

A Place for New Music

A Discussion of Concert Hall Venues with
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1. The Ubiquity of Music
2. The Concert Hall as Legitimizing
3. Poor Venue Acoustics and Other Distractions
4. The Right Atmosphere
5. Appropriate Contexts
6. Rehearsal Time
7. Amplification and Multi-Purpose Venues
8. Web-based Concerts
9. Finding New Audiences and Creating New Venues

1. The Ubiquity of Music

FRANK J. OTERI: We've reached the point now where music really is everywhere. You can turn music on in your home; you can walk around the streets with it, with a walkman; music of your own choosing if you choose CDs or MP3s or whatever it is that people are listening to these days or music not of your own choosing if you're surfing through the radio. You can even listen to music playing whether you want to or not. When you walk into a supermarket there's Muzak□ blasting...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: The subway platform.

FRANK J. OTERI: True, you can even hear *live* music just about anywhere... There's almost no longer a distinction between a place that's specifically meant for hearing music and anywhere else. Is this a good thing or is it a bad thing? Is there too much music all around us?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I think that what's been happening is just going to keep going. I don't think we'll ever go backwards. There's always going to be live music on the subway platforms, there's always going to be Muzak□ in the supermarkets, so I just think we can almost not ask, "Is it a good thing or a bad thing?" I think we have to realize that that's what we're going to have. It's not going to change.

FRANK J. OTERI: But does it sort of numb us when we hear music in a "real" space?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: No. I don't think so. I don't think so.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I think it is expands our landscape. It expands our sonic landscape to have music everywhere whether we choose to hear it or not. It's the creation of the Walkman, the elevator Muzak□. The introduction of music in unlikely spaces has just broadened the sonic landscape to a point where it's just another conversation piece; it's just another conversation heard on the street. It's a part of our daily lives.

FRANK J. OTERI: But does it bring us to the point where a concert experience isn't as significant?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I don't think so. I think most of us turn the things off that we don't want to receive. When I hear live music on a subway platform, it doesn't really damage me. I can ignore it. So therefore when I go into another environment, let's say Carnegie Hall, where there's an established way of listening that's been developed over the last 350 years; when you go there you have quite a different experience than any other aural experience you're going to have. So I believe that the more or less sacred ground of concert halls, I think it's going to continue with this for, I hope, 200 years.

FRANK J. OTERI: Only 200?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: (laughs) At least 200!

LIMOR TOMER: When you go to listen to music, when you're actually going, whether you're paying or not paying, or going to a bar or a concert hall or an outdoor festival, you're making a conscious decision to go and you're participating in the experience, you're taking it in; so the level of your seriousness and your participation is different than being exposed to music as pollution, or air or traffic noise and so, you could hear it or not hear it if it's coming at you on speakers or in Penn Station or in the street or in the subway, you're not actively seeking it or participating in it, so the question is whether the listener is

participating or not. And if they are then the experience is different and it's...it could be in Carnegie Hall or an outdoor arena.

FRANK J. OTERI: Russell's comment about being able to channel out music he doesn't want to hear is interesting. To look at from the opposite point of view, is it possible in such an environment to actually listen to something? What if the subway musician happens to be really fantastic? Can you ever really hear that person in this context or do you need the barrier of a concert hall? Do you need a wall to somehow contain the music in order to give the performance credibility?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I don't think so. I think if a busker were standing in front of a theater in the Broadway section of Manhattan and he was really talented and had developed a technique for getting across his message, he gathers an audience and you do get the impact. You get everything he's delivering. And some of them, some of these chaps are really fantastic. So I don't think you have to be in a dedicated space.

2. The Concert Hall as Legitim�er

FRANK J. OTERI: So then the question becomes, what function does the dedicated space serve? What is the purpose of a concert hall at this point in our history? What could or should a concert hall be? We know what a concert hall has been. Russell mentioned Carnegie Hall, which is this model that goes back to the way people have been listening for centuries. But is that still the model that is the right model for our society here and now?

