

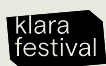
ECHO 2025

Coming of age



the classical music
sector event

Echo is an initiative of



KUNSTENPUNT



Bozar



“A great thing for classical music to learn would be that everything is temporary — live sound happens once, that is a big part of the joy.”

– *Diamanda La Berge Dramm*



Dear reader,

Looking back and looking ahead are both essential for a sector that wants to remain relevant. That is why Klarafestival, Kunstenpunt, Concertgebouw Brugge, and DE SINGEL annually organise Echo, the sector event for classical music in Flanders. In 2025, Bozar and De Bijloke joined as partners.

On March 26, 2025, the fourth edition of Echo took place at Bozar. Its theme was *Coming of Age*. Centuries-old scores and never-before-heard sounds. Tradition and innovation. Young prodigies and '*éminences grises*'. In classical music, old and new meet. Age is a central axis around which we think, play, create, and experience. During Echo 2025, we joined the sector in reflecting on how we deal with musical legacies and how we enthuse a young audience about classical music. We shared best practices on sustainable careers and scrutinised our expectations towards emerging talent. Our keynote speakers, Anne La Berge and Diamanda La Berge Dramm, explored all facets of the central theme in two intimate performance-lectures: a mother and daughter meandering along the common ground and fault lines between generations.

This publication is a reflection of Echo 2025. You will find (fragments from) the keynotes, and a summary report of each panel discussion. I wish you enjoyable reading and hope to meet you next year (again or for the very first time) at the moment of inspiration for *the* classical music sector.

On behalf of the Echo partners,

Joost Fonteyne
Intendant of Klarafestival



STATE OF THE YOUTH

– *Diamanda La Berge Dramm*

Hello.

When Joost asked us to speak here today – last fall – I had conveniently been thinking about a word. It was October and I was about 6 months pregnant and once you're big then it's hard to avoid the topic, and I had just been in a conversation where someone had said to me – well aren't your parents, Anne and David, just thrilled to be passing on their legacy? And I thought dude, because it was definitely a dude who said this, what do you mean by that word, legacy? Inheritance? A house? Your horse, mama? Papa's car?

This dude wouldn't have said it about my first – you see, I have 2 kids, but because my first I didn't give birth to, he wouldn't have said that about my first... Legacy, blood, Legacy. Lineage.

Legacy –

Is it this for me?

The privilege of a door into a community of music?

Or is it this for me?

The joy of playing music?

But isn't legacy too crystallized a concept to inhabit a place as alive as joy?

And mama, you did tell me once, take the ball and run.

But then with you still running, I wonder sometimes how does that work?

Do we both run and pass it back and forth before I take it, and when I really take it, do you I leave you?

Well in Tao, the future is behind you and you move backwards through it
and so you're facing the past.

So Mama, here is a list of things I stole from you

Need of danger
Many pairs of socks
Love of having a body
Having good rhythm for a girl
 You, because you actually wanted to be a drummer
 Me, because I actually wanted to be you
Prone to laryngitis
And the belief that what the grown ups say isn't always the most
interesting side of it

But here is a list of things you stole from me

Wearing mascara and bras
Wanting to use reverb and giving yourself permission to do it after you
didn't because it's not something your mother does

We run away we come home we run away come home run away.

To get away from my biggest role models, my parents,
I moved to another continent when I was 16.

We run away we come home we run away we come home run away
we come home.

We repeat this gesture with our teachers.

When it starts to circle back, the question arises, is it safe to come home?
Is it safe to come home, to the memory of it, the voices?

On the other continent, from JOBIV, I inherited a bow arm with a smooth straight wrist, that's how you can see we studied with him. We gained information but also a brand. Legacy as pedigree. And you say thank you and you mean it but you have to use that prized pedigree to push forward and away, and once you've cut, once you've decided to do it differently, is it (still) safe to come home?

A great thing for classical music to learn would be that everything is temporary - live sound happens once, that is a big part of the joy.

Let's keep moving backwards.

And let's not forget that classical music doesn't operate in a vacuum, but sits within larger cultural movements and mechanisms. To act as if we're still in a 19th century sensibility where the sublime and beautiful are our primary aesthetic categories isn't just naive, its pretty unhealthy - clinging onto archetypes like the angel violinist or the melancholic cellist. If what we're aspiring to is in fact a parody of itself, how much chance do you have to find your own voice there?

Simone Biles recently posted a story on instagram that said : let's not talk about legacy because that means it's over, right?

So let's not talk about legacy.

Let's talk about what we have here already, right now, what is the quality of this ball that we are passing back and forth?

Is it repertoire, is it people, is it sound?

All those things together, I would call them a chance at relationship.

Currently, a greater cultural mechanism is that immediacy is crushing mediation. Mediation is being crushed by immediacy.

Why is mediation important? Because it's how we relate.

I can practice relating to a score, a piece of music –
which helps me relate to another player, or an audience,
which is practice for relating to ... the other.

But we don't need to figure it all out right now.
We still have some songs to sing and states to hear.





SONIC YOUTH

moderator	Ward Bosmans – <i>(inter)national support and promotion classical music Kunstenpunt</i>
speakers	Rebecca Diependaele – <i>musicologist and general manager MATRIX [New Music Centre]</i> Liesbeth Peelman – <i>young audiences curator and development coordinator de Bijloke</i> Reinoud Van Mechelen – <i>tenor and conductor A Nocte Temporis</i>
language	Dutch

Belgium has earned an international reputation for its rich offering of classical music for young audiences. But why do artists here focus so strongly on this specific group, and how do they connect with them? Rebecca Diependaele (MATRIX [New Music Centre]), Liesbeth Peelman (Music Centre De Bijloke) and tenor Reinoud Van Mechelen (A Nocte Temporis) share how they are working to engage children and young people with classical and contemporary music in an honest and meaningful way. All three agree on the importance of an open and inclusive approach – one that does not reduce children to “the audience of tomorrow,” but recognizes them today as full cultural participants. They also highlight the power of intergenerational and participatory formats. By inviting children not only to listen, but also to create and perform, they can become genuine ambassadors for classical music. Yet working for young audiences comes with its own challenges: the marginal role of music in schools, or concert halls that aren’t suited to children, are just two examples.

