Renovation of the Traditional Concert Practice:
Transforming the Conventional Concert into a New Artistic Experience

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Abstract

In this paper, the author tries to address the huge divide between the classical music world and its institutions from a potential audience who is culturally interested but also engaged with other artforms which place their focus on the present. Based on the premise that academic music institutions, and specifically, its traditional concert experience, do not address the concerns of a society living in the twenty-first century, but instead are deeply rooted in ideological, cultural and logistical mechanisms of the nineteenth century, the author proposes ideas on how to modernize traditional concert practice. He suggests severing some ties with traditions that keep audiences from relating to academic concerts and to reconceptualize the way in which classical musicians and audiences view the experience of the concert. To that end, the author starts by contrasting in a narrative tone the vastly different experiences of the classical concert and the rock festival, so he can later expose the contradictions inherent in the classical music paradigm, which is rapidly leading to a decline in ticket sales. In the second part of the paper, the author reflects on how to change the downward trend the music business is experiencing. He concludes that it is in the reevaluation of the format and the content of the concert practice that potential audiences would be drawn to academic music concerts.

Keywords: classical music — contemporary music — performance practice — concert experience — concert practice – concert audience.

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Introduction

As a musician, and a frequent concert-goer, I have always noticed a palpable, but tacit, divide between the audiences that attend town halls to listen to masterpieces by Brahms or Mahler and youngsters that crowd around the billboards in festivals nervously awaiting the arrival of their inspiring rock idols. The activity of these two contrasting tribes is essentially the same – gathering together to listen live to the music that they are passionate about. However, the differences in setting, performance practice and cultural values of both the audiences and performers of these events make for radically dissimilar social atmospheres, as well as disparate concert experiences. Even though both concert cultures feature the same parties (performers and audience) and follow the same aim (transmitting music to an audience, in other words, an active process of communication between the two aforementioned parties), it is common notion that they belong to two different worlds altogether, due to their insurmountable differences. Arising from the same roots, these two concert cultures suffered a breaking point somewhere along the history of the concert practice, and now they proudly exhibit their idiosyncrasies, barely acknowledging the existence of their long-forgotten sister.

As interesting as it might seem from a sociologic perspective, one of those cultures – pop culture – is growing exponentially every year, unmistakably amassing funds, global awards and media attention, while music of the Western tradition struggles to make money, to appeal to new audiences and to remain relevant to a younger sector of current society. In this paper, I will delve into the reasons for this divide; furthermore, I will provide answers to why potential audiences, or people who are interested in art might decide not to come to listen to Western tradition concerts, but continue to attend different vehicles of current culture. With that goal in mind, I start my paper with a narrative approach, aiming to expose the differences in both concert cultures, focusing on both format and content. From there on, I strive to break down the terms that we use to designate both branches of the current concert practice and remark on the hidden meanings behind those terms. Surprisingly, we find that they hold useful

information to solve the mystery of the long-diagnosed crisis of the music of the Western tradition.

I sincerely believe that ideas, people, or concepts undergo crisis when they carry unsolved contradictions that have not been brought to the surface. In my mind, this is the case with music of the Western tradition. It is easy, as working musicians, to avoid facing the impeding problems – "there is nothing wrong with our music!" – but that would be a disservice to the artform, and utter lack of self-consciousness and sense of responsibility toward the sector. Evidence is there for anyone who wants to see it, taking the form of decline in ticket sales, and ageing audience, both issues being visually undeniable, but also backed by statistical reports and sociological surveys. In this paper, I will try to bring these issues to light and to provide reasons for this chronicle of a death foretold. My final objective is to avert the more-than-possible disappearance of Western tradition performance practice in a lapse of approximately twenty years. I will do so by providing ideas for the renovation of Western concert culture, both in the fields of format and content. I genuinely believe these changes are paramount if we want to avoid general bankruptcy and social disinterest.

Finally, I would like to state that this paper will only serve its purpose if it is followed by a stream of engaged action on the part of Western tradition music performers. Reflection and investigation are necessary and gladly welcomed, but they always have to be followed by bravery in implementing ideas, and notions of actual empirical change. If ideological barriers, logistical conundrums and understandable fears of abandoning the comfort-zone impede this renovation, I am afraid there is nothing left to do but to observe the slow but steady decay of the artform that outsiders call "classical music", until its eventual disappearance.

Prologue: Concert night

"In this silent hall in which we are supposedly united in a mutual contemplation of high art, the social compact is exposed and tested at every turn."

Anne Midgette, *The Washington Post* (2015)

"We break a lot of rules. It's unheard to combine opera with a rock theme, my dear."

Freddie Mercury, on *Bohemian Rhapsody*, during an interview (1977)

A Night at the Venue

It's concert night. You dress with your best clothes; well, perhaps not the best ones, but at least ones that suit the magnificent hall you are going to attend; to match the depth of the music that you'll hear. You arrive at the venue at least half an hour in advance, to make sure you do not have to make a scene in order to get to your allocated seat. You immediately note when you arrive that everyone dresses so elegantly; you wonder whether you should have chosen even a more refined attire. People around you speak incessantly about the spectacular pieces you are going to listen to; you realize when you glance at the program notes that the Beethoven 6th symphony that takes up the whole second part of the concert, is the same piece that you heard barely three weeks ago performed by a different orchestra. You squint your eyes at the first piece. How is that surname supposed to be pronounced? Oh, that is a living composer, isn't it? You had never heard of her before. You hadn't even entertained the idea of a woman composer before. Interesting. Now that you think about it, nearly 99% of the composers performed in classical environments are men. You wonder why is it so.

The first piece is about to start. You look around for your seat and you realize you're sitting between an aged lady and a middle-aged man who is gazing intently into a score with lots of staves. You squint your eyes once more. You can barely see anything from where you

are sitting; but those were the cheap tickets anyway. The lady next to you takes out of her bag some binoculars and you ask yourself why didn't you think of something like that yourself. The man at your left does not seem to care since he only seems to be interested in the score he is holding. The musicians occupy the stage, tune their instruments, and the lights dim. There is silence; five agonizing seconds in which no one seems to breathe. The conductor makes his entrance and walks solemnly to the center of the stage. Without further ado, he gives a cue to the trumpets and the piece by the composer with an unpronounceable surname starts. You stare in bewilderment, thinking perhaps that a brief introduction to this new sound world would have been nice. It would have sufficed with a thirty second presentation, no more than that. At least so that you know what the piece is about. Now you are lost; you do not know what to listen to. It occurs to you that maybe the information you're seeking can be found in the program notes. Unfortunately, the hall is completely dark and you cannot read a single thing on the paper.

You sit back and try to enjoy the music even if you do not know the reason for its existence. At the end of the day, that is what music is for, right? Not to understand it, but to listen to it. The strings are creating a lush atmosphere while the winds are doing some weird counterpoint. Yes, that is the word to describe this music. *Weird*. You do not know what is going on in the music. Is the main character dejected, angry, frustrated? Is it plain hysteria? In the background, the percussionists seem to be having a blast, at least. You close your eyes. The hall is dark, so it just makes sense to do so. The strings' lush sounds and the active interruptions of the percussion mix in your head, and creates some sort of crazy microcosm. You start thinking about your own life; in a way, this music incites your mind to drift to your personal problems. You have been working for eight hours today, your mind is tired and it needs a rest. Your head feels heavy; you relax the muscles of your neck. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they relax by themselves, since you have lost the control over your body by now. This music has transported you to another world.

You wake up in the midst of an applause. You wonder what is happening around you. Wait, what? Did you just fall asleep? In the middle of a concert? A tinge of guilt slaps you in the back. Why did that happen? In the meantime, you note how the applause sounds formal, forced, strained. Like if invisible hands were making the people around you clap. Were they bored? Did everyone just fall asleep like you? To be honest, the few minutes you got to hear the piece before dozing off, it sounded fairly cool. Intriguing, at least. You feel a bit of remorse for, uh… What was her name again? You try to read her name in the leaflet, but there is still no light.

The second piece is about to start. It is… Mozart Piano Concerto Nº23. Oh, you know that piece. You will not fall asleep this time around. The lady at your right moves in her seat with anticipation. There is this feeling in the air that now everyone is going along for the ride. The soloist comes out and walks towards the piano with an admirable determination. You feel kind of sorry for her; she must feel pretty nervous by now. She will have to play the whole thing without the score. You relate to her because you have had to speak on behalf of your company in front of representatives of other businesses without any sort of guide. You seriously hope she does not screw up. You wonder why a soloist has to play without the score at all times. If you are not mistaken, in chamber music scores are allowed. However, if a soloist plays with the score, some audience members feel like the performer does not know the piece, like it is some sort of unspoken scam.

The music starts playing and everyone, including yourself, feels at home. Ah, the civilization. These guys really did know how to compose music. The Mozart lines flow within the different instruments of the orchestra with ease, and it is sincerely beautiful. Your heart sings in your chest, your throat opens up and you feel the need to hum the melody you know so well. Oh, this is why you decided to attend these stuffy concerts in the first place. This music is just so good. Your head moves uncontrollably to the pulse of the music. You are thankful to that friend of yours that decided to show you what classical music is about. Suddenly, you feel

the eyes of the man sitting on your left on you. Your eyes meet; he seems displeased, somehow annoyed at your attitude. You look down to the floor, ashamed of yourself. You did it again. You have to keep your composure. You did not come here to sing or dance. Your role, your duty as audience is to listen.

