

Goodmorning. My name is Joris Blanckaert. I am a composer, I am the president of the music programme in the KASK & Conservatory school of arts, and I am the initiator of SeCuM.

I would like to take you on a short trip with my time machine.

2014. Three famous choirs create my first composition for large choir in the Saint-Rombouts cathedral in Mechelen, near Antwerp. It was a wonderful experience to be surrounded by all these voices who came from as far as Latvia to create my music. But also: all together it took a full Boeing 737 to move these people to sing my piece. Somewhere I read that there are more than 70 choirs registered, only here in greater Ghent. It was about the same time of the Paris climate agreements, where industrialized nations actually committed to reduce their carbon emissions dramatically. It made me reflect about the sustainability of touring with large ensembles. Imagine the difference with a simple PDF travelling by email.

2015. The Graslei, top-rated touristic highlight of Ghent, was hired by a real estate company for 10 days... for a private party, and this for just 1400 Euros. That made me reflect about the public space, its value and how easily it can be colonized.

2016. The renovation works of the Boekentoren, the famous modernist tower of the central university library, generate extreme noise pollution by means of a pretty big pneumatic concrete hammer. The pulsating sounds are perceived on a distance of more than 5 km. The works last for more than a year. This made me reflect about the acoustic public space, and why occupying it is completely free of charge.

Thought. Most major cities have a city architect. She or he and their aides take care of the visual hygiene of the city. Have we ever heard of a city audiologist?

2017. During a workshop live electronics, I explain my students how to craft a balanced contact mic, which doesn't make noise. We try it out on a chair, and it appeared that even while doing something dull as trying to sit still on a chair, we have a huge impact on our sonic environment. By the serendipity effect, Re:reflection was born, a sound installation that makes us aware of the sounds we produce. The visitor enters the exhibition room and is invited to sit in the chair and put headphones on. In the headphones a soft voice explains why our sonic environment is so precarious. It is hard to hear the text until the end, as contact mics attached to the chair heavily amplify every movement the visitor makes.

Reflection. I've mentioned the choirs, the acoustic environment, the city landscape and soundscape. What if we reclaim the public space with our voices, with our bodies? What if people get marveled by the power of the voice and by togetherness? What if we accomplish this by activating local communities?

Fast forward. 2020. Following a Creative Europe call for proposals regarding the precarious position of the young music professional, we started reflecting about what higher music education can do.

Sure, we already knew that a professional musician was more than a highly skilled instrumentalist, vocalist or composer. That's why in the past we have incorporated business-oriented courses in the programmes, culture management, intellectual property, perhaps some marketing tools, how to build a website and keep the books. But these business subjects appeared not to be the favourite subjects of arts students, they might even appear a contradiction with being an artist.

On the other hand chances to become a musician on a payroll of a professional ensemble are declining. The professional musician is basically a freelancer, and therefore needs other skills too. Their career will no longer be in one direction, but a hybrid combination of different pathways, from research oriented residencies, over programming to touring and playing concerts.

To overcome the natural cognitive resistance against entrepreneurship and to put the artistic identity at the focal point, the concept of the self-curating musician was put forward. Self-curating musicians create a global narrative in all their different projects and jobs. They curate their identity and thus their portfolio career pretty much like a museum curator does with an art exhibition: deliberately putting different aesthetic objects together in a meaningful order in space and time to create a cohesive narrative, thus revealing and creating new layers of meaning.

This requires a skill set and a mind set. To explain this, I have drawn this beautiful flower. The need for artistic skills are a no-brainer. The interface with the outside world are made up by the entrepreneurship skills, which are, among others, the so-called career toolbox (organizing concerts, fundraising, marketing, networking, branding, etc...) and the business particulars (culture management, production budgeting, royalties, administration,...).

But how do we do it? How to make it fulfilling and sustainable? Enter the self-curating mindset, which is 5-fold:

1. **Activating creativity:** Creativity, not surprisingly, is in my opinion the single most important skill. But it is not an obvious one. Classical performers in particular are mostly in the business of representation: recreating and interpreting what already exists. Most students are not empowered to be creative within their music practice, particularly in the early stages of their training, and I think it is fair to say that a big share also doesn't feel that way. Consequently, self-curation of musicians needs to begin with intentional exploration of creativity and creative problem-solving.
2. **Story creation:** As I've said before, curation is the practice of creating a cohesive narrative. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that it is vital to provide a discourse surrounding an artistic production. It constructs the value and the relevance of the art work, and it assigns it a position within the field of cultural production.
3. **Community engagement:** While entrepreneurship in its narrow definition is focused towards creating personal value – financially, career-wise, network oriented – is self-curation much more aiming at creating value for the other, which is in the first place the audience. The musician starts first with listening and understanding the needs and the sensibilities of the audience – or more in general the society. I believe that

creative engagement with crisis and upheaval is at the very heart of self-curation, and it is also at the heart of what our society needs today. The 'concert of today', naturally includes transversal experimentation (with science, other arts, politics, ecology) and relational social dimensions of sharing and active participation of the people involved.

