**Introduction**

**Anna Bull and Christina Scharff**

**Beginnings**

Over recent years, inequalities in the classical music profession have become a central issue in scholarly and industry debates. There are now a range of initiatives that seek to tackle exclusions along the lines of ‘race’, ethnicity, class, gender, and disability. In the UK, where the editors of this volume are based, the double bass player Chi-chi Nwanoku (see chapter 22, this volume), launched the [Chineke! Foundation](https://www.chineke.org/) in 2015, which provides career opportunities to established and up-and-coming Black and ethnically diverse classical musicians in the UK and Europe. An earlier example of this work comes from The Sphinx Organisation, based in Detroit, Michigan, in the US, set up in 1997, which aims to increase representation of Black and Latinx artists in classical music. Internationally, the [Keychange](https://keychange.eu/about-us/) campaign encourages music festivals and conferences to sign up to a 50:50 gender balance pledge by 2022, and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra’s [Resound](https://bsolive.com/people/bso-resound-ensemble/) is a professional disabled-led ensemble. These, and other initiatives have been widely discussed in the classical music sector. Reflecting these developments, policy-makers and funders are also starting to address these challenges. In Canada, the project Re-Sounding the Orchestra has explored relationships between Canadian orchestras, Indigenous peoples, and people of colour (Peerbaye and Attariwala, 2019); in the US, interventions to improve pathways into professional orchestras for BIPOC musicians have been set up (Feder and McGill, 2021), and in the UK, Arts Council England recently published the report “Creating a more inclusive classical music” (Cox and Kilshaw, 2021), which provides a detailed overview of the barriers to entering, remaining and becoming successful in the classical music sector in England. However, despite this attention to equity, diversity and inclusion, there is no book that *specifically* explores issues of inequalities and exclusions in the classical music profession. This volume addresses this gap by advancing our understanding of the nature of current inequalities in the field of classical music production, exploring why they continue to exist, and asking what can be done to tackle ongoing exclusions.

We have curated this collection in order to foreground voices for change – those who are already making a difference in classical music. As such, one of the distinguishing features of the book is the inclusion of chapters from those working in the classical music industry, where they are given the opportunity to reflect on issues of diversity and to share insights and inspiration as well as good practice. As a result, we have gone beyond the usual format for academic edited collections to include interview-based chapters with musicians and activists making change in classical music, and to include voices who are not usually heard, such as those who leave due to the very inequalities that this book outlines (see Anthony Gray’s chapter, this volume). As well as these practitioner accounts, we have chapters from industry professionals and organisations, and a wide-ranging selection of contributions from academic researchers. Indeed, our perspectives on the classical music profession are informed by conversations and collaborations with practitioners as well as industry bodies, and dialogue with academics who have critically explored the field of classical music (Baker, 2014, 2020; Bennett, 2008; Browning, 2019; Curtin and Whittaker, 2021; Green, 1997; 2003; Kajikawa, 2019; Kok, 2006; Leppänen, 2015; Johnson-Williams, 2015; 2020; Leech-Wilkinson, 2020; Moore, 2016; Lochhead et al., 2019; Schreffler, 2019; Yoshihara, 2007; Wang, 2015), as well as many of those included in this volume.

In curating this volume, we have drawn on our own scholarly and activist work on the classical music profession carried out over the past decade. Anna Bull carried out sociological research with young classical musicians in England after quitting her own career as a classically-trained pianist and cellist (Bull, 2016, 2016a, 2018, 2019). This research examined the middle-class culture and gendered norms in this classical music youth scene, arguing that classical music’s inequalities are in part created through its distinctive aesthetic which requires a long-term investment of time, money and effort that is more possible and feels more worthwhile for middle- and upper-class families. The social and aesthetic conventions and performance norms of this aesthetic form a boundary that keeps out those who are not able to reach the standards of ability that are required to play classical music’s instruments and canonic repertoire to the standards of precision that its education and performance institutions require. As a result, classical music institutions maintain an appearance of meritocracy and openness to ‘talent’, while the boundary-drawing that keeps out most of those outside the middle-classes is camouflaged by being part of the aesthetic requirements of the music. The gendered and racialised norms of the white middle-classes are also reproduced within classical music’s conventions, as observed in the youth music spaces in her study, for example through practices of embodied control and male authority. More recently, Bull has turned her attention to sexual and gender-based violence and harassment in higher education, including classical music education, asking whether classical music constitutes a ‘conducive context’ for such violence (Bull, forthcoming), as well as exploring how classical music education can shift away from its ‘pedagogy of correction’ (Bull, 2022) towards embedding ‘youth voice’ (Mayne et al., 2022).

