

Paul Morley at the ABO Conference 2014

I've spent a large amount of a life listening to and writing and thinking about music without paying much attention to the orchestra. For most of the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s and noughties, and therefore my teens, 20s, 30s and 40s, the pompous, pseudo sacred seeming orchestra had very little appeal to me. It seemed too formal, too superior, and not actually about music, but about the maintenance of a belief system that encouraged the conventional and the conservative, and the separation of the world into unrelated groups, some of which were far more privileged than others.

I was a pop fan, a rock fan, an overexcited punk and then a serious believer in deviant ideological post-punk values, growing up alongside the seductive invasion of modern life of pop culture, reaching a certain stage in life just as the territorial near tyrannical control of modern life was taken over by the computer, designed, built and managed by those who had also grown up mostly persuaded by the pleasures, perversions and occasional transcendent artistic achievements of popular culture.

Historians, if they survive, will note how tidily one field of influences set up the circumstances for the other to take over reality through gossip, sensation, and a calculated beat heavy soundtrack generally composed and recorded on the same machines that distribute it to listeners who then hear it on the same machines – and how both elements were a direct threat to classical music, always wary about any possible disruption to its assumed dignity and purity to the extent of defiantly, moodily ignoring any signs of the world around it until they were panicked into responding, usually in bumbling ways that often verged on the silly, kitsch or klutzy. The cautious remoteness of the classical world was emphasised by their reluctance to absorb the creative possibilities generated by technology, other arts, and new sorts of curious, engaged audiences, and by the time behaviour changed so much classical music was at the periphery of vision, except where it influenced film soundtracks, ambient music and electronica, it seemed almost too late for classical music and the orchestra to catch up and take a central place in a new world of music, where music was at the centre of life.

It's only lately, now that pop and rock has become the status quo, less a home for possible radical sentiments and creative surprises and more an insular venue for nostalgia, processed hipness and banal emotional comfort, that I have been attracted to classical music, and the idea of the orchestra. At its best, once you make it through the still entrenched formalities and the still standing intimidating barriers of entry, there is the raw power of its acoustic sound, the dynamic convivial spirit that flows from an ensemble of minds engaged in a special common pursuit, the sight and sound of a deeply skilled, hyper alert community trusting each other in spontaneous, virtuosic performance, as if exhibiting an ideal, exhilarating model of togetherness and empathy for wider society itself. And that endless supply of glorious music from the history of music, old music that was actually new because of the extent it had been ignored, and new music that was aware of centuries of music, an extraordinary interlinked sequence of themes, forms and dramas, made by musicians that have faith that even if the structures that enable the orchestras to exist did break down, the music would last, and there would be those who would find ways to keep it alive, and moving.

On the surface, my recent move into the classical orbit seems like the classic clichéd middle age move from rock and pop – until the last decade or two, traditionally meant for the young and lusty - a late life drift into a conservative, grown up and absolutely post-cool world, leading, perhaps preparing the way, soothing the expanding existential pain, for death. For me, though, it has been

more a move to where the provocative, thrilling, actually adaptive ideas are, more because rock music and pop culture have themselves settled down and become the status quo. The majority of pop and rock musicians have run out of ideas; even if the alluring, addictive sound of pop and rock still evolves, what is sung about more or less remains the same, and really, it is computers that are now the new pop stars, the performers like travelling salesman whose ultimate job is to sell phones, tablets and consoles, and maintain the illusion that the world is just as it was when there was vinyl, and the charts, and a constant, frantic turnover of talent, genre and ideas.

Rock has become predictable, ordinary and obvious, increasingly recycled and narrow in its concerns and expression, its stars more and more slick and shallow, its sounds more gentle and respectful, whether mainstream or alternative. Rock music, the festival culture, the repetition and rehashing of poses, riffs, rhythms and ingredients seems more closely related to the future fearing sentiments and sentimentality that have led to a revival in baking that anything socially and culturally revolutionary. Miley Cyrus seems no more vivacious and subversive than Mary Berry.

