

Review Article

Classical Music's Conflicted Futures: Perspectives on the Industry and Academia from Recent Scholarship

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Geoffrey Baker, *Rethinking Social Action: The Search for Coexistence and Citizenship in Medellín Music Schools*. OpenBook Publishers, 2021. xv + 456 pp. ISBN 9781800641273 (hard cover); 9781800641266 (paperback); 9781800641280 (digital / PDF).

Classical Music: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges, ed. by Michael Beckerman and Paul Boghossian. OpenBook Publishers, 2021. xxxi + 199 pp. ISBN 9781800641143 (hard cover); 9781800641136 (paperback); 9781800641150 (digital / PDF).

Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession: New Ideas for Tackling Inequalities and Exclusions, ed. by Anna Bull, Christina Scharff, and Laudan Nooshin. Oxford University Press, 2023, xvi + 352 pp. ISBN 9780197601211 (hard cover); 9780197601259 (online).

If the current state of publishing is anything to go by, the classical music industry and music academia are in a state of crisis. This will come as little surprise to anyone either teaching, researching, or studying music, or existing in the professional world of musical performance. The mushrooming of edited volumes, journal articles, and think-pieces such as op-eds and podcasts, all offering perspectives on variations of classical music's 'challenges' and 'futures' is notable, and has only accelerated in recent years. More important than this quantity, however, is the sheer diversity of opinions, revealing how widely the ideological fissures across all corners of academic music studies and the classical music industry have deepened. Fraught debates have spilled over from the relatively insular bubbles of social media discourse and academic publications into national headlines.

This review article examines three titles published in the past three years that exemplify some of these core tensions and concepts. There are many more that speak to issues at the centre of ongoing conversations, namely surrounding (in)equality, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (broadly categorised under the acronyms EDI or DEI in the UK and North America, respectively). Each book — one monograph and two edited volumes — explores, from varied methodological and disciplinary vantage points, the roles and functions of western classical music in modern societies; calls for change in the practices of classical music pedagogy,

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particularly in conservatoires; topics of repertoire and programming; and the management and administration of music institutions.

Geoffrey Baker's *Rethinking Social Action: The Search for Coexistence and Citizenship in Medellín's Music Schools* (hereafter *RSA*) examines the phenomenon of 'social action through music', or 'SATM', in a focused and extremely detailed study on the Red de Músicas de Medellín in Colombia, a broad organization founded in 1996 (hereafter I will refer to it as the Red). This network of music schools — at the time of writing, twenty-seven — is managed by the municipal government of Medellín; it was originally founded to provide *entornos protectores* ('safe spaces') from the intense, turbulent periods of violence in the city at the end of the last century. Baker's remarkably nuanced and patient history of the Red achieves a number of objectives: it traces the origins and evolution of the institution's format, structure, and governance, from its early days as a balm to social ills to its development into a large civic-cultural organization, and it interrogates core concepts that apply across music education and social impact or philanthropic work, such as music as a tool for social change (i.e., SATM). Throughout, Baker uses his extensive fieldwork in Medellín to inform his analyses, always striking a necessary balance between self-reflection on his position as a (foreign) observer, scholar, and sometimes participant and consultant, and centring the voices and narratives of the Red's participants and representatives alongside his critical interrogation.

Readers will likely be more familiar with Venezuela's El Sistema, and it is the most frequent reference point in the book for very good reasons; the Red may have technically formed independently, but it evidently developed along similar parameters. Baker builds on his extensive earlier work,¹ which is both helpful for those unfamiliar with the Colombian context (but with a passing knowledge of the more famous Venezuelan organization), and also provides a constant counterpoint, where the tensions and issues that Baker examines in the Red are closely compared to those in El Sistema. *RSA*'s Part I traces the origins and development of the Red, loosely chronologically, but exploring the varied topics raised at length along the way, such as notions of citizenship and civic participation through the arts, the concept and flaws of SATM, the minutiae of the debates and tensions between the Red's different parts (e.g. music teachers, psychologists, administrators, sociologists), varied initiatives and relationships with local communities and the programme's intertwining with other non-musical facets of Medellín's social and urban transformation. Part II shifts focus to broader considerations of change and transformation, offering detailed analyses of more recent developments in both the Red and across thinking about music education and SATM in Latin America and beyond.