Christina Scharff has examined gender, racial and class inequalities in the classical music profession in Germany and the UK. Scharff carried out qualitative and quantitative research to map and bring to light existing inequalities, and to understand why they continue to exist (2015; 2018a,b; 2020; 2021). Scharff published the report “Equality and Diversity in the Classical Music Profession” (2015), which provided quantitative data that detailed the under-representation of marginalised groups in the classical music sector in the UK. The report was widely circulated and provided much-needed evidence to begin a more informed conversation about inequalities and exclusions. Scharff also made a range of qualitative contributions by focusing on the dimension of subjectivity. In particular, she showed that ‘ideal’ musicians are often constructed as middle-class, white and male (2018b) and that various, common practices of getting work in the industry, such as networking and self-promotion, foster racialised, classed and gendered exclusions (2018a). Her research on ‘the psychic life of neoliberalism’ (2016; 2018) employed a Foucauldian framework to critique industry discourses that promote entrepreneurialism and to demonstrate that neoliberal rationality shapes formations of selfhood. Her most recent research analyses how freelance musicians negotiate sexual harassment (2020) and explores the extent to which current discussions of inequalities and exclusion in the classical music profession pave the way for social change (2021).

Both editors, as well as associate editor Laudan Nooshin, have also been active in trying to make change in classical music, and as such this volume reflects their dual role as both academics but also as activists who are deeply invested in the themes discussed in the book. Anna Bull has organised a series of events to help music education institutions in the UK better address the difficult issue of sexual abuse in classical music (Bull, 2016c), as well as running training sessions and talks for music teachers and working with classical music organisations to change practices and embed inclusion. Alongside this, she also co-directs campaign and research organisation The 1752 Group which addresses staff/faculty sexual misconduct in higher education, including higher music education. Laudan Nooshin has had a long-term commitment to bringing about change in relation to the issues discussed in this volume. She was involved in setting up and is currently co-Chair of the UK Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies Network (EDIMS) as well as Chair of the Royal Musical Association EDI Working Group. As outlined above, Christina Scharff has supported industry bodies with research data and theoretically-informed analysis to help them improve their approach to tackling inequalities and exclusions.

**Scope**

The book contains chapters which explore a range of national contexts, including Italy, Austria, Germany, the US, UK, France, Poland, Japan and Australia. However, a limitation of the book is that is predominantly focuses on the Global North rather than the Global South (as defined by Dados and Connell, 2012). Indeed, as editor Laudan Nooshin has described in her previous work the term ‘western art music’ is ideologically loaded, not least in claiming ‘exclusive ownership of a cultural space whilst denying the existence of ‘others’ who have been and continue to be central to it and who are rendered invisible by the dominant discourses’ (Nooshin: 2011, 294; see also Silpayamanant, chapter 16, this volume). The volume risks reifying the ideology that Anglophone and European voices are central to this tradition and practice by representing authors from these parts of the world, and in this way, it could be seen as complicit in, or reproducing the inequalities that it seeks to address. We acknowledge that due to this volume being the first to address the topic of inequalities and exclusions in the classical music profession, it is necessarily a partial account. We are uncomfortably aware of the gaps and silences in relation to contributors from the Global South, and we look forward to reading work in this area and collaborating with scholars who we hope will, in future, highlight research and activism from areas in the world we have not included. These issues also bring up questions of terminology. For example, whilst the terms ‘West’ and ‘Western’ are most often deployed unproblematically in the literature and elsewhere, where the authors in this book have used them, we have put these in quotation marks to indicate that these are historical constructs that should be read critically. It is also important to acknowledge that terminology around racialised groups differs across time and space; given geographical specificities, concepts do not always travel easily from one place to another and terminology changes over time, reflecting transformations in discussions about and understandings of racism. Throughout, we capitalise the terms Black, White, Asian, or other racialised identities to indicate that these are socially constructed categories. As with ‘West’/‘Western’, we have chosen to place the term ‘race’ in inverted commas in order to draw particular attention to the constructedness of the concept and to counter the still widespread popular views of racial categories as biologically rather than socially determined. We discuss the term ‘classical music’ in a separate section towards the end of this introduction.

