

Tamara Kohler S2E6: CURATING CROSS- ART EXPERIENCES

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Welcome back to Declassify Season 2 and we're already on our last episode of this year! This week is someone quite remarkable and someone whose work I am sure many of you already know: Australian and Uk-based flautist, curator, educator and arts producer – Tamara Kohler. Tamara has performed and premiered countless new works of music for festivals around the world such as the Eighth Blackbird Creative Lab, Bang on a Can Festival and Darmstadt. She is the founding member and co-Artistic Director of contemporary ensemble, Rubiks Collective – an ensemble whose mission is about showcasing contemporary music rising Australian and international artists. She is also a curatorial member COMA, UK. Her passion for mentoring young artists, curating cross-art experiences and for contemporary new art music is boundless and in this episode, Tamara talks approaches to new music making, interdisciplinary practice and collaboration as education and access

Victoria Pham

Hi everyone! We're back with a sixth episode for this season, and the least episode for 2021! This week is someone quite remarkable and someone whose work I am sure many of you already know: Australian and UK-based flautist, curator, educator, arts producer, and fellow podcaster – Tamara Kohler. Tamara has performed and premiered countless new works of music for festivals around the world such as the Eighth Blackbird Creative Lab, Bang on a Can Festival and Darmstadt. She is the founding member and co-Artistic Director of contemporary ensemble, Rubiks Collective – an ensemble whose mission is about showcasing contemporary music rising Australian and international artists. She is also a curatorial member COMA, UK. Her passion for mentoring young artists, curating cross-art experiences and for contemporary new art music is boundless and I can't wait to tap into her world of new music, curation and education! Thank you for being here!

Tamara Kohler

Aw thanks so much Vickie! I'm a big fan of the podcast so this was real honour to be asked to be involved!

Victoria Pham

I suppose I'll just jump to it! Well, basically, I'm just interested in because, I mean, you have so many like such a diverse range of skills is the wrong word, but I suppose experience in directorship and performing and commissioning, so I'm just curious as to how that happens.

Tamara Kohler

Sure. Look, my training started as a classical flute player. I grew up you know, like most kids playing piano and then started playing flute and then somebody suggested that I auditioned to go to the conservatory in high school and see And I had no idea what that was. And but I just thought, okay, look, but I was really happy at the school I was at which was had options for high school too. And I wasn't very interested. And then yeah, I was sort of just given this nudge. And I thought, okay, look, I'll have a go. And I didn't get in at first. I didn't get in actually, based on my flute playing, but I hadn't long been playing the flute, but I think I, I did okay, in the sort of music theory side of things. And I think so they sort of said to me, Look, we are interested in you, but would you like to play the oboe because I think they were down on oboe students at the time. And I said, Ah, not really not really. I was just starting to get a little do a little bit more with flute playing at the time, and I was changing teacher and I sort of said, my mum sort of said, Look, would you be willing to give her another shot if she did another audition. And so then I ended up doing this other audition about a month later. And I think I think I made a pretty massive improvement in that month. So then they were kind enough to take me and really, that's just where it all started. Like the con High was an incredible school, it just just opened a whole new world to me. And so went from there I was, you know, surrounded by excellent, you know, other students who had the same passion and who many are still my friends and just set me up. And then also I was I grew up in a, in a fairly artistic family, most of my family were working in the arts, in the dance, or the music, music sector. So then I went on to do an undergrad in Melbourne, studying with Maddie mcsalley, doing an undergrad in flute performance. And I'm just having those first few chances actually a little bit in con high too, but those first few chances to curate recitals. I just, I adored it. Like I just loved the idea of creating an event and creating experiences and thinking about how repertoire can inform thoughts and choices and and so it just kind of went from there this love of just wanting to make

something and do something with my musics. I think the flute playing was the catalyst for for bigger creation and, and then my career has just followed that path that you know, I'm doing all sorts of things now that but all of it is entirely influenced by the love my love of curation, I think. Yeah, so I went on to do some private study in Europe, and then went on to the Australian National Academy of Music in Melbourne. And then beyond that, I just, I just immersed myself in festivals around the world and just just throw myself out it really.

Victoria Pham

That's so cool. And I love that you use the word curation, rather than programming, which is something I feel like we're beginning to hear that more and more regularly. But I was reading some of the work that you had written or some interviews about you back in 2014 and 2015, you already using curation to look at to look at music, which I feel like is a much more inclusive term to talk about how we invite audiences in and how musicians can create experiences with their work.