The first movement finishes, and you feel the need to cheer, to clap, to stand up. Mozart's music is so beautiful one could cry; and the performer is amazing, too. What a wonderful show. You do not do it though. You know what would happen if you did. The audience members look down at the floor in shame, uncomfortably changing their position in their seats. Their pleasure is suppressed; pushed down to their stomachs. You feel some imaginary chains tying you up to your seat and preventing you from giving the performance the gratitude it deserves. However, someone in the lower part of the hall is not as lucky as you are and starts clapping, giving in to their excitement. This passionate instinct is followed by some angry hushes coming from everywhere. Oh, no! The sacred silence following the first movement has been perturbed by some imprudent, unaware of the rules of the hall! "Foolish." The man at your left passes judgement, his lips twitching.

The second movement starts, and the hall is once more enveloped in an otherworldly sound. The piano starts singing a beautiful aria in a steady rhythm, which drags a mysterious yet mourning melody. The hall holds its breath, welcoming the magic of this moment in its entirety. The woman at your right makes a weird noise and promptly changes her position in her seat. She is coughing, ever so slightly. I look at her. She tries to hide her cough covering her mouth subtly; I can see her cheeks blushing when I set my eyes on her. She starts fiddling in her bag awkwardly, probably looking for a handkerchief or something similar. She cannot stop having this uncomfortable cough; the poor lady must have got something in her throat. She gets increasingly nervous, shrinking in shame for suffering this sudden cough attack in the midst of such a splendid movement. Finally, with shaking hands she manages to take out a candy from her bag. Most likely, that will calm her cough down. Unfortunately, she is now very

nervous and she does not seem able to unwrap it properly. She fidgets with it, trying to find a way through the wrapping. The melodies being sung by the piano suddenly have a percussive accompaniment coming from the wrapping struggling with the poor lady. The man at our left raises his head from his score and looks at her in scorn. *Why* is this lady taking so long in unwrapping that candy? Its piercing sound is undermining the experience of the concert.

Unfortunately, that was not the only time the piece was disturbed by the audience. A mobile phone went off in the lower part of the hall, something heavy fell to the floor at some point during the exposition of the third movement, startling both audience and performers, and just by the end of the performance a child burst into angry tears, ruining the glorious coda. Mozart had been utterly disturbed, trampled upon. The man at your left closed the score in defeat and rested his hand in his forehead, devastated. Just after the bows he turned to you and he spoke. He clearly needed someone to vent to, you just happened to be there. “Just why… Why would anyone bring a child to a concert? They have no place in this setting… It’s so sad to watch how people do not know how to behave anymore. How far will we go…?”

A Night at the Festival

It’s concert night. The sun has set already, but there is this beautiful, reddish light that lingers in the air, shining through the foliage of the trees of the yard. It’s just past midsummer, so the warmth envelops your body. You are just wearing a sleeveless shirt and a pair of trousers, and you feel the summer breeze enter through the gaps in your clothing. You stand barely fifty feet away from the stage, where the band you came to listen to is playing one of their all-time hits. You are in awe; you had no idea of the existence of this band until it showed up magically in the Discover Weekly playlist you’re following on Spotify, and now you have the pleasure of listening to them live. Apparently, they don’t have the biggest fanbase; but it is a very active one.

In any case, you can see people everywhere. They are all around you; the place where the festival is held hosts four simultaneous stages in different areas. There is no dress code; everyone shamelessly expresses themselves the way they want; the way it is meant to be for them. The music roars through the massive speakers located at the sides of the stage. The band cries about the ecology disaster; about the pain we're exerting over Mother Nature. Two guitars and an electric bass give the lead to a synth, who starts improvising a solo. The people around you go crazy; apparently, they had been waiting for this particular intervention. You still have no idea why; this band is new for you, and therefore, you still do not really understand the inside lingo. Everyone around you shouts in delight. "I just love this song." Someone says out loud. The screaming of the audience does not impede for you to hear the music in any way; the speakers take good care of that.

"I'll compose a hundred songs like this if it means fighting for a global ecological awareness." The singer hums into his mic, and everyone cheers on from below the stage. There is a group just in front of you that toasts with their glasses, full of cold, foamy beer. The band moves on to the next song spontaneously, with no introductions. The sonority has changed completely; now the synths make a bed of sound that resembles the waves of the ocean. You have not heard this song before, but you are instantly taken by this sudden dreamlike atmosphere. It is a slow song; the downbeat, marked with a chord in one of the guitars, seems to float in the synth ocean. As soon as you feel the resonance of the bass in your body, someone gently pokes your shoulder. The person who poked you smiles at you; dressed in yellow and purple, they look into your eyes and they silently ask you to dance with them. Entranced with the tune, you take their hand and you let them take you. Everyone around you is dancing in pairs now, perhaps the fans always choose this song to dance to; or maybe it just turned out like this today. You never know. The lighting changes and the stage turns from a deep red to a turquoise. Your partner smiles at you again while they make you spin. Somehow, you feel comfortable around them. In a way, listening to the same music at

the same time, interacting with each other thanks to the music, creates an unexpected bond between you two. The movements become more fluid and you finally smile back. You feel a new sense of belonging with the people in the crowd. There is a sense of unity, of sharing, that arises from the fact that you are there listening and reacting to that music together.

A bit later, you feel tired; you have been in the festival since afternoon, and you can feel your body shutting down. The band is now rocking a fast tune with ska rhythms. The audience, driven crazy, jumps around in a mosh pit. There is a lot of noise, and you do not feel so comfortable anymore. You think you need a rest. You wave goodbye to the people you just met in the concert and you walk away from the front rows. You glance at the food stalls; at the moment, they are flooded with people. To be honest, you could use a hot dog right now. You decide you will go later, when there is a smaller queue. Instead, you walk to an empty grass patch in the yard. It's nighttime by now; the festival is only illuminated by the changing lights of the stages. From your current location, you can only hear the music from the concert you were attending just a few minutes ago.

Your body asks you to lay down on the floor while you listen to the band. By the sound of it, this will be the song that will close the concert. Again, you never know. It's not like there are program notes, or anything like that. The musicians hold in their hands their plan for the concert and it remains undisclosed until the audience finds out themselves. You close your eyes, while you feel the nocturne summer breeze, caressing the pores of your skin. When you open them again, you look up to the sky. The night sky lay in front of you.

"This music helped me go through some rough times." The person who you were dancing with is now by your side. You have no idea when they arrived there; perhaps when you had your eyes closed? For how long have you been in that state? You stop thinking about that immediately when you see them look intently at the sky. You follow their gaze. You cannot tell apart a single constellation; but the sight that lies before you is breathtakingly beautiful. You feel one with the grass, with the trees, with the music, with the sky. "It's

beautiful music, for sure.” Your tone is somewhat cautious. You never know how to properly address such a complicated topic. They don’t seem to care. They keep looking at the night sky. Their eyes are slightly watery. The music arrives to your eyes and its simplicity colors the scene around you. Your heart flutters in awe against such a declaration of beauty. The stars in the sky are separated by mere centimeters, but the real distance among them could be millions of light-years. “We are so small.” They say, somehow finding a truth in that particular instant. The musicians in the band finish their ska song with a raw and resonant chord, and the audience cheers in delight. You just smile, looking towards the minuscule balls of fire planted in the night sky. You’ll cherish this memory. This is one of those moments.

The Current Situation

"If a tree falls in a forest, and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?"

***George Berkeley**, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (1710)*

Words

Words are sanctuaries of meaning. In my view, they hold a deeper significance than we realize in the craze of our frantic and hectic lives. The root of a word gives us clues to uncover the mystery that lies within it; to reveal its inherent concept that gave it birth. I want to focus on one of the most important words for the people in my profession, people who I suspect might be reading this paper. The word I want to reflect about is classical music,[1] the name of our beloved artform.

Alex Ross, the sharp and successful American critic states with deadpan sincerity: "I hate classical music" (Alex Ross 2010, 19). He is not referring to the concept, to the artform, of course, but to the term we have coined to name it. "It traps a tenaciously living art in a theme park of the past. […] Some jazz aficionados also call their art 'America's classical music', and I propose a trade: they can have 'classical', I'll take 'the music.'" It is not the only word that gives name to our art: some people who do not like this term call it instead serious music, or good music (Alex Ross 2010, 20). These words raise a handful of logical and dialectical problems, so they do not seem like the best choice to designate what we do.

[1] Classical music – By classical music I am referring to music that is taught in the conservatories, composed between the sixteenth and twenty-first century, and played in traditional concert formats, usually in symphonic or chamber ensembles. Therefore, it stands in opposition to the terms "popular music" and "folk music". It would be a synonym of "serious music", "intellectual music" or "common tonal practice", though neither of those terms satisfy me since classical music is not always serious, intellectual, or tonal, sometimes even embodying all of its opposites. I am perfectly aware the term "classical music" is not adequate for this concept either, but, as a sociologic project, wishing to determine the position of music in our current society, I decided to use this term since it is the name which the general society (outside from academic music settings) calls our artform.

However, the word classical does not seem the best word to describe our music either. When submitted to scrutiny, its obvious contradictions come to light easily: the word classical should refer to the music that was composed during a specific period in time, in a specific place – Vienna, roughly from 1750 to 1828, following the ideological aesthetics of Enlightenment and the artistic movement of Neoclassicism. In spite of this, we keep happily categorizing pieces composed outside this time-space frame with the simplistic label we came up with. Bach's The Well-Tempered Clavier (1722), Mahler's Second Symphony (1888-1894), and Shostakóvich's Quartet No.8 (1960) are regarded both by people within the artform and audiences as evident epitomes of classical music. In extreme cases, the situation becomes undeniably grotesque – how could we stick that label to, say, Kaija Saariaho's *Laterna Magica* (2009), a piece which was composed roughly ten years ago?

Even if it is true that music that is being composed nowadays has been rebaptized as New Music by some, another possible name for it, as unbelievable as it sounds, is contemporary classical music.[2] We cannot remove the label from our music even when the works have been composed during this decade! This savage characterization does not affect every work of music, though; no one would have the audacity to state that Radiohead's Paranoid Android (1997) is classical music. But how can that be possible? It was composed before *Laterna Magica*.

