

Online

On 4 July 2007, the day that *The End of New Music* was to receive its premiere screening in downtown Manhattan, music critic Steve Smith previewed the film in the *New York Times*. Smith interviewed the Free Speech Zone composers about the documentary, foregrounded the political significance of the tour, and described how the musicians attempted to “forcefully reject the standard conventions of concert halls and academia.”¹⁰⁹

A national readership that might not have had the opportunity to view the indie film thus encountered the perspectives of the musicians it depicted. A few days later on the contemporary music blog *Sequenza21*, writer Jerry Bowles posted Smith’s article, briefly discussed the film, and asked his commenters “Anybody seen the film? (I know you have, Judd.)”¹¹⁰ Greenstein and Smith were both among the community of bloggers who commented on *Sequenza21*. Following Bowles’s post, a handful of commenters critiqued the seemingly narrow perspectives of the Free Speech Zone composers and the the provocative title of the film. Bowles himself added that “Well, the title does seem to be somewhat misleading. Something like—Can Three Young Composers Save New

¹⁰⁹ Smith, “Rebel Composers On a Rock Tour of Sorts,” *New York Times*, 4 July 2007. Smith’s article also examined how the composers tempered that forcefulness in the years following the tour, and had begun to build bridges with mainstream institutions; the article concludes with Greenstein saying that “The main thing is understanding that you can actually take control over the way that your music is heard... Once you see that you had that power all along, then it suddenly doesn’t become ‘you versus the system’ anymore. It’s just you behaving as an adult, going out and making decisions in the world.” Greenstein, quoted in *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Jerry Bowles, “Is This the End of New Music?” *Sequenza21* (blog), 11 July 2007, <http://www.sequenza21.com/2007/07/is-this-the-end-of-new-music/>. Bowles founded and edits Sequenza21, which at the time included a Composers Forum discussion page; twenty individual blogs hosted by composers and performers; and a Wiki platform in which musicians could create their own page and upload music samples. By 2016, however, Sequenza21 had reduced its web platform to blog posts by a handful of writers (updated with significantly less frequency than in 2007), a calendar of upcoming events, and a corresponding Facebook page.

Music by Getting Down and Dirty?—might have been more on target.”¹¹¹ Composer Andrea LaRose responded, “how about ‘three young composers discover what many have figured out before them: the lure of D.I.Y.’”¹¹² Smith himself subsequently weighed in:

Perhaps the title should have been The Death of “New Music,” since the real idea is that the misery of the 2004 presidential election prompted Judd, David and Missy to cast off the concept of an aesthetic pursuit hermetically sealed against societal engagement, in favor of a more activist approach NOT JUST in terms of where to perform, but also WHAT.

I’ve received just enough negative feedback about that article—some typically anonymous, some not—to make me realize that this was one area in which my article most certainly fell short: Judd defined his usage of “new music” pretty clearly in the film, and I should have made a greater effort to report that. If I had the article to do over again, I’d try to make that point more emphatically.

Otherwise, I’ve been hearing both reasoned argument and supercilious snark about how this is just the “same ol’ same ol’.” Yes, well, maybe Free Speech Zone didn’t invent a new musical genre or reinvent the notion of touring. But the title of Stephen’s film is still, I think, an accurate depiction of the spark that motivated the 2005 tour.¹¹³

The iconoclastic perspectives of these young musicians—due to their depiction on film, the film’s subsequent depiction in the national press, and the press’s subsequent depiction online—caused a minor, if relatively typical, flare-up in the new-music world.

That bit of Internet controversy—one in which a music critic for a major national newspaper also contributed to the comments section of a specialty blog—demonstrates the ease of travel between print and online that was crucial to the formation of the indie

¹¹¹ Bowles, comment on Bowles, “Is This the End of New Music?”

¹¹² Andrea LaRose, comment on Bowles, “Is This the End of New Music?”

¹¹³ Smith, comment on Bowles, “Is This the End of New Music?” Smith clarified in a subsequent comment, “Hoo, baby, did I sound shrill up there! Let me hasten to add, it’s not the comments HERE that prompted my malaise, but rather messages I received privately and through my blog, which already had me questioning the job I did.” Ibid.

classical generation in the mid-2000s. In this section, I will scrutinize the materialization of what might be called the “new-music blogosphere,” a public sphere for contemporary music online; its relationship to traditional forms of music criticism; and how the fluidity between these worlds shaped this generation.¹¹⁴ It was this exchange that facilitated the cohort’s transformation from a group of Tanglewood, Bang on a Can, and Yale alumna into a generation as understood by the press and institutional world of classical music. The blogosphere disseminated the ideas and ideology of these musicians—including their acts of generationalism—to the mainstream audience of the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*.

In the early twenty-first century, composers and performers started blogs to contextualize their music with their opinions, which joined web platforms including *NewMusicBox* (established in 1999 by the American Music Center), *Sequenza21* (founded in 2006 by Bowles), and *I Care If You Listen* (launched in 2010 by digital marketing consultant Thomas Deneuve). In 2003, the website *ArtsJournal* added specialty blogs to its news platform, and several focused strongly on new music:

¹¹⁴ For a study of the concept of the blogosphere writ large, see Christoph Meinel, Justus Boss, Philipp Berger, and Patrick Hennig, *Blogosphere and Its Exploration* (Heidelberg; Springer, 2015). Literature on the history of “blogospheres” has primarily focused on the “early” political blogosphere circa 2002–2004 and its role in shaping public discourse surrounding the Iraq War and media incidents such as Trent Lott’s 2002 resignation from Congress (often attributed to the tenaciousness of bloggers in investigating Lott’s controversial comments in favor of segregation at a birthday party for Senator Strom Thurmond). See, for example, Aaron Barlow, *The Rise of the Blogosphere* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007); Michael Keren, *Blogosphere: The New Political Arena* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006); Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004); and Damien Pfister, *Networked Media, Networked Rhetoric: Attention and Deliberation in the Early Blogosphere* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014).

