dromey and Julia Haferkorn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 148–171.

of the people raised within its traditions. Moving space, therefore, but with a majority of the same audience, may displace these practices rather than radically challenge them.

The Diary Approach

The effects of classical music's spatial innovations will be explored in relation to three themes that emerge from a concert diary kept by me between 2019-2021. For this diary I at first sought out concerts that were exploring space in an unusual manner, visiting two of these before the pandemic and its subsequent lockdowns in the UK forced the majority of concerts to innovate spatially in some way. The diary entries were then analysed inductively and three themes isolated. The first theme, *audience and engagement*, isolates passages from the diary that explore whether and in what way unusual performance spaces involve new publics. The second looks at *acoustic*, which becomes particularly important in outdoor performance, or performance in larger buildings, such as railway stations. Finally, the third section explores passages that are relevant to the relationship between interior musical experience and the classical tradition, here labelled *listening and place*. The ability of music to take the listener 'out' of their immediate environment is discussed and, in particular, its intersection with the 'placed' listening that site-specific events encourage.

The following reflections are designed to raise these issues while discussing real live concert events in cities in Scotland (Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen) and in London. What follows is no quasi-scientific exploration of music in different spaces, but a series of reflections on – mostly unusual – classical performance spaces, which I approached with the explicit aim of thinking about how the space affects the performance. As a composer of, and researcher on, new music, space has always been a fascinating resource to me, though one that it is difficult to make work as well in reality as it does in the imagination.[8]

8 In a similar vein, Blesser and Salter critique spatialised musical performance: 'Placing performers below, above, behind, or to the side of listeners is not intrinsically interesting… Spatial music is interesting precisely because, and only because, it allows combinations of musical elements that would otherwise be artistically weak without using spatial distribution.' Barry Blesser and Linda-Ruth

This study is part of a wider project looking at spatial innovation within the classical sector, which was part of the Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music's (MCICM's) research line that explored the societal relevance of classical music. In particular, the project looked at attempts to create new concert halls.[9] The diary material is presented here as a series of scenes that relate to the three themes. These are followed by commentaries that further tease out the challenges and implications of the observations, relating them to relevant literature on space and musical performance.

Clearly, this is a personal story: people have personal reactions to space just as they do to sound. Jonathan Sterne argues that there is 'no "mere" or innocent description of interior auditory experience,'[10] rather our own histories shape our inner auditory worlds: 'what we hear is influenced by how we are allowed, and have been taught, to hear' as Leyshon et al. put it. As a regular attendee not only of traditional concerts but of new music events and festivals, I have a keen interest in the craft of composition and in novel musical experiences. Through education and experience I am a listener at ease in the concert environment, which gives me a large bank of concerts to which I can compare the events described below, but does very much make me a concert 'insider'. This is significant considering that space is often called upon to make the art form more accessible. I cannot judge such attempts in terms of my own feelings of being welcomed or feeling involved, but I can observe my musical reactions and the behaviour of the audience at large.

Ethnography, therefore, is the chosen tool for this chapter as it is well placed to engage with complex questions of spatial dynamics. It can approach the complexity of spatial-sonic experience, with Born stating that there is a 'multiplicity of any human's subject's experience of

Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?: Experiencing Aural Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2007), p. 169.

9 Neil Thomas Smith and Peter Peters, 'Music for Buildings; Building for Music' in *The Routledge Companion to Applied Musicology*, ed. by Chris Dromey, forthcoming; Neil Thomas Smith, 'Concrete Culture: The Planning Hearing as a Stage for Cultural Debates' in *Cultural Sociology* 16:2 (2022), 147–164; Neil Thomas Smith, 'Constructing the Public Concert Hall' in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 146:2 (2021), 255–281.

10 Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins in Sound Reproduction* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 19.

music and sound as s/he inhabits a particular physical or virtual space, performance venue or site', something that is complicated further by the 'social multiplicities' of these same spaces, as well as the nuances that emerge from subtle changes in spatial arrangements.[11] Hirschauer argues that 'ethnographic writing puts something into words that, prior to this writing, did not exist in language' and sonic-spatial experience is a good example of experience that escapes everyday expression.[12] Low goes further, contending that 'ethnographic approaches to spatial analysis are crucial for any adequate analysis of the contestation of values and meanings in complex societies.'[13] In aiming to understand some of the effects of space in performance and some of the issues that innovating in this area raises, ethnography is a valuable tool.