Now, we can suspect that classical does not refer in itself to the period in which a piece was composed, since we indistinctively categorize works from the past and the present under its wing. What classical actually seems to designate is the separation of markets in the music business. The pieces that fall under the classical category are managed by a first market,

[2] Contemporary music - I use the term "contemporary music" as a synonym to "New Music" or "contemporary classical music", in other words, music that belongs to the classical music market but that it has been composed by a living composer or one that has died recently. Again, it is a shaky term, but for the sake of clarity in my arguments, let us establish 1950 as a landmark to consider a piece "contemporary". It does not matter whether this music is tonal, modal or atonal, or does not englobe itself in either of those categories.

a specialized one, marketed towards a very specific sector of the population (the classical music consumer) whereas the ones who do not make the cut fall in the massive spectrum of the wider, ever-changing musical market we call within classical spheres as pop industry.

The term pop industry is as inaccurate and reductionistic as classical music. As much as we can distinguish the Baroque, Gallante, Classical, Renaissance music, Romantic, Dodecaphonic, Impressionistic, Expressionistic, Minimalistic genres, among others, within the classical label, we can find jazz, rock, Balkan, dance, protest, indie, techno, reggae, hip-hop as members of a current musical culture that holds an exponential growth, both potential- and production-wise.

We see now that the music taken by both markets can be very varied in idiosyncrasies, styles, and objectives. So, what is indistinctively different between one type of music and the other? What forms that unsurmountable wall that seems impossible to demolish that separates music in two different fields, with almost no passages from one side to the other? There is one characteristic I can think of; no matter the genre, music that falls under the pop category seems to be performed by the same people that created it – except certain famous figures who hire a whole writer team behind their songs, a mechanic not so different to what we know today as ghost writing (Fletcher 2018). In any case, in the diverse scene of pop, where new, aspiring bands flourish every year all across the globe, the figure of the composer and the performer has merged. Even if it is not unusual for bands to take songs from different authors to cover them (still modifying them to their heart's content and giving them their own stamp of individuality), for the most part bands generate their own content, with their own specific boundaries, musical ideas and social and cultural ideals. This leads to an unparalleled dimension of authenticity in popular music[3] – the band who creates the content

[3] Popular music - In opposition to the term "classical music", I use the term "popular music" to define music that is not taught in conservatories and that is played in unconventional concert formats, usually in tour concerts or festivals. We refer commonly to this music as *pop*, but this is as inaccurate term as classical music since there are many more genres within popular music than pop. In any case, I will

knows exactly what they want to communicate, what they want to express. They do not fail to captivate audiences because they actively engage with them, transmitting the core of their music, the content, the message of it. By this process, they grasp the truth of the music, the reason for its existence, and project it outside of themselves to the world.

It is clear that this is not the way the classical music industry works, since performers and composers are two clear and differentiated entities nowadays; claiming, however, this to be the main difference between classical works and popular music is no more than a blatant lie. Franz Liszt (1811-1886) was an unprecedented showman who caused folly and frenzy among the impressionable Parisian ladies of the 1830s, performing his Hungarian Rhapsodies by heart (Burton-Hill 2016). Composers such as Mahler, Stravinsky, Schoenberg or Shostakovich conducted and performed regularly their own pieces (Alex Ross 2009, 19-102), fragments of which are now available online, to the delight of classical music fans which incessantly hunt them, trying to find the authenticity in the music they are craving for. The way in which current popular music relates to their audiences is no different to how classical music connected to its own back in the first half of the twentieth century. As with the classical video hunters, popular music audiences want to be a part of that communicative process, they want to receive that message.

However, this music is not classical. It cannot be classical. Why? What is lacking? Why cannot this music adhere to the music of Western tradition? Well, something must be missing from it. What could that be? What could this music lack? I believe that the mystery lies within the root of the word itself. Class.

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establish the terms classical music and popular music to differentiate the markets between the two industries.

The Birth of the Paradigm

The distinction of the music of Western tradition of classical is as absurd as it is functional: even if no one really knows what separates classical music from popular music, granting the first group that glorious term sublimates it and justifies it, becoming exempt from engaging in self-reflection or critique, transforming ideology in unquestionable truth and relegating the music which does not conform to its totems to the demeaning status of pop industry, at the same time ignoring the fact that classical music conforms an industry in its own right. The fact that the stubborn concertgoers and defenders of the status quo are largely unaware of the contradictions of this stance is highly troubling.

This notion of pretended moral and artistic superiority has, of course, a discernible origin: the change of paradigm that Beethoven's revolutionary approach supposed at the beginning of the nineteenth century and its inescapable influence that it has projected both retroactively and prospectively. This is fundamental to understanding the position in which now we stand: Beethoven arrived to the music world, changed the basic conceptual approaches to music, and shaped the whole culture of Western music tradition ever since.

Before Beethoven, composers were craftsmen who worked for aristocratic employers who needed entertainment and for whom they made music, plainly speaking, to earn their rent (Baricco 1992, 25). During the last decades of the 18th century, Mozart was one of the first to become an autonomous musician and engage in the emerging practice of the public concert. However, it was Beethoven who, financed by the rising bourgeois class, increased the length of the performances, and who started to compose for ever broader orchestral ensembles, inevitably distancing concerts from the aristocratic settings they were tied to, since they were not able to host events of such requirements (Raynor 1972, 417-437). Furthermore, Beethoven endowed music the concept of the subjectivity of the artist, the spiritual and romantic dimensions, the fire and the revolutionary ideas that were going to be latent in the upcoming French Revolution.

Beethoven's music and public concerts attuned with the revolutionary pretensions of the bourgeoisie, who rejected the aristocratic class, its moral corruption and the decadence of its old structures of power. The Eroica Symphony (1803) soon became the embodiment of the dreams of an eager bourgeois class which had accumulated wealth in the Enlightenment Period but which still lacked cultural primacy and status due to its humble origins, in opposition to the existent supremacy of the aristocratic class at the time. As such, Beethoven's musical and ideological content provided them with a base for their yearnings for cultural valorization, which legitimized them as a class and provided them with a sense of identity. That legitimization would be highly enhanced if they succeeded in self-appropriating the precedent craftsmanship they would rename as art – Bach, Haydn and Mozart soon became part of the new realm, and the bourgeois class claimed them as their own to fit their narrative of pretended grandeur (Baricco 1992, 19-34).

It is surprising to see how this ideological shift systematically changed the way audiences related to their music of their time. If the audience in the era of Mozart were only offered earlier music, concerts would have been empty, since what people were interested in was the music of its time (Harnoncourt 1982, 14). However, this trend started to subvert as the nineteenth century went on. The bourgeoisie, oblivious to its own contradictions, longed to shelter themselves from the disenchantment of everyday life and the corruption of those romantic ideals by the ferocious capitalism they themselves supported, in the "pure" art of the past (Bach, Mozart), which began to be increasingly idealized. The statistics speak for themselves: at the end of the 18th century, 84% of the repertoire offered by the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, founded in 1781, was made of music made by living composers. By 1855, that percentage had plummeted to 38%, and in 1870 it was at a mere 20% (Ross 2009, 61).

The glorification process of classical music had already begun; and unfortunately, it was at the expense of its actual ideological content. Mozart's work stopped being brilliant craftsmanship connected to the people of its time to become considered as the purest and

most elevated music a human could ever compose, giving birth to the myth of the child genius. As the bourgeoisie became the dominant class, Beethoven's music was stripped of his revolutionary approach that called for the unity of the mass to overpower a corrupt system and became the omnipotent message of a noble, suffering, misunderstood god who withered away in his deafness. "[…] By Mahler's day classical music had abandoned its earthy roots and become mystified, occupying an Olympian plane above the masses in which the smug bourgeois could see himself reflected." (Behrman 2009). In this new-born cult of the figures of the past this ideological void became full with the exaltation of beauty, and makeshift "truths" and "ideals" which had no correlation to the original meaning of its music and which were only understandable by the bourgeois social and cultural elite.

By the turn of the century, the artists of the time were not very happy. The bourgeois audience was enraptured with the music of the past; paying no heed to the new music they could offer – at the same time negating the revolutionary aesthetic experiments the artists wanted to engage in, grounded in a determined set of new ideological convictions and themes. On the other hand, the masses, which had been left out from the classical music institutions, started to engage with the new and down-to-earth genres of the cakewalk and the ragtime (Ross 2009). With a series of controversial premieres which took place in the years preceding the First World War – Mahler's 1st Symphony (1893), Richard Strauss' *Salome* (1905), and *Elektra* (1909), Schoenberg's First and Second Quartets (1907, 1908), Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1913), and the Musikverein scandal (1913), where even the police had to intervene, it became apparent that the bourgeoisie was adamantly resistant to the new, dubious turn the classical works were undertaking, despite those changes being coherent with the social and political atmosphere at the time.

It was, thus, in the first decades of the 20th century when the audiences started to part ways with the composers due to an irreconcilable disagreement on what music should depict or represent. As we have seen, Mozart and Beethoven's music were deeply grounded

with the political, social and ideological situation at their time; by the turn of the century, Schoenberg, Berg and Stravinsky's music were also products of their current situation. (Did anyone really believe the music still ought to be "beautiful" when ten million civilians had lost their lives in the First World War?) In any case, a great part of classical music audiences was already spellbound by the wonders of the lost beauty of the past and had no interest in the art that could be produced in the new era of modernity. In Schoenberg's painting "Self-Portrait, Walking" (1911), he depicts himself turning and walking away from the audience, probably a result of their constant hisses, their laughs and their insults (Ross 2009, 81). It was the announcement of the birth of a new paradigm in Music History, a shift of conception that would end the decadence of the post-romantic artform.

