

# **DECLASSIFY**

## **Episode 9: The Stats**

Guest: Ciaran Frame

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### **SUMMARY**

This week Declassify welcomes on media artist, educator and composer, Ciaran Frame. Ciaran is passionate about cross-disciplinary collaboration and education, seeking a place in the world of data, technology and music. He has found a home in interactive and generative computer music, creating everything from sonification toolboxes to make music out of plants, to performance works where players must purchase their musical material. Our conversation in this week's episode, Ciaran is the author and researcher behind the fantastic data collection series and publication, the Living Music Report. This week's episode is a deep dive into data sets as inspiration for bio-music, the intricacies of stats and their revelations concerning MPA (Major Performing Arts Company) programming choices, accountability and the nature of grants and funding.

## TRANSCRIPT

Victoria Pham (VP): Hello, hello to everyone listening! Welcome back to Declassify and this week we've got a great guest and episode lined up for you. From Melbourne, I'd like to welcome on board media artist and composer, Ciaran Frame! Aside from the brilliance of Ciaran's work and practice that you're going to be introduced to in this episode, we're going to have a deep dive into the world statistics and data because, if some of you haven't already caught this publication, Ciaran is the person behind 'The Living Music Report,' a very revealing – albeit not so shocking – statistical report published earlier this year that unveiled the stats about the plateauing MPA programming choices

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So now it comes to the intro about Ciaran bit because I don't think I can adequately explain your classical music training and how it has led to what your diverse and very interdisciplinary practice is now. Perhaps if you could describe how that development has happened?

CF: So, I'm Ciaran and similar to yourself and almost exactly the same as yourself my musical background comes through the Con and a Bachelor of Composition, and I guess, my practice has taken very dramatic turns since that time. I sort of nowadays see music as a lens to view other concepts whether that be scientific or processes or data, or any non-musical stuff. I think that's how I view music, as a tool to understand different things, but I guess I'm still connected to tradition and my degree, whether that's a good thing or a bad thing remains to be seen. I think I use the tools available to me to interpret other genres and other disciplines to see if anything interesting comes of it.

VP: Cool. So how do you... say you're going to use a data set to inform the music you're writing, how would you integrate and select it the ones you then integrate?

CF: So I guess I select things, or data sets or processed based on what I'm interested in. So if I'm curious about a particular discipline or genre or niche area of biology, I tend to gravitate towards those data sets just because it's interesting and if I want to learn more about something I think music is an interesting tool to use, amongst others obviously, to be curious.

VP: So, for example, I know you're writing something about lichen now, or you were interested in lichen growth as the premise of a piece?

CF: Yeah, I guess it's about, it's static so it's just about lichen as it sits in the environment and that came about through a residency I did at the arctic circle at a scientific research station in Lapland, Finland, which is a very remote town on the edge of Finland – Lapland. And again, lichen was something I was so fascinated by and these little ecosystems on rocks, almost like an alien lifeform, so it's not like I set out to write for lichen but these kinds of things I get very fixated on and there's so much potential for musical works for those fields, like lich,

VP: Now I have to ask. Did you write music for the lichen to enjoy, or is it so we as the audience are listening to the lichen?

CF: I think we as an audience are listening to the lichen. It's not even about the lichen, the piece is the lichen, so what the musicians' play is the score and so they are interpreting the lichen so it is a reflection of what the lichen is. But I guess, you know, there's every chance that the lichen would be interested in hearing itself, in the same sense that a programmatic, biographical piece maybe the lichen would be interested in listening to itself. Mostly it had to do with sonifying these ecosystems in Finland and learning more about this interesting little quirk of biology.

VP: That's amazing. Because, in a way it links into the previous episode, with Alexis Weaver where she spoke a bit about one of her projects which included writing music that frogs would enjoy, so for some reason I made the immediate leap that some of your work was not just an homage to the lichen but music the lichen would enjoy.

CF: That's brilliant. I think there's so much we can learn from the natural world and these sorts of little ecosystems. To be honest, I'm surprised there's not more of it out there, and there is a lot with bio music being its own genre, but there's so much out there and so much creative potential... and now I need to write music for frogs.

VP: So now I wrote down on my piece of paper a question that now as I look at it, it seems rude, and it's do you like trees?

CF: I love trees! That's not a rude question at all!

VP: Well it brings to mind another work you did and it was VIVID and it the one where it interactive and you could hug a tree and it would light up.