There is no attempt here to comprehensively evaluate any of the individual events in question, rather they are used to raise wider issues. Some background to the events considered here will be of help to the reader, however. The first event was a concert given by the Scottish Ensemble (a small string orchestra) in Edinburgh. This event was split between two locations on the same evening, the large expanse of St. Giles Cathedral and the smaller (yet still rather grand) interior of the Georgian Signet Library. This meant the first 'small' half was repeated twice, either side of a single performance in the larger venue, so that the larger audience that fitted in St. Giles could be split between two performances in the Library. Tickets gave the audience access either to the Signet Library *then* the cathedral, or the cathedral *then* the library. The second set of concerts was part of the contemporary concert series The Night With..., organised by composer Matthew Whiteside. In this instance, the young UK-based Hermes Ensemble was heard in concert in Glasgow and in Edinburgh on subsequent evenings. Both the Scottish Ensemble and Hermes Ensemble concerts took place prior to any pandemic restrictions.

11 Georgina Born, 'Introduction' in *Music, Sound and Space*, p. 19

12 Stefan Hirschauer, 'Putting things into words: Ethnographic description and the silence of the social' in *Human Studies* 29 (2007), 413–441, p. 414. Blesser and Salter state that for both 'cultural and biological reasons, the language for describing sound is weak and inadequate.' Blesser and Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?*, p. 6.

13 Setha Low, 'Spatializing Culture: The Social Production and Social Construction of Public Space in Costa Rica' in *American Ethnologist* 23:4 (1996), 861–879, (p. 862).

Four events were attended after the initial COVID-19 lockdowns, each with special measures in place. *Call* by composer Pete Stollery was a new piece performed in the fishing village of Footdee (Aberdeen, pronounced 'Fittie'), which sits where the river Dee meets the sea, as part of new music incubator Sound Scotland's 'Unbound Sound' festival. This piece was for massed French horns – some of which were placed over 200 metres away on the other side of the river – and, at its conclusion, it made use of the horns of the ships in Aberdeen harbour. The Edinburgh International Festival adapted to COVID-19 restrictions by placing huge tent-like structures in different locations in the city. Pianist Steven Osborne played a concert that included Beethoven, Michael Tippett and George Crumb in the Old College Quad, part of the University of Edinburgh. Also in Edinburgh, Music for Bridges was a series of outdoor performance events around the cycle paths in the north of the city, initiated by myself and organised in collaboration with local arts charity Tinderbox. This is the only I event in which I was involved as a performer and composer. It made use of several pieces of Victorian railway infrastructure, including the eponymous bridges and a large tunnel, which was where the performance described took place. Finally, Lost and Found was a Royal Opera House project that resulted in a series of mini operas composed by different writer-composer combinations for performance in St. Pancras Railway Station, London.

The discussion begins with reflections on audience engagement in three of the events attended.

Audience

The Cycle Path, Edinburgh, 12 September 2021. Music for Bridges

I stand at one end of Trinity Tunnel, almost 120 metres of dark and rather dank former railway tunnel, which (with surprising subtlety) lies under the plush houses and gardens of East Trinity Road above. At the other end, my clarinettist companion stands waiting. The sound had been great in the rehearsal, drifting back and forth between the two instruments. All was set for the performance, about which there were a

number of mysteries: was anyone going to be there? Would they stop to listen or move on?

What had not been predicted was an audience of around fifty people, including ten children and several dogs, all standing in between the instruments in the middle of the tunnel. A surprising success, it might be thought, yet with this audience the performance situation changed entirely. The enclosed space meant that no sound dispersed. The most audible thing became the audience rather than the music. What had before been a fragile, meditative piece, became a group of people standing in a tunnel listening, in the main, to sounds they were themselves creating. The very thing that had attracted me to the tunnel in the first place – its ability to transmit sound – became the downfall of the pieces I had written for it. A fellow composer and sound artist described the situation as 'Cageian', which I found a touchingly sympathetic summary.

