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Density 21.5 was written in 1936 for one of the first instruments made entirely of platinum. It was the first piece of contemporary flute music I heard. I was 13 years old, and it completely transformed my life.

I was so obsessed with it that when I was asked to play for my junior high school graduation, I tried to convince them to program *Density*. Now, this was the early 90's when public schools in Southern California didn't even have band programs! And I was this uber-nerd, queer, flutistic-experiment-in-orthodontics (I'm pretty sure I had as much metal on my teeth as I did on my flute), with the fantasy that I could rouse my teenage comrades by wailing on Edgard Varese in a football field.

I wish this were how the story went. My proposal, however, was summarily shot down, and I played a rousing rendition of *Danny Boy* instead.

There's nothing more emboldening to youth than being told that you can't do something you really, really want to do. And this derailed attempt lit a fire in me that blazes to this day -- the fire to tell a different kind of story.

As a seeker of new sounds for this little tube of metal, I dream that by 2036, the 100th anniversary of the piece, I will have commissioned or had a helping hand in giving birth to a work that, like *Density*, shakes the very foundations of what we know and instantly propels us into a new century of possibility.

Salman Rushdie, one of my favorite storytellers and activists, said recently:

*We need all of us, whatever our background, to constantly examine the stories inside which and with which we live. We all live in stories, so called grand narratives. Nation is a story. Family is a story. Religion is a story. Community is a story. We all live within and with these narratives. And it seems to me that a definition of any living vibrant society is that you constantly question those stories.*¹

Density 21.5 is a story. Contemporary music is a story. Classical music is a story. The new music ensemble is a story. The orchestra, too, is a story. The segregation of our creative practices into buckets that we call organizations, departments, boards, bands, unions -- these are also stories.

¹ Salman Rushdie: "Secular Values, Human Rights and Islamism." *Point of Inquiry*, 2006.

We are gathered at this conference to speak together about the future of American orchestras, a subject I might be the least qualified person in this room to address, since I have created a life in music that challenges much of what the institution has embodied for the last half-century. But I have reverence and boundless curiosity for the orchestra as an evolving art form, for its vast and ever-expanding repertoire (past, present and future!), and for the palpable utopia of 100 people coming together to make music with one common purpose. Although I have no solutions to offer, I am honored to have the opportunity to tell a different story today.

The same year that he composed *Density*, Varese wrote that **“Music, which should pulsate with life, needs new means of expression.”**

Density ignited much more than a search for the next great flute solo. It marshaled in me a desire for new vehicles of expression, and for an engine to drive them. It unleashed a curiosity about creating new economies, collaborative models, and definitions of community that could also pulsate with life.

I imagined, if four minutes of music could do what *Density* did for me, what might happen if a group of young artists came together to create new music for ensembles large and small as pioneers seeking new instruments, technologies, performance practices and new ways of hearing and distilling our world?

What new story could unravel if a whole generation of artists tried to expand the ways we created music using these ideas? What if we did it with the spirit of *invention* rather than preservation, and with *change*, rather than convention, as our guides?

The ICE Story

As a junior at Oberlin, in 1999, I got curious about how I might make this happen. It was the end of a century, and that seemed like a good time to explore Varese’s vision of new expressive means.

I assembled 15 of my Oberlin classmates to commission a program of new works in celebration of the year 2000, and moreover to create a *scene* around their world-premiere performances. Somehow, we got permission to do this in Oberlin’s 750-seat concert hall. Most of the new music concerts I’d been to up until that point had a few dozen people in the audience and, you know one of them is my uncle, who is wearing earplugs, and says, “Gosh, Claire, why can’t you just play the Poulenc sonata?!”

We wanted this to be different. We wanted to pack that hall with young people, old people, people from school, town, people who loved new music and, just as importantly, people who thought they hated new music.

To do this, we needed to look at every decision as a creative decision. Whether it was about marketing, fundraising, budgeting, education, production, outreach, where to put the chairs at the concert, or how to get people on and off stage between pieces, there was no decision that wasn't creative.