Except that it was not. Classical music and its institutions have never been able to reconnect with modernity since. Even if it is true that a great part of the classical contemporary music tradition has willingly cut their ties with the traditional, bourgeois audience, as Schoenberg devised, it has failed to represent a social majority and embody the voice of reason, denounce or reference of passing generations during the 20th century. Instead, its impact on modernity is regrettably non-existent, and in the best cases, highly situational. Meanwhile, the audience, thirsty for music, has become tired of waiting and has gone to modernity,[4] to the place we all belong.

Fighting for Legitimacy

The position classical music is submerged in in our days is special, particular, completely alien to the rest of phenomena that happen in the world. It is incredibly surprising

[4] Modernity - Setting a date for "modernity" would be akin to killing what it represent. I wish to use the term "modernity" in a sociological way, as a term to reflect the diversity of social realities and concerns of our days. Modernity shapes us as a society because it gives us influences we cannot avoid just by living in the twenty-first century, such as cinema, theater, popular music, historical conscience, social transformation, daily news, instant messaging, globalization, etc. In my paper, this term usually stands in opposition to "the nineteenth century", whose idiosyncrasies I believe still permeate the classical music paradigm even today.

– as clear as it is that classical music as a business, as a brand, as a system, is undergoing a fatal and eternal decadence that does not seem to end; we also realize that its lethal crisis has been going on for decades. The critic Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt said, back in 1926: "Concerts are poorly attended and budget deficits grow year to year" (Ross 2010, 21). We have been mourning classical music for a hundred years now. Classical music lives in an endless requiem; its existence reminds us of an unperturbed, terminally ill patient who keeps living in pain thanks to an artificial breathing machine. Forgotten by the media, by the schools, by the international music awards, by the governments; the rare cases in which we do get the spotlight is in the shape of sharp criticism or denouncement that highlights the decay of our institutions and our top performers – for instance, James Levine's and Plácido Domingo's recent sexual harassment scandals, among others.

The classical world, however, refuses to die. Even among all the problems that surround it, all the difficulties the system our artforms faces, it continues to live on with an admirable and stubborn tenacity. The classical music world is alien to the contemporary world we live in because its baffling capacity to keep living among the adversities is unparalleled by any other business – no tornado seems to be strong enough to wipe out once and for all this millennial artform. No other field seems to be able to endure a 100-year-old crisis and still be living; agonizing but living.

This is only possible because the focus, the center, the axis of our craft is still undeniably established in the past. The classical environment is distinct from the rest of the fields of our present in that it lives in its own bubble, completely ignorant and disinterested in the events of our present; self-content with its anachronic idealization of certain figures of the past and reluctant to any notion of change or evolution. The ties with the present are sharply cut whenever we enter the hall; the 21st century is abandoned and we are plunged into the world of the 19th century; a world where everything that happened during that century is deified and anything composed after 1940 is "too modern", "too uncomfortable", "too ugly".

We keep recreating the 19th century compulsively, as though we do not want to admit that no less than one hundred twenty years have passed since we left it for good. Both professional musicians and heirs of the 19th century bourgeoisie unconsciously comply to deny that modernity exists all around us – we escape from the vibrancy and diversity of the current world while we repeat to death the sterile cult of a few figures of the past (Baricco 1992, 30-32).

According to Bachtrack statistics, in 2019 the top three most performed composers were Beethoven, Mozart and Bach. Among the top ten we cannot find a single composer from the 20th century. This, of course, keeps repeating every year. And every year that passes the situation becomes just a tiny bit more grotesque – (can we imagine Beethoven being the most performed composer, say, in the year 2200?) this is of course only possible because we have been taught by previous generations to venerate a certain type of music. Music education nowadays is taught in "conservatories" where it seems it is more important to conserve rather than create, as if we were more akin to museum curators rather than musicians. We are endlessly taught how the music worked in past centuries to perform it accurately, delving in the intricacies of musical notation; however, music that is being composed right now is undeniably not a focus in our current educational curricula. Being completely honest, what it is taught is more the elitist cult of classical music rather than ways to innovate, to self-express and to create. Piano professors at the classical institutions do not teach how to proficiently play popular or traditional music. I will go further – rarely does any music other than Western classical music come up in conversation, it is not commonly acknowledged as something worthy to prepare for a performance. Students are not frequently encouraged to create their own music, to include their own songs or compositions in performances. It is only the music of tradition that is considered, because the whole paradigm that supports classical music ubiquitously rejects the present with a passion – and this is passed down to the next generations as some sort of sacred creed. It does not only apply to music of other genres; the

indifference of the institutions and the audience towards contemporary classical music is certainly appalling.

Plainly speaking, the maintenance of the paradigm[5] leads to quite fruitful outcomes for itself (at least for now). This is evident in that, after a hundred years of crisis, classical music is still alive and kicking. However, when examined closely, this paradigm raises a handful of contradictions and problems that someone has to address. Firstly, the aggrandized cult of the past has led to a very interesting phenomenon; with time, fewer current pieces are becoming part of the regular repertoire performed by musicians and conductors. With a few fortunate exceptions, only pieces composed from 1770 to 1920 are the ones that are regularly performed. We are in 2020 now. There is already a whole century of undiscovered music – music that has not been given a true chance to shine, always frowned upon and shamed when compared to the greatness of Beethoven or Mahler, even if it is of exceptional quality. Music that is and will be forgotten or undiscovered, leaving a cultural gap of an ever-increasing amount of time if we performers do not fight to change it. With the excuse of the fetishization of the past, and the supposed unintelligibility of the avant-garde of the 20th century, the present is trampled upon and forgotten, despairing composers worldwide who do not find an adequate channel to showcase their work (Ojeda 2017).

Peter Hill, a renowned British contemporary performer, perfectly sums up in his article "'Authenticity' in Contemporary Music" the basis for the second contradiction I would like to explore: "Although the study of interpretation is supposedly composer-centered, the constant repetition of a core of repertoire means that it is differences in performance which provide the principal interest"(Hill 2017). In the same article, he points out how musical notation and the scores are the basis for the performances. "The text is sacrosanct." (Hill 2017)

[5] Classical Music Paradigm - The ideological, educational and logistical system that englobes classical music, born in the nineteenth century, which affects both conservatories, concert programming and the general performance praxis. In the classical music paradigm, the focus is placed on curating the past, enhancing music from a handful of composers between approximately years 1700-1920.

Hill accurately pinpoints the glaring contradiction that arises from both premises, which are, in my view, both correct. Are we to conclude that we want our performers to play the same pieces over and over, but also with the same interpretative qualities? Are we creating musicians or are we reifying the concept of authentic perfection and fidelity to the masterpieces of the past in every performer educated through our institutions? If anyone challenges the way core repertoire is interpreted (and transmitted), its value is cut off immediately, labeled as “unauthentic” “inaccurate”, or simply, “bad”. We are taught that, as performers, we are due to “serve the music”, but who exactly are we supposed to serve? Is “serving” some dead people of the past a value in itself? In that case, why? Are we labeling the works of the past as “sacred”? Do we have to protect them from the corruption of the influences of the present? In that case, why? “Value, it seems evident, is not intrinsic in objects, but attributed to them by whoever is doing the valuing” (Carey 2006, chap. 1).

Thirdly, but not less importantly, we have to face the impending problem of financial doom in our artform. There is an unshakable truth to classical music – it is an incommensurably expensive art to make. Let us, for starters, take Mahler’s Second Symphony. This monumental work is often performed; it is easy to forget the expenses a production of this piece comprises. The number of musicians required for the performance is huge; there is the conductor, an orchestra of over 100 musicians, a mezzo and soprano soloists and a choir of approximately 40 people. That makes approximately 150 people on stage that have to get decently paid for their work. On top of this, the venue has to get its income, and the superstar performers and conductors who regularly visit and play with the local orchestras demand their fair share of money. The expenses only increase in the opera genre, where we can find multiple soloists, a stage director, scenography, lighting, wardrobe masters, choreographers, actors, extras, etc.

Orchestras are not profitable. "They all run an operating deficit, in the sense that the money they earn from concerts, records and so forth does not cover their expenses"

(McClintock 2017) These are words from Robert Flanagan, an economist and professor at Stanford University. One could argue that this situation does not only apply to the classical music genre. Musicals, rock festivals, sports events, all of them require a large sum of money to work. While that is true, the difference between them and classical music is that in our case, unfortunately, the income from the tickets sold does not make up for the expenses of the productions. The outcomes are devastating. “Some of the major orchestras that have succumbed to bankruptcy since 1993 include the Florida Philharmonic Orchestra, Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego, San Jose, Honolulu, Louisville, Syracuse, Denver and New Orleans” (Saquilayan 2015).

The economic support for orchestras varies from country to country; the situations have to be assessed individually. In the US, only 31% of the classical music income comes from ticket sales, while 41% of the total revenue is made from private donors. The rest of the revenue is gathered from different sources, public funding accounting for only 3% of the total (Saquilayan 2015). “In Europe, most (orchestras) are funded entirely by federal, local and state governments” (McClintock 2017). In any case, these data prove Flanagan’s hypothesis – we are not making money from the people who come to our concerts, but from private or public donations, thus, from mere human generosity.