The music hall, vaudeville, show business side of pop music has taken over, ejecting the militant, provocative and genuinely experimental side, and I find myself in my disturbing mid 50s bored and frustrated with all this glittery orthodoxy, these old fashioned values crudely disguised as rebellion. Not because it's too noisy, controversial and alienating, but because it's too timid and ultimately reserved, stuck in its ways however superficially psyched up and mischievous. I've turned more to classical music, and it's greatest structure the orchestra, and all its massed, turbulent history, because it seemed this was where I was more likely to find the radical and experimental, and music that was about difference, and ideas, and how surprising, and unexpected they can be, and how necessary when reality itself is experimenting on itself.

I reached the stage where I decided, if I was listening to pop and rock that was up to and over 50 years old, I might as well listen to music that was up to and over 100, 200, 300 years old. I found that the music from the 17th, 18th and 19th century, let alone the 20th, made a lot of the rock of the 60s and 70s sound very quaint and dated. Here was music made up by active, agitated minds dealing with extraordinary revolutionary changes in human behaviour, perception and circumstances, and suddenly it seemed alive in the now, appropriate to what was happening now, the mass changing of shape, geography, society, perception, mentality, history – more so than the recent rock and pop styled music that followed fashion, and now just mostly follows itself, much like classical music seemed to me forty years ago. Now that, to an extent, all music is about the past, and a curation and sampling of taste and history into playlists and knowing revivalist music, and fashions have collapsed, discernment wiped out, classical music takes its place in time, not now old, or defunct, but just part of the current choice there is, as relevant as any music, which is now just one big gathering of sound, up in the clouds, in the air, perpetually streaming into the world, waiting for it to be given new purpose, and new meaning.

In the 70s and 80s, exploring sounds from hundreds of years ago would have felt like this was looking away from where things were happening; now it was like looking towards energising mental activity, and vast, largely unvisited galaxies of invention and insight. When I was younger, orchestral classical music seemed to be all about the past, it was a museum, collecting and freezing culture, routinely recycling repertoire, adrift from ideas and the future - the serious, contemporary classical music that interested me existed close to those cryptic, undefined zones and borderlands where experimental rock music drifted, it was conceptual, electronic, speculative, it embodied artistic freedom, it was as

concerned with change and forward momentum as the most adventurous avant-garde rock and jazz. But then there was the orthodox, orchestral classical music that was written by dead people, and seemed to be, where I lived, in the middle of urgent life, all about death, and dying, mourning, and sighing – it certainly sounded dead next to Hendrix, Miles, Joy Division, Public Image, which seethed with a need to take control of reality, and take control of the choices we could make about how we lived our lives.

It is pop music that is now about its past, about anniversaries and retrospection, and more and more about its revered dead or nearly dead icons, and from where I listen and think, it is classical music, whether from the 18th century or last week, that seems to be more about challenge, mystery, metamorphosis and the essence of what it is to be human. At a time when what it is to be human is threatened by the emergence and speedy mutation of machines and the provisional emergence of an unfathomable machine consciousness, it seems increasingly important, if just for old time's sake, that the human isn't completely lost.

The best music articulates the enigmatic, timeless essence of what it is to be human, and it seems music is where we should look if we are to retain pulsating human presence. But the music we look towards for this human presence should not sound as though it has been made to serve machines, and complete their mission to turn reality into a tightly coordinated sequence of pulses, rhythms, patterns, clichés, climaxes and abbreviations - or, to give them the benefit of the doubt, into an explosive utopian paradise where all our unruly needs are instantly catered for...listening to music made by great musicians, what it proposes about why and how we are alive, and how we should all share the experience, and keep our wits about us, is one of the reasons why I am just too paranoid to believe that a future built around the apparently very helpful machine is actually going to liberate us rather than simply use us as some fleshy, dusty kind of fuel, as emotionally chained aides, functionaries and assistants.