Marketing -- which is really just storytelling -- is intrinsically connected to curation and programming. Education and community building are natural outgrowths of a burning need to perform, to make music for people and tell them stories.

It took all year, but we did it -- that night in April 2000, Warner Concert Hall was standing-room-only -- and for a brief moment, we felt like anything, absolutely anything, was possible.

We were about to graduate into a world with dwindling job opportunities for classical, let alone contemporary, musicians. We had this nutty idea that, in the face of all kinds of adversity, we could create a new kind of organization. Part 21st century orchestra, rock band, circus troupe, startup -- in search of new expressive means in our artistic practices *and* our organizational ones.

We didn't imagine having one concert hall as a home base. We wanted to be mobile, modular, and light on our feet. We could be a duo one night, and a cast of hundreds the next. We didn't want to exist in just one city. We wanted to be everywhere. We could play in a black box theater one night, the back of a pickup truck the next.

But we also didn't want to recycle the touring model and offer one-stop-shop re-enactments. We wanted to build meaningful relationships with audiences in each place, and we wanted our repertory to be constantly growing, pulsating with life. So we decided that we'd have local outposts in Chicago and NY, with the eventual idea of setting up similar satellites on the West Coast, in Latin America, in Europe, a museum in Qatar, a warehouse in Berlin, a boat on Lake Bikal, a school in Greenland, Hogwarts, a spaceship - on the moon, even!

Varese wrote that **"Possible musical forms are as limitless as the exterior forms of crystals."**

The same can be said, then, of organizational forms, and the forms of community, economy, place-making and patronage.

When we didn't have the faintest idea how to fundraise, we put together ragtag festivals in Chicago in bars and galleries on budgets amassed from hundreds of modest contributions -- five, ten, fifty dollars each -- and we watched our audience and donation numbers practically double at every event, growing from a \$500 startup to a \$1 million organization over ten years.

When we learned that record companies weren't going to offer us an ethical and efficient means of disseminating our music, we created our own in-house label so we, the artists, could own our music and decide what to do with it.

When we discovered that none of our local public schools in Brooklyn and Chicago had music programs, we created curricula based on improvisation, play, discovery - the same principles that fueled our own music-making. Being a musician is being a teacher and we need to do both in order to authentically do either one.

When we were frustrated with the lack of commissioning funds for emerging composers, particularly for artists of color and those working at the risky crossroads of different disciplines, we started a program -- ICElab -- so that the ICE musicians could fund, administer and curate a body of repertoire by the brightest voices in our generation.

When we saw that the Berlin Philharmonic had created a state of the art Digital Concert Hall, we asked ourselves how we could create an American, DIY, public-service version of that on a sliver of their budget. So, we launched DigitICE, our own virtual concert hall that is rapidly becoming one of the world's largest video archives of contemporary music.

As we view the demise of the subscription ticket model and what the news characterizes as symptoms of the "death of classical music," (!) we're even more fired up. We're imagining the kind of story we want to tell in our second decade, and we're creating OpenICE, a kind of 21st century improvisation on the public library that combines crowd sourced funding, education and performance, production and curation, and live and online events -- all free and open to the public. Our aim is to reach a million people annually with contemporary music by 2020.

All along, it's been the ICE musicians -- not managers, not market forces -- that have been in the driver's seat of every one of these innovations. As we'd learned in our earliest

experiments at Oberlin, if the most creative people are artists, why not engage them as the engines of the organization, the necessary agitators of change? Where did we ever get this idea that there are people on stage who do creative things, and people behind the scenes who enable them? Isn't it time we challenged that binary? At ICE, our bassoonist, Rebekah Heller, is running development, alongside our new saxophonist, Ryan Muncy; our percussionist, Ross Karre, is running production; our pianist, Jacob Greenberg, is running our education programs; our clarinetist, Joshua Rubin, co-directs artistic programming; and they do these hybrid jobs because they see them as deeply creative enterprises. Like music-making, these organizational projects come of a place of curiosity, generosity, *and love*.

But this story isn't about ICE.