The period under examination here might be called the “mature” blogosphere, in which new-music bloggers were most active between 2004 and 2011; since 2011, social media platforms Twitter and Facebook have replaced much blogging activity among composers, performers, and critics (see my Conclusion). Notably, several composer-bloggers including Greenstein and Darcy James Argue frequently commented about politics and engaged with political bloggers.

consultant and former *Village Voice* critic Greg Sandow speculated about the future of classical music and what he called “alt classical” (see Chapter 2); writer and *NewMusicBox* editor Molly Sheridan covered the relationship between audiences, technology, and contemporary music in a blog with the tagline “No genre is the new genre”; *Village Voice* critic Kyle Gann wrote about his generation of composers and the legacy of uptown and downtown; and publicist Amanda Ameer described her experiences in the classical music business and engaged in co-blogging exercises with Muhly.¹¹⁵ Larger institutions such as radio also turned towards participating in an Internet new-music ecosystem, with the founding of online station Q2 Music (a subset of New York’s WQXR) and the classically focused NPR blog *Deceptive Cadence*.¹¹⁶ Music critics—including ones who wrote regularly for prominent publications such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, and *New Yorker*—maintained blogs of their own. With lively comments sections and bloggers who frequently cross-referenced each others’ posts, online commentary on new music became robust.¹¹⁷ This public sphere participated in a broader digital classical music landscape. In a 2007 *New Yorker* article,

¹¹⁵ See <http://www.artsjournal.com/sandow/>; <http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/>; <http://www.artsjournal.com/gap/>; and www.artsjournal.com/lifesapitch/.

¹¹⁶ These radio shifts are partially owed to NPR member station WNYC’s purchase of WQXR in 2009, which allowed for an increased collaboration between public radio and the classical station. The cross-genre new-music identity of Q2 is also informed by the longstanding work of John Schaefer at WNYC.

¹¹⁷ This fluidity of exchange is similar to what David Chapman describes of the 1970s, when John Rockwell in the *New York Times*, Tom Johnson in the *Village Voice*, and Joan La Barbara in the *SoHo Weekly News* participated in the construction of the downtown musical community. David Chapman, “Collaboration, Presence, and Community: The Philip Glass Ensemble in Downtown New York, 1966–1976” (PhD diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 2013).

Ross described the recent appearance of hundreds of specialist blogs, writing that “Classical-music culture on the Internet is expanding at a sometimes alarming pace.”¹¹⁸

New-music composers and performers believed that blogs would allow them to reach a readership without the intervention of journalists or critics. In a 2009 post on his personal blog, Greenstein identified this shift as “a replacement of mediation-by-Media...with mediation-by-self”:

If you need a magazine to come interview you in order to have a public persona, it’s going to wind up being more cultivated and distanced than if you are talking directly to Your People through Your Website, or talking with your friends through a trusted quasi-3rd-party outlet. The kind of mediation that used to be necessary for artists to have a robust public life is not entirely gone, of course, but it’s severely diminished by the direct communication outlets that are now available.¹¹⁹

This mediation-by-self allowed composers and performers to develop their ideas, in a dialogue with one another that was also visible to the public. A relatively early adopter, Greenstein posted regularly on his blog between November 2004 and fall 2009: he discussed national politics, chronicled developments in the new-music scene, critiqued the culture of classical and contemporary music, and crafted a rhetoric that would inform New Amsterdam and its idea of indie classical.¹²⁰ Giggling musicians such as composer

¹¹⁸ Alex Ross, “The Well-Tempered Web,” *New Yorker*, 22 October 2007.

¹¹⁹ Greenstein, “Feeling Good in a New Decade,” *Judd Greenstein: Why?* (blog), 15 June 2009, archived with Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091216134431/http://www.juddgreenstein.com/why.html#feelinggoodinane wdecade>.

¹²⁰ Greenstein only posted a handful of blog updates in 2010 and 2011; when he revamped his website in April 2013, he removed the blog section entirely, and older blog posts are only accessible through the Wayback Machine. He wrote in an introduction to the new website that “For the first 7 of those years, I used the basic HTML site to its fullest capacity, writing essays (which I will gradually migrate over here), making music available for download (most of which I have posted to my new Soundcloud page, also in development, and which will appear in widgets all over this new site), and generally maintaining a regular presence online. In the past couple of years, I’ve been too busy to write regularly, and the HTML uploading

and big-band leader Darcy James Argue (b. 1975) started blogs to have an online presence for their music, and subsequently became documentarians of the scene:

The thing about having a blog is: you should post updates. Since I was young and un-jaded and excited about moving to New York, I was seeing a lot of music—all of these awesome shows, and they're not really getting any kind of coverage. And I have a digital camera, and I have a blog, and so I could cover them. Why don't I do that? It got kind of obsessive for a while, of just really trying to document everything I was going to and everything I was listening to in New York, and trying to make some sense of it. I was going to indie rock shows, indie classical shows, jazz shows, trying to figure out, "So what is it that makes this thing work, and how can I talk about this music in a way that can, I don't know, explain what I like about it to people who are more narrow in their listening habits?" I'm not sure if I ever thought about it consciously that way, but subconsciously that may have been my goal for the blog, to justify my own listening and concert-going habits to the world.¹²¹

Vocalists Mellissa Hughes and Anne-Carolyn Bird wrote about their performing experiences, building community in the new-music world, and programming contemporary music.¹²² Muhly—among the most prolific and widely read of the bloggers—advocated for the music of his generation, criticized the lack of support for contemporary music among major institutions, and lambasted the writing of professional

and formatting that the site required was just enough of an additional hurdle to keep me from writing at all, except for very special occasions. Instead, most of my writing attention has been given over to feeding the 140-character Moloch." The "Moloch" is Twitter, and Greenstein suggests that the social media platform contributed to his decline in blogging; I will address this decline within the blogosphere more broadly in my Conclusion. Greenstein, "Website 2.0," *Judd Greenstein*, 19 April 2013, <http://www.juddgreenstein.com/website-2-0/>.

¹²¹ Darcy James Argue, interview with author, 9 October 2015. In attending these concerts, Argue developed a cross-genre approach in his online writing that lent itself to the ethos of New Amsterdam, and he became one of the label's early artists. In interview, he said of participants in the indie classical scene, "I think for me as a jazz musician and a jazz composer, it really felt like all these separate musical streams were finally converging at the same time in the mid-2000s in Brooklyn...and I realize this is a highly subjective impression, I'm aware that's not actually the case. This convergence had been happening for a long time. But it really felt like, all of a sudden, 'Oh my god, there are all these composers like Missy Mazzoli, and Judd Greenstein, and Ted Hearne, and what they think is cool is the same stuff as what I think is cool!' And that was not an experience I had had previously with very many classical composers. There's the shock of, 'I can't believe you guys like disco records! When did this happen?'" Ibid. For Argue's blog, see <http://www.secretsocietymusic.org>.

¹²² See <http://mellissahughes.com/> and <http://theconcert.blogspot.com/>.

music critics.¹²³ His irreverent and florid writing style provided a personal complement to his growing public persona, as he continued to receive commissions from major institutions.

Composer and blogger Timo Andres (b. 1985) followed similar institutional pathways as Greenstein: he attended Yale for undergraduate and graduate degrees, and participated in the Bang on a Can summer festival in 2009.¹²⁴ Nonesuch Records released Andres's first album, *Shy and Mighty*, in 2010; it received a strongly positive review from Alex Ross in the *New Yorker*.¹²⁵ In a July 2009 post, he described his fascination with the music of his contemporaries:

I was wondering because I've been listening to my "Colleagues" iTunes playlist recently, which is where I put my generation's music. I've got some newly-acquired [Judd] Greenstein and [Stephen] Gorbos, two of my favorites, and I realized that I liked their music better than almost any other "contemporary" music. It's worlds away from most of the pap that gets big commissions. And while it's really cool that I can link to free MP3's on their websites, I'd really like to be able to buy, say, an all-Gorbos CD in a store. (Naxos? You listening?) This guy has the right idea, but I still can't stop in at Cutler's and walk out with [Muhly's] *Speaks Volumes*.

What I guess I'm trying to say is that I hear something in the music of my peers that I don't in that of their teachers. Composers have been espousing the idea of

¹²³ See, for example, a 2008 blogpost in which Muhly castigated the repertoire of the New York Philharmonic's opening night, writing that "You can't be a major orchestra and program like a youth orchestra"; and a 2009 post in which Muhly criticizes, line-by-line, a *New York Times* review of a concert of the indie band Grizzly Bear. Nico Muhly, "Sarah Palin's Favorite Soloist," *Nico Muhly* (blog), 7 October 2008, <http://nicomuhly.com/news/2008/sarah-palins-favorite-soloist/>; and Muhly, "Collabos," *Nico Muhly* (blog), 30 May 2009, <http://nicomuhly.com/news/2009/collabos/>.

Indicative of Muhly's online reach is his number of Twitter followers, significantly larger than any other composer of his generation. As of 21 June 2016, Muhly (@nicomuhly) had more than 77,200 followers; for comparison, Greenstein (@judgreenstein) had approximately 54,300 followers, and Mazzoli (@missymazzoli) had approximately 6,200 followers.

¹²⁴ Andres and five of his colleagues in graduate school at Yale formed Sleeping Giant, a composer collective modeled after Bang on a Can; it comprises Andres, Andrew Norman, Jacob Cooper, Christopher Cerrone, Robert Honstein, and Ted Hearne. Hearne has released three albums on New Amsterdam.

¹²⁵ See Ross, "Brazen," *New Yorker*, 3 May 2010.