CF: Yes, so that was *Treehugger*. I absolutely love trees and I'm writing a piece for trees right now, it might not surprise you to elarn. I'm similarly obsessed with trees and this whole rabbit hole I've fallen down, this whole social ecology disclipine that looks at the way we interact with different organisms in our society, in the city even and where I live in Melbourne. How do trees change the way we behave? How they change our wellbeing and the city's livability? How they are, perhaps, ignored or how not that much emphasis is placed on them. For example, if you see a possum in a tree, you're like "oh my god a possum," but if you see a tree you just go "oh it's a tree." So, I love trees.

VP: So then, if you're looking at trees, and interactions between ourselves and trees, and trees between each other and varying biological aspects, how do you then translate that into a musical language? Would you play around with notation or maybe even electronics?

CF: Yeah, I think I kind of try to keep my methodologies pretty open to the circumstances, in this case I'm looking at sonifying trees via electronic music. There are these wonderful data sets that the City of Melbourne publishes about every public tree in the City of Melbourne in this big open data set. So, to me, that just screams every tree needs a data set to go with it, which can be generated through different processes of sonification, and I think it's (to answer your question) it changes. I also enjoy creating notation systems that are weird and wacky, and maybe they're based off the look of bark of a tree or the position trees. I think there are an infinite number of ways you can sonify or create music from trees.

VP: So, hypothetically if you write music for every tree, would you then be able to interact when you physically go to each tree?

CF: Hopefully. So that's definitely one way that I was thinking, could you sonify and then bring this music to every single tree or an interpretation of? Another way I'm looking at, now that everything is moving on-line and in the digital space, can you place yourself in different environments in Melbourne? At the moment, we can't travel outside of a 5km radius from our place of residence beause of the restrictions, is there ways that we can experience didferent parts of Melbourne that we can't access at the moment to learn about different tree species, and

these ecosystems through music in ways we couldn't have otherwise done. There are some interesting conversations in there as well. I just think it's such an amazing field and in a way it's kind of under, not undervalued, but not as much work as I expect there to be in these fields in terms of collaborations going on. We as musicians have so much to learn from biology, chemistry, physics and all these scientific disciplines and I think, to a certain extent, during these collaborations, these scientific fields have something to learn from music as well. Obviously not going to discover the Higgs-Boson through a piece of chamber music, but I think even just different ways of interpreting data or looking at concepts or processes, there's just so much potential.

VP: And it allows the audience, if not the musicians themselves, a chance to understand some of these seemingly untouchable and difficult one, like physics, to understand them from a different lens which is very useful and interesting.

CF: Yes, absolutely. And I think that sometimes music and science is praised as this way of finding untapped interpretations. I'm not sure it goes that far but I do think it can at to the feel, at least, or add some meaning and social relevance to these fields that otherwise aren't just being explored enough.

VP: And it's not unheard of to combine the arts and sciences. For example, a very old and ancient example, but if you take a look at something like Plato's *Republic* there is an entire chapter about how certain musical keys and modes are capable of affecting social changes or behaviours.

CF: Yes, so maybe we're going through some sort of Renaissance of these kinds of collaboration.

VP: Well I hope it continues and expands because big institutions like CERN offer an annual artist in residence and in Australia you have an Antarctic expedition and work with scientists down at that base which I believe Speak Percussion did two or three years ago.

CF: Well, another one on this list. My list is going to get very long after this podcast.

VP: Well in fact this is probably a good time for me to attempt to do a Segway. So, I was thinking about how to bring in your work as a composer into your other, quite prominent work, you've been doing as the Living Music Report and it seems like data is a centre of a lot of your work. So how did you move from creative practice into what we have now?

CF: Yeah, I think you're onto something with the data in my pieces and other areas that I'm interested in. The Living Music Report came about not initially as something I was set on doing. It started because I was looking for an equivalent that does not exist, and I guess it was inspired by a lack of data and a lack of big picture kind of views on how contemporary performance landscape in Australia.

VP: And how should I describe to other people who haven't had a chance to take a look at it yet?

CF: Yeah, so essentially, it's a report that summarises what everyone played, and by everyone, I mean the main orchestras in Australia which kind of fall under this umbrella what are called Major Performing Arts Organisations (MPAs) and it summarises everything that they played in 2019 on a public program whether that be an outdoor gala or concert hall, I sat down and individually recorded every single piece that they had played and it totalled to 2006 works in total, which is... I think it was worth it even though it was a lot of manual data entry.

VP: it's actually an incredibly useful resources because you're right in that it was lacking. I was trying to look for data before this was released, well, before you released this, and instead I found very disconnected and disparate segments of the whole picture – for example, APRA AMCOS and AMC but it was more centred on the percentages that made up their representation and royalty divisions, and there were some individual company reports. For example, if you go and search for Musica Viva, that last one you'll find easily is from the 2017-18 season, so thank you for doing this work.

