

CLASSICAL MUSIC FUTURES PRACTICES OF INNOVATION

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





<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2024 Neil Thomas Smith, Peter Peters and Karoly Molina



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International license (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the work for non-commercial purposes, providing attribution is made to the author (but not in any way that suggests that he endorses you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

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>

Further details about CC BY-NC licenses are available at
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>.

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at
<https://archive.org/web>.

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions. Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0353

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

Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

15. Monsieur Croche – Concerts at Eye Level

Tal Walker

Introduction

I dared to tell him that some men had sought, some in poetry, others in painting (with great difficulty, I added a few musicians), to shake off the old dust of tradition [...] Mr Croche continued without flinching, “it doesn’t matter. A beautiful idea, in formation, contains something ridiculous for fools” [...] “Remain unique... without blemish” [...] “Discipline must be sought in freedom, not in the formulas of a philosophy that has become obsolete and is good only for the weak. Listen to no one’s advice, except the wind as it passes and tells us the story of the world.”¹

Claude Debussy expressed his views on artistic traditions through his alter ego *Monsieur Croche* (Mister Quaver) in his concert reviews written for *La Revue Blanche* and *Gil Blas* journals in Paris. This criticism challenges artistic conventions of France in 1901. Despite the risk of being ridiculed by the media, Debussy calls for innovation and creativity in music inspired by the freedom of art and nature. He is featured here as

1 ‘J’osai lui dire que des hommes avaient cherché, les uns dans la poésie, les autres dans la peinture (à grand-peine j’y ajoutai quelques musiciens) à secouer la vieille poussière des traditions [...] continuait M. Croche sans broncher, ça n’a aucune importance. Une idée très belle, en formation, contient du ridicule pour les imbéciles [...] « Rester unique... sans tare [...] « Il faut chercher la discipline dans la liberté et non dans les formules d’une philosophie devenue caduque et bonne pour les faibles. N’écouter les conseils de personne, sinon du vent qui passe et nous raconte l’histoire du monde.’ Claude Debussy, ‘L’Entretien avec M. Croche’, in *La Revue blanche* (Paris: 1 July 1901) as appears in Claude Debussy, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971), pp. 51–52.

an intellectual, almost a poet, in his own way. He, and other musicians, mingled with painters, writers, dancers and other artists. Gabriel Fauré, Marcel Proust and Paul Verlaine were no strangers. Maurice Ravel and his group of *Société des Apaches* were composers, writers and visual artists who would gather to perform music, read poetry and discuss art.

Nowadays, a small interdisciplinary fringe society such as the *Apaches* might have been overshadowed by big concert halls and museums. Conservatoires and art academies are playing a big role in this specialisation, which has its advantages and disadvantages. We owe so much to music conservatoires in bringing together international students and faculty members, and inspiring young musicians to aspire towards high achievements, as well as helping to collect knowledge through research and archival work. Many musicians like me, who went through the traditional route of conservatoires, might end up performing in an orchestra, as soloists, as chamber musicians or teaching music. However, despite growing encouragement for interdisciplinarity today, they might rarely be expected to work directly with other artists from theatre, dance, visual art or literature.²

This chapter presents a Belgian concert series, *Monsieur Croche*, as a possible future of classical music. It is a concert series which brings French classical music into non-conventional 'concert halls' in an interdisciplinary way. The series' performances take place in less conventional concert venues such as art galleries, museums and cathedrals. Once a unique space is transformed into a concert venue, the audience witnesses a one-of-a-kind experience. *Monsieur Croche* believes in a real 'connection with its audience through emotionally immersing, and intellectually intriguing experiences'.³ The concert series looks to bring classical music to the audience in an approachable, engaging and interdisciplinary way.