The book focuses on the classical music profession, including institutional training routes into the profession in the form of conservatoires, but we have not included discussions of under-18s education in the volume, for two reasons. First, this issue has already been covered extensively elsewhere, most recently in the Oxford Handbook for Social Justice in Music Education (Benedict et al., 2015), as well as other edited collections (Burnard et al., 2015; Frierson-Campbell et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2021). Secondly, we wanted to explore what the classical music profession itself is doing in this area. There is a tendency to shift the blame for the lack of diversity in classical music onto the education pipeline, implying that the profession itself does not need to change. While there is certainly work to be done in classical music education, in this volume we explore ways forward for the profession within the current circumstances, without expecting the inequalities and exclusions that are described in this volume to be solved by education organisations alone.

In line with our focus on industry rather than education, we do not address the question as to why children of diverse cultural backgrounds should study classical music in the first place. Besides going beyond the remit of this volume, the question itself rests on a problematic assumption of a naturalized link between a person’s ethnic or indeed any other aspect of their identity, and the music that they listen to or play, in this case between ‘classical music’ as a genre and ‘whiteness’ (Bull, 2019; Kajikawa, 2019). As explored by Bull (2019), Stirling (2019), Born (2011) and also chapters 14 and 15 in this volume, there often exist cultural and historical associations between social groups and musical genres which may form a contingent connection or ‘articulation’ (Bull, 2019: 13-14). However, reifying relationships between genres and ethnic identities can serve to draw racialised boundaries around particular musical styles, thus reinforcing exclusionary processes. The question of classical music education for children from diverse backgrounds is therefore one that needs careful thought and more empirical and theoretical investigation elsewhere. Likewise, this volume does not discuss community and amateur classical music-making, and indeed these practices have been less explored in academic literature in relation to inequalities. There is thus a need for more research and potentially activism in this area. We focus on professional, rather than amateur, classical music here as we suggest that there is a particularly urgent policy imperative to diversify cultural practices that receive high levels of public funding, as does professional classical music in the UK and in many other Global North countries (Bull and Scharff, 2017).

As editors, our aim was to centre the voices of those who are marginalised in relation to various, and intersecting, axes of difference. Several chapters, for example, show how conservatoires reproduce gendered, racialised and classed power relations: Jennie Joy Porton’s interviews with conservatoire alumni bring to the fore the ways in which class background shapes experiences of higher music education in the UK. Similarly, Clementina Casula’s study of Italian conservatoires demonstrates the presence of a class divide in the selection process, taking the form of an urban-rural distinction, and of gender biases. Drawing upon interviews with music teachers working at elite state-funded higher music education institutions in Austria and Germany, Rosa Reitsamer and Rainer Prokop trace how constructions of the ‘ideal’ classical music student reproduce the association of the classical music profession with white middle-class culture. Lastly, David-Emil Wickström focuses on sexual harassment in higher music education in Europe and discusses strategies for addressing power-based abuse in instrumental lessons.

As demonstrated by the chapters on higher music education, this edited collection mainly focuses on issues of ‘race’, gender, class and, to a lesser extent, disability. Charlotte Armstrong discusses disability representation in opera and focuses on a range of issues, such as inaccessible spaces and education programmes to demeaning, stereotypical roles and problematic performance practices (see also the contributions by Oliver Vibrans and John Shortell). Other axes of difference, such as age, body positivity, pregnancy, maternity/parenthood, sexuality and gender identity are not explicitly addressed. These gaps reflect trends in research on classical music, which has explored some axes of difference – such as ‘race’, class and gender – more than others (see Cox, 2021). While there exist discussions on inclusion around gender identity in classical music (see for example Pullinger (2020)), this work is comparatively recent, and more needs to be done to include the voices that are not represented in this collection. This book is, therefore, part of a longer and ongoing conversation about inequalities in classical music. The gaps listed here as well as others that may become apparent over time highlight that this book does not address all forms of exclusions and oppression. It is, instead, an attempt to centre research and activism that tackle inequalities and exclusions.