St. Pancras Station, London, 8 March, 2022. Lost and Found, Royal Opera House

When I arrive at the station I am greeted by an usher in a hi-vis jacket. There are many such volunteers, letting people know where in the large building the action is occurring. The situation needs to be managed and people need to be told. Walking down the concourse, I hear trained, operatic voices before I see anything, eventually joining a circle of people around two singers and some instrumentalists.

An older couple become interested in proceedings. 'It's hard to see' says the woman. They watch for a moment before moving on. Another man in jogging bottoms and his own hi-vis is attracted by the sound. He moves to the front to record a moment on his phone before saying 'I'm not going to miss my train' and moving on. It is as if an invisible cord delays the people walking past for a moment: they slow down, offer a glance, sometimes a smile, but the vast majority pass by without stopping to listen.

Footdee, Aberdeen, 13 June. *Call* by Pete Stollery. Unbound Sound, Sound Festival

The quiet conversations of the people who stop to listen during the rehearsal do not disturb the situation as they would have done in a hall. The dispersion applies to the sound of the audience as much as the sound of the players.

More attentive listening is present in the concert performance. People do say a few words to their companions, but this seems in keeping with the event and not much of a disturbance. During the rehearsal, people walk past with various reactions, indifference, curiosity. None stop for long, as if maybe it is not their business.

Commentary

A key point from literatures on space and sound is that space is not a vessel that is filled with sonic material, rather the two are co-constitutive. For example, Lehtovuori states that 'events not only take place in public urban space, but *partake in its production*.'[14] At the same time, music can create unique coalitions of people and communities, providing good material for answering DiSalvo's question 'How are publics made with things?'.[15] Music, therefore, can define spaces and create publics to a significant degree. 'Can', however, requires a certain emphasis here: there is an idealism that emerges from literal application of literatures on space, or at least it is very easy to overestimate the effects of musico-spatial relations.

The potential to define space and create publics does not guarantee that musical events in public space will achieve these goals. Reviewing my notes, one comment states that outdoor performance is 'Not an immediate means of engaging people' and that the '"Problems" of audience are displaced rather than solved.' Different places obviously come with different publics. The railway station is a good example of very directed presence: few people hang around St. Pancras Station without

14 Panu Lehtovuori, 'Towards Experiential Urbanism' in *Critical Sociology* 38:1 (2012), 71–87 (p. 4). Emphases in original.

15 Carl DiSalvo, 'Design and the Construction of Publics' in *Design Issues* 25:1 (2009), 48–63 (p. 49).

a specific aim, or train, in mind. Many of the people who followed the event had come – like me – specifically for the music. Photographs and videos also made their way onto social media and television news programmes, creating a mediatised event: from the point of view of the Opera House the audience was, perhaps, as much online as in the flesh.

There is, however, an undeniable openness to outdoor performance that is arresting; the challenge is making people welcome to stay if they wish. The event in Aberdeen does point to the informality that outdoor performance can achieve from an acoustic point of view. The rigidly policed silence of the concert hall cannot be broken without disturbing other people. The outdoors does give more scope for different levels of attention to sit side-by-side.

Space, however, is not an innocent construction that is just waiting for music to enter it. Massey argues that '[a]ll spaces are socially regulated in some way, if not by explicit rules (no ball games, no loitering) then by potentially more competitive (more market-like?) regulation.'[16] To encourage what Iris Marion Young sees as fundamental to city life – 'The being together of strangers'[17] – such restrictions must be taken into account: adding music does not immediately resolve the tensions around who is comfortable occupying spaces. Yet, it can subtly alter the use of spaces, creating different points of focus.

The word 'can' again emerges. Music, space and audience is full of revitalising potential but without guaranteed results.

Acoustic

The Cycle Path, Edinburgh, 12 September 2021. Music for Bridges

Before the event begins, I take my flute out below the first bridge I come across. The feeling is immediate once I start playing. The enclosure, even

16 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 152. Or, as Lefebvre puts it, 'there is a politics of space because space is political.' Henri Lefebvre, *Espace et politique: La droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 2000 [1972]), p. 59. See also Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 183.