Firstly, this chapter addresses some of today's challenges in the classical music world. It examines salon societies in Paris of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a model for *Monsieur Croche's*

2 There is a resurgence in interdisciplinarity and multi-media intersection today. A collection that demonstrates an impressive number of projects as such is Adrian Curtin and Adam Whittaker 'Introduction: Representation in/of Classical Music', in *Open Library of Humanities* 8:1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.8252>

3 *Monsieur Croche's* website, <http://www.monsieurcroche.be>

concert series. It then investigates challenges such as the specialisation of the arts; alienation and estrangement of the audience; and the challenge of inclusivity and representation of a broad population in classical music. The concert series *Monsieur Croche* is then presented as a case study for a small initiative that addresses the various challenges through interdisciplinarity, approachability, accessibility and inclusion. Additionally, an example of an interdisciplinary project, where music and fashion were brought together, and other examples of outreach initiatives (such as master classes and concerts for children) will be shared, as well as *Monsieur Croche's* obstacles and successes. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the goals and ideas of *Monsieur Croche*, and where it is heading in the future.

Challenges in Today's Live Classical Music Concerts

A century ago, cultural centres like Paris attracted artists from all disciplines. Composers, visual artists and poets would gather in cafés and salons where their ideas and work inspired each other. Even at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, salon concerts were important venues in the musical scene. Salons such as those of Pauline Viardot and Winnaretta Singer would host musicians such as Fauré and Saint-Saëns as well as writers such as George Sand and Marcel Proust. Other societies such as the *Société nationale de musique* and the *Société musicale indépendante* were important for the development of French music and took place in a salon setting. *Le XX* was a particular salon movement where concerts and lectures were performed alongside symbolist and impressionist art in galleries and museums. Performers such as pianist Cortot and violinist Ysayë featured French and Belgian music alongside visual artworks.⁴ This particular salon movement, in its juxtaposition of music and visual art, inspired the initiative of the *Monsieur Croche* concert series a century later.

Through my personal experience, as a piano student in Maastricht and Antwerp, I observed that often the conservatoires, big concert halls, museums and art galleries would specialise in their own field. It was

4 James Ross, 'Music in the French Salon', in *French Music since Berlioz*, ed. by Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 91–96.

relatively rare for me to find interdisciplinary events in these venues. We musicians experience a similar tendency of specialisation. In times of 'inflation' in university degrees, my fellow musicians, me included, tend to specialise in music and perfect their art. It has become the norm for many classical musicians to obtain more university degrees; these correspondingly slowly lose their value, as musicians need more and more degrees to get noticed or find a job. As a classical pianist, I observed my peers pursue not only a bachelor's degree, but often continue for a master's, and even sometimes an artist's diploma, an education diploma or a doctorate. Our focus revolves around playing recitals, participating in music competitions, forming ensembles, recording and teaching, but opportunities to work together with, for example, visual artists or actors very rarely present themselves. The disconnect between classical music and other arts represents a threat to its future as a vibrant art form.

Apart from specialisation, another challenge I observed is classical music's estrangement from a broad public. Attending concert halls and opera houses might be perceived as a statement of status or prestige. People unfamiliar with the conventions of the concert hall may feel intimidated by these venues. What to wear? How to behave? When to applaud? According to Julian Johnson, classical music was and remains accessible to the elite, to those with economic means who are also more likely to access music education.⁵ In these prestigious events, the audience might feel alienated, as the artists perform on a distant stage often without any interaction with the listeners. Some might even find it difficult to enjoy the music of the past if it is completely unfamiliar to them.⁶ Even though classical music is growing more popular via digital platforms, film soundtracks and mass distribution, live classical music is not necessarily becoming more approachable.⁷ Jargon-filled programme notes or complex programming could also contribute to scaring away listeners.⁸

5 Julian Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music?: Cultural Choice and Musical Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 21–22.