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I think at the moment, the concert hall serves its well-established community and without its concert hall, that well-established community would find itself without live music. The people who go to Lincoln Center to hear a specific, Western classical music tradition concert are not going to be surfing the Internet looking for a live webcast. That's their community. They know the people that are sitting next to them in their subscriber seats and the community is very solid. Without that particular experience of hearing music, they would be musically homeless. So, yes, those traditional concert halls I believe do a wonderful community service for Western traditional classical music, for their specific audience, and that audience is going to be with us for a long time. They don't make the transition into another environment. That's their environment; that's their home.

FRANK J. OTERI: But is new work served by this kind of concert hall situation?

COLETTE DOMINGUES: New work is not served by that concert hall situation. Traditional work is served and that's all.

LIMOR TOMER: We were talking about tuning out buskers or subway musicians. I've seen more people tuning out in the traditional concert halls—Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall—than on the subway platform. I mean, it becomes a whole other thing for many people when they go to a traditional concert hall. Sometimes it's about the music and sometimes it's not. I don't think that music is necessarily served by the concert hall environment; I think the concert hall environment is something that emerged—I don't know, maybe I'm completely off—that emerged from economic conditions, what was happening with the middle class demanding and owning something that was only available to a different class before that. And so the size just began growing and growing as more people were interested and demanding to be exposed to culture, you know, museums and that whole model of making important culture available to large numbers of people. But new music does not necessarily fit itself or develop along those lines. And its needs are very different and its audience is different and the way it needs to be nurtured is not going to fall into those existing structures.

FRANK J. OTERI: But in order to get people to listen, in order to make that leap, there needs to be some kind of message: "This is what you should be paying attention to out of the myriad of noise surrounding us." So, you know, we have these barriers; it's almost like a sanctioning. Somebody says, "Well, you know this guy has a gig at the Knitting Factory. Oh, well, the Knitting Factory must think this guy is good therefore I should pay attention to this." Whereas somebody playing on the street, nobody says this guy is good, he's just there in the street playing. So the question becomes, this barrier, this construct of the concert hall with its social context that allows you to listen to music in the foreground rather than the background. The questions become: Are these barriers the same for every kind of music? Are they different for different kinds of music? Why are they different? And what kind of barrier is minimally needed to listen to anything?

LIMOR TOMER: All right, so, the Internet, right? Everything is possible; everything is available. It's like all the colors are there so everything becomes white. So an unsuspecting neophyte who wants to

love music, who wants to engage, is lost. So then what becomes really critical is the role of the curator. The curator becomes someone a listener can trust and say, "O.K., lead me and I will follow. And I will trust your point of view. And I will take chances and I'll spend money on what you tell me to buy and the curator can be a critic, it could be an artistic director of an institution, it could be an institution. It becomes a sanctioning and a curatorial entity that people can trust and follow. And that I think is a tremendous opportunity for people in institutions who are positioned to really advance great new music and new music that matters and people can sort of follow that. And the Knitting Factory is a great example. I mean, it's such a terrible place in every way, acoustically and the floor and just the environment, and yet it has established itself as a curatorial entity of real importance. I don't know exactly how this happened, a lot of it was by conscious action...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: A lot of it was created by the artists who wanted to form their own community and found the building to be in a geographic location that was suitable to their needs. So the artists putting up with the awful conditions, which we've learned, kept on coming together in this building that they called home. And obviously in the past few years, the artists have chosen to go their own way and to create new homes and new buildings.

FRANK J. OTERI: But that wasn't really so much because of the acoustics so much as the environment, the culture, the personalities involved. To bring us into an acoustical dimension, you have musicians that are playing in halls with terrible sound, but there's a scene there and there's some sort of recognition, so the audience comes. There's a legitimacy to the scene. From an acoustical point of view, is the music being poorly served in such a scene?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I don't think so. Forgive me for going back to the Knitting Factory. There, it's something that's established; it's a routine, it's established and if you don't get that experience anywhere else in Manhattan, you're going to go to the Knitting Factory whether the acoustics rate 3 on a scale of 100, or 82 on a scale of 100. So, acoustics is not by any means the dominating thing in performance.

