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Re-Sounding the African Diaspora: Uncovering Afro-British  
histories in classical music through curatorial-activism

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# LIST OF MEDIA PORTFOLIO CONTENTS

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Below is a list of materials that I am submitting as evidence of my research throughout this doctoral project. Each folder can be found on the accompanying USB stick attached to this commentary.

- 1. Portfolio Instructions**
- 2. plainsightSOUND website—offline archive**
- 3. plainsightSOUND timeline (screen recording)**
- 4. Creative Projects and Performances**
  - a. plainsightSOUND x Decus [November 2018]
  - b. Hidden Sounds [May 2020]
  - c. A plainsightSOUND Celebration [August 2021]

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# DECLARATION

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# ABSTRACT

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An over-reliance on 19th and early 20th-century Western art music canons and performance traditions has resulted in continued reinforcement of the notion that only white (usually male) musicians have made substantial contributions to the field in Britain until recent decades. This research explores the Afro-British presence in Western art music, focusing on compositions and performances before the 1970s. Through curation, I examine how the erasure of Afro-British stories in British classical music settings has impacted on modern-day music programming. Established musicological and Practice-as-Research methodologies such as those presented by Christopher Small and Robin Nelson perpetuate these systematic exclusions through assumptions about knowledge gathering, construction, and availability.

With reference to several interdisciplinary theories, I explore how diversification of repertoire can be facilitated in different musical settings. Alongside this, I identify ways in which counter-storytelling can locate and fill gaps created by dominant discourses in Western classical music among students, performers, and audiences to reveal alternative performance and listening models away from established hegemonic norms.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

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Contemporary interest in Black British history grew markedly following the 1984 publication of Peter Fryer's *Staying Power*. In the ensuing decades, awareness of the experiences of historical Black British communities continued to develop into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Events such as the 2007 commemorations for the 200th anniversary of the 1807 Slave Trade Act and the demise of older members of the Windrush generation (Pirker, 2011; Chater, 2020) brought personalised, individual stories into the general public consciousness<sup>1</sup>. In 2020, awareness of the complexities of community experiences intensified following international media focus on social movements and global protests such as Black Lives Matter (BLM). During this period, many corporations subsequently realised their stakeholders expected discussions regarding racial equity to be placed at the forefront of public interactions and embraced these calls for progress as part of their brand activism.

Despite this growing acknowledgement, African diasporic historical representations in Britain have largely been limited to the Middle Passage, brief mentions of colonisation and Windrush-focused mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Caribbean migration stories (Moncrieffe and Harris, 2020). As wider African, Caribbean and earlier Black British experiences are excluded from school curricula, society remains ignorant of the breadth and diversity of these connections to British history, a stark symptom of Britain's 'national forgetting' (Lidher, McIntosh and Alexander, 2020).

Centring slavery and Windrush as sole representations of historical Blackness in public discourse has persuaded many that African-descended Britons did not exist prior to the mid-20th century. While long and short-term migration throughout history brought people to the British Isles for various reasons, it is still common for the presence of African-descended individuals to be rationalised through exceptionalism (Otele, 2020, pp. 3–5). This ignorance is

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<sup>1</sup> These conversations became even more fervent when news of the Windrush scandal broke in April 2018 (Gentleman, 2018), but continued to perpetuate distorted versions of events (Lidher, McIntosh and Alexander, 2020, pp. 1–2).

further compounded in music education settings that solely focus on Western art music history as a series of subgenres and eras. Rather than connecting these narratives to mainstream historical learning, music historiographies are formed around Kantian myths of the creative genius that reinforce nationalistic and Eurocentric perceptions of art construction (Cook, 2018, pp. 2–3). These exclusionary ideas have become central to mainstream forms of Western art music production that discourage so-called ‘non-traditional’ artistic explorations.

### 1.1 Finding Relevance Through Interdisciplinarity

Creating or teaching music situated beyond standard conventions requires a blurring and augmenting of pedagogical and cultural structures by looking outside of Eurocentric disciplinary traditions. Rather than remaining within established confines, Estelle Barrett writes on the importance of arts researchers broadening their points of inspiration by being ‘more proactive in inserting creative arts research discourses and methodologies into other disciplinary research arenas’ (Barrett, 2007b, p. 7). Interdisciplinarity is an effective method for collaborative working; it engages with diverse skills and experiences as ways through which critical approaches such as demarginalisation (Chughtai *et al.*, 2020) can be involved.

Interdisciplinary research is essential for understanding the original contexts that generate the investigating, teaching, and performing of excluded musics, and for locating its contemporary applicability. Such methodologies are routinely undertaken by Black scholars who are often required to reach outside of subject-specific confines to produce more relevant and meaningful knowledge (Hawthorne, 2019). My own experiences as a Black woman researcher are evidenced through the range of sources and academic fields it has been necessary for me to draw on in the production of this commentary. Many of the texts supporting my arguments are produced by writers and academics of colour who themselves employ interdisciplinary or trans-disciplinary approaches to bridge gaps in disciplines that have historically impeded knowledge production from certain groups.

Interdisciplinarity requires working across subject boundaries (Viljoen, 2012), but domains such as Western art music have continually resisted this, viewing its ‘cultural isolation’ as a ‘natural and desirable condition’ (Kramer, 2009, p. 15). The sustained compartmentalisation of musical genres, subgenres, and styles has contributed to ‘othering’ and exclusion of the African diaspora in music archives. A limited presence is permitted, usually in sanctioned race-focused spaces such as ethnomusicology, itself a product of colonial ideological thinking. The establishment of approved areas within archives and ethnomusicology and connections with Eurocentricity are explored further in Chapters 2 and 3 of this commentary. In fact, it is within these spaces that we find several 20<sup>th</sup>-century African and Afro-Caribbean performers, composers, and writers who pursued academic careers that were recorded by institutions, alongside their performing and composing. Musicians who became theorists will be remembered through scholarly citation, but we can also consider musical performance as acts of both memory and cultural citation as I discuss in Chapter 5. By sharing and listening to these musical works, we can preserve the broader cultural contexts of their creation in our collective memories.

## 1.2 Points of Departure

This investigation focuses on the work of African and Caribbean diasporic musicians in British classical music before 1970, examining the relevance this has to contemporary renderings of diversity in Western classical music performance and curation. My intention is to look specifically at the documented outputs of musicians of African descent<sup>2</sup> including sheet music and audio recordings. Terms used to collectively describe these specific musicians have been reconfigured through time and I chose the year 1970 as a milestone at the end of a decade notable for the number of African countries that had regained their independence from British rule, while reclaiming their own identities. Stuart Hall describes identity as a ‘production’,

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<sup>2</sup> Hall wrote on the difficulties of trying to define the variety of Black cultural identities. Constantly evolving, they exist in Western perceptions as ‘the same *and* different’ (Hall, 1997, p. 227).

positioning it as 'never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation' (Hall, 1997, p. 222), reflecting on the constant flux of definitions.

Johny Pitts is more critical, writing that '[l]abels are invariably problematic, often provocative, but at their best they can sing something into visibility' (Pitts, 2019, p. 1).

Despite the complexities and problematic nature of racial grouping, it is necessary for me to clarify the central focus of this project. Through realisation of a music curatorial-activist role that challenges exclusionary cultural structures, I interrogate ways of uncovering marginalised creativity through musical presentations. In this writing, I use the term *Afro-British* to refer to persons of Black African or Caribbean descent based in the UK<sup>3</sup>, with other terms such as *Black* or *African American* used to denote specific contexts.

The idioms 'European classical music' and 'Western art music' are used interchangeably in this research, with geographical descriptors used to differentiate them from West African Art Music as explored later in this chapter. European classical music as a genre can be broadly divided into early music, classical and contemporary music, with further subgenres within these (Parakilas, 1984). In the development of a canon, it has focused on scores produced in the early and classical periods by composers such as Bach, Mozart and Beethoven for instruments commonly found in Western orchestras and chamber music groups. Despite the ubiquity of the term 'classical music', its meaning remains somewhat nebulous, so it is necessary at this point to provide a definition that will be used in the remainder of this thesis. Henceforth, my meaning when using this term comprises not only music composed for specific forces or settings (as above), but also music adhering to particular stylistic, historical and cultural undertakings. These encompass a breadth of musical activity, mostly, but not exclusively situated within Western traditions, exceeding any simple classification within the Classical period itself. Gathered within this is a substantial amount of what is commonly

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<sup>3</sup> According to Kathleen Chater: 'the word 'black' was used to describe people of both African and Asian origin, as well as very dark-skinned native Britons'. (Chater, 2020, p. 334)

termed 'Early Music', the music of the Baroque and Classical periods (including the development of sonata form), music of the increasing turn towards chromaticism in the nineteenth century, and up to some 'Contemporary' or 'New' music of the present day that has emerged from within these traditions. Such music is not only characterised by instrumental and stylistic tropes but has also been influenced by socio-political ideology and musical historiography, such as the epistemological schema proposed by Carl Dahlhaus in his ten-volume history of Western music theory (Dahlhaus, 1984). This work broadly categorises the history of music-theoretical thought into three traditions: firstly, a theologically and speculatively motivated focus on scalar and intervallic musical structures motivated by a desire to explain the harmonic relation between earth and the universe (dominant up to the end of the Renaissance period); secondly, a turn to empirical classification and codification with music coming to be seen as an acoustic object (in the 17th and 18th centuries); and thirdly, a move towards the particularism and autonomy of the individual musical work (in the 19th century), the dissolution of tonal form, and the use of technical or 'scientific' models to interrogate this. The definition used here therefore requires the utilisation of both musical and extra-musical traits, tropes and features.

This research comprises three parts:

- a written commentary;
- the *plainsightSOUND* website<sup>4</sup>;
- a virtual music event.

These outputs document and support the material developed during the investigatory process, within which two main modifications to my approach were made. Firstly, I expanded the original focus on instrumental chamber ensembles to include vocal and solo keyboard works.

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<sup>4</sup> The plainsightSOUND website <https://www.plainsightsound.com/> is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Secondly, I moved away from using common European art musical eras as temporal boundaries. These changes assisted in decentring the Eurocentric gaze around which Western classical music is based, allowing room to explore the historical and social contexts vital to this research.

### 1.3 Historical Framing

Having outlined the parameters of this study, I now briefly explore the process of framing this research as a way of identifying intersections of musical and historical environments. Detailed documentary and geographical investigations prove African musicians were active in the royal courts of England, Scotland, and across Europe during the Tudor period (Kaufmann, 2017). Ignatius Sancho, although born a slave and mainly remembered for his role in the British Abolitionist movement, wrote several musical works that survive today. Afro-Europeans such as Chevalier de Saint-George, George Bridgetower and Frederick Bridgetower (Labrew, 2014; Hart, 2017) spent extended periods living and working in London. Their correspondence at the time demonstrates that each was well respected in high society and that there were other active musicians from similar backgrounds. The collected letters of Samuel Wesley detail his correspondence with George Bridgetower, focusing on such mundane topics as invitations to concerts and recital cancellations that would be familiar to musicians working in present-day London (Olleson, 2000). For decades, seeing Afro-British musicians in public settings was commonplace enough that William Cavendish (1808-1891), the 7th Duke of Devonshire, is cited as the originator of the quotation 'African musicians are always in season, and always in plenty and perfection' (*Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*, 1859; *Eddowes's Journal*, and *General Advertiser for Shropshire, and the Principality of Wales*, 1860), that appeared in 19th-

century newspapers. This passage appeared as a commentary on the stereotypical perception of the African as a naturally gifted entertainer<sup>5</sup>.

Although there had been many attempts by displaced Africans to return to their native homelands during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Abolition of Slavery Act of 1807 resulted in tens of thousands of formerly enslaved African recaptives (Silva *et al.*, 2014; Sierra Silva, 2020) being officially 'returned' to Africa via Sierra Leone. Of those who were not transferred back into slavery, many either returned to their places of origin or settled in new locations, forming influential, Western-educated communities such as the Saros and Amaros of Nigeria and Ghana (Omojola, 1995; Adi, 2018). Group membership provided access to Western-style colonial education, where their children and descendants also received European classical music education as part of their studies. Education was usually delivered by church missionaries, with their rejection of traditional music and arts, and by the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, the pedagogical tension between tonic sol-fa and staff notations—as represented by the Tonic Solfa College and Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) respectively—was being played out in Britain and its colonies. Where staff notation and music certifications were the focus of the ABRSM and wealthier participants of music, tonic sol-fa became the tool of choice for the British working classes and children of the British Empire. European classical music education and performance became tools of colonisation and social class control through a combined method of presenting the colonised and lower-classes as non-knowledge producers (Johnson-Williams, 2015, pp. 58–62; Richardson, 2018, p. 234).

Africa's academic dependency on Europe continued through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>6</sup>, but music as a method of cultural imperialism in West Africa slowly declined as Western-educated

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<sup>5</sup> Later, the phrase was used to query the decline in numbers of visibly Black musicians in popular entertainment, particularly those who had been members of British regimental bands as was once the fashion. It is worth noting here that the term 'African' did not always mean a person was of African descent.

groups realised that regaining political and economic power and independence required a reconnection with their traditional cultural heritage (Omojola, 1995). The late 19th and early 20th centuries also saw an increase in the numbers of international students from British colonies including Daniel Peter Hughes Taylor (the Sierra Leonean father of composer and conductor Samuel Coleridge-Taylor<sup>7</sup>) who had attended school in England before qualifying as a doctor in London and relocating to Guinea. During this period, it was not unusual for African students from similar backgrounds to have attended churches that were incorporating local musical styles into Christian religious services, and it is from this colonial perspective that many of them first encountered Western classical music.

Citizens across the British Empire studied music in colonial institutions including churches and schools, as well as military, police, and Salvation Army bands. Fragments of these establishments are visible in photographs and recordings of early jazz and music hall groups but are rarely discussed in connection with Western classical musicians. Trinidad-born Rudolph Dunbar—the first Black man to conduct the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 1942 and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 1945—was a successful classical, jazz, and dance clarinettist before focusing on his conducting career (Aubin, 1945; Various, 1981, p. 193). Rita Cann (also known professionally as Rita Lawrence), whose father was a businessman from the Gold Coast, studied classical piano before spending much of her performing career as a dancer, singer, and Latin pianist (Wilmer, 2001). There are numerous accounts of classically trained Afro-British musicians during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but much fewer tales of sustained success in this genre. It is beyond the scope of this research, but further exploration is needed to document why so few Black musicians maintained long-term careers in classical music until recently, despite many accessing high-level training at music conservatoires.

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<sup>6</sup> Academic dependency has been defined as ‘a condition in which the knowledge production of certain scholarly communities is conditioned by the development and growth of knowledge of other scholarly communities to which the former is subjected’ (Alatas, 2008, p. 5).

<sup>7</sup> Patricia Walker cites Williams (1990) and Kenyon (1990) in stating that there were 21,000 post-secondary international students in Britain in 1958. This increased to 27,500 by 1960 (Walker, 2014, p. 330).

Hakim Adi writes that the African students in London during the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century 'tended to be members of the coastal elite or members of other wealthy and aristocratic families' (Adi, 1993, p. 107), although this familial wealth was not available to all African students. Some students, such as Fela Sowande, found additional means of income during their studies and turned to their skills as performers in London's churches and jazz clubs to supplement their finances (Southern and Sowande, 1976). Organisations such as the African Association<sup>8</sup> and the West African Student Union<sup>9</sup> developed as support networks in ways that enabled musicians such as Sowande to transfer from prestigious courses—like civil engineering or law—to music studies at London-based conservatoires including Trinity College of Music, the Royal College of Music, the Royal Academy of Music, and Guildhall School of Music and Drama (Adi, 1993; Matera, 2015)<sup>10</sup>. These intersections of race and class remain contributory factors to the complex difficulties African and Caribbean students face regarding financial support and access to higher arts education and the profession in the UK (Walker, 2014).

British imperialism and colonialism informed the experiences of musicians from across the African diaspora, though creative responses to this varied. Coleridge-Taylor, a composer of part Sierra Leonean descent who was embraced by the British public in the country of his birth, sought ways to explore his personal interpretations of African heritage in his music writing. In the foreword to his *24 Negro Spirituals*, he wrote, '[w]hat Brahms has done for the Hungarian folk-music, Dvorak for the Bohemian, and Grieg for the Norwegian, I have tried to do for these Negro Melodies' (Coleridge-Taylor, cited in Tortolano, 2002, p. 91). While Coleridge-Taylor alludes to then-popular European folk styles, Western musicians would not have had knowledge of African styles outside of colonial presentations in entertainments such

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<sup>8</sup> Formed in London in 1897 by Henry Sylvester Williams.

<sup>9</sup> Formed in London by Ladipo Solanke in August 1925.

<sup>10</sup> From the 1930s onwards, several future leaders of African and Caribbean states were sent to Britain to study subjects such as anthropology, history, economics, law and medicine (Matera, 2010, p. 392).

as the world's fairs, first popularised in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe<sup>11</sup>, which strongly influenced Western perceptions of Global cultures.