One need not be a Latin Americanist here: anyone with half a foot in ethnomusicology, music education, or arts and civic culture, can easily appreciate and engage with Baker's analyses. Parallels are quickly grasped with familiar contexts of evaluating music's role in society, attitudes towards music as a social tool, and the thorny histories and ideologies of the classical music profession. For those unfamiliar with core concepts, such as the aforementioned SATM, citizenship education, 'social impact of making music' (SIMM), and 'social justice through music education' (SJME), these are patiently and clearly explained and elaborated without becoming dull or textbook-like. Baker's study is unafraid to dwell periodically in the minutiae of meetings and workshops observed, in the internal critiques of management, staff, and students, also demonstrating how the imbrication of the Red with local government and urban planning has shaped its evolution. But a reader is steered well to relate these hyper-local happenings back to the broader philosophical, ideological, and practical questions that are

¹ Especially *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

raised by interrogating what kinds of meaningful social change are or can be achieved through music education. Baker's nuanced clarity throughout thus helps to navigate the impossibly existential big picture (what's the purpose of music in education?) through successes and failures in Medellín's musical landscape.

Classical Music: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges (hereafter *CMCPC*), co-edited by Michael Beckerman and Paul Boghossian, offers a varied look at the current problems facing classical music, featuring perspectives from academics, journalists, industry professionals, scientists, and performers. Evolving out of a think-tank based at New York University's Global Institute for Advanced Study 'to study the phenomenon of classical music's decline and to investigate ideas as to how its fortunes might be revived' (p. xxvii), it advances everything from philosophical ruminations on the value of classical music to neuroscientific and sociological-historical studies on music and education. The breadth of voices represented from outside academia is welcome, through which a reader can gain insights into inner workings of the industry that seldom fall under the auspices of academic research. At around 200 pages, it is something of a challenge to explore such variety of perspectives in detail. This can be advantageous, allowing a broad readership (especially students, and those not engaging regularly with academic scholarship) to dip their toes into diverse topics quite easily, but it also prevents, in my view, those ideas from developing in depth. Unifying the volume across sixteen very different chapters is, perhaps, Boghossian's early articulation of a 'sense of a community in crisis' (p. xxxv): whether from music journalists, academics, or arts administrators, each chapter identifies ways in which the practices and traditions of classical music are threatened or declining. Of the three volumes, *CMCPC* most consistently returns to the Covid-19 pandemic — understandably, given its timeline of publication. I see this as a necessary feature: while some of the discussions may already be outdated or have been superseded by subsequent developing pandemic and perhaps even post-pandemic life, *CMCPC* functions as a useful testimony from the 'thick of it', from the most turbulent and unsure period of the past four years.

Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession: New Ideas for Tackling Inequalities and Exclusions (hereafter *VfC*), co-edited by Anna Bull and Christina Scharff, with associate editor Laudan Nooshin, exhibits a broad spectrum of those within the classical music industry and within music studies in higher and secondary education who seek to make change, and who are involved in varying forms of activism, scholarly critique, and practical initiatives. In broad thematic sections such as 'Marginalized Voices', 'Activism: Starting with the Self', and 'Racial Inequalities', chapters focus largely on European, UK, and North American contexts. They examine everything from tackling opera companies' diversity initiatives to scholarly analyses of neoliberal philanthropy in the arts to sexual harassment in the industry. Similar to *CMCPC*, voices typically sidelined in academic publications are given considerable space: we hear from representatives of the Musicians' Union (MU), conductors, teachers, and performers alongside academics. The three co-editors bring a wealth of expertise across multiple sub-fields in scrutinizing the professional and academic worlds of classical music; Bull has published extensively on systemic issues in sexual assault and harassment and on questions of class, gender, and identity (this book can be read as a good companion to her 2019 solo-authored *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, published by Oxford University Press); Scharff's existing research zones in on inequality across the classical music industry, feminist practices and critiques, and topics of labour, activism, and neoliberalism; and Nooshin, as well as having published widely in ethnomusicology and sound studies (particularly on contemporary music cultures, Iran and the Middle East), is co-founder of the UK-based Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies (EDIMS) Network.

With twenty-six chapters in addition to an introduction and afterword, *VfC* represents a wide variation of perspectives. There is no unifying single approach to issues facing classical music as a profession. It covers a huge amount of ground, and the chapters can sometimes feel too brief — although a happy consequence is that this volume is exceptionally well-placed to be assigned to undergraduate and graduate student reading lists, or topical reading groups (it also features helpful discussion prompts and questions following the final chapters). Rather than a flaw, I suggest this is a way to approach engaging with the book: each chapter effectively offers a summary that would introduce a reader to key ideas, and provide a starting point for either further reading or, indeed, to extend this research. Some topics have been more widely written about than others, but all merit more attention from all corners.