3. Poor Venues Acoustics and Other Distractions

RUSSELL JOHNSON: If you have an audience which is sensitive to acoustics, or a music director who is sensitive to acoustics or a group of performers, musicians who are sensitive, then of course they are going to keep looking always for a better and better place acoustically. But we also know, acoustically speaking, that all over the world there are a lot of very unsatisfactory opera houses and a lot of very unsatisfactory recital halls, a lot of very unsatisfactory concert halls and yet that's where musical life is. Maybe 92 percent of musical life of the world is in acoustically unsatisfactory places.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I curate a series at Galapagos, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn and it's a raw, brick back room of a large and well-housed bar. The acoustic is maybe five on a scale of zero to 100. But the environment and the constituents of the neighborhood, the actual visitors to the space, create an atmosphere in which most new music proponents want to perform. They want to be there, they're eager to be there, they volunteer to be there. So with the right environment as far as the furnishings of the room and the candles on the wall and the drapery in the background and the dimming of the lights, we can create a warmth and a coziness that the music demands and also a much more informal atmosphere than one would find at Alice Tully Hall. People can get up. People can change their positioning so they can get a better sightline of the stage, of the musicians if they want to. So the whole nurturing of the barrier is there and available and people come for that. They're not coming for the 100 percent acoustic on the stage. They're coming to be part of a new music community and they find it very inviting.

FRANK J. OTERI: Before the camera got turned on, we talked about our other favorite venue to pick on other than the Knitting Factory—Lincoln Center. We talked about the New York Philharmonic premiere of what I believe was probably a beautiful piece, I've heard many other works of his and they're all beautiful and I can only assume that this one is beautiful too. I say it was "probably beautiful" because I can't say it with certainty even though I was at the premiere! I'm talking about Somei Satoh; I'm not sure I heard his music at that premiere.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: You didn't hear it. You didn't hear it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yeah, and I heard parts of it and I what heard was beautiful, but it was an utter failure in that space and...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: And it wasn't for want of Kurt Masur trying to control the audience. That piece starts with 32 seconds of pure silence...resonant silence. A waiting, pending, pregnant pause. And the conductor, even though he tried three times, could not create the right pregnant pause to be able to start the piece. I think I found the right venue for Somei Satoh, which is the Angel Orensanz Arts Center down on Norfolk Street, but at the same time we'd have to create the right seating environment. No squeaky folding chairs, people reclining. So I think it could be developed, but certainly not in Lincoln Center, despite the best efforts of the maestro to create that environment.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well that then becomes another question, the proper environment to hear a new piece of music and obviously every piece comes with its own agenda and you certainly can't go to a new concert hall for every single piece of music that's being done, although Carnegie Hall's attempt at this with their plans for that new Zankel Hall which has twelve different stages that change depending on what's there is a pretty interesting way to deal with this issue. But the question now becomes how to experience a piece of music? Sitting, standing, laying down...what is the ideal physical state that a listener should be in when listening to music?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: Send that question somewhere else first.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I think it's an individual matter; it's an individual listener's concern. I mean, some people like to buy standing room, I mean, that's where they're more comfortable. Others are more comfortable in one of the new cinema seats, which is like a cushioned armchair with a reclining back, others are quite happy to sit bolt upright. It's an individual decision that a concert hall can't really facilitate. It can't enable those people to have a multitude of ways in which to pose themselves to listen to the music.