“eclecticism” for a couple of decades, but I think it’s taken until now for that to really sink into the music in a meaningful and coherent way. Even when Big John [Adams] tries to do it, things like this come out (though, respect). But a curious mind like Alex Temple somehow assimilates and synthesizes [her] influences, instead of just dumping them in a misbegotten salad.¹²⁶

I will focus in more detail below on the implications of the “naturalized” eclecticism that Andres evokes. Visible here is a clear construction of a “generation” out of Andres’s Yale colleagues and friends (and, significantly, one that is already shaped by the press; Andres became friends with Muhly after Ross wrote about them both in a 2004 *New Yorker* column).¹²⁷ This generation is mediated by composer websites and Andres’s iTunes playlist—but has not yet reached the professional caliber of releasing albums on Naxos and in record stores—and distinguished from the influence of older generations (which are granted an elder statesmen status, as he invokes “Big John” Adams).

Even as “mediation-by-self” appeared to render traditional outlets less necessary, blogs participated in a discourse with professional critics active in legacy media organizations. Some writers, such as Daniel Stephen Johnson, positioned themselves in an ambiguous sphere between fan and professional commenter.¹²⁸ (The smallness of the new-music world meant there were fewer “fan blogs” than in other genres such as indie

¹²⁶ Timo Andres, “Gleaning,” *Timo Andres* (blog), 29 July 2009, <http://www.andres.com/2007/07/29/gleaning/>. Although he is several years younger than Greenstein and Muhly, Andres pointed out how he gradually evolved into a colleague of these older composers, a shift from his early undergraduate years to his professional status in 2016: “When I arrived at Yale [for a bachelor’s degree], the composition grad students were New Amsterdam! So they were the cool older kids who I looked up to and followed their career paths, and made me think ‘Oh, maybe this isn’t such a crazy thing to do. This could work.’ It was a very fertile environment... When you’re a little younger the age difference seems much greater—they seemed *so* old to me. And now, of course, it’s not really a difference at all.” Andres, interview with author, 9 January 2015.

¹²⁷ Ross, “Ignore the Conductor.”

¹²⁸ See <http://danielstephenjohnson.blogspot.com/>. Johnson also wrote liner notes for Muhly’s early albums, and has subsequently worked as professional critic for Q2 and *Musical America*.

rock). I oriented my own blog—Seated Ovation, which I started in 2009—from the perspective of a fan and non-professional critic, and frequently commented on developments in the world of contemporary music.¹²⁹ Looking back through the archives of Seated Ovation, it is clear that I was reinforcing the generational group-making already pervasive in the new-music blogosphere. An August 2010 post stated, for example, that:

In the past couple years, we have seen a wealth of full-length albums from the newest generation of composers. Since [sic], we have Corey Dargel's *Someone Will Take Care Of Me* [New Amsterdam Records], Timothy Andres's *Shy and Mighty* [Nonesuch], Nico Muhly's two upcoming albums [Bedroom Community], Ted Hearne's *Katrina Ballads* [New Amsterdam], and Tristan Perich's *I-Bit Symphony* [Cantaloupe]. Besides Nico, these are all names that have made waves in the classical world only relatively recently, and the increasing media devotion and intrigue into these new projects has given an almost disproportionate (but well-deserved) attention to a set of composers who haven't quite hit thirty.¹³⁰

My version of a “newest generation of composers” was, in essence, synonymous with indie classical.

Two blogger-critics that focused substantially on this generation, however, were professionals: Steve Smith (b. 1966), in his work at the *New York Times* and *Time Out New York* and online with the blog *Night After Night*; and Alex Ross (b. 1968), with the *New Yorker* and online with the blog *The Rest is Noise*. Beginning in 2005, Smith posted concert and album reviews as well as news stories on *Night After Night*.¹³¹ He mentioned and linked to the work of other bloggers such as Argue; advocated for new albums by composers including Muhly and Greenstein; and drew his readers' attention to nascent labels like New Amsterdam. Smith's blog made explicit the flow of information from

¹²⁹ See <http://seatedovation.blogspot.com>.

¹³⁰ William Robin, “one bit, two bit, red bit, blue bit,” *Seated Ovation* (blog), 23 August 2010, <http://seatedovation.blogspot.com/2010/08/one-bit-two-bit-red-bit-blue-bit.html>.

¹³¹ See <http://nightafternight.blogs.com/>.

musicians to critics. In January 2008, for example, he posted about an email that he received from Greenstein explaining that the series at Gallerie Icosahedron had been cancelled.¹³² And Smith would review these same artists in *Time Out* and the *New York Times*: in this period, he was the only classical critic writing for the *Times* who maintained a blog. He contributed major feature articles for the *Times*—including profiles of New Amsterdam artists William Brittelle and Corey Dargel (b. 1977)—that focused on indie classical and constructed a post-genre image for this generation. In a profile of composer and singer-songwriter Gabriel Kahane (b. 1981), for example, Smith wrote:

At 27, Mr. Kahane is part of a musically omnivorous generation. Young classical composers like Nico Muhly and Caleb Burhans are not crossing over to pop idioms so much as they are ignoring stylistic boundaries outright.¹³³

Smith also served a significant role as *Time Out New York* editor, where he solicited articles on musicians in the scene, including writer Olivia Giovetti's 2010 profile of Mazzoli.¹³⁴ (As of 2016, Mazzoli still utilized the article's headline, "Brooklyn's Postmillennial Mozart," as the top clipping in the list of press quotes on her website.) Mazzoli described Smith as Victoire's most significant early champion: "With his attention, other people started to pay attention. So without that, it would have been very hard to do a lot of what we did."¹³⁵

¹³² Smith, "When the Music's Over," *Night After Night* (blog), 28 January 2008, http://nightafternight.blogs.com/night_after_night/2008/01/when-the-musics.html.