Note how a machine dominated world appears keen on shrinking attention span, on pleasing, on comforting, on delivering requested goods and goodies on time, serving in order to control the human – any sign of the level of attention required to enjoy and appreciate serious music, and read unprecedented literature, is effectively rejected. So, to those of us paranoiacs resisting the shift into a compressed, spaced out utopia constructed by engineers, game makers, publicists and statisticians, classical music, with its emphasis on patience, imagination, privacy, progress, wonder, paying attention, layers of meaning, making connections, epic historical detail, seems part of the alternative, seems to represent a better form of the idea of progress, and is inevitably ideologically opposed, culturally and emotionally, to the sort of world the machines are organising, which fancies a bloodless reality containing mere flickering, flashing echoes of the messy, neurotic human impulse.

For all its reverential aura and its hemmed in operational spirit, the result of its fear of disruption from the livid, vivid outside world, classical music, the music itself, not the structural organisations that deliver it to the world, is one of the greatest signs of evolving intelligent human life – and in that sense, the machine world set up and given permission to roam and store by morally clipped geeks and entrepreneurs, sees it as the enemy, just as it sees the book, even language itself, anything that sustains the idea and ideas of the sensitive, contemplative, deeply curious, intellectual restless and therefore protesting, resistant human, as the enemy. It's part of its tactics that there should be a

marginalisation of the serious music listener, and the replacement of the book with...small machines and toys.

I mention the fact that I have only just begun a relationship with the orchestra, to make clear that although the tendency is to use speeches like this to express a certain angst about the future of the orchestra and classical music, and how the old paradigms have shifted, about how the pressure of change induced by the internet era that naturally favours dazzling light entertainment, hypnotic special effects and the aggressively trivial and trivialising has profoundly challenged the certainties of those who teach, perform, consume and advocate passionately for the arts, I have a certain amount of innocence possibly spilling over into a dreamy optimism that means I approach the orchestra as a realistic symbol of the future. The orchestra excites me not necessarily because of its significant history, certainly not because of the way it presents a certain repertoire or performs sometimes like it's a million miles away, but because it seems an important sign of the sort of thing we should sustain faith in.

I am aware of, but nowhere near an expert in, the challenges facing the cultural positioning of classical music and the institutional side of the orchestra in the age of media histrionics, joyless content crafting and relentless self-promotion. I am alert to the speedy changes in means of production and consumption, instrumentation, venues, programming, vaguely hopeful that classical music is reaching a stage in its history where it ceases to be known as classical and simply becomes music, but mostly I see the orchestra not as something in crisis but as something with so much experience at dealing with various problems, it seems capable of dealing with this collapsing, expanding new world, and finding a way of yet again reinventing itself. Which it obviously has to do.

Like steam trains, and lately recording studios, banks, high street shops, newspapers, TV channels, political parties, educational systems - the orchestra is from another time, and it does not seem to work, financially, structurally, socially, in the fluid, shape shifting, miniaturised new world, which is now always on the verge of becoming another new world, which is intent on making the 20th century seem as distant as the 17th, whilst turning us all into targeted consumers whose desires are being inexorably whittled down to only reflect what it is we are being sold, and told by those doing the selling.

Like other systems, institutions, genres, societies, organisations, religions, foundations and values that are threatened by a complete, e-and i- and self-styled smart overhaul of what it is to be human, and relate to each other, and what reality is and could be, classical music and the orchestra gets most attention in articles, programmes and debates that generally wonder whether it is dead, or if it isn't, how long it has left, and in what form it can survive. What on earth will be the sustainable business model that will see it still around in fifty years time? It is always put on the back foot, cornered, having to defend its right to exist, as a business, as a musical philosophy, as somehow an organisation that has meetings about how to cultivate innovative practises, when, it's said, very few really care, just a small community of connoisseurs. One of the difficulties the orchestra faces is always being treated as though it is in unstoppable decline, a simplistic, prejudiced twisting of the debate that overwhelms what it is the orchestra should really be doing – making sure that the vast diversity of serious music composed over many centuries doesn't get wiped out in some insidious techno-equivalent of the Kindle inspired burning of the book. And what those who understand the need for the orchestra must do is establish very firmly, and without it sounding sad, defeatist and

wishy-washy, what the actual value of great music and art really is at a time when, for the purpose of creating an obedient mass of customers accepting only what is on offer, the questioning, probing intelligentsia itself is being shriveled into an easily bullied and discarded, and slightly dotty, minority.

