

MUSICIANS' RESPONSE: POST-INSTRUMENTAL PRACTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract: This article is situated within the framework of a definition of curation of new music that includes, in addition to the choice of pieces, venues and players, the active choice of specific tools and roles that will be filled by people, roles that have rich traditions and expectations and are thus ripe for instrumentalisation. In earlier research we have demonstrated that the roles of musicians within new music have been instrumentalised, and in this article we aim to better understand the musicians' response. One such observable response has been dubbed by artist–researchers Håkon Stene and Louise Devenish as 'post-instrumental practice'. In this article we will discuss how and where we also observe this trend. We then test its sustainability through in-depth interviews with venue organisers and artistic directors as well as analysing funding and employers' organisations' published policies on socially and economically sustainable practices.

Introduction

Soprano and curator Christie Finn, one of our first interviewees for this article, set the tone when she said, 'transferability: I think it's very problematic in new music'. She was specifically referring to pieces that she has premiered and commissioned: works that 'were written for her and her capacities'¹ and are thus difficult to transfer to other singers, musicians, ensembles and settings. She also remarked that the skills she acquired for certain pieces were so piece-specific that they too became difficult to transfer. She invested precious resources in learning these new aptitudes but, 'problematically', they may never be used again. This subject often arose in the interviews we conducted with performers, organisers and composers:² both person-specific and piece-specific performance practices in contemporary music can be rather singular, one-time events in which the performer invests enormous amounts of time and energy for perhaps only a handful of performances, sometimes only one.³

¹ Christie Finn, interview by Thomas R. Moore, 10 October 2023.

² Between October 2024 and March 2024 in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 professional performers, concert organisers and composers active in Europe and abroad.

³ Thomas R. Moore, 'This Is My Instrument: An Approach towards Performance Practice for Integrated Concerts', *INSAM Journal of Contemporary Music, Art and Technology*, 10 (2023), pp. 90–108, <https://doi.org/10.51191/issn.2637-1898.2023.6.10.90>.

This kind of continual retraining and amassing of performance practices may be attributed to what the performance and visual artists of the Brazil-based INLAND have called a ‘thirst for the new’. The ‘succession and fast programming and the allure of a global scale of artists and institutional exchange’⁴ has spread its roots throughout all aspects of artistic and concert programming in the Western world. New music has not been immune to this insatiable thirst and, perhaps more importantly, nor has its funding organisations. Composers and new-music curators are shamed, often berated, and sometimes unfunded for their lack of innovation. This was even a main topic at the 2024 European Platform for Artistic Research in Music.⁵ We are not making any kind of value judgement about this; we are simply setting the scene. Innovation is required in the arts but it does have consequences for performing artists and that is the perspective which we adopt in this article.

We are also not insinuating that innovation is a one-sided activity. In a conversation with Saskia Lankhoom, pianist with Ensemble Klang in The Netherlands, she explained that she often presents composers with new sounds she has discovered:

Sometimes there are just really beautiful sounds that come out of [previous projects or experiments]. We [Ensemble Klang] also work, for example, with composers who are much freer and say, ‘Gosh, it should sound something like this. What ideas do you have?’ And then I use those ideas [and sounds] that I gained [from] different written-out works to create something new. So actually those ideas and those techniques become, in part, a part of what [I] can do.⁶

Yet overwhelmingly, in the genre of new music,⁷ it is composers and artistic directors who take the initiative and utilise musicians, their capacities, skills and concert-ritualised roles for their own specific artistic needs.⁸ Players are viewed as instruments for composers and artistic directors to examine; the available components are taken, rearranged à la carte or reorganised in new ways.⁹ Consider, for example, the plethora of pieces that employ composer-made digital, mechanical and/or acoustic instruments, each of which requires a combination of existing skills with new performance practices.

In accordionist Andreas Borregaard’s PhD he describes how new disciplinary approaches and methods, such as acting, dancing and gestural studies, must sometimes also be acquired to tackle new performative works, especially by the composers whom Jennifer Walshe grouped in her manifesto ‘The New Discipline’.¹⁰ In his abstract he writes:

⁴ INLAND, ‘Watching Grass Grow: Forms of Care & Cultivation’, in *Sensing Earth: Cultural Quests across a Heated Globe*, eds Philipp Dietachmair, Pascal Gielen, Georgia Nicolau (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2023), pp. 123–31.

⁵ Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC), ‘Call for Proposals’, <https://aec-music.eu/event/european-platform-for-artistic-research-in-music-eparm-2024/call-for-proposals> (accessed 30 March 2024).

⁶ Saskia Lankhoom, interview by Thomas R. Moore, 10 November 2024.

⁷ In this article we define ‘new music’ and ‘contemporary music’ as music having been written since 1950 and in the Western art-music tradition.

⁸ Thomas R. Moore, ‘Redefining the Conductor’s Role in New Music Ensembles: Artistic and Socioeconomic Motivations for Instrumentalizing the Conductor’, in *Auf’s Spiel Gesetzt: Interpretation im Fokus*, eds Christa Brüstele and Karolin Schmitt-Weidmann (Mainz: Schott Verlag, 2023), pp. 28–53.

⁹ Thomas R. Moore, ‘Conductor à la Carte: Artistic and Practical Motivations for Utilizing a Conductor in New Music Ensembles Performing Integrated Concerts’, *Perspectives of New Music*, 60, no. 2 (2022), pp. 191–211, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pnm.2022.a914774>.

