This kaleidoscopic collection reflects on the multifaceted world of classical music as it advances through the twenty-first century. With insights drawn from leading composers, performers, academics, journalists, and arts administrators, special focus is placed on classical music's defining traditions, challenges and contemporary scope. Innovative in structure and approach, the volume comprises two parts. The first provides detailed analyses of issues central to classical music in the present day, including diversity, governance, the identity and perception of classical music, and the challenges facing the achievement of financial stability in non-profit arts organizations. The second part offers case studies, from Miami to Seoul, of the innovative ways in which some arts organizations have responded to the challenges analyzed in the first part. Introductory material, as well as several of the essays, provide some preliminary thoughts about the impact of the crisis year 2020 on the world of classical music.

Classical Music: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges will be a valuable and engaging resource for all readers interested in the development of the arts and classical music, especially academics, arts administrators and organizers, and classical music practitioners and audiences.
Music is often practiced collectively. From this point of view, the orchestra could be perceived as a mirror of society. It sometimes even gives the impression of anticipating certain changes in society, a characteristic which its social history has reflected over the centuries. Today, in our twenty-first-century world, what we call globalization is interrogating musical life in different ways: how can we keep attracting audiences to venues when new technological means allow citizens to enjoy unlimited content remotely? How can audiences be renewed and increased, especially for classical music, when the amount of culture and entertainment on offer is multiplying everywhere, and new forms are emerging that are more suited to the tastes of young people? How can we imagine the financial survival of orchestras in an increasingly liberal world—from an economic perspective at least—which accepts less and less the idea that there can be art forms which are structurally supported by public authorities or by the generosity of patrons? How do we avoid being labeled as an elitist art, engaged only in the satisfaction of a privileged audience? How can we instead establish a dialogue with populations, citizens, families, young people, and children who are totally cut off from cultural offerings which are essentially available in large urban centers?

In this conflicted context, it becomes urgent to invent new models for the dissemination of music in which culture is merely a vector for the
personal fulfillment of a few people, but also a force for social cohesion. These new models must be based, in my view, on a more generalist vision allowing us to project our future on the basis of a broader historical perspective.

First of all, our customs divide high and popular culture: the symphonic repertoire, for example, suffers from being almost exclusively played in specific iconic buildings erected in the center of large cities and frequented by rather privileged citizens. This situation could change. By way of example, the Philharmonie de Paris gives more than five hundred concerts a year. The entire history of music is represented on its stage: the Western repertoire of the past, as well as that of today; popular music (from jazz to pop, to today’s emerging forms); but also traditional and modern music from other continents (Japan, China, Cambodia, Africa, The Middle East, India, etc.).

Another related problem is that the way we present our music sets the urban against the suburban, and even against areas far from the main urban centers. In Europe, the Philharmonie de Paris is the only major musical complex built in recent decades to have chosen not to settle in the city center or in a well-off neighborhood, but rather in a district that mixes different populations, close to the ring road, near the Parisian suburbs where struggling populations are living.

Furthermore, our musical practices also set the local against the international. While we do need to rely, to some extent, on the prestige of great artists or orchestras from all over the world, a project cannot genuinely resonate if the audience does not feel some kind of local affinity. This can be provided by involving regional orchestras, or by performances given several times a year that mix professionals and amateurs, and even allow for audience participation. There are many initiatives to be taken in this regard. For instance, most cultural institutions do not consider the fact that children represent a potential relationship with a future audience. Even prestigious institutions should explore the issue of transmission in all its forms: specific events, workshops, exhibitions, etc. To demonstrate the social role that music can play, in 2010 the Philharmonie de Paris launched a children’s orchestra project called Démos, which may be defined as follows: a musical and orchestral educational system with a social vocation.
From 2006 onward, our budding Philharmonie project was the subject of much criticism from politicians, senior officials, and music lovers alike. The arguments ranged from the view that classical music was an art of the past, interested only in an elderly elite, to the idea that new generations identify with other, more modern and entertaining musical practices, such as pop or electro; that classical music was the music of the privileged and that young people living in working-class neighborhoods have their own cultural practices, such as rap or hip hop; and, finally, that only young people with very favorable family backgrounds receive real musical training. And the indictment would often conclude with this final sentence: this project is not appropriate, because young people will not recognize themselves in it and music lovers will never venture into a disadvantaged neighborhood.

We considered that some of these attacks, which we regarded as specious, were actually based on observations we had made ourselves, and which could be supported by sociological studies. One of these studies (Dorin, 2012), which focused on symphonic life in Paris, interestingly pointed out that the median age of the classical audience is about sixty, whereas the median age of all those over eighteen in France is close to forty-eight. As a result of this age difference, 50% of the specific classical music audience have no dependent children, and 75% have a higher diploma, compared to 20% of the total French population. More than 50% (and up to 80% among those under twenty-five) have received a musical education, compared to 20% of the total French population. Finally, as regards the financial situation of classical music lovers, the average household income is close to 70,000 euros net per year, compared to 25,000 euros for the total French population.

