Original Article

Inviting Ethnically Marked Music into the Classical Music Concert Hall: Contradictions and Potentials in Diversity

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The field of classical music, also called Western art music, is known for being widely exclusionary in its performance traditions and practices, prioritising the participation of White, male people with middle- and upper-class upbringing (Scharff 2015; Bull 2019). Over the last decade, an increasing number of initiatives have been implemented to increase diversity in this particular cultural field, but research shows that in doing so, structural boundaries are hardly challenged (Bull, Scharff, and Nooshin 2023; Kolbe 2024). In the 2022/23 season, a renowned concert house in Vienna, Austria, also attempted a diversity initiative, putting the focus on ethnically marked musicians, who were based in the city, and their music in a year-long concert series. This article takes this special project as a case study and analyses the different layers of Othering that unfold in such a setting aimed at diversifying a deeply classed and racialised location. Thereby, not only different conceptions of diversity come into view; especially the penetrating boundary between 'classical' and 'non-classical' musical worlds is striking. In our analysis this binary appears as intrinsically bound to ethnic categorisations, and classed practices, in their intersectional nature. Looking closely at audience behaviour and utterances, musicians' experiences in music and organisation, and public documentation of the concert series, we argue that while classical music claims to serve the society in which it is situated, and upholds its undisputable value for society, it does not meet this claim concerning society's sociodemographic and cultural diversity – even with diversity initiatives. In specific moments, however, diversity can nevertheless produce cracks and creative ruptures in the 'normal' classical music practices. Overall, our findings point towards the most relevant question for classical concert halls: whether expanding beyond the traditional classical repertoire to embrace greater diversity represents a viable – and desirable – path forward for these institutions.

European Journal of Musicology | ISSN: 2504-1916
Bern Open Publishing
Vol. 24 | Issue: 1 | DOI: 10.5450/EJM.24.1.2026.1

Introduction

While classical music[1] constitutes a distinct musicological field, contemporary classical music practices have increasingly drawn scholarly attention since the turn of the century from ethnomusicological, sociological, or pedagogical researchers, placing the social habits and cultural conditions of classical music in the forefront (e.g. Nooshin 2011; Small 1998; see also Nettl 1989). This research has thoroughly documented the inherent and long-lasting structural inequalities of classical music, which has been criticised for prioritising the participation of White[2] and male individuals with middle- and upper-class upbringing (Scharff 2015; Charton 2019; Bull 2019; Kolbe 2021, 2022, 2024; Bull and Scharff 2023). While classical music invokes a claim of universalism – that is, the assertation that it is accessible to everyone – in its self-definition (Bull 2019; Bull and Scharff 2023), a closer look at who is actually listening to classical music, and even more so, who is attending live concerts reveals that classical music is neither neutral nor free from social inequalities. Rather, this field of musical performance – with its performers, composers, audiences, and music – is clearly "linked with White, male, western identities" (Bull and Scharff 2021, 679; cf. Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000): The repertoire is built on compositions by White European men from the 18th and 19th centuries, and – despite this long being contested by the work of (female) music researchers (cf. Jezic 1988; Citron 1993; Rieger 1981) – women, lower socioeconomic groups, or musicians with minority/Black/non-European backgrounds remain significantly underrepresented as performers (Scharff 2015; see overview of studies in Kolbe 2024, 50–55). Clearly, classical music does not live up to its claim to reflect the society it claims to serve. At the same time, it is the musical field with the most public financial and structural support and public prestige as a high art, especially in Western European countries.

Like many organisations in different cultural fields in the last decade, also classical music institutions have started to implement actions and measures to address this unequal presentation and participation (Kallio et al. 2021; Prokop and Reitsamer 2024; Bull and Scharff 2023; Kolbe 2024), sometimes using the term diversity to label such projects, sometimes avoiding the term. At its most general, diversity "refers to policies and practices that seek to include people who are considered to be, in some way, different from the traditional member. Less tangibly but more centrally it means to create an inclusive culture that values and uses the talents of all would-be members" (Herring and Henderson 2012). So, in short, diversity refers primarily to a variety of different things or people; the relevant meaning in the context of this article, however, is the one generally associated with projects aimed at *increasing* diversity: It points to creating inclusion. In the context of organisations, then, diversity means presenting and actively including people and ideas of different backgrounds and positionalities in society that are not yet participating or represented within the organisation (Bührmann and Schönwälder 2017).

Due to the neoliberal framework within which contemporary cultural institutional work operates, the motivation to implement diversity is not necessarily simply altruistic or driven by socio-political responsibility. Quite often the need to legitimise public funding, and to attract a wider audience amid changing demographic and societal realities leads institutions to turn to diversity work (Bührmann and Schönwälder 2017). Existing studies on diversity in classical

1 This specific music is also often referred to as 'Western art music'; however, we will use 'classical music' as it is the most widely used term within the field itself (Bull and Scharff 2021). We hereby refer to the Western European-based traditions of classical music, in full awareness of other classical music traditions existing around the globe.

2 The capitalisation of the term White indicates that it is not meant as an alleged description of bodily appearance, but of a societal position which is connected to being read as 'White' within a society. Such a position is connected to privileges. As Eve Ewing writes: "White people get to be only normal, neutral, or without any race at all, while the rest of us are saddled with this unpleasant business of being racialized" (2020; see also Röggla 2012).

music institutions have found that the notion of diversity often serves more as a marketing strategy, pointing to what Alejandro Madrid called "tokenism" (2017, 126). Diversity is an "add-on", brought in as a commodity, representation, and capital (Kolbe 2024, 27–48), used rather to strengthen the positive image of an organisation than as a measure to sustainably reduce inequality (Kolbe 2024, 2022; Scharff 2015; see also Jurkiewicz and Schneider 2024; Gaupp and Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021; Saha 2018; Ahmed 2012). In her recent monograph addressing what she terms "the politics of 'diversity'" in classical music, Kolbe pointed additionally to the effect of "elite reproduction processes", where diversity functions as capital for those in privileged positions to maintain their privileged position within the field of classical music (Kolbe 2024, 46). However, Kolbe also attributed to diversity an "unruly, unsettling potential" and asked, under which conditions this can be "unlocked" (Kolbe 2024, 46).

At this point our aim in this article comes into play: Analysing a specific concert series that was designed as a diversity initiative, we expose structures of privilege and exclusion that operate through repeated acts of Othering across different levels and settings in concert halls and discuss the pitfalls of diversity in classical music concert halls, and simultaneously hightlight the potential of such initiatives in this field. The concert series that forms our ethnographic case study was entitled 'Wiener Stimmen' ('Voices of Vienna') and was held during the 2022/23 season at the Vienna Musikverein. This location is a prestigious classical concert hall in Austria, recognised globally for its annual staging of the Viennese Philharmonic's New Year's Concert. The 'Wiener Stimmen' concert series featured six female Viennese singers from different cultural/regional and musical backgrounds, musically situated in 'World'[3] and Experimental Music, Jazz, or Funk – artists who rarely, if ever, find themselves performing alongside a symphonic orchestra, let alone in a classical concert hall like the Musikverein. The concert series was part of a cooperation (beyond this concert series) with the Viennese NGO *Brunnenpassage*, an institution known for its expertise in enabling transcultural art. Taking up Anna Bull's argument that "inequalities in cultural production need to be understood through examining the practices that are used to create the aesthetic" (Bull 2019, xiii), and in line with our understanding of classical music as a living, contemporary social and cultural practice creating and embodying meaning for those involved in it, we approached the field with ethnographic methods (cf. Barz and Cooley 2008), by documenting the ongoing processes through interviews, participant observation, and the collection of press and social media material. Using these materials to analyse what people actually do in such a setting of diversity engagement, and why, we focused specifically on the experiences of 'invited' and involved musicians in the organisational and artistic process, as well as the situation – in music and beyond – of the specific concert performances.