¹⁰ Walshe lists James Saunders, Matthew Shlomowitz, Neele Hülcker, François Sarhan, Jessie Marino, Steven Takasugi, Natacha Diels and James Saunders in Jennifer Walshe, ‘The New

The musician's moving, dancing, touching, speaking, singing, shouting, grimacing, sounding body opens a novel and still expanding palette of expression – but its use also requires new skills that are currently not an explicit part of higher musical education or standard musical performance practice.¹¹

Borregaard systematically explored pieces and methods that demonstrate what it means to be a performing musician in new music today. Like Lankhoorn, he progressively built a repertoire that he shared and allowed to influence his newest collaborator. He distinguished his approach to performing and acquiring new skills through the vast multidisciplinary realm into which he threw his nets. As the percussionist Louise Devenish writes, Borregaard's practice continually 'expands the definition of "instrumental" or "musical" material beyond sonic instrumentality', thus meeting the first of four characteristics she lays out for what she has called a 'post-instrumental practice'.¹² Louis Andriessen once suggested that, before the rise of specialist post-instrumental performers, composers would often depend on fellow composers to perform their music, relying on collegiality and shared ideas about experimentalism and performativity.¹³

Devenish's article charts a collection of practices towards which performing musicians like Borregaard, Lankhoorn and Finn have relatively recently gravitated. She lays out four key characteristics of what percussionist and artistic researcher Håkon Stene¹⁴ first called 'post-percussive practice' and which Devenish was later able to further discursively develop and demonstrate are prevalent across the full spectrum of musicians. The first, already discussed above, is instrumentality. Alongside Borregaard's work, another clear example is found in Mark Applebaum's *Tlön* (1995). Here three conductors face the audience and conduct a piece; it is clearly music, yet there is no sonic material besides the occasional page turn and the grunting of the performers. Applebaum explains in the preface that he has instrumentalised the music-making material, in this case the conductors' movement repertoire, pushing it 'beyond sonic instrumentality' and using it as the musical material itself.¹⁵ Another example can be found in Andy Ingamells' *Bowmanship* (2018) in which the composer-performer utilises only a bow and the 'behaviour of a classical concert soloist':

This piece is about extended instrumental playing techniques, a trope of mid- to late 20th-Century Western classical music, and their theatricality. I made this by using a violin bow as a sword to perform a disciplined sword-demonstration routine. . . [It] was rigorously rehearsed because I find a seemingly frivolous action executed with seriousness to be funny, highlighting the absurdity of concert performance rituals.¹⁶

Discipline', Milker Corporation, <http://milker.org/the-new-discipline> (accessed 20 July 2021).

¹¹ Andreas Borregaard, 'Just Do It! Exploring the Musician's (Use of) Bodily Performance' (Ph.D. dissertation, Norwegian Academy of Music, 2023), www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1926394/1926412 (accessed 30 March 2024).

¹² Louise Devenish, 'Instrumental Infrastructure, Instrumental Sculpture and Instrumental Scores: A Post-Instrumental Practice', *Music & Practice*, 9 (2021), p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.32063/0906>.

¹³ Louis Andriessen, conversation with Maya Verlaak, 2010.

¹⁴ Stene Håkon, 'Towards a Post-Percussive Practice', *Music & Practice*, no. 2 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.32063/0204>.

¹⁵ Mark Applebaum, 'Tlön' (1995); Moore, 'Redefining the Conductor's Role in New Music Ensembles'.

¹⁶ Andy Ingamells, 'Bowmanship', Andy Ingamells, 31 August 2020, <https://andyingamells.com/bowmanship/> (accessed 30 March 2024).

The second characteristic of post-instrumental practice that Devenish sets out is plurality: the ‘use of instrumental materials to fulfil a plurality of sonic and non-sonic roles in performance’.¹⁷ In an earlier article on the Belgian Nadar Ensemble, we argued that this characteristic can be found in much of this ensemble’s approach and performance practice. The musicians in the group have all become specialists in applying ‘instrumental materials’, such as their principal instruments and elements of musical training, to their performing roles. For example, in a performance at the 2014 Darmstadt Summer Course for New Music, the percussionist, cellist and clarinetist also performed as drone pilots. They acted on musical and choreographic cues and, although not visible, were clearly still members of the performing ensemble rather than backstage assistants.¹⁸

Further examples of applying and introducing (new) ‘instrumental materials to fulfil a plurality of sonic and non-sonic roles’ can be found in Jessie Marino’s *My heart has teeth* (2022),¹⁹ for soprano and double bass, and Robert Blatt’s *Memory Studies: Recording Series (Beach Bums)* (2015/16). In Marino’s duo the performers play chattering plastic teeth, call bells, sticks and the table, beat their chests, speak and move in time, as well as singing and playing double bass. In the Blatt the musicians first perform a series of instructions on a beach. These are recorded and then played back in a concert hall. One set of instructions, entitled ‘tracing’, asks the performers to roll in the sand with a camera on their heads. During the live concert the performers write memories from the beach performance on a blackboard while the corresponding video is played for the audience. Performing this piece means embodying (and living) the work; it is not about simply performing a series of activities. The material required for *Beach Bums* is:

3 dictaphones, 3 notebooks, 9 postcards, 2 books, 3 beer bottles with bottle caps, 5 fried food containers with forks and napkins, 15 videos (3 screens), 3 loudspeakers synced to videos, 2 audio recordings with headphones, 2 loudspeakers with independent audio and conversations at the bar [4 hours]²⁰