CF: No, and I think the other thing to point out I is that there is very little data collection and big picture in terms of the key areas that this report focuses on, whether that be First Nations music or gender in music, in performances, there is just very little information out there, in particular from organisations. It's very selective use of data on an organisation's behalf, and I

yeah, it's very selective use of data and there's no big-picture because it's not in the organisation's interest to be doing so.

VP: Hmm... so do break this down, I'm going to read out some of the primary statistics and figures for people listening at home so they get a picture of what is happening statistically and it'll set us up for a deep dive into these stats. So basically you give an overview at the beginning about MPAs function, and function in terms of how much money they receive on an annual basis particularly your notes on how much money they get from federal funding, which in Australia is the Australian Arts Council. And they received a substantial chunk and it's 61%.

CF: Absolutely, it's a massive chunk of money.

VP: And it's 131 million Australian dollars, in the year of 2019.

CF: I should point out that that's all the MPAs, not just the orchestras. But if you actually look at the orchestras and how much federal funding they receive in total, it totals to about 76 million dollars last financial year. That's still a fairly large chunk of money for all of the orchestras in Australia to be receiving, in my opinion.

VP: That is a lot because all of the other MPAs are inclusive of theatre or dance companies.

CF: Yeah, that's right. There's also a discussion to be had in the balance of MPAs. Orchestras are a massive part of the MPA landscape and you look at something like circuses, they have almost no representation in MPAs, and things like literature and those kinds of organisations have no kind of representation. So, I think the orchestras carry a lot of responsibility and a lot of weight in the decision making process, which is an interesting thought.

VP

CF: That's more than a super-majority.

VP: Yes, that's more than two-thirds of the national budget. Oh dear. Well we'll be sure to touch on why that's significant a little later. But to go back to the report, you then after providing this bigger perspective, break down all the percentages per category – so Australian

composers – how many of their works are programmed – to female composers, to CaLD (which is culturally and linguistically diverse composers) and First Nations composers, correct?

CF: Yes, and also living composers and they were the one that was a metric that was quite crucial. It's pretty self-explanatory that one.

VP:

CF: Yeah, absolutely. And that was definitely the purpose of the report. I don't think anyone was surprised by the results but the fact that the results now exist that is important. Colloquially and anecdotally, we all know what the orchestras play and it's public knowledge, they advertise their programs every year so it's no surprise in that sense but what I think is really important is that bigger, more details picture that's really lacking in that performance landscape in particular.

VP: So for example the report shows the representation of female composers is... 15%, or wait nom it 3%.

CF: 3%. 15% is very generous of you.

VP: Well, I know internationally it's almost or around 15% so I was hoping... well then, we're behind.

CF: We're behind in essentially every area, possibly imaginable, in fact, I think one of my favourite is the wrong word... one of my go-t- statistics or facts is that Bach, Beethoven and Mozart individually featured more times than all female composers combined in the entirety of the 2006 works performed, which I think paints a pretty shocking picture of what the report summarises.

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## INTERMISSION 1

VP: Before we get back to unpacking the results from Ciaran's *Living Music Report*, our first intermission is actually from the work Ciaran described at the beginning. Please enjoy this

musical work which unpacks the ecosystem and life of lichen which Ciaran worked on during his residency in Finland, entitled *Thallus* .

*Follows a 4 minute excerpt from Thallus*

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VP: And I am wondering why the statistics this way, particularly what you mention with the big three – Bach, Beethoven and Mozart featuring more – because for example, if it were this year I would slightly understand why because of it being Beethoven’s 250<sup>th</sup> birthday? I mean, that’s a whole other topic. But considering your report is taking stats from the 2018-2019 season, it’s a little bit concerning.

CF: Yeah, absolutely and I also don’t think that, it’s great that it’s Beethoven’s birthday and everything, but I don’t think that’s even reason we shouldn’t have diverse programming embedded in these orchestras. I always say that I’m not out to destroy Beethoven, I happen to quite enjoy Beethoven. But I also think it’s not the be all and end all, maybe we can cut a couple of Beethoven of the program – I know it’s his birthday but please.

VP: Also, it’s his birthday at one point in the year and we’ve dedicated an entire year to programming all of Beethoven’s work internationally.

CF: That’s true. [laughs]

VP: Why do you think, particularly in Australia, we are so fixated on programming these four major composers?

