

Some Necessities for Artists

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This report responds to the discussions that I have undertaken with composers and performers. Its ideas come from these people, but do not represent the totality those offered. Rather, it brings together the ideas that have emerged most frequently, or which have found most favour in the consultation process. These are ideas that are emergent, describing a body of practice as it currently exists: innovative ideas that come from current working methods and that have been honed through a process of consultation with a wide variety of musicians – they are practical ideas. They are ideas that form the basis of what is needed now.

Above all, those with whom I have spoken have indicated their desire for a new approach to new¹ music. Allied to this is a desire for organizational support that is open, flexible and responsive to the needs of composers and performers as they go about producing new music. Support for new music must complement existing entrepreneurial practice by providing facilities and undertaking those tasks most efficiently done on a collective basis.

The composers and performers (henceforth, artists) agree that an organization needs to provide a new focus on the vibrancy of Britain's musical scene, highlighting the exciting, innovative work that is being undertaken. Space that is dedicated to new music is also needed, to support artistic endeavour.

An open approach that is responsive to artists' needs can reduce the red tape and opaque artistic direction that is seen to characterize many of the existing opportunities. This approach is needed by new and established artists to help them bring forth their ideas. It will **complement the opportunities offered by existing organizations**. A forum needs to be provided for artists to take new risks and to engage with new audiences. An open and responsive approach necessitates an organization that has at its heart **a collective of composers and performers**.

All the following ideas are designed to facilitate new music, not to compete with what already takes place: to make the most of what occurs, to support new approaches, and to help composers and performers highlight their work. Organizational support for artists will help to broker relationships with organizations (including ensembles, orchestras, venues, festivals) throughout the sector, by highlighting new music. By promoting a more open way of working and embracing the diversity of new music, new audiences can actively be developed.

A Space

A most pressing need is for a space that is dedicated to new music. Throughout the consultation process this need has been requested again and again. Even when different models of working have been proposed, artists have argued for a dedicated space for new music. This venue is most valuably located in central London.

Far from a London-centric move, situating **a venue in London will provide a concert venue for use by those based outside London**. Many of those based around the UK have indicated that it is difficult to present new work in London, owing to three factors: the high cost of hiring venues; the difficulty of attracting unknown audiences to performances; the difficulty of knowing which venue to choose. For those in London a new music venue will tackle similar concerns.

Composers have indicated that they need a venue which has a 'buzz' or 'excitement', where they can work with performers to develop and present new work. Existing venues are often difficult or expensive to access, especially so if artistic outcomes are not known in advance.

But where?

Throughout the consultation process it has been suggested that the venue needs to be in central London, and that it be in an area in which people find themselves for other reasons. It needs, as it were, to be a home for new music, rather than a space to which one takes a holiday.

Composers and performers have suggested various options for a space for new music, but the overwhelming concern is that:

- It have an acoustic that is flexible and suited to a wide variety of musics, and able to host multi- and trans-media events.

1 Throughout the document, the term 'new' is intended broadly, encompassing recently composed music as well as music that will be new to audiences. Generally speaking, music composed after the middle of the previous century.

- That is be embedded in an area of other artistic endeavour, attracting diverse audiences ('contemporary arts', 'historical arts'...).

Those consulted have made it clear that the choice of location for new music's space clearly makes a statement about the (changing) nature of new music in London, and that developing this space ought to be free from the weight of past practice. The social aspect of concert going is vitally important to artists and audiences alike, and the close proximity of venues that are ideal for social activity (before and after concerts and other visits to new music's hub) has been a consistent request through the period of consultation. Artists want new music to be part and parcel of life: the support for artistic endeavour must respond to the uses that people make of new music.

A Network of Spaces

A wider network of new music venues is needed to complement London's new music scene. Performers in particular have indicated that it is often difficult to broker arrangements with venues around the country. An organization with an exciting programme of concerts in its space can help to form a new network of venues, by highlighting the possible events that other venues can host. This network will facilitate the exchange of music throughout the UK, promoting greater links between artists throughout the UK.

Composers currently face difficulties in getting their music widely known. The same difficulty faces performers, who are often restricted in the music that they are able to programme and perform. A network of like-minded venues will help to disseminate more widely the music about which performers are especially keen.

With so much already going on, the ensembles that exist around the UK now need organizational support to highlight their work, and to use this to build a network of venues. This project should begin modestly, with venues that already host new music, and expand as the projects gains momentum.

Artistic Direction

It is essential that an organization exist that has **no single artistic direction** and has **no artistic director**. Rather than relying on a single guiding voice, as many existing organizations do, the artists themselves need to be able to form the heart of an organization.