In the same set of pieces, Coleridge-Taylor names the sources for the traditional African and Caribbean melodies used in his arrangements. They included a publication by the Swiss missionary Henri Junod<sup>12</sup> (Junod, 1913, pp. 170, 256) and Mrs Victoria Randall, an Afro-British acquaintance living locally<sup>13</sup>. Coleridge-Taylor appears to have been the first notable European composer to treat African and Caribbean music respectfully, but his musical approach could only come from a Western perspective. Decades later, Sowande addressed his own cross-cultural navigations as a composer-ethnomusicologist ('Music of Africa', 1964). As with several other composers of African Art Music, Sowande was interested in bridging different cultures, but his work as a musician and broadcaster at institutions such as the BBC has since been forgotten. In this research, I investigate how these absences from institutional and cultural historiographies impact on common perceptions of knowledge and culture-building in British society, a connecting theme to my critiques of Practice-as-Research (PaR) methodologies in Chapter 4. What follows is a brief outline of my research questions and a short synopsis for each chapter.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

An interdisciplinary inquiry such as this requires an investigative approach spanning multiple strands. For this reason, the process comprises two key components, each informing the other in an iterative, bidirectional, and reflexive manner:

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<sup>11</sup> Despite Coleridge-Taylor's explorations into his African identity, he was still culturally tied to the fashionable influences of European exoticism. This is apparent in his most famous work, the *Song of Hiawatha* cantata trilogy, based on the epic poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

<sup>12</sup> An arrangement of Coleridge-Taylor's setting of *They Will Not Lend Me a Child* as collected by Junod can be heard in the plainsightSOUND celebration, a recording of which can be found in section 4 of the portfolio accompanying this commentary.

<sup>13</sup> Mrs Randall was also of Sierra Leonean heritage and goddaughter to Queen Victoria (Green, 1998, p. 186).

1. Historical and critical research, including biographical and ethnographic explorations of the musicians, putting them into social, cultural, and political contexts.
2. Practice-based research, focusing on my roles as a performer, educator, and curatorial-activist working towards the development of a new practice. This serves as a model for increasing diversity and presentation within classical music and other performing arts.

This interdisciplinary project covers themes from multiple academic fields. As a result, the research questions I have constructed are broadly divided into two groups.

### **Historically and Critically-Focused Questions**

- a) Considering the historical intersections of race, class, and nationality in Western classical music, in what ways can we avoid perpetuating the dominant supremacist narratives that are continually promoted through Western hegemonic musical traditions?
- b) In what ways have epistemic inequalities affected cultural understandings of what constitutes British classical music?
- c) There have always been barriers to entry into the classical music establishment, often due to industry gatekeepers such as impresarios/funders, publishers, performance venues, and performers. Given this, what is ultimately responsible for the erasure of diverse stories from British classical music and in what ways might this issue be addressed?

### **Practice-Based Questions**

- d) In what ways might the role of performer-curator-activist assist transformation within art forms such as Western classical music?
- e) How might epistemological and hegemonic barriers to preserving music by Afro-British classical musicians be addressed through performance?

## 1.5 Chapter Overview

These research questions will be interrogated through a musical presentation which will be contextualised and documented in this commentary. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the existing literature reviewed as a starting point for this research. Through explorations of the historical circumstances informing this project, I address questions b., c., and e. by analysing relevant historical, academic, and cultural backgrounds. Chapter 3 is an exploration of curation and how acknowledging its political elements aids the development of curatorial activism. By incorporating the methods of several visual art curators, I assemble a more comprehensive overview of all five research questions. In Chapter 4, I summarise my critique of standard PaR methodologies, in particular the model provided by Robin Nelson, and identify how it can lead to further marginalisation within arts-based research. In addressing the dismantling of existing structures, this is relevant to questions a. and e. Finally, Chapter 5 analyses and discusses the application of my developing role as curatorial-activist in practice. It is a consolidation of outcomes, broadly using counter-storytelling and augmentation to deal with all five research questions.

In 1977, Samuel Akpabot wrote, 'it is certain that as more black musicologists emerge to write about the music of their people, there will be a need for music historians to re-write their books to accommodate the contribution of Africa to world music' (Akpabot, 1986, p. 67). This research project was created in response to the lack of information and knowledge disseminated via mainstream music sources and institutions. Histories have been erased and stories need to be recovered. Responding to Akpabot's call, the next chapter is where I begin my journey as a Black musicologist and performer, drawing on the existing work of scholars so that these books will be re-written for the future.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

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Musicians of African descent have been vastly underrepresented in mainstream British musicological scholarship. Despite the increasing availability of digitised primary sources, Afro-British or Afro-European classical musicians have been relegated to the margins and footnotes of their white peers' biographies, regardless of individual successes many achieved in their lifetime. As noted in the introduction to this commentary, research exploring marginalised—and particularly African-descended—subjects in Britain within typically Eurocentric academic contexts requires the construction and presentation of interdisciplinary approaches as functional elements of rigorous scholarship. On that basis, this chapter outlines foundational frameworks in literature from a range of fields exploring relevant cultural and social histories pertinent to this research, alongside their critical and creative structures.

What follows is a brief survey that creates a foundation from which prior research in the field can be documented, gaps can be identified, and from which the resulting project is structured (Murray and Beglar, 2009; Sayfour, 2014). Defining a clear rationale for this literature review was an essential guide for locating, managing, and distilling appropriate materials that contextualise this study and deduce its core themes. I begin by examining the historical fluidity of Afro-British identities, before briefly exploring notions of African culture as seen through colonial and post-colonial perspectives. This leads into a reflection on contemporary conflicts between mainstream musicology and ethnomusicology. By investigating these themes, I determine the intersections and gaps used to identify the creative roles and positioning of curator, performer, and activist as will be discussed in later chapters.

### 2.1 Situating Contemporary Blackness and African Descent in Britain

Developing this research requires an exploration of concepts of Blackness and Africanness in Europe, and specifically Britain. These shifting terms have historically been used to group disparate ethnicities under single identities. Despite a centuries-long Black British presence,

scholars have noted the omission and limiting of Black British voices from the cultural and historical landscape (Harris, 2009; Moncrieffe and Harris, 2020). I address this issue by positioning the principal subjects of my study as part of broader African diasporic stories. By consulting academic and generalist non-fiction texts, I start with a brief investigation of the changing socio-political landscapes that influenced Afro-British classical musicians into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1880, Nigerian organist Robert Coker travelled to England to study at Trinity College of Music, one of the first in a long line of African conservatoire students in Britain. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many UK-based African and African-descended students became involved in Ethiopianist, pan-Africanist and Black internationalist politics as explored by Adi in *Pan-Africanism: A History* (Adi, 2018). Adi charts a clear lineage of the political and cultural legacies produced by activists and intellectuals working collaboratively towards the common goal of Black unity. The inclusion of individuals such as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor—recorded as an organiser at the 1900 London Pan-African Conference—highlights the importance of activism in the lives of African-descended people who maintained careers in non-political fields<sup>14</sup>. Student organisations such as the West African Student Union (where composer, organist and ethnomusicologist Fela Sowande often directed musical activities) are also noted as crucial cultural and political meeting spaces.

Pan-Africanism emerged as a call for unity among diverse African diasporic groups whose cultures had been scattered through the forced migration and colonialism that continue to contextualise their personal and creative identities. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Gilroy, 1993) conceptualises the African diaspora as a ‘black Atlantic’ culture through a series of connections that draw in and across a range of interlinked geographies, locations and experiences—something that is neither African, Caribbean or African American,

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<sup>14</sup> There is earlier evidence of politicisation in the anti-slavery writings of Ignatius Sancho (Mtubani, 1984; Carretta, 2015), whose music is also featured in this research project.

while simultaneously inhabiting all three. Paul Gilroy's examination of 'black music' forces the reader to reflect on the meanings of 'race' and 'culture' in society:

*What special analytical problems arise if a style, genre, or particular performance of music is identified as being expressive of the absolute essence of the group that produced it? What contradictions appear in the adaptation of this cultural expression by other diaspora populations, and how will they be resolved?* (Gilroy, 1993, p. 75)

Interrogation of how cultural meaning is ascribed to music is of particular interest when exploring Western classical music and its hierarchical interrelationships with genres such as West African Art Music.

Difficulties apparent in *The Black Atlantic* stem from Gilroy's focus on specific gendered and cultural voices as representative modes of Black expression. Firstly, presenting 'black musics' as soul, hip hop, and jazz excludes a considerable range of African diasporic music. In fact, descriptions throughout the text centre African American, Caribbean, and British Caribbean experiences with little recognition of other diasporic experiences. While the lack of female representation is not unexpected given the original publication year of 1993, a more complete view is necessary for my research and these gaps highlight common issues regarding British perceptions of intersecting Black cultures that are continually perceived and presented as homogenous.

*Afropean: Notes from Black Europe* is a record of Johny Pitts' journey to document the liminality of Black identity in Europe from the perspective of a British man of mixed heritage (Pitts, 2019). Reminiscent of Gilroy's rendering of double consciousness (Gilroy, 1993), Pitts records the trajectory towards his acceptance of the descriptor 'Afropean'<sup>15</sup> as an alternative

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<sup>15</sup> Pitts cites musicians David Byrne and Marie Daulne as originators of the term in the early 1990s (Pitts, 2019, p. 1).

to culturally-specific notions of Blackness, including Black Britishness, which he saw as ‘often packaged exclusively as an embodiment of the Windrush Generation’ (Pitts, 2019, p. 2)—a theme I discussed previously in the introduction. By inviting readers to collaborate through their own personalised history using the project website Afropean.com, Pitts acknowledges the diverse stories required to portray the realities of being Afropean<sup>16</sup>. This crowdsourcing of perspectives aligns with my aims for the plainsightSOUND project website, which has been developed as one of the core outputs of this research project as explored further in Chapter 5.

In contrast to Pitts’ autobiographical reflections, in *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology*, Michelle M. Wright explores the complexities of Blackness as both a historical construct and a phenomenological function. Whereas Blackness was constructed as the antithesis to European whiteness during the Enlightenment, Wright defines phenomenological Blackness as being viewed at a moment ‘through which the past, present, and future are always interpreted’ (Wright, 2015, p. 4). The discussions presented by Wright support my previous assertion that the dominant Middle Passage and post-war epistemologies of Blackness have resulted in a focus on linear histories, leading to the exclusion of non-dominant diasporic stories.

The above texts demonstrate the difficulties inherent in defining a single umbrella term encompassing the African diaspora in Britain through history. As Wright suggests, Blackness itself is a construct anchored both geographically and temporally, a term that previously included ethnic and cultural groups who would not self-identify as Black today<sup>17</sup>. Olivette Otele acknowledges this challenge and while African European is her preferred term, recognises that expressions including African, Negro, mixed-race, and dual heritage have

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<sup>16</sup> Institutional archives now welcome input from their users to correct and update their records (Ketelaar, 2008, p. 14). I experienced this myself when corresponding with the British Film Institute over conflated information they held for Fela and Olu Sowande that listed them as the same person due to confusion over their names. The brothers now have separate entries.

<sup>17</sup> This is seen in the concept of political blackness and other groupings formed ‘on the basis of not being white’ (Andrews, 2016, p. 2).

precise cultural, temporal, and geographical contexts. Similarly, as I have focused on connections between Africa and Britain as the central spatial locations of my research, I use the term 'Afro-British' in general reference to the musicians focused on in this study<sup>18</sup>. From this perspective, I now examine interpretations of colonialism and its legacies by musicologists and cultural theorists with particular consideration of West African music and culture.

## 2.2 Exploring Colonialism and Post-colonialism in Western Classical Music

While acknowledging the barriers created by an over-reliance on limited Black epistemologies, in-depth explorations of Afro-British participation in Western art music cannot occur without recognising the violent impact of chattel slavery and European colonisation. Support for the transatlantic slave trade and British imperialism required the construction of social ideologies that hinged on the masking or minimising of non-European humanity through denial of African culture (Cesaire, 2000)<sup>19</sup>. Colonialism resulted in the development of 'communities of taste'<sup>20</sup> within hierarchical Black African colonial societies, consisting of those exposed to European music as part of Western-style education. Sowande noted that 'anything traditional was linked to paganism, heathenism, and it couldn't possibly have anything good about it. So everybody was trying to get himself "brainwashed"' (Southern and Sowande, 1976, p. 92). European cultures and cultural standards were elevated within local communities that were being dissuaded by colonial authorities from participating in traditional music-making (Nketia, 1979).

Interpretations of colonialism can vary significantly according to context and attempts to distinguish between different forms of colonialism and imperialism can be unproductive. As Ania Loomba writes '[l]ike 'colonialism', imperialism too is best understood not by trying to pin

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<sup>18</sup> As an umbrella term, I am not claiming that Afro-British can sufficiently describe every musician discussed as part of this study. Rather, that the complexities of racial identification in the UK historically and in the current climate, allow people to self-identify in ways that have not been interrogated to the extent that they have in the USA. Afro-British allows me to avoid limited and problematic terms such as 'political blackness' while acknowledging the varied heritages and terms used by the musicians themselves.

<sup>19</sup> Cesaire's writing showed that ultimately, 'colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer'.

<sup>20</sup> The development of musical taste in Europe is discussed in Chapter 3.

it down to a single semantic meaning but by relating its shifting meanings to historical processes' (Loomba, 2015, p. 10). By focusing on quality of terminology, important aspects, such as the actual outcomes of a policy, can be obscured. Kofi Agawu also avoids the limitations of restricted definitions, identifying colonialism as 'the broad range of European influences in Africa from the fifteenth century onward, rather than the narrower range of influences initiated during the 1880s' (Agawu, 2003, p. 3). Agawu is clear that colonialism occurred in a wider cultural sense and over a more extended period than some sources recognise. His ethnomusicological stance is particularly relevant when examining European and Afro-European musics that inspired many of my archival and musical explorations for this research. In the same text, Agawu presents the core European musical elements of tonality and harmony as tools of colonialism, powerfully describing 'tonal-functional harmony' as 'the most pervasive, the most far-reaching, and ultimately the most disastrous' musical impact of European colonisation (Agawu, 2003, p. 8). This critique appears alongside an acceptance of European influence in the cross-cultural development of popular music forms, such as highlife and African Art Music, into the postcolonial period.

As with its predecessor, scholarly consensus on what postcolonialism *is* or *means* remains elusive. 'Post' as a suffix implies something that follows on from or after and literal interpretation by Kwame Anthony Appiah refers to work produced following independence from the colonial state (Appiah, 1993, p. 148). As he then points out, however, '[a]ll aspects of contemporary African cultural life... have been influenced, often powerfully, by the transition of African societies through colonialism, but they are not all in the relevant sense postcolonial' (Appiah, 1993, p. 149). Appiah argues that while African intellectual and cultural production continues within former colonial societies, this application of 'former' appears only in a temporal sense. African populations are still reliant on the Eurocentric structures embedded into African knowledge production. In fact, as Loomba writes, 'if the inequities of colonial rule have not been erased, it is perhaps premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism' (Loomba,

2015, p. 28). Referring back to Agawu, the main thrust of postcolonial theory in his ethnomusicological work is 'to unmask (or unveil, demystify, "lay bare") the enabling constructs of various knowledge systems... a constellation of critical practices drawn from philosophy, history, social theory, and literary criticism' (Agawu, 2003, pp. xvii–xviii).

'Unveiling' the experiences of those whose cultural identities have been shaped and hidden by European colonialism runs central to my research practice. Starting from this perspective allows for deeper contextual understanding in creating space for other hidden stories to be resurfaced and explored.

The wide range of postcolonial theoretical perspectives 'offers grounds for the legitimisation of apparently incoherent lived experiences' (Agawu, 2003, p. xviii), as scholars who are otherwise unconnected, draw on their personal renderings of 'lived experience' to interpret specific meanings. As an essential aspect of Practice-as-Research methodologies (to be discussed further in Chapter 4) I use my own expertise within these topics to explore the ways in which colonialism and postcolonialism are becoming central to contemporary ethnomusicological debates.

### 2.3 Changing Perceptions of Ethnomusicology

Frequent discussions about the distinctions between musicology and ethnomusicology focus on the former's centring of Western musical forms. *Musicking* (Small, 1998) is widely regarded as an essential musicological text that reframes Western perceptions of musical activity and culture. In his writing, Christopher Small draws heavily on the use of metaphor as a way of connecting an audience assumed to be knowledgeable in Western art music with culturally unfamiliar ideas. In doing so, he relies on stereotypical symbolism, continually othering his imaginary non-European or non-white representative characters <sup>21</sup>. Musicology as a field is

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<sup>21</sup> In the opening to 'A Solitary Flute Player', in *Musicking*, Small even admits that he had been advised against including this text as the fictional character created to represent his point seemed 'too much like a totalized

rooted in Western classical music, separated from ethnomusicology through the othering of popular, folk, and non-Western music. Engaging with the reader through metaphor is employed contrastingly by Agawu and other African musicologists, such as J. H. K. Nketia, Samuel Akpabot, and Godwin Sadoh. Aware that their readers are likely to approach from a Western perspective, they draw on their embodied knowledge of both African and Western cultures to create cultural connections, rather than reproducing epistemological hegemonies.