**Challenges and developments**

We have noticed a shift in urgency in this work in recent years, most notably since the Black Lives Matter movement gained more public and international attention in 2020. While there have always been reflective practitioners in classical music who are trying to make change, these efforts have now intensified and more radical discussions have started to become possible. Nevertheless, challenges remain, particularly around patchy and poor quality data, the high levels of unpaid labour that such diversity work often involves, and a sense of fatalism among many institutions that classical music will always remain elitist due to the long training period required to learn to produce its distinctive aesthetic. This fatalism is only exacerbated by the high levels of economic and social inequality that characterise some of the countries discussed in this volume, including the UK where we are based. It is not misplaced; but it is perhaps incompatible with acting to make change in the world. As Scharff’s (2021) analysis of discussions about inequalities has shown, fatalist statements can also lead to a sense of a lack of agency, especially in a wider neoliberal context. Instead, we suggest that activists need to chart a course between retaining awareness of the structural inequalities that exist while drawing inspiration and hope from examples of positive change, including some that are described in this book.

The question of how to acknowledge structural inequalities whilst holding on to a sense of possibility of change also emerges from analyses of initiatives that promote ‘diversity’. Among scholarly critiques of diversity discourses, some have argued that diversity initiatives can “actually serve as an ideological function that sustains the institutional whiteness of the cultural industries even while they claim (often genuinely so) to do something more inclusive” (Saha, 2018: 88; see also Mellinger, 2003). As Sara de Benedictis, Kim Allen, and Tracey Jensen (2017: 343) have argued in relation to television production, representation and consumption in the UK, “while class is now ‘on the agenda’, this is not necessarily ‘progressive’” Class inequalities can, for example, be openly acknowledged, but simultaneously downplayed, shutting down critical discussion about the media’s class politics. Resonating with wider critiques of diversity (e.g. Ahmed, 2007), diversity discourses (Bell and Hartmann, 2007), and discussions about racial hierarchies (e.g. Hastie and Rimmington, 2014), ‘doing’ diversity does not necessarily lead to structural change. In their contributions to this book, Mina Yang and Marianna Ritchey draw attention to these dynamics in their analyses of the LA Philharmonic and neoliberal philanthropy (Yang, this volume) and diversity and inclusion in U.S. classical music discourse (Ritchey, this volume). Mina Yang’s chapter weighs the costs and benefits of neoliberal philanthropy and unpacks the neocolonialist subtext that underlies much of the recent wave of classical music social programs. Similarly, Marianna Ritchey takes a critical look at calls to diversify classical music, highlighting the way they exclude considerations of class and prestige. According to Ritchey, classical music is white supremacist and patriarchal, but it is also elitist, and there is a need to radically reframe how we envision both diversity and the music itself. As these chapters and wider research on the cultural and creative industries demonstrate, there is a need to subject diversity initiatives to critical scrutiny, whilst also trying to move forward and find ways to make change.

Resonating with this argument, this volume evidences not only much more critical scholarship than there was just five years ago but also a vibrant field of activism in classical music. It includes examples of activism taking place on the levels of individuals; of groups and networks; and established organisations and unions. We see all these levels of activism as important for creating change in classical music. On the level of individuals, some chapters describe how the conditions of the author’s life as a musician led them into change. For example, Brandon Keith Brown describes how the racism he faced as a Black conductor led him to start educating himself in this area, speaking out, and setting up his own organisation. Maiko Kawabata took as her starting point personal experiences of racism and sexism, and conducted research on the new ‘Yellow Peril’ to discuss the forms of marginalisation that East Asian musicians experience in professional orchestras in Western Europe. The labour that is involved in trying to do social justice work is described by conductor Cayenna Ponchionne-Bailey – labour that is not often recognised or supported by the working conditions in the industry. This labour can also involve confronting internalised values and ideals that uphold inequalities; as Eleanor Ryan describes, White classical musicians can engage in critical self-reflexive work to make processes of racialisation visible to themselves and others. This includes reflecting on the ways in which whiteness as embodiment, in hierarchies of cultural value or simply a sense of superiority, can be reproduced within cultures of classical music. As she outlines, this reflexive work is likely to be deeply uncomfortable for White musicians, but it is crucial to challenge the reproduction of racialised forms of privilege through classical music practice. Shedding light on a different form of reflexivity and self-awareness, Beata Kowalczyk draws on empirical material collected through multi-sited research among Japanese musicians based in France, Poland and Japan to trace how they negotiate and navigate racialised discourses of ‘authenticity’ in classical music.