Those consulted have offered the following idea, as an example of a viable model. They desire a space that can be available to anyone who:

- Can demonstrate that they have support – from performers and composers – for the concert to take place. NB: this does not (at least, not necessarily) mean the support of a large audience.

And they are willing to pay a fee for the use of such a space:

- Several artists have mentioned figures between £100 and £200 for hire, which they have indicated is sufficient to ensure their commitment to finding audiences for their programme. In return, those putting on the event retain 50% of the net box office receipts.

There needs to be a 'no comps' policy for new music.

Such criteria will ensure a transparent process for using the venue.

This is an idea that departs from most of the models by which new music venues are run. Although artistic directors and artistic committees work to ensure high standards by selecting those who they believe to be of sufficient standard, they also produce an opaque selection process. Furthermore, if an event is unsuccessful (by whatever measure), it is not in the interests of the artistic director to make this apparent. Such obfuscation is unhelpful for artists, who need organizational support to promote the vibrancy of new music.

Artists need more options, in terms of programming, to devise events that suit intimately the people involved (including their audiences). Support should in the first instance be given to those who can demonstrate their willingness and enthusiasm for performing new music. This model relies on the impresarii who are already operating and will support their work by reducing their administrative burden. It will encourage new collectives. Audiences respond well when performers perform well. It is essential that performers have an equal position alongside composition, such that they and composers can work together to develop new audiences and engage existing audiences anew.

It has become apparent from this consultation that the UK's new music scene is both fragmented and splintered. In response, **existing differences must be embraced**, since diversity is essential to the vibrancy of the scene. This can only be brought about by an organization with no one artistic vision.

Aesthetic decisions need to be made by those writing and performing new music.

Within an artistic policy open to all those keen to highlight new music, organizational decisions are needed to balance one-off events with longer-term programmes; (for concerts as brief as necessary for the artists involved, or for long-term projects.)

The most entrepreneurial people directly involved in music making should be identified. They should be guiding the direction new music. Organizational support for new music should be as lean as possible, to support artists as much as possible by removing existing red tape. Organizational support is needed to broker arrangements for artists, enabling them to take greater risks. No organization needs to align existing activity in one direction; rather, support is needed for the most enterprising activity that currently exists, and to enable new people to develop their ideas.

A Point of Contact

A Hub

The physical space is needed that forms a hub for new music. This space needs facilities for artists to work – to work together – and to support their administrative work (printing music for performance, scanning scores). It is vital that those working for the hub have the expertise, charisma and enthusiasm to promote new music.

The hub also needs to provide visitors the resources that they need to access music. These resources need to be broad, since they encompass online resources (such as pdfs of scores and recordings), calendars of 'what's on', and access to the people who work for the organization. The latter ensures that there is a personal face to new music.

A Website

There needs to be a website that is a resource for all those (within the UK and without) wanting to access information about new music. It needs to be a recognizable point of contact for those who know about new music and are looking for specific composers, performers and festivals. It also needs to be a recognizable point of contact for those who are fresh to new music.

All the composers and performers with whom I have spoken have individual websites (or are in the process of developing one). Almost everyone suggested that duplicating the efforts of individual websites is a waste of resources. Each of these websites is a point of entry for those new to new music, and the hosting organization needs to make the most of these paths, by being the second website, if not in every instance the first, that people find. This fits the model on which this report is built, since a central website that refers to individual websites ensures that each artist is able to represent their work in their own way: it eschews standardisation in favour of diversity. It also suggests that a website is needed to be the way that people can find out more about new music.

A central website is needed, and its role is:

- to link to each artist who is a member of the organization
- to host new music resources. A call for composers to add their music (in electronic form alone) to a central resource should accompany initial membership drives.
- This website needs a **calendar of events** to which music can be added by any member. A clear, day by day listing is needed, so that audiences can access information about events easily. The same information needs to be accessible on a region-by-region basis.

The central website needs to be simple, streamlined and compatible with other online resources. It needs excellent design that brings together form and content to ensure accessibility and impact. Conversations with artists have revealed that extensive content for a website already exists. Such a website needs to be content rich, to be a focus for the content of new music, hosting material that will make it easier for audiences to learn about new music.

New music events are routinely recorded (audio and video) and organizational support is needed to help broker arrangements with other organizations over the rights to use these resources. In this and

other ways **an organization that is a peak body is needed**, to represent the needs of new music artists and other organizations committed to new music. Audience development ought to take place through the existing practice of artists.