Tamara Kohler

Definitely, I think I've always thought of it as an experience because I'm, like, I remember early experiences. When I loved a concert, it wasn't purely most of the time. I don't think it wasn't purely just the repertoire I was hearing it was you know, this room and I get this real obsession with watching reactions around me like my favourite thing is being an a hole of 1000 people and having silence and watching who can be at peace with it and who, you know, that's the struggle and you know, is SCORM and I love that I really love watching the kind of human reaction I'm a real people watch. I can't lie. So I think I've always thought of it in a in a deeper way than just, you know, repertoire on a programme

Victoria Pham

with question, which is when you were studying at the Con and then moving through international study as a flautist and the curator, did you ever have like a set of missions or a musical mission that you wanted to set out to achieve or express through your career?

Tamara Kohler

It's an interesting question. I, I always had a love for for newer music. So music being written more recently, I always just found as a performer, I connected with it more. I mean, I still, you know, absolutely, you know, was a flute player and playing a Brahms Symphony was like a dream and still is absolutely wholesome to play. But I think I found connecting with newer music, it just it just works better with me. So I guess it started from there, but I always just wanted to make, make experiences that were a bit of a journey that that you know, I always thought about when I was looking at repertoire in terms of different different experiences and trying to pull out a range of emotions or trying to make people introduce people to something new or give a different perspective to a concept or I've always been interested in that. You know, it even goes back to it's so silly. At the con high you know, we had we had houses like every most schools, do. sports, sports houses, things were of course It's weird dorky music school. Our houses were bath Beethoven and Brahms. So funny talking to people now weren't in that bubble. And like, from a youngster being a youngster in high school, like I knew that I wanted to be captain of I was Embark. And I knew I wanted to be captain of bark. And the reason I wanted to be captain of bark is because you've got to curate this concert in year 12. And like, I was dreaming about curating that concert since I was in year eight, you know, and I always, like, literally, to the embarrassing point, right, a little book where like, I had a piece of music, I'd like write it down. You know, I was I had an idea, I'd write it down. And so, you know, luckily, I was elected

Captain because it wasn't a sure thing. I really scared everyone to voting for me because I was sort of so passionate about it, and really intense way. But I think even back then even back then I wanted to create this programme that had this variety of experiences and soundworlds. And yeah, I wouldn't say it was like, now Now later on, you know, doing some some bigger level curating, I think I do have a few more ideas about more more intentional concepts and things. But it did always come from a real natural place of just wanting to create interest and, and just drawing trees out of people.

Victoria Pham

You still have that book?

Tamara Kohler

Probably in a box in my mom's place somewhere.

Victoria Pham

Gonna find it, you never know, there's some hidden gems in there.

Tamara Kohler

It's true, I might have been well ahead of myself.

Victoria Pham

When you say a variety of experiences, do you mean with music as the central focus, but including other kind of interdisciplinary considerations? You mentioned the room, so maybe they even architectural space, plus art or dance, etc.

Tamara Kohler

I think I think that's definitely a massive part of my practice. Now. Look, I grew up in a family of dances, my brother was a professional dancer, and choreographer, my mom, you know, taught dance. And so I was, I was always and I'd also danced until I was in my mid teens, I was always even more than music surrounded by dance. And I think, you know, that dance aesthetic of, you know, like, like, how you present yourself. And just little things like thinking about how you do your references and, and things like that. I was just, it was just part of my life. From early age, I think I always had a visual aesthetic to performing in my head, like, it was just for me, it wasn't separate from music. Again, it was it was it was natural, because it was just my that was my surroundings. And my stepmom, you know, is an opera singer. And opera is obviously so performative. And it is so much about the visual as well, in a performance setting live performance settings. So I think, yeah, I was just surrounded by it. Certainly nowadays. I love working in cross disciplines, because I just think you can draw so much more meaning and create, create just incredible interest. But I think I think it's always been there on some level,

Victoria Pham

which I happen to think is really cool, because I also love the mixing of all the arts. And you're right, because I think what I've noticed in the last two years has been more present in my experience or interaction with classical music or art, music, I'm not entirely sure what to label it as anymore. But listening to recordings or having a digital experience, you lose that entire bodily experience, that you know, people in the room or other people, like you mentioned before looking at people's reaction, you lose that dimension of being part of a mass audience. And

then I kind of lose my bodily connection to the instrumentalists that I'm watching and their, their connection to their instruments and seeing the physicality of making music. So it's interesting now that everything's signed to open up how we're going to balance the digital with the physical and ...

Tamara Kohler

absolutely. I mean, I think, you know, secret that that this sort of immediate society we live in, has probably destroyed us a little bit in that way, in that we, we expect to be stimulated full time, you know, and if something you know, and I do wonder if that's destroyed, listening to a really wonderful recording for some people, but I think a lot of people don't know how to just listen anymore. And, and, well, actually, it's something I'm playing with a little bit at the moment. You know, I hosted a listening party just two weeks ago, as part of some of my work, because I just thought I wanted to bring a group of people together, who'd been working on audio, sort of an audio production course and doing different music production tracks, and, you know, the focus is solely been on the music and when or video clips or anything, and so, I tried to curate curate this sort of really relaxed listening party where people just came together and we you know, we had some food and we had some drinks, but we really just listened and chatted about tracks and it was so pleasant.