Transferral is the third observable characteristic and perhaps the most recognisable to a new-music public. In many new-music concerts it is common to see performers switching between their principal instruments and new, sometimes composer-made, instruments. Devenish describes this characteristic as the transfer of ‘methods, materials and mediums from *multiple artforms*’, making it clear that this kind of ‘transferral’ is reliant on a player’s training as well as being an interdisciplinary approach. The latter is similar to composer Simon Steen-Andersen’s ‘hyper-concrete’ approach to composition, exemplified in his pieces *AMID* (2004) and *Besides Besides* (2004/2006). While composing *AMID*, Steen-Andersen analysed the wind players’ breathing, created a gestural notation to indicate the performance method and then directly and ‘concretely’ transcribed the methods to the other five players.²¹

¹⁷ Devenish, ‘Instrumental Infrastructure, Instrumental Sculpture and Instrumental Scores’.

¹⁸ Moore, ‘This Is My Instrument’.

¹⁹ Ensemble ATMUSICA, ‘Jessie Marino – My heart has teeth (excerpt) – Soprano et contrebasse’, YouTube, 2023, www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWjTlqjC30M (accessed 30 March 2024).

²⁰ Robert Blatt, *Memory Studies: Recording Series (Beach Bums)*, 2016, <https://robertblatt.riercata.org/pieces/RecordingSeriesBeachBums.html> (accessed 30 March 2024).

²¹ Thomas R. Moore and Pascal Gielen, ‘The Politics of Conducting’, *Music & Practice*, 9 (2021), p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.32063/0903>.

'Transferral' also forms the basis for what Christie Finn has noted as piece-specific performance practices. Devenish describes it thus:

Utilising 'technique transferral' as a means of exploration and execution, and subsequent development of performance practices specific to individual works, rather than individual instruments.²²

In other words, playing methods that have been created for a specific piece may not be transferable to subsequent works or fellow performers. Stockhausen's famous Helicopter String Quartet offers a good example of the kind of 'development of a performance practice' that is specific to an 'individual work'. Although the piece has been performed more than once and by different performers, its instrumentation is not accessible and has not subsequently been used in other pieces; the four helicopters are a unique and piece-specific practice.

The fourth characteristic of post-instrumental practice that Devenish delineates is integration. Like 'transferral', Devenish divides 'integration' into two sub-categories. The first speaks to a trans- or cross-disciplinary approach: 'Blending of acoustic and digital instruments, of technologies and practices, and of disciplines and artforms'.²³ In other words, ensembles that perform integrated concerts 'blend' elements such as 'video, light and sound design (including live electronics), costuming, decor, and utilization'²⁴ and/or instrumentalisation of the musicians and their (perceived) roles. Examples of such ensembles include Nadar (Belgium), Klangforum Wien (Austria), MusikFabrik (Germany), Sound Initiative (France), Pamplemousse (US), Nemø (Belgium) and Ensemble Klang (The Netherlands). This subsection would also include the approach that Borregaard explored while collaborating with Jennifer Walshe on *PERSONHOOD* (2001), for accordion soloist and chamber orchestra. This piece exemplifies her 'New Discipline' manifesto, in which she invokes a composition style that 'integrates' the 'physical, theatrical, visual, as well as musical'²⁵ elements 'into one whole, authored from a single unified perspective'.²⁶

The second subsection of Devenish's integration describes the collaborative efforts now prevalent in new music and other performing arts ventures: 'Development of new work by communities of artists'.²⁷ Often these communities' coming together is based on a common cause or a shared training at university or conservatoire, examples including the concert series Post-Paradise²⁸ and Weisslich²⁹ in England, DNK³⁰ in Amsterdam and the venue KM28³¹ in Berlin.

While discussing Devenish's observations, cultural activist Katrien Reist suggested in our interview with her that collaboration in the performing arts is perhaps more of a symptom of our times than a deliberate development.³² If there were more means and funding, individual artists might remain individual and not venture so frequently into cross-disciplinary partnerships. Because we 'must all act and attempt to

²² Devenish, 'Instrumental Infrastructure, Instrumental Sculpture and Instrumental Scores', p. 15.

²³ Devenish, 'Instrumental Infrastructure, Instrumental Sculpture and Instrumental Scores', p. 15.

²⁴ Moore, 'Redefining the Conductor's Role in New Music Ensembles', p. 30.

²⁵ Walshe, 'The New Discipline', p. sp.

²⁶ Moore and Gielen, 'The Politics of Conducting', p. 20.

²⁷ Devenish, 'Instrumental Infrastructure, Instrumental Sculpture and Instrumental Scores', p. 15.

²⁸ Post-Paradise, <https://postparadise.ricercata.org/About.html> (accessed 31 March 2024).

²⁹ Weisslich, <https://weisslich.com/> (accessed 31 March 2024).

³⁰ DNK Amsterdam, www.dnk-amsterdam.com/ (accessed 31 March 2024).

³¹ KM28, www.km28.de/ (accessed 31 March 2024).