6 Sarah M. Price, 'In Defence of the Familiar: Understanding Conservatism in Concert Selection Amongst Classical Music Audiences', *Musicae Scientiae* 26 (2022), 243–258, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1029864920940034>

7 James Parakilas, 'Classical Music as Popular Music', *The Journal of Musicology* 3 (1984), 1–18.

8 Bennet and Ginsborg conclude that programme notes have a small positive impact on a minority of the listeners. Dawn Bennett and Jane Ginsborg, 'Audience

Lastly, a major challenge for classical music lies not only in addressing a broader audience from different socio-economical groups, but also allowing within its circles of performers and leading figures an equal representation of the population. Although the world of classical music of the twenty-first century tries to diversify with respect to gender, race and class, it remains a rather conservative field.⁹ Initiatives such as the *La Maestra* competition of the *Philharmonie de Paris*, which promotes women conductors; or *Chineke! Foundation* created by Chi-Chi Nwanoku, which supports the career development of black and ethnically diverse classical musicians, are relatively new in the field.¹⁰ For many years, the majority of leading classical musicians were white men. According to Ewell, despite the call for diversity, a large majority of composers and music theorists are white.¹¹

As mentioned above, *Monsieur Croche* took inspiration from salons like *Le XX*, where interdisciplinary artists mingled and collaborated. However, it's it is worth remembering that these salon societies were a remnant of bourgeois and aristocratic cultures. Exclusivity and a particular social circle were strongly associated with the old salon model. Nowadays, in times when awareness of diversity and inclusion is on the rise, it is important for us to draw inspiration from the positive aspects of such events (such as the intimate setting and interdisciplinarity) and create something new which embodies contemporary values (such as diversity and inclusion).

Monsieur Croche – A Project with Missions and Purposes

These issues have led me as a musician to often ask myself how we could produce interdisciplinary classical music concerts of high quality, which at the same time would be approachable to the wider public and inclusive in their programming. And so, together with a cultural producer (and close friend), I initiated a small project, hoping it could bring together different art forms and bring classical music down to

reactions to the program notes of unfamiliar music', *Psychology of Music* 46:4 (2018), 588–605.

9 Philip Ewell, 'Music Theory's White Racial Frame', *Music Theory Spectrum* 26 (2021), 324–329.

10 *La Maestra: Concours et académie de cheffes d'orchestre*, <http://www.lamaestra-paris.com>; *Chineke! Foundation*, <https://www.chineke.org>

11 Ewell, 'Music Theory's White Racial Frame', pp. 324–327.

'eye level'.¹² As suggested by Devlin and Ackrill, innovation in classical music together with educational outreach could help breathe new life into classical music and attract younger audiences.¹³ Founded in 2017, *Monsieur Croche* produces interdisciplinary events in non-conventional venues, while trying to programme diverse artists. In order to pick our artists for the concerts, we combine those who specialise in the repertoire with people who share our enthusiasm for an intimate and innovative concept.

The first iteration of *Monsieur Croche* looked to reflect its values, mission, purpose, ecosystem and offering. During an interactive workshop, *Monsieur Croche's* team of volunteers co-created its strategy and implementation plan.¹⁴ The latter outlined roles and responsibilities in the team and has been translated into a *Strategy and Playbook* document, which includes a blueprint that outlines key activities of future seasons. Our overall mission and purpose were articulated as the following:

Monsieur Croche's reason for existence is to make French music from the 19th and 20th centuries, in combination with other forms of arts (such as literature and visual art), accessible to a large audience and to support young talent in their musical development.¹⁵

We divided these aims into three different topics: experience of French music; accessibility and approachability; and lastly, opportunities for young talent. The organisation creates events with an artistically thought-through programme focusing each time on one composer or theme while inviting international artists, including intriguing narrations and finding special venues. We create events that attempt to be approachable, thanks to narration, the link with the location and other (interdisciplinary) arts (e.g. poetry, fashion). Lastly, the organisation engages the audience in

12 Here I use the term 'at eye level' both literally and figuratively. Literally, getting off the high stage and performing in a smaller venue at the height of the audience. Figuratively, in Hebrew 'at eye level' could mean 'as an equal' or 'without condescension', a performance is presented in a 'down-to-earth' manner without pretentiousness.