CF: That is a really tricky question. I guess, I don’t know really. It seems like a no-brainer on paper that you would have these diverse musical experiences but history has shown us that, that is not the case. I think it’s a complicated issue and extends well beyond the scope of just orchestras and their creative directors, I think it extends to board rooms, to management and the way that orchestras function in society and it’s not necessarily a problem that is unique of orchestras but it is definitely a symptom of these broader problems with society.

VP: And perhaps playing safely to people's expectations because it is so difficult to turn over money if you're an orchestra or an MPA.

CF: Yeah, it's definitely and they always say that people expect a certain thing from orchestras but the classic argument of its "risky" to program these diverse voices is the tried and true "reason" that these orchestras play what they do., But I actually think that is also not well-founded in any facts. It's very easy to say it's risky to program new music, and sort of first nations or music by CALD performers, but one of the best performing organisations in the Living Music Report - they're not a shining example but they're one of the best – is ACO (Australian Chamber Orchestra) and ACO's government funding is essentially nothing. They mostly rely on ticket revenue and philanthropy, so clearly there is an appetite for these kinds of experiences and whether it's a risk or not, I'm not so sure. I think it's a lot easier to say it's risky than to try it.

VP: Sometimes I wonder what do they mean by risk. Is it purely financial because it could be difficult to sell a concert and make money through that way.... Or could it also be seen as artistically risky? In that there is an implication that somehow, the quality of the product or performance will be compromised.

CF: Yeah, I think, I guess it's usually talked about in a financial sense, but then you look at the government funding that these orchestras receive for example last year the SSO received 15 million dollars of government funding and they say themselves on their annual report, we are reliant on government funding to operate as an organisation, so in my mind surely that would provide some sort of license to take these risks. If not then, what is this government funding doing?

VP: Exactly. I always thought that they would have a higher degree of responsibility to engage with living practitioners or local, living practitioners if they are receiving this volume of money.

CF: Absolutely and it's a shame that the burden is placed on small to medium arts organisations, or even individual artists, that the burden is placed on those groups to pull the weight of these experiences as opposed to the people that receive the majority of the funding.

VP: Well now I suppose we should touch on the issue of grants now that we've slipped into talking about government funding. And we've both had to fill out a grant or several grants at some point [CF: laughs – Yes], through the same bodies being CreateNSW for state funding or the Australian Council for the Arts for federal funding. And I'm sure many of you listening have been confronted with one of these lengthy and detailed application forms, and if not you're about to hear a lot about them.

So, an anecdote is probably helpful here. The last time I filled in a very thick grant application, both for state and federal funding, I was confronted with about 12 questions interrogating myself and my collaborator about the cultural impact of the work. This is not just estimated KPIs, like audience numbers, but really detailed information about cultural considerations of the work ranging from diverse story-telling, the nature of our accessibility plans to translations like how will we work with regional audiences? Or, how, if we can, seek collaboration and consultancy with first nations communities and practitioners? How are we bringing in different audiences and other CaLd workers and participants? And it was really long putting together this very thorough application all with supporting documentation, so it's great because these funding processes make us and force us, as individual artists or small groups, to think about our impact and the power of representation, and yet when we get to these large MPAs like orchestras, I don't believe they're probed in the same manner.

CF: Absolutely. I absolutely agree. Everyone knows the feeling. I think there's great that there's accountability in these small to medium and independent grants and I think it's a great model, but then you look at the major performing arts model and this kind of thing doesn't really exist. It's really interesting that you mention accountability because I think that's something that's definitely lacking in the Major Performing Arts framework. It's kind of just, you know, it's very opaque in the sense that if they do fill out these same forms – we never see them. If they do have KPIs, we never see them on an individual level. We only see them on a broad and aggregate performance essentially, and collective achievements I think they call them. You know, the highlights reel from the orchestra which kind of reads like an Annual Report from all of the orchestras. It's like look at all this great stuff, and they do great stuff, but that's not what accountability looks like in my mind.

VP: No, not at all. And to go into detail about this, if we move down into more detail in your report what you offer is a detailed, statistical look into each of these MPAs. And because you

mentioned Sydney Symphony Orchestra before it would be worth talking through some of your findings about them here. So their 2018-19, in fact, I actually went to this one performance...

CF: I think I know the one you're talking about.

VP: [laughs] Yeah. And so it was a single performance of one piece by a female composer that entire year.