³² Katrien Reist, interview by Thomas R. Moore, 5 February 2024.

function in a neoliberal society today, artists are driven to creatively seek partnerships across typical disciplinary lines and traditional disciplinary avenues of funding'.³³ Another symptom of 'artist-driven organisations in which performing artists also take on the [non-sonic] roles of manager, producer, director and other back-office functions'.³⁴ Examples of this practice include the Amsterdam Cello Octet, Sound Initiative and the instrument inventors initiative (iii) in The Hague, who say on their website that they are an '*artist run*, community platform supporting new interdisciplinary practices linking performance, technology and the human senses' (emphasis added).³⁵

While post-instrumental practice is not all-encompassing, our experience as performers and composer and the interviews we conducted suggests that it is the manner in which solo and ensemble players in a significant number of new-music ensembles across Europe and the UK now function. It thus seems reasonable to further examine post-instrumental practices for their sustainability, especially in relation to the practice(s) of the performing artist. Is it sustainable to specialise in being an anti-specialist? Can we continue in a profession whose practice is centred on an observable specialism in which the musicians must 'move beyond the instrumentality' of their principal instruments, grow proficient in a stream and 'plurality' of new (non-) sonic roles, regularly 'transfer' their highly trained skills to new piece-specific performance practices and, finally, 'integrate' a multitude of methods from various artforms?

Questioning Sustainability

Defining *sustainable* and *sustainability*, either in a general sense or for the performing arts, is a task beyond the aims of this article, but we need a way to test the durability of post-instrumental practice within new music. In her efforts to find her place and/or function (as an artist) in what she deems a post-sustainable world, Perdita Phillips offers an 'original definition: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the... future';³⁶ but she notes that in this definition 'confusion arises as to whether we are developing sustainment or sustaining development. The word sustainability can imply maintaining stable conditions and this can be interpreted as a conservative strategy and in the worst case, foster inaction rather than action'.³⁷

Merriam-Webster defines sustainable as: 'of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged'.³⁸ (Curiously, this definition seems to imply that all resources are renewable.) If we consider resources in the broad economic sense and accept the definition of curatorship framed in the abstract,³⁹ then we must also include

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ iii, 'Mission', <https://instrumentinventors.org/about/mission/> (accessed 31 March 2024).

³⁶ Perdita Phillips, 'Artistic Practices and Ecoaesthetics in Post-Sustainable Worlds', in *An Introduction to Sustainability and Aesthetics: The Arts and Design for the Environment*, eds C. Crouch, N. Kaye and J. Crouch (Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker Press, 2015), pp. 55–68.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Merriam-Webster, 'Sustainable', last updated 27 October 2024, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustainable (accessed 14 November 2024).

³⁹ Modern curation work is narrative in nature: telling a compelling story not just through a static collection and presentation of artefacts to a single, monolithic audience but through dynamic and multiply iterated discourse with a range of audiences, communities and

performers, their acquired skills and their ability to learn new skills as a 'resource', which artistic directors, composers and performers themselves may need to 'harvest' in order to meet their artistic needs. Investigating post-instrumental practice for evidence of any depletion or increase in the ability for performers to learn new skills thus seems to be a good starting point.

Because the Merriam-Webster definition is so narrow and does not, like Phillips, include any kind of 'stable condition', we also considered the lexicographers' characterisation of the word 'stable': 'the property of a body that causes it when disturbed from a condition of equilibrium or steady motion to develop forces or moments that restore the original condition'.⁴⁰ If we were to apply this definition to post-instrumental performing artists, then the players would only be considered 'stable' when they manage to self-generate or '[self]-develop' the 'force' to 'restore [their] original condition'. But post-instrumental practice, in its 'original condition', represents a constant state of renewal, so stability for the musician would entail developing an original condition that relies more heavily on 'steady motion' instead of 'equilibrium'. In other words, a 'stable' post-instrumental performer will be able to self-generate 'forces' to continually reinvent themselves (specialist in anti-specialising). Certain composers' practices also resemble this anti-specialism. While there are some who 'tend to settle with a particular set of compositional techniques throughout their career [and apply] techniques that prove to work successfully in the process of creating a new work', a post-instrumental composer is one who sees 'each different context [requiring] different a compositional technique' and is thus intrinsically forced to rethink the process each time.⁴¹

Both Perdita Phillips and Merriam-Webster take an individualistic approach to defining sustainability, laying out a self-generating system that balances the needs of today without depleting the resources for tomorrow. This kind of individualism is not just present in artistic practice but seems to be a pillar of neoliberal societies across the Western world.⁴² Culture sociologists Elena Raevskikh and Maxime Jaffré suggest that 'contemporary usage [of sustainable systems] tends to emphasize an individualist interpretation', while 'an older usage points to a more collective and state-driven interpretation'.⁴³ Seen through this lens it is arguable that individual performing artists have begun to recognise the need for a strategy to deal with the increasing instrumentalisation of their roles and their highly trained

stakeholders.' Furthermore, 'curating, in addition to presentation, is also actively choosing specific tools and roles, and the way they are used and instrumentalized... Instrumentalization of not only pieces and locations, but people and roles is inherent to curation today.' Holly Tessler, 'Introduction: Why Is Everything Curated These Days? Examining the Work of Popular Music Curation', *Popular Music History*, 13, nos 1–2 (2020), pp. 5–17, <https://doi.org/10.1558/pomh.42196>; Thomas R. Moore, Pascal Gielen and Rebecca Diependaele, 'Fair Games: Curating New Music: A Continuum between Exploitation and Commoning', *Journal of Musicology* 41, no. 4 (2024), pp. 476–93. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2024.41.4.476>.

⁴⁰ Merriam-Webster, 'Stable', last updated 27 October 2024, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stable (accessed 14 November 2024).

