



Online Symposium on Classical Music Futures

18th January 2024, 1.00pm - 4.30pm (GMT)

Hosted by:

- Professor Stephanie Pitts, Director Sheffield Performer & Audience Research Centre (SPARC), Sheffield University
- Professor Peter Peters, Director Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music (MCICM), Maastricht University
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Welcome and introduction - Professor Stephanie Pitts

The AHRC Classical Music Network is a partnership between Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music (MCICM) and the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre (SPARC). Both research centres have previously conducted research into the subject of classical music ecologies.

The AHRC Classical Music Network is researching classical music in seven focus cities: Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Graz (Austria), Groningen (The Netherlands), Leeds and Liverpool. The research methods used include desk research, surveys and interviews, with findings summarised into an initial report for each city. This report is used to inform focussed city meetings with representatives from their city.

Initial findings show key similarities and shared challenges between cities, as well as some distinctiveness. Differences between the cities include: Cardiff respondents were more politically-minded, and discussed things like transport and funding; Liverpool respondents were optimistic about the new Tung Auditorium, belonging to the University of Liverpool; Glasgow representatives showed the strongest objection to the term “classical music”; and Groningen and Graz received funding from the arts council, unlike the model in Britain. Shared challenges include: a decline in music education and the impact this has on audiences, amateur musicians and musical careers; communication, and the limitations of time and the size of organisations; spaces for music-making, such as for amateur rehearsals and smaller-scale concerts; and local pride and ambition versus more outward-looking organisations, comparing themselves with similar organisations beyond the local area.

Ideas for the next steps for this network include: looking for ways to encourage communication, promotion and coordination between organisations, e.g. by extending the existing Classical Sheffield network in Sheffield; looking for ways to influence policy locally, regionally and even collectively nationally; opportunities for further funding to explore these ideas.

Classical music ecologies in three focus cities

1. Leeds, UK: Professor Stephanie Pitts on behalf of Dr Kirsty Devaney.

Dr Kirsty Devaney is a composer, educator and researcher at Birmingham City University and the lead academic for Birmingham.

A summary of key findings from conversations with respondents from Birmingham:

- The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) presents itself very strongly, as having “superb orchestras, world class soloists and unmissable programmes”.
- Birmingham has an organisation called [B:music](#), which coordinates information about music groups and events.
- Respondents felt the term “classical music” could be a barrier for certain parts of society.
- There is lots of classical music activity, but this doesn’t reach all parts of the city.
- Concerns that many graduates are drawn away to places such as London, although there are some opportunities in Birmingham.
- There is a vibrant amateur scene, and graduates who remain local are involved in local music.
- The decline in musical education is a prominent concern, and activities to support this risk “running dry”.
- Collaborations are thought to be stronger between individual people rather than organisations, so connections are vulnerable to people moving roles.
- A sense of pride in the people of Birmingham, “Brummies”.
- Diversity of audience and participants is felt to be a strength of the city
- Concerns about the tension between offering more events, or fewer but of higher quality

2. Graz, Austria: Professor Constanze Wimmer, University for Music and Performing Arts, Graz

Professor Constanze Wimmer has previously conducted research on audiences and arts management, and also has a background in journalism.

So far, Constanze’s research into classical music in Graz has included interviewing two people at length. Next she will interview some individuals funded by the Graz council.

There are key differences between Austria and Britain. Art and music are very important to Austria and in the Austrian education system. Most people play a musical instrument, and this is encouraged in school. There are lots of amateur choirs, brass bands and orchestras. Music is important economically too, as it is a part of Austrian heritage and the tourism agenda. The arts in Austria are almost entirely publicly funded. Graz spends 4.5% of its entire city expenditure on arts, while Austria spends 1.1.% of its entire spend on the arts.

Constanze explained how the history of Graz has influenced its music today. Graz was historically a far right-wing city, and this really changed in the late 1960s. Now Graz has a communist mayor, and we can see a response to the history of the city in the development of its arts and music. For example, in 1965 the first music conservatoire with jazz education opened in Graz, and the city has a special focus on contemporary music. In addition, many students and teachers at the conservatoire come from the Balkan states, which enriches the scene in Graz.