Victoria Pham

Something about just being present in the in the practice of listening that I feel like I've lost as well in the last year. So I'm trying to cultivate that. You're it's really easy to slip into needing to be kind of stimulated all the time instead of Being actually present? How did people react to, to the Listen prompts,

Tamara Kohler

it was amazing, actually, you know, I was working with a bunch of participants from a mental health and well being programme that I, that I direct. And there's all sorts of musical programmes in there. But this one was, particularly if we had some participants, you know, training in Logic Pro X software and Soundtrap software. So it was a mixture of some training to be producers on other artists tracks some word training to just make their own electronic tracks. Some had been recording in the studio, and it was a real mixed bag. But I was pretty nervous because, you know, I don't think anyone in that group had ever just been to an event just to listen, without, you know, that live performance visual element. And so I did sort of set it up, you know, talking about, about how to listen, and just just, you know, some really gentle prompts there. And it was really well received, actually, and I think as, as the event went on, you know, people got really much more confident about sort of, you know, calling out what they heard and atrac and giving some really beautiful, like, positive criticism. And yeah, it actually turns out really beautifully. It's something I definitely want to do more of.

Victoria Pham

Oh, wonderful. Are there going to be plans for for more of these listening cards?

Tamara Kohler

That's the plan. Yes, we definitely share the word when I when I think about how I can, I'd love to take it another step further, which I haven't really knotted up conceptually yet, but definitely, definitely something that to look out for.

Victoria Pham

I really look out for that. Definitely. I suppose I should move on to ask about one of the projects, I want to call the project ensembles that you founded in co-directed. And actually, that's how I first came across it, which is rubrics, and to see how your philosophy about cross art and new music has kind of formed formed how you direct the group and run the different programmes that you guys do. Yeah.

Tamara Kohler

Yeah. So Rubik's Collective is, is a well, we were doing like using labels for labels are so hard. And I, I often struggle you'll hear me say all sorts of different things about rubrics. I say art music ensemble, sometimes sometimes they say contemporary chamber music ensemble, because we do cross a few worlds there. And I really hate labels in that sense, because I use one and then I feel like I'm understanding another part of what we do, but Rubik's effectively. We started in 2015. In fact, we just had our sixth birthday last week. And the ensemble was co founded with three, three of my colleagues who were all at the Australian National Academy of Music at the time. So Kaylee Melville, who's a percussionist, and she's the co director with me at the ensemble. And then Jacob Bella pianists and Gemma Neil, a cellist and the four of us. Yeah, I mean, we, we had a couple other members, sort of, in those early days as well playing around with us. And it just started because we, a lot of us had been, had been introduced to some some of the Bang on a Can style music or the eighth backbone kind of style music that was being commissioned in America. And we found it really groovy like it was kind of dislike new music, a bit of a pop influence a bit of a sort of, like, minimalist influences, and just we didn't feel like that music was happening much in Australia. So we kind of, we kind of just thought, let's bring it here a little bit more, that's where it came from. And then we always had wacky plans of like, how can we how can we, you know, make music even more exciting by adding a theatrical element or adding, you know, looking at across art influence and how it can heighten an experience. And I guess, I guess it just went from there. And these days, it you know, six years old, we're at a stage where we are pretty much 90%, playing commissioned music by us. And I think it's, it's become a really special part of what we do, because we do want to make these sort of deeply personal artistic experiences. I mean, music is, is at the heart of the more we are all musicians, but we always love working with cross collaborators who, you know, who can take that experience a step further.

Victoria Pham

And got a 90% That's, like, insane. I've never heard of any other ensemble, maybe except for eighth Blackbird who just probably pretty much works that they have commissioned. How, how did that how did that shape over time of the last six years because you had to you have to have time to build up that kind of scale of repertoire?

Tamara Kohler

Definitely, definitely. I mean, it's, it's not easy. And we were we were lucky, a combination of having a low good friends who wanted to try stuff out in us, you know, sound creators and composers and, and so there was an element of that. And then, Kaylee and I just worked really, really hard at grant writing, to be honest, and we're permanently writing grants. It's as you know, anyone who's a freelance or was really working in any org realisation arts organisation, there's someone in there permanently writing a grant. And we just knew that that was really important. So we, we worked really hard at honing in on that skill. And that did open up additional commissioning opportunities for us. And then I guess, I guess the way we were able to do it is we sort of just all of us in the ensemble were really interested in, in travelling the world and going to a whole lot different festivals and meeting different musicians and, and just exploring different practices in terms of musical styles and approaches across the world. And it's led to just a lot of really great collaborations. I actually, you know, many of

our main collaborators now we met at festival, international festivals, and many of them don't necessarily live in Australia, but those relationships have really fueled, fueled how we've sort of developed our practice. And I think also just went well, and then it was also by necessity, I should add, because our core instrumentation flute, cello, piano percussion, I think we had one work we found that existed, so it was also out of necessity.