⁴¹ Maya Verlaak, 'Hexenhaus – A Scrutinizing Compositional Position' (Ph.D. dissertation, Birmingham City University, 2019), 19.

⁴² Pascal Gielen, Paul De Bruyne and Jeroen Boomgaard, eds. *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm: Realism versus Cynicism*, 2nd edition (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2013); Peter Fleming, *Dark Academia: How Universities Die* (London: Pluto Press, 2021); Reist, interview.

⁴³ Elena Raevskikh and Maxime Jaffré, 'The Performing Arts Ecosystem in Abu Dhabi: Sustainability, Resilience, and Local Capacity Building', in *Global Creative Ecosystems*, ed. Tarek E. Virani (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), pp. 39–57.

skills, as well as the need to continually learn new skills. Until recently each artist and ensemble has approached this uniquely but, as Stene and Devenish observe, key common characteristics are apparent. We find it important, however, to note that this 'post-instrumental practice' has been the response of individual performing artists to what has been requested of them by artistic directors and composers rather than any kind of collective response.

The rise of this demand for flexibility as well as an increase in 'artist-driven organisations' may, as Reist suggested, be due to a decrease in funding for the arts. Reist also suggested that artists may be forced to take on these new roles and grow more flexible simply because there are fewer hands available to run an ensemble or arts organisation.⁴⁴ This development,⁴⁵ coupled with the observable origin of post-instrumental practice as an individual response to a top-down imperative, leads us to question post-instrumental practice as sustainable at a policy level, rather than at the level of the individual performing artist.

Francesca Sabatini, in an article imploring the European Commission to consider culture as a key pillar of sustainable development, argued that 'at a policy level sustainability is reached through the production of self-generating or self-perpetuating characteristics in systems'.⁴⁶ Here, too, we find a basic criterion for sustainability to be 'self-generating'. However, Sabatini makes the clear distinction that it is the policymakers and institutions who must 'produce' these characteristics in the artistic 'systems'. For her it is clearly a top-down responsibility, and this provides a convenient test for post-instrumental practice's sustainability. If we consider artistic directors and venue organisers to be the institutional force in Sabatini's definition, then we can question whether there is any discernible effort on the side of the institution to balance performing artists' post-instrumental response with sustainable (and stabilising) systems in their organisations.

Testing the Systems

In the past year we conducted 13 in-depth interviews with venue curators, artistic directors, composers and performers, in order to assess post-instrumental practice in new music. Below we examine specific cases based on the responses offered by those we interviewed. These will be contextualised with previous research and from our own experiences as curator-composer and performer-researcher.

Policy level

Concerns about the general sustainability of all artistic practices abound. In Belgium, several artist employers and freelance artists

⁴⁴ Reist, interview.

⁴⁵ At a structural level, the flexibility referred to in this article was never required of the 'original' new-music ensembles such as Ensemble Intercontemporain, Ensemble Modern or Klangforum Wien. Composers such as Louis Andriessen often asked fellow composers to participate in the work of Orkest de Volharding and Hoketus, but only in the period before they achieved structural funding. Later the rise in specialist-performers was observable in the Netherlands as well. Reist's argument points to a decrease in public funding over the past two decades. Paul R. Judy, 'Pierre Boulez: Reflections on Symphony Orchestra Organizations', *Harmony: Forum of the Symphony Orchestra Institute 3* (1996), pp. 30–38; Robert Adlington, *Composing Dissent: Avant-Garde Music in 1960s Amsterdam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁴⁶ Francesca Sabatini, 'Culture as Fourth Pillar of Sustainable Development: Perspectives for Integration, Paradigms of Action', *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 8, no. 3 (2019), p. 31, <https://doi.org/10.14207/ejsd.2019.v8n3p31>.

recently joined forces to write a code of conduct, entitled 'Juist is Juist' (Right is right). Among their principal statements they write:

We support each other in building professional and sustainable careers and collaborations. In order to build up knowledge and experience. This is only possible if collaborations take place within the applicable frameworks and under correct conditions.⁴⁷

In The Netherlands, a Fair Practice Code was introduced to which all structurally subsidised arts organisations must adhere. Regarding sustainability, they write:

Production is carried out with an eye on excellence and the long term. This means investing in people in the form of training and talent development, preventing mental and physical overload, and handling tangible and intangible capital responsibly. In a more sustainable organization, employees and staff do not have to be predatory on themselves. A lower turnover rate also means less consumption of resources.⁴⁸

In both codes there is a clear policy goal: to create long-term and sustainable working relationships between those receiving public funding and their collaborating artists. Creating conditions in which performing artists are supported seems to be a shared responsibility in the Belgian code; in the Dutch example it is more explicitly the responsibility of the institution, which must '[invest] in people in the form of... talent development'. Encouragingly, they also recognise that mental and physical stability is characteristic of a sustainable organisation.

In England, the new-music promotion organisation Sound and Music wrote a fair-practices code that is currently being implemented across the country. While their code does not deal explicitly with sustainable practices, they do suggest resisting the urge for everything constantly to be 'new': 'Allow composers to submit works which have already been created, with no limit on time period. This ensures that composers are not being asked to write something for free, or are discriminated against if they have taken a career break.'⁴⁹

At the European level, a 2023 report for the Creative Europe Programme defines sustainability in terms of environmental practices: 'Sustainability... refers to the sectors seeking to adopt more environmentally sustainable practices and, by this, to minimize their environmental and climate change impacts... as well as concerns and needs of their audiences, seeking to prevent the depletion of natural and physical resources'.⁵⁰ Here, too, grant applicants must aim to prevent the depletion of resources.