However, rather than a standard book review of these volumes (having now introduced all three), the aim of this review article is to offer commentaries that draw on themes emerging from across the many authors represented in the publications. I have chosen the following threads to explore as ones that criss-cross each volume and which appear to me to be the most significant and broadly salient. There is, of course, a wealth of research comprised in these three books, and this review article is by no means a comprehensive discussion of every detail. The focus in these books is largely on the industry and education, rather than musicological or music-theoretical analyses of repertoire, though historical perspectives are still in evidence. Where performance practice is discussed, it is in consideration of evaluating and/or challenging norms and practices; where topics of repertoire and genre emerge, it is with regard to canonic processes, diversifying content, and challenges to the industry such as funding and the role of digital media.

Two flashpoints that have caused seismic ruptures in the contemporary social fabric, and whose ripple effects continue to shape perspectives on these matters, are inevitable framing contexts. Invoked across *VfC* and *CMCPC* are first the Covid-19 pandemic and, second, the murder of George Floyd and other racialized persons in the United States, and the ensuing uptick in global attention and action related to the Black Lives Matter movement. Both isolated and in intersection, the impact of the two phenomena is impossible to underestimate. The latter is not only invoked in musicological writing of the past four years that has sought specifically to address questions of diversity and systemic racism in arts and culture: it is frequently emphasized as a broad social framing that contextualizes recent scholarship (added, for instance, to other key sociopolitical rupture points this century, including 9/11, the Arab Spring, the 2016 US presidential election, Brexit, and the migration crisis in Europe). I am nevertheless wary, sometimes, of authors who reference the significance of Black Lives Matter only then to present arguments that seem to work in ideological contradistinction to efforts that seek to dismantle white supremacist systems of power and how they manifest in cultural spheres. It warrants continuous presence, not just a casual mention as almost reflexive context, but as part of a sustained and precise interrogation of systemic racism, and how classical music cultures are complicit. Both the former and the latter can be found in edited volumes under review.

Yet across the three books, a multifaceted tapestry emerges of snapshots of localised approaches and attitudes towards the evolving role of music in our society, offering some windows into a broad spectrum of musical communities, from Medellín to Manchester to Miami. Some of the approaches and attitudes are therefore indicative of hyper-specific contexts that will not necessarily be applicable elsewhere but nevertheless warrant attention. Indeed, it is valuable to read about initiatives happening across multiple continents and, importantly, not just in the metropolitan centres of London, New York, Los Angeles and so forth. Discussion

around change can gravitate towards the most mainstream and famous, but the more spaces there are to learn about and highlight what regional and local music institutions are doing, the better off we are.

It is likely of no surprise, then, that there are many different methodological approaches taken across the books, and all of which have merit. However, personal narratives and anecdotes emerge as especially valuable in adding to a growing body of first-person accounts of experiences of structural racism, sexism, ableism, and classism in classical music teaching and professions (see e.g. chapters 10–13 and 16–18 in *VfC*; chapter 10 in *CMCPC*). Qualitative analytical approaches are strongly represented in *VfC*, where semi-structured interviews form a large proportion of how studies have been conducted (e.g. chapters 1, 3, 5, and 14 in *VfC*, with emphases on conservatoires; *RSA* also naturally relies deeply on interviews). Quantitative data collection and/or analysis is repeatedly useful to highlight hard data on statistics such as audience attraction and retention (e.g. chapter 12 in *CMCPC*, discussing the New Audience Initiative); race and gender diversity (e.g. Maiko Kawabata's data on representation of East Asian musicians in symphony orchestras in Western Europe versus North America and the discussion of GRiNM [Gender Relations in New Music], chapters 14 and 24 in *VfC* respectively), or scientific studies on music and cognition (chapter 4 in *CMCPC*). The range of methodologies and strategies appears essential. We need to foreground individual stories as much as we need short- and long-term studies that provide clear pictures of what is happening in the industry. Repeated references in the books as well as in general academic and public discussions of 'crises' facing classical music need a fine balance between personal testimonies and evidence-based investigations.