Other chapters detail the experiences of classical musicians and administrators in building networks to create change within their specific field. Antonio Cuyler, in conversation with Quodesia Johnson, discusses the work of the Black Administrators of Opera group as a form of ‘Blacktivism’, i.e. ‘Black peoples’ use of advocacy, personal agency, and political action to actualize racial equity and justice’. They discuss Blacktivism in the context of an opera industry that ‘continues to call on our stories and experiences, our creativity, our communities, our expertise, and our networks without ceding power, demonstrating a reluctance to progress beyond a White-centered approach to opera’. Similarly, Beth Higham-Edwards describes how her own lived experience as a woman training and working as a classical percussionist led her to become an activist, and to organise networks for women in minoritized roles in classical music. Other examples of such networks, as discussed below, include Gender Relations in New Music and Illuminate Women’s Music.

Finally, chapters from the Musicians’ Union and the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) in the UK detail what is possible when musicians come together in their thousands to try and make change and improve working conditions. The ISM’s chapter describes three strands of their work in the UK, including gathering data on discrimination and harassment in classical music; campaigning for better legal protections from harassment for freelance musicians; and revealing the conditions for musicians that the Covid-19 pandemic brought about, including inequalities, and describing how they have been fighting for musicians’ rights during this time. John Shortell from the UK Musicians’ Union describes two of their campaigns, on inclusion strategies for disabled musicians, and the Safe Space campaign around sexual harassment in the music industry. However, despite these vibrant examples, such progress is too late for some. In an interview, Anthony Gray, a former classical singer and education worker in classical music institutions, describes how the racism he experienced in classical music led him to leave the industry entirely. He does not retain the hope described by others featured in this book, in part because of what he perceives as a lack of activism in the classical music world especially compared to his new professional milieu of theatre where opposition, unrest, and demanding change is much more common.

By bringing these activist and practitioner voices together with academic research, we hope that this book will continue an important dialogue between scholarly research and analysis and musicians’/activists’ work on these issues. This dialogue also has its challenges, when, for example, the rhetoric that is required in activist work to inspire others and to build commitment does not take the tone or use evidence in the ways that are required for scholarly publication. Editing these chapters therefore gave rise to questions about the kinds of voices that get heard in scholarly publications; a difficult balancing act for us in terms of our aim to publish a wide range of voices, but also doing so whilst operating with the conventions of academic publishing. Facilitating the dialogue between musician/activist and academic voices also sheds light on the different forms of labour, including emotional labour, involved in attempts to undo existing power relations. Various contributions to this volume discuss – sometimes more centrally and sometimes more in passing – the work involved in making change. This work is often time-consuming and yet unpaid; mentally and emotionally draining and frequently done by those already marginalised (Shim, 2021); and carries with it a lot of responsibility.

The editorial decisions needed to draw these diverse voices together mean that some of the chapters in this book directly contradict or argue against the perspective of others. Reflecting wider debates about the lack of diversity in the classical music field, some authors advocate an approach to inclusion that provides all, including those from marginalised groups, with the opportunities and means to access classical music training and practice to perform to what is considered a ‘high’ standard. Others, including the editors in their own publications and research, want to push further to analyse, critique and challenge the exclusionary aesthetics of classical music (Bull, 2019), or the racialised, classed and gendered constructions of the ‘‘ideal classical musician’ (Scharff, 2018b; see below). For example, some chapters seek to make change in the classical music industry by devising schemes that support Black and racially minorited classical musicians to succeed within already established industry conventions. These perspectives can be contrasted with the more structural critique in Antonio Cuyler’s conversation with Quodesia Johnson, in which Cuyler opens up the question ‘in relation to White supremacy, do you think the opera industry is ready to change?’ Johnson responds that

If we were ready to do it, it would have been done by now. We've taken the very compliant approach, which is normal in White supremacy culture of: ‘let's name all the things that have happened. Let's attribute it to the art form as opposed to our nation, individual selves, or lack of accountability within organizations. Let's look at the systemic things, as opposed to the intentional, systematic exclusion of Black people in the nation and in the field.

