

Conservatoires in society: Institutional challenges and possibilities for change

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Abstract

Educational sociologists and philosophers have long recognised that educational institutions play a significant role in shaping as well as supporting societal norms. In the face of growing global social, political, and environmental challenges, should conservatoires be more overt in expressing a mission to sustain and improve the societies in which they are located? In times of ever-increasing scepticism emanating from governments and the broader populace alike about the efficacy of public spending, if not the public sphere itself, this essay suggests it is both timely and necessary for conservatoires to reconsider, reinvigorate, and re-articulate their capacity to contribute to broader social goods. Drawing on the authors' professional experience as well as current literature and debates, the essay is both deliberately provocative and open-ended, articulating a number of points of departure that institutions might consider in addressing the challenge of maintaining and exercising their relevance to broader society.

Introduction

At the conclusion of the 2012 'The Reflective Conservatoire' conference at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, John Sloboda, a research Professor at that institution, contributed to a final plenary session by challenging assembled delegates to think about how they could better articulate the potential of conservatoires to contribute not just to musical culture but also the needs of broader society. In particular, he asked:

whether conservatoires have any contribution to make to addressing the increasing polarization of modern society, increasing environmental and economic threats, the breakdown of popular trust in the ability of politicians and corporations to work in our interests [and] how conservatoires can work to ensure that [their] activities do not simply address the sickness and brokenness of the prison cell or the hospital ward, but also the shortcomings of the corporate boardroom or of the political system' (Johansen 2014: 87).¹

Implicit in Sloboda's challenge was the recognition of a problem, a threat, and ultimately an opportunity for conservatoire leaders. These in turn have origins partly in broad challenges facing Higher Education as a whole, but they also

¹ Several conservatoire leaders decided to respond to Sloboda's challenge and set up a working group with the broad title of 'conservatoires in society'. Self-nominated, it was able to attract participants from across Europe, North America and Australia. Two face-to-face meetings were held: 24 May 2013 in London and 13–14 January, 2014, in Antwerp. Six members of the group decided to develop this essay emerging from what the group had presented at the most recent 'Reflective Conservatoire' conference in February 2015.

arise out of the nature of conservatoires themselves. As the name suggests (it is derived from the latin *conservare* 'to preserve'), they tend to be conservative institutions, defenders of proud and rich traditions, to be sure, but also liable to be suspicious of, and resistant to, change. A recent report prepared by the US-based College Music Society noted:

Despite repeated calls for change to assure the relevance of curricular content and skill development to music outside the academy, the academy has remained isolated, resistant to change, and too frequently regressive rather than progressive in its approach to undergraduate education. While surface change has occurred to some extent through additive means (i.e. simply providing more courses, more requirements, and more elective opportunities), fundamental changes in priorities, values, perspectives, and implementation have not occurred. ...[We have] concluded that without such fundamental change, traditional music departments, schools, and conservatoires may face declining enrollments as sophisticated high school students seek music career development outside the often rarefied environments and curricula that have been characteristic since music first became a major in America's colleges and universities. (Sarath et al., 2014: 4).

For the conservatoire system in particular, the threat such educational conservatism amplifies is the concurrent, and seemingly inexorable, retreat of the social contract, and associated revenue base, that once empowered and legitimised state support of elite arts education in the West (Danckert, 2015). ~~Grim news stories are not hard to find in either the UK or Australia, such as the cuts to local government music education services in the UK announced in February 2015 (Stevens, 2015).~~ Arts organisations that traditionally provided employment pathways for conservatoire graduates face similar challenges. In the United Kingdom, for instance, grant-in-aid, the annual budget that Arts Council England receives from the UK Department of Culture Media and Sport, has decreased from £453m in 2009-10 to £350m in 2014-15. In February 2015, the UK-based National Campaign for the Arts released its 'Arts Index' tracking changes in the financial and artistic health of arts organizations between 2007-14, suggesting that despite signs of some good health, they are 'living on borrowed time'. Board member David Brownlee wrote in the *Guardian* newspaper (UK) that:

The arts continue to be one of this country's success stories; they could play an even larger role in helping to unite communities and grow the economy. However, we... worry we have now reached a tipping point where further cuts to funding will permanently damage how the sector supports society. Without new talent and adequate funding, the arts simply won't deliver the outputs of excellence, inspiration, access for all and the financial benefits – jobs, exports,

taxes, international reputation and so on – that our society depends upon (Brownlee, 2015).