13 Graham Devlin and Judith Ackrill, *A Review of Orchestral Provision for Yorkshire* (London: Arts Council of England, 2005), <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20150205143656/http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/a-review-of-orchestral-provision-for-yorkshire>

14 I elaborate on *Monsieur Croche's* ecosystem and team below.

15 *Monsieur Croche's Strategy and Playbook* (version 1.0, April 2020).

a dialogue, which gives an intimate yet educational character to the events. Additionally, *Monsieur Croche* creates opportunities for young talent to connect with more experienced artists through performances and masterclasses. The organisation invites emerging artists to perform at their main events and brings classical music to a younger audience through masterclasses, children's concerts and affordable tickets, while always paying the performing artists.

A compact ecosystem with trusted partners enables *Monsieur Croche* to organise its events and explore its future activities. Firstly, a team of volunteers contributes to the success of the non-profit organisation. These are mostly professionals in the cultural sector who work in fields such as cultural management, production and communication. They offered to help *Monsieur Croche* and eventually became an integral part of its team. Some of these volunteers worked regularly in theatre and dance companies or have a background in music or art. They use their talents, energy and experience to contribute to artistic, administrative, legal, communicative or production activities. Furthermore, our ecosystem includes our (returning) audience and growing circles of visitors; a group of well-respected regular, international artists that are connected to our network or who specialise in French repertoire; a selection of trusted partners and venues with whom *Monsieur Croche* collaborates (e.g. art galleries, museums, piano shops etc.); and lastly, *Monsieur Croche's* hive, an intimate circle that brings its knowledge, experience, inspiration and networks, while contributing ideas for the future and funding opportunities.

Monsieur Croche has a clear understanding of its offer. Firstly, the organisation creates unique musical experiences in which we aim to take the audience on a journey through narrative and different forms of art in an unconventional setting. Secondly, the organisation's public masterclasses are accessible with a voluntary contribution from the public and are free for selected students. Additionally, off-the-shelf concerts (e.g. *Mini Croche* and lecture-recitals) can be presented in schools and other institutions. And finally, carefully considered solo piano or chamber music programmes, based on individual requests, can be presented in private settings. All of these offers are executed by our team through various routes: artistic direction; production; administration and legal; communication and promotion.

Our Activities – Five Seasons of Unique Events

Since our first concert in 2018, *Monsieur Croche* has produced more than eighteen events, including ten main events, three *Mini Croche* children's concerts and five benefit concerts in private venues. Each main event concert is one-of-a-kind, as it tells the story of one specific French composer. A narrator presents the stories behind the composers and their pieces in a creative way through poetry, literature, letters and biographical information in three languages: Flemish (Antwerp's official language), English (to make the narration accessible for our international audiences and artists) and French (which is an official language in Belgium and the original language of some of our source materials). The first composer to be programmed was none other than Claude Debussy, as the festival was initiated as a homage to the centenary of his death. The title, *Monsieur Croche*, as mentioned above, was his pseudonym and the concerts therefore aim to take the audience on a journey through French music of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Together with Debussy, the first season featured the music of Gabriel Fauré, Maurice Ravel and Francis Poulenc. Since then, we have featured Olivier Messiaen, Camille Saint-Saëns and César Franck. So far – we must admit – no women composers have been programmed, as we have not done sufficient research in finding the artists who play their repertoire. However, it is our highest priority to commission artists in performing the music of Cécile Chaminade, Lili Boulanger, Mélanie Bonis, Germaine Tailleferre, Louise Farrenc and many other important French women composers.¹⁶

'The audience's journey is not only metaphorical, but also literally a journey through the old city of Antwerp'.¹⁷ The venues include art museums, art galleries, churches, and even private salons. The small venue and the proximity to the artists both make our concerts intimate and exclusive – at eye level with our audience. 'The idea was to give

16 Since writing this chapter, *Monsieur Croche* has organised a concert around Lili Boulanger, telling her life story and presenting her solo piano pieces, violin pieces and *mélodies* for voice and piano. This concert took place on 7 May 2023 at the art gallery 'Valerie Traan' in Antwerp and on 28 June 2023 at St Mary le Strand church in London in collaboration with the 'Hidden Gems' concert series.