With the orchestra, words like dodo get used. Elitism. Victorian. Pomposity. And it's undeniably true - the orchestra in many ways can be viewed as an ancient, outmoded thing, a toy for the rich, an expensive, over-protected indulgence for the narrow minded obsessives and the casual cultural tourist. It suffers from nervous, frivolous, sometimes well intentioned attempts to modernise itself, to locate relevance, to appear cool, or it just suffers because it was not built for the atmosphere as it is now. It is forced to compromise, to perpetuate tired but popular rituals, to make embarrassing audience courting deals with pop, light entertainment and rock, to take on menial community tasks and appear to perform musical healing - as if they should become a worthy social service rather than abstract, driven custodians of a momentous, genuinely psychedelic, reality shaking musical tradition - to set up fun creative learning programmes, to become public educational institution, all of which ultimately increase its dry, haughty and weary irrelevance to a world trained to seek beat smashed fun and games and the smashing instant, and which force it to move away from its purer, loftier, more mind expanding principles. Attempting to look as though it is a gentle, friendly, even adorable thing, content to sincerely serve the local community, it ends up seeming even more aloof and stiff, worried so much about its purpose and future that it comes across as already accepting an inevitable demise and merely arranging the last will and testament, and trying to do a bit of end of life charitable good.

It isn't as such a dinosaur, it's like it is from another planet, an alien species, speaking in tongues, articulating a reality that seems as foreign to the world we're sold and limited to as ancient Egyptians or future Martians - precisely the thing which now excites me as a fanatical music lover, always on the lookout for the fresh, the enlightening, the delightfully disturbed. Perversely, what seemed stale and static in the middle of rock and pop's rise to glory now seems fresh, and unsullied, and as we are breaking free, for better or worse, from traditional, modernist notions of distinct, easily measured progress, of one thing leading to the next thing in conventional linear order, the orchestra is freed from the museum - or everything else has joined it in the museum, otherwise known as the internet - and can become a new thing, a new force, a new way of seeing, hearing and making sense of things.

So I come to the idea of the orchestra knowing all about the sense of crisis - the fear and anxiety, or acceptance and resignation, or ingenuity, negotiating and campaigning, that there is from those on the inside, who make their living from them, who believe in them, who spend their time working out how to make them viable, or more viable, or useful, or accessible, or simply functional. I've read years and years, even decades, even a century, of doom and gloom, or slightly deranged, enforced optimism, of stories of struggles to survive, of ways to deal with a ruthless, uncaring, money minded changing world that seems to be leaving them behind.

But I also come to the idea of the orchestra as though it is a new thing, new to me and therefore truly new - always releasing astonishing information about the history and present of music, and art, and possibility, and I am not so much hindered by reality, by practical problems of funding, governance and sustaining, bogged down with fixed costs, audience share, subscription models, worries about the need to democratise the concert experience, the monetisation of the virtual

experience, the dreary male dominance of proceedings, the elusive younger audience – I come to the orchestra at a time when everything is changing so much we are in many ways beginning from scratch in terms of what the new is, and what the new categories are, and so I come to the orchestra blissfully ignorant of the essential bureaucratic, political, financial and repertoire problems that can lumber those involved with a sense of despair and confusion.

I think - perhaps I dream - of the orchestra as a great example of how art and the arts has constantly justified itself by helping individuals to adapt to new ideas, to fundamental change, supplying clues about how to protect ourselves as humans from the damaging consequences of those environmental changes that result from technological and economic advancements. Art tells us about beauty, and broadcasts different, special ways of thinking, but it also warns us about the perils of the type of people who tend to crave power, and influence, who don't care really about beauty, unless it is worth millions, and who loathe ways of thinking that are different from theirs, especially when that thinking questions their worth to possess any sort of power.

Change and progress is part of being human, but it also historically threatens what it is to be human - and art is ultimately what helps us deal with the force of change, it explains it, predicts it, contains it, is a necessary antidote to the rampaging forces of those claiming power. It is the most vital corrective alternative to the entrepreneurial energy that generally exploits technological change mostly to make money and take control of our interests, and it is a mysterious form of opposition to those who, especially at the moment, use the development in technology to herd us into obedient, pacified communities whose sole function is ultimately to consume and download and disappear into a kind of censored, gated territory of lifestyle ease, merciless entertainment and moral indifference.