Agawu suggest that the move away from comparative musicology and the development of ethnomusicology as a distinct discipline of 'noncomparison' may have restricted how African music has historically been viewed and studied. Through this lens, the funnelling of African music through ethnomusicology resulted in the exclusion of African Art Music (as a distinct genre) from promotion and 'serious' academic study in either of the fields that it stems from—African traditional music and Western art music (Agawu, 2003, pp. xi–xxii). This is echoed in the observations of Matthew Morrison outlining the foundation of musicology 'through the process of epistemic exclusion' (Morrison, 2019, p. 785). Such gatekeeping of fields and subfields in musical research is among the reasons that Stephen Amico argues for the removal of the suffix 'ethno' and allowing the general term 'musicology' to 'best serve as a (provisional) marker for interdisciplinary enquiry' (Amico, 2020, p. 32).

In recent decades, ethnomusicological discourse has focused on wider problematic issues of the discipline, as discussed in *"We Are All Musicologists Now"; or, the End of Ethnomusicology* (Amico, 2020). Referring to a series of binaries, Amico argues that genre-based hierarchies within musicology and the constant othering present in ethnomusicology are examples of the colonialist power dynamics inherent to both fields, amid a continued hunt for cultural

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representation of the "other" that has beset European thinking about the rest of the human race' (Small, 1998, p. 201).

authenticity<sup>22</sup>. While he raises the importance of lived experience alongside the complexities of working with ‘nonnormative’ subjects and theories within a largely conservative field (Amico, 2020, pp. 4–5), it appears that ethnomusicology’s preoccupation with defining and redefining itself within academic contexts leaves open its methodological connections to oppressive theories, as is also seen in the social sciences (Amico, 2020, pp. 11–13). Amico’s recommendation is to consolidate all subdisciplines of musicology and encourage interdisciplinary approaches, as ‘all cultural analysis benefits from occupying diverse locations’ (Amico, 2020, p. 21). Musicology and ethnomusicology focus on cultural protection—of the canon and ‘real people’, respectively. Acknowledging the diversity of experiences present in observers and the observed is essential in the continued development of these fields. Likewise, this research project has emerged from my position as performer and curator, incorporating additional elements of my lived experience to determine a theoretical basis for this research.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the key texts providing the contextual foundations for this study. Afro-Britishness is constantly shifting, and its histories obscured by selective representations in education and entertainment. The history of Afro-British participation in Western art music institutions includes the earliest days of the London music conservatoires during which time, thinking on the impacts of colonialism was beginning to be discussed on an international basis through Pan-Africanism. Subsequently, postcolonialism has been a lens through which academics have been able to examine the cultural effects of imperialism on African societies, and their wider ramifications particularly through the dominating force of European functional harmony. The importance of lived experience runs through both postcolonialism and contemporary ethnomusicological debates that aim to recentre the observed and avoid the

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<sup>22</sup> This tension can also be seen in the mainstream debates on usage of terminology such as ‘world music’ that developed through commercial demand for broadly grouping disparate musical genres associated with minority cultures (Jähnichen, 2020).

othering that was central to the colonial roots of the field. While discussion continues as to whether ethnomusicology should be absorbed into the wider musicology discipline, the existence of both as academic fields (or subfields) are dependent on exclusionary boundaries. Examining these frameworks has underlined the importance of narrative and visibility within hierarchical structures. As will be explored in the following commentary, the curator identifies and presents creative narratives within these structures and holds power over the knowledge an audience can access. Building on this theme, this study examines the ways in which institutional and industry preoccupation with establishing and replicating canonical repertoire has systematically marginalised Afro-British classical composers. Chapter 3 contextualises this position by identifying artists and performers who have incorporated curation and activism their work.

### 3 THE CURATORIAL CONTEXT

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Curation encompasses more than gathering and presenting art to audiences. Its varied approaches have a long history in the visual arts and are increasingly visible in music performance. As a range of intertwined presentation methods, curation's appeal lies in its flexibility and scope for personalisation, with curators often in central positions of cultural influence. The term is becoming popularised in music, particularly in organisations that focus on popular music, contemporary classical music, multimedia or festival spaces, and emerging activist voices have employed it as a method of effecting societal or institutional change. This chapter aims to define curation as an activist methodology in music by prescribing a distinct contextual meaning—that of a performer-activist expanding repertoire lists typically dominated by white Western classical musicians.

I begin this chapter by connecting the origins of visual arts curation that developed alongside 'musical taste' (Weber, 1977) in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to a discussion of contemporary live music programming. Following this, I examine the social and political aspects of curation, acknowledging the power structures positioning it as an influential 'gatekeeping' role of control in potential conflict with institutions. Finally, I identify and evaluate specific curatorial methodologies relevant to this study. While my overarching thesis focuses on the output of Afro-British musicians, examples explored in the latter part of this chapter intentionally focus on creative strategies emerging from both the UK and the USA. I use the observations in this chapter to interrogate my own multifaceted creative functions, concluding with a definition of the role of the curatorial-activist—itself a vital framework, through which I will define and position my research.

#### 3.1 Defining Curation

According to David Balzer, the etymological origins of curating stem from the work of government officials in the Roman Empire. Sixteenth-century developments saw the growth of

museums and collections as independent fields, leading to the creative organisational identities that emerged during the visual art movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Balzer, 2015, pp. 23–38)<sup>23</sup>. By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had become common for artists to curate their own exhibitions, with the independent 'curator-creator' acting as innovator, gatekeeper and tastemaker for audiences eager to learn more (Gawronski, 2020, pp. 238–242). Contemporary curators are most frequently encountered within the context of art galleries or museums, in positions that—alongside practical collecting and display tasks—can include commissioning, lecturing, planning and fundraising. By investigating the origins of curation and its development across Western art forms, it is possible to identify the key elements central to the development of the music curatorial-activist as a separate but necessary role within the arts.

There are multiple interpretations of the term *curator*, and the responsibilities that fall on the person adopting this title vary significantly according to the context in which it is used. Modern definitions focus on its Latin roots as *curare*—‘to care’—with the Oxford English Dictionary entry presented as ‘[o]ne who has the care or charge of a person or thing’. From its origins as keeper of art collections in ancient Rome and early modern Europe to the professionalised positions of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century galleries and museums, this curatorial act of ‘looking after’ has expanded, becoming integral to the presentation, consumption, and creation of the visual arts (Paul, 2020). While it is now possible to undertake formal study in curation as it relates to the visual arts and museum practice, routes into the profession remain varied (George, 2015, pp. 18–23), and there has been comparatively little scholarly writing exploring the development of this role in the wider performing arts<sup>24</sup>. Of curating, Will Dutta writes ‘[i]n the

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<sup>23</sup> This was the same period that saw the acceptance of European music into ‘high art’ and the development of what Lydia Goehr has termed ‘the imaginary museum of musical works’ (Goehr, 1992).

<sup>24</sup> This could be due to the perception by some that encouraging acceptance of curation outside of the art world devalues the term (Cohen, 2018).

field of music (and performing arts more generally) there has been a distinct lack of literature, modelling and practical application' (Dutta, 2018, p. 11).

Despite what could be perceived as academic disinterest, usage of the term increased during the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, and recent scholarship has focused on defining the curator's purpose. In his analysis, Raul Gschrey argues that the role of art curators is to 'develop and define topics, they explore relevant (artistic) material and follow up on the current state of research, they interpret and contextualize objects, and establish connections between individual exhibits and artistic positions' (Gschrey, 2016, p. 2). Gschrey continues by describing the 'pedagogical role' of the curator as one that intentionally projects a particular perspective or narrative through a specific medium<sup>25</sup> (Gschrey, 2016). Shifting the focus from galleries to museum practice brings a similar view of stories, concepts, and cultural memory but in less conventional areas. For example, the growth of popular music in new museums practice has developed through an understanding of the importance of 'experiential learning' and an awareness of the 'purposeful use of narrative' (Baker, Istvandy and Nowak, 2016, p. 2). These methods of engaging directly with audiences are recognisable to many in the performing arts. These audiences include many who consider themselves 'amateur experts' (Baym and Burnett, 2009), alongside less-knowledgeable visitors who require supporting information. With this, we can see how gallery and museum curators connect with their respective audiences by building on their existing understanding with additional knowledge. This perspective is easily transposed into performing arts settings such as concert or events programming as I discuss later in this chapter.

While establishing what a curator *does*, Juli Carson explores definitions of 'curation' and asks what can happen when the terminology 'shifts from being a *profession* to being an *action*'

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<sup>25</sup> This is independent of the educational turn in curating (Rogoff, 2010) which views curation and pedagogy as two distinct but interrelated and complementary formats.

(Carson, 2020). An absence of consensus on the function of curation allows for variations in the specific requirements of a role that can ultimately be tailored to suit circumstances as a way of defining the parameters within which curators operate. Inspired by Hans-Georg Gadamer's expression of 'double mimesis', Carson posits exhibitions can be produced in the same way that a theorist or researcher produces knowledge. By entering into dialogue with the artwork and locating this knowledge, the curator becomes a conduit between the artwork and the audience (Carson, 2020, p. 90), adopting the associated responsibilities. These dual positions of caretaker and interpretive pedagogue require decisions that shape and present a narrative to the audience. These curatorial acts are found in settings across and between the arts. It is within these varied locations that I have situated my research.

### 3.2 From Art to Live Music Performance

The title 'curator' has been used with increased regularity to describe various responsibilities related to musical performance, including archival work. Music archives are frequently kept in large libraries and higher education institutions, often including sheet music, instruments, recordings, concert programmes and other ephemera. While institutional archivists might focus on relationships between items, performers are increasingly turning to curatorial methods that intersect with archives as important and distinct elements of creative performance production. Referring to trends in contemporary classical music, composer and curator Lars Petter Hagen notes that '[m]any musicians include curatorial strategies in their work. Both curatorial, compositional and performative strategies include collaborative methods, interdisciplinarity, appropriation, staging archives, working with context as a compositional parameter, development of concert series and alternative institutions' (Hagen, 2020, p. 4). Expectations of musicians have changed, and their roles have become more complicated. Portfolio careers are increasingly common, resulting in the blurring of boundaries between previously distinct musician-administrator/impresario relationships (Haynes and

Marshall, 2018; Weston, 2020). Will Dutta's exploration of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century 'curating composer' (Dutta, 2018) outlines a figure that mirrors the gallery approach of exhibitions being curated by the creator(s) of the artwork. Western art music has generally separated these roles, using music programmers to select concert repertoire within an industry resistant to change. Miguel Ángel Marín summarises programming as 'the selection of a coherent and attractive range of works, performers, and concert formats, in accordance with an institution's economic capacity and profile, as well as its target audiences' (Marín, 2018, p. 116).

Programming is a standard musical convention but shifting contemporary art boundaries have facilitated the wider acceptance of curation. Public arts venues supporting a range of genres such as London's Southbank Centre frequently collaborate with guest curators for renowned music and arts festivals such as *Meltdown* (Byrne, 2015).

The emergence of 'quarantine concerts' in 2020 due to the social distancing required during the coronavirus epidemic, encouraged performers to engage directly with their online audiences in new ways (Frank, 2020). New standards developed, but concert-programming success has always necessitated a series of social negotiations that facilitate musical discovery and listening experiences for audiences. Marín's programmer definition encourages creative exploration, but is answerable to existing institutional cultures and concerned with increasing or retaining audience numbers (Marín, 2018, pp. 116–117). This reflects aspects of museum and gallery curation that anchor responsibility to the institution and existing audience while also advocating for the artist though, as Heloisa Amaral points out 'many of us [performers] are driven by aesthetic motivations that do not necessarily follow the market logic of audience-pleasing' (Amaral, 2020, p. 24). Curatorial choices can have considerable influence over audiences and performers within cultural events and the tensions between the culture and politics of musicians becomes clearer when the curatorial remit is absent, giving them less control.

As with visual exhibitions, musical performance reflects a cultural narrative. This perspective brings music curatorial responsibilities in line with those of their peers using multiple methodologies in galleries and museums. From this position, I will continue to investigate how curation can support effective transformation within Western art music.

### 3.3 Political Acts as Curation

The curator is responsible for the audience experience and can decide the context within which production takes place. As cultural influencers, they can make choices that support the creation of new, more inclusive structures or perpetuate exclusionary hierarchies of control. Aspirations as cultural mediators can be placed, sometimes conversely, alongside a need to appeal to those with financial or social power to facilitate work creation or market to audiences. In designating sites of 'powerful knowledge'—particularly from a postcolonial perspective (Rudolph, Sriprakash and Gerrard, 2018)—this curatorial control materialises as the monitoring and promotion of approved musics (and performers) to predictable audiences. While this could be considered a method of ensuring the longevity of artistic works and extending musical careers, this also seeks to protect and control what can be presented to the public, ultimately resulting in permanent exclusions. In the context of classical music, these exclusions—in the form of 'tradition'—are systematically and intentionally embedded into organisations that regularly produce these performances (Shadle, 2018). Based on familiarity, audiences rely on producers to identify and present high-quality work. Helen Kaplinsky writes '[a]s cultural producers, both artists and curators remain gatekeepers of bodies of knowledge, veiling and unveiling multiple cultural subjectivities and proposing them as mediated encounters in the art context' (Kaplinsky, 2013, p. 32).

Assumptions, prior experiences, and external pressures inform all creative and artistic decisions, and this subjectivity is key to understanding the importance of curation in any context. While protecting and caring for art is central to the role, the methods used will vary

according to a diverse set of standards, as I will explore here. Whether official or unofficial, these standards result in the omission of works from constructed canons, leading to a ‘forgetting’ or loss of cultural output based on its perceived values to those in power<sup>26</sup>. These sites of creativity use different methods of presentation to control and define values that are seen through a combination of economic, academic and political activity. In these settings, arts curation creates spaces that ‘are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed’ (Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, 1996, p. 2). Whether musical performance, museum exhibition or art installation, these sites of creativity control and define precisely what the arts are, and who should engage with them.

Viewing the 19<sup>th</sup>-century formation of European classical music as a metaphorical ‘imaginary museum’ (Goehr, 1992) brings us closer to positioning the curator as responsible for the upkeep of musical works placed within their care. The development of ‘musical taste’ as a concept during this same period led to influential musicians and thinkers setting trends based on their hierarchical societal judgments (Weber, 1977). As musical trends solidified into traditions over time, the tastemaker and impresario evolved into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classical music programmer, who is now often responsible for establishing and maintaining exclusionary values through gatekeeping. Such norms have become further embedded in music as influential groups and institutions reinforced these principles through professionalism (Citron, 2000, pp. 80–119). Reliance on standards as criteria for creative quality results in the erasure, dismissal, and marginalisation of work produced by socio-demographic groups whose institutional invisibility renders them insignificant (Bowman, 2007). The question remains as to whether curatorial activism is possible from *inside* these institutions. Maura Reilly has

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<sup>26</sup> Modern perceptions of cultural value and the impact on social inequalities in the UK were collected in the AHRC Cultural Value Project (Crossick and Kaszynska, 2016), the results of which have been discussed in detail by Orian Brook, Dave O’Brien and Mark Taylor (Brook, O’Brien and Taylor, 2020, pp. 38–43).

documented what she considers activist practice within established galleries and museums (Reilly, 2011, 2018). Others such as Juan Albarrán Diego insist that curatorial activism must intend to overhaul the institutional structures they exist within, while ensuring activist individuals do not, themselves, become the focus of their advocacy. Diego writes that curators 'are agents that must question the very structures in which they operate, and from there, their role and legitimacy in making others visible' (Diego, 2018, p. 3). As a distinct voice, the independent curator has the opportunity to rectify fundamental hegemonic imbalances while defending social justice, pivoting from viewing silenced groups as 'textual objects for analysis' and instead supporting them as 'agentive speaking subjects' (Harris, 2009, p. 495).

Classical music organisations have increasingly been expected to address racism and discrimination as part of funding requirements (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2019; Creative Scotland, 2019; Arts Council England, 2020; Arts Council of Wales, 2020). Despite repeated calls for action in the years prior (Nwonka, 2019), it wasn't until global outcry against systemic discrimination in 2020 that a 'cultural shift' took hold (Arts Council of Wales, 2020, p. 20), Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies began to be fully incorporated into mainstream institutions, and individual classical musicians began to review how repertoire choices might be contributing to the marginalisation of communities. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, UK arts organisations including the Southbank Centre (Brown, 2020) and National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain (NYO News, 2020) rapidly began to alter their programmes. Artistic directors swiftly constructed events solely featuring Black composers or supplementing previously all-white programmes<sup>27</sup>. Press releases and public announcements accompanied these gestures that could be considered performative, but the longevity of these changes is not yet apparent. It also remains to be seen how internal organisational structures and policies that reinforce the

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<sup>27</sup> Chineke! Orchestra, who consist mainly of Black, Asian and minority ethnic musicians commissioned the work *Remnants* by the composer James B. Wilson during this period. Its composition was directly influenced by events at BLM protests in London (Reuters Communications, 2020).

narrow worldview represented by conventional concert programming are likely to change. As Diego writes, these performances – no matter how well-meaning – cannot be considered forms of activism unless they intend to interrogate the very structures that create these barriers (Diego, 2018, p. 3). Without structural transformation, programming will continue to revert to positions where ‘BME musicians are encouraged to participate as players, but with little acknowledgement of their presence in terms of influencing the culture and character of what is being played’ (Griffiths, 2020, pp. 67–68), and altruistic displays reinforce existing exclusionary systems. Unlike heritage institutions, individual curators can use their influence to dismantle these frameworks.