Victoria Pham

I see Did you also have to grapple with arrangements at the beginning?

Tamara Kohler

Definitely, definitely. And it's, it's something I, I, I still, we still do a little bit, you know, I often find a work that I think off when that being grateful was right for us. And, and that's something you got to tread lightly with, because some composers are right up for that. And some you could deeply offend by asking so you tread lightly with that one?

Victoria Pham

That's good advice. I'll keep that in mind. Should I need an arrangement? So out of this, then emerge the Pythia Prize, which is something that I think is super important for everyone, and you've supported so many amazing new works with these female and non binary composers? Was that something that was a conversation at the beginning, or something that kind of evolved? Because you knew that the way that the direction that Rubiks was taken was very commissioned base?

Tamara Kohler

Yeah, I think from the get go, we, you know, it was blatantly obvious the lack of representation of female and gender diverse voices in in the music slash art scene across the world, really. And so that was always at the back of our minds. And then what actually triggered the PTO prize to be launched was we were programming a concert in Hyde Park estate writing 2017 I'm pretty sure. And it was celebration of Meredith monk's 70th birthday. So Meredith Monk was an artist that all of us needed somebody who had just been deeply inspired by it. And you know, there's, there's an artist who I, how do you put a label on Meredith Monk, she's a dancer and a composer and a singer around, like a writer, and she's just an unbelievable beacon of, you know, creativity. And, and we were, we were planning this big celebration, really lucky to have the invenio singers really great vocal ensemble from Melbourne, join us for that for that programme. And it just got us thinking that, you know, how did she get to where she got to, and thinking about the opportunities that she had, and the importance of giving, of giving any voice really, but, you know, balancing out those, those, those kind of miss, you know, lack of representations. And so, we thought, what if we would have a prize where, you know, we can help to do, you know, play our part in helping to expose some voices that might not necessarily be heard. And so we decided to link that up with the concert, we didn't really know what it was going to be at that point, we just thought we want to do a prize. And, and, and then yeah, we've just closed, we're literally in the middle of adjudication for our fourth iteration of the prize. And it's just been an incredible thing that's just sort of evolved. You know, our first our first winner of the prize was was Samantha Wolf, who just had an absolute ball working with and it was something that we decided as an ensemble we wanted, like, it was really, really important to us that we we put a little sort of parameters in terms of jellema development timeframes as possible. So we wanted to really just say like, we are yours, you know, new, we are your test dummies, we want to work together. And it was so nice, because those early developments with Samantha were really just like get to know us, you know, I just like sat with her. We just drink pots of tea and just got to know each other for the first three hours of about you. I remember her coming to my

house and we just that was such a crucial part of being able to create science together was just developing that relationship. And, you know, it's something we're all really passionate about in law. So we we've just made it really a part of our part of our practice that we don't limit it with, you know, you've got to developments. It's the one thing I mean, you know, what a dream if we could do that with every single work, but obviously it's just not realistic. We will have lives we will have to eat. But Pythia we do really keep in a separate category. And we really try to just allow total openness and total freedom, in terms of what we can provide for the Creator.

INTERMISSION I

For our first intermission is a work selected by Tamara. This is the work 'Don't say a word' composed by Annika Socolofsky composed in 2017 as an active reflection on the female voice and experience. Rubiks Collective gave its Australian premiere in 2018. This recording is performed by US-based ensemble, Eighth Blackbird.

Victoria Pham

I think that's really amazing the approach you've taken to development, they actually understand that there's time to cultivate all these different musical voices in the space to, in order to truly collaborate, is just as an experience that, you know, as a composer, I, that doesn't happen particularly often. So often you either get a prize or a workshop or a position in a festival or something like that, and you get two weeks and then you have to produce something at the end of there's very little input. And all my amazing experiences with working closely with musicians have been when there has been a lot of time, where we get to know each other and, and also so that the musicians feel like they actually have a say, in the music that that's being written to, I feel like that's quite important. Otherwise, I think many orchestra musicians may have an experience with just kind of had an a brand new piece, you got to rehearsals, and that's it. That's their relationship with the music.