Constanze summarised some findings of her research onto Graz so far:

- Traditional concerts in Graz have a very old audience, but the newer formats of concerts (e.g. immersive) are popular with audiences of mixed age.
- Audiences and conservatoire students are mostly well-educated and of similar social background, but the newer concert formats attract a more diverse audience.
- The open borders with the Balkans mean musicians come to Graz with more hierarchical “Eastern” approaches, however this also encourages a mix of young and international musicians and gives Graz its flavour.
- The main classical music institutions are all led by older, white men, however the funding board is open and democratic, and therefore accessible to younger artists.
- The best graduates of the University of Music do tend to leave to go to Vienna or beyond, but grants in Graz assist talented musicians from the Eastern countries e.g. Ukraine.

The University for Music and Performing Art Graz has developed a project with 8 other European conservatoires, researching power relations in higher music education (PRIHME). The University aims to be a place where young artists develop not only their skills, but also their “artistic citizenship” - including an awareness of sustainability, fair pay and other political issues. Research also focuses on new formats of performing classical music to address a wider audience.

3. Leeds, UK: Professor Karen Burland & Dr Emily Payne, University of Leeds

Professor Burland is a professor of Applied Music Psychology, who has researched audiences. Dr Emily Payne is an Associate Professor of Music, and researches creative performance practices.

A big city in the North of England, Leeds is the home of big organisations including Opera North, Leeds International Piano Competition and Northern Ballet, as well as lots of small and amateur groups too. The city also has music provision at three HE institutions: the University of Leeds, Leeds Beckett University, and Leeds Conservatoire. Last year Leeds 2023 was a big drive, an independent, not-for-profit “Year of Culture” supporting creative and cultural events across the city.

Karen summarised the findings of the survey:

- Strengths of Leeds included the variety of classical music activity and the passion of people.
- There is a need for a central coordination “hub” of music activities, as well as a major concert venue for the city.
- Respondents felt Leeds should have more pride in and celebration of classical music, there was a desire to learn from other places about this.
- Concerns included the loss of graduates from the city, with more needing to be understood about reasons for this.
- There is a need for more access to shared rehearsal and performance spaces.
- Respondents discussed the need to diversify audiences.

Emily reported on the Leeds focus group, which took place on Tuesday 16th January 2024:

- Participants discussed their vision for what Leeds as a classical music city might look like, and what would help to realise the vision
- A new concert hall would be a symbol of classical music identity and pride in the city
- There is a need for organisations to work in balance with one another, with a shared vision and aims
- There is a need for coordination of activities and reciprocal support.
- Leeds should build on the momentum and energy of Leeds 2023, e.g. by making good use of equipment (a “lending library of things”) and of the many keen volunteers. Looking ahead, Bradford 2025 will be a good use of these resources.
- Organisations should share and recycle resources, e.g. via a resource bank.

- There is work to be done around “normalising” classical music, highlighting its relevance to everyday life to improve audience diversification e.g. a piano trail around the city.

Invited speakers

1. Dr Sarah Price, The University of Liverpool: *What do we know about classical music audiences?*

Sarah's research focuses on classical music audiences. Sarah is also the network lead academic for Liverpool.

We know a lot about classical music audiences, due to academic research and research in industry. Academic research has exploded in the last decade, including into fields such as music psychology and experience, consumers and marketing, and sociological patterns of engagement and inequality. Industrial research includes research and design of new events and programmes and the evaluation of these, research into sales data, engagement with websites and marketing, as well as nationwide market research and national surveys.

Research into classical music audiences can be hard to find and navigate as it belongs to different academic fields. Sarah is currently funded by AHRC to synthesise the existing knowledge and identify under-explored areas, which includes audiences for amateur classical music, audiences of alternative concerts, and listening via streaming services. Sarah has summarised her findings into 3 separate areas: understanding the concert experience, how people make decisions to attend events, and structures of engagement.