### 3.4 Institutional Influences

Public bodies such as Arts Council England are now requesting voluntary submission of demographic data, including race and ethnicity, from their funded organisations. Discourse surrounding structural power imbalances within the UK arts sector has recently begun to address intersectional inequalities in the arts. A substantial body of recent classical music research has been produced that focuses primarily on gender and class inequalities (Bull, 2014a, 2014b, 2019; Scharff, 2015, 2019; Bull and Scharff, 2017). In these, reference is made towards the need for a more complex intersectional inquiry into the experiences of professional classical musicians who remain othered, but this is still an emerging research area in the UK. Looking toward the USA, Tamara Levitz writes that although class is acknowledged in musicological settings, those within the discipline ‘have tended to neglect systemic racialized power relations’ (Levitz, 2018, p. 10), instead reinforcing a romanticised hegemonic narrative of classical music that perpetuates assumptions of innate cultural integrity, while dismissing alternative histories and perspectives. This narrow worldview relegates those falling outside of officially recognised hegemonies to the position of a tokenistic outlier, the pedagogical effects of which are cultivated through material such as that located ‘within academic repositories,

that have customarily excluded the historically disenfranchised’ (Hughes-Watkins, 2018, p. 4).

Stories that are obscured through archival erasure become completely removed from the wider institutional discourse.

Since at least the early 2000s, British visual art institutions have confronted imbalances in their curatorial processes. The Tate group of galleries<sup>28</sup> addressed marginalisation in the Museums and Art sector through research projects including *Tate Encounters* (2005) and two collaborative investigations with artist-curator Lubaina Himid—*Open Sesame* (2005) and *The Point of Collection* (2007). A 2008 report by Victoria Walsh notes that *Tate Encounters* was developed in response to a failure to increase diversity among its visitors, where ethnic minorities made up just 3% of visitors to Tate Britain. When compared to the 14.6% of the total population identified as BAME<sup>29</sup> around the same period (Office for National Statistics, 2018), the disparity in visitor participation becomes very clear. As a longstanding institution, Tate Britain’s engagement with diversity issues was complicated by the fact that their key responsibilities were not to the public, but to academia (the origin of much of this cultural erasure) and the policies of the UK Government (as Tate Britain’s principal financial provider<sup>30</sup>). In line with similar projects, the move to uncover diverse narratives through *Tate Encounters* was presented primarily as a pedagogical enterprise, overseen by Tate Britain’s Education Department. The final report acknowledged that Tate Britain was only just beginning to consider minority groups as part of standard curatorial practice, experiences previously addressed only through educational projects (Walsh, 2008, p. 3). This is analogous to updated policies at music organisations that had previously recognised diversity only as part of outreach projects rather than through core repertoire or organisational staffing. Increased

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<sup>28</sup> Tate currently consists of four museums—Tate Britain, Tate Modern, Tate Liverpool, and Tate St Ives—and is caretaker of the national British art collection.

<sup>29</sup> Although the term BAME is still in common usage by many large organisations, there has been growing criticism regarding its use as a catch-all descriptor for any person of mixed or non-white European heritage that assumed a heterogeneity among other cultures.

<sup>30</sup> Through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

support for diverse representation has encouraged music organisations to begin to acknowledge their roles as cultural gatekeepers (UK Music, 2020). Some continue to voice concerns that these changes will hasten the drop in classical audience numbers while failing to address how their cultural policies negatively impact the recruitment of diverse participants (Glow, Kershaw and Reason, 2021).

Engaging with underrepresented groups and creating structures that accurately reflect the communities they serve remains an obstacle for music organisations due to ignorance and lack of expertise on relevant issues (Parkinson and Buttrick, 2014, p. 4). For organisations already stretched in other areas, pursuing diversity and inclusion policies to attract unspecified new audiences becomes of secondary importance. As Roaa Ali notes: '[o]rganisations may gain funding by appealing to funders' diversity agendas, but their engagement with ethnic minority communities and artists is rarely sustainable or lasting, leaving creatives feeling exploited and perhaps further marginalised' (Ali, 2020). Political and financial risks are balanced by continuing to provide predictable and recognisable experiences for proven audiences who are already understood. Regardless of ideology, the challenge for a curator is in finding creative and exploratory methodologies that their patrons will not find distasteful.

### 3.5 Constraints Within Classical Music Traditions

Rapid socio-political changes in the 19th century that took place alongside the development of 'mass' musical tastes across Europe resulted in establishing the canon of 'great composers' (Weber, 1977). Eurocentrism perpetuates outdated myths and presents incomplete, exclusionary historiographies as fact (Young, Robert J. C., 2004; Richardson, 2018). This is the basis on which Western classical concert programming is framed and implies that a canon can only consist of work produced by white men<sup>31</sup>. With canons presented as a benchmark, groups

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<sup>31</sup> A 2021 report by Black Lives in Music showed that "40% of the Black music creators felt they were pigeon-holed into a music genre where they disagreed with the genre classification" (Black Lives in Music, 2021, pp. 19–20). In the

unable to attain representation within it are assumed to lack innate creativity and talent, rather than being casualties of systematically imposed barriers. Music organisations that focus on attracting new concertgoers while retaining existing audiences incorporate work by under-represented composers while offering opportunities to explore less familiar repertoire and push the boundaries of standard formats<sup>32</sup>. Divesting from orthodox constraints liberates curators and performers from the rigidity of convention, providing freedom for experimentation and artistic self-expression. Robert Young writes '[f]or the other to remain other it must not derive its meaning from History but must instead have a separate time which differs from historical time' (Young, Robert J. C., 2004). Performing and teaching hegemonic chronological historiographies in classical music<sup>33</sup> reinforces the belief that unheard or unperformed repertoire is unworthy or does not exist<sup>34</sup>. Creative emancipation allows these alternative positions to be made visible. As stated earlier in Chapter 3, the activist who also wishes to curate must position themselves within structures that enable missing histories to be heard. If none exist, they must consider how new frameworks might be crafted in support. Without this, the conflict between Western music programming and curatorial activism unambiguously remains situated within the rigid structures of classical music performance.

Visual art and musical curation have existed in parallel settings, as I have shown. Breaking free from conventional expectations through curation has been embraced by visual curators in recent decades and is now being integrated into music. Following my research aims of

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same report, a surveyed participant said "There is an individual whom I have come across at the BBC who commissions music projects who questioned whether there are any Black people in the UK who come from a classical music background even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (Black Lives in Music, 2021, p. 35), showing clearly how assumptions based on race and ethnicity continue to present barriers for musicians in influential spaces.

<sup>32</sup> Amaral notes that audience attraction and retention may not be the main drivers for all who work in curation. In particular, she mentions performer-curators who are likely to be 'driven by the aesthetic motivations that do not necessarily follow the market logic of audience pleasing' (Amaral, 2020, p. 24).

<sup>33</sup> Inequalities in music education commonly go unchallenged unless they are widely reported in the press. Newspaper coverage showing that the ABRSM music syllabuses were 96% male (Busby, 2019) and 98.8% white (Batty, 2020) resulted in the creation of a diversity and inclusion plan to improve these statistics (ABRSM, 2021). In 2021, the school examinations board Pearson Edexcel were publicly challenged when it emerged that they had removed works by the multi-instrumentalist and composer Courtney Pine from their A-Level music exam syllabus, leaving no Black composers on their list at all. Pine was reinstated a few months later (Adams and Clifford, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> William Jamal Richardson has explored similar ideas in relation to 'undone science' (Richardson, 2018).

addressing the developing curator-activist in classical music, I now examine curatorial activism through the critique of several artist-practitioners and curators who incorporate activist approaches to varying extents in their work.

### 3.6 Curatorial Methodologies in Context: Towards a Theory of the Curatorial-Activist

At this juncture, it is necessary to draw from a variety of curatorial methodologies spanning different disciplines, including contemporary visual art and digital media platforms. Settings to be discussed include curation within research, formal classical music settings, and festival curation. I also contrast curation with archival methods and explore its use in advocacy and promotion. I have selected approaches to arts activism through each of these lenses to develop an artist-curatorial-activist model focusing on the demarginalisation of creative histories. In each instance I will be interrogating the methods used, noting areas of relevance to my practice in this context.

#### 3.6.1 Curation as Research

Lubaina Himid was the winner of the Turner Prize 2017. As an artist, curator, and writer, her win was notable not only as the first Black woman prizewinner, but also the oldest at 63<sup>35</sup>. Examining representations of the Black body is a central feature of her work as both an artist and curator. When discussing her artistic motivations in 2018, she responded '[t]elling stories of the black experience that are both everyday and extraordinary is what I'm here to do' (Whitley, 2018).

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<sup>35</sup> The prior age limit of 50 was removed shortly before Himid's nomination.

Himid has curated several exhibitions that seek to increase the visibility of young Black and Asian women artists. From 1983-86, she presented three significant projects in London: *Five Black Women* (1983), *Black Woman Time Now* (1983-4), and *The Thin Black Line* (1986). In each of these, Himid promoted the selected artists through challenges to 'their collective invisibility in the art world' (*Thin Black Line(s): Tate Britain 2011-2012*, 2019). She achieved this by 'conceptually reframing' socialised perceptions of Black and Asian women in Britain and presenting their work in spaces where they had historically been underrepresented or existed as silent stereotypes or caricatures that lacked agency. This alternative exhibition of art solely by artists identifying as Black women shifted critical focus to their creative outputs, forcing them to be viewed as creative beings. Carefully constructing spaces that direct the viewer's gaze towards the work, rather than the creator's identity, is a thread that I explore throughout my research. Although Himid has partnered with exhibition spaces and institutions of various sizes, keeping smaller, local organisations as core to her practice allowed her to continue working closely with marginalised artists who have had fewer exhibition opportunities.

In a collaborative continuation of this work with researcher Susan Walsh and the Interpretation and Education team at Tate Liverpool, Himid developed *Open Sesame* (2005) and *The Point of Collection* (2007), sponsored by the Tate museums network. These projects focused exclusively on artist and audience experiences and sought to discover how artistic contributions by artists of African, Asian, and Caribbean descent had shaped new policies in education and collection at Tate (*Prof Lubaina Himid MBE*, 2019). In 2011-12, Himid partnered with the curator Paul Goodwin to present *Thin Black Line(s)*. Again based at Tate Britain, this was simultaneously a summary, culmination, and contemporary revisiting of her three original exhibitions from the 1980s.

Beyond her role as Professor of Contemporary Art at UCLAN, and as a further extension of the studies undertaken previously with Tate Britain, Himid is lead researcher of *Making Histories*

*Visible*, ‘an interdisciplinary visual art research project’ with Susan Walsh and Christine Eyene. In aiming to undertake ‘internationally leading research on the art of the Black Diaspora’ (*Christine Eyene – Guild Research Fellow*, 2019), the aims of the project align with those of my online portal and database.

It is not unusual for a curator to share their thoughts in writing<sup>36</sup>, and in *Letters to Susan*, Himid presented a series of letters that reflected on her development work for exhibitions. Topics raised include the importance of developing audiences for unknown artists, allowing them to create a following over time, instead of restricting them to private gallery spaces (*Letters to Susan*, 2010). This resonates with my ambition to share rediscovered music as widely as possible as a means of preservation. As an active practitioner, the various interlocking strands of Himid’s practice—artist, curator, teacher, activist—are vital, with each feeding into the other and informing creative decisions in multiple directions.

The exhibitions produced by Himid are practitioner-led examples of curatorial-activism. Other forms of activism are steered by groups working to restore hidden institutional histories such as *UncoverED* at the University of Edinburgh. Established in 2018 by eight students as ‘[a] collaborative decolonial research project’ (University of Edinburgh, 2019), volunteers from across the student body contribute multidisciplinary, multi-heritage perspectives. They document the stories of historical African, Caribbean, and Asian students at the University of Edinburgh from the 18th century onwards, and have constructed several biographies of ‘notable’ alumni which were presented as part of a temporary exhibition (University of Edinburgh, 2019). Usage of the term ‘notable’ as part of the subject profiling highlights a critical tension within academic activism and can be counterproductive to claims of broadening inclusivity. The criteria for ‘notable achievements’ are not explicitly detailed on the *UncoverED* website at the time of writing, but the positioning of many featured alumni as racialised

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<sup>36</sup> As seen in the publications of curator-authors such as Hans Ulrich Obrist.

pioneers in their fields<sup>37</sup> could be perceived as simultaneously inspirational and examples of racial exceptionalism.

UncoverED is funded by Edinburgh Global, an enterprise formed to promote the University of Edinburgh's internationalist aims. This type of partnership ensures access to financial and administrative support, but leaves open the possibility of ideological conflicts arising due to differing priorities. While project participants might have altruistic intentions, business priorities could potentially influence research positions to frame stories of higher value to the establishment more favourably. This would allow the institution to present itself as working towards diversity and platforming the research findings made by students, without reshaping existing internal structures to support them. Absent systemic change, diversity initiatives will continue to remain project-focused and divorced from routine institutional practice (Glow, Kershaw and Reason, 2021, p. 13).

Impact can be made externally, and the UncoverED project has produced two public outputs—a website and a temporary physical exhibition (University of Edinburgh, 2019). As with *Making Histories Visible* (*Making Histories Visible*, 2018), project information is published via an online platform that is the primary form of dissemination. It is aimed at generalist audiences and ensures that information is shared in an accessible manner<sup>38</sup>.

### 3.6.2 Visual and Performance Art Curation

Cross-arts collaboration has been fertile ground for artistic innovation. The classical singer Julia Bullock was appointed MetLiveArts Artist in Residence at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met) for 2018-19. The music curator residency was developed to allow living artists to access

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<sup>37</sup> The earliest entry on the *UncoverED* timeline is Jamaican medical student William Fergusson, described as 'the first known black student of the University of Edinburgh' and 'the only ever black governor of Sierra Leone'. He is closely followed by Wong Fun (the first Chinese doctor to train in the West) and Elijah McCoy, who secured patents on more than 60 of his own inventions.

<sup>38</sup> Similar methods of creating and sharing accessible historical content from independent perspectives can be seen with the *Young Historians Project* (*Young Historians Project*, 2019). This group of Black researchers was formed in 2015 to address the shortage of Black African and Caribbean history teachers and students in Britain.

original works in museum collections as inspiration for devising performances or new artistic creations that, in turn, would develop new audiences. As an established performer known for innovative programming, Bullock's approach to the residency was as both a performer and a researcher-activist discovering and sharing lost African American narratives.

The series began in September 2018, drawing inspiration from the Met exhibition *History Refused to Die: Highlights from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation Gift*, a retrospective featuring African American artists from the American South (*History Refused to Die: Highlights from the Souls Grown Deep Foundation Gift*, 2018). In developing the series, Bullock's activism explored and amplified the stories of individual African Americans, presented via a combination of existing songs by historical and living African American composers and new works created specifically for the project, including arrangements of slave songs by contemporary African American composers ('Julia Bullock', 2018). *History Refused to Die* connects past and modern African-American narratives by creating additional interlinking material and contexts. Similarly, my research explores marginalised histories in British classical music, but solely through the recontextualization of existing repertoire and extra-musical influences.

Bullock adopts the performer-curator role, as explored in my practice, openly acknowledging the changing levels of responsibility and collaboration the format requires. In commenting on Hans Werner Henze's work *El Cimarrón* (which was included in the Met series, but in which she did not perform), she said 'it's easier to visualize things with my direct involvement. But I was so glad to let the bookend of this be in somebody else's hands' (Woolfe, 2019). Here, Bullock clarifies that while her activism is mainly delivered through performance, its message must be prioritised. Within a trusted team, the most effective method for this may be in a facilitatory role.

Visual art researcher and curator Denise Murrell centres her investigations around depictions of Black people in European artwork. She aims to encourage gallery visitors to view familiar art from non-Eurocentric perspectives by providing additional context. In understanding the real-life models historically ignored in Western art historiographies, questions are raised regarding how this information alters interactions with paintings.

Murrell is the curator of *Posing Modernity: The Black Model from Manet and Matisse to Today*, which exhibited at the Wallach Art Gallery in New York in 2018, before moving to the Musée D'Orsay, Paris in 2019. Her curatorial-activism is expressed through locating, identifying, and reframing the (in)visibility of Black—usually female—figures in classical European art.

Originating as a seminar paper before being expanded into a doctoral thesis, and subsequently, this exhibition (Sheets, 2018; Smith, 2018), *Posing Modernity* was a visual exploration of historical Black figures that have been continually ignored, despite their undeniable presence. This central theme of uncovering Black histories and challenging audiences is explored through a plainsightSOUND event discussed in Chapter 5.

Murrell sought to redress the balance by recentring the Black female figure, aiming to 'contextualize their presence, focusing on periods in which the black model remained woefully underexamined' (Smith, 2018). Addressing assumptions and altering perspectives raises questions about the original roles and subsequent dismissal of these figures, leading to wider reconsiderations of accepted interpretations of such work. Paintings interrogated as part of the exhibition included Claude Manet's *Olympia*, which was retitled *Laure*, recognising the real-life model portraying the Black maid in the image. Murrell herself notes that '[i]t is in the extensive body of response to Laure's Olympia pose by artists, more than by historians, that the full complexity and enduring influence of the figure's problematic nuance can be seen' (Murrell, 2014). In analysing the full impact of the work, we understand the broader historical context of artworks and their relevance today.