For Van Mechelen, the lack of visibility of classical music in education and in society at large is a key reason not to limit himself and his ensemble A Nocte Temporis to adult audiences. “As an ensemble, we’ve been reflecting for a long time on how to expand our reach and remain relevant. For me, it’s not

just about young audiences. The real question is: how do we bring people into contact with classical music? I believe this music is worth it – it has the power to enrich us emotionally and psychologically. Imagine a future where in twenty or thirty years, no one ever hears a Bach Passion again. That would be heartbreaking, because I truly believe this art form has something profound to offer to so many people.”

Children, the panelists argue, are often far more receptive to music commonly labelled as ‘difficult’ than adults assume. Rebecca Diependaele, managing director of MATRIX [New Music Centre] in Leuven, sees this on a daily basis. MATRIX runs a library and documentation centre, while organizing educational projects for all ages, from workshops and exhibitions to the recent book *Hoofd vol klanken* [Head full of Sounds], a collection of stories about post-war composers written by Annemarie Peeters and Emilie Lauwers. “Children listen with open ears – that’s something we see constantly. In very young children especially, you sense that their frame of reference is still being formed. Over time it narrows, which is a perfectly normal process. Of course, they don’t need to take in everything, but it’s still valuable to expose them to a wide variety of experiences at an early age. That’s why being present in schools is so important.” Liesbeth Peelman, programmer for young audiences at De Bijloke in Ghent, agrees: “Children listen without prejudice. They don’t come with reference points or context – it’s up to us to create that and encourage them to open up to something unfamiliar.” Under Peelman’s lead, De Bijloke has moved from a largely receptive approach to one focused on co-productions with partners such as MATRIX and A Nocte Temporis. “We now present a broad and diverse programme: not only concerts, but also lectures, series and festivals for ages ranging from toddlers to teenagers, featuring both national and international artists. On top of that, we run development projects and bootcamps, like the I SOLISTI Summer School, a chamber music competition curated by Anneleen Lenaerts, and the Soundpainting Academy for teachers, in collaboration with MATRIX.”

Is the ultimate goal to encourage children to play or create music themselves? For Van Mechelen, that's a welcome by-product, but not the main point. "What we're talking about here is the foundation. Of course, it's wonderful if some go on to become professional musicians, but that's not the essence. What matters most is letting children experience classical music. If that inspires them to pick up an instrument or compose – all the better." Peelman adds: "And we shouldn't interpret 'doing something with it' too narrowly. Too often we focus on the professional level, but if you can show people that music can play a role in their lives, that it's a form of expression, that's already incredibly meaningful. If that leads them to maintain a lifelong amateur relationship with music, that's fantastic." Van Mechelen notes that music can also act as a catalyst in schools. "At De Veerman, for example, we run week-long projects where children gradually start working, communicating and creating together in completely new ways. You can also use music to teach much more—why not bring it into language or history classes?"

How, then, do you actually reach children? For Diependaele, stories are essential. "Stories – whether in cartoons or children's novels – are how kids learn about the world. That was the idea behind *Hoofd vol klanken*: to tell the stories of contemporary composers in a narrative and empathetic way. Contemporary music often feels like it's surrounded by a sort of barbed wire. But what happens if you enter children's imaginations through stories, long and short?" Another strategy is active participation, treating children not as passive listeners but as collaborators. Van Mechelen points to A Nocte Temporis' projects with De Veerman, where children are invited to make music, dance, or imagine scenes in response to the music. MATRIX pursues a similar approach: "With *Hoofd vol klanken*, together with De Bijloke, we created an extended project in Ghent's part-time arts education."

"When children are deeply involved in a project, they share their experiences and become wonderful ambassadors to their parents," Peelman notes.

"That's how you get parents out of their comfort zones and introduce them to

repertoires they might never have encountered otherwise.” In her experience, programming for children often resonates with older audiences as well.

“For example, De Bijloke commissioned Klankennest to create concerts for babies and toddlers, and they succeeded brilliantly. The concerts become a creative playground for the children – but also for their parents.”

Van Mechelen concurs: “Last year we performed Bach’s *St. John Passion* – which I reluctantly condensed to fifty minutes – for children. It worked beautifully, and the parents, who often didn’t know the work either, came along for the ride.”

This intergenerational approach also shapes *Boutersem Buitengewoon Klassiek* [Boutersem Extraordinary Classical], the festival Van Mechelen organizes with his ensemble in his hometown of Boutersem. “We always include a family concert, with an interactive element: we explain what’s happening on stage. You can see the eyes and ears opening – not just the children’s, but the adults’ as well. Classical music simply isn’t very present in society. Beyond Klara, which does excellent work, there’s very little. So how do we reach audiences? Through the children!” Diependaele sees intergenerational programming as “a clever way to reach adult audiences too – without them even realizing it.” MATRIX applies this philosophy in their structural collaboration with the contemporary music festival Transit. “Every year we create a new performance there. Two years ago, we staged a concert with primary school children that included an amplified ball pit. In other words, we broke open the whole concert format and also showed the largely professional Transit audience that there are so many possibilities. You really don’t always have to sit on little chairs.”





NEXT GENERATION

moderator	Paul Craenen – <i>composor and research professor The Hague Conservatory</i>
speakers	Jolente de Maeyer – <i>violinist and teacher conservatories of Tilburg and Antwerp</i> Jan Philipp Sprick – <i>president Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg</i> Joris Blancquaert – <i>teacher and researcher KASK</i>
language	English

Within classical music, the conservatory remains the primary springboard toward a professional career. Yet while the education that shapes the next generation is still largely based on a 19th-century model – one designed for a society with a high demand for trained musicians, schooled through an intensive and expensive master-apprentice system – the professional field has changed dramatically. A secure chair in an orchestra or ensemble is no longer a given. Today, classically trained musicians are developing careers across a wide range of contexts and disciplines. This raises a crucial question: does our formal system of music education still serve its purpose? Moderator Paul Craenen, research professor at the Royal Conservatoire The Hague, put the issue to three educators. Should curricula, which still emphasize traditional skills and competencies, be rethought – and if so, how? Is there a need to revise the structure of higher music education itself? And how does the next generation of musicians view this reality? To what extent have their expectations shifted, and how do we meet them? In short: is our model of education still aligned with today's reality?