At this point, in the middle of the sort of changes that will either end us or profoundly transform us, even replace us, there is an extraordinary need for the orchestra, as an unclassifiable symbol of otherness and artistic endeavour, as a method of communicating thought about the vastness of the cosmos, the glory of love, the wonder of existence, the nature of our minds, which music is a mirror of, a maker of, beyond words, and logic, and temporary societal pressure.

I say this as a new born fan, falling in love with what those who have worked for, in and around the orchestra all their lives already appreciate, the uncanny, civilising, even absurd nature of the thing, I say this as someone that wants to avoid as much as possible the usual language that reduces the existence of the orchestra to a political problem, or a cultural inconvenience. For it to survive, how it is discussed and regarded needs to shift away from it being in its last stages, too clunky and clunky to survive in a streamlined digital world, too demanding to work in spaces that can't cope with intricacy, and genuine intimacy. It needs to invent a new context for itself, not by responding to the pressure put on it by cynical business, superficial media and indifferent technology, all quite happy to see it shrink to next to nothing, but by grasping the argument on its own terms, making a case for its existence that is not about revenue, fame or tech strategy, but that is about why there needs to be the orchestra because the alternative is quite simply desolate.

It's easy for me to say this, completely oblivious to the details of how it is funded and functions, the internal and external battles with each other and with outside sceptics, but then, at the moment, I am in control of what is being said, and sometimes, what is being said needs to be less about the mundane, everyday practical details and more about a truth that is actually fantastic, about believing in something else, in other ways of thinking and being, to such an extent it becomes true. At this moment in time, we can make up new rules, we need to make up new rules, and to some extent that

means a world where classical music barely resembles what we mean by classical music at the moment, in the way it is currently presented through the traditional radio channels and concert venues, and the orchestra is only related to a 19th century orchestra in the way a be-bop quartet was related to a 20s trad jazz group and an anonymous electronic duo tinkering with the history of disco are related to four boys from Liverpool inventing a new kind of British empire in the early 1960s. The orchestra and the classical music it represents has missed out on a lot of change this past hundred years ago – fearful of losing its identity – that it is now struggling with what it is in relation to the rest of the world. Now is the time to catch up with change, and even overtake those things around it that did keep up while it was preserving itself, and yet really losing its momentum.

It needs to be about helping to invent new categories to deal with the new circumstances, responding to a world that undeniably contains sinister elements intent on restricting individual freedom creepily using entertainment and pleasure, and ensuring that the true complexity of being alive and organising cities, societies, media to reflect positive thinking are still represented through developing forms of art and music.

If the orchestra is of worth, and had worth, then surely the aim must be to ensure it survives, in some form, in some way, into the next era, and one way to guarantee this is to not weaken and soften its power when presenting the idea of the orchestra, but to toughen it, exaggerate its more radiant, poetic and breath taking elements, sell it not as a local community service, or mere pleasant, attractively ornamental decoration, which is then easily absorbed into the world as it is, even if that means it dissolves completely, but as a brilliant, ground breaking example of unique artistic endeavour. It should not play sweet, it should not stubbornly carry on as it has been doing until the buildings it appears in are no more, or the sponsors it relies on have moved elsewhere, it should act like it knows it is on a crusade to oppose soft thinking, banal interaction and weak minds.

If I made the rules, I would demand a world where the orchestra doesn't chase audiences or try and make friends with them, hunting down a specifically targeted audience or sticking with the one they have by perpetuating outdated modes of presentation, but makes up a new world for audiences to find and decode, an update of the spirit of the music at the heart of its core repertoire that came out of the blue, the newest, most miraculous thing on the planet alongside electricity. Realists might point out that being so pure and uncompromising would render them redundant within a matter of months; for me, a strain of truth in how an orchestra positions itself in the new world related to the actual depth and power of the music, which is rarely as smiley, fake welcoming, and polite as the marketing indicates, would give it a better chance of an extended and influential life. In the end, the greater point is not reaching a wider audience, because to do so means sacrificing every single thing that you do that means anything, but ensuring that music as something more than entertainment survives by ensuring that it still evolves, by marketing the music played by orchestras not as some sort of spa therapy, or teaching aid, or social welfare, but as something that contributes to our knowledge of music and therefore of what it is to be human, here in space, at this weird moment in time.