Theory is often separated from the practical and, outside of historically informed practice, there has traditionally been a divide between musicology and modern performance. Individuals identifying as performer-musicologists or musicologist-performers have succeeded in bridging this gap (Menuhin, 1972), but the rare investigations into Afro-British classical musicians continue to be undertaken by historians who are largely not practising musicians, and are likely to overlook or misinterpret detailed musical evidence<sup>39</sup>. Curators searching for nuanced perspectives of marginalised creators must develop additional processes to access and analyse this material. In Murrell's case, the historical context was established through research that located the Black maid portrayed by Laure in Manet's *Olympia*, before mapping the influence of Laure's representation on other more recent painters (Murrell, 2014). The questioning of gender and racial hierarchies in European modern art evident in *Olympia* was scandalous at the time. This intentional subverting of accepted social structures is less visible to the contemporary viewer, but would have been perceived as very bold by the French gallery visitors of Manet's time. Now an associate curator for 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>-century art at the Met, Murrell continues her work within a historic mainstream gallery. The challenge here becomes how to navigate the typical art space as curatorial-activist, and how this can facilitate the uncovering of additional marginalised stories within these boundaries.

Similarly, European classical music remains firmly entrenched in the reinforcement of 19<sup>th</sup>-century norms surrounding audience behaviour and performance (Goehr, 1992). Programming formats, internal hierarchies, and even event times contribute to the specific cultural

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<sup>39</sup> This can result in reproduced assumptions, such as works presumed to be lost that are then not investigated, only to result in the work becoming further obscured or genuinely missing. Prior to more recent scholarship on George Bridgetower (Hart, 2017), information about the violinist, his work, and his family remained limited. Several discoveries made during my research process would undoubtedly have been made years earlier, had sources been examined or performed by practicing musicians. An amateur flautist who had been undertaking genealogical research discovered musical scores by his younger brother Frederick Bridgetower at the National Library of Dublin and took copies for her own interest. When she later came upon a plainsightSOUND blog post I had written about the younger of the brothers, she sent the gathered material to me.

atmosphere. While I have listed several individuals operating as curator-activists, a growing number of curators are employed to promote arts and culture to audiences on a wider scale.

### 3.6.3 Festival Curation

During festivals, curators can be responsible for performances encompassing several events in a day or over developing several events over an extended period. Working with multiple contributors requires longer-term planning and additional contingency planning. The festival can be seen both as an expansion, in that a single viewpoint controls the overall narrative, and as a contraction, since events that might otherwise be spread across an entire season are condensed into a reduced timeframe. Content can focus on a single theme or draw inspiration from several places, including outside of the arts. In a 2009 interview, art historian Mary Ann Staniszewski said that radical museum practice requires a welcoming of ‘the full spectrum of the tradition of artistic practice and the full spectrum of current possibilities’ (Morland and Amundsen, 2009, p. 3). These ‘possibilities’ do not appear to be visible in the music festivals that remain conservative in style and content, functionally mirroring conventional outlooks, while claiming to be relevant and current. Again, this reflects the concerns raised by Glow et al. (Glow, Kershaw and Reason, 2021), that the publicly stated intentions of arts organisations are continually thwarted by the structures they function within. This narrows creative practice and restricts which arts become eligible for public consumption.

For many contemporary artists, the biennial is a crucial opportunity to present, view, and participate in new art at a single locale. As significant industry occasions, these events have become overtly commercial, and many organisers actively avoid exhibiting controversial material. Staniszewski argues that even a refusal to engage in political curation is, by definition, ‘a highly political and ideological act’ (Morland and Amundsen, 2009, p. 3). Across the arts, ideological stances are being read into presentations regardless of claims otherwise.

Music organisations and festivals are now expected to provide diverse programmes, with particular consideration of race and gender<sup>40</sup>.

Contemporary classical music festivals such as *New Music Dublin* and *New Music Biennial* offer alternative ways of presenting modern art music to the general public. In Ireland, New Music Dublin attracts international artists and ensembles; its smaller size allowing programmatic risk-taking that would not be possible with larger financial investment. Current Festival Director John Harris employs methods of programming that rely on 'stylistic inclusivity' (Cummings, 2018) and efforts are made to achieve gender parity in the commissioning of new works while maintaining an overarching 'responsibility towards building and nurturing the music scene within Ireland, not only in terms of composers and performers but also in terms of the audiences and the new participants' (*The Journal of Music*, 2019). Single themes adopted by festivals encourage in-depth exploration of ideas through many different outputs, producing a range of events where performers and participants can take on different roles. Performers can appear in multiple events, supporting a diversity of programming otherwise challenging to curate as part of a single presentation.

New Music Biennial (NMB) is a flagship festival run by the PRS Foundation, a UK funding body for the promotion and development of new music and talent (*New Music Biennial - PRS for Music Foundation*, 2019). As part of the initiative, NMB forms partnerships with ensembles who, in turn, receive support for commissioning new works that are premiered during the festival. In 2019, standard NMB performances were set at 60 minutes, comprising a premiere of a new commission, followed by a short discussion with the composer or producer, and a repeat performance to close. This format allowed audiences to connect with the compositional process more deeply than by reading a conventional concert programme. Tickets were free for

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<sup>40</sup> In addition to events curated and directed by those with altruistic intentions, large public bodies such as Arts Council England have publicly declared 'diversity targets' to encourage funded organisations to consider this when making applications for financial support.

audience members, removing any financial barriers to attendance, but only for those who were able to secure them online before they sold out. In addition to main concert hall performances, the festival included less formal pop-up performances and foyer installations. In recognition of criticism of London-centric arts funding in England<sup>41</sup>, the reach of NMB 2019 was widened, by repeating the entire festival the following weekend in Hull<sup>42</sup>.

The earliest festival examined as part of this investigation—and the only festival of this selection directly focused on creativity in the African diaspora—is *Africa '95*. This festival was a response to the exhibition *Africa: The Art of A Continent*, held at the Royal Academy of Arts where decisions were made 'to address the art of the whole continent but to leave out any works of the twentieth century that smack of Euro-American influence' (Ross and Geers, 1996, p. 1). Unease with this arrangement culminated in *Africa '95*, a series of events and exhibitions showcasing contemporary arts that took place in multiple venues across the UK over six months in 1995<sup>43</sup>. As a large-scale UK-based celebration inviting global participation, it faced criticism for its presentation of Africa, London-centricity of experiences, and the ulterior motives of various organisations involved as partners (Hylton, 2000). Despite these misgivings, others saw this as a remarkable legacy. Five years later, Richard Hylton noted that:

*By no means unproblematic in either its corporatising of Africa, or the curatorial agendas adopted by some of the major institutions involved, 'Africa '95' nevertheless crystallised the need for academics, curators, artists and the general British public to acknowledge a different kind of Africa; one that was built upon a complexity that was both historical and contemporary* (Hylton, 2000, p. 123).

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<sup>41</sup> The *Rebalancing Our Cultural Capital* report highlighted the disparities and bias shown in arts funding for London compared with the rest of England (Stark, Gordon and Powell, 2013). These disparities have been addressed by Arts Council England through policy changes and initiatives such as Creative People and Places, which focuses on areas of England that have least access to arts projects (Wheeler, 2019, p. 9).

<sup>42</sup> Hull had been awarded the title of City of Culture for 2017 as part of the European Capital of Culture Scheme. Events held during that year attracted over 5.3 million people (Wheeler, 2019, p. 3).

<sup>43</sup> The *Africa '95* archives are currently held at SOAS, University of London (formerly School of Oriental and African Studies).

Examination of the Africa '95 archives and its programming gives insight into how African artists, including European and African Art Music composers, have been represented by institutions claiming to bestow agency upon marginalised performers. Where '[m]uch of *africa95* was also about rethinking the traditional roles of curators and artists' (Ross and Geers, 1996, p. 11), I have further explored how these roles can be proactively incorporated into creative practice through the performer who is also a curatorial-activist.

Both Africa '95 and New Music Biennale utilised presentation methods that appealed to what they perceived to be broad and diverse audiences, attracting non-standard classical music audiences. While these would not be considered deliberate activist activities, performing arts spaces have more openly engaged with alternative performance methods and ideologies as these have become mainstream. London's Southbank Centre caters to an increasingly diverse audience through its arts and literature event programming. A central venue for Africa '95, it is now the London home of *WOW, Women of the World festival*<sup>44</sup>, which centres on amplifying discussions of gender-based barriers to equality in the performing arts.

This chapter has so far explored the origins of curation in the visual arts and museum practice, noting its adoption into performance settings. Some curators have avoided overtly political displays in their work, but it is increasingly expected that ideological beliefs are demonstrated through exhibitions and events. This creates challenges for independent curators working with established organisations, who must balance the expectations and structures of their working partners with their own ethics. Whether presenting newly commissioned pieces or existing material, curators must determine if the ethos and structures of their professional associates support their vision.

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<sup>44</sup> The festival was founded in 2011 and has grown to incorporate a number of different events taking place internationally.

### 3.6.4 Institutional Curation and Archiving

There are many similarities between archiving and curation. While curation involves an outwardly-focused interrogation into how audiences directly connect with materials, archival practice tends to be an overtly exclusionary and inward-focused process that centres on past production. Both, however, require navigating hierarchical structures and policies. Randall C. Jimerson explores narratives of power and responsibility within archival construction (Jimerson, 2007). Similarly, Lae'l Hughes-Watkins describes archival abilities to 'bring forward narratives that have been previously erased from history' (Hughes-Watkins, 2018, p. 4). Hughes-Watkins explains that archivists can choose to reverse reinforced inequalities in collections by embracing '[s]ocial justice through archival repair' (Hughes-Watkins, 2018, p. 5). This methodology is comparable to counter-storytelling—utilised by Caroline Stevenson as a way of exploring liminal spaces between expectations and understanding of knowledge produced by Black undergraduate students, the institutions they attend, and the students' relationships with their own cultural identities (Stevenson, 2015). In conjunction with previously discussed notions of 'undone' work and the lost potential from those discouraged from participating in certain cultural spaces (Richardson, 2018), incorporating counter-storytelling could go some way to examining how music education institutions continue to enable and reinforce Eurocentric, male-dominated hegemonies. This narrative imbalance is promoted through a music profession where orchestras, broadcasting and concert seasons present programmes that are 98% male and 99% white (Griffiths, 2020)<sup>45</sup>. As sites of hermeneutical injustice (Anderson, 2012) lacking resources required to comprehend issues affecting marginalised students and staff thoroughly, curatorial-activism, archival repair, and counter-storytelling can be effective methods towards building epistemic justice in music education.

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<sup>45</sup> These statistics align with the demographics of composers reportedly presented in school and music examination syllabuses until recently (Busby, 2019; Batty, 2020). Although it is outside the scope of this study, it would be interesting to view what impact the syllabus changes make.

With epistemic justice at its core, focusing on the inclusion of hidden 'liminal identities' in the curriculum is central to my research, as presented through the plainsightSOUND website. This method of contextualising Black musicians through evidenced historical display forces visitors to the site to address personal cognitive biases, which may prevent them from recognising the musicians' credibility or competence in other circumstances (Anderson, 2012, p. 167) . Use of portraits and short biographies positions them alongside other familiar figures or world events. Similarly to that conveyed through museum exhibitions, I am revealing how the archive can 'reflect full diversity and complexity' (Jimerson, 2007, p. 266) by uncovering hidden histories.

This view of responsible archiving was first stated in the work of Howard Zinn who wrote:

*[T]he collection of records, papers, and memoirs, as well as oral history is biased towards the important and powerful people of the society, tending to ignore the impotent and obscure: we learn most about the rich, not the poor; the successful, not the failures; the old, not the young; the politically active not the politically alienated; men not women; white not black; free people rather than prisoners; civilians rather than soldiers; officers rather than enlisted men. (Zinn, 1977, p. 21)*

My argument here is that both archivists and curators are responsible for the emergent narratives of materials in their care and the ways in which this occurs. While some curators openly accept the political elements core to the role, the archivist seeks objectivity despite their judgments, as part of an archiving process that demands hierarchical establishment and reinforcement. In welcoming their power within these structures, archivists and curators can choose to redress imbalances through careful and active reconsideration.

### 3.7 The Role of the Curatorial-Activist

This project combines the multiple roles of curator-archivist-activist-advocate with that of the performer in the context of PaR. The curator/carer explores the rediscovery of existing material that is generally hidden, invisible, lost, forgotten, and unknown within both private

and publicly accessible archives. Gschrey's description of curators as 'moderators in the emergence of insights and perspectives and facilitators in the establishing of individual positions and attitudes' (Gschrey, 2016, p. 3) speaks to Socratic methods of encouraging exploration of personal perceptions by audiences, rather than imposing idealised models. Regardless, the act of curation is itself inherently political. Where specific experiences may draw visual or auditory focus, the curator also seeks to effect change (knowingly or unknowingly) 'within the processes of delivery rather than [solely] the products being delivered' (Sharpe, 2005). Effective transformation requires making iterative aesthetic and methodological decisions throughout the performance preparation process.

Often perceived as conflicting roles, the curator is sometimes viewed as an administrative manager at odds with the artist's creativity. It was not until the 1960s that the curator began to move from a purely practical caretaker to a more administrative, organisational, and creative decision-making role. Exhibitions began to intersect the 'curatorial framework with artistic intentions in experimenting with the exhibition space, including also new artistic productions created especially for these exhibitions' (Oprea, 2016, p. 40). Unlike the prior separation of responsibilities that focused on collecting and showing existing artwork, the development of this perspective encouraged collaboration between artists and curators, generating new site-specific and exhibition-specific works. Curators took on pedagogical roles as part of this, mediating between the artist and audience by highlighting important themes, histories or individual practitioners of note. In her designation of curation as a 'site of collective knowledge' (Oprea, 2016, p. 145), Corina Oprea argues that although the curator or activist may not contribute artwork to an exhibition, combining the facilitative and pedagogical functions is essential to their value-perception within the art community as a practising artist. Politically, a curator's personal bias becomes explicit when the potential for activism is acknowledged, harnessed, and utilised. It is not just the work itself that must be interrogated

by the curator, performer, and the public—as receivers or participants—but also the work or presentation space (Osten, 2007). With the support of a large-scale institution at the Met, the singer Julia Bullock is an example of a classical musician who has overtly incorporated forms of activism into her roles as curator and performer in a way that United States classical music audiences have accepted. Denise Murrell has undertaken a broader curatorial role, also at the Met. However, similar to concerns about organisational motives for supporting Africa '95, Diego's assertion that activism cannot occur from within an institution raises additional questions around the effectiveness of representation in these spaces. Reilly's detailed field-specific accounts of curatorial-activism indicate otherwise, as evidenced in her study of curators who push discursive boundaries within established art galleries (Reilly, 2018). The non-permanence of fixed-term roles such as Bullock's allows a quasi-independence from the institution similar to the autonomy of freelance positions, allowing the distance required to form productive activist spaces.

From the examples given, it can be observed that the role of the classical music curatorial-activist is still in flux. Variations in ideology, geographical location, genre, and adherence to specific cultural traditions remain malleable in approach. Artistic methodologies can be transferred across fields by analysing the successes and failures apparent in the contemporary art world and in music performance. In a research study such as this, existing structures can undermine ventures aimed at uncovering marginalised histories. These explorations have necessitated developing modes of practice and enhanced PaR methodologies that connect the presentation of the material with archival research at an early stage. This supports a considered awareness of marginalising narratives embedded in the exhibition of creative work. Curation is political, and choices are continually made that rely on bias for their construction. Maintaining an honest and focused awareness of this can help avoid unintentional reinforcements of mythologised historiographies that replicate the harm being repaired. The

following chapter will discuss how active curation can create space for marginalised voices through counter-storytelling.

## 4 PRACTICE-AS-RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

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This chapter critiques a selection of common arts-based Practice-as-Research (PAR) methodologies, exploring possibilities for development in conjunction with epistemic and archival justice theories. I argue here that PaR methodologies, notably as constructed by Robin Nelson (Nelson, 2013), are insufficient for researching hidden or suppressed material, such as those external to Western arts canons. This line of inquiry is relevant to three of my research questions that investigate the effects of traditionally accepted modes of presenting Western art music. Question a) challenges the dominant supremacist narratives promoted through Western hegemonic musical traditions, while b) examines the ways in which epistemic inequalities affect cultural understandings of what constitutes British classical music. I also begin to explore how PaR methodologies might relate to question d), in identifying how the role of performer-curator-activist can enact change within Western classical music.

The first section of this chapter critiques Nelson's three modes of knowledge, exploring the ways in which they each, contrary to the intended methodological aims, restrict knowledge production. The following section further probes concepts of embodied knowledge as assumed within practice and the resulting challenges. The final section explores interdisciplinarity as a necessary feature of inclusive PaR frameworks. The overarching aim of this chapter is to identify gaps in standard PaR concepts and suggest how these might be used to devise PaR methodologies suitable for practically researching underrepresented subjects.