17 Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 237.

though partial, is enough to return the sound back, to reinforce and give me confidence. It feels like an acoustic embrace.

Footdee, Aberdeen, 13 June. *Call* by Pete Stollery. Unbound Sound, Sound Festival

The Horn players: 'I hate playing outside' – 'Really? I don't mind it'

Even with ten horn players, the sound immediately reminded me of how 'flat' outdoor playing can be. This, coupled with the instruments' brassy tones, puts me in mind of the bugle playing the 'Last Post' [which is played by the British military on occasions of remembrance]. Sound disperses, immediately. There is no comforting and encouraging room reverberation to spur players on, the transmission of sound seems to only go in one direction: away from you into endless space. As an audience member I am never in the sound, enveloped by it, resonating with it.

Two horns are positioned over 200 metres away at the other side of the Dee. It is a set-up that points to a narrative at which the listener can only guess: why are they over there, so far from their fellow players? What are they trying to communicate to us? The two distant horns are heard surprisingly well, particularly over the closer players' material. Only a little of the sound is lost on the breeze, while the varying dynamics of close and distant players give the sound from over the river a certain clarity: the timbre of horns playing loud from a distance is quite distinct from those playing quieter close by.

While I am surprised by the effectiveness of this constellation, I am – as always with spatial exploration – perhaps slightly disappointed. Perhaps no sound can match the epic sonic experience that I imagine when players are divided up amongst geography on the largest scale.[18] My mind is full of mountains resonating and two horns are a little underpowered for that. Sound cannot conquer landscape with these tools.

That being said, the eventual performance is (unsurprisingly) louder and fuller than the rehearsal, with the spectacular addition of the ships' horns. These are something else. As if the piece is a building

18 Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).

and the horns are a shattering force that rips off the roof to suddenly reveal the sky. Whereas the sounds of the French horn existed gently in this context, the ships obliterated the space.

Edinburgh, 16 October 2019. Scottish Ensemble: Take Two

'One half of the audience I'd like to welcome, the other half I'd like to welcome back' states the music director. The seats in St. Giles Cathedral are not so comfy, and some of the musicians wear scarves and shawls to keep warm, reminding me of my own experiences performing in chilly British churches. The sound of chairs and stands scraping the stone billows out from the ensemble's position in the crossing. During the music, details of intimate moments are lost in the generous acoustic, but the *maestoso*, slow material sounds great. At times the bass is a little woofy, making for a bad blend, while the higher instruments sound a little far away. The church bells ring at one point, but come to an end just as the piece is also concluding, as if it were planned.

I often find myself thinking how the acoustic is deficient in various ways, though the musicians still pull the pieces off with aplomb. It appears easier to think about what you lack, at least to a listener with significant experience of listening in concert halls. I am taken out of myself entirely by a *slow* [Pietro] Locatelli opening. The bold contrasts of fast and slow offered by the Baroque repertoire allow for easy comparison between the space's reactions to the two speeds. At the end of the half, for some audience members, it is the end of the concert while for the other half, including me, it is only halfway. I realise that there is a particular character to the final applause of a normal concert, one that cannot be fully realised in this configuration.

In the interval, there is less natural opportunity for a drink. We inhabit spaces less as we have to move from one to the other, even though sensitivity to the space is part of the intention of the format. I wonder whether any of the pieces we heard had any particular religious significance. A church is naturally not just an empty box with an acoustic and the relationship between its religious function and the programme was not made explicitly.

The Signet Library part of the performance is a little like having the Scottish Ensemble play in your (very large) front room. I can hear

interaction between bass/inner and melody and it adds a whole new, human level to the music-making: more social, less ritualistic. Here, big chords do seem to die a little soon. Again the acoustics seem defined by their, to my ear, deficiencies (which are shown up, almost expertly, by the concert format). In the first intimate passage, I immediately think 'Wow, these guys are great [players]', which I never quite did in the church, even though the music was just as virtuosic. The final *tierce de Picardie* [a major chord at the end of a minor piece] must feel rather different depending on whether you heard it in the middle or at the end of the evening.