~~We might note with irony that announcements about cuts to funding of the arts and arts education commonly coincide with news stories about tax-evading multi-national companies, banks, or political donors, and Pressure on governments to reduce the cost of public spending more generally.~~ There is a sizable body of political theory which suggests that there is in fact a grim nexus between the decline of state funding of the arts and arts education and the rise of globalised economies (Genschel, 2004; Hewison, 2014; Scharpf, 2000). But we live also in an age of unprecedented wealth generation. Music education is under pressure in the West not for lack of money, it seems, but for the lack of political will to collect and redistribute enough of it for this purpose.

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In such a climate, conservatoire-style education cannot avoid particular scrutiny. Is it really essential for either the potential student or the state that might hitherto have generously supported it? The common perception of conservatoires among the music profession and general public alike is that they exist principally to train elite music performers for a career in jazz or classical music, that is they are a kind of an elite performing arts trade school (Polifonia, 2007). ~~The degree to which our culture is wedded to this narrow utilitarian idea is observable in the fact that US Cable TV company HBO is currently developing a pilot for a new television series called 'Virtuoso' based around an~~

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Academy of Music Excellence in late eighteenth-century Vienna (Munn, 2015).

Never mind that there never was anything approaching an 'Academy of Musical Excellence' in Vienna at this time. If the age of Mozart Haydn and Beethoven did not have an elite conservatoire one had, it seems, to be invented. But this can also imply a narrow understanding of what, and who, education for 'musical excellence' is ultimately for; the realisation of individual talent for the benefit of a narrow social elite. In such circumstances would a narrow 'user-pays' approach to meeting the cost of such an education be so unreasonable? Many of us who occupy leadership positions in conservatoires can recall conversations with skeptical public officials and private philanthropists alike who express similar views. There are many, it would seem, who do not appreciate that there may also be a broader value to society in the subsidizing of a few lucky and talented people to pursue their dream of personal musical development.

Herein, however, lies an opportunity. As Samuel Johnson famously quipped as he mused upon the recent execution of William Dodd at Tyburn in London in 1777: 'When a man knows he is to be hanged...it concentrates his mind wonderfully.' The time, it seems, is right for conservatoires more explicitly to raise and address questions about what (and who) a conservatoire education is for, what sorts of new subjects it might cover, and why its on-going relevance might be important not just for musicians but for all of us.

Four questions that we believe could usefully be addressed explicitly by conservatoires are:

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1. How do conservatoires currently express their commitment to society-at-large?
2. How might conservatoires better appear and act as institutions of public service?
3. How might conservatoires work to promote attentive listening to fellow citizens, in acknowledgement not only that it is a basic, human characteristic, but also one increasingly marginalised by the pressures of modern life?
4. How might the conservatoire-society relationship be informed by research?

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In the expository discussion around these questions that follows we draw on recent commentary in both the scholarly press and the broader media.

1. How do conservatoires currently express their commitment to society-at-large?

If we were to look at what conservatoires currently say via their published mission statements, we can find values like 'actively involved in society', 'for the benefit of society', 'independent, dedicated and reflective members of society', 'work responsibly', 'responsible citizens', 'take initiative in life', 'responsible for the welfare of our nation', 'strengthening principles of democracy', 'respecting human rights', 'contribute to society through artistic reflection on it', and 'encourage creative, entrepreneurial members of society' (Jørgensen 2015).

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These statements tell us that it is possible for institutions to include societal aims and not only musical and personal ones for their students' development. Conservatoires are, indeed, potentially powerfully transformational because

they can be incubators of such a culture that celebrates values somewhat at odds with those most common to the consumerist society. The values we celebrate are not non-existing in society. They are only less visible and not as widespread as consumerist, measurable, priorities that confuse 'value' with price and measurability. However, only seven of fifty institutions across Northern Europe that we examined found it necessary actually to make such aims explicit. Of these, only four institutions stated they wanted to contribute to what could be called the 'broader development of society', with explicit statements like 'social responsibility', 'serve the community', 'responsibility to society', 'a human-centred society', 'provide service for society', 'benefit of local and regional communities'. A sceptic might question, further, what is really meant by these statements, how deeply the engagement with society is, and in what areas and activities they will be carried out.