¹³³ Smith, "A Singer-Songwriter Ignores Musical Boundaries," *New York Times*, 24 April 2009.

¹³⁴ Olivia Giovetti, "Missy Mazzoli: The Stock of Brooklyn's Postmillennial Mozart Continues to Rise," *Time Out New York*, 15 February 2010, <http://www.timeout.com/newyork/opera-classical/missy-mazzoli>.

¹³⁵ Mazzoli, interview with author, 10 November 2015.

When Ross launched his blog in 2004, he already had an established career as a critical voice in new music. Ross had written reviews for the *Times* from 1992 until 1996—with a strong focus on contemporary music—before being appointed the *New Yorker*'s classical music critic.¹³⁶ Ross named his blog in anticipation of his in-progress history of twentieth-century music, *The Rest is Noise*, and he posted frequently about its genesis. The blogosphere offered Ross an opportunity to hear the work of composers and performers that classical music's institutional gatekeepers might otherwise have overlooked. As he recalled,

The Internet was, somehow, making visible and audible to me a lot more music than was being presented by the leading institutions—or even the established new-music venues....I could find out what a twenty-five year old composer was doing who hadn't been published, hadn't been recorded, but put an MP3 on a website...The thing about the blog was that it was interactive, so I was getting a lot of information sent to me, email mostly...I liked the immediacy of it: you don't have to go through certain checkpoints to reach me. A graduate program decides this composer is worthy of being included in their program, such and such fellowship anoints them, a publisher signs them: you could sort of cut through that.¹³⁷

Because his columns for the *New Yorker* ran biweekly or monthly and addressed classical music writ large, Ross frequently used the blog as a platform to draw attention to new music that he could not focus on in print. He often discussed a younger generation of

¹³⁶ Ross said that when he was hired by the *Times*, "it was understood that new music was going to be a big part of what I was going to do," because of his previous freelance experience covering it for other publications; he noted that though he was assigned to cover classical concerts as well, "I gravitated immediately towards new music." Alex Ross, interview with author, 16 December 2015. He added in an email that "The fact that I had been a composer of a sort (through my freshman year of college) may also have played a role." Ross, email to author, 27 June 2016. Printed with permission.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

musicians, one he had first examined in a 2004 *New Yorker* article that profiled several student composers including Muhly, Little, and Timo Andres.¹³⁸

Ross's prominence as a critic meant that even an online listing of a concert on *The Rest Is Noise* could represent a minor coup for younger musicians. In a 2007 post, Ross first noticed New Amsterdam Records, and connected it to what he perceived as a major generational development:

It's great to see a young community of composers and musicians supporting each other. Nobody's playing the domineering genius (yet). On Friday I was talking to the veteran composer Scott Johnson, who commented that this latest scene has an appealing openness about it, an optimistic spirit. I think of it as pragmatism—music beyond ideology.¹³⁹

Ross said that because he was so busy attending a wide range of classical and new-music concerts, he kept track of the scene more online than in-person: "I feel like part of my role that fell to me, at a certain point was, to just pass along...to spread the news about what's going on, especially beyond what is already known and widely talked about."¹⁴⁰

Ross's awareness of these developments was crystallized in a 2007 *New Yorker* column, in which he described "more new music in the city than ever before" and wrote that "an exceptionally vital group of young composers is driving the proliferation."¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ross, "Ignore the Conductor." In interview, Andres said that he believed that Ross's article had helped him gain the attention of John Adams, who has championed his music, and producer Robert Hurwitz, who has released two of Andres's albums on Nonesuch.

¹³⁹ Ross, "The New Pragmatism," *The Rest Is Noise* (blog), 18 March 2007, <http://www.therestisnoise.com/2007/03/18/>. Ross added in a subsequent email that "I understand pragmatism to mean not an elimination or fusion of ideologies but a mediation between them, an attempt at 'settling metaphysical disputes that might otherwise be interminable' ([William] James)." Ross, email to author, 29 May 2016.

¹⁴⁰ Ross, interview with author, 16 December 2015.

¹⁴¹ Ross, "Club Acts," *New Yorker*, 16 April 2007.

Like other critics, Ross highlighted the fact that the musicians were working in a liminal space between genres: he declared that “many composers of [Christopher] Tignor’s [b. 1976] generation are erasing the lines between classical and pop,” pointed out the predominance of contemporary music in club spaces such as LPR, and examined in detail a Wordless Music concert.¹⁴² And Ross foregrounded the Internet as a key space for this generation: “As they pontificate on blogs and Web sites such as *Sequenza21* and *NewMusicBox*, distribute music via MySpace pages and Internet radio, and post flyers for their shows, they act for all the world like unsigned rockers trying to make it in the city.”¹⁴³

Finally, the online radio station Q2 strongly emphasized the music of young American composers. Dedicated to what it calls “dynamic and inspiring contemporary classical music,” Q2 was launched by the New York metropolitan area radio station WQXR, when the classical station was purchased by New York Public Radio in 2009.¹⁴⁴ Sirota curated a Q2 program that focused on music by her colleagues including Muhly and Greenstein, and wrote essays for Q2’s website;¹⁴⁵ Giovetti hosted a weekly show called *The New Canon* that featured online chat forums and addressed the questions of

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ See <http://www.wqxr.org/#!/series/q2/>.