These contrasting viewpoints reflect the discussions ongoing in the classical music industry at the present time and as such, as editors, we have not sought to edit out or soften any perspectives that are inconsistent with the stance of other chapters. We have presented these arguments as they are made in the public sphere today in order to allow readers to make their own interpretations, reading across the volume as a whole, and we hope to serve as a resource for critical discussion by students, musicians and industry workers and leaders. In order to facilitate such critical discussion, we have added a series of discussion questions at the end of the book for use by teachers, students, activists, industry leaders, and of course musicians themselves, who may wish to set up a reading group to discuss the chapters using these questions as a starting point.

In particular, it would have been possible to focus the entire volume on the issue of ‘race’, due to the complexity and diversity of the different conversations occurring internationally in this area currently. As a result, the chapters that focus on ‘race’ and racial inequalities only skim the surface of the wider academic discourse in this area. We recognise that there is a well-developed conversation around ‘race’ in US musicology (see for example André et al., 2020; Ewell, 2020; Kajikawa, 2019; André, 2018; Maxile, 2008). This conversation is crucially important. But in this volume, we wanted to avoid focusing primarily on the way ‘race’ is mobilised in the US context, which would risk universalising this context. Therefore, rather than working as a comprehensive introduction to debates, the volume juxtaposes discussions of ‘race’ in a selection of national contexts including the US, UK, Japan, Germany, Austria, Trinidad and Poland, offering empirical contexts that will, we hope, provide material to contextualise the wider academic debates occurring in critical race theory within a variety of local, national, and international contexts.

**To what extent does the music itself have to change?**

It might seem like an obvious statement to say that changing the groups of people who create classical music will change the music itself. That is to say, if more diverse groups are involved in producing culture and a wider range of perspectives and identities are represented, the cultural object itself will surely change by having to incorporate these diverse voices? And yet, this point remains, to a degree, an open question in discussions of classical music and diversity, as evidenced by the chapters in this volume. While it would be hard to argue against diversifying the canon of classical music away from the narrow representation of its core texts, the question of whether the sonic ideals, the genre forms, the listening experience, the instruments and other technologies, and the performance and production practices that create the music, need to change, remains open to discussion. One example of the specific form these debates take in classical music is around performances supposedly being required to be ‘faithful’ to the written score and the composer’s intentions (Bull, 2019; Goehr 1991) even when musicologists have shown time and time again that contemporary interpretations and tastes do no such thing and often differ dramatically from ‘what the composer intended’ (Leech-Wilkinson 2020; Scott, 2014). These live and ongoing debates around notions of ‘fidelity’ to the score are thus also an important part of any discussion of diversity and inclusion, as are the genre conventions of classical music more widely.

The chapters in this volume contribute various angles on these questions. Angela Slater explores what we mean by the canon and looks at practical ways in which we can make meaningful change, using the case study of Illuminate Women’s Music, a ‘touring concert series that seeks to highlight the creativity of women both as performers and composers working today, as well as promoting the rich legacy of composition works written by women composers historically’. Chi-chi Nwanoku, in relation to the work of the Chineke! Foundation, and Patricia Ann Neely, discussing early music, describe diversifying the canon through recovering the work of composers of colour. For Chi-chi Nwanoku a crucial part of transforming classical music is also changing the audience’s experience of classical music by allowing audiences to respond to the music however they wish rather than following classical music’s habitual listening conventions. However, other chapters illuminate the backlash or difficulties that can occur when changes are introduced. For example, Caitlin Vincent’s discussion of revisionist approaches to classic operas describes how even when the musical text remains exactly as written by the composer, changes to the plot of Bizet’s *Carmen* were not well-received. Kristine Kolbe outlines other experiments in musical change to address inequalities and exclusions, drawing on case studies from Germany of ‘the commissioning and performance of two new opera works which were intended to be ‘intercultural’ and broaden the opera’s aesthetic profile beyond a standardized notion of opera by bringing together Turkish and Western musical elements’. Kolbe’s chapter ‘make[s] visible how the opera house’s standardized institutional workings ultimately constrained the transgressive potential of the two pieces, risking the remaking of racialized representations and inequalities.’ As a result, Kolbe argues, tweaking existing institutional practices to become diverse and to bring in ‘other’ musics is not going to be sufficient; rather we need to ‘fundamentally rethink the standardized production logics that have been entrenched in the Western classical music sector’. These standardized production logics are also highlighted by Oliver Vibrans, who notes that the standardisation of classical instruments works to disable musicians whose bodies don’t fit these instruments. It is not only the instruments that are disabling, but also the expectations of the industry which is ‘seeking a very particular, specifically-educated musician who can execute the work the way they expect’ rather than allowing for people whose musical development doesn’t follow the path of early, intensive training.