Not only we do not make enough sales, additionally it seems that the number of tickets sold for the concerts is perpetually declining. Greg Sandow, a passionate teacher at Juilliard School of Music who fosters a subject centered around the classical music crisis, and a writer of a renowned blog on the same topic, explains the problem that impedes the correct evaluation of the problem; “Orchestras do not want to reveal their ticket sales.” (Sandow 2019) Apparently, the concrete percentages regarding the reduction in sales must not be displayed, since it would expose the magnitude of the crisis we are facing. We are denied the very data that would help us realize how badly we have to change our institutions if we want this artform to survive. Moreover, there is another variable to consider; the age of our

audience. As early as 2006, Sandow was already warning us: “According to a report from the National Endowment of the Arts, ‘In 1982 those under thirty years of age comprised 26.9 percent of the audience […] By 2002, they’d fallen to 8.8 percent.’” (Sandow 2006) That is not all. In 1992, the largest age group which attended classical concerts was the 35-44 sector, while in 2002, the largest age group was 45-54 (Sandow 2006). On another note, in 1930, the average age of the audience was 30. In 1968, the median age was 38. (Sandow 2006) Referring to the data of the year his book was published, Ross acknowledged: “The median age is forty-nine” (Ross 2009, 21). As for current data, Statista, one of the leading consumer data providers in the world, has developed a graph in the year 2019 showing what percentage does every age group suppose to the total of the worldwide classical music audience. The results are appalling. While 41% of the audience is formed by the age group “55+”, only a meek 11% of our listeners are under 25 years of age (the worldwide data seem indeed to be a bit more hopeful than the American data). However, according to the trend Sandow proposed in 2006; the median age group now would be 55-64, which lines up with the data offered by Statista.

This begs the simple, yet devastating question we are all afraid of asking ourselves. So, how much time do we have left as an artform? At the end of the day, what we are facing is nothing other than a legitimacy crisis. The funding we receive, both public and private, will only be sustained as long as we have an audience to justify being given money in the first place. It is hard to state it in such a cold fashion, but in approximately twenty years the people who are coming to our concerts will not be able to keep doing so. If the audience keeps shrinking – and it will, of course! – how can this whole institution we call classical music be relevant in any way to society? At some point it will prove itself to be just a situational form of cultural elitism completely divorced from the spheres of relevant forms of culture, indulging in its own self-entitled values and deluded notions of primacy it attributes itself. Thinking about music in particular, a relevant artform would be one that is able to create an active audience,

an audience who supports the artform ideologically and financially, an audience to whom music is able to communicate, to voice their personal and social concerns.

The only way our artform can survive is to bring our music to modernity. To destroy the classical label, which refers to a distinction we have felt at some point we were entitled to grant our music. We have to find a way to get our message across in concerts; to revitalize the way we relate to our audience. Some measures have been taken already and have produced wondrous results. The arrival of classical music to the age of streaming, which some years ago was limited to popular music genres only, sees classical music as "the fourth most popular genre among music consumers", according to a study commissioned by Idagio, a classical music Berlin-based streaming service (Wassenberg 2019). As surprising as it may seem, when we do take conscious steps towards modernity instead of shielding ourselves in the past long lost, we generally receive a warm welcome by the people outside our spheres. It is also worthy of remark that a new way of listening to classical music is arising in the streaming services among the new generations: "The study, and many analysts, point to the emergence of mood-based playlists on the big services like Spotify for piquing the interest of younger generations. Such playlists include music that is based entirely on mood, ignoring genre, and typically includes classical music tracks" (Wassenberg 2019). As we can see, when modernity enters to play, our music adjusts itself to it with shocking ease.

Stepping out of the comfort zone is not an easy thing to do; as its own name suggests, it does not feel comfortable. It is understandable; we have been trained in the conservatories to play or to compose music (never both at the same time) and we have never thought about anything else when it comes to performances. Why would we need to change what we already have, if it works? In my opinion, it is paramount to rethink our ideas, our conceptions, when it comes to our artform. Not only to prevent the shrinkage of our audience; but for our own sake. We get so tangled up in what we have learned in the conservatories – the places to conserve – that we never dare to imagine where we could arrive if we let the

rules and conventions that have been tying us up all this time. The influence of YouTube or Spotify in the classical recording label has been a game-changer. But there is more to our artform than just recorded versions. What about live concerts? How can we renew such a focal point of our art-making? How can we break the chains that tie us to the long lost 19th century? Is it worth it to try to speak to people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and interests using different communicative resources? How can we adopt a relevant position in the cultural life of the society of the 21st century, participating in its debates, uniting forces with other social and cultural movements to face our global struggles? How can we rediscover the classical music from the 20th and 21st centuries, acknowledging its importance which has been stripped from them due to the cult of the 19th century?

The Experience of the Concert

"Is classical music a higher form of music than rock music? Classical music is certainly more complex. However… I always wonder why the rock musicians are millionaires."

Kevin Dougherty**, raising topic on musical forum **Violinist.com

"If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head.

If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart."

*Attributed to **Nelson Mandela***

Reasons for the Decline

As alarming as the statistics offered about the attendance to classical concerts may be, they should hardly come as a surprise. Statistics by themselves do not accurately describe a situation; they merely express mathematically a reality that can be seen through our own eyes. It is our duty to interpret those statistics and to give them an actual sense. If musicians manage to accurately pinpoint the actual meaning in the downward spiral the attendance to concerts is suffering, and are brave enough to radically change what they find might be causing this problem, they might be able to avert the negative fate that currently awaits the artform. If they do not successfully find the weak link, or they do not have the resolve to make some substantial changes, classical concerts will be eventually completely relegated to the realm of redundancy.

Let us go to the core of our problem: Why do we consistently fail to bring young people to our concerts? Why is our core age group (41%) over 55 years of age? In my view, the answer to this question is simple. *Classical concerts are deeply rooted in mechanisms of control and pleasure suppression.* Youngsters reject this type of control and do not want to see their pleasure suppressed. On the other hand, popular music concerts enhance the expression of

pleasure and have little to no mechanisms of behavioral control. Thus, youngsters wildly prefer this type of concert where they feel they can be themselves, unbound to rules and conventions from a different time. “Some social critics have judged the symphony orchestra to be the epitome of capitalist oppression. […] Everything is uniform and formal, from the penguin tuxedos to the prescribed moments of applause. […] The audience has no part in production, it simply consumes what it is offered” (Jourdain 1997, 262). Immediately after, the author shows us the other side of the coin: “A rock concert is all barricade and guillotine. Its every symbol is of rebellion against hierarchy. Players interact among themselves and with the audience in stringent egalitarianism, conveying by smiles and greetings that the concert is a pleasurable social engagement for them, that in the audience they are among friends” (Jourdain 1997).

Structures of behavioral control in classical concerts were born at the end of the nineteenth century, and are now accepted in the classical world as “natural” or “what it has always been”, even though there is evidence to suggest the contrary. During the 1890s, audiences would apparently scream at concerts and stand on chairs “for what seemed hours” (Joseph Horowitz, 2012, 5). Even so, our rules in our current concert praxis are kept for the sake of preservation; there is a belief that in their we will successfully recreate the music and the necessary setting for its adequate delivery. This notion came from the glorification process music underwent during the nineteenth century, as enhanced by self-aggrandizing composers and the birth of the discipline of music criticism, as by a compliant bourgeoisie who had succeeded in furthering the divide between them and the uncivilized masses. In 1882, Denis Magnus, a critic of the time, advises audiences against making any sort of noise in Bayreuth, invites cold-sufferers to stay home and forbids any sort of misplaced applause: “It would be a profanation of the religious center of which Wagner is the pontiff sovereign” (De Laleu 2019). These rigid views were ruthlessly implanted among the social elites of the time. With the

perpetuation of the canon repertoire in the twentieth century, and the separation of audiences and living composers the patterns of these learned behaviors only strengthened.

In the twenty-first century, the rules of the classical concert still remain, stronger as ever, and they affect indistinctively the *active* (performers) and the *passive* (audience) agents of the concert, transforming the classical concert in an undying ritual that belongs to the forlorn nineteenth century. In my opinion, the endless repetition of both behaviors and repertoire presented at the ritual inhibit the development of a forward and communicative artistic experience. This outright refusal to let go these conventions and canon repertoire make our artform look "dated"; but most importantly, it evidences a lack of actual ideological or conceptual content behind our concert practice other than to repeat the standard structures for the sake of it. The stubbornness in the maintenance of the ritual might differ from what the audiences might actually want from classical concerts. "The new audience, unfamiliar with classical music and its codes, is only driven by instinct, its heart, and above all, the music" (De Laleu 2019).

This dissonance between what we, as classical musicians, are offering the audience and what the general audience wants and needs from art – aside from, of course, the diminishing frequent concert-goers who are in on the ritual – is the real reason behind the constant decline of sale tickets and the ageing of the audience. "If I could clap when clapping felt needed, laugh when it was funny, shout when I couldn't contain the joy building up inside myself. What would that have been like?" (Dare 2012) Our audience needs to feel they can be themselves in the concert, not having to abide by predetermined codes of behavior. "Perhaps it is time […] to react to classical music with our hearts just as we do when we meet other forms of art" (Dare 2012).

In my view, the structures of control we exert on both performers and audiences prevent real experiences from happening since we compulsively grab what we know in the cultural belief that the figures of the past we adore cannot be surpassed or improved,

forbidding ourselves from exploring new possibilities or messages to transmit our audience. Furthermore, the messages we *do* transmit are anchored in the nineteenth century, so the new generations or the non-initiated feel no desire to engage with our institutions since they hold no real connection to modernity, and the cultural reality they are living. Additionally, we systematically alienate the young generations by teaching them in schools and conservatories that *our* music is superior to the one they listen to, in an act of blatant ethnocentrism, moral superiority and disconnection from the current cultural panorama. The disregard and contempt for non-classical music has been widespread in our artform and has been theoretically legitimized by important figures such as Theodor W. Adorno and Karlheinz Stockhausen, who categorized popular music as mere *capitalist commodities* and who related it to fascism (Paddison 1996, 56-60). Meanwhile, the general audience who is being patronized by our ideological models watches us from the sidelines with bewilderment; uncapable of understanding why we keep playing the same pieces over and over; systematically disregarding other kinds of music with sufficiency and blissfully self-restraining our behavior in the concert halls with a bemusing sense of pride. "Rise to your feet and applaud. The Dear Leader is coming on stage to conduct. He will guide us, ever so worshipfully through the nerocracy of composers we are obliged to forever adore" (Dare 2012).