It is important to note that the concert series consisted of two very different performance settings: First, during the opening concert evening, the singers performed two songs each accompanied by a symphonic orchestra; second, the following six concerts – which we call 'solo-band concerts' – were curated and performed by one singer and their respective band or accompanying musicians each. This is important for our analysis, as the agency of the singers was rather different due to the pre-designed musical features. The particularity of this case study involving very different actors and collaborations and different performance modes allowed us to detect not only persisting structures of Othering, but also moments of the "unsettling potential" that Kolbe points to (2024, 46). As we show, these occur specifically when existing power structures are either less dominant, which is the case especially in the context of the smaller concerts, or actively countered, when rules and expectations were deliberately challenged or not followed,

3 'World Music', in recent years increasingly called 'Global Music', refers to a commercial category used within the Western music market to classify music with folk and/or non-Western musical characteristics and sounds (cf. Taylor 1997; Fuchs/Müske/Holtsträter 2023).

which was the case in certain organisational and curatorial elements. Furthermore, the presence of a different audience at all concerts laid bare the specific *habitus* of classical concert halls, thereby, so we argue, already questioning and challenging it.

Othering – as the process of using a specific social or cultural difference to produce non-belonging and non-affiliation to a certain community, or institution (cf. Hall 1997) – is inherent in diversity: Diversity initiatives need a specific Other, that is, the definition of someone or something that is different, and, as such, excluded based on certain criteria. Only on this basis can measures of inclusion be identified. This ambivalence of – ideally – wanting to work towards equality and equity, but having to position certain people as the Other to reach this goal includes the pitfall of essentialising certain communities and groups. This points to yet another problematic aspect of diversity: its relationality. The relevant difference that is addressed is defined by the initiating institution: "What exactly is meant when cultural organizations seek to 'diversify' themselves, how the very term is understood, and how it is negotiated in the different areas and processes of institutional life is therefore not a given but a contingent and contested social process" (Kolbe 2023, 73–4; cf. Dobusch 2017). So what 'diversity' within an organisation is, what is detected to be necessarily 'diversified', which categories are addressed by 'diversity,' and which groups or contents are left out, is up to the organisation or institution. In short: The power to diversify lies in the hands of the organisation. It is the organisation that defines the level of diversity, the category addressed, and the aim. Hence, addressing diversity can be used in different ways within the organisation. It could be used, for example, as a tool to foster a discrimination free environment, by actively and consciously assessing structures and practices that produce inequality, and developing measures against them; however, this approach of "critical diversity" is still scarce (Mayer et al. 2025), and how it overcomes the danger of essentialising within a diversity approach still remains to be seen. Most often, however, the main motivation of cultural organisations to aim at diversifying themselves in one way or another lies in economic, political, or demographic aspects.

Diversity initiatives are commonly designed along one of the main social categories of difference: gender, race/ethnicity, and class/social status. For example, an organisation might work towards reducing a gender imbalance within the organisation or addressing a bias in social background among staff or students. When ethnicity/race are addressed in Europe, organisations usually seek to increase participation by people of non-White, BIPOC, or migrant positionality, of the "European Others" (El-Tayeb 2011; cf. Hall 1997; Said 1978). Diversity work in classical music in Europe has often been designed along these lines (Kolbe 2024), as the term "diversity" itself has come to signify involvement primarily of ethnic/racial difference. Our case study was similarly framed around inviting cultural and ethnic diversity from the city of Vienna into the concert hall. A focus on only one – albeit complex – structural category, however, is part of the challenge: It not only ignores the heterogeneity of the defined target groups (Dobusch 2017, 1646), but also overlooks the intersectional reality of these categories. As studies on the intersectionality of categories of difference have clearly shown, none of these categories stands alone, and their effect is bound to the specific interdependence (cf. Collins and Bilge 2020). Any category is intrinsically interwoven with others, thereby creating unique processes of boundary-making, which depending on the situation, can lead to specific practices of differentiation and discrimination. In our case study, we concentrate on the 'big three' of difference categories, that is gender, ethnicity/race, and social status/class, because these are the most obvious in the specific design of the project, and its setting within the field of classical music.[4] Our perspective therefore is necessarily and intrinsically intersectional: We examine the intersectional foundation of the boundary-mak-

4 Age does play a minor role in addressing a new audience, but to our current knowledge not beyond that.

ing practices in the concrete practices we observed throughout the concert series. This perspective leads us to detect ambivalences between the particular forms of difference that are intended to be shown and performed, and those differences that – in intersectional constellations – become visible throughout the concrete practices. What was intended and what actually was acted out, differed. It should be noted at the outset that throughout our case study no public references to class-related aspects could be observed, except for a conscious reduction of ticket prices. While gender was addressed explicitly in the invitation of female singers (though not beyond this), and ethnic and cultural difference was the main 'invited' category, the challenge of social class was not consciously tackled.

There is one last level to mention concerning diversity measures in classical concert halls, a level that also becomes of immediate importance in our case study: the music itself. In addition to the question of which structural category is addressed, diversity can be sought on different organisational levels. In the case of classical music concert halls it can aim at increasing diversity within the organisational structures or staff, the biographical/cultural backgrounds of performers and composers, the audience, and/or the musical repertoire. At all these levels "diversities" (Bührmann and Schönwälder 2017, 1635) could – and should – occur within classical concert halls, and on these levels different diversity initiatives try to tackle the dominant narratives and structures. These levels necessarily influence each other: Who is on stage and what music is played obviously brings different audiences to the location. Here, a main specific question of diversity within classical music concert halls comes to the fore that is unique to these specific locations: Should the music itself diversify? Or is it 'merely' about the social and cultural position of audience members, performers, and composers? In what way must there be a connection of the music performed to the established sound aesthetics of Western classical music? Is a change in the music repertoire desired, or even possible? Why should a renowned classical concert hall even 'diversify' in music, and if so, on which level(s)? Is there a chance to diversify, if the music stays the same? These questions not only arose repeatedly throughout our data collection and interpretation process, but also guide our analysis, as this specific concert series tried to strike the balancing act: sticking to the aesthetics of Western classical music through the sound of a symphony orchestra, but with repertoire grounded in non-European music traditions, and additionally providing space for different musical styles usually not heard in this location at all. And while we detect structural inequalities, power imbalances, and more or less rigid boundaries along ethnic-class intersected aspects, the question of musical differences is in conclusion the one of immediate hindrance, and therefore the one of immediate importance to inclusion. The balancing act continues, and has to be resolved.

We start by introducing the framework of this study, defining what we mean by classical music, how the concert series evolved and was designed, and our methodological approach. In our analysis, we look at the conceptual foundation of the project, discussing the complex matter of difference that was meant to be invited by a Viennese Other to the concert hall. Thus, it becomes clear that it was not one ethnic Other that was invited, but diversity within. In an intersectional perspective, however, what is at stake is first and foremost a musical Othering, connected to ethnic markers and classed realities. Taking up the thread of a binary between classical and non-classical musical traditions, then, our observations of the audience show how powerful the space itself, and the connected rules and expectations were. Audience reactions not only confirm the intrinsic exclusion felt by many outside the classical music sector, but also reveal the specific habitus that classical music performance spaces expect, including the need for knowledge about this in order to be able to act without standing out. Concerning the staged music and the processes of deciding and rehearsing, the binary of classical/non-classical was most obvious in the debate about arrangements for the symphony orchestra, showing the overall challenge of

summing up six different traditions to one Other. On an individual level, we detect productive moments of transcultural understanding that point towards the 'unsettling potential' of diversity. Structurally, however, the working conditions that were of immediate importance in the feeling of Othering to the musicians invited confirmed not only power imbalances, but also the self-conception of classical music in its self-ascribed intrinsic value for everyone, also outside the immediate field. In conclusion we argue that the Othering involved in this case study is by no means one-directional, but is a complex, intersectional mix-up, occurring on different levels. The most relevant binary is a musical one, grounded in the general notion of classical music as the (musical) norm; but this binary is complicated with various differences along ethnic belongings and classed practices. Diversity initiatives like the one we analysed do not automatically challenge the existing unequal power structures; but they do provide windows to possible pathways, when the aspects are detected that produce little cracks in the system.