### 4.1 Critical Practice as Research

A growing body of academic research has emerged in recent decades with the intent of positioning the arts as legitimate and rigorous sources of knowledge production comparable to the sciences. This perception that 'the natural sciences are the arbiters of knowledge claims

and that claims from other disciplines are justified only to the extent that they strive to make themselves 'scientific' (Forrest, 2007, p. 7) veers towards scientism<sup>46</sup>. Even science-based arguments *for* the arts often ignore that arts-based knowledge maintains a separation from the sciences through *additional* constructions of 'ways of being' or 'feeling'. Nelson relies on three modes of knowledge, described as 'know-how', 'know-that' and 'know-what', stating 'reflection on the kinds of knowledge practitioners bring to their workspaces is a useful starting-point to establish what knowledges are in play' (Nelson, 2013, p. 40). He places particular importance on 'know-how' and 'know-that' as the key sites of knowledge exchange (Nelson, 2013, pp. 41–47). Throughout this investigation of arts research, I use various interdisciplinary concepts of 'knowing' as connecting threads.

Nelson's viewpoint assumes that PaR projects are, by default, situated within a predefined knowledge or are easily defined within existing academic structures. His process begins with reading or 'gathering' resources as a means of acquiring knowledge before subsequently embodying it through practice. Nelson fails to recognise two essential points. Firstly, the privilege inherent in PaR projects emerging from existing bodies of knowledge assumes that the required evidence is visible and available to the practitioner-researcher. On this basis, arts research exploring under-researched subjects requires additional and unrecognised effort before new knowledge is produced through the act of 'doing'. As an example, knowledge-gathering often takes place in archives or other institutional spaces that have historically excluded and erased non-dominant voices (Zinn, 1977; Punzalan and Caswell, 2016). Since the 1990s, there have been steps to repair and balance archives through engagement with social justice. Larger libraries now offer schemes to fund practitioners engaging in non-traditional

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<sup>46</sup> Predominantly used pejoratively, Susan Haack describes scientism as 'a kind of over-enthusiastic and uncritical deferential attitude towards science, an inability to see or an unwillingness to acknowledge its fallibility, its limitations, and its potential dangers' (Haack, 2012, p. 76).

research,<sup>47</sup> but competition is high, and many physical music archives remain less accessible<sup>48</sup>.

As a result, the comparatively greater effort required when researching topics absent from mainstream repositories means that practitioner-researchers are less likely to undertake such work.

The second limitation of Nelson's framework relates to forms of knowledge or 'know-that'. Academic institutions have systematically suppressed non-dominant epistemologies, leading to their complete erasure from disciplinary discourses and discouragement of pursuing materials outside of established bodies of work. Just as politics informs art and curation (as discussed in Chapter 3), political and social ideologies have significantly influenced the forms of knowledge permitted within academic and artistic communities. The institutional self-reflexivity necessary for inclusive creative scholarship and performance is not yet fully embedded into British classical music despite incentivisation from the general public and arts funding bodies. There is still some industry resistance to the diversification of practice and repertoire by those who see it as an intrusion into the traditions of the genre, claiming that such moves are 'making artistic values subservient to political considerations' (Vlaardingerbroek, 2019). These complaints ignore the deep-rooted ideologies that keep exclusionary canonical representation at the centre of repertoire lists and are comparable to objections to the integration of social justice methods as standard procedures in archival practice. Of archival studies, Mario H. Ramirez writes that this resistance is 'emblematic of an inability to think critically about race, whiteness, and sociocultural positionality that is supported by the escalating homogeneity of the profession' (Ramirez, 2015, p. 339). With British music education syllabuses and teaching staff still embedded in Eurocentric hegemonic

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<sup>47</sup> I should state here that I was a recipient of an Edison Fellowship at the British Library in 2018-19 to research recordings of Black classical musicians and composers.

<sup>48</sup> Though many classical musicians would not consider themselves to be archivists in the traditional sense, repositories such as the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP) have shown how valuable open-source digital archives can be for performers and researchers, while reinforcing the inequalities in the tradition (Brady, 2019, p. 923).

epistemologies, privileging of whiteness remains the starting point from which new work is expected to be produced. Nelson's citing of 'know-what' as equivalent to academic knowledge (Nelson, 2013, p. 45) reinforces the barriers to academia and the classical music profession faced by marginalised historical and contemporary participants. These restrictions are addressed in pedagogical areas of my practice with reference to theories of epistemic justice, as previously discussed in Chapter 3.

It is certainly not my intention here to conflate Nelson's theory of PaR with the interface of practice with 'hard' conceptual, propositional or scientific knowledge. In fact, Nelson makes an effort to simultaneously stress how the tacit forms of 'know-how' that are fundamentally embedded in artistic practices also form an ongoing dialogue with 'soft' modes of knowledge production, as a means through which they can also be interpreted. He therefore proposes a modality of 'liquid knowing' at work in artistic research, situated 'in the movement between the tacit know-how and the explicit know-what and in the resonances marked between know-what and know-that' (Nelson, 2013, p. 60). As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Nelson's version of PaR does contain two major flaws when considered alongside projects such as my own. The first is that regardless of the mode of knowledge-production selected as the basis for a PaR project, there is an inherent assumption of the prior existence of this knowledge within Western academic contexts and institutions. This neglect ignores several areas of additional labour that are then required to overcome this, such as a critiquing of the politics of Western knowledge-construction itself, and (often minimally supported) navigating of the circumstances of epistemological privileging and partitioning within the academy and cultural institutions. These sites are politically and ideologically fundamental in the erasure of important artistic practices emerging from marginalised communities, necessitating a focus on epistemic justice and repair and have previously been discussed in Chapters 3.4 and 3.6.4. The second flaw relates to the first in that the model of 'curator activist' constructed here aims not only to correct certain historical and cultural epistemic injustices, but also to develop a certain

type of subjectivity in artistic research. This form of subjectivity – motivated by both political and aesthetic concerns – seeks not only to construct a variety of new knowledges, but also to action change in circumstances and institutions beyond the strictures of the Western Academy. For this reason, the task of the curator-activist emerges from the political situation described in the famous aphorism of Karl Marx, which we could paraphrase as ‘seeking not just to interpret the (art)world, but to actively change it’<sup>49</sup>. This knowledge is produced through what Frantz Fanon has described as:

*passionate research... kept up or at least directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others.*

(Fanon, 2001, p. 163)

In relation to Fanon's observations, Stuart Hall has also noted the power of creativity-based methodologies in drawing together the fragmented histories of the African diaspora (Hall, 1997, p. 224).

## 4.2 Embodied Knowledge in Practice

My research focuses on curating performances by professional Western art musicians who rely on developing their 'embodied knowledge' in pursuit of their discipline or musical 'know-how'. At advanced levels, gaps in knowledge become apparent when required to explore musical influences outside of their experience, such as in West African Art Music<sup>50</sup>. Despite its development stemming from European classical music forms, experienced Western classical musicians can find the integration of African concepts challenging without additional support. This difficulty highlights Nelson's assertions of the importance of maintaining flexibility within

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<sup>49</sup> In his 11<sup>th</sup> note written as part of the collection subsequently titled *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx writes: ‘The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, is to change it’.

<sup>50</sup> A hybrid of West African traditional music and European art music (Omojola, 1995).

the research process and the importance of praxis—doing the 'knowing'—for understanding the 'know-how'. Yet, these ideas still require placement within an appropriately defined framework. While I agree that research flexibility is vital within praxis, there is friction caused by Nelson's assertion of starting from a place of assumed knowledge. Suitable frameworks cannot be identified until sufficient knowledge is uncovered and used to craft the necessary research process. Recognition of this alongside a self-reflexive critical study of practical and standpoint epistemologies is essential in the conceptualisation of PaR within my practice. As noted in earlier chapters, comparatively little scholarly research has been undertaken into historical Afro-British musicians<sup>51</sup>. Uncovering hidden figures in the arts through practice-based projects connects to an awareness of the 'social impact' of findings obtained from PaR projects (Nelson, 2013, p. 41). My investigations occur through music curation, performance, and pedagogy using collaborative processes stemming from recovered histories and musical artefacts.

PaR methodologies as explored by Nelson are a useful starting point for my research, but this approach is weakened through repeated attempts at legitimising arts research by mapping projects directly against scientific-based criteria constructed for qualitative research. The bricolage-based *a/r/tography* (Springgay, Irwin and Kind, 2005) is an interdisciplinary exploration of practice-research methodological frameworks prior to Nelson. It resists this temptation of scientism by approaching research as 'living inquiry' through six renderings. *A/r/tography* positions the arts as an iterative model of scholarly inquiry offering researchers opportunities to develop unique methodologies emerging directly from the practice itself. This approach emphasises that arts-based studies can empower and change the manner through which the research itself is conducted and understood (Springgay, Irwin and Kind, 2005, p.

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<sup>51</sup> Since the 20<sup>th</sup>-century investigations of African-American musicologists Eileen Southern (1920-2002) and Dominique-René de Lerma (1928-2015) into Black classical musicians in Europe and the USA, a growing number of researchers from African diasporic backgrounds have actively worked to promote mainly African American classical music scholarship within academia.

897). Similarly, Estelle Barrett argues that 'knowledge is derived from doing and the senses' (Barrett, 2007b, p. 1), drawing on the earlier research of Eisner and Heisenberg to conclude that rigorous arts research does not need to be science-based and is necessarily interdisciplinary. Like Springgay et al., Barrett prioritises the importance of arts-based research in research innovation (Barrett, 2007a). Both texts focus on the significance of creativity and interdisciplinarity as independent modes of knowledge rather than through a forced dependence on science.

Interdisciplinarity is crucial to this discussion of arts-based research, particularly in the initial stages of knowledge gathering, where exploration beyond academic field boundaries can be more fluid. This can connect to Nelson's notion of the 'interrelationship of different kinds of evidence' (Nelson, 2013, p. 38), although I would suggest that practical interdisciplinarity is more closely aligned to the 'living inquiry' of Springgay et al., where the a/r/t/ography framework creates liminality, within which arts-based researchers make their explorations. This qualification is useful for alternative modes of practice presented as oppositional to the Eurocentricities of academic arts and social science research. The reception of this research is also impacted by use of language, such as discussions around 'cultural capital' that reinforce the coding that 'traditional' is synonymous with 'white' (Meghji, 2019).

This chapter has so far critiqued the principal methodologies that have influenced my research and the ways in which commonly cited PaR works relate to my practice. In the final section, I will briefly explore absence within academic knowledge production and its significance to my research.

#### 4.3 Locating Knowledge in Arts Research and Activism

Existing forms of PaR contribute to 'absence' within knowledge production by reinforcing the structural barriers that cause particular areas of invisibility within a field. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Nelson's PaR proves inadequate in two ways. Firstly, there is no

acknowledgement that PaR studies might be produced in areas that are not easily accessible within the academy. The second issue stems from Nelson's failure to recognise that PaR projects focusing on marginalised or excluded subjects will require additional or alternative methodologies. His process supports marginalised research only where additional steps are constructed prior to the proposed starting-point of 'existing knowledge'. In the case of my study, field-based theoretical and contextual knowledge must be developed before the practice-research begins. Therefore, while Nelson asserts that the flattening of hierarchical knowledge is central to his PaR methodology (Nelson, 2013, pp. 53–56), this contradicts the realities of working with performance and under-researched music. It is clear that for PaR to be an inclusive and fully functional methodology, institutional and cultural epistemic equality cannot yet be assumed. The origin, purpose and value of what is considered academic knowledge must be recognised and addressed.

As noted in Chapter 2, compartmentalisation of music genres and the split between musicology and ethnomusicology have fortified structural barriers. Decolonisation in the sciences allows these barriers to be examined, while acknowledging academic impediments to developing marginalised perspectives. Adopting the concept of 'undone science' (Richardson, 2018), we can use 'undone work' to describe knowledge curbed by the systemic barriers embedded within institutions. Nelson's model articulates a foundation in done-knowledge (knowledge that exists), but unformulated, unacknowledged, or even uninitiated ideas can never be applied. Given that European classical music was used to replace and suppress indigenous cultural practices through colonialism, the likelihood remains that much of the work exploring classical musicians of Black African descent will remain 'undone', despite the continued labour of many to rectify this. Fundamentally, where individuals are prevented from participating, this becomes a missed opportunity for wider society.

Similar to other academic fields, philosophy today is 'grounded on and advances a particular arrangement of power/knowledge' (Maldonado-Torres *et al.*, 2018, p. 65). Unlike the arts, efforts to decolonise philosophy have centred on acknowledging the problematic structures that prevent diversity and inclusion initiatives from having their desired impact. Rather than attempting to work within strategies constructed to maintain the status quo, frameworks must be dismantled, and alternatives rebuilt. Incorporating arts-activist strategies with epistemic and archival justice theories creates room to develop PaR methodology suitable for curatorial-activism.

In conclusion, PaR and a/r/tography, while both essential elements of arts research, need considerable expansion to allow space for the diversity of arts-based research projects. In the preliminary stages, these methodologies require analysis of the political structures within which the art is situated, and clear definitions of the intended political, epistemological and cultural outcomes on which the resultant curatorial-activism relies. As such, in addition to creative explorations, this form of PaR also exists as an interrogation of the motivations and queries leading to any resulting artistic interventions. This chapter has outlined the need for scrutiny and construction of appropriate foundations before arts-centred research begins. In their quest for legitimacy, science-based arts research methodologies can devalue the arts, rather than developing as appropriate frameworks from within which material can be located, made visible, and restored, as part of a progressive and flexible process. In the context of music curation, this restoration is a key component through which practice is designed, defined, and distributed. In the following and final chapter, I outline presentation methods and frameworks I have engaged with to overcome some of the limitations of standard PaR models.

## 5 AN ARRAY OF AUDIENCES: CURATORIAL-ACTIVISM IN PRACTICE

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This research is a celebration of Afro-British musicians who have been systematically erased from classical music history. Its focus is on three key elements—historical contextualisation, curatorial-activism, and the implications of new knowledge emerging from these two positions. The historical investigations formed part of an examining of cultural erasure in European art music pedagogy and performance. Alongside this, redefining Practice as Research (PaR) and a subsequent defining of curatorial-activism was integral to repositioning common arts practice research. From this point, identifying methodologies appropriate for unearthing and reproducing creative works from marginalised musicians in this context was the focus. This inevitably led to a probing of the impact of this on contemporary performance practice, which I will further consider here. The practical presentation of my research comprises two elements: public engagement and recognition of underrepresented Afro-British musicians. This chapter outlines these displays—an online portal and a virtual music event highlighting the creative diversity of this repertoire amid efforts to define and reclaim this postcolonial cultural heritage.

As sites of performance, venues and locations are important considerations in any artistic presentation. Small discusses how spatial presentation of music influences performance and audience reception of musical events (Small, 1998). An audience can receive an identical concert programme differently in distinct venues because of countless variables including acoustics, lighting, staging, and audience seating. Personal perspectives, experiences, and expectations combine with surroundings to influence a person's impression of an event. While purpose-built concert venues might augment performance of particular music styles, other settings have an existing significance that must be acknowledged. At this current moment, pandemic changes mean that audiences have become used to observing and interacting

virtually and globally with musicians working from their living spaces, private studios or on socially distanced concert platforms. This transformation of ‘concert-going’ means that musicians in their own homes have become connected as performer and witness, viewer or participant. Though public spaces are reopening in the UK at this point in 2021, the immediate future remains uncertain, and it is likely that these digital navigations that have become commonplace since 2020 (Frank, 2020) will continue to develop. Online engagement has always been an intention of this research project, and I have created additional elements to account for these changes. I established the plainsightSOUND website (Ngwe, 2020) from the outset as a digital first method of dissemination (Baskerville, Myers and Yoo, 2020), and the event concept moved through several permutations before reaching its final configuration. The details of these developments form the basis of this chapter.

### 5.1 Digital Resources and the plainsightSOUND Project

I argued previously in Chapter 4 that when engaging with PaR methodologies, knowledge identification and gathering must occur before attempting new knowledge creation. In this study, the initial knowledge-gathering phase took the form of exploration and biographical reconstruction of African and African-descended musicians and their creative outputs. This was achieved through interviews and analysis of primary and secondary sources, including archival creation and recovery, to facilitate the construction of the narrative underpinning my research. From the early stages of this gathering process, the importance of identification and sharing of sources was clear as a useful starting point for other researchers within and outside of academia. Having established the need to make recovered sheet music easily accessible as part of increasing the diversity of classical music repertoire, I developed the plainsightSOUND project. This aims to be both an activist intervention into the lack of access to this knowledge, and a public platform for dissemination of my research.

Situated as a digital first<sup>52</sup> project focused on ‘creating and shaping’ knowledge (Baskerville, Myers and Yoo, 2020, p. 511), the plainsightSOUND website is a resource for musicians, educators, historians, and those with a general interest in related topics. It facilitates knowledge exchange by sharing documentation and evidence I have gathered to date. The most significant included elements are the timeline—a chronological display of African-descended performers and composers connected to the UK prior to 1970—and works database. The plainsightSOUND database is aimed at professional and amateur musicians and lists compositions, publications, and recordings by musicians of African descent with connections to the UK during this period. A common issue found within classical music sites containing information on musicians racialised as Black is that there is a reliance on US-centric information, which is then insufficiently used to support work produced by the UK music industry and academia. This is likely to reinforce inaccurate cultural assumptions where many influential African, Caribbean, and Afro-British musicians are excluded from US-focused Black classical music resources, and therefore from the knowledge pools of the UK classical industry and its programmers. Before I discuss solutions to this issue, I will first ascertain methods used by individual platforms to function alongside or against these structures.