Tamara Kohler

Yeah, I, you know, I think that is something that holds back a lot of ensembles from commissioning as well, I was really lucky to speak at a conference in Dresden in Germany, earlier this year. And it was, the organisation was German, a German amateur actually gets it wrong. German was the organisation for amateur musicians, basically. So it was a whole lot of bodies of organisations that do work with amateur musicians, and I was presenting a talk on how to make new music more accessible. And a lot of people, you know, was sort of asking me, you know, about commissioning and saying, Well, you know, like, what if it's an awful piece, or, you know, and, and this sort of thing of like, well, you know, I set this deadline, they hand me this piece of paper, and, you know, it's too hard, or it's, it's awful, we don't like it or, and I spoke to them, you know, at length about the importance of relationship development. And you know, think about like, think about friendships, think about, you know, your personal relationships, they take work, and if they need nurturing, and they need care, and you're entering into a relationship with someone, on some level, when you're commissioning something, if you're going to create something together, I mean, there are different ways to do it. Some people are happy to just set a deadline and have a finished product planned in their lap. But I really think that, in my experience, the most, the most interesting creative works, or the most rich works come out of a collaboration where you know, you get to know each other, it's a two way street, and you can really create something that you both feel you connect with.

Victoria Pham

That sounds fascinating. And yeah, I feel like I think the conversation is changing in terms of how we collaborate, at least I think so. Maybe I'm just overly positive. But I think it's changing. I think some marketers are taking a different model than just setting a date and then having the orchestra play. And I think that will make the actual performance feel less ostracised from

Tamara Kohler

Yes, I totally I totally agree. And I think it's, you know, I understand the the restraints in terms of finance and time and everything, but if we're going to do something deal properly, you know, yeah,

Victoria Pham

we're making should be fun, I suppose. Has that has all this experience with Rubik's? And then all your talks at these conferences then influenced how you're now working in coma in the UK?

Tamara Kohler

Yeah, definitely. So contemporary music for all or come as its, as its more well known as dead, this organisation that is entirely about providing access to amateur musicians to contemporary music. And you know, what an incredible thing that this exists. First of all, I've, I'm a newbie, I've been engaging with coma for just over a year. And, and I, I saw a role advertised for the organisation, and I just thought, what how does this exist, and this is literally my two passions, like, you know, contemporary art. And I just found in the last few years, by, you know, not by direct intention, but I just have moved more and more into community settings into community work just by I don't know, sheer love of sharing experience, and also just my passion for making sure everybody has, you know, has opportunity has experienced this, to find that this organisation existed was just wild. And it was it was a funny thing. I sort of saw the job the job, AD and I just thought, That's my job. I just thought like, I'm I'm built for this job. Like I just actually in a way it was the easiest interview I've ever done because it's just like, I just just felt it in my core that I just should be here. So I was lucky enough to be offered the role and and then I was a different role actually, I've actually stepped into a new role the organization's we have a biannual festival. every month or every second March, and a very kindly appointed me as the festival director. So I'm working my way up to my first festival as director in March 2022, which will be quite an adventure. And this festival, it runs throughout the UK and throughout Europe. So we host different events, I think, I think we're looking at about 25 Plus events across three days in March that all across the UK in Europe. So it's quite a feast of, of all sorts of performances and workshops and talks. And yeah, and, you know, considering the world we're in now, I'm trying to make a lot of it hybrid and a lot of it available online. So it is worth checking out because we have some pretty cool projects in there.

Victoria Pham

That sounds like a massive festival to combine the UK and Europe.

Tamara Kohler

So it's, we're very lucky that the way part of the way that kind of works, because we are a charity, and we're you know, quite a small team. But the way it works is we have we're really heavily reliant on partnerships. And we have partners all over the place and wonderful partners. So other arts or, you know, professional musicians, amateur music, buddies, music, education hubs, and comas, founder Christianity has just set up this really amazing culture where the idea is that you get involved with coma, and you start to sort of take on the, you know, you know, that there is a period of sort of understanding why we're there and what we're about. And then the idea

is that you start to embed your collaborations with coma into your core core budgets as an organisation, you know, what a wild thing but, and I have to admit, when I first heard of that approach, I thought, wow, how does that work, but people do it, because the work is really incredible, like, really valuable stuff, I guess that the most amazing thing that kKoma does is we commissioned work that's in an open scored setting. So the idea is that if you are living in, you know, a rural town, and you know, there's a violin player and a bassoonist, and you know, someone owns a tin whistle, we've got repertoire that you'll be able to play, and it's accessible. It's not, you know, we commissioned at a level where, you know, if you're an amateur player, most works are achievable, they're satisfying, they are of a high quality, it's something we take really seriously that, you know, not just sort of weak work. So they are high quality works, but they're accessible, you know, doesn't matter about your instrumentation. And I think home is commissioned over 300 works now in that in that sort of structure, and then the catalogue. That's just what we've commissioned. And we have this catalogue, where also where, where we know we're finding works that fit that always been given works, and the catalogue has 800 Plus works. Now it's an incredible resource