17 Tal Walker, 'Alumni Stories: Tal Walker' in *Royal Conservatoire Antwerp's Website* (Antwerp: 2018), <https://www.ap-arts.be/en/news/alumni-stories-tal-walker>

the concert[s] an interdisciplinary feeling by placing them in special artistic locations throughout the city'.¹⁸ Normally, fewer than a hundred people can attend each event except for those in large cathedrals. The venues themselves are mostly rich with art, and so provide a creative environment and interdisciplinary feel. So far, *Monsieur Croche* has collaborated with important art galleries and museums in Antwerp such as *De Zwarte Panter*, *Valerie Traan*, *Museum De Reede* and *Maagdenhuis*. Churches include the *Sint Joriskerk* and the *Sint Walburgiskerk*. Other benefit and promotional concerts included private houses, piano shops (such as *Piano-Atelier Chaerle*) and even a promotion recital during the *Cultuurmarkt van Vlaanderen* at the Royal Flemish Opera.

Diversity and inclusivity are key factors in the choice of artists we work with. Celebrated performers perform side by side with emerging artists. Until now, *Monsieur Croche* has always managed to include both male and female artists from various cultural backgrounds, nationalities, age groups, religious beliefs and those who identify as LGBTQ+. We invite artists according to their performed repertoire, and album releases, and find new ones through networks that surround French music, and through scouting. *Monsieur Croche* currently operates only in Antwerp, but we are intending to expand to other cities and countries.¹⁹

Social impact is important for us, and therefore besides concerts, we organise outreach events such as masterclasses, narrated concerts for children, digital concerts (which were distributed throughout the COVID-19 lockdowns), and other benefit chamber music concerts. Our masterclasses are given by select artists who perform during our concerts (e.g. the first four of those mentioned above). The young students (or those who are young in spirit) who participate in the masterclass are given the opportunity to play in front of a live audience and receive live feedback from these renowned artists. Some of our masters are professors in leading music schools in Europe such as Antwerp's Conservatoire, the École Normale de musique de Paris, Geneva's Conservatoire, and Valencia's and Brussels's music academies. The special thing about these masterclasses is that the students do not pay. International masterclasses can be extremely expensive and therefore

18 Walker, 'Alumni Stories: Tal Walker'.

19 We are currently exploring curating a concert or a series of events related to Gabriel Fauré's centenary (1924–2024) in London in 2024.

not accessible for some young pianists, and so we have decided that ticket sales, donations, contributions from the hosting school, the audience or other sources will cover the costs. Students can participate without breaking the bank.

Initiatives and Collaborations

Some of our past concerts have featured collaborations with visual artists, fashion designers, hair designers and dancers. In February 2020, we held a concert in *Museum De Reede*, which exhibits art by Edvard Munch, Félicien Rops and Francisco Goya. The concert began in a standard theatre setting with the performance of emerging artists. At the break, we asked our audience to come to a small reception downstairs and have a glass of wine, while we transformed the hall into a catwalk. This concert was a collaboration with a sustainable fashion designer, who creates textiles herself from recycled fabric. The concert focused on the music of Francis Poulenc, and the Paris of these years, which was a symbol of art, music, literature, cinema and fashion. In this period, *Les années folles*, international writers and artists were attracted to Paris to pursue and exhibit their art. Among the notable women in Paris of the time were Coco Chanel, Josephine Baker and Édith Piaf. Chanel's designs became the symbol of the emancipated woman. Our models were in fact dancers from the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp – a small twist which made the connection with the music even greater. An international hairstylist designed the models' hair.