Commentary

There is a reason why the concert hall was created. Acoustic, as a performer, is usually a positive. The continual feedback and support it offers provides great encouragement, whereas a complete dispersal of sound in the outdoors can be problematic. There is a logic to the covered bandstand in the open park, for example.

It is unsurprising that performers and composers explore spaces and places outside of concert halls, which – as Blesser and Salter state – are a 'very narrow application of aural architecture in a very specific context.'[19] Yet, the material above raises the issue that, although there are innumerable places on earth that can function as locations for musical performance, the *acoustic* differentiation will be artistically significant in a minority. Gieryn describes three defining features of place, namely 'location, material form, and meaningfulness'.[20] Acoustically, changing the first can make little difference, while the second usually falls into broad acoustic types: outdoor performance sounds like outdoor performance in a great many locations. Blesser and Salter use the concept of 'metainstruments' to describe how instruments are tied to the imagination of a particular acoustic and it is this connection that is troubled by alternative performance venues. The temptation is to infer that the outdoors provides a whole panoply of acoustic opportunities for the performer, yet in practice there are certain archetypal spaces

19 Blesser and Salter, *Spaces Speak, Are You Listening?*, p. 127.
20 Gieryn, 'What Buildings Do', p. 466.

that cover most locations: large open spaces, valleys, woods, etc. The benefit of placing music in particular locations is usually to be found in other facets, such as the profile of the background noise, the visual panorama, the social function of the space (Gieryn's 'meaningfulness'), the physical sense of being in it, or the affectual impact. Other scholars may well describe this as the difference between 'place' and 'space'.[21]

The dispersion of sound applies to the audience as much as the sound of the players, however, which, as discussed above, is an important reason why outdoor performance does offer a certain kind of informality. Technology is the key to dominate such outdoor space. Think of the racks of speakers at a festival gig, the ships' horns firing sound in all directions.

Listening and Place

Glasgow/Edinburgh, 25/26 November 2019. The Night With... The Hermes Ensemble

This was a typical pub back room: black walls, posters and low lighting with some purple highlights. A disco ball rotates slowly on the ceiling. A fan hums gently in the background, but it is one you can ignore, like a work computer. The group are set up at the far end of the low-ceilinged room, the voice of the singer amplified through some speakers.

Here, we are sheltered from the world outside, by the space but also by the music. The weird, affecting, simple, expressive can all find a place here, but not too lengthy. The gig is a kind of secret despite significant individual efforts at advertising. What is played here is not presented as 'great art'; it is something to momentarily move, amuse, disorientate us. People still listen attentively, with just the occasional sound of ice moving in plastic glasses. After his piece, *Daily Rituals*, composer

21 See, for example, Tim Cresswell *Space*: *A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). For the purposes of this chapter (and following Massey, *For Space*, p. 6) the distinction is not made here as it is taken for granted that all spaces have 'meaning'. Though the concert hall is seen as a space that in some ways tries to underplay its nature as a specific 'place', all concert halls are different and the generalised 'space' of musical performance is an ideal towards which they aspire rather than a reality.

Matthew Grouse stands to take his bow from the middle of the room. In the space there is an effortless shift of perspective from the stage to the composer. The piece's references to selfies, Tinder and other dating software landed with the audience. In this way it feels 'connected' to outside world.

In Edinburgh, the Scottish Storytelling has a vibe I would describe as 'concert in rural arts centre'. The audience dress code is less trendy than Glasgow, the group a little older. The rows of seats also create a feeling of formality that was not present the night before. I draw a diagram of the 'parameters of formality' in terms of seating and audience-performer relations: the smaller the space between audience and performer, the more informality; the more rigid the seating, the more formality.

There were so many more laughs in Glasgow! The older audience perhaps struggled a little with the references, but it was not just a matter of content but of situation. There was still warm applause.

The sound of dishes being moved from behind the screen to my rear irritates me and takes me out of the music. A voice is raised in an easy-going discussion, and later the café staff whistle while working. A noisy tap gushes occasionally. None of this noise contributes to my musical experience, though it does keep me in the real world. But perhaps tied to this kind of real world is not where I want to be.