Ethan Hein, a music educator specializing in non-classical settings, lengthily speaks about the issue in his online blog. "I don't mind the idea of […] the classical canon, as long as I can approach it as an ethnic music of a particular time and place, not a transcendent or universal one." (Hein 2019) However, all those people who have felt excluded or patronized by the classical music institutions and its dogmas will most likely never come back to us.
Some institutions have tried to widen the classical music audience only by changing minutiae of its concert praxis. Unfortunately, makeshift changes will not do when it comes to bringing our artform to modernity and finding new people to connect to. If changes are too small; if new audiences perceive that our efforts are just a begrudging way to prevent our audiences to

shrink further, if we give the impression that we would be better off if we did not change anything at all, all of our efforts will be largely for naught. New audiences will perceive that these renovations are no more than a superficial marketing ruse, and instead of bringing new audiences closer, it will keep them away, enjoying the many other cultural possibilities that the twenty-first century offers (Eatock 2010).

It is, therefore, our whole culture of performance that we have to question, the actual meaning behind the whole concept of what classical music means. If we want to persist in the world of the twenty-first century, we have to reinvent a paradigm that is not based on the mechanisms of past centuries. "The changes will be large. […] The old ways aren't sustainable. Classical music cannot survive without major change." (Sandow 2014). In his excellent article, Sandow delivers a wide array of proposals, but in essence, he asks for *diversity* and *creativity* in the renovation of our performance culture. To that, I would add another plea; *motivation*. As musicians, we need to find a motive for the repertoire we choose; we need to become more aware of the values to which we subconsciously subscribe. We have to find new ways to express the reasons why we are alive through our music; being specific in our intentions regarding art works. And we have to let go those mechanisms of control that stiffen up our performances. We have to remember that concerts are, above all, *entertainment*, and, as such, we should entertain our audience and at the same time, keep ourselves entertained. Even if some critics might argue with this point, claiming that the mere conception of music as entertainment is a product of the capitalist society I have been born in, it should be pondered why is classical music suffering such a widespread crisis of legitimacy in our current society, evidenced by the consistent decline in ticket sales, and to what extent we, as musicians, are willing to remain complacent in the swift decline of our artform or get ready to face the challenges of retrieving classical music to a realm of cultural relevancy. Capitalist or not, we have to decide if we are going to let classical music shrink to the point of irrelevance just to leave untouched "the true manuscript in a bottle", in Adorno's words.

There is no limit to what we can achieve if we manage to overpower these mechanisms of control and we reconcile our artform with the concepts of communication and conceptual specificity. These two must go hand-by-hand, permeating the rigid structures of the classical concert from within, if we are to rescue our artform from the well of the 19th century and bring it to modernity. In my opinion, this is the only way by which will grow an active audience beyond what we already have (Eatock 2010). Any other attempts that try to avoid this issue will only encounter irrelevance as its inevitable outcome. Trying to renovate the classical music concert just by marketing it slightly differently for youngsters, but keeping our effort in maintaining what was done in the 19th century, will be completely futile. Our only way to survival is to get rid of the mechanisms of control and to find ourselves a new place in the reality of the current social culture we live in.

New Concert Formats

Even if not every classical concert follows the same rules and structures; it is safe to say that there are standard formats to which we adhere the majority of the concerts we offer. Though these formal standards might be reassuring and welcoming for frequent concert-goers; they can easily discourage the non-initiated and prevent them from attending altogether. These formal standards or conventions are the mechanisms of control and pleasure suppression I have spoken about above. Classical music by itself is generally well-liked by first-time listeners, and its language is powerful enough for it to reach to a diverse range of potential audiences. However, this overbearing control we exert over both performers and audiences in our current concert format swiftly take these new audiences aback. They will not keep listening to our music and coming to our concerts as long as we do not provide them with an exciting prospect; in other words, we will grow our audience as long as we are able to organize our music's delivery in a way that holds the newcomers' attention, and as long as they do not sense their expression of pleasure suppressed by the format. So, speaking about

the *format* of the concert, the key questions would be: Do we have to innovate the way we organize our concerts? In that case, how can do it in a way for classical music not to lose its spark in the process?

When thinking about format, we should demolish everything that "has to be" and encourage what "could be". Following that simple rule, the structures of control and pleasure suppression immediately come crashing down. It is in the power of our imagination to conjure up new formats that may or may not overthrow the tyrannical concert praxis paradigm that we currently experience in the classical world. To do so involves, obviously, leaving our precious comfort zone and spending time and effort thinking up of new formats or structures. While we might make blunders and misconceptions, we must not falter. Every attempt at modernizing our artform is a step in the direction to freeing ourselves from the paradigm and saving *classical* music from future irrelevance.

The first big debate that must happen within the classical community regarding concert format is the effectivity, or lack thereof, of the known as *The Ten Commandments of Concertgoing*, quoted in the introduction of this paper. "Disguised as humor, they are actually propagating a widespread and pernicious idea: that the performing arts in general, and classical music in particular, require specialized knowledge and a particular code of behavior." (Midgette 2015) In my opinion, every single one of them should undergo a careful and exhaustive revision, under the light of the current times. It would not come as a surprise if, from the *Ten Commandments*, when subject to scrutiny, only two or three actually enhanced the musical and conceptual communication between performers and audiences. I will give some examples that illustrate my theory. "*Thou shall not talk*." While it is true that in non-classical concerts the audience is allowed (and encouraged!) to speak, I do not know how well it would mesh with classical music, for the simple reason that in our music the soft dynamics such as *pp*, *ppp*, and *pppp* are not all that rare, and an uninterrupted murmur from the audience could make difficult the transmission of the music. However, we cannot know how

this would actually work, since it has not been put to test often. "*Thou shall not clap in the wrong places*." In my opinion, this one carries a clear mechanism of control and pleasure suppression that should be examined. A listener's expression of awe, euphoria, excitement, and appreciation is curtly shattered if "it is not the correct place to clap." It is like instructing your body and mind when they should feel excited, and not the other way around. It is unnecessary to state that in those exciting non-classical concerts, the audience claps whenever they see fit, and there does not seem to be a problem at all with any of the involved parts.

At the end of the day, the *Ten Commandments of Concertgoing* are rooted in the belief that a classical piece is heavenly supreme and should not be disturbed by extramusical factors; such as human behavior, subjectivity or other external circumstances. The *Commandments* exist because, according to that belief, those pieces must be conserved in alcohol, safe from those dangerous external factors, and the conditions for its correct reproduction must be present at all times. The *Commandments* are the enforcers that ensure that those optimal conditions are met, even if it means suppressing the physical, mental or emotional urges of an audience. If we managed to change that belief into "*external factors affect the music creating a new artistic experience*", like John Cage thought in his piece 4'33", we would not be needing those *Commandments* ever again.

In any case, we must not stop there. What if we dared to flip the situation over completely? What if the conditions necessary for a worthwhile performance were derived from the content itself instead of the other way around? "*Thou shall not talk*". What if what we were doing in stage was so interesting and mind-blowing for the audience that *the silence was a result* of our work and not the other way around? It seems to me that the mere existence of behavioral rules and concert etiquette comes from an actual inability by the structural format to effectively keep the attention of the audience.

In this process of evaluation of conventions, we must address topics such as the following: is there a suitable attire to wear for the audience? Is there a suitable attire to wear

for the performers? What role can handheld technology play in the modernization of the concert? Are smartphones forbidden? In that case, why? What about taking pictures? Why would taking pictures be forbidden?

When we have examined, and fixed the scope of these *Commandments*, a real communication with no boundaries can start taking place between performers and audiences. However, that is only the beginning in the massive shift that the classical concert praxis must undertake. So to speak, we would have managed to remove the obstacles in the way to start creating a new, unbound artistic experience. After establishing a closer relationship between audiences and performers, and easing up those mechanisms of control, we are ready to tackle the challenge of creating a new artistic experience focused on modernity. Let us start from the beginning; and discuss the *structure* of the classical concert.

For the most part, *classical* concerts always follow the same guidelines. While the standard format does make musical sense, variations and experimentation in the classic structure would be highly appreciated, namely because it would surely facilitate the effective transmission of an underlying message or storyline, unbound by predetermined rules. Even if the standard format suits the initiated, it is not hard to see why newcomers would find it dry or hard to swallow.

Firstly, it has been noted that classical concerts are just too long. Taking the recesses into account, they easily exceed the two hours in length, if not more (Reynolds 2020). This point of view is shared by a range of professionals in the field, such as critic Paul Wells, and pianist Stephen Hough (Savage 2016). When we think about it, it makes a lot of sense. In our current conception of classical concert, we lay back and listen, without speaking or moving, *for two or more hours straight*. “Symphonies and concertos can last nearly an hour, individual movements up to half an hour of uninterrupted music, and it’s a lot to process when you’re not used to the musical language.” (Wells 2016) The lack of movement, the lack of conversation, the dimming of the lights, and the time at which the concerts are held, usually in

the evening at the end of the working week (Thursday or Friday evenings) make for a wonderful napping experience. Non-classical concerts and other live artistic experiences such as theatre can be as long as this; however, it is easy to see that a huge number of factors make up for its length, the most important, in the case of the non-classical concert, being that the program does not consist of three or four long pieces but of short songs (usually, from 15 to 20), which lend a sense of variety to the performance that cannot be found in the classical concert. In the case of a theatre performance, the general inclusion of a storyline and character development as central parts of the format is very effective in keeping the audience's attention. To be blunt, the people want to know what happens next.