Ideological Tensions

Laurent Bayle and Catherine Provenzano, in their chapter on classical music and technology (ch. 11, *CMCPC*), keenly emphasize a balanced view on multiple perspectives on the subject, particularly on the impact of the “digital revolution” (p. 105) on the music world. Through an examination of varied opinions (including, of course, their own), they probe the extent to which these technologies have improved our connectedness in and through music, and what negative consequences may have already resulted, asking: ‘for all the rapid developments of technological innovations that make things “easier,” “better,” or “more accessible,” at what point and pace does the residue of those growth spurts become slick with loss?’ (p. 104). Rather than any deep ideological chasm, they view the multitude as a ‘cacophony’ (p. 105): a noisy plethora of opinions jumbling together, rather than an unbridgeable divide. To some extent, it is a question of framing. While I also wish to avoid falling into a trap of over-emphasizing a kind of ‘culture wars’ oppositionality, from my perspective, reading across multiple chapters and volumes, stark ideological divides *do* present themselves. To illustrate: I see two core beliefs articulated in *CMCPC* (Premise 1 [P1]) and *VfC* and *RSA* (Premise 2 [P2]) respectively, which I boil down as follows:

P1. Classical music (as an artform, a profession, an industry) is in decline; the classical music community (broadly defined) is in crisis.

P2. Classical music (as an artform, a profession, an industry) has systemic issues that have fostered exclusionary and unequal cultures.

These are not mutually exclusive. P2 does not disagree with P1; it just adopts a different primary framework. If anything, P1 is taken *for granted* in P2; there is an underlying

assumption that there are things of value in classical music and that it is in a crisis state. Yet the focus is less on saving or preserving classical music traditions, and more about transforming them. Given the authors' divergence in diagnosing the causes of the current situation, their proposed solutions also differ. There are, consequently, moments of ideological divergence across the writings. Indeed, there is considerable disagreement in evidence on what issues are of the most pressing importance for these authors. In *VfC* and *RSA*, it is the 'inequalities and exclusions' of classical music practices that are placed at the centre; in *CMCPC*, authors grapple in various ways with asserting classical music's value, while being careful not to reify it as a superior art form (see chapter 1, 'On the Enduring Value of Classical Music in the Western Tradition', where Beckerman and Ellen T. Harris are at pains not to let 'value' be misunderstood as 'better'). There is a fundamentally different root approach in this latter volume to assessing the causes, symptoms, and potential treatments to classical music's ills, and one which is not exceptional or isolated, but representative of many who work with classical music. Such diagnostic problems, then, need to be addressed.

For example, Boghossian's preface to *CMCPC* lists nine questions that the NYU-based working group tackled, including the decline in music education, the impact of technology, the live concert experience, the prevailing whiteness and affluence of orchestras and their audiences, and the 'mausoleum-like character' of classical music (p. xxviii). Yet I see the latter two being far more rigorously scrutinised in *VfC* and *RSA* than in this volume. As a further example, Christopher Peacocke and Kit Fine's 'The Live Concert Experience: Its Nature and Value' (chapter 2, *CMCPC*) emphasizes the importance of live performance for its capacity to sustain the classical music tradition and as an important sociocultural function, with recorded music and digital engagements firmly put into second place. The authors place no blame on technology per se for a decline in classical music engagement, but some of the opinions discussed as a frame for their discussion (Furtwängler and Karajan, for example) can be troubling: 'it is hard to believe that a musical listener could flourish without ever having attended a live performance' (p. 10), or 'the performer intends the audience to hear the music in a certain way' (p. 8). (What does it mean to 'flourish' as a listener? How would flourishing be assessed — and by whom? How do we access the intentions of the performer, and why should it be important?). A philosophical exploration of the phenomenon of the 'live' experience can go hand in hand with critiques of classical music as inherently white supremacist. Yet in essence, this is a question of energies sometimes being focused in very different directions as to *what* problems are identified as most pressing.

Digital frustrations emerge in various ways: for some authors, recording technology and the digitization of classical music culture is a contributing factor to its state of crisis. Divergences appear again within *CMCPC*: Beckerman's introduction suggests that 'the staggering and increasing amount of online content has kept viewers at their smartphones and laptops and away from concert halls more than ever' (p. xxxvi). Bayle and Provenzano's aforementioned chapter offers, contrastingly, a more nuanced exploration of the multifaceted relationships between classical music and technology. Zachary Woolfe's assessment of the twin declines of print media and music journalism (chapter 6) is similarly more practical in accepting that writing about music will have to figure out ways to chart paths through the 'digital ecosystem' (p. 49). Claims like Beckerman's are ones I want to see scrutinized more using qualitative and quantitative surveys of audience behaviour, not just assumptions, for example as shown in Howard Herring and Craig Hall's discussion of the New Audience Initiative in chapter 12. Are audience not coming to the symphony because they are glued to Netflix, or is the bigger problem audience *retention*? Why, as Alex Ross importantly outlines in chapter 5, are audiences

for *new music* thriving in the demographics that other institutions crave (younger, more diverse, etc.)? This is where the critiques of the social structures of classical music that are more prevalent in *VfC* are vital.