For violinist Jolente De Maeyer, professor at the conservatories of Tilburg and Antwerp, the answer is twofold. She sees how education is adapting, but also

how firmly certain traditions remain in place. “Compared to twenty years ago, when I was a student myself, things have really changed. Students today are much more aware of the wider musical world. They see it through social media, and schools also give them a clearer picture of what is going on. Of course, some constants remain: one-to-one tuition, the focus on music as a physical craft, the emphasis on technique and interpretation. But even within those traditions, I see a huge evolution. The dynamic between teacher and student is completely different now. It used to feel unidirectional: the teacher imparted knowledge, and you simply followed. Now there is far more dialogue. Students have study coaches, they have sounding boards, and they can actively shape their own trajectory.”

A similar tension between tradition and renewal exists in Germany, says Jan Philipp Sprick, director of the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg and council member of the European Association of Conservatoires. In some respects, however, he feels Germany lags behind. “Study coaches, for instance, are far from standard, and our curricula remain quite rigid. There are many discussions about power relations, about how students should be guided. Only last year, Germany had a major debate about the abuse of authority by professors. Everyone agrees things must change, but once you start to adjust the system, it becomes complicated. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that Germany still has 130 professional orchestras. And the path to those orchestras is exactly the same as fifty years ago: you play your Mozart concerto, your Brahms concerto, and if it’s not flawless, it’s ‘thank you, goodbye’. So when we think about reforming conservatoire training, the question remains: how do we ensure students are still prepared for that single audition path? That’s why dialogue between conservatoires and professional institutions is so essential.”

Composer, lecturer, and researcher Joris Blanckaert (KASK) offers a metaphor: “I sometimes compare the curriculum to a cauliflower. The core is the same as a hundred years ago, but we keep attaching little florets – reflection, entrepreneurship, research, creativity. But in the end, it remains a cauliflower.

What we really want is an onion: multiple layers that penetrate all the way to the center, the artistic practice. The student as a creator, not just a performer. Five years ago, when I asked my students, 'Who considers themselves creative?' almost nobody raised a hand. That's absurd – of course they are creative, but we don't nurture it enough. We need to change that." One of the methods he has explored is the idea of 'blank space': "Students spend a week with an established artist, and after five days, there's a presentation. Everything is open. Since most participants are musicians, the result will probably involve music, but the starting point must come from the students themselves."

The value of such open-ended space is widely acknowledged, though De Maeyer cautions that the classical core cannot be ignored: "We can't be naïve. Anyone who wants to play a string instrument at a high level has to put in the hours. It's an intensely physical craft. Students enter at 18, still young, with much to discover. Over the years, you see their development: in year one, they can hardly grasp the field; by the end, they're more critical, more independent. Our goal is not to hand them a fixed job profile but to prepare them for what lies ahead — to make them resilient, to help them cope with setbacks and with the pressure of being on stage."

Sprick adds that many teachers are themselves in search: "A violin professor told me recently, 'I don't feel creative.' She wants to give more than technique alone, but she also knows she must prepare her students for auditions — and the reality is brutal. One wrong double stop in Stamitz, and the orchestra says: 'Thank you, goodbye.' Teachers feel that pressure too. Which is why we need to involve not only students, but also teachers in the conversation about change. Yes, it's essential to ask what students want and expect, but educators must also have a voice."

Flexibility and creativity are not the only concerns. Inclusivity is also on the agenda. The lack of diversity in classical music is well-known.

Why, for instance, is the next generation of dancers visibly diverse, while conservatoire audiences remain so homogeneous? Blanckaert points out that while student bodies may be international, “we have students from China, Iran, Japan”, this does not automatically equal diversity, especially socio-economically. “We are missing entire groups, including many white students from certain backgrounds. And we must also ask: do we need to involve everyone in this particular tradition at all costs? Maybe some communities simply aren’t interested – and that’s okay. They may prefer to cultivate their own culture, and that is perfectly valid.” Sprick, however, argues that early engagement is the key: “If we want diversity, we need to start with children, not wait until they’re twenty. In Hamburg we’re trying to reach kids from underrepresented backgrounds at an early age, so they stand a real chance later. That’s the only way to make a difference.”

At the heart of the debate lies a simple question: what should a young musician in 2025 really be able to do? What makes the difference? For Blanckaert, the answer is clear: “They need to recognize opportunities. Not just for themselves, but for others. Increasingly, students are less interested in competing and more in building something together. That sense of community is new. They want to form networks that will sustain their careers long after graduation.”

Sprick adds: “People sometimes forget how demanding this profession is. Standing on stage, performing at a high level, requires enormous mental resilience. More and more students struggle with this. Providing support must therefore be a core responsibility. As institutions, we need to say: we stand beside you – not just for technique, but as fellow human beings.”

In this way, the classical conservatory is gradually shifting from bastion to laboratory: a place where tradition is not discarded, but where students are increasingly encouraged to chart their own artistic path – without losing sight of the fact that such a path must always begin with craftsmanship.



AFTERLIFE

moderator	Mariet Calsius – <i>general manager CEMPER</i>
speakers	Birgit Van Cleemput – <i>musicologist, music selector Klara and widow Luc Brewaeys</i> Bea Steylaerts – <i>widow Wim Henderickx</i> Diederik Glorieux – <i>composer, conductor, musician, former assistant Wim Henderickx</i> Claudia Stobrawa – <i>general manager Nikolaus Harnoncourt Zentrum</i>
language	English

What happens to an oeuvre once its creator is no longer here? How do family, collaborators, or institutions build a bridge between past and future? For the *Afterlife* panel, Mariet Calsius – director of CEMPER, the Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage – sat down with four experts by experience. How do they go about preserving, unlocking, and keeping alive an artistic legacy? Amid practical puzzles, emotional decisions, and digital dilemmas, one theme stands out: an archive is never an endpoint, but an invitation to continue the work.

That taking up this work is far from self-evident is something Birgit Van Cleemput knows well. As the widow of composer Luc Brewaeys, she has long been the driving force behind the Luc Brewaeys Foundation. “Luc passed away in December 2015, and the archiving has been a slow process. Already in the first weeks people asked me: ‘Are you going to set up a foundation?’ But at the time I couldn’t even think about that. The best advice I received came from Rosie Harvey, widow of Jonathan Harvey. She told me: ‘Darling, you don’t have to do anything at all for the first two years.’ That was liberating – knowing that there was no pressure and that I could take time to grieve. After about a year and a half I started cautiously making inventories, which

I think was also part of the grieving process. I listed his large comic book collection, his scores from other composers, and finally his own works. Music was everywhere in the house – in the basement, the living room, in boxes.”