¹⁴⁵ Beginning in 2014, Sirota also hosted the Q2-sponsored podcast “Meet the Composer.” The podcast has gained significant attention outside the world of new music—and, unlike the online-only Q2, was subsequently broadcast on WNYC’s terrestrial stream—and won a Peabody Award in 2016. Each episode profiles a single composer; Season 1 (2015) included John Luther Adams, Andrew Norman, Donnacha Dennehy, Caroline Shaw, and Marcos Balter; Season 2 (2016) focused on Meredith Monk, Ingram Marshall, Anna Thorvaldsdottir, Kaija Saariaho, and Muhly. See <http://www.wqxr.org/#!/programs/meet-composer/>. A 2016 *Kickstarter* online campaign to raise funds for Season 3 obtained \$32,500 in donations. See “Meet the Composer: Season 3,” *Kickstarter*, <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/q2music/meet-the-composer-season-three/description>.

“Where does the line between classical and pop sit?” and “What exactly do we call the music being made now?”¹⁴⁶

For a 2011 feature co-sponsored with NPR Music, Q2 asked online listeners to submit names of favorite composers under the age of forty for an upcoming eight-hour broadcast. But even in its call for suggestions, Q2 imagined a particular cohort closely tied to that of indie classical: “To get you started, here’s a list of a few notable composers under 40: Timothy Andres, Sufjan Stevens, Missy Mazzoli, Tyondai Braxton and Shara Worden.”¹⁴⁷ The website received over eight hundred responses and compiled “The Mix: 100 Composers Under 40,” a “crowdsourced selection of young composers.”¹⁴⁸ Though the final list was international in scope, it is notable that the three composers pictured at the top of the NPR page—see Figure 2—are Tyondai Braxton, Sarah Kirkland Snider, and Muhly, all strongly associated with indie classical.¹⁴⁹ And the image of the generation that the website painted was one explicitly “without walls”: “The 21st-century composer makes his home wherever he sees fit, uses a battery of electric guitars and

¹⁴⁶ WQXR, “Kahane and Andres Rock Out,” *The New Canon*, *Q2 Music*, 6 June 2011, <http://www.wqxr.org/#!/story/137993-kahane-and-andres-rock-out/>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ See WQXR, “Attention All New Music Lovers!” *Q2 Music*, 23 March 2011, <http://www.wqxr.org/#!/story/119602-attention-all-new-music-lovers/>; and Alex Ambrose, “The Mix: 100 Composers Under 40,” *NPR Music*, 17 April 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/23/135473622/the-mix-100-composers-under-40>.

¹⁴⁹ Braxton’s background is significantly different from the cohorts that I have discussed thus far: the son of composer and improviser Anthony Braxton, he studied at the Hartt School and first became known the leader of rock band Battles, which he founded in 2002 and left in 2010 to pursue solo projects. His orchestral work *Central Market*—released on a 2009 album on Warp Records—was premiered by the Wordless Music Orchestra at Lincoln Center, and he subsequently wrote music for the Bang on a Can All-Stars. Music critics Jayson Greene and Justin Davidson both place Braxton within an indie classical generation, in articles I discuss below; Davidson called *Central Market* “the quintessential opus of the New New York School.” Davidson, “A New New York School.”

drums in the same breath as a section of violins and violas, and performs for a rabidly dancing audience on one night and at a concert-hall subscription series the next.”¹⁵⁰

The Mix: 100 Composers Under 40

WQXR's Q2 Presents A Crowdsourced Selection Of Young Composers

April 17, 2011 · 8:00 PM ET

ALEX AMBROSE

FROM 

This audio is no longer available.



From left: Tyondai Braxton, Sarah Kirkland Snider and Nico Muhly were selected by Q2's audience as part of this Composers Under 40 crowdsourcing project.
Courtesy of the artists

Figure 2: Screenshot taken 6 June 2016 from Alex Ambrose, “The Mix: 100 Composers Under 40,” *NPR Music*, 17 April 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/04/23/135473622/the-mix-100-composers-under-40>.

Readers criticized the narrowness of the project: one commenter on the NPR page, Aura Centrique, wrote that “This list is intensely New York centric... One could draw a social map that links all of these people to just a few networks, labels, and venues”;¹⁵¹ another commenter on the Q2 site, Christopher McGovern, wrote that “I wish

¹⁵⁰ Ambrose, “The Mix.”

¹⁵¹ Aura Centrique, comment on Ambrose, “The Mix.”

you weren't limiting it to under 40-yr-olds. That's a bit discriminatory."¹⁵² Indeed, for many commenters, the seemingly singular focus in the press and online on a "young generation"—combined with institutional opportunities and competitions often limited exclusively to "emerging composers"—fueled accusations of ageism. In a 2013 *NewMusicBox* article, composer Bill Doerrfeld (b. 1964) compiled data from 165 composer "opportunities" published on the website ComposersSite.com between November 2012 and April 2013 (including awards, performances, paid positions, residencies, and workshops), and found that 35% were restricted to composers at or below the age of forty; Doerrfeld wrote that "The moral of this story: in today's society you better make it as a composer before you turn 40."¹⁵³ The article received more than one hundred comments that debated the merits of specific institutional support for emerging composers. For many, the emergence of a "new generation" meant the marginalization of the old. **[End]**

~~In the Cohort~~

~~What is it that made Nico Muhly, Missy Mazzoli, Judd Greenstein, and David T. Little part of the same generation? Dozens of other prominent American composers, from Andrew Norman (b. 1979) to Tyshawn Sorey (b. 1980) to Ashley Fure (b. 1982), share similar birth years but were not labeled indie classical. We have already seen the institutional pathways through which these musicians traveled, the venues in which they performed, and the online sphere in which they engaged in dialogue. In this section, I~~

¹⁵² Christopher McGovern, comment on WQXR, "Attention All Music Lovers!"