A core theme grappled with throughout *RSA*, of course, is the very function and role of music in society; scrutinising *SATM*, Baker's text explores in depth the range of evolving ideologies in the Red's history that treat music as an end in itself, or as a means or tool to achieve specific non-musical goals: social mobility, financial security, moral betterment, peace — *convivencia* — personal development, interpersonal conflict resolution, small- and large-scale social change. As it becomes evident quickly, there is no one-to-one music *act* followed by, say, social *consequence*. Music-enabled social change is not a linear but a multilayered process. Baker's central argument with respect to music's 'inherent power to transform society' (p. 18) is hence an essentially cautionary and sceptical position towards 'over-simplification and exaggeration' (p. 17). Instead, it is music's 'ambiguity' that he insists upon. That is, music's 'mystique' or 'power' is neither innate nor self-evident, and attachment to either idea is an idealistic position that is ultimately unhelpful. However, music's mystique/power underpins, problematically, many ideologies behind music-social initiatives. That is, it is taken as a given that music possesses a kind of intangible 'good', *uncritically* — and this is a key word! — ascribing powers to it. See, relatedly, *Culture Is Bad For You*, by Orian Brook, Dave O'Brien, and Mark Taylor (Manchester University Press, 2020), which provocatively and convincingly challenges this dominant creed that culture (or the arts) is inherently good (for you). Therefore, in situations where music is the chosen tool to effect some kind of change, the lack of critical attention to this assumption of music's *a priori* abilities can end up clouding other systemic issues or functioning as a stand-in for meaningful change. For example, music's ability to aid an individual (e.g. instrumental lessons as a tool to 'lift' someone out of poverty) can preclude sustained attention to what might actually be needed and impactful. Here, music 'itself' (that is, the mere presence of music where it was not before) is imbued with seemingly magical properties; the music *is enough on its own* to effect this change.

Such faith in music's immanent goodness and social value is shown repeatedly, in *RSA* and through the studies in *VfC* that reveal deep inequities in the industry, to be problematic when left under-scrutinized. Baker's insistence on music's intrinsic 'ambiguity' is a vital corrective to this belief, in particular when it manifests as a deploying of classical music's inherent abilities for positive social change. His analyses force a confrontation with one of the most uncomfortable truths for us as a field to deal with, but it is a rock that needs turning over and the messiness underneath to be dealt with. Few of us wish to argue that music is not innately special; in Mina Yang's vital analysis of the 'YOLA' (Youth Orchestra Los Angeles) initiative in *VfC*, for instance, she notes that it feels 'curmudgeonly' to critique it, to 'find fault with any effort into the lives of our youth' (p. 85). But she demonstrates, as Baker does for El Sistema and the Red, the vital necessity of critical scrutiny of the ethics and ideologies of EDI/DEI-related programmes that function as a 'concrete instantiation of neoliberal philanthropy' (p. 83), ending up with selective small numbers of students given access to 'high art', rather than as many children as possible getting a music education. In comparison, chapter 4 of *CMCPC* by Assal Habibi, Hanna Damasio, and Antonio Damasio similarly studies participants in YOLA in a longitudinal neuroscientific study, but with an emphasis on how music education aids development in terms of executive function, motor skills, cognition, and behaviour. While valuable, these kinds of studies cannot be isolated from — and would do well to be informed by — the critiques of the 'white saviorism' and 'corporatization of public education' (p. 85) that intersect with YOLA and similar programs. Without these two sides, studies such as Habibi

et al.'s risk being used as justification for continuing these El Sistema-legacy programmes uncritically, never challenging their ideological foundations, because it is easier to hang onto the positive data results that music *helps*, music *does good for us*.

This also reminds us of the need to address often contrasting perceptions between a general musical public, donors and investors, and scholars. For instance, as a result of its global fame and the many international accolades and attention given to both the organisation and its founder, José Antonio Abreu, there is a considerable amount of deeply critical literature from within music education, community music, and music and social justice fields on El Sistema. Nonetheless, it is also clear that this criticism is not widely known, or acknowledged, in popular society and government-arts areas; on the contrary, it is evidently still referred to as a model to be followed elsewhere.² Prior research findings by Baker and his co-authors has also demonstrated a gulf between 'largely negative responses of critical scholars and the almost entirely positive conclusions of published evaluations'.³

Institutions and Industry: Towards Action and Change

A point made repeatedly in different ways throughout *VfC* and *RSA* is that institutions and industries of classical music replicate, reproduce, and thereby contribute to sustaining social hierarchies and inequalities. This claim about classical music is only occasionally tackled, and more obliquely, in *CMCPC*. In her chapter in *VfC*, for instance, Jenny Joy Porton specifically applies Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and social capital to the environments of classical music conservatoires, focusing on England and Wales in the period 1998–2018.