Once everything was mapped, the question arose: what to do with it? In her search, Van Cleemput encountered a wide range of advice. “Some thought I should keep it myself, since no one would take better care of it. Others said I should send it to the Royal Library of Belgium, while still others advised against that because of a lack of funding. Someone suggested the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, another warned that it would just end up forgotten on a shelf.” Eventually Van Cleemput found her way to MATRIX [New Music Centre] in Leuven. “For me it was decisive that it remained in Belgium, where the interest is likely greatest, and where research can be done.”

For Bea Steylaerts, widow of composer Wim Henderickx, the process was much faster. “Wim passed away unexpectedly, two years ago. He was not only my partner but also my professional companion. For twenty years we did everything together. Just two months after his death we had the opportunity to apply for funding for a pilot project on archives. We seized it immediately. Without that project I would have fallen into a black hole, I’m certain. The archive became a way of moving forward.” Throughout the process, Steylaerts found invaluable support in Henderickx’s assistant, Diederik Glorieux, who vividly remembers how their shared studio suddenly changed after his passing. “The last time I was there, we worked all day on his *Third Symphony*. Eleven days later I returned – and the workplace was no longer a workplace. Even the pencil on his desk, I couldn’t touch it. That’s when I realized: from now on, I’m working in an archive.”

Claudia Stobrawa joined the panel on behalf of the Nikolaus Harnoncourt Centre. The archive of Harnoncourt – pioneer of historically informed performance – remained physically with the family but was given a digital dimension. “His widow Alice decided five years after his death to open it up.

She wanted it to stay in the region, close to home. We began with a feasibility study, looking at examples like the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna and the Karajan Institute in Salzburg. Ultimately the Centre found a home at the Anton Bruckner University in Linz. Now we have a location, infrastructure, and students who can work with the material. Collaboration with the regional archive in Linz is crucial: students there scan thousands of pages every week. By June we'll reach 200,000 scans." But digitization comes with its own headaches, Stobrawa notes. "How do you ensure files remain readable thirty years from now? Which resolution, which file format? These aren't details, they're fundamental questions. The physical originals remain with the family, but the scans and metadata are stored both at the Linz archive and the Austrian Media Library. That way, preservation is guaranteed even if our Centre were ever to disappear."

But heritage is more than boxes and data, the panelists stress. Glorieux insists that Henderickx left behind far more than a stack of scores. "Wim was also a conductor, a teacher, an inspirer. His archive contains ideas, notes, methods. Those are just as valuable as the sheet music. They're the keys to understanding his work, now and in the future." Steylaerts wholeheartedly agrees. "Wim was a true performer-composer. He improvised, he explored together with others. That's what we want to transmit. We don't just want to preserve his music, but keep it alive." Van Cleemput echoes that sentiment, which inspired the founding of the Luc Brewaeys Foundation in 2023, together with Jan Raes, Jerry Aerts, Marie-Christine Janssens, and Melissa Portaels. "The aim isn't just preservation, but above all: making the music heard again. Luc wrote eight symphonies. The first four didn't yet exist in digital form, the sixth lacked a digital orchestral score. Thanks to the foundation we can now digitize them. At the same time we're speaking with musicians like Arturo Tamayo and Annelies Van Parys. Luc never made sketches – everything was in his head. That's why we're now conducting in-depth interviews with people who knew him, so we can also preserve what was never written down."

Another shared point is the importance of support. Steylaerts describes the pilot project they could join as a gift. “It gave us the time and resources to buy acid-free folders, remove plastics, store everything properly. Without that funding, none of it would have been possible.” The downside, however, was the time pressure: “One year is simply too short. Building an archive takes years. For us this was only a beginning, not an end.” Stobrawa, too, knows how crucial timing can be. “You have to act quickly. Don’t wait twenty years, or too much will be lost. We were lucky: the right idea at the right moment. But there’s so much involved: rights, publishers, legal restrictions. You can’t just put everything online.”

What does the future hold? For Stobrawa, the key is to keep the material active. “We don’t want to lock it away but share it with researchers, students, conductors, children. Harnoncourt believed music should be accessible to everyone. We organize masterclasses, workshops, exhibitions. His methods live on in how people learn to listen.” Glorieux is equally clear: “Wim’s scores leave space. They invite reinterpretation. We need to keep feeding that.” And Van Cleemput sees Brewaeys’ archive first and foremost as a way of keeping his music alive. “Next year, ten years after Luc’s death, his symphonies will be performed again in Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, and Brussels. That’s what counts. Not boxes of paper, but music that sounds again.”



TAKE CARE

moderator Eva De Groote – *audio maker, writer and facilitator*
speakers Jeroen Vanbever – *saxophonist and coach*
 Judith Vindevogel – *soprano and founder WALPURGIS*
language Dutch

How do you build a career that not only lasts but also remains bearable? What does care mean in a sector fueled by boundless passion, yet offering little space for real rest? In a conversation with saxophone player, coach, and mentor Jeroen Vanbever and soprano and WALPURGIS founder Judith Vindevogel, it became clear that care is far more than a buzzword: it is an undercurrent that determines whether a career holds firm or quietly collapses. Moderator Eva de Groote noted that we all live in a time of constant exposure to an overload of images, stimuli, and expectations. *“How can we protect ourselves from that? How do we learn not just to endure the flow but also to interrupt it?”* Fittingly, the panel didn’t start with theory but with practice. Vanbever shared a simple exercise to help the room arrive in the here and now. *“We forget that so often.”*

That simple exercise turned out to embody the session’s central message: self-care starts small. But it takes courage to maintain in a field that rewards speed and sacrifice far more than pause and rest. For Vanbever, a sustainable career is first and foremost “a career you can continue as long as possible, in a healthy way, without destroying yourself.” Obvious as that may sound, he believes that especially in the music world it is anything but. *“Sadly, you see it very early on. Students enroll at the conservatory at 17 or 18, and within*

the first six months exhaustion rises exponentially. Depression, stage fright, performance pressure: they're already familiar with it, and they've barely begun. Once graduated, the so-called 'real work' starts: setting your own deadlines, auditioning, coping with rejection, starting over, juggling multiple jobs – and keeping that going. The field is tough, and constantly changing. Take social media: they're useful tools, but you no longer control who you reach or when. That's something you have to learn to deal with. And then, of course, there are the physical and mental demands. Playing, working, dancing – they all take their toll. What do you do when you hit your limits? It all demands a great deal of resilience."