Victoria Pham

we got that's amazing. I often think that's the way forward right? Instead of having to have like stick Kestrel things, or chamber officers or quartets, even, for example, Rubik's is not, as you were mentioning before, is not traditional instrumentation. And there's now this amazing resource. I'm definitely going to look at that. So people can ask,

Tamara Kohler

yes, yes. And I'm working very hard to even expand it at the moment, I've got a new partnership I don't think I'd say too much about yet. But effectively, what I'm trying to do is I'm trying to launch a subcategory of that, that is music that is more accessible to disabled musicians. So we're working quite a bit at the moment, looking at how we can adapt current works in the repertoire, but also commissioned new work and to start getting composers to think a little bit more about, you know, when they're writing works, what kind of what kind of things they should be considering what kind of adaptations what kind of new methods they should be to try and stop people working more with disabled musicians.

Victoria Pham

It's amazing, actually. Because, honestly, as a composer, there's no training for that at all.

Tamara Kohler

Yes, that's what I'm trying to setup. You know, I'm I am hopefully we'll have some training options in the next year. That's the plan to try and get that kind of that kind of movement happening.

Victoria Pham

Okay, well, I may sign up, actually, yes, I mean, this is a complete aside, but in my art practice that is less less about classical art, music, and more about sound installation I've been in last year also trying to figure out how to integrate accessibility, like features into it for hearing and vision impaired, because I mean, that's not my lived experience. So I don't know how to make work that sound based accessible to someone who simply cannot hear them. So I think this is incredible to work in acoustic, classical music, pop music around to make that.

Tamara Kohler

Absolutely. Well, and that's where actually also partnerships become so so important, because obviously, that that's, that's not my lived experience, either. And so working with partnerships, where we are really you know, this is I can sit him up with ideas all day long. But what good is that it's not, you know, I really see my role in this kind of work as a facilitator to try and you know, just provide resources and opportunity to those who actually care and speak truly to this kind of work and to those also who, you know, have a much better idea of what's actually worth investing in and feasible and all of that.

Victoria Pham

I think now just like thinking backwards with all these resources that you're building an alternative, and I think essential ways in how we present and make and commission music, just thinking when I was a student, I don't think I played any new music. Because it wasn't part of our curriculum for the standard A and maybe in Australia, it wasn't really at the continental we had to take specific kind of music history courses, that tackles new music, but generally, I think I played mainly romantic repertoire, which must be I think, the majority of people's experiences, they encounter classical music.

Tamara Kohler

I think so. And, you know, I think I think a lot of people just assume because I have immersed my life in new music. Oh, she you know, she must hate anything written before 1950. I mean, it's absolutely not true. Like, you know, you'll see me sobbing in symphonies easily Alpine symphonies on in my house. That's probably my partner's influence. But it's constantly I feel like Alpine zoomies blaring in our house, you know, three times a week. I am my deep love of classical music came from growing up with those classics, and I think good new music, good musicians who, who specialise in new music, have incredible technical facilities that have come from a study of that of, you know, rich, Western classical music. And I think there's a real misconception there of a lot of people think, Oh, you go into music, new music you're not very good. At it's actually, it's not true at all. Because to be able to master that next level of technique, you need a solid foundation. And I think it's really important, but no, my goodness, like, you know, without without Brahms and Bach and Strauss, I wouldn't love new music, you know, they absolutely whet my appetite. And then I just found another path off that way.

Victoria Pham

I think it's all connected. I do find it funny that you're right. Like you specialise in your music, like almost like it's a completely separate discipline within music, whereas it's all entirely connected. And I'm increasingly now seeing concerts that are programmed with, you know, brand new pieces that have the music only music that maybe 20 years ago, people would have been hesitant to play with works by Bach and Beethoven advance. So I like that these dialogues are beginning to happen more regularly. I was wondering, and I don't know how relevant this question is, if in all your experiences when you're programming for yourself for recitals when you're working with Rubix, or any ensemble, or if you're creating anything through karma, do quotas play a role in how programming is created?

Tamara Kohler

I guess, on some level, I think with with Rubik's Look, I can't like yes, they do. But inclusivity is just by way of practice, by just a lot of work I've done in the past, by my own personal belief, it's just it, I don't think twice about it. And so it's just that important to me. So I actually find when I am programming, I don't have to be so hardcore with quotas, because it's happening more naturally. Look substan terrible, I'm often just more interested in, you

know, female, gender diverse voices, I'm personally just often more drawn to, to their work. But I don't have to be so hardcore with the quarters myself, because I think I'm just drawn to that work more in saying that, I think quotas are a useful tool to get people thinking about, whether they're practising where they're really representing community within their work. The problem with quotas is that people tick a box and say, but I did that, you know, I programme three females or I programme, you know, for, you know, I commissioned, you know, a global majority composer. And so I ticked that box, and that's where it really gets me because quotas are a starting point. But they're a starting point to get you thinking and get you considering and get you changing your ways. And I feel like it works beautifully. For some and for others, it's still a box ticking exercise, which is, which is frustrating. And, you know, some colleagues and friends of mine have started acting on that, in what refused to go to certain concerts that have certain types of programming and I, you know, I respect on some level, because how else how else do we bring change? And, you know, we still have a lot of work to do in terms of representation in terms of, you know, different cultural identities and backgrounds and genders.