Nevertheless, even if only four out of fifty institutions found it necessary to include such statements in their mission statements, it suggests at least the beginning of a shift in rhetoric if not deed. And in defense of those institutions which lack more explicit statements, they might argue that a positive, engaged, relationship to society is implicit in the nature of their curricula. After all, the task of educating future music professionals inevitably requires teaching programmes to strike a balance between meeting and shaping the specific needs of organisations that typically employ conservatoire graduates, and between reflecting and shaping the broader musical tastes of the audiences that sustain them. Conservatoires also typically support a variety of explicit

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social outreach initiatives, such as programmes that bring musicians into socially deprived areas of cities, or prisons, or that work with refugees or other marginalized social groups. The motivations for such programmes can range from a desire to provide professional development opportunities for students interested in community music programmes, to meeting obligations directed by external philanthropy, either way they suggest that an institution's social obligations can and should have concrete expression via the nature of musical activities undertaken.

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What is less clear, however, is how these music-specific activities might relate to even broader societal challenges such as social inequality or climate change, or how music might be a 'means of liberation and a vehicle for struggle for justice and against injustice' and not just a palliative (Jorgensen, 2007: 172), and whether such engagement occurs because of, or despite, the education that music graduates may have received in conservatoires.

Musical performance could be seen to be potentially critical of mainstream consumerist culture because it is an example of the gift economy, that is, because its value cannot be meaningfully captured by the price of a ticket alone. Unlike a traditional marketplace economy, implicit in a performance is a notion of giving; like public values more generally, music's worth comes ultimately from the fact that it is shared. Conservatoires are potentially powerfully transformational because they can be incubators of such a culture that

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celebrates values somewhat at odds with those common to society as a whole.

There is, however, a tendency to hide such potentially deeper messages behind a glamorous surface of concertizing. The kinds of musical performance that remain central to conservatoire curricula are, furthermore, also now commonly portrayed, at least in the UK, as being largely for the benefit of a similarly small, rich elite (Atkinson-Lord 2015, Mason 2015). A 2015 Warwick University report on the 'Future of Cultural Value', for instance, declares that it is the 'wealthiest, best-educated and least-ethnically diverse 8% of the population' that dominates attendances at live music events (some 44%). 'On the other, participation in music in schools by children aged between five and 10 has dropped from 55% to 37% between 2008/9 and 2013/14' (Neelands et al., 2015: 33, Higgins, 2015). Not surprisingly, we can also find increasing amounts of critical public commentary suggesting that musicians themselves are also disproportionately from the same proverbial wealthy elite. For instance, the UK Shadow Minister for the Arts Chris Bryant MP recently stated that: 'the truth is that people who subsidise the arts most are artists themselves. That of course makes it much more difficult if you come from a background where you can't afford to do that' (Mason, 2015). And as one *Guardian* newspaper commentator added by way of postscript, 'It can also mean [too much] confidence and its evil twin entitlement' (Lynskey, 2015). Recent research by Dr Christina Scharff at Kings College London gives some evidential support for these views by revealing extensive inequalities at every level of the classical music profession in the UK with regard to sex, class, education and ethnicity (Scharff, 2015) (Service, 2015).

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Conservatoires are not helped in this arena of cultural politics by the perceived nexus that exists in many countries (especially the United Kingdom and Australia) between classical music in particular and private secondary education—one commonly trumpeted as a point of difference in these schools' brochures. Such private schools frequently boast concert halls and other facilities that are far better than what is generally available to the broader community. An emphasis on classical music education can, as a result, appear as little more than an 'act of class differentiation' (Tregear 2014). But we should be careful not to cede implicitly to such observations not least because there is unlikely to be a professional class in existence in Western society today to which similar socio-economic observations would not apply. If access to, and investment in, the arts is to be depicted as little more than the posturing of a privileged class over the less privileged, then there is, frankly, little that can be said in favour of public arts education more generally.