For me, the future of the orchestra, even beyond the problems of funding, or structural replenishment, involves committing itself to the idea that what it is about maybe problematical, difficult, severe, even obscure, but that's what it is, and it's ridiculous to pretend otherwise. It doesn't mean it cannot be enchanting, inspiring, poignant, erotic, hair raising, spine tingling,

glamorous...in fact, it's more likely to mean that it can be, and can be to more than it's relatively satisfied hard core audience.

The ways the orchestra announces itself to the world should be stranger, not nicer, it should let itself be intriguing to those that still want the different because it is so uncompromising, not because it pretends it is in the same basically pleasing world as the entertainers, and it should be unashamed in reconnecting our musical tradition with its primary source of inspiration, the inner spiritual life of its citizens, accepting that one of its job is to re-awaken this, not contribute to how it is being deadened by those pleased that an inner, questing life is being removed, because that makes the consumer easier to harness even hoodwink. The orchestra must conceive of a role that accepts there is a kind of ideological battle going on, and set itself up as a confident, compelling alternative to commercial standardisation and the on-line reduction of possibilities, not try to find inoffensive ways to compete with their ingratiating, weightless delights.

If the orchestra survives in a neutered, reduced, exiled form in the new world, because it was so worried about losing its audience, becoming just another dutiful element in a controlled entertainment landscape, merely another stored, tamed choice, a mere subservient component, it might as well not exist at all – it's future must be as the most extreme, challenging version of what it is and was, a streaming, cloud era reinvention of a perhaps over romanticised 19th century idea of the orchestra, a ravishing development of the essence of the orchestra as a combination of brains that becomes one brain that presents the ideas of another brain that is better than all other brains put together. It must not be put off by the fact classical music and the orchestra clashes with prevailing cultural norms, but make a virtue of it, connect with those increasing numbers of people unconvinced even repelled by Google, Apple and co; designing and dominance of reality, its self-serving manipulation of our minds and lives.

In a machine ordered, and disordered, world, the orchestra should exist as a glorious reminder of a staggering, largely untapped and unexplored musical heritage - become a rival machine, hand-made and cosmic, imaginatively connected to other serious minded rejections of trivia and sensationalism, to literature, cinema, politics, architecture, design, a whole world outside, and put so much concerted pressure on the media to take it seriously as a going concern, not something to pity or just plain ignore under pressure, on the verge of becoming obsolete, that it begins to take control of its own destiny. In my dream, it does this by acting and appearing more resolute and cerebral, not less.

The orchestra is just as likely to be a part of what comes next as anything, and just as likely to disappear as all those other things that once seemed to be permanent and constant – churches, newspapers, books, record labels, TV channels, test cricket – and from my position, dreamy and unrealistic, utterly unmoved by the dreadful, complex realities of patronage, management, governance, what will make it survive is a greater emphasis from those that are involved on what it is as art, on the fact it is transmitting art and therefore the important thinking and judgement of great minds keen on making the world a better, fairer, freer, wonderfully odder world.

I am definitely not suggesting that the solution is a superficial, marketing and publicity led attachment to fashion or technology, Google glass replacing music stands, that it involves Twitter sessions, Facebook shenanigans, tabloid simplification, reality TV flirtations, or laser lit cross over events with chic electronic dance acts, all of those things that smack of gimmicky, desperation, lost

hope. The solution lies in accepting that the orchestra is rooted in the mutinous and otherworldly, in the sublime and the radically exciting, not the cheery, convenient and easy going.