Classical Music, the Concert Series 'Wiener Stimmen,' and Our Methodological Approach

We deem it necessary to briefly frame what we refer to by 'classical music'. For our analysis, we use Anna Bull's definition of classical music which is based on four elements: (1) a canon of works composed primarily between 1750 and 1950;[5] (2) a primary focus on acoustic instruments; (3) a hierarchy centred on individual composers and their works, distinguishing composer, performer, and audience; and (4) deep institutional embedding in music universities and concert halls, shaping musical education and restricting performance spaces (Bull 2019, xvii–xviii). These characteristics have been subject to change over time, but they reveal a specific formation of the kind of music, institutions, practices, aesthetic discourses, and values inherent to classical music. From the perspective of feminist, cultural, and postcolonial studies, classical music remains the 'unmarked norm' in musical life, especially in Western Europe, but presumably worldwide (Stokes 2004), with non-classical music marked as the Other, as 'popular,' 'ethnic,' 'non-art,' or 'hybrid'. This includes a hierarchical distinction towards other musical genres, with "classical music […] more highly valued than other genres" (Bull and Scharff 2021, 687). Part of this discourse upholding the unmarked norm is the practice of defining it as 'art' rather than as 'culture' or 'practice', arguing for classical music to be devoid of a function, as "outside of any particular social identity" (Bull and Scharff 2021, 679), as a musical field of highbrow character, and as universal and autonomous (Bull 2019; Usner 2010). Additionally, the image of classical music has long been constructed along a self-conception that denies or masks any impact from people of non-European descent, from women, and from music from lower socio-economic classes, despite sufficient academic evidence against this conception (Stokes 2004; Nooshin 2011).

Vienna, the city our case study is situated in, has a unique position in classical music history in Europe; it is therefore also internationally renowned as 'the city of music' – primarily of classical music as described (cf. Nußbaumer 2007; Usner 2010). Tourists are drawn to its musical heritage and institutions, such as the Vienna State Opera, the Konzerthaus, or the Musikverein, and aspiring music students from around the world compete for places in its prestigious academies. At the same time, the Vienna Tourist Board also highlights the pop, rock, folk, children's music, and various festivals that make up the city's more diverse music-cultural scene (https://www.wien.info/de/kunst-kultur/musik-buehne, last accessed September 4, 2024). Not immediately visible in Vienna are the musics grounded in the demographic reality of an eth-

5 This canon is what ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes once called "an extremely narrow selection of musical practices (principally Austro-German and nineteenth century)" (Stokes 2008: 211). Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl has further pointed out the factor of a common notation, as a specific cultural practice (1989, 5).

nically and linguistically diverse population. Vienna is the former capital of the multi-national and multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the capital of a country that has been active in recruiting 'guest-workers' from the 1960s to the 1980s from former Yugoslavia and Turkey, and of a country that has a long tradition of hosting refugees from different war and conflict situations, such as the 1990s Yugoslav wars, the Syrian civil war since 2011, and recently the war in Ukraine. This ethnic diversity in the city has not been represented in classical music venues in Vienna. What Jurkiewicz and Schneider argue for theatre institutions in Germany also applies to classical music institutions in Austria: They have not really adapted to the demographic reality their respective towns reflect (2024, 77). It is this reality of Vienna that the concert series we documented actively sought to address. In its public communication, the Musikverein formulated the overall aim as follows: "With 'Wiener Stimmen', the Viennese Musikverein wants to open its doors widely for the diverse city society and make tangible the heterogeneity of the Viennese musical life" (Musikverein 2022, 9; Original German, authors' translation). So, members of what was called a diverse city society, referring to the manifold different ethnic and cultural practices and belongings that Viennese citizens have, should be drawn to visit the classical concert hall in central Vienna.

The concert series 'Wiener Stimmen' took place at the renowned concert hall Musikverein in Vienna (Austria) during the 2022/23 season and opened with a main concert in the symbolically significant concert hall 'Great Hall' ('Großer Saal'), often called 'Golden Hall' due to its ornate decoration, in June 2022. This concert featured the Viennese singers, in alphabetical order, Alexia Chyrsomalli, Marjorie Etukudo, Basma Jabr, Nataša Mirković, Golnar Shahyar, and Sakina Teyna, accompanied by a symphonic orchestra. These – all female – singers came from different cultural/regional and musical backgrounds and worked not in classical music, but in World Music, Experimental/Jazz, or Rock/Pop. For this main concert of 'Wiener Stimmen,' they were invited to perform songs from their repertoire, in their own language and style, accompanied by the symphonic orchestra *Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich*, with an additional instrumentalist invited by each singer. The concert was opened by Basma Jabr singing two songs composed by herself in Arabic, accompanied by the qanun player Sofia Labropoulou. Sakina Teyna then performed a Kurdish and a Turkish traditional song, joined by Sarvin Hazin on the kamancheh; next, Golnar Shahyar took the stage with two songs composed by herself, one in Farsi, one in a fictional language, accompanied by Mahan Mirarab on the electric guitar. Nataša Mirković performed two Bosnian traditional songs, accompanied by Pippo Corvino on acoustic guitar. Marjorie Etukudo staged two jazz-rock songs in English, accompanied by Elena Todorova on electric guitar, and Alexia Chyrsomalli sang two Greek songs, accompanied by the clarinetist Oscar Antolí. As an additional song, the six singers sang together a traditional Viennese song in Viennese dialect.

Following this opening concert, the concert series continued throughout the 2022/23 season with individual concerts featuring the six singers and their respective bands or chosen accompanying musicians. In these solo-band concerts, the singers were free to stage their music according to their own concept and musical choices, while inviting one musician from the symphonic orchestra to join them. The singers therefore staged their respective repertoires that they commonly sang in their individual work. Greek folk songs, Arabic songs, Kurdish songs, Bosnian Sevdalinke, English-language and instrumental funk/jazz, and Iranian-infused jazzy and experimental songs took the stage of the Musikverein for one evening each during the 2022/23 season. As we will see, each singer used this performance space differntly, yet all approached it creatively and productively.

The overall project design – developed by the curator Gordana Crnko from the *Brunnenpassage* – took the discrepancy between the musical realities in the classical concert hall and the demographic reality of Vienna as a productive starting point: There was room for the singers to

present their own music in a venue rather unusual for their genres, and there was the aim to productively combine the aesthetics of classical music with different non-classical musical traditions, all present in Vienna. This sensitive handling of the rather peculiar situation also came to the foreground in the marketing of the concert series. The title 'Wiener Stimmen' positioned the identity of the six singers as 'voices' in Vienna, presenting them as part of the city. Marketing material was provided in the respective languages of the singers to specifically address the respective 'diverse' audiences. The design of the concert series therefore reveals a conscious reflection of the complex discrepancy in this meeting of musical and social worlds that this project aimed to bridge.

Concerning this sensitivity and the organisational framework, the mentioned cooperation with the NGO *Brunnenpassage* was a crucial factor. *Brunnenpassage* is a non-profit Viennese cultural institution, run by the aid organisation Caritas Austria, with expertise in curating transcultural and participatory art (www.brunnenpassage.at, last accessed September 4, 2024). The concert series 'Wiener Stimmen' was one of several projects in this cooperation that the Musikverein initiated with the NGO. Concerning the definition of the project, it is important to take this relationship into consideration. While it was clearly communicated that it was a partnership based on equal foundation, at least the financial power imbalance is hard to overlook: This was a collaboration between a financially secure, state-funded institution (see https://www.musikverein.at/sponsoren/, last accessed December 6, 2024), which features advertising affiliates selling expensive watches to wealthy consumers, and an NGO-financed cultural organisation running a transcultural performance space in an outer district of Vienna. Our data clearly indicates the honest and ambitious intentions of all those involved in establishing this concert series and their commitment to work on an equal footing and for mutual benefit; however, the inherent power imbalance shaped by symbolic and financial capital is nevertheless not to be ignored and becomes visible on different levels in our data (see especially our discussion on working structures). At the same time, however, the cooperation with the NGO was the foundation for the concert series to unfold the way it did: Several singers explicitly stated that they would have been reluctant to participate without its involvement. The NGO *Brunnenpassage* was known to the singers and held significant symbolic capital for them, and it was its leading participation that guaranteed that the project would run in a way they could support and wanted to be part of.