These arguments all point towards musical change as being necessary for social change. However, it is also important to remember that musical innovation does not necessarily lead to social change, but can still entrench existing inequalities, as discussed in Rosanna Lovell and Brandon Farnsworth’s chapter on activist network Gender Relations in New Music (GRiNM). As they argue, ‘new music’s understanding of its own ‘newness” is understood as a succession of works by individual geniuses,’ similarly to the work-concept ideal of classical music more generally. However, this legacy needs to be questioned, as:

focusing too much on music as the creation of one singular individual comes at the cost of thinking about it as the product of a specific set of social, historical, institutional, even technological circumstances. Because these conditions have been ignored while universalizing its appeal and accessibility, the contemporary classical music scene has ignored the fact that it strongly favours the music of white, Western, bourgeois male subjects (Farnsworth and Lovell, this volume).

However, other chapters detail how composers and musicians from minoritized backgrounds have indeed diversified classical music and in so doing have changed its aesthetic to give voice to identities that have not previously been heard in its spaces. Composer Hannah Kendall describes how she brings instruments such as the harmonica and music box into her compositions, engaging in ‘creolisation’ and mixing to change the way instruments sound by ‘blend[ing] aspects of the afrological into the Western classical context.’ Similarly, multi-instrumentalist, composer, and music educator Jon Silpayamanant describes his working practices around creating musical hybridity with classically-trained and non-classically trained musicians, arguing that classical music has already, and is always being hybridised in different cultural contexts around the world, and has been for centuries due to colonialism. His description of a very different rehearsal style to that described by Kolbe suggests ways forward for a musical and social practice that seeks to embed musical and social diversity in longer-term, deeper ways. More broadly, this approach points to debates about the extent to which participants from demographics underpresented in classical music may be expected or choose to assimilate its deeply entrenched and often exclusionary cultural norms and which depend on forms of bodily disciplining that have been argued to reproduce exclusions along the lines of class, ‘race’, and gender (Bull, 2019)

**Introducing classical music studies**

Throughout the volume, authors and interviewees have not generally defined how they are understanding the term ‘classical music’. As editors, our use of the perhaps taken-for-granted term ‘classical music’ as an organising category requires explanation. In our previous research, we have used this term because it reflects how our research participants talked about their musical practice (Bull and Scharff, 2021, 6). We continue to use it here not only because it exists as a commonly-understood term in public discourse, but also because it is recognised in cultural policy (eg Cox, 2021) as well as in emerging discussions of classical music as an ‘industry’ (Dromey and Haferkorn, 2018). However, similarly to Beckerman and Boghassian’s recent edited volume on the classical music industry in the US (2021), precisely what this term designates varies across the chapters in this volume. Furthermore, as explored above, discussing diversity means calling into question the boundaries of what counts as classical music. This variability is important as it opens up space for classical music to change over time and space, moving beyond ideals of a transcendent, unchanging ‘museum’ of musical works (Goehr, 1991) towards a living practice that changes according to who is playing it, where it is being played, and the purpose for which it is being played.

It is clear, therefore, that any definition of classical music needs to allow for aesthetic, social and institutional change. It is for this reason that we argue that rather than specify the particular characteristics or conventions that define classical music[[1]](#endnote-1), we instead theorise it as a genre, in this way enabling these changes to be captured within our understanding of the term. As outlined in Bull and Scharff (2021), we draw on approaches from popular music studies which use genre

to understand the relationship between the social and the aesthetic by studying the circulation of common “orientations, expectations and conventions” (Neale 1980: 19) between producers, audiences, industry, and texts. This approach draws together analysis of the conditions of production of cultural objects, the aesthetic properties of the objects themselves, and their reception (Negus, 1999; Toynbee, 2000). (Bull and Scharff, 2021, p.3)