Secondly, I believe that the endless repetition of the standard classical concert format; this is, *overture, concerto, intermission and symphony*, easily becomes tiring and unimaginative. Even if it does make for beautiful concerts, it stops making sense after every option offered follows the same tried formula. It is akin to only being able to watch theatre performances which have two acts and the same character arcs within. It becomes predictable and dull, and it only exposes the lack of message or conceptual approach from which our artform suffers. It is my belief that we must not change the format of the concert for the sake of it; but we should innovate in its format *as a consequence* of having something new and exciting to say; something worth the effort of leaving the comfort zone. Solo recitals and chamber music or ensemble concerts are, in my opinion, the perfect place to experiment; since they involve fewer performers, they will provide more autonomy for performers to break these chains.

Concerts should feel different, in a way, impossible to predict. The format that we choose must be in line with the central message of the concert, it must be derived from it. In my view, the biggest problem with the traditional format of concert is its actual shallowness, its absence of message. Here is where the real change would start; in realizing what we, as artists, want to express to our audience and fitting our concerts just to that end, getting rid of

every other rule that does not help to communicate that message. Do we want to speak about mental health? Then, we should have a concert that features composers who have struggled with it; pieces which were composed as result of mental and emotional trauma, music that expresses the pain of coping with a mental illness. And we should make *evident connections* to the theme, since the focus of the concert is the discovery of a part of life through music. Listeners who engage in this experience might take something away when it is over. Maybe they were able to enjoy and understand the music much better than in a concert that sticks to a standard format with no ulterior concept other than the music itself.

If we include new factors that might enhance the communication of our core message to our listeners, the impact and the connection to the audience will only increase. It is done in every other live performance artform except in classical music, due to the rules that have tied it down for so long. When we accept that a message or a key theme has to be *relevant* to every performance, new questions regarding these factors that we do not consider in classical music praxis arise. How can we relate the pieces that we have chosen to the theme we want to speak about? How will the order of the pieces affect the theme? How could we use lighting in a way that our messages, our pieces, are more communicative? Should we use props in the performance? How should the staging be organized? Could we use any audiovisual projections to enhance the transmission of our message? Should we use devices for amplification of the sound, such as microphones and speakers? Should we include any body movements? How can our choices of clothing play a new part on our performance? The more we think about these questions, the more sense our final product is going to have in an overarching way, and the more holistic the experience is going to be for our audience, who is avid for diverse and inspiring artistic experiences. It must also be stated that, the more we try to innovate in a concert regarding *format*, the fiercer the criticism, sometimes even demanding for us to tone down our outrageous ideas. I will expand upon this point later.

If we keep asking ourselves questions in this manner, we might arrive, of course, to unexpected conclusions. *Why is a classical venue the best place for us to present our new formats?* Maybe we decide that our concert about mental health would thrive better in a smaller setting, such as an underground club or a pub. Maybe we need special lighting for our concert which is not available in a classical music venue. Maybe we need to collaborate with a wider range of artists such as choreographers, dancers or lighting technicians. Maybe we should improve the ways we communicate with different artists from different artforms and backgrounds; or maybe we have to learn new skills altogether!

My main point about the renovation of the formula for our performances is that *there is no fixed formula*. Concerts in the most diverse places with the most diverse conceptual ideas are conducted in various places in the world, and have been a clamorous success among audiences of different backgrounds, who, thanks to these initiatives, have started to change their conceptions about what classical music is. Consider the case, for example, of the *Sound Unbound Festival* or the ensemble *Manchester Collective* in London; or the so-called *Indie Classical* movement in New York City, which arose from the festival *Ban in a Can* with representatives such as William Robin, Missy Mazzoli, or Judd Greenstein (Robin 2016). New names in the United States that are working to bring classical music to a wider audience also include Nico Muhly, Caroline Shaw, or Jessie Montgomery. It is, in my opinion, in open festivals, pubs and clubs where the development of a new classical performance praxis can take root. These scenes embrace a much wider social spectrum; and their laid-back environment completely shatters the structures of control that impede our music to set free from the chains of formality and pleasure suppression. As we have seen, the old paradigm will not die so easily. It is deeply rooted in the heart of the institutions of the creation of our music. However, the transition to these more relaxed and diverse formats of concert practice must begin somewhere. We, as musicians, must make them happen. It is the only way for classical music to have any actual cultural relevancy in the present and in the future.

New Concert Content

Concert practice at its best features a specific theme or message that speaks to the audience and constitutes the key aspect of the performance. The format that we choose must always be dependent on its adequacy to represent and communicate the main theme or artistic premise of the concert. However, there is a very important topic we have not yet touched upon and which is of utmost importance for the actual renovation of the classical performance practice; this is, of course, the *content* of the concert. It is fundamental that we think about the pieces we choose to depict the theme, or to create the storyline we want use for our artistic premise. In other words, to devise the raw material we are going to dispose of to fulfill our artistic premise.

In the majority of the performances within the system of the current classical concert practice, their *content* is intrinsically bound to the maintenance of the core repertoire we have been taught to conserve by our own educational institutions; this is the norm. As a result, the music programmed in the symphonic and chamber music cycles is almost always music composed by male, white, dead, and to a lesser extent, European composers. “Seven of the ten most performed composers died over a century ago (the other three are Ravel (1937), Rachmaninoff (1943) and Shostakovich (1975).” (Marín 2019) This is not only based on ambiguous notions of cultural superiority, but also on a dire need of securing a short-term stable income in an increasingly unstable financial business. (Marín 2019) Even if our audiences are aging, our concerts still produce more income when we take on conservative approaches to programming. This system of eternal revival of composers of the past is legitimized by the widespread practice of celebrating the birth and death anniversaries of prominent composers, which ends up being an excuse for lazy and unimaginative programming. Recently, it has been the case of Chopin and Schumann in 2010, Mahler in 2011, Debussy in 2012, Britten, Verdi and Wagner in 2013 (Marín 2019). As we can see, it is rare that there is a year without a birth or death anniversary of a “golden” composer. And, as long as

there is a dead composer to commemorate, there is no need for innovation in programming. In a way, these programming trends violently shy away from exploration, or influx of new ideas. Rather, the *content* featured in classical concerts represents a completely different goal altogether: “Programming becomes an act of curating musical history, not just providing musical entertainment.” (Terauds 2019)

If we really want to change our old concert practice system into new, meaningful experiences, we have to defy the norm, let go of the cult to the 19th century and bring our artform to modernity. This does not mean forgetting about the composers of the past; however, it does imply changing its focus to the music that is being composed right now. This is extremely important; we cannot claim to want to change a system based on the past if we do not change the content of that system into the works of the present. Furthermore, in this new concert that speaks to an audience of the 21st century, the artistic premises or messages will be based on the current social and cultural context, and not on the ones of the 19th century. For that to happen, the repertoire chosen to reflect our current conflicts must be comprised of works that were created in our cultural conditions and social or political worries and not merely repeat the ones of bygone eras. If we our artistic premise is revolution, we will not be able to fully speak about the meaning of revolution in the 21st century if we limit ourselves to play Beethoven, even if revolution was indeed one of his artistic premises at that time. To speak about revolution in our modern world, we have to consider the work of current composers who have known and reflected about absolutism, totalitarianism, fascism, the Arabic revolutions, the LGBT+ revolution, the feminist revolution, etc. To speak seriously about revolution, we have to acknowledge the different ways in which it affected diverse cultures and ideologies all around the globe. If we do so, we cannot simply ignore the folk and traditional music of other cultures, and merely showcase what revolution was for Beethoven, a white, dead, male, European composer whose music conforms to the norm.

In order for a revolution in the classical music industry to occur, it is paramount that we see it from the standpoint of *diversity*. The society of the 21st century must be diverse and welcoming, and so must also be our performances. We must include music written by female composers. We must include music written by PoC composers. We must include works written by LGBT+ composers. Until now, these concerts have taken place but only as a label. For some time now, concerts have already taken place where pieces written by women, or by people of color, would be featured. However, we must move on from that stage; even if the creation of spaces for different kinds of music is welcome and desirable, the final goal is deeper. Marga Richter, an American composer who has fought during her career for the female representation in concerts and for equality of opportunities between women and their male counterparts, sums it up perfectly in a concise phrase: "We don't want to be featured. We want to be absorbed." (Genzlinger 2020)

As we can see, the changes in content are not easy to undertake, since it also means a deep reevaluation of the ideological structure that surrounds the classical world, which has deep roots in the way we perceive the artform itself. Additionally, it must be stated that, in many cases, our musicians are not well-prepared to play diverse kinds of music due to the institutions that have formed us – the *conservatories*. Miggy Torres, a composer from Connecticut (US), spoke lengthily about the need of restructuring in the institution of the conservatory in a particularly enlightening Facebook post that was shared all over social media by a large section of the classical world. In it, he compares *classical* education to a closed religion. "You study the same book the entire time, the same book that's been studied for centuries. It is a closed canon. And any artistic creation takes place in the form of new glosses, new commentaries, new interpretations, new illuminations—but always of the same book. Other books? Other religions? Why would you study other religions?" (Torres, @Miggy.Torres.73, Facebook, 6 June 2020).

In order to be culturally relevant to our modern society, we have to innovate the musical content of our performances, which must pass by rethinking the conservatories as places where we preserve and starting to see them as *places where we create* so that musicians are well-formed to play the music of our present, and not just to reenact the "*three Bs*: Bach, Beethoven, Brahms" (Torres, @Miggy.Torres.73, Facebook, 6 June 2020). The question that bothers all of us who think along these lines is the following: If we manage to substantially change our artform, taking the values of diversity and inclusion into account, and we start to create instead of preserve, *will we still be classical musicians, and our artform, classical music, or will we be something else entirely?* It is a tough question to answer. Only time will give us an answer to that.