This concert was a representation of *Monsieur Croche's* artistic vision. It was a surprising fusion of visual art, music, dance and fashion which were all tied together through the narrative surrounding Poulenc. The event proved complicated logistically, but the museum's staff was able to accommodate our needs through innovative solutions: for example, blocking a section of the exhibition space in order to transform it into a dressing room for the models. Many positive reactions from our listeners concluded that the evening was 'unique' and 'unforgettable'. Yet, some of the listeners testified that the narrow exhibition space provided limited visibility in a theatre setting, while fitting perfectly for a catwalk. Others complained that it was hard to focus on the music when the dancer-models roamed the space followed by the photographer; some

added that it was almost impossible to see the piano with such a seating arrangement. Overall, the evening was considered a success by *Monsieur Croche*'s team (based on the satisfaction of the audience, the artists and the museum, as well as the excellent turnout).

Monsieur Croche's little nephew *Mini Croche* is our initiative of narrated concerts for children, which started in 2019. The idea was to make classical music concerts, which usually have serious, adult connotations, more accessible for children. We did so through storytelling, acting, and visual objects and images. During our first concert, our narrator told the story of *Babar the Little Elephant*, written by Jean de Brunhoff, in an interactive way, with dancing and acting, and with my accompaniment on the piano playing a piece composed by Francis Poulenc. Our narrator has also created his own text and story to the music of Debussy's *Children's Corner*, which was performed by a pianist. This was a fun concert for the children but also the adults accompanying them. So far, this project has taken place in schools such as *House of Music* and *Prince Dries* primary and ballet school in Antwerp, as well as part of *Maagdenuis*'s charity Christmas concert. Future productions will include Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* adapted for children and accompanied by Debussy's *Préludes* and Jacques Ibert's *Histoires*.

Our little non-profit organisation would not be what it is without its growing family of volunteers. As well as initiatives such as *Mini Croche*, was the digital concert named *Monsieur Croche Blijft Thuis* (*Monsieur Croche stays home* in Dutch), which took place during the first and second COVID-19 lockdowns. It was based on our past performances, with poetry, visual art and narration. Instead of distributing the video on social media, we decided to offer it to retirement homes and hospitals. We had a few wonderful partners, one of them, the *Ziekenhuis Netwerk Antwerpen*, whose patients enjoyed our concerts in their own way.

Even though the collaborations mentioned above were successful, unfortunately, not all envisioned collaborations were eventually realised. Due to financial constraints and the outbreak of COVID-19, a fully envisioned project together with the orchestra *Antwerpen Camerata* did not take place. The project *Debussy – Fauré: Dialogue* was supposed to bring the parallel and overlapping stories of Debussy and Fauré and their compositions into the spotlight. Some of the titles and inspirations for their compositions were published coincidentally (or not) at the

same time.²⁰ Not only musical information was to be shared, but also more personal anecdotes, such as the fact that Fauré's lover, Emma Bardac, later became the wife of Debussy. We still hope to realise this, or another project together with *Antwerpen Camerata*. The orchestra believes that 'music belongs to everybody and [we] put all our passion and skill into making every single concert a unique experience', which is in line with *Monsieur Croche*'s vision.²¹ The idea of two young and energetic organisations working together was very exciting and hopefully is still on the table.

Obstacles and Successes

Monsieur Croche did not survive five seasons without any challenges. In the beginning, our initiative received some resistance from art galleries and museums who preferred to remain a place for visual art alone. The first locations to be interested, *Valerie Traan* and *House Happaert*, caught the attention of other venues, who soon followed.²² Some music institutions, concert halls and concert organisations did not appreciate a new initiative in town, while others were interested in collaborating with or promoting us. Today, *Monsieur Croche* enjoys a diversity of venues that appreciate our vision and professionalism, while new venues join the family every year as our hosts. During the pandemic, *Alliance Française d'Anvers* has honoured us with an artists' exchange and mutual promotion. A year later, *De Kathedraal*, Antwerp's monumental cathedral, invited *Monsieur Croche* to produce two of its concerts, during the *Festival César Franck in Antwerpen* bicentenary chamber music and organ music festival.