The power imbalance in this cooperation was also immediately obvious upon our entry into the field, which was the reason why we consciously decided against formally interviewing people working within the two participating institutions. Diversity work like this concert series, involving two rather different project partners with rather distinct resources in terms of financial, cultural, and symbolic capital, comes with complex communication and negotiation processes embedded in the related power structures. When we started our research, concerns were raised by people of the involved NGO that our research could detrimentally interfere in this process. Consequently, it would have been possible to interview people from the respective concert hall organisation, but not from the involved NGO. This would have left an imbalance in representation in our research data, and after intense discussion, also with colleagues at our department, we decided not to interview any organisationally involved people, focusing on the musicians' perspectives and our participant observations. While this certainly limits some of our insights, it was nevertheless necessary for us for ethical reasons to accept the request of the involved NGO as the organisation worrying about possible complications to the cooperation.

Our field was primarily constituted by the events of the concert series; a main pillar of our data is our ethnographic participant observations as audience members of these seven public concerts (cf. Stock 2004). We did participant observation at all concerts, documenting especially the characteristics of the stage performances, the audience and overall audience behaviour.

Audio or video documentation was not possible, so extensive field notes during and right after the events guaranteed the documentation of our observations and experiences. While the opening concert was attended by Anja Brunner, of the six solo-band concerts three were documented by Tessa Balser-Schuhmann alone, three by both of us. Throughout the year, we also collected all media reports and material on the concert series. Given that there was only little resonance in the national or regional media, this material consists mainly of screenshots of websites of the Musikverein and the *Brunnenpassage* and print material for the concert series. Additionally, we consciously followed the social media accounts of the singers and documented their posts on the concert series, as well as those from connected accounts that shared content about the concerts. In addition to this, we conducted qualitative interviews with all six singers and with two musicians from the symphonic orchestra, each of whom also played in one of the singers' solo-band concerts. The interviews were carried out at different stages throughout the concert series; overall, we conducted eight interviews between July 2022 and June 2023. The first interview done shortly after the opening concert was with two singers at the same time; all others were individual interviews. All but one interview were in presence. One interview was conducted by both of us, whereas the other interviews were led by one person alone. We used a prepared questionnaire to semi-structure our interviews, asking about experiences from the concerts, the musical processes in developing the concerts, the perception of the cooperation of Musikverein and *Brunnenpassage*, impressions of the organisational framework, and relevant musical cooperations, but leaving room to talk freely about their insights and impressions. The interviews, fieldnotes, and (social) media material were transcribed by Tessa Balser-Schuhmann and coded thematically by both of us. Our data reveals different voices from different positions: (1) the voices of the 'invited Others', retrieved from the interviews of the six singers, who come to speak both in unified and individual voices; (2) the voices of the field of classical music, retrieved from the orchestral musicians, who spoke from very different positions, each individually, and together as members of the orchestra, and from public texts; (3) the 'voices' of the audience, retrieved from eclectic documentation of reactions to the concerts on social media, and our own observations at the concerts; and (4) our own voices, as researchers, unified in our research aim, but different in our individual observations. A note on our positionality: As we are White, middle-class, female, German native-speaking music scholars, one may expect a certain level of familiarity with classical music. However, classical music itself had been neither the focus of our research nor the object of our personal interests. This was the first time – and only on account of this particular study – that we had attended a concert at the Musikverein. Our observations, therefore, whilst obviously influenced by our educational and biographical familiarity and our privileged position within this cultural field, provide, to a certain extent, a novice perspective on the Musikverein as a cultural space. Since the concerts were public events, the singers cannot remain anonymous regarding their participation in the concert series. In this text, however, we use generic terms like 'one singer' or 'one musician' to conceal individual voices. In cases where singers can be identified, relevant passages have been explicitly approved by them. The two musicians from the symphony orchestra, the *Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich*, remain entirely anonymous.

The Imagined Diverse Other(s) in 'Wiener Stimmen'

Classical music has drawn much of its self- and externally ascribed specific position in the realm of music, as Nooshin points out, from a "deep-rooted discourse of binary opposition […] to mark the boundaries between Europe and its 'ethnic others'" (2003, 245; cf. Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000). Our ethnographic material supports this with a whole range of statements constructing a boundary between classical music and the non-classical musics: All participants, not only the classical music practitioners, used descriptions like 'normal' or 'different from us.' The non-classi-

cal thereby was thoroughly ethnically marked, in contrast to the classical music which appeared devoid of ethnic characteristics (cf. Pearse and Bouliane 2024). In reality, however, there were at least seven musical traditions meeting, some more similar than others. While there was overall awareness of differences in language, traditions, and cultural situations in the selection and marketing of singers, references to the heterogeneity of the 'invited' people became less consistent when talking about the general experiences in the concert series. In the end, six traditions converged to become one Other to the dominant norm of classical music. This binary can be observed on all levels of this diversity initiative, and while obviously consciously produced in the design and aim of the concert series, it proves meaningful to take a closer look at the intersectional character of these apparent opposites that are intrinsically connected to issues of ethnicity and class.

Implementing a diversity initiative requires an Other, and for this concert series the publicly envisioned Other was the 'diverse city society' which in this case implicitly, but not explicitly, referred to the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of people living in Vienna. The term 'diverse' does not point to social status/class, gender, age, or ability; what is sought to be 'invited' to the concert hall is, at first sight, cultural, ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity. This diversity was clearly conceptualised as heterogeneous. The aim was not only ethnic difference, but diversity within the ethnic difference. This was clearly followed through by the choice of the six singers of different backgrounds and musical styles, which also illustrates the aim of representing a certain ethnically marked diversity of Vienna. As such, the invitations were not merely to individuals but to certain symbolic representations of ethnic diversity. Due to the limited number of possible participants, many of Vienna's diaspora communities, for example, East-Asian or Latin American, were absent; but the singers who did perform were all from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. One singer thereby stood out in two ways: The only Black singer was not situated in 'World Music'/Jazz, like all the others, but instead performed English-language Funk/Neo-Soul. Additionally, while the others were part of a common music scene in Vienna, often presented as the 'World Music' or 'Global Music' scene, she had no prior connections with them. We suggest that a major criterion for including her in the project was her skin colour – a strategic decision to include a BIPOC performer on stage. For the opening concert, the singer performed songs in English, which is one of her native languages and a language she commonly performs in. This contradicted the overall expectation of the concert series to some extent that the singers present 'their ethnicity,' which can be seen in the case of another singer. The Kurdish performer, who grew up in Turkey, usually sings Kurdish songs but was specifically asked to include a song in Turkish, which comes across as a rather problematic request given the fact the Kurdish language has for long been systematically suppressed by the Turkish state. While the singer did not mention explicitly this political dimension, she then chose a song that used both languages. The request, however, shows the expectation that the audience could possibly include Turkish-speaking people, and that these, too, should be presented. The language of the songs in the opening concert was thereby an important aspect for attracting or serving the different ethnically marked communities in Vienna. That one singer performed in English can, however, be seen as a productive example of refusing exoticism in Othering and a constructive conception of ethnic difference and heterogeneity which does not commonly include English as a global lingua franca. In the choice of the singers, then, the complexity of the 'diverse city society' has been clearly conceptualised as involving different ethnic, linguistic, and musical backgrounds, while at the same time acting along a reflective political intention by consciously including a BIPOC musician. In addition, throughout the narrative of 'opening up' to the Viennese diversity, they were all positioned as belonging to Vienna. The implicit Othering, however, comes apparent on another level: All singers did not belong to the classical concert hall; their music was not part of the field of classical music sketched out above. This was of course part of the design in this concert series: If the

diverse city society should be invited to the Musikverein, then there should be different music. The ethnic difference was not sought in – for example – the Turkish, Brown solo violinist performing with symphonic orchestra, but in an ethnic Other that is also audible and performable. This brought with it the Othering that was intrinsic to the overall project, which was one of 'musical worlds': a classical one, and a non-classical one. The non-classical musical worlds presented are not (White) rock music, jazz, or pop, which could also count as Other to classical music, but ethnically marked musical traditions that can be found in Vienna. At second glance, however, it becomes clear that also gender – in consciously staging female singers – and the complex aspect of class played an important role, albeit not communicated upfront. The choice of singers for performing solo with a symphonic orchestra clearly indicates a conscious reflection on the compatibility of the singers with this situation, in experience and music. The singers – as well as the other non-classical musicians performing in the different concerts – had to be familiar with the conventions and practices, or ready and competent to adapt accordingly, without many ruptures to expect in the process. This points to a certain level of experience and proficiency with 'art' contexts that influenced the choice. In addition, their music had to be adaptable to an 'art' conception of music in an arrangement for symphonic orchestra. All 'invited' singers and musicians, meaning those not part of the 'classical music world', performed in a way that was compatible with this field. So, while there was a conscious reproduction of a binary between classical and non-classical music, the latter had to be possible to include into the aesthetical 'art' framework common for classical music.