¹⁵³ Bill Doerrfeld, "Ageism in Composer Opportunities," *NewMusicBox*, 5 June 2013, <http://www.newmusicbox.org/articles/ageism-in-composer-opportunities/>.

~~And although the composer does not address it in his program note, the origins of *death speaks* are tied to a popular meta-narrative about classical music in the twenty-first century. As Nova explained,~~

~~We had our first meeting and he [Lang] said, “I’d like to write a piece about the death of classical music.” And he doesn’t really talk about it, but the way that he talks about it, I just started crying. It was the first time I’d ever met David Lang, and I’m sitting at this table with Bryce [Dessner] and I’m just crying, I can’t stop crying. And I’m really, really emotional, and he’s like, “You guys represent the death of the old thing.” And I’m crying because I love the old thing too, and he loves the old thing, and we all love the old thing. And so it felt like grieving, like the passage of time or something, that there’s something new that’s happening, and it doesn’t mean that any of us don’t love the old stuff too.”⁵⁰²~~

~~The metaphor of *death speaks* is the ne plus ultra of intergenerational citations, a declaration that this quartet of indie composer-performers represents a kind of phoenix that will rise from the ashes of classical music.~~

~~But I do not share Lang’s apocalyptic optimism. I worry instead that the mechanisms that I traced in this dissertation—what allowed Muhly’s cohort and the indie classical generation to establish itself—have begun to unravel. As I have shown, what facilitated the rise of indie classical was the “old thing.” It is telling that *death speaks* was co-commissioned by Carnegie Hall and arts presenter Stanford Lively Arts: it is yet another example of rhetorical distance and institutional nearness. “Music without walls” has always existed within the frame of classical music.~~

[Start here] During my dissertation research, I felt a certain mournful nostalgia for the world that I was investigating, as it seemed to slip into the past. Of the twenty-two blogs that I list in my bibliography, only three are still updated with regularity. Many remain dormant, except for an occasional post. The intense textuality of the blogosphere that

⁵⁰² Shara Nova, interview with author, 7 March 2014.

shaped the emergence of indie classical a decade ago—one that allowed composers to fiercely debate what they should call themselves and imagine a shared generational ethos—has mostly disappeared. Although this evidence is anecdotal, it is part of a larger decline within blogging practices since around 2011, one primarily shaped by the rising presence and prestige of Facebook and Twitter.⁵⁰³ When Greenstein updated his website and removed his blog in 2013, he was referring to Twitter when he posted that “most of my writing attention has been given over to feeding the 140-character Moloch.”⁵⁰⁴ Communication will always exist within and among musical communities, and a robust discussion of new music exists on these social media platforms. But the public discourse of the blogosphere has been replaced by either Facebook—in which information is only semi-public, available to one’s “friends,” and shaped by an algorithm that determines what conversations users may actually see—or Twitter—which, in its aphoristic form, is useful for pithy disputes like the ones that surrounded indie classical, but is limited in its ability to generate serious dialogue and debate.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ See Verne G. Kopytoff, “Blogs Wane as the Young Drift to Sites Like Twitter,” *New York Times*, 20 February 2011; and Jason Kottke, “The Blog Is Dead, Long Live the Blog,” *Nieman Lab*, 19 December 2013, <http://www.niemanlab.org/2013/12/the-blog-is-dead/>.

⁵⁰⁴ Judd Greenstein, “Website 2.0,” *Judd Greenstein*, 19 April 2013, <http://www.juddgreenstein.com/website-2-0/>.

⁵⁰⁵ For a discussion of the implications of Facebook’s algorithms, see Zeynep Tufekci, “The Real Bias Built In at Facebook,” *New York Times*, 19 May 2016.

Since 2015, a community discussion oriented around new music has taken place weekly on Sunday evenings on Twitter, utilizing the hashtag #musochat; see <http://musochat.com/>.

Both platforms also exist outside the archiving reach of the Wayback Machine, making historical research more difficult. In the wake of the importance of Twitter and Facebook in the Arab Spring and the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, scholars have begun to develop tools to archive social media, including the in-progress digital humanities project Documenting the Now; see <http://www.docnow.io/>.