The Old College Quad, Edinburgh, 12 August 2021. Steven Osborne, Edinburgh International Festival

I notice a curious tension between the 'placeness' of the venue and how I wanted to listen. The moments that I feel most 'inside' the music, struck me as those that were most 'successful'. I close my eyes at times. I prized those moments at which there is a complete interiorisation of experience and the outside world is blocked out. Music transforms space in various ways and part of its great magic is its ability to take your imagination elsewhere, out of the moment in which you find yourself.

Commentary

The 'place' of musical experience is seen to be somewhere between here and elsewhere, the advantage of music in a traditional listening

configuration is its ability to transcend its space, or to define it. The space of performance and the space-defining abilities of the music interact in complex ways: this is no one-way street. Most concert halls aspire towards invisibility, focusing attention on the musicians so that the ear is given full rein, the body a comfortable (if restrictive) chair.[22] Music in place presents more to the other senses. Where music takes us is in dialogue with a stronger sense of where we are.

I prized those moments when the outside world – and my own body – was blocked out, i.e. what I have been trained into seeing as the ideal Western (classical) music experience. My training as a musician and many hours spent sitting in concert halls will certainly have a bearing on this. I take this ideal listening experience around with me, whether I am sat in a concert hall or a university quad. Why, then, bother with performing in unusual venues at all? Just because listeners have the ability to close off from their surroundings and join with a musical experience, does not mean the space they inhabit has no bearing. On the contrary, it is the site and context for these musical experiences and can help or hinder them.

The tensions that arise here are partly due to the presentation of what is essentially concert music within a more 'placed' context. The presuppositions of the concert – primarily silence – are not only within me as a listener but within the pieces themselves. Pieces can, to a degree, define their listening expectations. Interaction with the sounds and spaces of the place, as occurs in creative directions inspired by sound art, would immediately create a kind of listening that includes and appreciates the sonic environment outside the work: indeed it questions this divide between the sounds 'inside' and those 'outside'. There is another echo here of the theoretical distinction that can be made between 'place' and 'space'.

The aim of all the spatial explorations discussed here was never to make the musical experience incidental and in this a cornerstone of the Western classical tradition is maintained: contemplative listening. Richard Leppert argues that such listening is 'not philosophically removed from the world, as later aesthetic would have it; it is instead the sign of one's control and domination of the world.' He continues that

22 There is a link between this 'invisibility' and the purported universalism of the bourgeois culture from which the concert hall arose.

'[a]s such, it *is* an exercise of power.'[23] Leppert comes to this conclusion through the study of various pieces of visual art, which in part show the nobility enjoying immersive musical experience while peasants toil: his material 'establishes an opposition between contemplation (thought) and physical labour (in essence, nonthought).'[24] While the situation is far from identical, there is an echo of this in the diary material above, in the contrast between the hi-vis jackets of the staff and volunteers of the Royal Opera House and the hi-vis-jacketed man who must catch his train. James Johnson also plots how attentive listening arose in Paris (and spread from the capital) with a similar focus on its potential for distinguishing class credentials.[25] Finally, Richard Sennett considers silence as a matter of privilege, not least in relation to the gentlemen's clubs of Victorian England, where men could sit in silence, undisturbed.[26]

These perspectives cast a different light on what are described above as the most positive musical experiences, which were in the main attentive and undisturbed by noise around, albeit not within a context of pure silence. There is a connection in these concert experiences between attentive listening and deep, musical experience. Are all such experiences an 'exercise of power' or does a new location give them new meaning? Musical immersion is by no means purely an aim of concert music; just think of audiences losing themselves at festivals throughout the world. The experiences described above 'felt' silent to me, in a way, because they spoke of a quality of connection between me and the music.

For the authors above, the supposedly stifling silence of the concert hall is the primary target but is the experience so very different in such 'placed' concerts? Perhaps the more critical question, for myself as much as for anyone else, is why 'successful' musical experience requires some kind of disavowal of the present space and moment. This is a deeply embedded part of Western musical experience. Whether it can be expanded, or even replaced, is still a rather open question and

23 Richard Leppert, 'Desire, Power and the Sonoric Landscape: Early Modernism and the Politics of Musical Privacy', in *The Place of Music*, ed. by Andrew Leyshon, David Matless and George Revill (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), pp. 291–321 (p. 302).