### 5.1.1 The Internet as a Canonical Gatekeeper

Growing numbers of internet resources are being developed to broaden access to classical music scores and expand the general understanding of what it means to be a classical musician. Digital archives such as the Canada-based *International Music Score Library Project* (IMSLP) (*IMSLP: Petrucci Music Library*, 2021) and smaller open-source projects such as *Musopen* (*MusOpen*, 2021) make sheet music freely or affordably available to musicians. Through these platforms, users can download public domain scores, including thousands by well-known composers (Brady, 2019). The models for these platforms rely heavily on volunteer

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<sup>52</sup> The term ‘digital first’ refers to items or systems designed and created using computers in the first instance, with any physical renderings based on digital versions, if required (Baskerville, Myers and Yoo, 2020, p. 511).

labour, using their personal value judgements to decide what they should make available to site visitors, including deletion of 'noncanonic' or 'unusual' arrangements (Brady, 2019, p. 931). Though a broad range of repertoire has been uploaded, Brady notes that 'most visitors to IMSLP do not seek lesser-known and obscure repertoire' (Brady, 2019, p. 927), and 'noncanonic' repertoire is not promoted by these repositories. These are policies that are visible in practice across other, similar platforms, resulting in a range of digital archives that uphold European hegemonic standards through their popularity.

Projects that directly address underrepresentation, such as *Inclusive Early Music* (*Inclusive Early Music*, 2021) and *DONNE, Women in Music* (*Donne, Women in Music*, 2021) focus less on providing scores to musicians, and instead direct users to lists of repertoire or reference material that can be acquired. Similarly, *The Institute for Composer Diversity* (ICD) (*Institute for Composer Diversity*, 2021) was developed as an initiative to support diverse programming in classical music. Launched in 2020, ICD allows users to search for composers using 'identity markers' (*Demanding Accountability: Systemic Issues in the Institute for Composer Diversity*, 2020). Shortly after its founding, severe concerns were raised surrounding the intentions behind its creation and methods used to identify living composers without consultation<sup>53</sup>. Despite changes to its organisational structure and policies prior to its relaunch several months later, issues remain with the implementation of the ICD databases. These are apparent in several ways, including the limited search filter options that restrict African-diasporic descriptors to 'African' and 'Black', and location criteria allowing only US states as options. Search categories also reinforce the exclusion of non-standard instrumental groupings that composers working across multiple genres and cultures are likely to utilise.

*African Composers Database* (ACD) (Oriwoh, 2021) was created by Nigerian composer

Edewede Oriwoh and differs from ICD in that it was created specifically to raise the profile of

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<sup>53</sup> In its early stages, this project received backlash from musicians pointing out several actions that reinforced the marginalisation of communities it claimed to help, while centring the profile of its white, male founder.

African composers from an African perspective. This contrasts with the Western-centric focus of other sites discussed thus far and, while it does not list individual works, the website promotes African composers working in and across any genres. Like many platforms developed by African and African-diasporic creators, ACD does not have institutional support, and despite its potential as a useful tool, the project cannot rely on paid staff, global teams of volunteers or the university subsidies available to IMSLP, Musopen, and ICD respectively. The lack of significant financial support for Black-led initiatives is a key factor in reduced dissemination of knowledge and displays of social and cultural capital. As online resources, many classical music sites are easily accessible for free or at a low-cost, which aids in their effectiveness as sites of knowledge-distribution. This benefit was a key consideration in my construction of plainsightSOUND as digital first from the outset and allowed for its utilisation by a range of users from a variety of backgrounds and locations.

Platforms professing to address cultural imbalances can easily be created on the internet, but this does not inherently make space for the diverse voices that need to be heard. The challenging nature of an increasing reliance on the internet to recover and disseminate knowledge has been extensively discussed (Noble, 2012, 2018; Phipps and Lanclos, 2017). Biased data collection and analysis, combined with biased algorithms, result in definitions that become standardised without consideration of groups and communities with less societal influence. As explored in Chapter 2, the continued replication of Eurocentric hegemonic structures in knowledge production reinforces assumptions that voices that have been 'othered' do not experience—or are incapable of experiencing—certain spaces. Classical music resources are reliant on these structures, treating Western cultural norms as universal models, which are then quickly disseminated and replicated through online resources. When a platform is positioned from the outset as an alternative to Western models, it becomes possible to create resources that are useful to a wider range of users. From this vantage point,

it becomes easier to interrogate and avoid some of the most problematic issues while attracting and responding to feedback.

Distortion of search results is increasingly understood and, in some ways, becoming more accepted by the public. The plainsightSOUND website emerged as a response to internet search results that are 'deeply contextual, and easily manipulated' (Noble, 2018, p. 45). When using the internet to research any subject, the results shown are determined by the data provided, replicating any biases inherent in the collection of the original dataset. Relying on automated systems reinforces knowledge inequity and assumption (Birhane, 2021). For example, a Google search for 'composers' results in a list of dead white European men, while 'African composers' listings focus on African-American composers. As Safiya Umoja Noble has written, the processes of filtering online information openly display biases that reflect 'US-based social norms' (Noble, 2018, p. 57), tendencies that are apparent even when carrying out internet searches from within the UK. At the same time, online search and digitisation have reframed public perceptions of what can and should be in the public domain. Reliance by amateur and professional musicians on digitised sheet music sources has grown rapidly and '[t]he abrupt closure of libraries in March 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted the need for increased digital access to sheet music' (Deck, 2020).

In describing the most common model used to disseminate information, Noble has referred to tech companies as reliant on 'labortainment', where users consent to giving away their labour and data either directly to the company or to society through creative commons (Noble, 2018, p. 56). This is seen in Western art music repositories such as IMSLP and leaves user-volunteers to determine what is reproduced in these spaces. The platforms reflect the ideologies of these volunteers, which directly impact the results. At the time of writing, *Wikipedia's* list of composers of African descent consists largely of African-American composers ('List of composers of African descent', 2021), failing to include several successful published African

composers such as Samuel Akpabot, Laz Ekwueme, and Joshua Uzoigwe. This excludes composers who do not have significant connections to US institutions and is a clear a symptom of Western-centric knowledge production in music publishing. Just as with IMSLP, Wikipedia relies on a team of volunteers, with the resulting knowledge emerging from the beliefs and experiences of chosen knowledge producers. It is from this standpoint that I have devised alternatives to the current online presence as ways of giving voice to some of these missing historical and cultural narratives.

### 5.1.2 Developing plainsightSOUND

As the sole developer and researcher of the project, I created plainsightSOUND using WordPress, a cost-effective method through which I can quickly and easily update the website. Without institutional financial backing or a team of volunteers to assist, access to affordable plugins and tools gives the required flexibility and functionality. The plainsightSOUND timeline (portfolio item 3) was produced early in the project to help visitors conceptualise the featured musicians. Although some of these have been referenced in entertainment media and print publications, they remain an abstract, semi-mythological group of characters whose work is seldom heard. Making these musicians visible in the same way as more commonly performed figures such as J S Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven is the first step in this process of recovery and rediscovery. Contemporary performers can creatively engage with them by performing the works listed in the database (portfolio item 2), many of which have been forgotten. I examine this type of cross-temporal interaction further through my demonstration of creative practice. I have developed this as an online event using the plainsightSOUND online resource and discuss this later in this chapter.

Despite its lack of financial backing, the plainsightSOUND website has attracted a range of online visitors including amateur and professional musicians, educators, publishers, and arts

administrators in the UK and further afield<sup>54</sup>. Followers of the project can interact with it through dedicated Facebook and Twitter accounts or contact me by email via the website. Responses have been positive although one administrator who tested the database articulated their preference that the search function be altered to mirror the *Daniels' Orchestral Music Online* database more closely<sup>55</sup>. Subsequent feedback received from others reflected an opposing preference, as many found search functionalities in existing resources such as Daniels' to be exclusionary not only to composers or performers (as noted with the ICMP, Musopen and ICD websites), but also to ensembles requiring more flexibility in their instrumentation. This is particularly the case with mixed-instrumental chamber groups and contemporary chamber orchestras that do not have a fixed instrumental set-up.

To support adaptability, the plainsightSOUND database assists users seeking repertoire by providing a simple layout that lists the full instrumentation wherever possible, rather than grouping by instrumental format. Users can then quickly determine whether a piece is suitable for their needs or if additional or non-standard instruments are required. Recognising all elements of this process from source material to end-user is key to understanding my role as performer-curator-activist and directly links to both of my practice-based questions. By identifying a problem—in this case, access to knowledge—I have been able to create a tool that addresses it. Through the creation of resources such as plainsightSOUND, I hope to see an increase in industry, institutional and individual support for work produced by and for African diasporic musicians working across genres in multiple areas. These include live performance, recording, sheet music publication and the creation of more representative syllabuses across

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<sup>54</sup> The plainsightsound.com website uses the Jetpack software plugin tool to analyse visitors to the site and has revealed a number of insights. For example, during the global Black Lives Matter protests, June-August 2020 saw an average of 648 visitors per month, which was a significant increase from just 117 in May 2020. Additionally, website stats show that while most views originated in the United Kingdom, over the lifetime of the project the website has been accessed from 82 countries. These include the USA, Nigeria, Germany, Australia, Ireland, Canada, France, China, Netherlands, Austria, India, South Africa, Belgium, Indonesia, Norway, and Finland.

<sup>55</sup> Daniels' Orchestral Music Online is the online version of a classical repertoire resource first produced in print in 1972 and can be found at <https://daniels-orchestral.com/> (*Daniels' Orchestral Music Online*, 2021).

the range of institutional music education settings. Public interest in this repertoire is already evident through events such as Africa '95 and more recently at Wigmore Hall (Church, 2022), but sustained reinforcement is required to enact systemic and cultural change in ways that everyday practitioners can access. This database provides simple ways for its users to begin challenging and breaking down epistemological and hegemonic barriers in their own networks through teaching and performing alternative repertoire. While this online element focuses on provision of largely printed material in an accessible format, I will next demonstrate how I use this approach to frame an online music event through curatorial-activism.

## 5.2 Developing an Online Event

The *plainsightSOUND Celebration* is a musical presentation of the investigatory process that recognises how creativity by Afro-British musicians has largely been ignored by British classical music narratives. Via performance, these stories are explored through the lens of performing 'counter narratives' (Bhabha, 1994; Hingorani, 2018). As an online presentation, it contrasts with the website in that it was not a digital-first concept. Concerns surrounding the safety of live performance during the coronavirus pandemic required a major reworking of the intended live installation. Though audience explorations are now mediated through digital platforms, this major logistical change is not a disadvantage. Such modifications highlight the importance of iterative changes in curatorial-activism and the ability to create such responses ensures a continued and purposeful movement towards the intended outcomes as discussed in Chapter 3.7. Developing projects that make allowances for radical flexibility keeps the conceptual focus on the intended goal, rather than structural or process-driven confinements. Elements of this intention emerge from an understanding of the role of music performance in cultural memory.

### 5.2.1 Realising Memory Through Performance

The plainsightSOUND project centres on cultural recovery and preservation; if music is to be protected as a cultural element, it must be remembered. According to the concept of

forgetting as investigated by Paul Connerton, prescriptive forgetting and structural amnesia are essential when it comes to the canon formation that Western art music has come to rely on (Connerton, 2008). Even where explorations of migrants in 20<sup>th</sup>-century British classical music are examined in detail (Scheding, 2019), the possibilities of cultural contributions from African and Caribbean migrants present within the same geographic and temporal spaces do not seem to be seriously considered<sup>56</sup>. Existing frameworks continue to fail to acknowledge these gaps, and studies of Blackness and the African diaspora frequently require the creation of new methodologies as I have shown in my interrogations of PaR in Chapter 4. In *Dear Science and Other Stories*, Katherine McKittrick discusses Black cultural production in literature through citation and 'rememory' (McKittrick, 2021, pp. 38, 146–7). If we consider musical performance as a form of citation, where we recreate and make reference to the originators of a work, we can continue McKittrick's line of inquiry towards performance as a mode of knowledge sharing. Transposed into this musical sphere, I argue that citation as rememory is applied through the creation/recreation of live, recorded, or digitised performance transmitted to others as audiences. Connecting with the creative outputs of musicians as diverse as Ignatius Sancho, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Amanda Aldridge, Winifred Atwell or Fela Sowande brings their individual stories and common experiences into contemporary and future realities. Teachers who are learning, hearing, and performing this work can access and share these sites of memory,<sup>57</sup> broadening our understanding of the musical art forms inhabited and created by these historical musicians.

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<sup>56</sup> Scheding's text contains a fascinating account of mid-20th century wartime migration and the effects on British classical music including many valuable details of interactions between European refugees and the BBC and evidence of anti-Semitic policies. His historical analysis, however, fails to even briefly acknowledge the simultaneous presence of musicians and broadcasters from British colonies. Further investigation into the likely political motivations behind the 1944 broadcast of work by Nigerian, Fela Sowande and South African, Michael Mosoeu Moerane by the BBC Symphony Orchestra would contrast interestingly with the marginalisation of Jewish composers from Europe such as Hungarian-born Mátyás Sieber during the same period.

<sup>57</sup> Toni Morrison explores similar concepts in her essay *The Site of Memory* (Morrison, 1995).

The continued occupancy of music in the Academy relies on two forms of cultural preservation—canon formation and citation or referencing. Observed through academic perceptions of knowledge construction, European music canons consist mainly of work produced by white European men active during the 17th - 19th centuries. This is presented as ‘a narrative of the past and a template for the future’ (Citron, 2000, p. 1) and is reflected in the ways that Western art music and its related forms are reproduced and replicated for contemporary audiences. Epistemological foundations within music conservatoires reinforce these patterns in their production of new musicians. Examples of this can be seen in curriculum design and the repertoire lists that students and early career musicians rely on as creative points of departure. Despite campaigns to address racial, gender, and class disparities in the field, the knowledge gathering within institutions has not been sufficiently widened to support the range of voices housed within them. This is not entirely unsurprising, given that the reliance of Western art music has resulted in a field where participants assume, but do not question, canonical repertoire as its central focus. In her reflections on academic citation and referencing, McKittrick ponders whether ‘the function of communication, referencing, citation is not to master knowing and centralize our knowingness, but to share *how we know*’ (McKittrick, 2021, p. 17). In treating performance as a form of citation, we can interrogate the ways in which knowledge is created with direct reference to the varied and complicated backgrounds that have informed both the music and its creators. Through these virtual performances, I share alternative histories of European art music and its influences, drawing on and (re)writing into gaps in cultural memory.

### 5.2.2 Performing Difference as Celebration

In opposition to a reliance on stereotypes and broad, unhelpful definitions of diversity in the arts constructed in or as responses to racism, ‘performing difference’ can be a way to ‘enable the arts to engage diverse, new and existing audiences in ways that meaningfully engage with

their cultural loci and experiences’ (Hingorani, 2018, p. 79). In this way, performers and creators who have been underserved in Eurocentric or colonial spaces are empowered to present themselves and their stories from their own perspectives. Fashioned from alternative experiences, new and more relevant modes of production are developed to platform marginalised voices<sup>58</sup>.

Considering the limitations of PaR for underresearched topics raised in Chapter 4, counter-storytelling through art music is a valuable tool for this project. A method developed out of Critical Race Theory in education<sup>59</sup>, counter-storytelling begins with ‘finding and unearthing sources of data’ (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 33), which is also the starting-point for my proposed enhancement of PaR. As with PaR, lived experience should be the central component of counter-storytelling, and through living inquiry, should support investigations of Western classical performance from alternative, less Eurocentric standpoints. From this position, new knowledge is produced and applied across the research. The plainsightSOUND Celebration takes place entirely online, which enables direct connection between the performances and the digitised narratives on the plainsightSOUND website. Drawing on these divergent, but interlinked strands allows for varying levels of engagement from the participants<sup>60</sup> who are exposed to the pedagogical nature of the project as audience members, spectators, performers, or partners through this activity. In opposition to a demonstration of gaps or absences as incomplete, this event challenges by positioning liminal spaces in cultural history as sites of creative complexity. While Afro-British composers in these genres have historically

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<sup>58</sup> An example of this type of alternative production can be seen in *BEAM – Everybody Can Stand in Their Own Light* (2021). Black British lyric soprano Nadine Benjamin collaborated with Decus Ensemble as part of Team Beam to co-construct this music-theatre piece based on Benjamin’s life. Through explorations of existing and new music, it explores ‘sexuality; race; gender; neurodiversity – dyspraxia; trauma-tourettes; domestic violence; bullying; addiction, and the role of music and creativity as healing forces in her life’ (*The Strad*, 2021).

<sup>59</sup> Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education is used to oppose ‘deficit-informed research and methods that silence and distort the experiences of people of color and instead focuses on their racialized, gendered, and classed experiences as sources of strength’ (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 26)

<sup>60</sup> Josephine Machon writes of the challenges found in describing individuals or groups who might be considered ‘audience’ in traditional performances, particularly when considering the various experiences being brought to the work by each person that becomes involved with it in any way (Machon, 2016, p. 38). In this instance, I have selected *participant* as a descriptor to represent those engaging with the project on any level.

been erased or minimised within the prevailing narratives (Green, 2018; Griffiths, 2020; Ledford, 2020)<sup>61</sup>, in presenting recovered histories—such as repertoire additions—as an excess, I am making them both visible and available in the present. This uncovering occurs by building on the known, partially-known, and unknown histories of Afro-Britishness as a way of visualising alternative musicological perspectives. By 'countering' through augmentation, light is reflected into the liminal spaces formed between the known works, and attention is drawn to those in danger of becoming permanently forgotten. In this way, participants rediscover, remember, reclaim, and restore these stories into cultural sites of respect.