Vindevogel found the picture all too familiar. "We work in a sector driven by passion. That's beautiful – passion propels you forward – but it's also treacherous. It can push you past yourself, and past those around you. Because we so firmly believe that it 'must' be this way, and that it's simply who we are. But you are not your profession. You are so much more." Vanbever fully agrees. "You are not an artist; you work as an artist. That's a big difference. We often say 'I am an artist' or 'I am a saxophonist,' but that's just part of your identity. You need to learn to separate those things, and recognize that you are also a man, a brother, a son, someone with hobbies. It sounds mundane, but it makes a world of difference. Imagine you get a bad review. If you think: 'I am a saxophonist,' then you as a person have failed. But if you see: 'I work as a saxophonist,' it's more easily put into perspective."

For Vindevogel, 2022 marked a major turning point in her long career. "I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Of course that's confronting. I've gone through two profound experiences of loss that changed my life deeply – but I tried to see them as opportunities to take new paths and learn new things. Because if we're talking about self-care: for me, the ability and freedom to learn is a precondition for self-care." She found her anchor not in the concert hall, but in nature. "It may sound strange, but the first thought I had when I got my diagnosis was: smell sheep and manure. To return to the balance

I had as a child, between nature and art. I had been too focused on art alone. Now I seek that balance again.” It even inspired a new line of inquiry: what happens when you combine art and nature? “That’s what I want to work on in the coming years — together with doctors, farmers, and artists.”

Vanbever stressed that self-care often begins with small gestures. “You don’t need constant expensive retreats. The exercise we did today, consciously taking breaks, sitting quietly with a cup of tea without your phone: that too is self-care.” Vindevogel drew a parallel with the Alexander Technique, a method that teaches people to break habitual patterns. “Habits are necessary – a violinist must always hold their violin the same way. But combined with stress, with tension, those habits can create harmful patterns. The Alexander Technique helps you become aware of them. It’s not a fixed exercise – you apply it in the moment. As I speak, I feel tension, I tell myself: release. You can do that anywhere. It’s unbelievably simple.” But habits extend beyond the individual. An audience question linked the idea to organizations: how can care play a role there? Vanbever confirmed that context matters as much as individual guidance. “As a creator, you can’t always control how a production house operates, or how the sector functions. But we try harder to listen. That’s where it starts. Listening prevents so many problems.” Vindevogel referenced psychologist Viktor Frankl, who said there is a space between stimulus and response. “That space is everything. How often do we jump at a trigger immediately? But if you notice that space, you have a choice. That applies to us personally, but also to organizations. Art begins with encounter, and encounter requires attention.”

One audience member raised the paradox between ecological pressure and financial scarcity – a sensitive point. For Vindevogel, we allow ourselves to be seduced into doing more than we can all too often. “I’ve always consciously chosen to do less. I was sometimes criticized for it, but I knew: doing more than you can, will exhaust you. Self-care, care for society, and care for the planet belong together. But you can’t carry everything. As a sector we must

unite in saying: this far and no further.” Vanbever hopes that thirty years from now, care – for ourselves, for one another, and for the planet – will be so self-evident that it no longer needs to be a topic. Vindevogel agreed: “Let us above all keep learning and keep an open mind. To see where doors open. That, for me, is the essence of care: to keep moving. That way we can keep carrying. That way we endure.”



KINDER, MACHT NEUES

moderator Jan Van den Borre – *artistic director MA Festival*

speakers Aïda Gabriëls – *director and artistic director Music Theatre Now*
 Manoj Kamps – *conductor, theater maker and composer*
 Peter Vermeersch – *composer, musician and artistic director Flat Earth Society*

language English

“Kinder, macht Neues!” Wagner once wrote to Liszt. New generations setting themselves apart from the old guard and exploring radically new paths – we often think of it as the driving force behind music history. But how do today’s iconoclasts relate to the rich tradition of classical music? How do you stay true to a centuries-old repertoire without becoming stuck in it? What do we leave behind, and what do we take with us? Jan Vanden Borre (MA Festival) sat down with Aïda Gabriëls (music theatre maker and coordinator of Music Theatre Now), Manoj Kamps (conductor and theatre maker), and Peter Vermeersch (musician and founder of Flat Earth Society). What does it mean to work in a field where repertoire and ritual are so central – and how do they make space for new stories, voices, and audiences?

Do they see themselves as iconoclasts, breakers of sacred idols? The three are surprisingly nuanced. “I don’t see myself as an iconoclast,” says Gabriëls. “I’m a maker, and I’m political – but I believe everything is political. Doing nothing is also political. So iconoclast? Not exactly.” Kamps does not believe in apolitical art in the least. “Every choice we make, is of course loaded. Who do we invite to the premiere? Who sits next to whom? How do we work with artists from Russia or Israel? Of course, the world does enter the concert hall.

And when someone makes this explicit by holding up a sign that reads *Free Palestine or the climate catastrophe is now*, who are we kidding by not allowing them in?" Kamps admits the label of iconoclast has been attached to them often as well. "But I usually start from what already exists – the repertoire, the canon, and so on. For some, it already feels like breaking tradition if someone like me takes the lead. For a long time, the image of the conductor was monotonous: a white, cisgender man on the podium. When I stand there, people suddenly see a crack in that image. That crack threatens the idea of music as something untouchable. What they don't always realize is that the image itself was also constructed. That runs much deeper than most people think." Vermeersch sees the very idea of iconoclasm in music as a paradox. "You can't really break music. You can play Bach on a Hammond organ, on an accordion, on a Rhodes, on a guitar—it doesn't matter, the music still stands. You can tear down the Eiffel Tower or the Statue of Liberty, and then it's gone, you'd have to rebuild it. But music is different. Duchamp already said it: there's no answer, because there's no problem."

If demolition or renovation is needed, perhaps it's not at the level of the notes, but the context and codes that surround them. Kamps points out that classical music has always been tied to power, whether religious or secular. "And that hasn't gone away. We've seen again and again how power structures can be abused. Look at my own field: plenty of conductors have fallen from their pedestals for that reason. I make a point of exploring other models of leadership – not top-down, not authoritarian, but serving. More like a first among equals. In that sense, yes, I do try to break away from tradition. But in a world that is used to the maestro as the absolute ruler, people quickly perceive that as weakness." Gabriëls recognizes this. "The dominant model is still performers interpreting a score as the composer or director wants. But I feel a genuine need and desire from performers to be more involved – to co-create, to co-own what comes into being. That need is growing. The choir I just worked with wanted much more say in how something sounded, rather than simply executing the music. That's a different relationship to repertoire."