CF: Yeah, I mean that concert is a fantastic little summary, and I guess this is the opposite of an Annual Report highlight – like you'll see SSO might say "33% of our Australian compositions were by female composers," and that's because they had 3 Australian composers in the whole season. I think what the Living Music Report tries to do is to look at these more detailed snapshots of the reality of these orchestra's programming and like we both know, there are some very interesting examples of these things. Like, for example, replacing the only female composer in SSO's season with a different piece for the other two performances of a concert series. You know, that absolutely boggles my mind, it's not like a program misprint or "Oh sorry- we forgot to include that." It's an active decision to remove a female composer from an existing program. It just... I mean, it's unacceptable behaviour., What kind of message does that send? It was for Meet the Music, in a school's program and specifically designed to be absorbed by students, so they're telling students – actually, this female composer only belongs in 1 of 3 of these concerts. It's so unacceptable, it's almost comic.

VP: So, the main thing is I don't understand why that happened. Because practically the orchestra would have had to have made this decision well in advance. This doesn't and they go "Oh no!"

CF: Exactly! And we just talked about taking financial risks. They have to rehearse an entire different piece in addition to this piece, just so they can cut it from the program.

VP: It's bizarre, also that concert series had a female conductor as well. So, I don't really know what to say although I did mention this to someone who worked in programming and concert presenting and they mentioned that this used to be common practice in the 80s and 90s, having one new music piece and then suddenly cutting it from the program and always having a back-up piece prepared.

CF: Yes, there is definitely a sense of how far can we bury these diverse musical experiences in the program? Can we just sneak them in at the start? Where can we put it in the program where no one will notice it? The attitude to these compositions is also comic.

VP: And it extends well past just programming and into other realms like marketing. Like the chat I had with Carl Vine for another episode he briefly retells being programmed alongside classical hits like Bolero in order for it to feel safe – for the orchestra or the audience or both – but that happened there.

CF: That does not surprise me in the least.

VP: So, have you had any responses from these MPAs since you've published the report?

CF: Um... yes. I think they've been fairly coy I would say and I think there's a very good reason for that and I think it sort of ties into this idea of accountability, it's just not in these orchestras interests to engage with these kinds of reports or engage with these kinds of discussions. They'd rather just stay quiet or whip out the old quick quote for the paper that we've commissioned  $x$  amount of pieces. They are excellent initiatives, I'm not saying how dare they commission 3 Australian works, you know, the Living Music Report isn't designed to take these organisations down but it's designed to create these discussions and ensure that there is data available to anyone who needs it. And it's just very easy for these orchestras to stay quiet and not engage with these discussions and just continue going about their business, and when they do response it usually entails the highlight reels of the work that they do. And they *do* do some fantastic work, there are some great schools program and fantastic resources to do with Australian music but when you look at it from a bigger picture and a bigger perspective, the statistics paint a different picture to those highlight reels, and I think we need to engage with that just as much as we engage with the great positives of these orchestras.

VP: So, if we look ahead from what you've reported on. Do you think in the next coming years or say the next decade if they continue not to take some of these statistics into account or think about their role in terms of engaging with living people and new music, or just different voices musical and non-musical, do you think they will begin to lose a potentially younger or broader audience?

CF: *From my perspective, I think they're losing all audiences. And I actually, from my perspective, I just see it as bad management as a company and that's very controversial and these orchestras are not being managed properly as they don't provide these diverse musical experiences. And I think these kinds of sustained evidence-based and sustained hearing from diverse musical voices, I think that hopefully can contribute to the broader discussion and the idea that these orchestras are not sustainable institutions unless they change what they do. And I think that goes all the way down to just financial stability, I'm not just talking about artistic sustainability, you know, they're not being financially well managed if they don't have these diverse experiences in them because they're cutting themselves off from different audiences and cutting themselves off from different experiences and cutting themselves off from really good music. Obviously, they have a great weight to carry through the centuries of classical music but I don't think that's an excuse for not changing.*

VP: I also think it's an extremely reductive presentation of what classical music is. For example, the four that you mention in the report, so Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Brahms. If we continue or repetitively reinforce this reduction, then it's a wholly incomplete experience of classical music. For example, if we went back to their time when they were writing music – audiences were constantly accustomed to hearing new music as music was always being produced, but now we're in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we're experiencing *their* new music from the 1600s and the 1700s.

CF: *Exactly. It's not to say these "ancient" musical experiences don't have any value in society – of course they do. You might like them, you might not like them, but I think they have a place in orchestras, but I guess it boils back to the idea of meritocracy and what the organisation value is "good music" whatever that means.*

VP: There's also the physical practicality to contend with when it comes to orchestras and how orchestral musicians have to work. There's such a tough schedule, so in Australia it's roughly a concert program a week, which then cuts down the amount of time they're permitted to play and learn new music and perfect it to the standard they wish to for a performance because of the way its run, in order to turn over the money in order to run the actually company. So, there's a chance that that is inversely affecting new music or trying out new things that continue to be branded as risky.