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Arguably the opposite is the case. That is, an investment that widens access to high-quality cultural education can actually help improve our capacity to think outside the realm of social and political clichés, as Andrew Bowie eloquently argues:

Anyone who has been involved in the attempt, say, to persuade students who reject it or ignore the value of great music or other art soon realises that most of the rejection comes about because the

language that would allow them access to it was never taught to them. Instead, such art is often incorporated into an image of class society, where it is basically for “them”, and not “for the likes of us”. The fact that it is possible to overcome this resistance is not a direct route to political change, but it can and does open up whole new worlds to many people: if that is not political, I do not know what is (Bowie 1997: 121).

We might also better acknowledge, however, that the disillusionment of young people with the power of traditional structures to deal with the big problems like environmental change and the increasing gap between rich and poor means examples of new means of engagement and action are springing up everywhere. We need to make this situation a basis or point of departure for constructively criticizing our society’s wider priorities and the roles given to the arts within it, and not be afraid to suggest directions in which it could move (Apple 2013). Student musicians could be empowered by conservatoires to engage directly and pro-actively (rather than reactively) in these debates and actions. Even if it is hard to generalise about what this might mean for particular institutions in practice, these discussions need to be encouraged.. We nevertheless assert, however, that the ways most conservatoires commonly currently express their commitment to society-at-large are likely to have to change.

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2. How might conservatoires better appear and act as institutions of public service?

One 'mission level' idea might be to adapt and apply an idea most recently suggested by Alan Lane, the Artistic Director of Slung Low Theatre in West Yorkshire. We might promote conservatoires as unashamedly public institutions (just as Western society likes to think of public broadcasters or public hospitals or national parks), owned by and for, the communities in which they find themselves. Conservatoires would then be charged with explicitly empowering students with perspectives and attitudes that enable them to be advocates for a renewed sense of public life once they leave, as well as also developing new programmes that more powerfully draw the wider public into their institutional life. Lane noted in support of the idea that the 'banking crisis, the crumbling of trust in so much of the UK establishment and a profound shrinking of the size of the state means that the society theatres [and conservatoires] sit in [has] completely changed since 1997'. If that is true, then our arts institutions should as well. For, 'if there was ever a time crying out for a profoundly accessible central place that people could go to be more than a customer then it is now' (Lane, 2014). The answer to the question posed earlier, then, of 'who is a conservatoire education ultimately for', would be simple. It would be unequivocally for all of us.

Conservatoires could also usefully consider to what extent wider debates concerning Universities and their connection to society-at-large might also apply to them. David Russell, a lecturer in English Literature at King's College

London, has, for instance suggested that Universities should be asking themselves whether they are:

institutions that everybody feels they have a stake in, whether they are students or not? ...Are they places that train thinking, particularly the critical thinking required if we are to live in a healthy democracy? Do they introduce students, and so the wider culture, to resources of history and art and literature that could make them feel more alive... And if some of these descriptions have come to seem expendable, or luxuries, affordable only by the wealthy few, then I think that's a serious problem for all of us. (Rickett, 2015)

In a now famous essay for the London Review of Books, Marina Warner similarly was at pains to remind her readership that:

Universities are not businesses. Legally, they are charities, but the closer analogy would be a public coastal path or an urban park, a place created for the good of citizens. The current denaturing of the universities treats them less like a park than a shopping mall (Warner, 2015)

This is more than window dressing, but could be a key to re-inspiring and reinvigorating conservatoires as agents of positive social change as well as potentially helping to guide the way they might be run. For, as has been argued for Universities, they 'should not be desperately mimicking already outdated forms of corporate organisation, but rather be leading the way towards something better.' (Hansson et al., 2015) Terry Eagleton made the shared challenge more explicit when he argued that we should:

...seek to restore the honorable lineage of the university as one of the few arenas in modern society (another is the arts) in which prevailing ideologies can be submitted to some rigorous scrutiny. What if the value of the humanities lies not in the way they conform to such dominant notions, but in the fact that they don't? (Eagleton 2015)

Or, as Drew Faust posited in her inauguration address as President of Harvard University, 'a university looks both backwards and forwards in ways that must—that even ought to—conflict with... immediate concerns or demands' (Faust 2007). How such a change of culture at the mission level might impact actual programmes in conservatoire will of course depend on local conditions and circumstances, but there are a few more interconnected ideas relating to change that might need to be considered:

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Institute a new definition of musical excellence.