⁴⁷ Juist is Juist, 'Principles', n.d., www.juistisjuist.be/en/principles/ (accessed 10 March 2024).

⁴⁸ Fair Practice Code, 'De kernwaarden: Fair Practice Code: Gedragscode voor de culturele en creatieve sector', n.d., <https://fairpracticecode.nl/de-code/kernwaarden/#duurzaamheid> (accessed 10 March 2024). Original text: 'Er wordt geproduceerd met het oog op de kwaliteit en de lange termijn. Dat betekent dat er wordt geïnvesteerd in mensen in de vorm van scholing en talentontwikkeling, dat mentale en fysieke overbelasting worden voorkomen en dat er verantwoordelijk wordt omgegaan met het materiële en immateriële kapitaal. Bij een meer duurzame bedrijfsvoering hoeven werknemers en medewerkers geen roofofbouw op zichzelf te plegen. Een minder hoge omloopsnelheid betekent ook minder verbruik van grondstoffen en een lagere afvalproductie.'

⁴⁹ Sound and Music, 'Fair Access Principles', <https://soundandmusic.org/our-impact/fair-access-principles/> (accessed 14 April 2024).

⁵⁰ European Commission, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Greening the Creative Europe Programme: Final Report* (EU: Publications Office, 2023), <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/625636> (accessed 14 April 2024).

Festivals

Festivals are a vital avenue for new music and experimental practices. Martijn Buser, from the Utrecht-based Gaudeamus Festival, told us that his festival still centres on the composer as the creative driving force. He felt that it was his

responsibility to give the composer or the creator the best opportunity. So, by matching them with the right performer that will ensure that a long line can be developed. That is very important to us. I certainly feel responsible for that: the responsibility for making the right match.⁵¹

He aims to match each composer with an ensemble that will not only give an excellent concert premiere at the festival in Utrecht but will also perform the same piece at other venues and/or collaborate with the composer on further projects. The latter objective creates space for individual players to hone any newly acquired skills so that, as Lankhoorn said, these can become a part of the players' repertoire. They 'own' them, and this ensures no 'depletion' of skills. If this were achieved with every project, a self-perpetuating system might begin to appear. Composition professors take a similar approach when 'matching' their students with professional orchestras, hoping that this kind of introduction will lead to a commission.

Another approach mentioned by many organisers was to approach partner organisations directly and coordinate tours for performing artists from abroad, minimising the ecological and financial cost as well as broadening their exposure. Bert Palinckx of November Music in 's Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands, tries to book foreign artists over multiple days with repeat concerts and various programmes. Palinckx cited the example of Jennifer Walshe's *PERSONHOOD* (2021), for Oslo Sinfonietta and Andreas Borregaard as solo accordionist:

The starting point is usually a somewhat larger work, in this case *PERSONHOOD*. Then when Jennifer does come, I actually think that she should be on the stage, too, of course. I think it enriches her artistic voice and helps to understand her work. In addition, of course, it's also sustainable.⁵²

It is notable that Palinckx expresses an artistic concern, the 'enriching' of Walshe's 'artistic voice', alongside his concern for ecological and artistic sustainability. Though only cited in Devenish's work⁵³ as a composer who instigates a post-instrumental response from the performer, Walshe neatly ticks other boxes here, performing in a plurality of roles during November Music. During the rehearsals of *PERSONHOOD* she was both rehearsalist and light-board operator – the latter something she regularly undertakes during performances of her pieces, demonstrating a further instrumentalisation of her role as rehearsalist or director in a definitely 'non-sonic role'.

An ecological turn

French-British composer and curator Louis d'Heudières runs *Upstream*, a small series in Hamburg. Like Palinckx and Buser, he told us that he tries to help performing artists from abroad make their activities more ecologically and artistically sustainable by aligning

⁵¹ Martijn Buser, interview by Thomas R. Moore, 26 October 2023.

⁵² Bert Palinckx, interview by Thomas R. Moore, 23 October 2023. See also November Music, 'Wack', n.d., www.novembermusic.net/programma/jennifer-walshe-neil-luck-137666 (accessed 24 April 2024).

⁵³ Devenish, 'Instrumental Infrastructure, Instrumental Sculpture and Instrumental Scores'.

his offers with their engagements in neighbouring countries. As he is often the smaller partner he admitted that he keeps an eye on a 'desired performer's schedule, and when they are in the area, [he] extends a hand and offers a gig'.⁵⁴ This may seem impersonal and opportunistic but it is evidence of the curator's awareness of his reach and his attention to the need to make a performer's initial investment in their project more durable. Taking the time to be social and meet other composers/performers on tour, or building a community through organising small-scale concerts, might also present a better way to share, and it generates a method for the sustainability of practices. It is simply easier to talk to a performer or composer at a smaller-scale, artist-run concert series. D'Heudières expressed it in more human terms, noting the need for personal contact even if it is somewhat fleeting:

I think it is very important to offer some human comfort, otherwise, you know, it can be a very impersonal kind of European tour for some people. Like, if they actually have a place to stay with locals where we take them out and we go out with them and we all hang out and share stories and whatever. It's just a really great thing to do and a really great way to connect with people. And so that kind of human connection is quite important for me.⁵⁵