Counter-storytelling encourages participants to question the structures that determine the preservation of collective histories. They question which perspectives are deemed acceptable, why only certain stories are relevant within Western art music, and who makes these decisions. The complicity of contemporary audiences and performers in perpetuating these systems becomes clearer and, as seen across the performing arts through the work of theatre and opera groups (André, 2018; Hingorani, 2018), and dance companies (Adair and Burt, 2018; Uzor, 2018), voices that have been ignored can be re-centred.

Music curation involves serious consideration of location—an area where flexibility is extremely important. The plainsightSOUND Celebration was originally intended to be presented at Sutton House, a Tudor building in Hackney, East London. This would have allowed for the exploration of the programmed music amid spaces that reflect different periods in European history. The juxtaposition of physical and temporal locations such as the Victorian Study or Georgian Parlour, alongside the music and stories of Afro-British musicians who are largely absent from those histories would have been useful opportunities to explore variations

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<sup>61</sup> This erasure continues today, and it is common for individuals to contribute to this issue while attempting to show support. In 2020, Zachary Woolfe's referral to the young Black-British cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason as 'what the classical music world has long lacked: a black headliner' raised some concern among Black musicians who had already developed successful careers in Western classical music (Woolfe, 2020). Woolfe may have been writing in support of Kanneh-Mason, but statements such as this minimise the long history of Black classical musicians around the world, including many internationally respected contemporary performers of African descent from the USA.

of the 'localised scenographic detail' (Machon, 2016, p. 43) available in the spaces. The settings would have formed the contextualization of these stories, rather than problematising them. Extra-musical devices formed as links to wider-known and more commonly accepted histories, therefore become part of the broader framing of this project. This arrangement was halted due to coronavirus social distancing restrictions and safety concerns that mean planning a physical installation is not currently possible.

In the initial practical setting of this research, my intention was to recreate Sutton House digitally, presenting the event within this. The assumption here was that no changes to design were required, including the interactions between participants and the environment. During the planning phase, I realized that the virtual reproduction of the space—along with its associated colonial and postcolonial trauma—did not need to take place. Rather than replicating these burdens, this became an opportunity to devise an open space that keeps the focus on the individuals. Starting the process again, I moved further away from the concert planning process and considered my practice-based research questions more deeply in a freer context. In other words, now that I have defined the role of a performer-curator-activist, what effect does that have on my definition and presentation of Western classical music and how might I use this role to remove the barriers to Afro-British stories in Western art music performance? What began as a reframing through curatorial-activism methodologies resulted in building a new presentation that is much closer to the original aims of this research of enacting change and challenging structural barriers.

### 5.2.3 plainsightSOUND: A Virtual Music Celebration

The various projects that I have undertaken during this research have had a range of impacts in different spaces. Where individuals who have attended or participated remained uninterested in stories of underrepresentation, the majority of those taking part in live events have been excited to discover new and unexpected musicians who were active during periods they had

assumed they already knew well. Leading on from this, issues I have identified regarding knowledge gaps and suppressed subgenres have led to being invited to work alongside music examination boards as they now begin to commission a diverse range of new composers and arrangers from backgrounds that are reflective of their global students. I have found in working with musicians on a regular basis that even those who were fairly nonchalant regarding the importance of expanding regularly performed repertoire, have become more critical in their selection of repertoire. In several instances, musicians involved in plainsightSOUND performance projects have contacted me subsequently with requests for additional pieces that can be performed by other ensembles. Others have asked for assistance in exploring African diasporic performers who can broaden the histories presented in performance lectures and programme notes. These conversations appeal to those outside of music performance – wider audiences, including those reached by radio and TV programmes focusing on these topics. I have now participated in several media broadcasts due to my specific areas of expertise, and it has been interesting to note how barriers are continually enforced through the editorial and stylistic policies of public and commercial broadcasters even where individual broadcasters, programmes or series are given some space to challenge these. The work to reconstruct gaps in cultural knowledge still lacks concrete institutional support and relies on independent curation and labour from projects such as plainsightSOUND to realise this through performance.

Building on material uncovered during my research and website development, the plainsightSOUND Celebration explores the history of Afro-British composers in Western classical music. Participation in the event varies and, while levels of audience interaction during an event are self-determined, performers and production creatives have a deeper involvement. Creative output encompasses a range of audio-visual material, including specifically recorded performances for this occasion. Despite the adjustments required during the coronavirus pandemic, the modern concert hall is still central to modern art music

performance. Versatile performance spaces are in demand, and it remains common practice for pre-constructed programmes to be performed in in their entirety in several different locations. Even in this time of global uncertainty, many music groups have given the impression of innovation by pivoting to online rehearsal and performance, while continuing to replicate existing systems (Frank, 2020; Fairman, 2021; Wise, 2021). As I have noted, this is an error I was close to replicating early in the development of this event. Continuing along these lines would have been in direct opposition of my intent to explore how active and considered curation might be utilised as a tool of musicological resistance. In rebuilding from a digital-first perspective, I was able to shift 'from reflecting reality to creating and shaping reality' (Baskerville, Myers and Yoo, 2020, p. 511). In this way, I acknowledged my curatorial responsibilities in ensuring the project remained focused on my research aims and avoided perpetuating dominant supremacist narratives, while removing barriers to ensure that the event centres its Afro-British subjects respectfully.

Audiences have become more accustomed to attending online events during the pandemic and the plainsightSOUND Celebration engages with the stories of Afro-British classical music history in a virtual setting. Technology has become more central to everyday experiences and even personal devices are now expected to cater to the variety of media platforms available (Baskerville, Myers and Yoo, 2020, p. 512). Although means of accessing technology are not universal, access to devices has widened, and this allows for participation from around the world. By integrating the lived experience of intended participants into the event design, extra-musical modes of presentation—such as the plainsightSOUND website and *YouTube* as the video host—become useful bridges in the framing of this project.

The event is a living inquiry into experiential performance that is accessed across multiple online locations. It comprises several elements that combine new and existing material with the plainsightSOUND website as a connecting hub. With the audio and visual cues laid out

across the site, participants navigate the digital spaces to construct disruptive commentaries and develop their own ways of knowing. Selecting their own depth of involvement—as passive observers or actively participating in online discourse—they interrogate the structures that reproduce historical Afro-British cultural erasure and consider the types of knowledge that are acceptable in contemporary society. Within this context, the curatorial approach is a long and multifaceted process requiring numerous decisions. It begins with the framing of the concept and moves through selection of material (curator), a period of practice/rehearsal/creation (curator + performer(s)/artist(s)) through to the event (all participants). As part of these presentations, I encourage participants through listening, performance, and discussion to reflect on what it means that this music can now be heard and how its emergence might affect their future musical relationships. Counter-storytelling connects realisations of history and creativity as participants are guided to challenge existing exclusionary narratives now and in the future. Following this event, it is expected that some participants will continue with their own journeys of discovery, such as attending other events that amplify hidden stories or by using this as inspiration to develop their own projects. The rupturing of hegemonic frameworks within contemporary Western classical performance is only possible if multiple voices take up the cause.

## 6 CONCLUSION

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This study emerged from a search for cultural identities excluded from discourse and practice within the art form commonly known as Western art music or European classical music. My intention was to investigate the ways in which Afro-British musicians are rendered absent, despite historical evidence of high-profile performers, composers, and academics who have achieved mainstream popularity over the last few centuries. The aim of this research was to discover alternative methods of musical presentation that assist its participants in accessing a wider range of musicological history, creativity, and knowledge, through continued questioning of commonly accepted cultural hegemonic traditions.

The questions underpinning the basis of this project were formed from my own experiences as a 21<sup>st</sup>-century Black-British woman of Nigerian descent who is also a performer, teacher, and curator of Western art music. My personal background alongside these creative and pedagogical roles has been considered by some to be an unusual presence in this field. It has also been vital in providing me with an alternative lens through which to interrogate the rigidities of particular sections of British music and culture. The themes explored have been evident throughout my entire career, but have not previously been seriously probed from a performance perspective in academia. Having concluded this research, this chapter presents my main findings and their implications on the future trajectories of classical music research, pedagogy, and performance.

### 6.1 Significance to Music Practice as Research

I have produced two original contributions to knowledge, the first of which is a remodelled Practice as Research (PaR) methodology. This version acknowledges that additional steps may be required for knowledge identification and gathering outside of Eurocentric academic frameworks. The additional accommodation supports researcher-practitioners in sensitively structuring their PaR processes in alignment with specific research questions rather than being

based on standard assumptions within the Academy. Establishing this revised PaR approach was an essential part of the progression that led to my second original contribution, which lies in propelling change within the classical music profession through engagement with curatorial-activism.

The curatorial-activist's role in classical music goes far beyond standard concert programming in that it is based in recognising and transforming inequalities that are built into classical music institutions and presentation. Progression within an art form that is still bound by 19<sup>th</sup>-century traditions requires an instigator determined to implement structural and societal change throughout all elements leading to and from performance. Curatorial-activist is a multi-faceted role founded in creative, managerial, administrative, and political knowledge and self-awareness. It is a dynamic role that remains individual to personal and creative circumstances. As independence is a key motivator in ensuring intended outcomes are met, curatorial-activism cannot function fully within large institutions or organisations. In essence, while a curatorial-activist might have institutional or corporate professional associations, the activist elements of their work will have the most valid impact if undertaken separately or as part of small groups. This avoids potential issues of conflict or control that can come from larger entities. Before I discuss the impact of these findings on future work within music pedagogy and performance, I will summarise the previous chapters.

## 6.2 Chapter Review

Following the Introduction, Chapter 2 highlighted recent scholarship that is changing perceptions of the African diaspora as absent from British social and cultural history. I began by identifying literature relevant to the core topics of this investigation, amid changing constructs of Blackness and African identity within European structures. The sparse recognition of the African diaspora in British classical music aligns with a mainstream discourse focusing on distorted epistemologies that restrict acknowledgement of the culture and

knowledge produced by non-dominant groups. Post-colonialism in this context considers how West African musicians sought to reclaim their cultural identities by recognising traditional music that had been suppressed during colonial rule, and repositioned themselves within the context of the musical structures imposed through European-style education. The resulting composite genre of African Art Music has continued to be excluded from musicology and ethnomusicology due to the colonial origins of both fields that require clearly demarcated cultural lines. By crossing cultural boundaries, these outputs become simultaneously too ethnic and not ethnocentric enough for serious study. This contrasts with the reception of compositions by European 'folk'-influenced composers that have been welcomed within Western classical music canons<sup>62</sup>.

This review also considered pertinent examples of music curation relevant to the themes raised. While many British performers and arts administrators still assume Afro-Britons in European classical music have only recently emerged, arts-festival programming has referenced diversity since at least the mid-1990s, but has not yet made long-lasting impact on regular classical music concerts.

Chapter 3 probed contextual meanings of curation and activism by outlining alternative perspectives that become visible at the intersections of these roles. Curatorial-activists exploit their positions as cultural producers to present the key narratives necessary for making positive societal and cultural change. These threads will often have been hidden or suppressed within institutions, sometimes due to conflicting interests, therefore requiring a process of uncovering before presentation to the wider public. Actualisation of the curatorial-activist was essential in establishing a creative methodology for curation on which inclusive and transformative practice can be based.

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<sup>62</sup> In the years before his early death at 37, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor had become fascinated with his African heritage and had arranged many African-diasporic melodies and songs for instrumental ensembles. He was incredibly successful at the end of his life and it is possible that, had he lived longer, he might have had more influence in the reception of this music.

Focusing on practice, Chapter 4 examined how inclusion and transformation can be developed, beginning with a critique of common PaR methodologies amid the Eurocentric dominance embedded into the pedagogical frameworks of advanced music training. My argument here is that common arts-research methodologies are insufficient in their presentation as roadmaps for knowledge gathering, where the proposed research is based on materials that have historically been excluded from or marginalised within the academy. Additionally, attempts to validate PaR by modelling it on scientific research practice result in a reinforcing of dominant Eurocentric forms of knowledge while simultaneously suppressing non-Western cultures and narratives. Within scientific fields such as sociology, there have been recent movements to address problematic remnants of colonialism, but this thinking has yet to be fully embraced within mainstream musicology and arts-based practice research. In adopting what Richardson referred to as 'undone science' (Richardson, 2018) into artistic production, we can acknowledge barriers to alternative methods of knowledge and resource-gathering. By reviewing common strategies, I was able to identify additional actions necessary for developing inclusive arts research processes. This informed the development of the outputs discussed in the subsequent chapter.

I outlined the construction of the creative elements of this research project in Chapter 5 and demonstrated the practical application of my thesis as the plainsightSOUND project website and accompanying celebratory online event. Rather than awaiting improvements from other established but incomplete resources, the plainsightSOUND project is an example of how curatorial-activism and activist-based PaR models can converge within liminal spaces to create inclusive pedagogy and performance. The intent was to address gaps reinforced by popular websites and events that minimise or ignore the lineage of African and Afro-British composers. I reflected on how these considerations influenced my research outputs in not only raising public awareness of the history and facilitating performances, but also in engaging directly with interested parties.

### 6.3 Looking to the Future: Extendibility and Emergence

The significance of this research lies in its highlighting of issues around knowledge formation and cultural retention, particularly regarding accepted epistemological frameworks in higher education music pedagogies. Contemporary African diaspora historians have led the way in uncovering the stories of many Afro-British classical musicians, but this alone is not sufficient. A non-performing music historian can locate work, but unless it is also played and heard, a composition has not been fully recovered. Complete recovery includes practising musicians who can verify and perform the work, and curators who are willing to programme and broadcast it. By playing and listening to this music—and facilitating others to do so—we broaden our understanding of how musical styles have evolved across different cultures and fill in the gaps in our wider cultural histories.

There are several areas of further investigation that would build on my work thus far. The first of these is involves broadening the pool of composers and performers in plainsightSOUND, in particular Afro-British women. My initial data gathering mainly examined the archives of London music conservatoires during the period when African diasporic students were most likely to have been from British colonies. Many of these musicians would have been recipients of international scholarships or financed their studies through family funding or connections. As I could not gain access to archives myself, I relied on institutional curators who identified Afro-British students by their name or referred to biographies, if they had achieved some level of public success (as with Winifred Atwell<sup>63</sup>). This type of archival research is likely to have excluded any English or Anglicised names, and the focus on institutional records means that only those active within formal structures would be detected. It is possible that this issue would affect more women than men during the periods covered, as several male musicians

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<sup>63</sup> Despite several unverified reports that she was a student at the Royal Academy of Music, Winifred Atwell does not appear in any accessible student records. It appears she was a private student of Harold Craxton in 1946-7, who was then a professor of piano at the Royal Academy of Music (Bourne, 1993).

had transferred to music studies without parental knowledge or permission and women would have been under stricter societal scrutiny at the time. More expansive consideration could be taken in future of where, when, and how the activities of Afro-British musicians have been recorded.

Diversity and inclusion policies are now common within British classical music organisations, yet opportunities for creating meaningful change remain limited within their structures. These establishments have developed to support and benefit from exclusionary conventions, while failing to engage frankly with the larger socio-historical contexts within which the classical music tradition developed. This is apparent in policies that neither lead to, nor are informed by, diversity or inclusion. Unless the perception of European art music's development, influence, and derivations is broadened within the workforce, concert programming, and broadcasting will continue to neglect the interconnectedness of the multiple lineages that inspire contemporary composers and performers today. The independent curatorial-activist is a necessary step in developing creative presentations that drive artists towards transformative practice. With Western classical music, an understanding of the range of its contributors and related forms of music would not be accessible to the curatorial-activist without a reformed activist PaR model.

There is also room to examine how new knowledge developed through this research might affect diversity and inclusion in UK performing arts education. The introduction to this commentary outlined the importance of school curricula in forming societal understandings of history and culture. Cultures are presented as distinct and inflexible, even when they are relocated. This ignores the ways in which individuals from many cultures have historically intersected and inspired each other to create novel forms of art. Further study could explore how reconstructing music curriculums to more accurately reflect the ways musical styles form and influence each other might positively impact on student decisions to study music or

pursue it professionally. The recent publication of *Afro-Europeans* (Otele, 2020) has highlighted details of centuries of African-diasporic migration and communities across Europe, and other sources refer to records of African performers living and working across Europe throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Geographically extending my research would be an opportunity to scrutinise the wider Afro-European musical experience, exploring where, how, and why musicians migrated and how this influenced Western composition.

My hope is that we reach a point where participants in Western classical music understand the need to explore diverse repertoire and cultures. In an art form that is so reliant on its history, all contributory elements to its continued success should be recognised. There has always been a range of global influences on music and minimising successes or treating individuals as anomalies will not help to preserve it. Acknowledging the music in its entirety opens our understanding of creativity and looks toward an exciting future of musical possibilities. With this project, I am laying the groundwork for future performer-researchers. There were multiple reasons for beginning this research and several directions in which it could continue, always with transformative care at its core.

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