Unspoken Rules: Anew to the Classed Location

This 'art' habitus is very influential for the overall experience of audience members and musicians. When asking during the interviews why the singers wanted to play at a concert hall that was hardly relevant to their music and their audience, we heard that they loved the opportunity to perform on such a famous and beautiful stage, that it would be a special experience, that it had always been a dream, or that it would serve to enhance their professional profile. A musician well-known in the Viennese field of 'World Music'/Jazz stated right after the opening concert: "We heard traditional music together with a classical orchestra before. But to be here, to see our music staged in this location, that's so special" (informal conversation, field notes of A. Brunner). Classical concert halls, in Vienna as elsewhere, and the Musikverein in Vienna specifically, embody a certain image of high art and high culture that extends far beyond the world of classical music, which is – as Anna Bull has shown – positioned as having less value, less 'art', less universality (Bull 2019). The symbolic power of the space of the classical music concert hall, especially one as prestigious as the Musikverein, is felt also by people outside the genre of classical music. Consequently, a performance in the Musikverein, and with a classical orchestra, can clearly produce cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986) even outside classical music spaces and influence the individual cultural positions of the musicians.

The Black conductor Brandon Keith Brown calls the concert hall a "foreboding sonic space of Whiteness that Black people feel that they're not a part of, that they can't be a part of" (Brown 2023, 144), which is something we can extend to ethnically marginalised and minoritised people in general. It was an outspoken aim of this concert series to cross exactly this border: to bring people to the Musikverein who would not go there. For the opening concert, this obviously proved successful. The conscious invitation, including a musical performance that they could relate to, made Viennese citizens feel empowered enough to attend a concert at one of the city's most prestigious cultural spaces: The audience of the concert mainly comprised people aged 20–50, heterogeneous in linguistic backgrounds, and unified in their non-Whiteness – a demographic rarely seen in this musical space, as noted by our interview partners and other music

scholars (Petri-Preis 2024). This was an audience that had in the majority not been to a classical concert hall to listen to a concert before, or at least did not do this regularly, and according to our observations, it was at least in part the targeted 'diverse city society' that was present. This audience and the organisers clearly celebrated the event, as exemplified in a short interview extract from one singer when asked about the experience of the opening concert:

> Everyone was so excited, and everything was so exciting, […], and the audience totally celebrated it, the orchestra celebrated it just as much, the conductor celebrated it, we celebrated it, the Musikverein celebrated it, and the Brunnenpassage. It was somehow like a New Year's Eve event, like, now a new era is beginning, something special has taken place in this house, and also in this city. (Interview with a singer, Original in German, translation by the authors)

This celebratory description matches the accounts of the other singers; one even called it a "revolution". Also, the orchestral musicians were clearly impressed by the concert experience, as obvious by a statement by one of them: "At the end, I was really emotionally moved; I got teary-eyed." The people present not only celebrated a wonderful concert, but they celebrated the possibility and legitimation of being in a cultural space that they would not feel included in during 'normal' concert programming. Reflecting on this specific celebratory atmosphere during both the concert and the after-party, Anja Brunner noted in her field notes that night: "It felt like the Musikverein has been conquered" (field notes A. Brunner, June 4, 2022). For one evening, the Musikverein had invited an atmosphere of uprising and hope into its halls. However, the 'conquering' was a capture without resistance; the doors were open, so to speak, as the institution holding power over this cultural space had extended an invitation through the implementation of this concert series.

The reactions in the days after the concert showed the enormous significance of this first evening of the concert series as well as the level of exclusion commonly felt by the targeted audience. Statements of excitement and enthusiasm were posted on social media in the aftermath of the concert:

> The last time I was at the Musikverein […] I remember thinking, well, maybe this just isn't for me. But this, this was for all of us. (@colorinvienna, reposted by @golnarshahyar, June 6, 2022)

> To witness such a diverse group performing in such a historically "white" space was breath-taking, to say the least. (@strudelworte, reposted by @basma_jabr, June 5, 2022)

> Migras in Vielzahl (@kdm_rap_official, June 5, 2022), ["migras" is an empowering term used in German for people with migration biographies]

The overall feeling of not being part of it – and therefore the need to be invited – is here clearly connected to the symbolic representation of the classical concert hall as a White space. This confirms the perception of classical music concert halls as intrinsically racialized spaces, within which the performed music is meant to invite a predominantly White, middle-to-high-class community (Bull 2019, Kolbe 2024).

While the particularity of the occasion certainly did play into the attractiveness of the concert, the role of the music performed and the individual singers should not be underestimated. The audience was to a large extent composed of fan communities of the individual singers, and staging these six Viennese singers promised music that the listeners could relate to, regardless of how familiar they might be with symphonic music. The performance of music that one could culturally relate to together with the programming of musics of similar standing in Viennese society made this event so special and attractive for a rather different audience. Concerning the regular audience of the Musikverein, it seemed in our observations that this community was rather reluctant to visit this concert series. Overall, these reactions confirm the inaccessibility and lack

of appeal of the Musikverein through the common concert programming for many of the 'diverse city society'.

In the concrete experience of the concert itself, then, the symbolic power of the space, which we already touched upon in the previous section, becomes important. Gillian Moore describes the symphony orchestra concert as "a rather extraordinary ritual, a rather dimly and inaccurately remembered version of a performance that has been frozen in time since somewhere around the middle of the 19th century, when big public concerts were still a novelty" (Moore 2023, 297). She stresses the "sense of 'unreachability'" that comes with this ritual and states: "The ritual is strange to many" (Moore 2023, 297; cf. Small 1986). Our observations during the concert series confirm this, revealing various moments of confusion surrounding the 'secrets' of the classical concert, when people for whom classical music and its institutional culture do not play a major day-to-day role try to comply with norms and values of these classed structures.

These classed structures of classical concert halls involve a range of learned behaviours and rules, which can often seem outdated and strange, and are connected to the classed positioning that classical music upholds. As they serve as exclusionary practices, they need to be reflected on when diversity is at stake. Such conventions, for example around timing, behaviour, and dress code, as well as expectations concerning performance on stage (as seen with the choice of the singers), are genre-specific and have to be learned; they are part of specific aesthetics, rituals, and habitus (Bourdieu 1984; Atkinson 2017; Bull 2019). Beverly Skeggs argues that social difference along the category of class is made through what is authorised or legitimised as common or normal behaviours, rules, and tastes (Skeggs 2004, 153). At the concerts, many in the audience – including ourselves – were not entirely familiar with these rules. Punctuality, for example, which is of enormous relevance in classical music (and Western Europe in general), is not a universal cultural trait, but a learned habit. At the opening concert, after the first song, the doors opened, and about thirty people, being late, hurried to their places. They were not let in during the piece; it is unthinkable in classical music to enter a concert mid-performance. As it is equally unthinkable to start performing without the audience being absolutely attentive, the conductor, Wayne Marshall, waited with a smile for the latecomers to settle. To be there before the scheduled starting time is something uncommon or even odd in other concert contexts; to know that this is necessary in this context, implies a certain classed learning. Another aspect is reaction during the performance: Throughout the concert, each singer was greeted and supported with enthusiastic applause and cheers, and occasional cheering and clapping continued during the performance, which led one orchestra musician to describe the audience as being "louder", stating that it was clear from the first song onwards that "this is not *our* audience that is sitting there" (an example of the binary continuously produced, as discussed above). In typical classical music concerts, listening is generally done in silence, and applause is given at the very end; cheering is rather unusual. Furthermore, almost nobody was dancing. At some of the solo-band concerts, people in the audience – including us – wavered, uncertain whether dancing would be allowed or even appropriate, and it was only at one concert that we observed a single individual dancing expressively in the gallery. Body movement in reaction to music is not associated to this setting of the classical music concert hall at all; unless it is a ballroom dance event. Finally, there are the – often unspoken – dress codes that concert halls imply. People attending the respective concerts we documented were dressed in elegant, or smart-casual, clothing, largely following convention, although still in clothing visibly distinct from other audiences attending other concerts in the same place. Exceptionally, one person attended several concerts wearing sandals – something that drew astonishment from staff members and was commented on in interviews. This individual, however, was a person easily read as White and male; while people visibly belonging

to racialised groups followed the dress codes, the individual who broke with convention in this way appeared to do so from a position of social privilege.