LIMOR TOMER: I don't know. I think it's a little bit of a goofy question. I think the ideal way for me to take in a new piece of music is: A) to want to and B) to have a drink in my hand. I don't mean alcohol necessarily but a glass of water, something. And I think that maybe that just symbolizes a willingness and a comfort level, you know and then I'm engaged and then I am open and then I want to listen. I can be standing, I can be sitting, I can be lying down. All that is sort of, if the composer tries to or wants to dictate the positioning of the audience, fine. I find it interesting what you said about Somei Satoh and Orensanz in this sort of ecclesiastical environment where certain pieces just live and breathe more comfortably.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Yeah, and for Somei Satoh, the breathing is the thing. The space between the notes is absolutely of quintessential importance to the understanding of his music and if you miss the silence, you miss half the piece.

LIMOR TOMER: And just the building, just the Orensanz has that...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Quality.

LIMOR TOMER: Quality in it, so...

RUSSELL JOHNSON: Oh, all right, I'll try. I guess realizing that over the last 200 to 300 years a lot of the music we consider classical today was actually composed to be played when the emperor was dining and entertaining his guests.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Background music.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: In Vienna in the summer particularly, tea houses... A lot of the music that we consider sacred today was performed in that kind of environment. Also in parks, in very elaborate bandstands over the years, so having a drink in your hand to listen to music is not new.

LIMOR TOMER: Well no. I don't pretend it is. It's just, to me it has the connotation of a comfort level and a lack of formality that I think helps me and other people deal with the demands of new music, unfamiliar music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yet at Carnegie Hall you can't have a drink in your hand.

LIMOR TOMER: No. Drink bad, Carnegie Hall.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: In fact, at Boston Symphony Hall, for years, they'd clear out the whole main floor. They'd occupy the entire main floor with tables and about ten or twelve people at each round table.

That's been going on. I don't know if they're still doing it, but for most of the last 100 years, they've been doing it. So again...

LIMOR TOMER: That's not new.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: It's not necessarily the Mahler Ninth; it's a lighter version of symphony music. I'm sure we can think of many examples where food and drink are very intimately involved with listening to and performing music.

LIMOR TOMER: And it's found in other cultures too.

FRANK J. OTERI: You said something very interesting. "A lighter form of listening to music." So does having the drink in your hand or being engaged in another activity other than sitting upright and listening to music imply that you're not completely listening in some ways?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I think what happens in these circumstances is, you go through a number of minutes where you're talking with your neighbor and eating and drinking and then most of the audience turns their attention to the performance. So I'm going to stop there.

FRANK J. OTERI: There was a comment that Molly made that I just absolutely adored, she said that we're talking about musical Darwinism. If the music's good enough, won't people shut up and listen, no matter what?

COLETTE DOMINGUES: No!

LIMOR TOMER: I've seen that happen actually. I've seen it not happen but I've also seen it happen. Yeah, I curate a series in a space that's a restaurant. And so it's a very dangerous place for musicians. And I've seen musicians absolutely take over and it's not just the music, it's the projection or the communication skill. It's like what you said about the buskers, the communication skill of the performer up there that just shuts down what we call the silverware channel. It's just gone.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: And I bet you've also seen spectacular artists who have not been able to transcend the hub of noise.

LIMOR TOMER: Oh, yeah, well absolutely.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the most tragic concerts that I've attended was a duet concert at Iridium, which has relatively good acoustics for a jazz club where they serve food and I have heard a number of splendid concerts there. This was not one of them. Even though it was musically fantastic—it was Charlie Haden on bass and Geri Allen on piano—and it was summertime but the air conditioner was loud, so they decided to turn the air conditioner off and they decided to do the thing without amplification. You know, it was a fantastic idea in the abstract, but a deadly idea for this room. So it was just piano and bass with no amplification at all and busboys were taking away entrees and drinks and all, and they drowned out the entire gig. You couldn't hear anything. While the little I heard was fantastic, it was an utter failure because it showed a total lack of understanding for that space. Yeah, the music was good enough and you know the audience was quiet, but the staff was not.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Yeah you've got a similar situation at Belle Epoque, but the staff are all very concerned about the music so they're literally on tender feet. They're very, very respectful. So it's the

same kind of environment with the eating and the drinking and the busboys, but everyone is very respectful of the sound so it works beautifully.