INTERMISSION II

For our second intermission is another work selected by Tamara. This one is quite personal and is noted by Tamara as being the work that represents her love for contemporary music and sound-worlds. She first heard the work performed in Australia as part of a contemporary dance performance that her brother choreographed and was surprised by how a piano could sound so “weird and wonderful.” This is Sonata No. 5 for prepared piano by John Cage, performed here by Boris Berman.

Victoria Pham

I, maybe perhaps again, I'm being too hopeful. I do think Changing example because we have, you know, organisations that currently exist that I actually didn't know about until I met you.

Tamara Kohler

So I must admit, well, comer is amazing in many ways we have a lot of work to do to, you know, I would never sit here and say that we're leading, you know, I think we lead the way in some elements, we have a lot of work to do and others. But we always have a lot of work to do. Everyone does. You never get to a point where you've where you've nailed it. You know, what it is, it's not what it is, we all should be constantly set reassessing our practice and thinking, and just, you know, thinking, Am I being inclusive? Am I being representative? You know, you have this, as I said, Before, I really more than ever these days, except for when I'm on the stage performing. I guess that's slightly different. But I really see myself as a facilitator, more, you know, a lot of work I do now I see myself as setting something up for someone else, that's really changed, actually, in the last two years. The only time maybe that's not always the case is when I'm performing. Because when you put when your perform, obviously, it's slightly different. But then again, if I'm performing the work written by someone else, I am still delivering their message to them. So you could argue in that sense to

Victoria Pham

do you think the the kind of programming world and the way that constants are being curated, is, is is different between your experiences running Rubiks in Australia, now now getting a more experienced in the scene in the UK,

Tamara Kohler

I would say that there is excellent curation going on in both places, and there's work to be done in both places. I couldn't say that I think it's really tough comparing the UK and Australia because I mean, like not to beat around the bush, there's just a lot more money in the UK for the arts. And I know that, you know, everyone in the UK will sit here and go, we've got nothing. I can't believe working here now for a year and, you know, on and off properly for a year and a half. And I've been I've been working here on and off for a lot longer. There is that much more money here. And I know by there is that much more activity going on here as well. So it does even out in that sense, but I guess they're incredible artists, and they're incredible organisations in both countries. On some level, it comes down to resources, I see so much great work going on in Australia at the grassroots level, that probably won't get higher than a grassroots level, because it's so hard to get the money to do it. And you can do a lot without money. But, you know, this is Rubix have really turned a corner in terms of an organisation in the last year and a half, in terms of our ambition in terms of our goals, because we really got to a point where if we were going to go further with and, and take those next artistic, you know, ambitions to the next level, we actually can't do it without money. You know, and we were pretty good at stretching, stretching that budget and doing things on the shoes, and calling in favours in and working 12 hour days to make it possible. But it's not sustainable. It's just not. So not to be depressing. But you know, this is this is the world we're in. And but yeah, I would definitely say this this, there's great activity going in both countries. And I could definitely I won't, but he definitely call out organisations in both countries who need to pull their socks up.

Victoria Pham

Yes, I'm feeling we probably know which ones. Yes, you're right about the grassroots thing. That's why I'm seeing all this really cool innovation happening, these core interdisciplinary experiences, both in the UK and Australia have been from really small up and coming independently run companies that you know, hardly get any funding for maybe more than one season. I hope that changes will go to a more sustainable model where those groups can grow. And we somehow balanced the scale away from those massive organisations. that take a lot. I feel like I've given away too much now. Well, I have this might be a bit weird for you, but I'm going to read out your writing to you. Just so you know, because I like one or two final questions. But I thought I was doing this kind of deep dive research into two written work that you've done for common in various other publications. And there was one particular article you wrote in 2015. Common called the concert experience. Let's blur the lines. And kind of right at the end in the dialogue, you have a list of questions and I feel like I'm going to I'm going to ask you the questions that you that you've list. So I'll just I'll just read the little paragraph to you and see what you think. It starts off. Why don't we create experiences rather than concerts and give audience members permission to perceive the art as they wish itself is a medium with endless boundaries? Why do we place boundaries when our audiences, why not offer current day audiences another way of experiencing a piece of music, whether it be with a different setting of a venue, a little poetry, or a surprise, interpretive dance? In the end, it's all theatre. So let's blur the lines a little. So the reason why I'm reading it out is if there's anyone who's coming to read this article, like I did recently, or anyone who's thinking about these ideas, what advice would you give to these up and coming musicians, new music specialists and honest