Does this signal a broader shift from repertoire to narrative within classical music? Kamps sees a double movement. “On paper, yes. You clearly see orchestras and institutions foregrounding the story of certain individuals in their marketing. But that often comes from external motivation. There’s a cosmetic idealization of individual output, while at the same time I sense a decline in the intrinsic drive to truly tell stories through classical music. The status quo feels stronger than ever. During COVID there seemed to be room for experimentation. But now, those who want to try something new are often pushed aside. The fear of losing audiences seems stronger than the urge to renew.”

Still, radicality isn’t about smashing things apart, Vermeersch stresses. “The word comes from radix: root. Going back to the root – that, for me, is being radical. Why do we play music? Why do we gather in a hall together? In recent years I’ve often played at funerals, and that’s when I remember why I’m a musician. It’s not about a grand concert or a full house – five minutes of music can open up everything. Music is a ritual. That’s still true.” Gabriëls agrees: music is a ritual that brings people together. “Why we play may be an interesting question, but more important to me is: whom do we play for? Unless we open that up, we’re just ticking boxes. I believe that’s where we need radicality: rethinking for whom we open our doors. It’s absurd that in Brussels – a hyper-diverse city – I so often look out at a very homogeneous audience. There are barriers, invisible codes that shut people out. The only way to break them is to go to the people you want to reach, instead of waiting for them to come to you.”

Kamps notes that many still hesitate to recognize the classical concert as a holistic experience. “It’s not just what you hear. It’s how it looks, how you arrive, how you’re received, how welcome you feel. People aren’t quite ready to acknowledge that yet – and take responsibility for it. If a concert were only about sound, why would you leave your house when you have Spotify? The whole picture has to make sense. I remember a program in Rotterdam

around a new piece by Rick van Veldhuizen. I paired it with Debussy and Sondheim. It was the season opener, and the audience was diverse: queer folks, musical theatre fans, curious newcomers drawn in by Sondheim. At the same time, I think we also need to accept that not every concert has to be for everyone – as long as there is something for everyone.”

Vermeersch himself thinks less about his audience. “I’m a musician. I do what I do, and I try to be honest about it. It starts from within, from the music or the people I work with. And yes, I hope people come to see it. But honestly: that’s first and foremost the organizer’s concern.” Gabriëls sees it differently: “Makers also have a responsibility to communicate about their work. Not necessarily directly with the audience, but it does begin with communication. My show *Polyphonies* premiered recently. It’s experimental, so I feel it’s important to guide the audience, on different levels.”

All three agree: every choice is political. Kamps: “The canon, the rituals, the concert hall as we know it – they’re not neutral spaces. They’re built on structures that take effort to maintain. What if we let go of that? That’s when things get exciting. But it takes courage – and not every institution has it.” And what about repetition? Do we need to keep playing the *St. Matthew Passion*? Vermeersch advocates for moderation. “Repetition breeds recognition, and recognition gives you a little endorphin rush. That’s scientifically proven. But at some point, I’ve had enough. Some pieces I don’t want to hear anymore: *Boléro*, *The Four Seasons*... They’re done. So repeat, yes – but not too much. Mix it up. Throw in something new.” Kamps feels ensembles and orchestras have lost their edge. “In the past, ensembles had a distinct profile. Now everything looks alike. Everyone wants to do everything – and that leads to mediocrity. Why not return to specialization? An orchestra that breathes Mahler and Bruckner, elsewhere an ensemble devoted to contemporary music. Let people make a conscious choice.”

Between the lines, one question lingers: can you change something without losing it? Gabriëls concludes: “Maybe we need to let go of the idea of loss.

There's abundance, not scarcity. But as long as we cling to the idea of scarcity, we keep the gates shut. Open the gates and see what happens. That's where it begins."



ENDING AN ERA

moderator	Katherina Lindekens – <i>dramaturg Klarafestival</i>
speakers	Alain Platel – <i>choreographer and former artistic director les ballets C de la B</i> Eric Sleichim – <i>saxophonist and driving force BL!NDMAN</i> Hildegard De Vuyst – <i>artistic director laGeste</i>
language	Dutch

What does it mean to say goodbye to something you've built from scratch over decades, something so deeply woven into your DNA as both an artist and a human being that quitting feels almost unthinkable? Katherina Lindekens, dramaturg at Klarafestival, sits down with Alain Platel, Hildegard De Vuyst, and Eric Sleichim for a candid conversation about endings, passing the torch, and artistic legacies.

The word 'retirement', however, comes up only with hesitation. Eric Sleichim – saxophonist, composer, and founder of BL!NDMAN – doesn't even like to say it out loud. "I haven't decided to stop. Music is my life – cliché as that may sound. I imagine I'll keep playing until I drop. But of course I'm thinking about how to make space for a new wave, new ideas that can nourish BL!NDMAN. That's what I want to allow to happen – and that's already part of the plan from 2028 onward."

Hildegard De Vuyst, who succeeded Alain Platel as artistic director of laGeste (the successor to les ballets C de la B), also avoids the notion of retirement in the conventional sense, though she never intended to stay in her current role for long. "I've always seen myself as a transitional figure. I wear Alain's big shoes, but I never meant to fill them forever. For me, what matters is that the

organization can move forward, that there's a new team in place by the next funding round. For myself – it doesn't matter. That will work out, or not. It's not about me."

For Alain Platel, letting go wasn't a single turning point but a gradual process. "Officially I could retire in 2021, when I turned 65. But things converged that made it easier to slip away. In 2019 I made *Requiem Pour L.*, and that piece really got under my skin. Afterwards the question arose: what now? What's left for me to do? That was an existential moment – just as it was time to write a new subsidy dossier for les ballets C de la B. Should I go on for another five years, or stop? Then came the pandemic. In a way, that was an internship in not working – not being in the studio, not touring. And I discovered I liked it. Besides, I never claimed the company as my own, even though it was often identified with me. For me it was always a collective. So it didn't feel like I had to let go of something 'that was mine.' And I completely agree with Eric: an artistic mindset doesn't retire – it shifts. You just start doing other things. For me, the transition was actually quite smooth."