2. Karolien Dons, Prins Claus Conservatoire Groningen: *Confusing, questioning and catalysing. An ecological perspective on the transdisciplinary practice of musicians in healthcare*

Dr Dons is a musicologist and musical psychologist, and she leads the Music in Context Research Centre at Hanze University of Applied Sciences in Groningen. Dr Dons is also affiliated to the Prince Claus Conservatoire, one of nine music higher education institutes in The Netherlands.

Dr Dons' research at the Music in Context Research Centre studies the roles and approaches of musicians and music professionals when they seek to contribute to a humane and sustainable society. It explores collaboration, co-creation and leadership across disciplinary settings. This talk focuses on relationships in social artistic music practices, and how engaging in these can lead to confusion but how new relationships can catalyse initiatives.

Fostering musical relationships is a central part of what musicians do, including relationships with colleagues, between ensembles and orchestras, and with audiences. Relationships between musicians and audiences have been widely studied, and much is said about their fixed roles, separateness, and audience anonymity. Connecting outside the performance is said to enhance familiarity, which is important. There is a variety in musical relationships, and music making can reorganise human relationships.

The concept of Emotional Geographies refers to the ways emotions interact with and shape spaces, social settings and human experiences. Musicians can have a special role within such geographies, which leads to ethical questions for musicians about how they stage and provoke emotions in social contexts.

MiMiC (Meaningful MUsic in Healthcare) is a research project in which a group of classically trained musicians play improvised repertoire to patients and staff in a hospital ward in a person-centered way over 6 consecutive days. The music played is tailored to the mood. The musicians are

co-facilitators of an emotional experience, and catalysing connections among those engaged. The project has created some very emotional and significant moments for patients, staff and musicians. The musicians also feel and need to cope with the emotion of their connected experience.

To conclude, a diversified landscape of emotional experiences can emerge in a social artistic music practice, and these can foster different relationships to those we know from the concert hall. The experiences and relationships catalyse new experiences for musicians and professionals from other domains. The human work of musicians can transform a non-artistic environment (such as a medical environment) into a musical environment for equal participation.

3. Professor Paul Craenen: Royal Conservatoire of the Hague: *The role of the Royal Conservatoire in the cultural ecology of The Hague*

Professor Paul Craenen is a composer, Head of the Music Education and Society research group at the Royal Conservatoire of the Hague, and Associate Professor at the Academy of Creative and Performing Arts at Leiden University. Professor Craenen's research explores the changing role of musical expertise in culture and society, and the impact of these changes in higher music education.

Today classical music has lost the central place in cultural life that it had in the 19th and 20th century. Many conservatoires have relocated to modern spaces, with centrality to city life less of a priority. Now conservatoires mostly have an international orientation; at the Royal Conservatoire of the Hague only 20% of students are Dutch, the majority come from Europe and beyond.

In 2021 the Royal Conservatoire of the Hague opened a new building, "Amare", shared with the Dutch National Dance Theatre and the symphonic orchestra "Residentie Orkest". The new location connects the conservatoire to the city. Amare presents itself as a space for cultural encounters and for the city. This partly results from the design and organisation of space, e.g. the public can enter on the ground floor and walk through, and the building offers free public performances. The building is built for interaction with the public and diverse audiences.

However, as many people in the city will never enter Amare, students are encouraged to go out into the city and work on location, particularly with people from socially vulnerable positions. For example, composition students are matched with a local person, and asked to create a 1 minute symphony based on their conversation and the local person's story. The music is then performed by the symphony orchestra at Amare. The impact and challenges of these participatory projects include: musicians discovered new roles and relationships with a new kind of audience; some local participants made significant steps in terms of re-socialisation as a result of contributing to the performance; working on location requires patience and sensitivity; organisational challenges; the challenge of making participants feel at home in a location such as Amare; and the question of how such participatory projects can become durable and sustainable.

A new Horizon 2020 research project will aim to create an improved quality of life in two residential areas (one in Sweden and one in the Hague) through an artistically inspired redesign of the sonic environment, community engagement and artistic co-creation with a focus on sound. The project outputs will include a public sonic archive of the area in transformation, co-creative sound art projects with residents and schools in the area, an educational package on sound awareness in the area for use in schools and organisations and a journal article.

