

The Quarterly Review of New Music

Tempo



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Editorial

QUESTIONS OF SCALE

The connecting thread that runs through this issue is the question of scale, sometimes in the sense of a series of musical tones, sometimes in the sense of the quantity of resources deployed, but always as a consideration of the extent to which an individual musical work, or a collection of musical works, articulates something beyond itself. More poetically, to what extent is it possible, as William Blake proposed in 'Auguries of Innocence', to 'see a world in a grain of sand' or 'a heaven in a wild flower'?

Stefan Pohlit's orchestral piece, *VAPUR*, for example, is just that: an orchestral piece. But, as his article reveals, it is also a record of a period of exile in which his very livelihood was threatened. How can years of personal struggle be compressed into less than 20 minutes of music? Adeline Wong offers more examples of the musical work as microcosm: analyses of four pieces, each one a complex distillation of the visual, theatrical and musical cultures of the region within Malaysia from which its composer comes. Or the larger entity might not be a life or a culture but a theory; Marc Sabat writes about his creative journey through the harmonic spaces of Just Intonation, a journey in which individual works are never more than a temporary resting place on the way to a larger truth.

Perhaps these questions of expressive scale are a sort of curation. This issue opens with two fascinating articles that interrogate what it is that curators do or, at least, what they think they are doing. Michelle Hromin begins with a subjective reflection on curation as composition, suggesting that every artist should become a curator of their own practice. Patrick Becker's interview with Katrin Beck and Manuela Kerer presents a more pragmatic perspective: Two years ago Beck and Kerer became the fourth team to direct the Munich Biennale Festival for New Music Theatre and they talk about the iteration of the festival that will begin on 8 May, the first that they have curated. For them, curation is both managerial – selecting the creative teams that will make new work for the festival – and creative: sometimes they feel that there is a need to intervene in the development of a production.

Each issue of *Tempo* also depends on singular interventions into the boundless possibilities of new music – from our writers' choices of subjects to our own editorial decisions – and we welcome further interventions from you, our readers. Please send your thoughts, ideas and critiques to editors@temponewmusic.com.

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Editorial

Questions of Scale

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On Curating New Music
Michelle Hromin

To curate New Music is not simply to organise works. For Michelle Hromin, it is also to curate oneself: an articulation of agency through which one's own artistic identity is shaped and expressed.

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On Curating New Music

Michelle Hromin

Solange Knowles is known through the lens of pop stardom. Younger sister to Beyoncé, she has deviated from the traditional singer-songwriter-actress archetype. She was the first African American to compose a score for the New York City Ballet, and she has exhibited works inspired by performance art and choreography at the Venice Biennale and the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. In an interview with *Surface Magazine* about the reimaging of her album *A Seat At The Table* as a live work – performed, processed and danced to in the walls of the Guggenheim – curator Naomi Beckwith reflects on how we experience art, particularly inside museums.¹ With Solange and her collaborators, exploring metaphorical space and drawing on Black artistic movements that have long asserted their presence in cultural spaces – such as the African Commune of Bad and Relevant Artists or designer Jae Jarrell – Beckwith suggests that Solange is tapping into something viral. While museums remain rooted in traditional modes of laying, hanging and presenting work, Solange, as Beckwith puts it, offers a ‘blank space’: a site where both the space and the artwork itself can be transformed into whatever one needs them to become.²

So I wasn't entirely surprised when I heard that Solange was launching a curation course at USC Thornton School of Music. As the California school's first Scholar-in-Residence, she will lead a new cohort in partnership with Saint Heron – her multidisciplinary institution encompassing an archival library, design hub and resource centre – creating a space for artists to develop skills as music curators. Solange notes that the curriculum will prompt questions such as: ‘What distinguishes a musical artist's overall embodiment? What

1 Antwaun Sargent, ‘Solange Knowles Is Not A Pop Star’, *Surface Magazine*, 11 January 2018 <https://www.surfacemag.com/articles/solange-knowles-is-not-a-pop-star/#> (accessed 1 February 2026).
Solange Knowles, *A Seat At The Table* (Columbia, 2016) CD.

2 Sargent, ‘Solange Knowles Is Not A Pop Star’.

elements build and surround the music to create innovative, distinctive, and identifiable terrains?³

It is also not only Solange instigating these sorts of courses on music and curation. ArtEZ University of the Arts in The Netherlands also offers a two-part Curatorial Practices in Music programme, allowing for individuals with several years of experience to develop their ideas in dialogue with their cohort. ‘How can you use curatorship to strengthen your own musical practice from within? Which values and functions of music do you want to explore and develop?’, asks the course description.⁴



The Zadar Sea Organ (photo by Michelle Hromin).

Studying or training to become a curator has long felt like a role confined to fine art. Many programmes dedicated to curation have existed for decades, institutionalising its value and recognition as a practice and career path in the fine art world. As such, news of these music-focused courses jolted excitement through my body – finally! A space to discuss, experiment, talk about the niche interests within our musical practices, to become active curators ourselves. But

- 3 Kailyn Brown, ‘Solange to Build programming and teach course at USC Thornton’, *LA Times*, 14 October 2025 <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2025-10-14/usc-thornton-school-of-music-appoints-solange-as-first-ever-all-school-scholar-in-residence> (accessed 1 February 2026).
- 4 <https://www.artez.nl/en/programmes/cursus/curatorial-practices-in-music-online> (accessed 1 February 2026).