FRANK J. OTERI: Sometimes it's not even a question of volume. One time I was at the Beacon Theater. And you know, concerts there can be pretty loud, but despite that, the ushers were talking all the way through it and it was extremely intrusive. The audience was completely engaged, but the staff wasn't, and it was a problem.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: That's a matter of getting your act together and making sure that your business skills are in place so that you can actually go and manage the staff prior to the event so they know what is going on. That's a shame because that could've been avoided.

4. The Right Atmosphere

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I also think of a situation where the waiters are the performers, Italian restaurants where the waiters sing opera. And they wait on a table and they wait on a table and everyone makes noise and when they're ready to sing their arias everyone pays attention. There's no one in the room that's going to interrupt that.

FRANK J. OTERI: I remember Puglia's restaurant down in Little Italy and they used to come around and sing songs and they'd lock the doors so you couldn't actually leave. It was a captive audience awaiting their pasta.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I think careful curation helps. I mean, we were talking before the recording started about a performer who did a sonic meditation with a guitar and a wrench and it's a very mournful, very peaceful, quiet sound, so that has to be scheduled at a time at Galapagos where the DJ in the next room is taking his break. If it's between eleven and twelve at night, it's the perfect time of night for that kind of sonic meditation. Any other time, it's going to be lost. So careful curation can create a perfect environment, even if the general atmosphere of the space doesn't lend itself.

FRANK J. OTERI: This all sounds a lot like the same kind of planning that goes into designing a great restaurant!

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Well, you make a careful reservation, you choose a menu, you choose a very efficient staff... Choosing your piece of music, choosing your composer, choosing your performers and choosing an environment that is suitable to your taste.

FRANK J. OTERI: A restaurant isn't just about the food but it's also about the space. And I think when we talk about concerts, we're not always directly attuned to the space that the music is in but that space is as important a component as the music that's being played and who's performing it and how well it's being performed.

LIMOR TOMER: For me, it's exactly the opposite. I don't want to be challenged. I just want to know that things will be a certain way.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: You want to know that the food tastes good. You want to know that the quality of the food is going to be...

LIMOR TOMER: Right, but I don't want surprises, you know, I don't want my sensibilities challenged...I want security. When I go to a concert, I don't want that.

FRANK J. OTERI: You said before you do want that: you want to have a drink and to feel comfortable.

LIMOR TOMER: I don't want that from the music, I want that from the venue. I want to feel comfortable in a venue as I do in a restaurant but I certainly don't want—I'm not looking for security from new music, or old music, or any music! Dependability, you know...I'm not looking for a track record.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I have to come back to careful curation. You know, the chef chooses the menu very carefully, the curator chooses the musicians and the venue very, very carefully. You create an environment in a space for new music in the way that a good restaurateur would create a good

environment in a restaurant with attention to lighting and attention to the community seating in different sizes—you know, your table for eight, your table for four, your table for two, your table for the single. And you can create that kind of environment in a venue for new music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Would certain food not work in certain spaces? Most of the best Chinese restaurants don't have a lot of ambiance to them. Very rarely do you go to a Chinese place that's dimly lit, that has sort of a mystery to it. They're just about having a good meal. I used to joke around a lot, there's this place downstairs from us at the American Music Center, this Indian place, Sirtaj, which is a little hole in the wall. You know, the walls are very barren and you can see the cracks if you look carefully, but the food is really good. It's cheap. But on their takeout menu they say "wonderful atmosphere." What do you mean wonderful atmosphere? There's *no* atmosphere here.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: There is no atmosphere at Merkin Hall but the quality of the performances that come out of the place are excellent. I mean, the interpretation series, and people go and go and go, but it's a cafeteria, there is no atmosphere.