4. Understanding performance practice: Dutch composer Micha Hamel and musicologist Joep Christenhusz concur with one another that enjoying music increasingly comes to an all-encompassing, multisensorial experience instead of an act of contemplative listening only. Listening thus attains a shift in focus; the conscious act of seeking to understand musical forms has become a subpart of a broader, immersive experience. Musical practice shifts from an interpretive tradition to a relational and critical practice. Curator Markus Fein describes the concert of the future as including cross-disciplinary experimentation (with science, other arts, politics), a relational social dimension, choreography, stage design and scenography (visual amplification of music, unusual seating arrangements, site-specific concerts). There are 5 key elements to be considered to serve the needs of the audience:
 - a. intent (why),
 - b. narrative (what),
 - c. focus (how),
 - d. time (when) and
 - e. space (where),which have to be clearly communicated during a performance. Since all of these are interconnected and interact, it is key for the performer to consider them, like, by not simply leaving the lighting over to the light-engineer. Challenging traditional assumptions and paradigms is essential.
5. Seeking uniqueness: Ask a higher music education student about his employability, and she will come up with one or two from the following traditional job opportunities: musician in an orchestra or professional ensemble, freelance musician, or music educator. This offers a narrow perspective in a shrinking market of public funding. A professional music career could and should contain a wide diversity of career aspirations, displaying a complex and intertwined ecosystem of unique music careers and hybrid paths. The young music professional makes her choices based on her own artistic aspirations and insights.

But how to rationalise this, how to draw a system, how to design a methodology in order to equip music students with the tools they need to have a career that is artistically fulfilling and (financially) sustainable?

Enter the systemic design thinking approach. This is the very goal of this week. What we want to find out during this week, is the extent to which design thinking is a methodology to curate our artistic identity, to find new concepts that fit our artistic personality and appeals to an audience (even if that audience has yet to be created). We therefore need your full collaboration this week. You will be fed with inspiring ideas, societal tendencies, testimonials from your peers, curatorial concepts, creative sessions and discussions, but at the same time we expect you to give us feedback on this approach.

You're not being tested, we are. And as we all learned over the past months, the result of testing can be positive or negative - but the outcome is always learning. That's the information we need from you, during the week, and eventually in the feedback session next Sunday.

Back to 2018. A story was created: the human voice should reclaim the acoustic environment. Because that is how we communicate. And even more: in his book 'the music to come', Francois Bonnet argues that music was always meant to be a higher form of communication, the communication of souls. Sometime in history humanity somehow chose the path of language for communication, leaving music, promising as it might be, a possibility that was never developed.

I decided to bring many people together, to make them truly connect. To communicate, to sing. With the city as our stage: a unique experience for the local community, the performers (local choirs) as well as audience.

So we have a narrative, a unique performance, an engaged community and activated creativity.

All boxes checked.

This was the story of the creation of City of EAR: a large scale choir piece to be performed by 25 to 30 choirs, 500 to 1000 singers. Each choir would start in a different square of the city centre. Slowly they would walk, while singing, towards a central square where they meet. All the time they were singing their score in a synchronized way, because when they meet, it would turn out that all compositions make part of one master composition.

What skills did I need? I had to compose for choir, a 30' piece with 80 polyphonic voices. I needed to solve technical issues, like how to synchronise. But most important: I had to pitch the idea with people that could support me, organisations that could actually help to make it happen. A pitch about reclaiming the acoustic environment, about shaping the city soundscape with the voice, which is the communication tool of our souls that is needed to connect people. About Ghent as a city with a vibrant choir-culture. I pitched this with the city council, the city agency for culture, the platform organisation for amateur choirs. I wrote opeds in newspapers, to make the narrative resonate at the time. And then finally the most important pitch: the Ghent festival as a resourceful production partner. Then I invited all the choirs, try to convince them of the idea, how exotic it may sound for some. Many calls, even more emails (believe me, I'm not that kind of a communicative person), attend rehearsals in small villages, adapt the scores to the individual choir skills, brainstorm about how to synchronize the singing (how to start all click tracks at the same moment), on how to surprise the audience, etc...

2019.

Movie

2021. Here we are. We have prepared an intensive program for you. With an ugly word: a bootcamp. We, that is: Ellen and Pawan from Rotterdam, and Saskia and me from Ghent, with lots of feedback and advice from Anna from Tallinn, Bruno and Daniela from Porto, and Dimitrios and Tina from Athens. We will have lectures, workshops, discussions, improvisations, we will breathe and sit and reflect, drink, row and eat French fries. And perhaps, having a drink. Or two.

Aike is our superhost. She and I will help you out with all your practical questions, issues and curiosities. Don't forget to enjoy Ghent, It's an amazing city, and each other.

I have tried not to mention it, but I must: corona. Face masks are mandatory in the hallways, whenever moving inside the building. In class rooms, and out there in pubs, restaurants and concert halls it is not, although in some places you will be asked for your covid safe ticket. So basically normal life, except in the hallways. Do not ask me why.

Thank you.