This article does not deal directly with the way ecological sustainability relates to many performers' artistic practice, but many of those we interviewed were outspoken on the subject. When discussing her own concerns about bringing non-European artists to her festival, Heloisa Amaral, the new artistic director of Ultima Festival, in Oslo, went so far as to suggest that she was considering rebalancing her budget to compensate artists who choose to use more ecological forms of transport, citing renowned soprano Juliet Fraser's decision to only tour by train.⁵⁶ In Amaral's own words:

In theory she should get a different kind of fee because there are more days of travel included, hence less days in which she can earn money performing. This is not like a compensation: it is more than that. It has to do with making means available and slowing down the overall tempo of the touring industry. There will be huge financial consequences; it is going to become a huge conversation when we start being really, really, really serious about taking care of our environment.⁵⁷

Note that Amaral states that the travel compensation should not be perceived as additional pay, a view that is not shared by most countries' tax authorities. Amaral is explicit that Ultima, as an important and influential festival, will encourage artists to reconsider how they travel and to search for more ecologically sustainable modes.

Amaral's willingness to engage with performers in finding more sustainable approaches is reassuring; Ultima, with Amaral at its head, is clearly a top-down organisation that is willing to listen to the needs of performing artists.

Experience

In previous research we noted that several trends in the visual arts are increasingly apparent in contemporary music. One such trend is 'the experience of the monodisciplinary work of art such as the viewing

⁵⁴ Louis d'Heudières, interview by Thomas R. Moore, 27 October 2023.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Fraser, Juliet. 'London to Istanbul.' *Substack newsletter*. Notes on Flying (blog), February 12, 2024. <https://julietfraser.substack.com/p/london-to-istanbul>. (accessed 7 December 2024).

⁵⁷ Heloisa Amaral, interview by Thomas R. Moore, 21 December 2023.

experience for visual art or the listening experience for music' being exchanged for 'a total experience in which additional and integrated layers of music, image, performance, multimedia, etc. determine an often immersive artistic experience'.⁵⁸ Christie Finn made a similar remark about her role as curator of the Stuttgart-based interdisciplinary festival Klangraum, telling us that festivals today are about 'creating experiences. This is what I see everywhere and not just in the visual artists, but also musicians are much more interested [in this approach]'.⁵⁹ We have suggested that the movement towards integrated, total-experience art was initiated by the curators, but Finn says that this is a 'general societal trend. Rather than a product to buy and hang in your house, people are coming for the experience of the evening'.⁶⁰ Audiences and the public in general are more motivated to 'experience' art instead of a more static consumption. Finn also notes that musicians are not only willing to move in this direction but are 'interested' in it. Curator and percussionist Tom De Cock put it more bluntly: 'everyone is a curator today whether you like or not!' In a bottom-up style, musicians and the ensembles in which they perform curate the total experience for the audience(s), with 'fixed ideas for one concert'.⁶¹

Curating experiences, however, can run the risk of merely skimming the surface of an artwork. As the philosopher Martin Buber wrote, 'the world has no part in the experience. It permits itself to be experienced, but has no concern in the matter. For it does nothing to the experience, and the experience does nothing to it'.⁶² In his keynote address to the EPARM 2024 the composer Rui Penha tasked performing artists with making a 'sharp difference between experience and relation'.⁶³ He continued by entreating players, curators and composers (and artistic researchers) to create relational knowledge (as opposed to experiential) for/in the world and through their art:

This distinction becomes even more relevant in a world that privileges experiences – we just need to think about the ways in which tourism or food is sold to us today – whilst, at the same time, severely limits the establishment of meaningful relations, namely via massification and excessive mediation. Although experience and relation might be kindred, one can definitely have an experience without entering into a relation: the two require quite different attitudes towards the world.⁶⁴

If creation and curation run the risk of creating meaningless experiences for an audience, then we should also look more closely at Devenish's third characteristic of post-instrumental practices, 'integration'. As Finn, Penha and Gielen argue, artists (and ensemble artistic directors) have responded to the 'societal' urge for total experiences by integrating art forms and disciplines in which they have little training and are not experts. Andreas Borregaard opened his Ph.D. thesis with this notion, discussing the need to retrain himself in using his body on stage as an instrument. As part of his 'enhanced training' he worked closely with stage directors to learn how to act and with a choreographer to learn how to move and articulate his limbs in new and controlled ways.⁶⁵ Violinist and gestural artist Winnie

⁵⁸ Moore, Gielen and Diependaele, 'Fair Games'.

⁵⁹ Finn, interview.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Tom De Cock, interview by Thomas R. Moore, 22 October 2019.

⁶² Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, tr. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Scribner, 1958), pp. 4–5.

⁶³ Rui Penha, 'What Is Artistic Research About?', keynote speech, EPARM (2024), Ljubljana.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Borregaard, 'Just Do It!'.