In my mind, the only way to start communicating effectively with the current society and to be artistically relevant to a wider spectrum of audiences is to bring our artform to modernity. And bringing our artform to modernity must necessarily pass through looking at our artform from the perspective of the music of the 20th and 21st centuries, and, most prominently, from living composers. I firmly believe that the bridge that we seek between society and classical music lies in contemporary music. Here, I might get opposition from both within the artform and from the audiences, since the separation between the composer and the audience that happened in Schoenberg's era is still very present. Furthermore, the willing perpetuation of this separation through the 20th century, with composers such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen, who relished in the fact that they had emancipated from the audience, only strengthens this resistance. However, I have a strong belief that we, as musicians and audiences, must reconnect with the music of our present, since it is the music that reflects the beliefs of our time, that speaks to us in the cultural voices we understand; the music that was born under our same social and cultural ideals and circumstances. We have to change the conception that contemporary music is not connected to emotion, or to beauty in any kind of way. Music that is truly contemporary does not respond to a restrictive stylistic

dogma and is not intended to be unintelligible by the audiences. The music that is being composed now is shaped by the language of modernity; the language we all speak just because we are products of our time. I'm positive that the music composed in our times has a high likelihood to speak to a wide social spectrum, provided that we succeed in presenting it in an adequate format and with a strong artistic premise; this is, with something to say. (Ojeda 2017)

The people in the audience will feel moved by what we do if we are able to connect with them speaking to them in their own language, which is also our language. Our feelings of being ignored by society come from us trying to reach the general audience by demanding them to understand a language that died along with the 1st World War. The results of such a futile process are plain for us to see and are perfectly evident in the heart-breaking statistics that I have shared in this paper. *What is the language of modernity?* In my opinion, that is the question we must try to answer; and the key to our relevance and survival. Successful rock bands have understood the language of our days and speak closely to millions of people worldwide. Their concerts are awaited social events and their emotional impact and connection move eager concertgoers to tears. What makes us think that we cannot understand this process, assimilate this language and also speak to our audiences in those terms? The only way to answer this is to try.

The revolution in *content*, together with the revolution in *format*, will make for a vastly different concert experience which will require as much of technical proficiency as of imagination to make it work. We will receive a fair amount of criticism in the process, since the guardians of the paradigm, the conservatories, and the people who wear with pride the unintelligibility of contemporary music, the followers of Adorno's doctrine, will eventually see the danger in an innovation that can bring in a wider audience, with current social and cultural concerns. In the classical music world, we will be afraid because we will understand how vast a change the restructuring of our musical education requires to adapt to the new times.

However, we must pull through. We must take our own feelings of inadequacy, our vertigo for stepping out of our comfort zone, our inferiority complex towards popular music and try out different proposals and ideas. We must finally make peace with the past and embrace the modernity that surrounds us. Change *is* possible. We can be agents of a new revolution. I am not certain myself. But we have to try. We owe it to ourselves. We owe it to our artform.

Conclusion

In the last chapter, I have presented several ideas for the massive project that musicians have to undertake in order to improve the critical state in which the classical concert praxis is immersed in. It will not be rare that the reader might find these ideas inconsistent, incomplete, naïve, or mere wishful thinking. If you, reader, believe that is the case, please forget about them; erase them from your mind if you wish. As I have mentioned, we will make obvious blunders when starting to change the aspects of the concert practice that keep people from attending, since we still do not have enough experience, and I acknowledge that my ideas might just be a huge ball of those mistakes and misconceptions I have spoken about. We will certainly not know until we put them to the test.

However, what I do not want the reader to forget is the drive to generate new ideas; the conception of the structural problems that permeate the classical music concert culture and its consequences, and finally, the desire to explore, to bring people together, to find new ways to enjoy classical music as an artform. I believe I have contributed to the field by clearly stating these problems and providing sound reasoning for these issues, as well as offering ideas of my own on how to renovate the classical concert, by focusing on strong artistic premises and interdisciplinarity with other fields. I also want to draw attention to the humbleness we need to acquire to be able to understand this little world as a part of something bigger. The classical music world is one of the multiple sectors that exists in the huge cultural structure that is the history of global music, and alternatively, the history of human society.

I want to end this paper repeating once more one of the main points I expressed in the introduction. This paper will be for naught if it is not followed by factual action. Words are mere catalysts for human change and, in this paper, they illustrate the problems of the artform, the data, the cultural limitations. But there is only so much that words can do on their

own. Now, it is time for performers, composers, conductors, musicologists, programmers and business managers to act on the gravity of the problem and to take the lead in this fascinating field that will allow classical music to remain relevant in a society of the twenty-first century.

Epilogue: A Dream that Belongs to All of Us

It's concert night. The moon shines through and its cold glimmer can be seen reflected in the waters at the bottom of the cliff. On a mountain outlook, where you are right now, there is this small bar – or is it a terrace? – where a concert is going to take place. Apparently, a *classical* concert. It's kind of a shocker, actually. You had no idea classical music could live outside of its wealthy venues. You really don't know what is going to be performed, or even who is playing, but you saw it advertised in town and you decided to attend. Certainly, the setting looks beautiful enough to try it out. In the black poster ad, you could only find two words in white in the middle of the paper. You have no idea what they mean – maybe it is the name of the band, or maybe they mean something else entirely. When you saw the poster, however, you felt its calling. There was something in the poster that caught your attention. It was a silent invitation, like the touch of a child when they take your hand, or like the feeling of the spring breeze when it manages to ruffle your well-kept hair.

You have ordered a beer and now you calmly observe the space. There is no stage; or anything like it. There is, however, a counter at the other end of the area; two waiters there serve the customers the free drink they were granted with the acquisition of the ticket. "Thank you very much", they say, "The show will start at midnight." The lighting, minimal, consists of a few strands of colored-lighted bulbs that, placed here and there, give the setting a chill and serene atmosphere. Otherwise, only the full moon illuminates the terrace. You look at your watch. It's 23:47. Thirteen minutes left. You have no clue how are they planning to pull it off. Midnight comes and the noise hasn't died down yet. It's only natural – people are sitting at the tables of the vicinity, and they make use of this time before the performance to animatedly update the last news of their lives to each other. The sound starts with no preambles, with no warnings. At the end of the terrace, to the right of the counter, a violin and a viola have started playing. The musicians have not asked for permission for playing. They just started, as if they

held the conviction that the audience would listen. If the musicians were sitting there beforehand, while you waited; you do not know. At least, you are certain you had not spotted them before. The musicians were right; as soon as they started to play, the people went silent immediately. This abrupt start actually seems to have provoked some sort of enchantment within the audience. The concert-goers were not yet ready for the music, *but now they are listening*. Their attention was caught by the string players and now, undeniably, *they are listening*.

While you intently watch their smooth movements of their bows over the bridges, you wonder about the absence of program notes. This violin/viola duo sounds certainly beautiful, but you have no idea what they are playing, and there is no pamphlet that specifies exactly what it is. Certainly, it must not be anything composed prior to 1800. Is this… Debussy? Or maybe Britten? It could be. In any case, there is something in the style of the music that does not seem to match their music, or at least, with your conception of their music.
You immediately forget about the lack of program notes when two more people appear. They come from the sides of the venue; this is, one of them from the door and the other one from the far side of the counter. It is two women, of approximately the same height. One of them dresses in a beautiful yellow long dress, her hair tied firmly in a bun. The other one has a shaved head, wears colorful, baggy clothes and several pendants in different parts of her face. They walk slowly from their initial positions to the center of the space, ending up barely ten feet away from where the first tables are. They look at each other with each step, with every movement. They somehow manage to end up meeting in the center at the same time, accompanied by a remarkable crescendo in the music played by the strings.

They get closer to each other; swiftly extending their palms towards their faces – the audience silently gasps when they realize that they are covered in a blueish liquid that gets immediately smeared all over their faces. The music that plays, enveloping the whole scene that is happening in the outlook of the cliff, has an aura of nostalgia, of melancholy. However,

it does keep its clock-like rhythm, impeccable, impassible. The women, faces paint-stained, start to dance to that intoxicating rhythm. The woman in the yellow dress raises her arms, and her body surges and flies and glows – it is the full moon, that casts its glimmer over the blue paint in her face. The ballerina looks at the sky, at the stars, while her smooth movements in the air make her look like a dolphin when they jump out of the water, for just a second. She returns to the other woman, who now has a hand on the floor and whose body is contorting into weird shapes against the cold ground with astounding break dance moves.

There is something beautiful in the way they look at each other; in the connection you can intuitively sense between the two face-painted artists which such different performance styles. Even if their movements are radically opposite, – the ballerina being this ethereal, mystic creature, and the break dancer, a grounded powerhouse – they manage to always come back to each other, to not break the slim connection that is symbolized through the paint in their face. Every time they touch each other, they smear the paint all over their bodies, all over their clothes. They plunge themselves in the other dancer.

You realize they are not in the same spot anymore. Even though their contortions are constant, they are also approaching slowly the area of the space closer to the cliff. They are moving between the tables, and you understand now that there is not a lack of stage – the stage is there, everywhere, surrounding them. *The whole venue is the stage*. Whatever is being said there, it belongs to all of the people who are present on that day.

The moon shines through the tables, illuminating every step of the long way the dancers are covering in order to get to the desired spot. No one talks, no one moves. Everyone stares fixedly at the performers, as intently as the dancers look at each other. When they finally get to their destination, the contrast of the moonlight and the position they are in cast their figures in shadow. While they keep dancing, they keep honoring silently the indomitable rhythm produced by the strings. You realize in that moment you are not indifferent towards this; on the contrary, this rendition of beauty is making you feel something. This music is

speaking; is communicating an essence, a state. Somehow, it feels like this is the way this music, whatever it is, should be presented. You do not quite know what your current feeling is. But you do not need to understand what it is. That is not what is being asked of you, as a listener.

What you only have to do, *is to sit back and enjoy the ride*.

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