24 Leppert, 'Desire, Power and the Sonoric Landscape', p. 301.

25 James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 302.

26 Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (London: Penguin, 2002 [first published 1978]), pp. 215–216.

is a reason that experimental pieces that puncture this hermetic bubble of experience can still be powerful. Furthermore, there is room for a narrative of musical immersion that is entirely of this world, one that is a precious experience cradled by the context in which listeners find themselves.

For those attempting to innovate concerts in terms of their spatial dynamics, these questions are important because such innovations are often attempts to rid the concert of the formality of Western classical music. There is the issue, however, of the formality of the Western listening experience that is much deeper and is often left untroubled.

Concluding Thoughts

The aim of this chapter is not to discourage musicians from spatial exploration. On the contrary, the great potential of spatial exploration has been noted and should be further exploited. Yet, it is also a corrective to an approach that would imbue space with the ability to transform musical and social relations without the complicating factors of music's previous socialisations and the pre-existing complexities of the new spaces that are used.

The literatures on space provide a good deal of material to consider its potential and complexities, yet the individual nature of particular spaces means that continued, practical experimentation is vital to find solutions that discover that magical moment in which public, space and music fit together, or indeed rub against each other in an arresting manner.[27] The latter point is important, as Born is right to point out that considering music and space can uncover 'a universe not of consensual social relations, but of sometimes agonistic and dissensual relations – pointing to music and sound as the terrain on which not only aesthetic differences but also social, cultural, religious and political differences, inequalities and oppressions may be played out.'[28] Music does not necessarily need to 'fit' its space (which is the aim of most site-specific musical performances) but can be a daring juxtaposition or musico-spatial provocation. This is reminiscent of Chantal Mouffe's description of democratic politics, which '[i]nstead of trying to erase the traces

27 C.f. 'utopian' versus 'critical' public art in W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Art and the Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 3.

28 Born, 'Introduction', p. 33.

of power and exclusion... requires that they be brought to the fore, making them visible so that they can enter the terrain of contestation'.[29] Furthermore, shaping the spatial context of musical performance does not guarantee that the responses of individual listeners will 'fit' with the intention.

Concert-hall performance has been in full flow for 200 years and it may take time for other traditions of performance to emerge. In exploring this further, it is important to remain responsive to the new spaces that are used. Transplanting concert music into the outdoors, for example, while potentially novel for some, does not exploit how sound and space can interact, nor does it necessarily encourage ways of listening that are radically new. Consideration of what exactly a new space will add to a performance is all too rarely exhibited. Maximising engagement with space's 'meaningfulness' holds much potential, as does searching out spaces with true acoustic character and playing music that exploits it.

This is where another challenge in truly reacting to spatial dynamics is found. New works written for particular spaces are, by strict definition, not transportable. The concert hall, along with widely used notational practices, was important in establishing composers' reputations as music could be heard across vast distances and, eventually, over many centuries. There is a connection here with the 'white cube' in the world of visual art, which acted as a seemingly 'neutral' space for the presentation of modern works.[30] Composing for one specific space is challenging for current economies in new music, both financial and in terms of 'prestige'.[31] In reality, however, it is likely alternative spaces could be found for most 'placed' pieces and in this there is a sense of continual adaptation and transformation to new spaces that may well be beneficial for each iteration.

Finally, it is worth saying that the affectual experience of a space is very much tied to the behaviour of people within it, and one's previous exposure to it. A welcoming concert-hall environment could well be more effective than a cold or austere outdoor performance. Just as music produces spaces, so can words, actions and conversation.

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29 Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, (London: Verso, 1993), p. 149.

30 See, for example, Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

31 Hettie Malcomson, 'Composing Individuals: Ethnographic Reflections on Success and Prestige in the British New Music Network' in *Twentieth-Century Music* 10:1 (2013), 115–136.

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