It's clear that endings and successions are usually drawn-out, gradual processes, closely tied to how an organization develops and sustains itself. BL!NDMAN, for instance, began as a saxophone quartet and remained exactly that for ten years. "Then I started expanding – percussion, strings, hybrid formations. That partly grew out of outside requests, like when Ivo van Hove asked me to compose music for *Roman Tragedies*."

As Platel approached retirement age, he found reassurance in what he had built over the years. "We had the building, a fantastic studio, a huge body of know-how, and a team capable of supporting productions at a high level. So I didn't feel the need to hold on or feel responsible for the group – I had done that enough in the past. Everything was in place to continue in some form, and I trusted that completely. I also felt no urge to look for a single successor. As we prepared the new subsidy dossier, the real question was:

how can what we've built live on in a different way? For me, that mattered more than finding a person."

How, then, is that new form found? De Vuyst emphasizes that it was a slow process of holding on and letting go. "The transition from les ballets C de la B to laGeste was anything but smooth. We started during the pandemic – we had the time. We talked to partners, considered mergers. Eventually we joined forces with kabinet K, but just as the merger was set to happen, two artists pulled out. And the name had already been chosen. That crisis dragged on for nearly two years. We don't deserve any medals for that, but that's how it goes: transitions are rarely neat. It took time to restore laGeste's momentum. At the same time, I don't believe everything has to continue existing. Structures are often built around the strengths and weaknesses of a single person. Sometimes it's good for something to end. But if you quit, warn your team in time."

Today, the DNA of les ballets C de la B lives on unmistakably in laGeste. "I worked with Alain for 30 years as a dramaturg, so of course that influence is there. What we emphasize more explicitly now is inclusivity. Alain always worked intergenerationally, with all kinds of bodies and histories. We're pushing that even further. But the spirit? You can't erase it."

For Sleichim, too, succession is not just an administrative matter but a quest for a shared artistic language. "I wanted someone who approaches sound in a non-traditional way. Not just a composer who writes, but someone who breaks open a soundbank, who dares. I tried this with several people – Stefan Prins, Daan Janssens,... All great, but it never quite fit. Then one day a CV landed on my desk from Tomas Serrien, a philosopher who had written a book about sound perception. He was applying for a sales job, but I thought: I need to meet him. Now he's our dramaturg. He's launched projects, found his own collaborations. For me, that's a miracle."

To stop or to continue – the question touches on a complex tension. De Vuyst points out that in Flanders, quitting altogether is hardly an option. “You build up know-how, infrastructure, subsidies. You don’t just throw that away. But that shouldn’t be a reason to keep something alive that’s run its course.”

For Sleichim, BL!NDMAN without public funding is unthinkable. “Quality is a non-negotiable. Without resources, you can’t pay musicians, can’t stage concerts. We agreed with the board that if subsidies ever disappear, the ensemble ends. Technical quality has to stay top-level. That’s a daily burden, but also a drive. My wish for BL!NDMAN is that it remains a place where creators can be nourished. How long that lasts – no idea. Maybe the name will change. So be it.”

What’s clear is that ‘ending’ is rarely a simple affair. Or, as Platel puts it: “Fading out – that’s actually beautiful. To slowly disappear, while something remains standing. That’s what matters.”



STATE OF THE UNION

– *Anne La Berge*

I recently received a comment about how I communicate my expertise and knowledge with others.

Someone told me that my first response is to reflect on the last time I did that action or had that thought and to wonder about how I would do it again.

It is as if I may have forgotten exactly what it was or how I did it in the first place.

A typical response for me is, “How did that go again?”

That is, rather than assuming that whatever knowledge I have will be exactly the same each time comes up in my life, that things will be the same forever, I need to reconsider them.

My first response is often to reflect on what I remember,

how what I remember relates to the present

and in what way I want to re-use that bit of old information.

And then I mix my old knowledge with some new knowledge.

For instance, when I put my flute together, I look at the metals, I admire the construction, and reflect on how the pieces fit together, as if I’m still figuring out the best way to put it together after doing it for 60 years.

Each time I do this, my flute and I rekindle some old stuff and wake up to some new stuff.

Like, does my flute prefer me to hold it this way or that way when I assemble it.

These are moments when I trust that I know what I’m doing mixed with moments to reflect on why I’m doing it or how to do it this time around.



I'm telling you this story to give you some insight into the State of the Age.
Everytime we do something we merge into an already ongoing process.
We join with something that is already going on.
Something that has history and some kind of future.
Before now, before the present moment, before it becomes the future.
We do that merging in mysterious ways where our actions are both old
and young at the same time.

Before: How did I get here?

A senior in the field of electro acoustic composer/performer music
of the 21st century.

How did you get here?

People who support me as an electro acoustic composer/performer
of the 21st century.

Let's break it down.

I did not lack in creative, intelligent, skilled and passionate teachers and
when I was occasionally in a place where that was the case, I found a way
to move on.

I would like to focus on the creative part first.

My father is a scientist with a mission to change the world by explaining how
the brain works.

He's also hopelessly creative.

This was his gift to his children.

When in doubt, invent something.

The point of these two stories so far is to tell you that music is a series
of inventions that we can, at any time, re-examine and potentially change.
That is music's gift to us, that it changes with us when we need it to.

Music is a big concept.

Noise, sounds, timbres, melody, rhythm, harmony, structures, instruments,
humanity, SILENCE.

Academically, intellectually, financially.

Canons of our culture that need to be respected, recognized, questioned, shaken, tossed about, nudged, disassembled, reassembled.

How do we, those of us in our aged states, related and respond to the western art music musical canons?

The states that my artistic colleagues and I are in at this place and time, with our gray hair and slower tempos, winding down or probably just winding around, looping through past successes, questioning past failures, ready to impart wisdom and tell our stories.

Our lives are canons in the making.

We are excited to be relevant.

Give us a place where we can be us.

The past.

I had the opportunities in the 1970's and 1980's to work with John Cage, Morton Feldman, James Tenney, Gordon Mumma, Earl Brown.

And later I even found some women including Annea Lockwood and a bunch of lesser known colleagues of Pauline Oliveros.

I was inspired by the experimentalist composers' bold and daring endeavors to change music in whatever forms were necessary.