Frequently in *RSA*, meanwhile, do parallels emerge between the issues faced throughout the growth of the Red and structural dynamics explored in *VfC* in North American and European contexts, despite the very different social circumstances — the common denominator being the culture of (western/European) classical music. For one Medellín city official quoted, the Red is 'a colonial phenomenon ... it's perpetuating a colonial dynamic' (p. 64). Baker later notes how the growth of decolonial thinking across Latin America is reshaping music education. Thus, he argues, what is necessary is not the demise of classical music, but serious interrogation of whether 'conventional classical training should be the primary model for musical social-action programs [and] whether it should play such a dominant role in music education in former European colonies, reproducing the cultural hierarchy of the colonial period' (p. 294). So too does Rainer Prokop and Rosa Reitsamer's analysis of the role of music conservatoires in the making of classical music careers (chapter 2, *VfC*) emphasize the necessity for interrogation and self-awareness, describing how 'narratives of luck ... become disembedded from social structures' (p. 36). Notions of luck, chance, or coincidence are further uncomfortable rocks in need of repeated turning over, and ones I have seen play a core role in recent acidic debates among music academics and performers, particularly over the charged notion of classical music's 'elitism'. Many have trouble disengaging from a personal narrative that emphasizes happenstance over recognition of structural questions of power and privilege — I was *lucky* that my

² Among others, see for instance Owen Logan's assessment of the influence of El Sistema in Scotland, in 'Lifting the Veil: A Realist Critique of Sistema's Upwardly Mobile Path', *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 15.1 (2016), pp. 58–88.

³ Geoffrey Baker, Anna Bull, and Mark Taylor, 'Who Watches the Watchmen? Evaluating Evaluations of El Sistema', *British Journal of Music Education*, 35.3 (2018), pp. 255–69 (p. 255), doi:[10.1017/S0265051718000086](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051718000086).

small South London primary school happened to have a passionate music teacher, and I was *lucky* that my (non-academic, non-professional musician) parents happened to play a lot of Vivaldi and Handel at home. The very idea of privilege, and the self-reflection it demands, still raises hackles. Yet, like the recently galvanized conversations around the colonial pasts of British institutions, statues, and families, such self-reflection is not an exercise in self-flagellation but in understanding how this history emphatically continues to shape present cultural and economic realities. As Prokop and Reitsamer conclude in arguing that alternative criteria and methods of evaluation and assessment in the conservatoire context need to be developed, this again brings us back to notions of power, to challenging 'teachers' self-concepts that are structured by whiteness' (p. 39) — in other words, to follow Philip Ewell's concept — to challenging music's 'white racial frame'.⁴

I think here again of *Culture Is Bad For You*, whose authors put it very simply: 'Who produces culture reflects social inequality ... who consumes culture reflects social inequality ... the way we define culture reflects social inequality' (p. 2). Though noting that the Red is much more ambiguous than El Sistema, Baker nevertheless articulates the crux of the matter in a similar way: 'programs like El Sistema and the Red embrace progressive discourses such as social inclusion and social change, but in practice they often show more signs of reproducing the conventional, conservative gender dynamics of their surrounding societies and perpetuating the historical gender inequalities of orchestral culture' (p. 199). It is not hard to extrapolate from Baker's critique, with some modifications, to similar contexts across Europe and North America.

As Baker argues, pathways to solutions are not about abandoning classical music education, but decentering its power and prime position. For the fears expressed often in *CMCPC* of a tradition under threat, this might seem like a further nail in the coffin. Rather, I think it becomes clear that such decentering is probably one of the few ways by which to ensure the long-term health of classical music professions. Instead of cleaving to it as a great cultural emblem potentially doomed for extinction, it is a constant process of questioning and frank interrogation that is needed.

We thus arrive, here, at perhaps the most entrenched and thorny question grappled with either explicitly or implicitly across these volumes: what to actually change, and how to go about it? Unsurprisingly, this rears its head in the form of the old dilemma. Do we change a system from within, tear it down or, perhaps, disengage to create new alternatives? Some authors focus on access and inclusion as a primary vehicle for change by, for instance, widening access to existing structures through robust recruitment of and increased training pipelines for underrepresented groups (e.g. Susan Feder's contribution in chapter 10 of *CMCPC*). Some advocate for more radical and substantial overhaul of classical music practices and systems as a whole, for example Antonio C. Cuyler's description in *VfC* of 'Blacktivism' in the opera industry, which 'pushes opera and all of classical music towards antiracism and creative justice' (p. 264).⁵ Still others illuminate the possibilities of sidestepping existing systems in favour of

⁴ See Philip Ewell, 'Music Theory's White Racial Frame', *Music Theory Spectrum*, 43.2 (2021), pp. 324–29, doi:10.1093/mts/mtaa031, and *On Music Theory, and Making Music More Welcoming for Everyone* (University of Michigan Press, 2023). See also Sara Ahmed's invaluable critique of institutional whiteness in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Duke University Press, 2012).