As Ian Pace and others have been drawing attention to in the UK, the rhetoric of musical excellence has been used in troubling ways to camouflage misuse of power (Pace 2015, Tregear 2014). At the very least, the many revelations over the past two years from the UK of the damage a system of elite music education can do to vulnerable people should certainly make us more circumspect about praising the cultivation of performing excellence as a self-evidently good thing for students, let alone for society as a whole—a point made recently in an article in the *Daily Telegraph* (UK) in which the music critic and broadcaster Ivan Hewett posed the question ‘Can talented musicians be well-rounded people?’ (Hewett 2013). We must bring the more mysterious side of the culture we have traditionally inhabited out into the daylight and allow it to be inspected, discussed and critiqued. Need it be an inviolable premise that the nurturing of individualism and competition between music students is the best, or even the only, way to prepare them for life as an elite performer? Might collaborative learning with their peers help students meet other needs as well, such as safety and belonging? Or, ‘what’s the point of being a great musician if it comes at the cost of a life well lived in a world worth living in?’ (Tregear 2015). We might also note here, as *The Atlantic* magazine did recently that Finland has proved that educational systems actually achieve higher standards of excellence more generally if they focus on social equity. Lacking a private school system or standardised national tests, the main driver of education policy was fairness; a higher standard of educational excellence was the welcome byproduct. (Partanen, 2011). To be sure, these issues are complex and difficult, but it is surely no longer sustainable to operate as if the teaching

of individual musical excellence was something set apart from a broader social context.

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Encourage research quality not research quantity

US historian Jacques Berlinerblau wrote recently in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that tertiary education institutions of all kinds increasingly ‘resemble the ailing magazine, newspaper, and taxi industries: crippled by challenges we never imagined, risks we never calculated, queries we never posed.’ With the growing pressure on conservatoire staff (in the UK and Australia at least) to mimic the research culture of traditional Universities, we could do well to heed his warning that research, like other nominally socially useful activities, has become a quasi-fetishized ‘key performance indicator’ that can lead to publication and specialisation divorced from its social or educational impact. Nevertheless, in a number of countries, conservatoire-based research has recently been carving out a new and particular identity for itself, realising the unique opportunities that performance-centred institutions present for reflecting on musical practice, and its application in a range of societally important interventions, including the beneficial role that music and music-making can play in promoting general and specific health and well-being. The next challenge is to harness this new-found confidence in order to transform our models of learning and teaching so that they, too, are genuinely based on the principles of prioritising collaborative enquiry and innovation over repetitive and reductive formats. The succinct definition of research as **‘a process of enquiry leading to new knowledge effectively shared’** surely applies equally to the

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process of learning to be a citizen musician. At the very least, if we wish to enable our students 'effectively to share' what they discover, let's train them to 'write clearly, speak publicly, and teach effectively' (Berlinerblau 2015).

Educate not just future performers, but future audiences.

Conservatoire education should be directed towards developing musical leadership of the community as much as *in* it. We should actively seek out and draw into our fold the music lovers as much as music professionals of the future. In turn, performers should use the platform performance gives them to do more than just entertain. They should seek to make a statement, seek, uncover or offer a truth, a meaning or message about the music they perform that also offers the audience something new to play with (conceptually, intellectually, spiritually, and so on), lest their work risk being perceived as merely a pleasant distraction or a self serving indulgence. Or, to put it another way, their art should be conceived from the outset as more than just servicing a need for entertainment, offering more than just an idle distraction from everyday life.

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Teach a curriculum of giving

A conservatoire as public institution would also always strive to find a more productive (in the best sense) relationship between performer and audience, one that transcends the limitation of a "music product provider meets passive customer/consumer". Ultimately it may lead to rethinking the very nature of the

‘social contract between student, teacher, and society as a whole’, how an institution connects ‘to its responsibilities to society-at-large’ (Tregear 2014a). It will proffer a curriculum overtly conscious of its social context and explicitly recognizing the foundations of generosity and the various forms of social contract, that inform all musical practice.

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Arguably, then, conservatoires should be principally defined, and broadly understood, as public institutions. They have been, or at least been common considered as, places of privilege, narrowly defined. Only as places of public service are they likely to maintain broad-based public support and a central role in shaping our musical cultures.