Tamara Kohler

Advice to the artist, so advice to the audiences? Who actually, um, well, think about why you are an artist. And we're all the arts is broad, and there are many different types of artists and by nature of, of what you do, there is more freedom in some practices than other. Of course, if you're in an orchestra, you can't take the artistic liberties that you might take, if you are a solo contemporary dancer, but there's always a way to push the barriers, push those boundaries, in your practice, I think it takes it's, it's about thinking about a why you do it. And then really looking at if you are, if you are pushing it to its fullest extent, sort of being vague there. But, you know, we get really caught up, especially among musicians get caught up in technical proficiency. I mean, it's a given it needs to be there. And you can't take those next steps without it. But then I just think, why are we doing this? In the end, we're trying to we're trying to give people joy was trying to make people feel things. And I just think it's really interesting to step back and think, are you really, really achieving that? Are you doing that? You know, could you and even an orchestral setting, you know, like, like, the greatest orchestras in the world have just been chamber, chamber bands, who just, you know, just like vibe off each other and, and move together in the moment and surprise each other, you know, in concert, it's, you know, it's more possible than sometimes than others. But I think we should all constantly reassess why we're doing what we're doing. And if we're really pushing it to the full extent, because otherwise, we could just go and do something else that probably be a lot less stressful, and a lot less time consuming. And emotional, a lot more money, let's be honest.

Victoria Pham

That's excellent advice. And something that's good reminder for me as well. Sometimes it's very easy to get bogged down, I don't know in grant writing, for example and forget that you need to push

Tamara Kohler

grant writing to I mean, gosh, I know it can be a real pain. But I know I've got a lot of friends who like and colleagues who just have these great ideas. And I just think, oh my gosh, if you just read a grant, and you just like, got a little bit of a little even just like a tiny bit of cash for that you could do such great things. And they don't, because they're all paranoid and all freaked out, because it seems that this horribly frightening thing, it's just another practice, you just have to try. But the thing that's really great about grant writing is it can really help you to conceptualise what you're actually trying to do. And it kind of actually into what I just said, like, like, it really helps you clear, you know, have ultimate clarity in what you're doing, and how you'll do it. And I think that's a really positive part of grant writing that, you know, believe me, I know how to write a grant. Again, I'd be happy about it. But I'm going to put in a good spin for grant writing, because it feels like there are good things that come out of it. And I just, I tried to just tell people I know who are scared of it, you know, there are pros.

Victoria Pham

Yes, I know even when it feels tired, because you're right, like permanently in grant writing when you're a freelancer. But that realising that you have to really clearly communicate, what you want to do, how you want to do it, and how it will hopefully contribute to, to your discipline or to audiences is is really important, because I actually think without the, what feels like hundreds of grants I've had to write over the last decade, I wouldn't be able to articulate my own practice or what I wish to develop in my practices as clearly.

Tamara Kohler

Yes. Yep, yep. I think you've actually really beautiful questions, Vicki, I appreciate it because it's made me think, you know, it's really pulled me out of a bit of a tired slump and you know, at the end of the year, and you kind of

feel like we're looking forward to a bit of time off, but um, it's actually been really nice to just have a chat and remember, you know, how great everything we do is

Victoria Pham

before you've inspired me with with all your thoughts and your wisdom about new music and audiences and cross curation Thank you so much I really appreciate it thank you so much for speaking

Tamara

thanks so much for inviting me

Victoria Pham

Thank you again! It's been amazing speaking with you and what a way to end this year's round of DECLASSIFY! As mentioned earlier, all of the articles Tamara has written, her work as well as that of the resources through Rubiks and COMA will be available for you to access below. I would highly encourage that and for you to spread the word. Thank you to everyone who has listened year and I will catch you all for the second half of DECLASSIFY in 2022!

RESOURCES

Tamara's Website: <http://www.tamarakohler.com/about>

RUBIKS: <https://rubikscollective.com/>

COMA new music festival: <http://www.coma.org/>

COMA new music repertoire catalogue: <http://www.coma.org/catalogue/>

Tamara's Podcast *MyThirdEar*: <https://podcasts.apple.com/au/podcast/my-third-ear/id1111802017>

Article by Tamara 'Concert Experience: Let's Blur the Lines': <http://www.cutcommonmag.com/concert-experience-lets-blur-the-lines/>

Article by Tamara 'Creativity within Society': <https://musictrust.com.au/loudmouth/inside-the-musician-tamara-kohler-creativity-within-society/>