Genre theory affords exploration of ‘how identities (and inequalities) are formed or mobilised through genre; and the role of institutions in shaping genre’ (Bull and Scharff, 2021 p.4). Indeed, the centrality of institutions to genre theory is a further reason why this approach is helpful; both historically and today, classical music’s education and performance institutions have been formative in shaping and reproducing its social and aesthetic conventions. Furthermore, the relationality of genre as a concept (Brackett, 2016) whereby genres and subgenres are understood in relation to each other is important in making visible hierarchies of value whereby classical music’s value – educationally, socially – is constructed through what it is not, and through who it excludes. Indeed, in relation to new music in the US, as Anne Schreffler argues, ‘the claim of boundarylessness’ – such as ideas of ‘genre-free music-making’ – ‘masks the stubborn boundaries that remain in the new music scene, particularly those of gender and race’ (2019, p. 444; 446). It also masks the ways in which to be boundary-less is a form of privilege (2019, p. 449). Similarly, as Bull argues (in relation to classical music in the UK), ‘the way in which ‘classical music’ is defined is important - and contested - because the boundaries drawn around it work to store value in this space’ (2019, p.xvii). The lens of genre can make such boundaries and boundary-drawing visible by drawing attention to the processes of categorisation that are occurring, whether tacitly or overtly. Therefore, we suggest that genre theory constitutes a fertile theoretical framework for understanding and explaining the origins and persistence of inequalities in classical music practice.

In order to pursue these questions as well as to draw together the field of critical enquiry as represented by the chapters in this volume, we suggest the term ‘classical music studies’. This interdisciplinary field enables the study of classical music to draw on, but also move beyond the fields of musicology, ethnomusicology, as well as music education and bring it into dialogue with cultural studies, sociology, disability studies, gender studies, critical race studies, and other disciplines that have extensively discussed the questions of diversity and inclusion that we consider in this book. The latter fields have a history of engaging with social justice issues, drawing on a range of theoretical, analytical and empirical approaches. These are also fields that have evolved from, or in dialogue with, social justice movements and, as such, offer a range of tools to examine existing inequalities, understand why they persist, and point to ways to make change. By issuing a call for the interdisciplinary field of ‘classical music studies’, we argue that questions of diversity and inclusion are not subsidiary or additional concerns within the field but instead are integral to it; in the history of classical music’s institutions in the UK, for example, questions of inclusions and exclusions over class, gender, ‘race’, and disability have been central (see Bull, 2019; Fuller, 1998).

Furthermore, forms of hybridisation of classical music that have occurred during and through processes of colonisation also complexify our understanding of what ‘classical music’ is. As Laudan Nooshin has noted:

What needs to be folded into an understanding of the term [‘western’ classical music] is how a music that was originally European has taken on a multitude of forms and meanings globally; and this applies both to the performance of the Euro-(North) American ‘classical’ repertoire outside Europe and North America, and to the compositional work of composers from ‘elsewhere’ (Nooshin, 2011: p.296).

As well as such processes of hybridisation, such a term can also take as a point of exploration the relationship between this field and other so-called classical musics outside ‘western’ classical music, which are not included in this book. Overall, we suggest that to understand the institutional, aesthetic and social conventions and structures that have shaped the phenomenon we understand as ‘classical music’ today, is to explore – and attempt to address and unpick – these legacies and relations.

We hope that the chapters in this book go some way towards illuminating these questions of what classical music is, what it could be, and how we might make change. The first section of the book, “The Making of Classical Musicians”, explores the role of conservatoires and higher music education in reproducing classed, gendered and racialised exclusions. Looking at a wider range of classical music institutions, the second section, “Problematising Institutional Change” casts a critical eye on how classical music institutions have sought to implement change, shedding light on the benefits and pitfalls of initiatives that attempt to make classical music more ‘diverse’. Moving away from institutions, the third section, “Marginalised Voices”, features those who occupy a marginalised position in classical music, highlighting a range of exclusions based on gender, class, disability, and ‘race’. The fourth section, “Racial Inequalities”, takes a focused look at processes of racialisation by presenting data, experiences, and insights from a range of geographical contexts. While all chapters touch on what can be done to make change, the two final sections have a more explicit focus on activism. Section five explores forms of activism that have emerged from individual experience and initiative, whereas section six centres networks, alliances, and campaigning work by industry bodies. In the afterword, Gillian Moore, Director of Music at London’s Southbank Centre, reflects on what the volume means for music industry leaders. All in all, the chapters shed light on different forms of inequality and exclusion in classical music, but also point to ways in which these can be addressed and tackled.

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1. For example, in their work on equality and diversity in classical music, Arts Council England have defined classical musicians as those learning or playing symphonic classical music instruments (Cox, 2021). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)