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.

Edited by Michael Beckerman and Paul Boghossian
In the 1973 movie, *Serpico*, there is a scene in which the eponymous hero, an undercover detective, is in his back garden in the West Village drinking some coffee and playing at high volume on his record player the great tenor aria from Act 3 of *Tosca*, “E lucevan le Stelle.” His neighbor, an appealing woman whom he doesn’t know and who, it is later revealed, works as a nurse at a local hospital, comes out to her adjoining garden and the following dialogue ensues over the low wall separating them:

Woman: “Is that Björling?”
Serpico: “No, it’s di Stefano.”
Woman: “I was sure it was Björling.”

They continue chatting for a while, after which she goes off to work. This is virtually the only scene in the film at which opera comes up and there is no stage-setting for it: the filmmakers were able simply to assume that enough moviegoers would know without explanation who Björling and di Stefano were.

If one were looking for a poignant encapsulation of how opera’s place in popular culture has shifted from the early 1970s to the 2020s, this would serve as well as any. Such a snippet of dialogue in a contemporary wide-release Hollywood movie would be unthinkable: with the exception of a few opera fanatics, no one would have any idea

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1 I am very grateful to Mike Beckerman for his prodigious efforts in helping run this project and edit the present volume. Many thanks, too, to Anupum Mehrotra, who provided administrative support, especially in the early stages. A very special debt of gratitude to Leigh Bond, the Program Administrator of the GIAS, without whose extraordinary judgment, organization, and firm but gentle coaxing, this volume would probably never have seen the light of day.
who these gentlemen were, or what it was that they were supposedly singing.

In the decades leading up to the 1970s, many opera stars, including di Stefano and Björling, appeared on popular TV programs sponsored by such corporate titans as General Motors and General Electric. Their romantic entanglements were breathlessly covered by the tabloid press. The National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) had its own orchestra, one of the very finest in the world, put together at great expense specifically for the legendary conductor Arturo Toscanini, who had to be wooed out of retirement to take its helm. For the first radio broadcast of a live concert conducted by Toscanini, in December of 1937, the programs were printed on silk to prevent the rustling of paper programs from detracting from the experience.

Not long after Serpico was released, opera—and classical music more generally—started its precipitous decline into the state in which we find it today: as an art form that is of cultural relevance to an increasingly small, increasingly aging, mostly white audience. The members of this audience mostly want to hear pieces that are between two hundred and fifty and one hundred years old, over and over again. The occasional new composition is performed, to be sure, but always by placing even heavier stress on ticket sales. (Research shows that ticket sales for any given concert are inversely proportional to the quantity of contemporary music that is programmed.) The youth show up in greater numbers for new compositions, but not their parents or grandparents, who make up the bulk of the paying public.

Classical music’s dire state of affairs is reflected in poor ticket sales at the major classical music institutions—for example, at the Metropolitan Opera and the NY Philharmonic, both of which have run deficits for many of their recent performing seasons. The contrast with its heyday in the 1960s could not be greater. The Met recently discovered in its archives a note from Sir Rudolf Bing, then the General Manager, which said, roughly: “The season has not yet started, and we have already sold out every seat to every performance to our subscribers. Could you please call some of them up and see if we can free up some single tickets to sell to the general public?” What a difference from the situation today, when the house is often barely half full. The sorry plight of classical music is also reflected in the large and increasing number of orchestra bankruptcies or lockouts. For many of these wonderful institutions,
with their large fixed costs and declining revenues, already hugely financially fragile, the cancellation of months, and possibly years, of concerts induced by the current pandemic might well be the final blow.

It’s true, of course, that even prior to the current public health crisis, the “Netflixization” of entertainment had already had a major impact on the performing arts. So much content is available to be streamed into a person’s living room at the click of a button that the incentive to seek diversion outside the house has been greatly diminished in general. This has affected not only attendance at concerts, but also golf club memberships, applications for fishing licenses, and so on. However, classical music stands out for the extent to which it has lost the attention of the general public and so cannot be said to be merely part of a general decline in people seeking entertainment outside the home.