We are just one grain of sand in a landslide of startup momentum. Consider peer groups like New Amsterdam, which singlehandedly re-imagined what a record label could be, dissolving needless barricades between programming and producing. A Far Cry, which is spearheading a second-generation Orpheus model, stands on Orpheus' shoulders but takes the idea of collective ownership even further. *Meet the Composer*, a groundbreaking radio show masterminded by Nadia Sirota -- a kind of new-music RadioLab! -- is set to launch at the end of this month on Q2 Music.

There's also WildUp in Los Angeles; dal niente in Chicago, and hundreds, soon to be thousands, of others brewing. For all of these groups, the division of artist and administrator, composer and performer, practitioner and producer, self-made organization and public asset, new music and old music -- these are old, tired stories.

People thought I was stark-raving mad when I said a decade ago that new-music ensembles will have an indispensable place alongside the other great American cultural institutions -- opera companies, theaters, orchestras, baseball teams. But you know what? That fire is now blazing and unstoppable.

And it's no longer about ICE and our peers, or even about our generation; it's now about the generation younger than we are, the ones I constantly tell to *please, please* put me out of business.

While you're at it, please go ahead and put new music out of business! Isn't it time we called it something else and told an even newer story? Please, play better than we do. Please, innovate with more velocity, with more fire. Please, teach with greater knowledge than we have amassed. *Please*, think of solutions we haven't thought of.

Returning to Rushdie:

...a definition of any living vibrant society is that you constantly question those stories. That you constantly argue about the stories. In fact the arguing never stops. The argument itself is freedom. It's not that you come to a conclusion about it. And through that argument you change your mind sometimes....And that's how societies grow.²

All of us -- onstage and offstage, playing in pickup trucks and in opera pits, programming in concert halls and in stadiums, running startups and running monoliths, we are the authors of our own stories. And it is our responsibility, indeed our great privilege, to have our minds changed by each other's arguments.

If you don't believe that the generation younger than mine is filled with optimism, I invite you to the ICE inbox! We get emails daily from students who argue *courageously* about these stories.

They say I want to start a band, a composer collective, a label, a school, an orchestra. I want to make a kind of music that no one has made before. I want to spearhead a disruptive organizational model no one has thought of yet.

They're about to graduate, if we're lucky, into the ranks of our so-called symphony orchestras and our so-called contemporary-music ensembles. Who knows, perhaps the orchestra and the new-music band won't need to be separate entities in this century. Could that binary dissolve too?

The word "orchestra," in ancient Greece, meant "a dancing place." What if orchestras of the 21st century could revisit this most ancient part of their stories and be, literally, an open space?

A place where change is the norm, where even the permanent collection - what we call our canon - is questioned, argued, retold? A place that commissions twice as much new music as it repeats? And reaches twice as many schoolchildren as it reaches patrons? Or a place where the sphere of context, the very notion of *public*, is constantly widening? A place where the radical reimagining of *how* and *for whom* art gets made, is a daily practice?

² Salman Rushdie: "Secular Values, Human Rights and Islamism." *Point of Inquiry*, 2006.

The orchestra as a “dancing place”: a space that houses musicians not as interpreters but as catalysts for change; that inspires administrators to be alchemists, synergists; and welcomes audience members not as consumers but as participants in a dialogue about our pulsating art form and its *newest expressive means*.

This brings us back to Varese:

“Possible musical forms are as limitless as the exterior forms of crystals.”

As luminous as this vision is, even Varese’s ideas can’t stay new forever. But his fervent invitation to widen the spaces of our imaginations can feed our energy the same way that the vast, varied musical ecology of 2014 -- from garage bands to symphony orchestras to, importantly, new creative and organizational entities we don’t yet have names for -- forges a clearing for our current “dancing place.”

That last plaintive high B in *Density 21.5* isn’t an ending to a story; it’s a beginning. It’s not a proclamation, it’s an inquiry. And I hope that inquiry will never ever stop unfolding, never finish arguing with itself, and never cease unraveling into new questions and new stories.

Thank you.

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