Advice

Expertise that provides advice to artists about the production of new ideas is needed. This advice will link artists with others who will be keen to support their ideas. Organizational support needs to **connect people** to help ideas find fertile ground. This is especially necessary for younger composers whose experience of finding connections throughout the arts will be limited. Better links need to be forged between artists with similar visions, between artists and funders, and between artists and festivals and other venues. ‘Surgeries’ need to take place in which composers with ideas can have 1 to 1 access to experienced creators of new music to provide:

- direct feedback on their ideas, how these ideas might connect with other artists
- feedback on the best places for the ideas to be performed, and who might be interested in performing them.
- the names and contact details of performers, other artists, and funders
- advice about programming, to make the most of the new musics as they are being conceived.

Better advice – given by well connected and open, helpful experts – is needed to nurture art more directly, making more of resources as they become available.

Membership

Whilst new music does not need a private members’ club, a membership scheme is necessary. There need be no restriction on who can become a member, since the basic membership indicates support for new music.

The members must have an ongoing role in running the organization. By ensuring that collectivity is at the organization’s heart, this will help to reduce the need to get The Right People to make all the decisions.

A basic level of membership should be approximately £60 per year, with a student rate at £30 per year and a similar concession for the aged.

The artists with whom I have spoken have indicated the wealth of information that they are keen to share, including written materials and recordings (especially those that are not cleared for public broadcast). Paper copies of ‘what’s on’ need to be circulated. Lists of new works composed need to be published. Access to this content will justify the membership fee. (Further membership benefits ought to be developed in response to the members’ needs.)

Subscriptions

A different kind of subscription needs to be available to composers, and it needs to be run by an organization, to make the most of the economies of scale that an organization can harness. Following consultation with a wide variety of composers, the version that emerges most clearly is as follows:

- An organization needs to provide a service to produce (print, bind etc...) and disseminate musical materials. It is clear from my discussions that the amount for the subscription is dependent on the outcomes of the scheme, but that an entry level of £200 per year is appropriate. The organization will register the works with the PRS on the composer’s behalf, and retain 50% of net receipts from the sales/hire of music. This is not an exclusive contract, and its success will depend on the organization running the scheme efficiently, making the best use of the efficiency that comes with print production on a large scale.
- Further services can be offered as necessary, and should enough composers need a particular service – and should the expertise be available – then it can be offered. Advice (either directly or to specialists) for contracts, fee negotiation, proofreading and other such services need to be available.
- Advice to composers on the preparation of their materials should be provided. The scheme

should be run by someone with experience in managing digital resources and their print production, ideally from a design background.

- An online shop is needed (either within an organization, or in conjunction with a distribution partner) from which scores and parts can be purchased (either as hard copy, or as pdf, in consultation with the composer).
- International distribution needs to be secured. Securing distribution will attract composers to the scheme, and support the organization's work in highlighting British Music abroad. (Composers have indicated that they may be willing to sign an exclusive contract if it facilitates better distribution.)

This service needs to be available to anyone willing to pay for it. Artistic quality is of no importance: this is a print production and distribution service.

A List

Of all the ideas raised in the consultation process, this is one of the least stable. The most stable, workable version of it is as follows:

- Emerging composers are selected by a rolling panel (of no more than 6 people). Composers can be on the scheme for a maximum of 10 years. No more than 40 composers are on the list. Panel members serve for, at most, three years in every decade. Scores are sent to the administering organization, anonymized, and sent electronically to the panel. Feedback is then collated, ensuring every score is assessed at least thrice, votes counted and the results announced.

Such a list is an attractive idea for festivals and artistic directors looking for composers. Composers have indicated that this is a useful way of highlighting within the UK, and to European partners, those whose quality is assured. The composers have indicated the value that a list has in identifying valuable music. The panel should comprise composers already on the scheme (or, for the first year, composers taken from the former New Voices list), performers and conductors, with the emphasis on variety. The panel is named at the start of every year so that composers who do not feel they are likely to be selected by the panel members perhaps do not apply, but wait for the following year. Composers wanting to be selected have to be members of the organization. All those chosen for the shortlist will have their music clearly displayed in a separate section of the website. (They will still be required to subscribe to the production scheme if they want their music printed and distributed.)



The aim of all these practical and straight-forward ideas is to provide the best chance for new music to flourish, taking in new ideas and supporting new artistic ventures. Quality will emerge over time. Now is the time boldly to support those composers and performers who are already committed to producing new music.

Composers want performances. Performers want a space that is easy to access and has diverse audiences. They both want supportive and helpful people to support their work. Everyone wants a well designed, content rich central website to support and promote the vibrancy of new music.