The logistics of transforming a non-conventional concert hall also proved to be difficult. Some venues were too cold in the winter, and others had challenging acoustics for the artists. We had to turn down venues where transporting a piano would be too difficult or expensive.

20 Jean-Michel Nectoux, 'Debussy et Fauré' in *Cahiers Debussy* (France: Centre de documentation Claude Debussy, 1979), pp. 13–30.

21 'Homepage' in *Antwerpen Camerata's Website* (Antwerp: 2020), <https://www.antwerpenkamerata.be>

22 *House Happaert* unfortunately had to shut down for public initiatives in 2018 just before our first performance. Luckily, we were honoured to produce our very first performance in the celebrated art gallery *De Zwarte Panter* instead.

For one concert in the first season, we even ended up transporting chairs manually one by one from one location to another. With proper planning and expanding the network of partners, these tasks became easier and part of our routine. Undeniably, using a venue which was not intended for a musical performance might mean sacrificing some qualities such as optimal acoustics, comfortable seats or ideal lighting. Nonetheless, other qualities that are gained include an intimate space, proximity to the artists and an inspiring environment, among others.

An aspect that never becomes easier is promotion, which remains a challenge for any concert organisation. We started our first season completely unknown, handing out flyers in the streets. However, this proved to be unsustainable (both environmentally, physically and financially). Luckily the *Gazette van Antwerpen* newspaper decided to promote us in their culture column. We then decided to take a 'modern' approach and have gone digital. Together with *Studio Volt*, we created attractive promotion videos, which helped our crowdfunding campaign and our promotional reach. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook proved to be useful in approaching a wider audience.

Finance was never an easy topic for *Monsieur Croche* as we did not receive subsidies. Since the venues are small, we can sell only a limited number of tickets for each concert. This small income goes directly to covering the artistic costs such as artists' wages, transportation and accommodation, as well as the performing rights when the music is not yet in the public domain. Organising a concert in an 'unconventional' concert hall is also not financially easy as it involves renting a piano, obtaining chairs, promotion and much more. To overcome this challenge, our first season was completely funded by a successful crowdfunding campaign. Our inner and outer circles agreed to donate various amounts which concluded with a successful campaign and more than €5,000. Looking back at the crowdfunding campaign, it was successful mostly thanks to our inner circles with a combination of integrating into it a pre-sale of our tickets. We quickly understood that relying on our family, friends and colleagues together with ticket sales alone is not a sustainable financial model.

In the following seasons, cuts, donations, small increases in ticket price, income from *Mini Croche* and benefit concerts all helped us to (almost) break even. Since 2020, *Monsieur Croche* has been able to

cover its costs independently due to the generosity of loyal donors who contribute annually during an exclusive Christmas benefit concert. Our donors include some of our faithful listeners who responded to our offering (the programming, the artists and the concept) and hosted us in their houses while inviting their own circles. Despite the tension between exclusivity and inclusion, we feel that although this method of funding might be partially based on the old salon model, it is in line with our current values. These benefit concerts are indeed more exclusive; however, the same musical programme is shared with the broad public at a much more affordable price during our main events. These also provide an additional opportunity for our artists to perform, which means being paid for two performances of the same repertoire. The rest of the income from these concerts goes mostly to our artists in the main events.²³ Together with ticket sales and *Mini Croche*, we believe that we have come up with a more stable financial model that we hope to continue developing.