Access to learned behaviours and knowledge as described is not connected to ethnicity but is a question of upbringing and learning, which is connected to social class background. So while ethnic belonging invited a rather diverse audience into the classical concert hall, in the end, the invitation to join these concerts – whether as a performer or a member of the audience – inevitably spoke to people who were compatible with the habitus of the classical music concert hall, in that they were familiar with the expectations, or at least were confident enough to fulfil them to an extent that made them curious or comfortable enough to attend. To put it bluntly and consciously in simplistic categories, it was not the ethnically marked working-class industrial worker, the ethnically marked mum earning her income through cleaning, or the ethnically marked wedding band musician (while being an expert musician) who were addressed, but rather those compatible with middle-to-high-class culture and associated values, who were to a certain extent familiar with the expectations, even if they would not position themselves as middle-to-high-culture, and even if the rules could not be followed to the full. The intersection of class and ethnicity and the ambivalence of the ethnic imaginary is evident: Ethnic belonging was coupled with a certain need for cultural capital, in the form of knowledge about conventions, to feel invited to such a specific, highly classed diversity setting.

Music in Diversity: Decisions, Cooperations, and Conflicts

It has already been briefly mentioned that the staged music was of immense importance in this concert series, because it was – to a certain extent – an Other to the classical concert hall. Given the tradition at the Musikverein, however, it seems that it was out of the question that the opening concert in the Great Hall had to be an orchestral concert involving a symphonic orchestra, presenting the established musical-aesthetic framework of this classical music space and its musical conventions. It was probably not thinkable – yet – to simply open the Great Hall to non-symphonic music outside the realm of (Western) classical music, and in the framework of this diversity initiative, it made productive sense to ‘combine the different musical traditions with classical music. This aim for a productive cooperation, if not merging, between the classical and non-classical musical worlds is also visible in the mandatory inclusion of a musician from the symphony orchestra in the solo-band concerts. There was an obvious aim in the conceptualisation of the concerts to connect these musical worlds as much as possible. On this musical level, we see a very productive exchange, challenging and reflecting boundaries, although this was not without its insecurities or serious criticism.

The most critical aspect concerns the process of creating the arrangements and orchestration of the songs for the opening concert. As symphonic orchestras work with written music, the songs chosen to be performed had to be arranged and/or orchestrated in full scores. For this, the Musikverein contracted an arranger with whom they had worked before. The results were evaluated very differently by the singers and the orchestral musicians. While some singers were satisfied, and one even praised the arrangement as an “excellent job,” others were sceptical. The main critique was the arranger’s lack of familiarity with the musical traditions in question and their specific features, such as scales including quartertones and distinctive rhythmic patterns. Remarks included that the arrangements were too close to the musical conventions of the classical canon and that the arranger was “ill-suited” for the occasion. Put bluntly by one singer: “You can come, but we write for you [your music] without knowing if it works”. It seems that the decisive criteria for choosing an arranger lay more on the reputation for writing music for a symphonic orchestra than in the expertise in the respective musical tradition. An approach taking the musical traditions seriously would have needed experts for each musical tradition. The deci-

sion of having one person arrange all the music was likely due to reasons of economy; however, it points to a clear lack of reflexivity concerning the diversity of the Othered musics. Again, the six invited musical traditions are seen as one complex whole, not as singular traditions with their own traits and characteristics that would be worth considering. This decision reveals the importance of the music fitting the classical symphony orchestra and matches the conclusion Kristina Kolbe drew from her study on a transcultural opera project: "The burden to adapt to the musical dominance of 'Western' genre concepts was […] relegated to the minoritized musicians" (Kolbe 2023, 78). Rather than opening musically to the conventions and performance traditions of the respective musical traditions, the concept implied that the singers and their music adapted to a symphony orchestra, in a way set by someone familiar with classical music. This is not to say that this was not a creative and interesting process for some of the singers to work with a symphony orchestra and in the realm of classical music. It definitely was a productive experience for all of them. But the musical concept itself for this opening concert was heavily bound to the aesthetics and conventions of the location, which means classical music.

The tension between the merging of classical music with non-classical musical traditions was also consciously taken up by the performers themselves throughout their solo-band performances, using this special opportunity to adapt to the context of the concert hall and wishing to make this unique encounter audible. One singer, for example, fused Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata' with her own funky music; another chose to perform the song 'Die liebe Farbe', taken from the song cycle 'Die schöne Müllerin' by Franz Schubert, arranged by the orchestral musician who was asked to join the solo-band concert. Engaging – consciously – with this specific tradition of classical music and the fact that they were performing in a respective location shows the effort and motivation the singers invested in this opportunity. Interestingly, musical decisions were also influenced by the specific conventions of the prestigious classical music concert hall. With classical music being primarily acoustic music, one singer reported reflecting on whether an electric guitar – a main instrument in her musical work – would be appropriate as an accompanying instrument for the symphonic orchestra. Before even starting, she had anticipated a possible breach of protocol, bringing onto the stage an unconventional sound and habit. In the end, the decision was made to use the electric guitar despite its potential (assumed) unconventionality. The solo-band concerts were also unconventional, simply in that they brought to the stage music that is commonly not heard in this location. In these moments of consciously engaging with and countering musical tradition and convention surrounding classical music we see the potential in such diversity initiatives: using the space provided to create little cracks in the tradition.

Concerning the specific cooperation between individual musicians, everyone highlighted the cooperative and friendly exchange between the singers and musicians embedded in different musical traditions. There were, however, still some challenges that revealed differences in musical traditions that are important to address when conceptualising diversity initiatives within classical music contexts. An often-mentioned aspect was the role of musical notation. Most of the invited singers were used to working with or without scores; there was, however, an intrinsic expectation that this competence was necessary to sing with a symphony orchestra or to play music together and that it was linked to the perceived identity of the 'professional' musician: One singer openly communicated the fact that she had never learned to read music, and she recounted that an orchestral musician sympathetically remarked that it had not even been noticeable, obviously expecting otherwise. Also, the repertoire for the solo-band concerts was not always available in writing; a challenge that was usually solved by someone transcribing the music for the invited musician from the symphony orchestra. Connected to this question of notation was the topic of improvisation, a regular challenge in musical encounters between musicians trained in classical music and musicians coming from other traditions (Nooshin 2003; Ram-

narine 2011). One orchestral musician bluntly stated their preference for "less improvisation". In addition, unfamiliarity with the music and the musical practices and habits led to some insecurity for the orchestral musicians. One musician commented on how they were glad that the musicians in the ensemble had never let them feel that they were not as *au fait* with the music played, while "for sure it must have been striking to them". So within the process of collective music-making, productive ways of overcoming given hierarchical frameworks – if only temporarily – could be found through working together and engaging in each other's music and music-making traditions. For a lasting, sustainable change, however, this is not enough.

Inflexible Organisation: Working Structures and Responsibilities

While at first sight not of immediate relevance, our data pointed to the level of the organisational apparatus as being of high importance for the (non)functioning of this concert series. Overall, the organisation was – as can be expected in a renowned classical music institution – conducted to high professional standards, and this is something that was also clearly stated by all singers involved. However, the procedures, practices, and processes were not consciously altered to meet the diverse needs of the musicians invited or the different realities that a musical encounter of this sort would demand. The binary between classical and non-classical musicians resonated in the reality of working conditions. In essence, working in a symphonic orchestra differs greatly from being a freelance musician, which leads to the necessity to discuss the materially classed realities of this diversity project setting. Ultimately, this would mean accepting the necessity of more resources, but the fact that diversity projects need more resources than regular productions is often ignored (cf. Kolbe 2024).