⁵ For more work by Cuyler on this topic, see for example *Access, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Cultural Organizations: Insights from the Careers of Executive Opera Managers of Color in the US* (Routledge, 2020), and 'Moving Beyond @operaisracist' in *Music as Labour: Inequalities and Activism in the Past and Present*, edited by Dagmar Abfalter and Rosa Reitsamer (Taylor & Francis, 2022).

grassroots alternatives, for instance in Marianna Ritchey's stringent and vital critique of the politics of representation and diversity discourse in the US (chapter 7, *VfC*).⁶ Here, Ritchey advocates for an 'anti-institutional orientation' (p. 99) that instead focuses on autonomous community building, drawing inspiration from non-musical political action that is rooted in one's immediate communities such as mutual aid. This would entail, therefore, 'a radical re-envisioning not just of classical music but of the social world itself' (p. 100). An interesting corollary to this is Baker's reference to conflicting views within Medellín's cultural scene, where aspects of programs like the Red are seen as institutionalised and irrevocably imbricated with government structures, citing a member of the audio-visual collective Pasolini in Medellín, Lukas Perro, who 'was more interested in disruptive voices from the margins' (p. 169).

As Gillian Moore succinctly puts it in her afterword to *Voices for Change*, classical music is a 'product of historic imbalances of power' (p. 297), a statement that holds true beyond music. This is a core underlying thread in at least *VfC* and *RSA*. Analyses of power in these three volumes reveal themselves to be vital, and also again show different attitudes towards existing institutional structures. Deborah Borda's chapter in *CMCPC*, 'The Serious Business of the Arts: Good Governance in Twenty-First Century America', offers useful perspectives from within arts administration on the practical challenges facing classical music bodies. While noting that executive boards tend to be majority white men and the need for change, this, for Borda, 'must be led from within the board' (p. 61) to achieve success. In contrast, Quodesia Johnson's interviews with Cuyler in *VfC* brings up the need for power to shift, essentially arguing that those who have it want to keep it, and motions for change don't often come about with a self-reflective look at questioning one's own power, and how to yield it. Instead, efforts are often thwarted by resistance to giving up power (p. 259). Alex Ross's suggestion in *CMCPC* that new music people could look to collaborate more with bigger institutions sidesteps the question of where power is concentrated, whereas other authors are laser-focused on probing where this power is *unyielding* as the root issue. Across these volumes are very different attitudes towards achieving change. The question remains as to whether these diverging attitudes will simply continue in parallel but potentially non-complementary tracks, or have the capacity to merge.

Solutions and steps for action are discussed and proposed by the volume's authors, representing a range of theoretical, ideological, and/or practical approaches to change. Some are evaluative (i.e., exploring and assessing ways in which change has already been attempted and/or achieved), while some are suggestive. We glean insights across the three volumes of just the tip of the iceberg, really, of the staggering quantity of projects and initiatives that have flourished to address inequality in the music world, such as, in *VfC*, the Chineke! Orchestra (chapter 22), the 'Illuminate Women's Music Concert Series' (chapter 21), the Black Opera Alliance and the Black Administrators of Opera (chapter 23), and Beth Higham-Edwards's varied activism on gender and classical music in the UK (chapter 10). Especially since 2020, and since decolonizing discourses landed more distinctly in North American and western European academic discussions, the proliferation of non-profit initiatives external to academia have been matched by increasing swathes of resources and initiatives aimed at music studies. Here is a short list: Engaged Music Theory, Project Spectrum, EDIMS, Anti-Racist Music Theory Examples and Composers of Color Humanities Commons site, Black Composers in IMSLP, Decolonising the Music Room, Music Theory Examples by Women Composers, Plainsight

⁶ For more by Ritchey on similar topics, see *Composing Capital: Classical Music in the Neoliberal Era* (University of Chicago Press, 2020).

Sound, Inclusive Early Music, and the Online Database of Musical Representations of Disability.