CF: Absolutely. MPAs never come out and say “if only there were easier new music, then we’d be playing it all the time.” It’s like... that might be a factor...

VP: Hmmm, they hint at it.

CF: They do [laughs] They do hint at it, using big terms like “resources” and “commissioning.” There are other ways of programming this music like “resources and commissioning.”

VP: Well now that you’ve mentioned the word commissioning, it seems only apt that we move into a large part of the classical music world which rarely commissions and I must ask, why did you choose to leave out Opera in the report?

CF: Opera is a very tricky one and it was an active decision to leave it out. For me, and for a report that was purely focused on data and the collection of programming data, I don’t think opera. It’s very hard to paint a big picture of Opera using one year’s season, for example the own summer season in Sydney for Opera Australia, I think it had 5 classic – so La Boheme and all that jazz on repeat, and your Mozart and wheel out the classics. But because there’s such a limited scope for the program, if they were to have one Australian report in the mix, it suddenly tilts the see-saw widely, so maybe on a year-to-year basis there’s not a whole lot of point looking at it except to say, “where’s your Australian work?” or “Where’s your work by female or non-binary gender diverse composers?” Obviously, it’s not there. I guess the bigger page in Opera is already there, we know. You could take a one page look at their program and go – meh – whereas, for the bigger orchestras like Sydney and Melbourne Symphony, you can’t just glance and go how much Australian music did they play? Or how much First Nations did they play? And that’s where the Living Music report really does come in, when you can’t just take a glance.

VP: That makes sense. It’s true that they did just commission, I think the first time in a decade, but they commissioned a work by Elena Kats-Chernin – *Whitetely*- the opera, and then they would say 20% of their music is new and by a woman because it was 1 in 5 operas for that one year.

CF: Exactly, and then I'd never hear the end of it "We have 20% of all..." But look, I'm not discounting the fact that opera could be included in the future. There is scope for it and I think there are amazing discussions happening at this moment in that space as well. Such as gender equity in opera, the summits consultations with OzCo and Apra Amcos and the AMC, there are some really interesting so valuable discussions going on there, so I think there's a lot of momentum in that space.

VP: That's true, is it Sally Blackwood and Liza Lim who are spearheading that movement...

CF: And Cat Hope I think too. And every time I read a paragraph from there, it's just inspiring. Their language and their stories and their vision blows my mind. It's just so inspiring.

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## INTERMISSION II

VP: For our second intermission is BOTSOT, this work is also about the Japanese Flowering Crabapple blooming exploring changes of state over spring using contact microphone recordings and a drone maker.

*Follows a 4-minute excerpt from BOTSOT*

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VP: So, coming from this, so I did read some of the articles that came out including the one in The Age where the SSO representative sort of gave their highlights reel in the middle, which I thought was very funny, but they are commissioning 50 new pieces this year. [laughs]

CF: That's the thing. I would like to point out that I think these are brilliant initiatives and I'm not downplaying the importance of these initiatives. It's just the data, they could respond in any way they wanted, I didn't say they weren't commissioning people and didn't say they were locking composers in a cupboard.

VP: I hope, rather, this gives them perspective in terms of what their priorities are as a company, hopefully how they can improve and where they can go. Obviously not this season or next year, first because everything's been cancelled by the pandemic or next year because

they tend to set things at least 3 years in advance, but I really hope that after that and during that they have an actually important role to advocate for the representation of different people.

CF: Yeah absolutely. *I guess it's The Living Music Report doesn't exist to be a leader or commenting on the scene. I like to comment on the scene because I'm an individual but the report is its own thing. I think that it's the start of a conversation that doesn't necessarily come from me, a young, white male composer, I think it comes from other voices and from a momentum where data is one element in that mix which builds to or amounts to some form of change.*

VP: So, I have a weird question, so if it's say company that specialises in HIP performance, which is historically informed performance, or they just play music from a certain period, should they even try to engage with living people other than living performers?

CF: Yeah, that's a really interesting one because obviously the worst performing organisation from the Living Music Report was the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra and that's not particularly surprising. However, I was actually surprised that they were the worst performing orchestra because they have actually commissioned quite a lot of new work in the past and I think, you know, there's sort of wild scope for even a historically informed performance to explore different ways to integrate diverse musical experiences into their program, there are some wild things they've done in the past which have been fascinating and engaging things in concerts, that involve living composers and so I guess it also comes back to that idea of meritocracy and if you're saying that we only do historically informed performance just because, that's not a very good reason. And a lot of people think, well, they're saying that because it's somehow better than living music or modern music, or whatever you want to call it, which I don't think is true. And I actually don't think the Brandenburg orchestra thinks that's true either. And you could argue the same thing about non-historically informed performances like the SSO, they're doing the same thing the Brandenburg orchestra is doing – you know, they're playing Beethoven, Bach, Mozart kind of thing. In a way, it's not that dissimilar.