I imagine, from my wide eyed and impulsive position outside day to day concerns, that the orchestra works out a way to recreate its traditional role as a way of supplying regional civic and cultural gravitas in a future where the idea of the city and the country will be replaced by something else. The supplement of the traditional city with suburbia and exurbia, and the emergence of the internet as a location for the kind of attractions once limited to the metropolis, is one of the reasons why the traditional orchestra has been undermined, but there seems no reason why whatever the new zones and territories are, there won't be the need for the orchestra, a reworked more flexible idea of the orchestra faithful to its central motivation, connected to place in different ways than it traditionally has been, operating outside it's standard context, but still in existence.

It will reanimate in immense, irresistible ways the bravery and discernment it takes to lead public taste, rather than go along with it, or repeat the tastes of those that were leading in the last century, and the century before that, however hermetic seeming and idiosyncratic the music selected is, and maintain standards established by those not concerned with reaching an audience that will never care for the complex however you doll it up or monkey with it. To reach out, it mustn't look as though that is what it is doing, simply by putting posters up that say how wonderful and approachable they are - they must just look as though they trust an audience to be smart enough that they will respond to what it is they are doing, and not look as though they are out of touch with the speed and vividness of how information now moves, and that in fact they can be quicker, sharper, more adventurous, because at the heart of what they do is a form of smartness that means they should not be outmanoeuvred by the facile tricks and illusions of mere show business. And that smartness must reveal itself in how it adapts to the new world, shaking off that reluctance to adapt, just in case the purity of the venture is spoiled, and accepting that the spirit in which a lot of classical music was written, in response and to some extent inspiring extraordinary social and environmental changes, is actually suited to the world as it is now.

So if the question is, as it often is at such events as these, can you imagine the orchestra in the future, in twenty years, in fifty years, when even countries might seem outdated concepts – well, hell yes, I cannot imagine a world without them, or at least, with the next stage on, the orchestra that looks like, after the event, it paid a little more attention to what had happened around it in the 20th century, and is happening around it now, maybe a different frame, and format, a more flexible arrangement of adjustable shapes and sizes, maybe not with the same instruments, maybe even, without it dropping into the tackiness and novelty, without defiling the essential gravity and grandeur, with machines, samplers, different routes to the creation and manipulation of sound, repertoire and history, even with spectacularly conceived visual additions allowing for the ghostly appearance of some of the past greats, of appropriate, uplifting atmosphere, and playing in different figurations, mixing genres and histories a little more loosely and adventurously, maybe, in the end, with the Google glasses spooling their music to them, allowing the look of the orchestra to be less rigid and enslaved looking, less blocked in and uniformed, with a more democratically grounded version of the overbearing, back turning conductor, but essentially, the same thing, with a similar, recognisable anatomy, a collection of responsive, connected individuals in their own amazing world building the amazing world of others inside a whole new set of not yet worked out spaces and rooms and locations, that are and are not tethered to the planet and the people on it, making sense of who we are and where we have been and where we are going, mixing magic and mathematics, physics

and biology, light and dark, rhythm and vibration, an elaborate, visceral symbol of individualism and togetherness, as vital a representation of spontaneous thought, planning, organisation, electrifying continuity, self-belief, and diversity as a great city, and as long as there are cities, and the buildings that show them off, and what surrounds them, and whatever virtual structures replace the cities and the buildings, and there are human beings negotiating their way through these city forms and the other newly invented spaces, there will be orchestras. As long as we want them, regardless of how much they cost to run - I'm still dreaming, I'll wake up in a minute - and the way that works is that we need to imagine a situation, and make it realer and realer, where if the orchestra disappears, it means books have, and surprising thought, and we have too, and history has, the whole astounding effort it took us to get this far, so advanced, so provisional, so in thrall to the very magnificent devices that might yet usher in our extinction. Those that are concerned about the hole, and the holes, the disappearance of the orchestra would leave, the eradication of memory, of detail, of love, of the human spark, are obliged to make it happen, to make them live, not because they are posh, lumbering beasts built only for the rich and spoilt, but because they are so magnificent.

Some say the orchestra has not got a ghost of a chance of surviving the next 50 years, but for old time's sake let's imagine that they will, and how wonderful and alive, and present, they will be in a very human future they help create