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3. How might conservatoires work to promote the values of listening as a basic, human characteristic to fellow citizens?

One particularly powerful public role conservatoires can play is in asking us to listen to music in fundamentally different ways than we do to the sounds that daily surround us. To be sure, our contemporary world is conceived principally through spectacle: images, symbols, logos, emoticons, and so on. We are constantly bombarded by visual impressions, media and advertising, a ‘triumph of spectacle’ as one social critic has put it (Hedges 2010). Today, auditory problems have become much more common, and noise pollution a significant environment issue in its own right. Theodor Adorno’s 1938 essay ‘On the fetish-character in music and the regression of listening’ detailed a fear that we lose ‘along with freedom of choice and responsibility, the capacity for conscious

perception of music' by listening atomistically and dissociating what we hear' (Adorno 2002, 303).

Adorno implies no less than a belief that music can condition the sensibility of the subject who listens to it. But we are increasingly at risk of not appreciating this fact. As *New Republic* literary editor Leon Wieseltier stated at the commencement ceremony of Brandeis University in 2013, the technological advances 'to which we have become enslaved, all of them quite astonishing, represent the greatest assault on human attention ever devised: they are engines of mental and spiritual dispersal, which make us wider only by making us less deep' (Wieseltier, 2013). More particularly, the type of concentrate listening that we traditionally associate with the sorts of music taught in conservatoires is increasingly at odds with the ways most of us now experience music. To better understand and meet the challenges this state of affairs might present for modern society, we require a critically informed performing and listening public, and this in turn requires music teachers who are not just prepared to describe the musical world they find around them but who are prepared to exercise leadership in it. In this context good listening becomes a synonym for being present in the world, that is, being concentrated, attentive and ready to respond to what we hear and instinctively understand. Listening to music can be a means through which we can better engage with the other, with ourselves, and with the world-at-large (LaBelle, 2010).

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Good listening is therefore something conservatoires could help encourage, as one agent of transformation we very much need midst a growing sense of environmental crisis and deficiencies of communication and social cohesion. At a more local level, perhaps part of the oft-lamented problem of 'passive' audiences in concert halls is the sense that the embodied part of the experience of music has become irrelevant, and yet the embodied element of music is core to the experience of hearing it. We could encourage listening as an agent of being more alive and listening to musical performances as a 'point of convergence where the specific and the general come together, music as the most specialized of aesthetics with a discipline entirely specific to it, performance as the general, socially available form of its cultural presentation' (Said, 1991: 17).

Ultimately, we need better listeners listening to better music because, as Giles Fraser has argued:

The arts should be one of the places to challenge the idea that our political and financial masters have a monopoly on what counts as established reality. [The arts can provide] something we used to call vision, a sense that the world could be otherwise, that our political assumptions can always be turned upside down. That used to be the role of religion. It widened the lens and stimulated the political imagination to consider broader social perspectives. But in a secular

age, that responsibility now resides primarily with the arts. (Fraser, 2015)

This is not to say that what conservatoire-trained musicians do can therefore be understood as a self-evident social good. As the author and environmental philosopher Charles Eisenstein has suggested, we could be forgiven for thinking that ‘the most sublime achievements of art, music, literature, science, and technology’ are yet ‘built upon the wreckage of the natural world and the misery of its inhabitants... Under the shadow of every Chartres Cathedral, must there be women burning at the stake?’ The underlying challenge for us, more properly expressed, is to explore whether such gifts ‘of technology and culture’ that we now have can ‘somehow be separated from [that] curse’. (Eisenstein, 2013: xv). How might conservatoires promote more critically self-aware modes of listening, modes that would extend out from the concert hall and other rarefied places into everyday life. Can, indeed, better listening lead to also to more critically self-aware modes of doing?