VP: So now that we're looking into some of these specific organisations, I was having a think about how your stats have related to or, in a sense, been at odds with company statements which I always question whether or not these statements are essentially hollow and performative? For example, the LSO's statement in reaction to the BLM movement in the UK was about how

they as a company were going to invest in increasing aspects of diversity across their company... which I just checked, I can't even find anymore when it was across their social media in June.

CF: Yeah. It just does kind of ring hollow. I think the MSO, I've written it down here, the MSO has another cracking line that I think is just really disappointing. They said, the MSO Keychange pledge – dot point 2 that says – brace yourself – “work towards appropriate gender balance and representation across our concert seasons.” That word appropriate just makes me gag on the inside like...

VP: What does that mean?

CF: Exactly, what does that mean? Is appropriate just there because they could say “well, we just thought that programming 4% was actually the appropriate number of gender representation of female composers? I mean, I do think there are some good examples as well about these things begin active in organisation and their minds, is something like the BBC having internal codes and commissioning codes that aren't based on funding or demands from external organisations. They're basically a set of principles and it's what they expect from themselves as well and it's really important because the expectation bar from orchestras in Australia is non-existent. They don't expect anything from themselves and they don't deliver anything from themselves, and they – the BBC- has some fantastic commissioning codes. One that I really like is they look at, kind of, out of all the commission they do, let's look at section of the pie chart – such as, we have a broad range of commissioning that we do – so what can we change in that 10-20%, that makes meaningful change. And I think that's lacking in organisations in Australia as well, what can they do with the 10-20% of living music as well.

VP: And looking at this problem statistically, because I don't think they were doing it internally – I don't know if I can say that – But I highly doubt they were looking at these issues internally. But, I suppose, you've provided a report now so they cannot escape it.

CF: That's right. If they weren't before, then they have no excuse now.

VP: Thank you so much for doing this report, by the way. It's been incredibly useful for me, and I'm sure it's helpful for others.

CF: I hope it's helpful, I think that's why I made it as a reference for people to use.. And I should point out that the data I used in the report is part of an open data set published under the Open Data Commons so anyone can use it, recommend changes, or if I've made a mistake there's up till whatever hour of the night, watching Netflix and reading a program, it's open to corrections. I have yet to receive any corrections from any major performing arts organisation, so looking for comments or suggestions about the data. It's open so anyone can make another report about it and make their own insights.

VP: And it's been out for several months, so I suppose they would have said something had they noticed any big discrepancy.

CF: Yeah, and I also emailed them to see if they noticed any, most chose to promptly ignore.

VP: That's not a surprise either! My favourite line in the whole report is this line "more pieces had the word violin in them than were written by female composers."

CF: Even if it... that's another point, even if it changes their language and the way they talk about it. I think another line was Western Australian Symphony orchestra had a blog post, that's right, "attention women, men, non-binary and gender diverse people" and clearly, they think that celebration comes through performing zero works by female, non-binary or gender diverse composers in their entire season which is an interesting way to celebrate, but each to their own I think...

VP: So, I'm on their page on the report now and, oh no. Their pie chart is rather depressing isn't it.

CF: Yeah, it's not great. Oh no that's right, it's because it's zero. I was going to say you can't see the little segment but that's because it doesn't even exist.

VP: Actually, what did the SSO end up saying in their statement? I don't know if this bit's going to be in the podcast because it's now just me re-reading the report back to you.

CF: No, I'm all for it. That's right, they said "we include Australian compositions in all of our programming, and these features works by female composers." Which, the idea of including Australian composers in all programming which in my mind means it's in all of the things that they do, is an interesting interpretation of having 5 Australian works in the 52 concert programs that you are informed of. Again, a very interesting interpretation but perhaps a valid one that people make their own minds up about that.

VP: Is it not just – these statements - a marketing tool for them to protect themselves?

CF: Absolutely. It's a bit of a Kevlar vest they can put on because these statements can be interpreted in a number of different ways, so it's not untrue that as WASO says "it's time to celebrate." That is not an untrue statement, it is time to celebrate, but unfortunately it is not reflected in what they do, which is not the way I would express these kinds of Vox pops, but I do think it's definitely a way of deflecting some of the criticism they might receive.