A symphonic orchestra is organised like an enterprise, with staff working in the background to guarantee smooth processes for the staging of a concert. This is necessary considering the sheer number of people and instruments that have to be coordinated. The orchestral musicians typically have contracts with fixed working schedules and regular monthly pay; their task is primarily to perform the music, which usually comprises a repertoire not chosen by themselves. Working routines in such a large group imply certain standards, including punctuality. Indeed, an orchestral musician stated that they are required to incur a fine for being late to rehearsals. In the internal schedule of the *Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich,* the concert series 'Wiener Stimmen' was marked as a "special project" (German: "Sonderprojekt"), with the musicians not knowing for a long time what this special project was about. These working conditions, which are privileged even among musicians within the field of classical music, differ tremendously from those of the singers and supporting musicians in the project. While all of them are professional in terms of musical expertise and experience, not all of them live solely off their musical work, with some working additionally in other fields. Their engagements are freelance, which also requires them to organise their own performances, marketing, and touring. This entails different requirements concerning meetings, timing, and resources than the organisation of a symphonic orchestra.

Including a symphony orchestra for the opening concert also meant that the number of rehearsals was predetermined by the organisational structure of the symphonic orchestra. Both the singers and the orchestral musicians stated that this led to insufficient rehearsal time for this musically challenging concert, with orchestral musicians struggling to acquaint themselves with the requirements of specific songs from different musical traditions, as discussed above. Extending this rehearsal time, however, would have required greater financial investment. Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey states: "The time-money practicalities of the orchestral music industry are particularly constraining in professional settings where the cost of one minute of rehearsal time can easily range from £25 to £100+" (2023, 229). Therefore, any project with a symphonic orches-

tra – aesthetically and conceptually compulsory for the opening concert – requires extraordinary financial resources and the willingness to be conscious about the classed position of classical music across all aspects of work. We assume that the Musikverein continued with their normal procedures out of financial considerations, thus limiting their capacity to address some of the more challenging conditions of musical diversity work. Lack of adaption also manifested in the question of technical resources and marketing activities. One orchestral musician assumed that the concerts were marketed in accordance with "normal" procedures, which may have been insufficient for a project like this. Deficient marketing was also mentioned by a singer, who stated that "they [the Musikverein] really did a bad job in marketing". Marketing material was provided in different languages, but apart from this, the machinery was not adapted much to the different audiences they sought to attract. Possibly, this was thought to be the task of the project partner, the NGO *Brunnenpassage*. This is backed up by stories from the singers, who recounted that they were provided with marketing flyers in their respective languages and expected to distribute them themselves. Some of them did, and others refused, stating that distributing marketing material is the responsibility of the institution, especially one so financially well-equipped. There was also some frustration concerning the provision of technical equipment, with one singer commenting on an irritated reaction from the Musikverein staff when she asked why they did not supply amplifiers for the solo-band concerts. It seems that it was expected that the musicians provide resources – whether time or equipment – for free.

All these aspects – fewer rehearsals than necessary, expectation of unpaid work, not providing equipment, sticking to common organisational procedures – show a certain reluctance on the part of the classical music concert hall to face structural change in order to gain diversity. Singers' satisfaction with the overall organisation was clear *despite* these expectations, which serves to highlight the overall functional normalisation of these institutionalised structural realities. In her study on an intercultural opera production, Kolbe observed similar challenges, concluding that a diversity initiative "extracts labour from racialised others, but without challenging the unequal working conditions of the minoritised cultural producers" (2024, 136). For our case study, this not only applies for the singers and musicians involved, but also for the work of the NGO *Brunnenpassage*, whose expertise was not remunerated, as it was a cooperation which was aimed at being of mutual benefit. The benefit however was of very different natures: For *Brunnenpassage*, the aim could only be ideological and political, supporting their overall goal of more visibility for Viennese diversity, and more participation for those currently marginalised; for the Musikverein, however, the aim was rather the need for diversity as a commodity, and as representation, connected possibly to attracting new audiences. This also matches the perception of an – unconscious – assumption on the side of the concert hall that to be part of this project itself was – for the project partner and for the musicians – sufficient remuneration; that to be able to play in this location, to use these rooms, to be invited, is itself a gift of such an extraordinary chance so that there is no further need to consider fair and supportive allocation of resources, not to mention challenging of unequal working conditions.

Conclusion

In this article, we analysed the concert series 'Wiener Stimmen' which took place in the 2022/23 season at the renowned concert hall Musikverein in Vienna, Austria. This concert series, consisting of seven concerts, aimed at opening the programming of the concert hall to the ethnically diverse reality of the Viennese urban society. Based on ethnographic data, we took this project as a case study to examine how the challenge of increasing diversity in a classical music hall was put into practice, and what challenges and potentials came with such initiatives, focusing on the perspective of the 'invited' singers, the employed strategies of promotion and marketing, and the

musical performances put into play. Being aware of the pitfalls of diversity projects in general with their necessity to create an 'Other' to be addressed and included, we employed an intersectional perspective regarding gender, ethnicity/race, and class and examined which boundaries and potentials within these categories of difference became relevant, how they were put into practice, and on which levels difference occurred and was contested throughout the concert series. In discussing these matters, we contribute to an urgent question of our time in musical life in Western Europe: Why should and could a classical concert hall 'diversify', and how could this be achieved? Not only the shrinking audience numbers in classical music halls, but first and foremost the need to increase equality in access for everyone to state-funded institutions puts the need for more participation from non-included social groups to the forefront. Diversity initiatives like the one we analysed are a means on this pathway; however, they do not automatically challenge the currently given unequal power structures. Analysing them provides windows to discuss the pitfalls and the potentials, and to detect those aspects that produce little cracks in the system. In this conclusion, we argue that what was intended, and what actually happened, were different: The invited 'ethnic Others' did not enter alone, simply adapting to the given specific tradition of classical music in its interdependence of White and middle/high-classed norms, but consciously reflected, contested, and negotiated these practices and discourses which remained embedded in the structures of the overall aesthetic and cultural framework inscribed in classical music and its ethnic- and class-excluding practices. In the following, we summarize the struggles around the concert series, as well as the benefits that the participants could draw from it, which were immediately connected to issues of class, intersected on different levels with ethnic difference, to then give a tentative perspective for a possible future of diversity projects in this specific cultural field.

Obviously, by inviting six ethnically marked singers active in culturally different musical fields in Vienna to perform in different settings in the Musikverein, ethnicity and gender were upfront as decisive criteria in the outline of the project. As such, the case study conforms with most diversity projects, especially those in classical music (Kolbe 2022, 2023), in that ethnicity is the main difference focused on to be 'included'. While gender was present in the conscious decision of staging female singers, and as such visible throughout, we could not detect any further immediate relevance of gendered structures throughout the organisation and realisation of the concert series. Class, or social status, however, was not addressed openly at all. Given the obvious classed character of classical music practices, and the fact that classical music is a means to uphold middle/high class status (Bull 2019; Bull and Scharff 2023), this could seem surprising, but it rather reflects diversity initiatives in general, wherein class and social status as relevant discriminatory and excluding factor have been rarely addressed (Hanappi-Egger and Kutscher 2015). In the invitation to a 'diverse' Viennese audience, its classed realities, both demographically and musically, were – possibly unconsciously, but despite enough evidence in musicological literature – left out. The foundation for ignoring class as a relevant structural factor might lie in what Kolbe described as "two conflicting accounts of diversity, one that recognized the latter as a call for self-reflexive institutional change, the other focusing merely on bringing more minoritized cultural producers into the realm of classical music without, however, questioning the organizational and aesthetic set-up of the sector itself" (Kolbe 2023, 74). We assume that these two accounts also reflect the aims of the two cooperating institutions.

Ethnic issues and classed realities can simply not be separated in musical traditions, and classical music is no exception. Our insights confirm this once more. The concert series took place in a most obviously symbolically prestigious concert location, which was bound to certain factors, like symbolic capital for the singers, certain expected behaviour in the concert ritual, and different working structures and working conditions of the involved musicians. These factors are

connected to class; the knowledge of the 'right' behaviour and the privilege to feel comfortable – as a singer, and as an audience member – in such a location is learned behaviour connected to middle-class upbringing and accessibility, which can indeed additionally intersect with ethnic positionality. And while ethnic diversity and musical expertise were the criteria for selecting the singers, classed expectations were invisibly attached to them in that they had to conform to the necessary performance setting with their behaviour on stage and their music. The singers chosen can be seen as positioned within a multi-faceted Viennese middle class, including people of many different origins and upbringings, and they were familiar with the conventions they had to meet. This also applies to the audience, even though not everyone fully met or anticipated the conventions. The prestige of the concert hall was a benefit for the singers, in that a performance in this specific place created symbolic capital also within their musical fields and could be used as a marker of musical mastery. But the expectation of additional efforts beyond performing and being paid – which comes down to unpaid work which is not imposed on other musicians invited to perform in the Musikverein, for example marketing the concerts – points to the opportunity of performing being unconsciously interpreted as part of the renumeration.