We chose to use this statistical data constructively by initiating our Démos project, which envisioned setting up orchestras comprising children living in underprivileged areas. We postulated that it is not the music itself that creates barriers, but rather the way it is presented and the customs that have developed around it.

Thus, an educational model that keeps struggling families, and therefore some children, at a distance from the practice of music has been erected. In music schools, music theory is an obligatory stage that precedes the magical discovery of an instrument. But disadvantaged children often lack reference points and the fewer reference points a
child has, the more the learning of music theory becomes an obstacle. Afterwards comes the actual practice of music, which is highly individualized, with one teacher, and one pupil. Once again, this context has a tendency to intimidate disadvantaged children, who will be more at ease in a group dynamic.

Our bet was that if children who were cut off from music, or even from any cultural practice, were put in physical contact with classical music, they would be able to identify with it. If they were part of a collective adventure, for example an orchestra, they would want to join the project and blossom. We thus decided to create our first children’s orchestras, and to carry out our action in the underprivileged suburbs of the Paris region, in response to the controversy surrounding our project.

Initially, we observed new models already set up abroad to address the same issues, the most successful one being the Venezuelan El Sistema project in South America. However, it was not directly transposable to the French situation. The El Sistema, which brings together several hundred thousand children, imposes a daily orchestral rehearsal. A large proportion of the children do not go to school, and El Sistema therefore takes the place of the educational system as a whole, which would be prohibited in Europe.

However, we have learned a great deal from Venezuela, especially concerning the project’s educational dimension: how to teach an instrument collectively; how to approach a score for people without any knowledge of music theory; how a child can at first imitate with great ease the gestures of a professional musician, and then, when he or she has acquired a little confidence, begin to approach the first notions of music theory; or how to prepare the coaches for these new methods, knowing that it is necessary to recruit between fifteen and twenty coaches per orchestra.

We also studied the ways other European cities have been inspired by the South American model. We set up a partnership with the London Symphony Orchestra, which has developed substantial and effective activities for many populations in difficulty (specific communities, sick people or prison inmates, and so on). We have also learned a good deal from the London musicians, who came to train their fellow Parisian colleagues in new teaching methods and provided us with simplified versions of works, so that they could be more easily played by children.
Finally, in 2010, we created four orchestras in the Paris region. We started on the following basis: children would get free training and would receive their instrument (strings, winds, or brass) as a gift; they would make a commitment for a minimum of three years, with the possibility of continuing with us in another form or entering a conservatory; there would be regularity in the process, in the form of two workshops of two hours a week, which is the maximum number of hours permitted for schooled children; workshops would sometimes be organized in social centers close to the children’s homes and other times at the Philharmonie; there would be about twenty professional musicians involved with each children’s orchestra and social actors responsible for maintaining links with schools, families, and the children’s environment; children would not be selected based on the preconceptions of musicians, but completely put in the hands of social actors; these orchestras would offer an unusual definition of what is called classical music, through a program mixing works from the Western repertoire and other parts of the world with commissions to composers or film music; and finally, in June, an annual musical presentation of the resulting work of each orchestra would take place on our main stage, where the world’s largest orchestras perform.

After our first experiment with four orchestras of children aged eight to twelve years, we expanded to eight orchestras in 2012. But, as is well known, our country was marred by the tragedy of the Paris attacks in autumn 2015. They affected us deeply as citizens, but also as musicians. More urgently than ever before, we felt the need to defend music against all those attempting to silence diversity of expression.

This is the reason why we decided to root our project more firmly in the underprivileged areas around Paris, and to apply the model in other places with a concentration of social difficulties throughout France. As of today, forty-five orchestras have been created or are in the process of being implemented. Twenty of them are located around Paris and directly managed by the Philharmonie de Paris, while twenty-five have been set up in the other regions of France, through partnerships with local authorities, and also with local musical institutions, such as local orchestras or conservatories.

This project benefits from a permanent evaluation by researchers in cognitive sciences and humanities (specialists in music anthropology,
sociology, educational sciences, and social psychology). The studies (Dansilio and Fayette, 2019: 27) show that children’s support for the project is very high and that the desire to continue learning music after experiencing these first three years is shared by a vast majority of them. Evaluators (Barbaroux, Dittinger, & Besson, 2019: 18) also noted positive changes in their behavior, and regard the project as an educational tool for learning diligence, concentration, respect for others, socialization, and listening.

By way of conclusion, I would like to emphasize that an initiative like Démos is obviously not enough to single-handedly transform the existing situation. Our world is going through profound changes that notably challenge its order, the actual means of communication, the hierarchy of values, the place of culture and leisure in our society, and the role of education.

Démos seeks to address issues that go beyond itself and lie at the heart of our social challenges, including, among other things: the fight against barriers in cultural practices between audiences, social classes, generations, and territories; the renewal of cultural consumption habits; the promotion of cultural diversity; and the development of arts education for young people. All these questions, which can find answers in the type of field experience we have described, call for a broader political vision capable of guiding the future of our societies.

References