VP: So, just thinking about looking for season reports, like what I said at the beginning. When I was reading through documentation prior to talking to Carl, and looking for Musica Viva season and annual reports, I could find 2017 and 2018 when it was almost more than 50% of commissions from female composers, and then that report mysteriously goes missing in 2019.

CF: Hmmm that's another thing. What we receive aside from the Living Music Report, is what the organisations want us to receive but they're not going to put – Musica Viva is not going to put that they only had 8% of compositions by female composers, they're never going to include that in their annual report, which is why I think it's important to have eternal metrics otherwise we'd never hear about it, even if we know the truth.

VP: Yeah. From just attending concerts and sometimes looking around and seeing the same audience members every single time. Now, sorry I'm reading it again. I thought this was a good point which I should have mentioned earlier, but you mention that the average year of composition is 1885.

CF: Yeah or even looking at the distribution of where works are written because living and dead is a pretty crude way of looking at it. I think it's an important way of looking at it but I also think there are other ways. For example, the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra 65% of their

works performers were written before 1900, even though they had 11% of living composers performed so there are definitely different ways to look at it, and the distribution of when something was composed, not just if they're alive or not.

VP: So this is really my final question, and important one. Are you going to do this again?

CF: Oh, absolutely. It's going to be interesting, so the idea is that it's an annual thing so it comes out every year, and obviously 2020 is an absolute trashpile of a year, but I think there's still some insights to be had, so I am still collecting data as you go than all in one that I did for the inaugural report. And there are some equally interesting insights to be had for digital performances, on-line performances and things like that and spoiler alert, Covid has not been the Firestarter you think it might be for diverse musical experiences, I know, it's a shock to everyone!

VP: [laughs] Yes, I was really hoping that this would give people time to think but perhaps not.

CF: Yeah, to me, aging, it's just a no brainer, even from a management perspective, you have the time, you have the resources, you have the ability to take risks – you're already taking risks when you put content on-line, you know - what's another Australian work or another First Nations work going to hurt, really? MSO has yet to charge, in fact, most MPAs are yet to formally charge for these digital experiences and yet somehow it's still considered a risk to program this kind of music. It's just a wasted opportunity in my mind.

VP: I think so too. It's because we're still celebrating Beethoven's birthday.

CF: It is, it is.

VP: it's all Beethoven.

CF: It's all Beethoven. That will actually be the entirety of the 2020 Living Music Report, You'll just open it and it'll just say the word, Beethoven, and it wouldn't be that far from the truth.

VP: It's a shame, but I'm so looking forward to the 2020 Living Music Report. I just want to say a massive, massive thank you for joining me today and being so willing to talk about your practice and this very significant report.

CF: Thank you so much for your time, and thank you for your very insightful questions.

VP: Well, I hope they were and some were just personal questions that I found intriguing, so I hope they're actually helpful for anyone else who's also listening.

CF: In the same way, I hope the report is of interest and help, I guess.

VP: Well, I will definitely make sure that people will be given the link to the website and PDF of the report so they can access and read it. And on that note, another thanks to Ciaran for joining me and talking about the power of stats from biometric through to MPA programming. Again, all the information about Ciaran's work and the Living Music Report will be popped below and in the transcript. Thanks for listening and catch you all next time!

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# RESOURCES

**Ciaran Frame**

<http://www.ciaranframe.com/>

**The Living Music Report**

<http://livingmusic.report/>

Reactions to the Living Music Report

Australian Music Centre: <https://www.australianmusiccentre.com.au/article/living-music-report-2020-major-performing-arts-organisations-under-scrutiny>

The Age, Australia: <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/music/dead-white-european-males-dominate-orchestra-music-survey-finds-20200623-p5559e.html>

**Resources, Reports and Diversity Toolkits**

<https://countess.report>

<https://creativeequitytoolkit.org>

Australian Council for the Arts: MPA Framework Consultation

<https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/workspace/uploads/files/mpa-framework-consultation-pap-5bd2b5173e998.pdf>

Gender Equity and Diversity in Opera Summit

<https://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/programs-and-resources/Gender-Equity-and-Diversity-in-Opera-Summit/>

Diversity Arts AU: <http://diversityarts.org.au/>

- Case study report '*Promoting Diversity of Cultural Expression in Arts in Australia*,' accessed on-line here:

[http://diversityarts.org.au/app/uploads/diversity\\_of\\_cultural\\_expression\\_report.pdf](http://diversityarts.org.au/app/uploads/diversity_of_cultural_expression_report.pdf)