Familiar with this arena from my own work in teaching, performing, and research, two strong impressions and questions coalesced for me as I read these three volumes. First, what is the longer-term goal of these initiatives, and does plurality (i.e., the increasing quantity of different and specialised resources and projects) hinder or strengthen longevity? I offer no firm answer here, but a suggestion for consideration: is the answer more coalescing and collaboration? Contrastingly, would increasing the spread and quantity of these projects help to decentralize power — to have more effect as the kinds of community building Ritchey outlines?

Second, as these projects continue on gender, race, class, disability, and so on, how do we address questions of intersectionality? Initiative such as Keychange, for example, often express goals centred squarely on gender, e.g. aiming to achieve 50/50 gender representation in music programming. In the years since I first encountered discussion of Keychange at a conference on women and music in Budapest in January 2020, the conversations have certainly developed: Keychange's 'Manifesto 2.0' (2024), for instance, focuses language more directly on overall issues of equity and diversity, aiming to achieve 'a wider, more equitable, inclusive and intersectional representation in the music industry'.⁷ I mention Keychange not to criticise its valuable work, and crucially, its important cross-disciplinary and cross-border structure, covering popular and classical music in multiple countries. I am keen to note its language on emphasizing the need for intersectional representation, and its open reflection on issues that have had less attention, such as trans and non-binary musicians. Largely, though there is more acknowledgement of race and ethnic background and general language about intersectionality, every graphic in the 'manifesto' details statistics and data collected focuses on gender. Elsewhere, George Lewis summarises the paucity of available ethnic and racial statistics in comparison to gender in conversations about music.⁸ A recent *New York Times* article on the topic of the lack of gender parity in classical music similarly focuses on the Wiener Festwochen and the initiative of the 'Academy of Second Modernism' to 'showcase works by 50 female and nonbinary composers over five years'.⁹ Statistics from the UK-based organisation Donne, Women in Music are similar to those in Keychange's 'Manifesto 2.0', noting that this season, 'less than 8 percent of approximately 16,000 works staged by 111 orchestras worldwide were composed by women ... Of those works, the vast majority were composed by white women'.¹⁰ Although the last note brings us closer to an intersectional lens, it remains underdeveloped in these high-profile international collaborative organizations that seek equitable change. Intersectional approaches are evident in US-based organizations in classical music, such as the Black Opera Alliance and Black Women in Opera (among others). Yet, in publications and movements for gender equality in music in Europe, they tend more often to be an afterthought than a central concern.

⁷ Keychange Manifesto 2.0 (2024), p. 2, <<https://www.keychange.eu/themanifesto>> [accessed 1 October 2024]. Keychange has three core partners: PRS Foundation (UK), Reeperbahn Festival (Germany) and Musikcentrum Öst (Sweden), a network of partners from across 12 countries, and a Keychange U.S.

⁸ George E. Lewis, 'A Small Act of Curation', *On Curating* 44 (2020), pp. 11–22.

⁹ Valeria Safronova, "No Excuses Anymore" for Gender Inequality in Classical Music', *New York Times*, 6 June, 2024 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/06/arts/music/wiener-festwochen-gender-inequality-classical-music.html>> [accessed 1 October 2024].

¹⁰ Ibid.

It does not seem far-fetched to claim that we are in an unprecedented era of scrutiny and questioning over the existence and futures of the classical music industry and music academia. Finishing my reading for this review article, another new publication emerged grappling with the topic, *Classical Music Futures: Practices of Innovation*, promising a broad range of conversations on similar issues.¹¹ I see this continuing work as vital to sustaining the needed conversations that bring together voices from academia, industry, and other sectors. However, I also think of Lewis's note, for instance, that 'regular encounters in the USA and Europe with major festivals and educational programs devoted to contemporary music show that the paucity of nonwhite ethnicities, particularly the Afrodiasporic, is so obviously extreme as to oblige direct action now, without waiting for studies'.¹² As we continue to navigate through the 'cacophony' of perspectives on classical music's conflicted pasts and futures, taking such immediate action as individuals must feature alongside the many large questions raised throughout these volumes that we need to address and grapple with as a field. Thinking about some of the issues raised in these and similar recent publications is often fuel for existential spirals that take us away from the immediate lived realities we can work within. Rather, discussion of this recent literature should prompt further conversations across industry and academia, but also ignite urgent action. Each of these volumes speaks to ideological and practical tensions that warrant more investigation, but also remind us that many voices for change are heard quietly and locally, beginning with whatever 'small acts' we can each immediately do, in our classrooms and on our stages.

¹¹ Edited by Neil Thomas Smith, Peter Peters, and Karoly Molina (OpenBook Publishers, 2024).

¹² Lewis, 'A Small Act of Curation', p. 16.