If further proof of this were wanted, one would only need to note the stark contrast between classical music and the current state of the visual arts. Problems caused by the current pandemic aside, museums nowadays are mostly flourishing, setting new attendance records on a frequent basis, and presenting blockbuster shows for which tickets are often hard to get. Most strikingly, the museums that are doing best are those that specialize in modern and contemporary art, rather than those which mostly showcase pre-twentieth-century art—in New York these days, the Museum of Modern Art outshines the Metropolitan Museum. So, whatever is going on in classical music, it’s not merely part of a general decline of interest in the fine arts.

All of this formed the backdrop against which I decided that it might be a good idea to convene a think tank, under the auspices of NYU’s Global Institute for Advanced Study, to study the phenomenon of classical music’s decline and to investigate ideas as to how its fortunes might be revived. I had early conversations with Kirill Gerstein, Jeremy Geffen, Toby Spence and Matthew VanBesien, all of whom were enthusiastic about the idea, and all of whom made useful suggestions about who else it would be good to invite and what issues we might cover. At NYU, I had the good fortune to be able to convince Michael Beckerman and Kit Fine to join as co-conveners of the think tank. Together we assembled a truly illustrious group of musicologists, musicians, music managers, music journalists and, of course, musically inclined philosophers. (A full list of the members of the think tank can be found at the end of this preface.)
Over the course of three years, we looked at a number of questions:

1. What would be lost if we could no longer enjoy live concert experiences, at the very high level at which they are currently available, and had to listen to music mostly on playback devices?

2. Does the live concert experience, whose basic features date from the nineteenth century, need a major makeover? If so, what form should that makeover take?

3. Orchestras, as well as their audiences, are mostly white and affluent; how could this be changed so that classical music could come to better reflect the society which it serves?

4. To what extent is classical music’s mausoleum-like character, mostly programming eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pieces over and over again, responsible for alienating new audiences; and what might be done about it?

5. To what extent are the business model, and governance and labor structures, of big classical music organizations, responsible for their current problems, and what might be done about them?

6. How has the decline in music education, both in schools and in private, impacted people’s interest in classical music?

7. How might developments in technology help address some of the issues identified?

8. What is the role of classical music critics, especially as many newspapers face extinction and others drastically reduce their coverage of the arts?

9. What might music institutions learn from the relative success enjoyed by the institutions that serve the visual arts?

The presentations on these topics were given not only by members of the think tank but also by the occasional invited guest, such as Professor Robert Flanagan, a labor economist at Stanford University, whose book *The Perilous Life of Symphony Orchestras* gives a rigorous analysis of the challenges faced by these institutions. We were also fortunate in being able to include in our volume some specially commissioned pieces
from experts who did not participate in the think tank (Chapters 4, 8, 12). Although our focus was primarily on the United States, we were able to make useful comparisons with other countries through the presentations of Laurent Bayle (France), Unsuk Chin (South Korea) and Huda Alkhamis-Kanoo (Middle East).

Initially, some of us harbored the hope that this group would issue a joint report, proposing solutions that might attract widespread attention and perhaps acceptance. This hope evaporated in the face of a lack of consensus amongst the members of the think tank, both as to what the central issues were, and on the various proposed remedies. Of course, if these problems had been easy, they would have been solved some time ago. In the end, we agreed to have individual members (or appropriate teams of them) write essays on topics on which they were particularly expert. In addition, we commissioned a few pieces on especially relevant topics, or case studies, by folks who had not participated in the meetings of the think tank. The resulting collection is by no means a poor second best to what we had originally envisioned. It offers a great deal of insight into an art form that is beloved by many and will, hopefully, contribute to the thinking of those who are charged with maintaining that art form for the generations to come.

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Members of the NYU GIAS Classical Music Think Tank:

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- Laurent Bayle (Chief Executive Director, Cité de la Musique —Philharmonie de Paris)
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2 The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the NYU GIAS Think Tank members.
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• Ian Bostridge (Tenor)

• Claire Chase (Flautist and Founder, International Contemporary Ensemble)

• Unsuk Chin (Composer; Director, Seoul Festival with the LA Philharmonic; Artistic Director Designate, Tongyeong International Music Festival, South Korea; Artistic Director Designate, Weiwuying International Music Festival, Kaohsiung, Taiwan)

• Andreas Ditter (Stalnaker Postdoctoral Associate, Department of Linguistics and Philosophy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; PhD graduate, Department of Philosophy, New York University)

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• Ara Guzelimian (Artistic and Executive Director, Ojai Festival; Special Advisor, Office of the President and former Provost and Dean, The Juilliard School)

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