Beyond social and cultural norms intersecting through class and ethnicity, the most relevant form of Othering was the musical binary maintained throughout the project: Classical music on the one side, and other musics that do not count as part of this field, on the other. While the 'Other' was ethnically marked, the fact that also classical music is connected to a certain ethnic background was ignored and not mentioned. Classical music is historically and symbolically a White Western European tradition, and therefore by no means neutral, or devoid of structural cultural frameworks (Pearse and Bouliane 2024). Music bound to the intersection of Whiteness with middle-to-high-class positioning was positioned in reference to what was common to be put on stage not only in the Musikverein, but what was seen as the norm in musical terms. The musics of the six invited singers were fused into one imaginary Other, while the concept of what was the 'normal' music within the Musikverein remained within the conventional aesthetic and social frameworks. The working structures of the symphonic orchestra with limited options for rehearsals to reach the mastery of the pieces that the musicians and singers wanted, and the choice of an arranger not familiar with the musical traditions presented are clear signs that it was for the main concert the invited musicians who had to adapt to classical music, and it was assumed that it would still musically work. The questionable trope of universalism shone through. Putting diverse non-White music traditions outside of the classical music field, thereby additionally Othering them as one whole thing, again adds to the practice within classical music reality to uphold its own ethnically-classed values and conventions as normal, and thereby consolidates its position in society.

However, projects like this nevertheless produce little cracks and breaks in a privileged system, as we saw in the rejection of expectations to provide labour, in unexpected behaviour during the ritual of a symphonic orchestra concert, or in the creative programming of the singers during the solo-band concerts. The expectations and hopes of the singers concerning participation and responsibilities show a conscious reflection on the classical music hall as an ethnically-classed space; it seems that the challenge was much clearer to them than to the classical music hall. Our observations during the concerts clearly showed that while people tried to obey the rules of the space, some norms were nevertheless disrupted. It is possible to deviate, whether on stage or in the audience, from the behavioural norms implied by this place, consciously or unconsciously. Drawing on Judith Butler's premise of performativity (1988), in which social norms can be disrupted and re-enacted or embodied differently, such – albeit small – aspects point towards the creative use of the provided space in a way that actively challenges and unsettles normative structures. The most relevant aspect for the possible future of critical diversity initiatives in clas-

sical concert halls was the possibility for the singers to design an entire concert evening. This made this diversity initiative exemplary, as it gave full agency to the musicians, which they all leveraged, consciously and creatively, also by musically referencing the space they were invited to perform in. Taking this aspect further would mean opening classical music halls to non-classical music and giving the control over what is performed to the musicians. It is this aspect that brings us back to our question at the beginning: Why should and could classical concert halls 'diversify'? Would the opening up for non-classical music be a possible pathway?

In this sense, to open classical concert halls to non-classical music would need the fundamental conceptualisation of these locations as spaces for potentially all different musics, as places of variety, diversity, and equity. There could be a concert of a symphonic orchestra concert one day, an Iranian classical orchestra the next, a queer choir performance the following day, a chamber orchestra concert and a transcultural jazz band the following week. Concerts of different musical origins could even happen on the same day, across the different halls of the house. This would make it possible to challenge the Whiteness of classical music halls, or even classical music itself, and bring classical music to one evaluative level with other musics. It would possibly jeopardize the shielded space of classical music, leading to prestigious concert locations being accessible to people beyond the specific positioning of mainly White, middle-to-high-class bourgeois society. If state-funding bodies take social realities seriously, and this is the only foundation on which we can argue for a more diverse musical reality in concert halls, there is a need to establish such new formats and be open to changing their structural processes. It might be, however, that this would mean losing part of the specific audience, who expect to stay 'among themselves' to keep their classed status in classical music locations. Our observations during the concert series showed that there was only little overlap; the audiences of 'normal' classical music concerts were not attending these 'experimental' concerts. However, given the need for more diverse audiences in classical concert halls, this might be the way.

A decisive factor in this discussion has nevertheless to be mentioned: Currently, economy beats diversity. As long as there are no intentions – or mandatory measures – for allocating more financial means to such initiatives than what a 'normal' classical concert would need, there will not be a real, satisfactory process of diversification beyond perhaps classical musicians being of different ethnic backgrounds or the repertoire being occasionally composed by a non-White person. Economic decisions seem to have influenced the success of this project at significant points: in choosing only one arranger for all songs from different musical traditions, in not investing enough in diverse marketing measures, in not providing enough paid rehearsal time. If diversity is sought within the musical offerings of a classical music concert hall, which was clearly intended in the concert series we discussed, then financial means must increase (cf. Kolbe 2024).

In summary, while we cannot doubt the good intentions of all project collaborators, the concert series contributed only marginally to sustainably reducing inequality in the field of musical production in Vienna. On a continuum between "doing diversity" and "doing otherness", diversity projects in classical music institutions tend to gravitate more towards the latter (Pelillo-Hestermeyer 2021, 10), and our case study was no exception. However, none of our interview partners expected it to be immediately lasting; it was seen as an important first step, coupled with the hope that it would continue and start a process deemed highly necessary. But it didn't. For reasons unknown to us, the concert series was – against previous plans – not continued; likewise, the cooperation between the Musikverein and the NGO *Brunnenpassage* ended earlier. Obviously, there is still a lot of transcultural work to do to come to terms with diversity. For the moment, the excluded remain excluded, and without invitation, there is little access to these privileged spaces, let alone spaces to foster change. The power to change the structure lies in the hands of those within the classical music community, together with, as Kolbe rightly points out, state

actors and funding organisations (2024, 237). And it is classical music organisations and their funders that need to come to terms with which diversity they seek out. If the goal is 'critical diversity' which acknowledges the social responsibility of a central institution in a specific musical sector to implement structures to reduce inequalities and the dominance of White, male, middle-/high-class participation, the discussion has to be about how far it is allowed to question and disrupt the ethnically-classed nature of classical music. In this vein, we want to end with a remark from one singer who stated that the opening concert brought a "normal concert feeling" to a classical music concert hall. Classical music concerts, which include a process of sitting still, of listening to the music and following it intellectually are not the norm; they are – in the 21st century – rather the exception. And while there is no need to omit these practices, it nevertheless points to an important aspect in regard to diversity, inequality, and participation: namely the need to rigorously question and continue to deconstruct the norm(al) on all levels.

Statement of ethical approval

This study was conducted in a setting that, in accordance with our university's ethics guidelines and the scope of our research, did not require prior ethical approval. However, as ethnomusicologists, critical reflection on ethical issues is, by nature, a crucial part of our research discourse and practices. We adhere to the ethical guidelines of the *Society for Ethnomusicology* (SEM) and the *British Forum of Ethnomusicology* (BFE). All relationships and collaborations in this study were based on informed consent, with participants being comprehensively briefed on the research methods, aims, and objectives, and interviewees provided written consent for data use.

Authors' Contribution Statement

The research idea and theoretical concept were initiated by Anja Brunner within the research project *Women Musicians from Syria: Performance, Networks, Belonging/s after Migration*, funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF [DOI 10.55776/V706]. Both authors contributed to all levels of the research in the ways described in the article. They jointly developed the concept for the present article. Tessa Balser-Schuhmann wrote drafts on the empirical data analysis and parts of the theoretical discussion; Anja Brunner wrote the other parts and combined them into a first main draft. Both authors read and revised all sections, approved the final manuscript and assume responsibility for the article's accuracy and integrity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This research was funded in whole by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [DOI 10.55776/V706].

Acknowledgements

We wholeheartedly thank all the people who provided their time and expertise in the interviews. Furthermore, our thanks go to Paul Talbot for a first proofreading and the editors and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

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