The ruthlessness. Audacious.

After some years providing excessively virtuosic flute playing to the compositional ambitions of my contemporary colleagues,

I found a niche where I could be more directly influential as an artist.

The composer/performer.

What is a composer/performer? Why do they exist?

They experiment.

They lay ground for composers.

They gather diverse styles.

They ask performers to be collaborative, creative souls.

They can be trusted to come up with weird and passionate stuff.

The present.

What is our state now?

We have composers, composer/performers, performers
and everything in between.

We have conventional spaces and alternative spaces.

We have money and no money.

The future:

How can we support the younger generations to take the ball and run?

Take our balls and reshape them.

First, they need us to passionately believe in music as a way of life.

Not only as a performance or a creative outlet or an enlightenment tool but
music as making sound and listening to sound as a way of life.

You are listening to me tell my story.

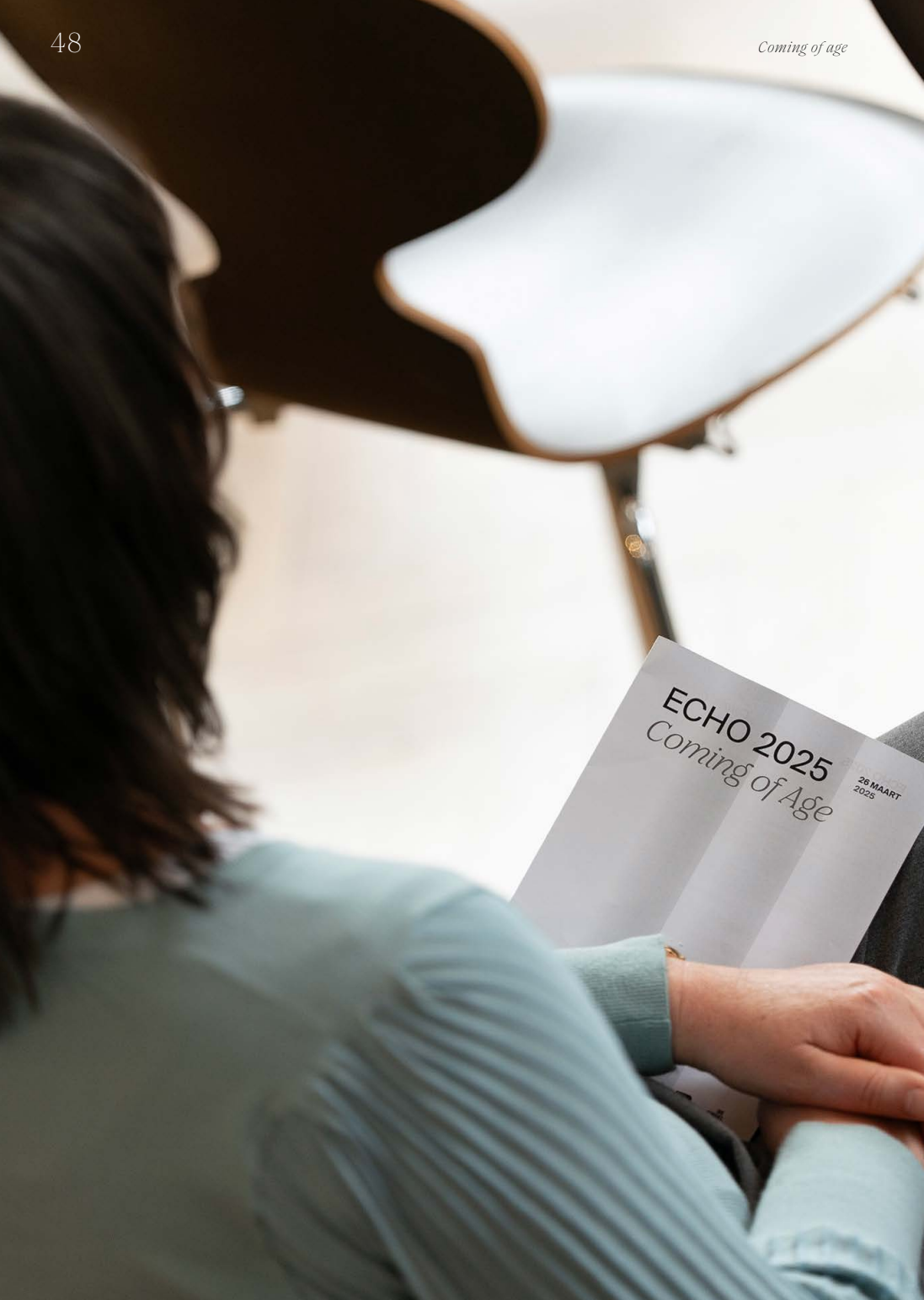
Who do I listen to? Am I allowed role models?

Yes. Those forging paths now, in the present, are my role models.

Diamanda.

We don't quite know what they are up to.

We do know that if we pay attention we will find new ways to move forward
or even new ways to make the place we are in now
grow with pleasure, invention and creativity.



ECHO 2025
Coming of Age
26 MAART
2025

COLOFON

This publication is a report on Echo 2025,
the classical music sector event.

26 March 2025
BOZAR

texts

Anne La Berge
Diamanda La Berge Dramm
Jannis Van de Sande

editing

Yentl Ventôse

translation

Yentl Ventôse

graphic design

Morgane Staelens

photography

Frank Emmers

thanks to

Joris Blancquaert
Ward Bosmans
Mariet Calsius
Paul Craenen
Eva De Groote
Jolente de Maeyer
Esther De Soomer
Rebecca Diependaele
Joost Fonteyne
Livia Fretto
Aïda Gabriëls
Diederik Glorieux
Tom Janssens
Alexander Jocqué
Manoj Kamps
Anne La Berge
Diamanda La Berge Dramm
Katherina Lindekens
Laurence Merchiers

Liesbeth Peelman
Jan Philipp Sprick
Alain Platel
Christophe Slagmuylder
Eric Sleichim
Morgane Staelens
Bea Steylaerts
Claudia Stobrawa
Hendrik Storme
Birgit Van Cleemput
Jan Van den Borre
Jannis Van de Sande
Sofia Van Laer
Reinoud Van Mechelen
Jeroen Vanacker
Jeroen Vanbever
Peter Vermeersch
Judith Vindevogel