Indie classical institutions have themselves contributed to this discursive decline. When it launched in 2008, New Amsterdam’s website included a social network component; a blog oriented towards, as Brittelle put it, “talking about what alex [ross] and steve smith are talking about”; and freewheeling interview podcasts such as the Bourbon Roundtable. In 2016, New Amsterdam Records and New Amsterdam Presents—which maintain separate websites that link to one another—act as a professional home for its artists, with information pages for musicians and albums, descriptions of projects, submissions information, and a calendar. Today, New Amsterdam’s discourse is generated primarily in its press releases. Similarly, the chatty blog that yMusic maintained when it first launched has been replaced by an irregularly updated “News” section announcing projects and concerts. Whereas these organizations once attempted to shape a community and perform generationalism, their online identities have now settled into a distanced professionalism.⁵⁰⁶

The blogosphere allowed indie classical to arise because it engaged in a strong dialogue with traditional forms of media and criticism that have historically supported new music. In 2007, Alex Ross heralded the “music beyond ideology” of a new generation of musicians on *The Rest Is Noise*, and Steve Smith reviewed early New Amsterdam albums at *Night After Night*; in 2016, neither critic posts on his blog with frequency. And, as the blogosphere has eroded, so too has the world of professional music criticism. In April 2015, *Time Out New York*—which once tagged Mazzoli with

⁵⁰⁶ This follows a broader shift towards professionalization in online communities, in which personal blogs have been monetized and refocused towards entrepreneurial branding. A 2015 article on the website *Refinery29*, for example, describes how fashion blogs—once “manned by obsessive fashion fans who got paid in the emotional currency of comments rather than agent-negotiated contracts”—have transformed into a professional blogging economy driven by corporate-sponsored posts. See Alice Hines, “Bye Gucci, Hello Kotex: How Fashion Blogging Went Mainstream,” 2 July 2015, <http://www.refinery29.com/fashion-blogging-mainstream>.

the description “the Postmillennial Mozart”—drastically cut its extensive classical music listings into a handful of events in a small column. Two of the strongest proponents of indie classical in the press, Smith and Allan Kozinn, have left the *New York Times* and New York: in April 2014, Smith began a position as assistant arts editor at the *Boston Globe*; Kozinn took a buyout in December 2014 and has moved to Maine. In 2006, the *New York Times* had three full-time classical music critics; now it has one.⁵⁰⁷ Two years after Smith started his position, the *Boston Globe* cut nearly all of its freelance music criticism.⁵⁰⁸ As I was working on this conclusion and wrote to Smith to check a fact, he responded that “it’s interesting to contemplate my small role in having helped to foster a musical movement, at a time when the conventional media are increasingly abandoning cultural coverage. It was a bright, shining moment—and happily the baby has its own legs to stand on.”⁵⁰⁹ Ross said that he “sometimes feels as though I belong to a dying profession while covering a dying art.”⁵¹⁰

The mechanisms that allowed indie classical to gain prestige and institutional support have been disrupted. Future cohorts of composers will continue to emerge, but is not clear how they will transform cultural capital into economic capital to create the kind of sustainable careers that New Amsterdam has sought for its artists. The rhetorical positioning of indie classical—that it came into existence outside the “strictures” of the

⁵⁰⁷ Staff critic Bernard Holland took a buyout in 2008; the only remaining full-time classical critic is Anthony Tommasini.

⁵⁰⁸ See BMint Staff, “To Dispossessed Freelancers *BMInt* Offers a Megaphone,” *Boston Musical Intelligencer*, 23 May 2016, <http://www.classical-scene.com/2016/05/23/globe-no-freelancers/>.

⁵⁰⁹ Steve Smith, Facebook message to author, 29 June 2016. Printed with permission.

⁵¹⁰ Alex Ross, email to author, 29 May 2016. Printed with permission.

concert hall and the academy—may create the false impression that the next generation could thrive without the traditional infrastructure of classical and new music.

It is troubling, then, that the supposed entrepreneurialism of indie classical is presented as a solution to classical music’s economic woes. In a 2014 editorial, *New York Times* chief music critic Anthony Tommasini contrasted the bankruptcy of City Opera and struggles of the Minnesota Orchestra with a “positive front”: “an entrepreneurial ethos is welling up from the ranks of idealistic young composers and performers, gifted artists who are inventing new templates for a life in music.”⁵¹¹ In a widely disseminated graduation speech given at Northwestern University’s Bienen School of Music in 2013, flutist and International Contemporary Ensemble founder Claire Chase said,

You can open the paper any day of the week and read about the supposed death of classical music, about the dissolution of symphony orchestras, and the implosion and bankruptcy of opera companies, about the narrowing number of jobs available to an exponentially growing workforce... Let’s not mourn a tragedy; let’s use our gifts for free and creative thinking, and our broad vision to seize this tremendous, and one could argue, historically unprecedented moment of opportunity as young artists in the year 2013. Classical music isn’t dying; it’s now just being born.⁵¹²

[end]

~~The optimism of Lang, Tommasini, and Chase—despite economic circumstance—resonates with what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello analyze as a “new spirit of capitalism,” one that justifies entrepreneurship over stability because of the artistic~~

⁵¹¹ Anthony Tommasini, “Lessons in a Year of Crises,” *New York Times*, 8 January 2014.

⁵¹² Claire Chase, “2013 Bienen School of Music Convocation Address,” <http://davee.music.northwestern.edu/video/2013-bienen-school-music-convocation-address-claire-chase>.

Chase has since nuanced her perspective about the future of classical music; in a 2016 interview she described the future of classical and contemporary music as “both disastrous and immensely hopeful. I think it is lazy to focus on one or the other... It’s a wretched situation, but also we are in—or soon will be in—a new renaissance. See Ricky O’ Bannon, “ICE Founder Claire Chase on the ‘Disastrous’ and ‘Hopeful’ Future of New Music,” *Baltimore Symphony Orchestra Stories*, 14 March 2016, <https://www.bsomusic.org/stories/ice-founder-claire-chase-on-the-disastrous-and-hopeful-future-of-new-music.aspx>