4. How might our knowledge of the conservatoire-society relationship be informed by research?

If we accept that conservatoires need to understand what they do, and its social impact, much better, research is the obvious tool to hand. It is already an increasingly prominent part of conservatoire life, for various reasons. In some parts of the world, conservatoires are increasingly finding themselves ranked

by the same impact methodologies such as governments in Europe and Australasia already apply to Universities. In other places conservatoires have been merged into larger Universities (Bennett and Franzmann, 2013), a process of academization (Karlsen et al. 2015) which has led to conservatoire faculty being required to do research in addition to their teaching, not always comfortably (Croft, 2015). Thirdly, we have seen a general increase in research on tertiary, or higher, music education generally (Jørgensen, 2009) as well as a raise in the general interest of the sociology of music education (Johansen, 2014, Wright, 2010).

As it currently occurs, such research activity in conservatoires generally includes one or more of the following areas (Polifonia, 2010):

- Practice-led artistic (performance, composition)
- Musicological and music theoretical topics, often practice-based.
- Music psychology and performance science
- Music education

We propose the addition of, if not a new research field, then a widening of the traditional scope of research in music education to include explicit consideration of the sociology and social efficacy of conservatoires. Research in this area could help us not just understand better how conservatoires function in society but also determine whether there is/can be a definable set of relations between conservatoires and society beyond just providing a music educational service. We could also develop better tools to evaluate, and ultimately promote, the

benefits and general educational effectiveness of outreach, other community activities, and public artistic programmes. Conservatoire-based research thus could play a particular role in helping conservatoires situate themselves more securely and appropriately in society.

It is also possible that conservatoires could use research culture to promote a more critical and enquiry-led approach to their day-to-day learning and teaching, perhaps rebalancing the curriculum in favour of students as 'co-researchers' in addition to 'apprentices', again to encourage them to address wider societal issues. Master's and doctoral students could also pursue collaborative projects that address broad questions about their own roles as musicians in society.

How conservatoires ultimately see their role in society depends on their perceptions of society's need for the kind of services they provide along with how they can, proactively, influence the ways in which society understand the potential of their contributions. Research could help explore explicitly how society currently views conservatoires and what they want conservatoires to offer. Conservatoires could then use the practical and political resources that such research might develop to help prepare their students to become better citizens and not 'just' musicians, 'ultimately people who have something worthwhile to say about what the ultimate purpose of that better' might be' (Tregear, 2014). Conservatoires would be would be actively exploring extent

and limits of their social contract, and how free they are to do so. The latter questions will no doubt require them to reflect more broadly at the institutional and social level with respect to how potent a capacity for social action a music institution ultimately can have.

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Conclusion

In setting this kind of agenda, do we risk pushing beyond the practical limitations of the educational brief, let alone resourcing, of the traditional conservatoire? Perhaps, but the alternative might be to risk witnessing conservatoires slide into impotency and irrelevancy, or just as concerning, becoming just another source of education whose purpose, in the words of commentator George Monbiot is merely 'to prepare people for jobs they will never have in the service of an economy ordered for the benefit of others.' (Monbiot, 2015).

The time is absolutely ripe, therefore, to reconceive conservatoires now as unashamedly public institutions, overtly and actively engaged with the pressing social issues of our times. Conservatoires may then have a chance of becoming better known as institutions that support and nourish not just the dreams and hopes of the talented, elite, performers fortunate to enter their doors, but ultimately the dreams and hopes of us all.

Commented [HG25]: Strong conclusion!

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Helena Tulve is an Estonian composer. Her music is centered on constant change and grows out from simple primary impulses, being influenced by natural patterns, organics and synchronicity. Besides composition she has thoroughly studied Gregorian chant and various oral musical traditions are still her subject of research. Helena Tulve has been commissioned by Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, NYVD Ensemble, Nieuw Ensemble, *ensemble diferencias*, Netherlands Chamber Choir, Uppsala Symphony Orchestra,

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Richard Wistreich is a scholar, singer and teacher. He recently joined the Royal College of Music in London as Director of Research from the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where he was Dean of Research and Enterprise from 2010–2014. He has had an international career as a performer specialising in music written before 1750, and was for a number of years Germany's only full-time Professor of Early Singing, at the Institut für Alte Musik in Trossingen. He has made more than 100 CDs of music ranging from medieval to Mozart, but he also sings contemporary music commissioned for his path-breaking vocal ensemble, Red Byrd. Richard is also a distinguished scholar, and has written books, journal articles and essays about the technical and cultural history of the voice and of singing in the early modern period, and also published extensively on the composer, Claudio Monteverdi.