Huang has also described a need for retraining in the period after she officially left arts schools.⁶⁶ The young Dutch ensemble Moving Strings takes it for granted that movement and sound should hold an equal place in their performances:

Imagine you are at an exhibition and suddenly the paintings and sculptures wake up and come to life. The colors, shapes and textures, the visual structures become three-dimensional through sound and movement, telling stories in the dimension of time and space. This is what a Moving Strings creation might resemble.⁶⁷

Borregaard, Huang and Moving Strings were following their own artistic interests towards this movement-based practice and, to become proficient in this relatively new subgenre, their response to their intrinsic artistic impulses and extrinsic 'societal urge' required them to retrain. Huang goes so far as to re-identify herself as a 'gestural artist' and Moving Strings call themselves a 'platform for the research of sound and movement'.⁶⁸ For these artists to create meaningful art they need to seek skilled instruction that is both beyond the regular curriculum or practice at arts schools and not something that receives consideration in typical funding organisations. On grant application forms there is no tick-box or drop-down menu that includes 'gestural artist' or 'moving musician', even though, as Reist notes, in the real world of performing arts today, 'the frames are shifting'.⁶⁹

Rising to the Demand

Innovation in the performing arts, and for musicians specifically, is nothing new. In the twentieth century there are plenty of examples of innovative practices that were collectively called 'extended techniques'. Many of these extensions to the traditional manner of playing an instrument were designed by composers together with performers. Luciano Berio's *Sequenza III* (1965), for female voice, for example, was written for and with Cathy Berberian, and the piece is the result of the 'symbiotic relationship [of] Berio's vocal ideas and, equally, Berberian's illustration of new vocal techniques',⁷⁰ reframing 'noises and sounds that have historically been purposely excluded from the concert stage'.⁷¹ The trombonist Stuart Dempster helped Berio to understand the mechanics of the 'suck-tones', circular breathing and split-tones deployed throughout *Sequenza V* (1966),⁷² and some of these new techniques, such as split- and suck-tones, are now part of instruction manuals for players and composers.⁷³

⁶⁶ Winnie Huang, 'The Pragmatic Musical-Gestural Performer', *Experience Music Experiment: Pragmatism and Artistic Research* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2021), pp. 35–60.

⁶⁷ Moving Strings, www.movingstrings.com, n.d. (accessed 15 April 2024).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Reist, interview.

⁷⁰ Nena Beretin, 'Re-evaluating the Collaborative Process between Luciano Berio and Cathy Berberian for *Sequenza III* (1965–66) and Its Critical Reception in North America, the United Kingdom and Australia', *Analitica. Rivista Online Di Studi Musicali*, 14 (2021), <https://lnx.gatm.it/analiticojs/index.php/analitica/article/view/178> (accessed 3 April 2024).

⁷¹ Finn, interview.

⁷² Barrie Webb, 'Performing Berio's *Sequenza V*', *Contemporary Music Review*, 26, no. 2 (2007), pp. 207–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494460701295358>.

⁷³ Michael Svoboda, *Die Spieltechnik der Posaune* (The Techniques of Trombone Playing) (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2017); Heather Roche, 'Resources for Clarinetists' (2024), Available at: <https://heatherroche.net/resources-for-clarinetists/> (accessed 7 December 2024); Stuart Dempster, *The Modern Trombone: A Definition of Its Idioms* (Athens, OH: Accura Music Inc., 1979).

The composers for whom Dempster and Berberian helped to create new sounds and techniques perhaps faced fewer difficulties in documenting these new methods than composers do today. Many had access to engravers at publishing companies; today composers who push the bounds of sound and technique tend to self-publish and must bear the burden of clear documentation on their own shoulders. Many female composers and composers from other marginalised groups had no access to publishers, and their innovations in playing techniques are only now being (re)discovered and documented.⁷⁴ Documentation centres such as IRCAM in Paris, or Matrix [Centre for New Music] in Leuven, Belgium, offer some help, as does open access to Ph.D. dissertations on particular playing techniques, but the availability of this documentation relies on public funding. As with the move towards interdisciplinary collaboration, this kind of funding mechanism places much of the documentation responsibility on the composer or performer. Finn's fears about transferability resurface, and this also raises the question, alluded to by Lankhoorn, of performers' authorship and agency: if a composer writes a piece for a player with whom they have developed a technique, whose technique is it and who is responsible for its documentation, making the technique accessible and transferable to a new generation of performers?

If we question the sustainability and transferability of new performance practices, is innovation itself at the root of the problem? Why look for new ways to make music if they are not sustainable? Perhaps this is what composer and curator Mathilde Wantenaar had in mind when she put together a concert series titled 'What's New?' at the festival Dag in de Branding in The Hague and in her programme notes offered the provocation that 'we cannot all be as revolutionary as Beethoven'.⁷⁵ For her it is not essential constantly to seek new processes, techniques and methods in composition; instead composers can return to tradition to create beautiful music with the established tools at hand.⁷⁶ The danger here, however, is that the Western art-music canon might become entrenched and there would be no need for new composers, new innovations in instruments or playing techniques and no new reflections on today's society.

It was this conservative mindset that triggered the protests of the *Notenkrakers* during a concert in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw on 17 November 1969.⁷⁷ Yet, in his time, Beethoven was a revolutionary and, arguably, it was this that has made his music sustainable. If a new way of performing music is to be sustainable, it must also have the ability to force change and dislodge rooted traditions. In this regard, post-instrumental practice has passed the test: players have risen to the demand, responding with a new performance practice that may well survive.

⁷⁴ See, among others, B. Coleman and J. A. Sebesta, *Women in American Musical Theatre: Essays on Composers, Lyricists, Librettists, Arrangers, Choreographers, Designers, Directors, Producers and Performance Artists* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2020).

⁷⁵ Mathilde Wantenaar, 'Mathilde Wantenaar: What's New? Festival Dag in de Branding', Amare, n.d., www.amare.nl/nl/agenda/2698/festival-dag-in-de-branding/mathilde-wantenaar-what-s-new (accessed 3 April 2024).

⁷⁶ Wantenaar, 'Mathilde Wantenaar'.

⁷⁷ Adlington, *Composing Dissent*.