Whither *Monsieur Croche*? – Futuring Classical Music

After two years of the pandemic, we have learnt that we must remain flexible, agile and open to new ways of working. The future of *Monsieur Croche* is open: we seek to explore new programmes, exciting interdisciplinary combinations, surprising collaborations and always aspire to excellent music performances. Luckily, lesser-known composers, women composers, and extra-musically inspired compositions (those inspired by visual art, poetry, nature and literature) exist in abundance within the French repertoire of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Every year we discover new venues in Antwerp – it has been an adventure discovering each of their acoustics, their local audience and the atmosphere they convey. After including visual art, poetry and fashion during our concerts, we would like to introduce live visual creations (either painted live or projected in synchronisation with our music) and collaborate with actors and dancers. In 2022 we

23 Artists' salaries and artistic expenses (such as accommodation and transportation) are our biggest expenses.

included, for the first time, a pre-concert talk by a musicologist from the Royal College of Music in London.²⁴

Improving our financial model is important to us. Being financially stable is crucial for *Monsieur Croche* to survive in the long term. As part of our goals and aims, we would like to stay affordable, but continue paying our artists properly. Some ideas include exporting our performances (or select pieces) to cultural centres; or performing the same programme more than once in various locations. We will continue offering donors access to our exclusive private events, offering private concerts and children's concerts, applying for subsidies and collaborating with other organisations.

'It is our strong belief that awareness, inclusion, and interaction are key elements in keeping classical music alive and relevant today'.²⁵ We will continue presenting concerts to the audience in an approachable, engaging, interdisciplinary, and unique way in non-conventional venues. We hope that creating small and local projects, which are intimate, diverse, inclusive in programming, approachable in presentation and financially affordable, together with outreach and social impact is the future of classical music. We wish to continue producing enjoyable concerts, keeping them 'young, relevant, and up-to-date while continuing a long and respectful tradition of music making'.²⁶

References

Antwerpen Camerata (2020),

<https://www.antwerpencamerata.be>

Bennett, Dawn and Jane Ginsborg, 'Audience reactions to the program notes of unfamiliar music', *Psychology of Music* 46:4 (2018), 588–605,
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735617721339>

Chineke! Foundation (2021),

<https://www.chineke.org>

24 Narrations, pre- and post-concert talks as well as conversation with the audience are encouraged by Pitts and Gross. These might help deepen the relationship with the audience and create an inclusive and meaningful experience. Stephanie Pitts and Jonathan Gross, "'Audience exchange": cultivating peer-to-peer dialogue at unfamiliar arts events', *Arts and the Market* 7:1 (2017), 65–79.

25 *Monsieur Croche's website*, <http://www.monsieurcroche.be>

26 Walker, 'Alumni Stories: Tal Walker'.

- Curtin, Adrian and Adam Whittaker, 'Introduction: Representation in/of Classical Music', *Open Library of Humanities* 8:1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.8252>
- Debussy, Claude, *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1971).
- Devlin, Graham and Judith Ackrill, *A Review of Orchestral Provision for Yorkshire* (London: Arts Council of England, 2005), <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20150205143656/http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/browse-advice-and-guidance/a-review-of-orchestral-provision-for-yorkshire>
- Ewell, Philip, 'Music Theory and the White Racial Frame', *Music Theory Online* 26:2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.30535/mto.26.2.4>
- Johnson, Julian, *Who Needs Classical Music?: Cultural Choice and Musical Values* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- La Maestra*, <http://www.lamaestra-aris.com>
- Monsieur Croche's Team*, *Strategy and Playbook* (version 1.0, April 2020).
- Monsieur Croche*, <http://www.monsieurcroche.be>
- Nectoux, Jean-Michel, 'Debussy et Fauré' in *Cahiers Debussy* (France: Centre de documentation Claude Debussy, 1979), pp. 13–30.
- Parakilas, James, 'Classical Music as Popular Music', *The Journal of Musicology* 3:1 (1984), 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/763659>
- Ross, James, 'Music in the French Salon', in *French Music since Berlioz*, ed. by Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 91–115.
- Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp* (Antwerp: 2018), <https://www.art-arts.be/en/news/alumni-stories-tal-walker>