This project focuses on sounds rather than classical music, which may be why it was successful in being awarded the grant. This raises the question: is it possible to valorise the skills of classically trained musicians?

Discussion groups were held on the following topics, with the discussion points below fed back to the group:

Classical music ecologies: learning to collaborate locally, nationally and internationally

- Long term plans needed for collaboration. Resources, time and capacity are limited but necessary to make connections for collaboration.
- “Starvation funding”: projects can be given a fraction of the funding applied for, with the same outcomes expected.
- Discussion around borders of a city/ecology, is there a tangible way to measure this for research, e.g. postcodes?
- Failed Sheffield City of Culture bid - this prompted our Classical Music Network, as there was a shared desire to collaborate.

Music Education: musicians of tomorrow

- Individual v collective nature of music education: the focus can be quite individualistic, e.g. individual’s progress on a particular instrument. Where are the conversations about networks, collaboration and individual’s place in society within musical education?
- Importance of young learners’ experiences. Exam boards are trying to overcome the historical sense of who musical education is for, by diversifying repertoires, including ensemble assessment.
- World Economic Forum Skills for Your Future: group reflected that these skills are not necessarily the skills valued by governments, and can be sidelined out of the curriculum.
- Importance of digital skills and spaces.
- Innovation in the curriculum, and a tendency towards resistance (amongst staff and students. Discussed models of innovative curriculum practice, e.g. core modules with a group approach to expose students to new ways of thinking.
- Need for musicians to own their identities as freelancers, they will contribute in many ways to society.

Hidden Musicians: connecting local professionals and amateurs

- Those working professionally are often also amateur musicians, which can be what inspires them professionally
- Amateur classical music can be about socialising and community building, as well as just music making
- The relationship between professional and amateur can be blurred, each contributes to the other, particularly via personal connections made, and by amateur organisations providing training for young musicians.
- Difficulty of language - problematic terminology
- Education includes adult learning - what prompts people to learn a new skill in adulthood, the value of this and barriers to it
- Institutions, e.g. churches and community spaces vital to allow amateur organisations to play

Digital Transformations: developing hybrid and experimental concert formats

- Creative composition, e.g. modular pieces, challenge of engaging with and performing these
- Streaming technologies: effect on classical music, e.g. individualised playlists. What can these

technologies learn from classical music?

- The role of emotion and attachment in digital environments - it can be difficult to create a bond with audiences, works better with existing audiences.
- Nature of experience of a concert - how this differs in digital realms
- Failing: creating meaningful interaction online doesn't always work, what can be learned?

Making research useful: bridging practice and academia

- Sometimes faulty assumptions about who attends classical music events, can be corrected by research
- Difficulty of finding time for meetings between practitioners and researchers
- Practice based research isn't recognised in certain countries
- Success stories: Harrogate Festival aims to appeal to and value different audiences by thinking of seasons differently; establishing orchestras of Afghan musicians

Values and Qualities: defining what 'good' classical music is for today's audiences

- Agreement that there is a problem with the term "classical music", but it is difficult to find a term that works better. Contemporary classical music - also a problematic term.
- Assumption of focus on western classical music - Leeds researchers used the term "historically European classical music" for accuracy
- Classical music events can seem like a closed shop, but non attenders can be curious. Can it be made more obvious what happens at a classical music event?
- Performers' values may not match the audience's - e.g. is it necessary to play large scale works in their entirety, if not as enjoyable to the audience? Daytime concerts, informal dress codes may also make classical music more accessible.
- If terminology is the problem, could focus move to what classical music does, what it can do for a younger generation. Educators may find the answers in discussion with students.

Finally, Dr Neil Smith introduced the book: ***Futuring Classical Music. Practices of Innovation*** (Eds. **Neil T. Smith, Peter Peters & Karoly Molina**), **Open Book Publishers**, which will be published and available online in the coming weeks.

Peter Peters thanked everyone for their attendance and insightful contribution to discussions.