FRANK J. OTERI: I love Merkin and I go to a lot of concerts there and a lot of them aren't as well attended as I think they ought to be. And I wonder if that is part of it. If...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: There's a harshness that's not hospitable.

FRANK J. OTERI: Although by the same token, we were talking about the Miller Theatre which is also a terrible hall in a lot of ways, but the programming that goes on there is fantastic. The performances that are there and the environment is fantastic, the way George Steel has set it up: That after a concert there's always a reception, there's always drinks. So you can't have a drink in your hand when you're hearing a piece but after you've heard it and you're talking to people about the piece you can have drink.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: But you might as well because George's personality just sort of takes over Miller Theatre and it's just...it's a whole way of being with music that just makes it an intensely joyous experience.

FRANK J. OTERI: I remember when it was called McMillen Hall. I was a Columbia undergrad. And it was a God-awful place to hear music. Terrible, terrible environment. They didn't redesign the hall; they didn't repaint the hall. It still sounds as dreadful as it always did. But you know, you don't really hear how bad it sounds when you're there. Somehow you're transported somewhere else. It's like an acoustical placebo, you know, Miller Hall. The acoustics are bad, but they don't sound bad, even though they are.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: (laughs) Well, of course, most audiences really pay absolutely no attention to acoustics and I think that's appropriate. The people who are mostly focused on acoustics are the performers. In the average symphony audience in North America today, probably, probably a good 94 percent of the audience is just completely unaware of the acoustics. And that's, of course, why so many halls are operating with very bad acoustics. That does not really send audiences away. The works being played, the quality of the musicianship, the quality of the music director, that's what counts. So, it doesn't surprise me at all, what you said. It's sort of normal.

5. Appropriate Contexts

FRANK J. OTERI: So, in this country, most of the places that have the buzz value would not have it because of the acoustics. They would have it because of the environment.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: It's mostly the performers on stage. It's the music being played and the quality of the musicianship. Those two things together—that's what really brings the audiences in, I think.

FRANK J. OTERI: I think another factor beyond the musicians who are playing there is the legacy of the musicians who once *played* there. Certainly that's true of Carnegie Hall for classical music, and for jazz a place like the Village Vanguard where so many great live jazz recordings have been made over the years. Many of these recordings, like a Bobby Timmons Trio LP I was listening to last night, are stunning, but I don't know if people are going to the Village Vanguard for the acoustics. They're going for the history. They're going there because this is where Coltrane and Bill Evans played.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I think you're missing something here. When I say the audiences are not aware of acoustics, all I am saying really is that that does not enter their consciousness. However, when they leave a performance, if they walk out the door at the Vanguard and they feel they've heard the musician that they want to hear and playing the kind of music that that man or woman plays, the acoustics of the Vanguard have still played a very, very important role. They're probably completely unconscious of it, but when they go back to their homes, they're going to be taking with them the memory of the whole thing, including the good acoustics. And of course, as you know, the Vanguard is the most crowded sardine can you can imagine. And the seating is most unusual. I can't even imagine and people get a kick out of that. They're in a very, very informal space and you sort of wedge yourself in at the Vanguard and the only times that I've ever been there it's been absolutely packed. So acoustics are not all that important.

LIMOR TOMER: Max Gordon did not care one bit about acoustics, the fact that the Vanguard has good acoustics is just an accident. It's an accident of nature and the artists made it what it is. And it happened—he didn't care about jazz either. He didn't! It happened.

FRANK J. OTERI: But Lorraine definitely does.

LIMOR TOMER: Lorraine definitely cares about something. And she cares passionately about many things.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now that's a hall where you do hear the music because if somebody talks...watch out!

LIMOR TOMER: Yeah. But it's the most wonderful place and you go there for the history and all that. And it does have great acoustics and people don't talk, but I don't think that it grew up there because it had great acoustics. I think that's just something that we all appreciate and love about it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Places like Carnegie and the Vanguard are sort of like cathedrals in a way. They're sacred spaces and playing in them carries so much weight, so much history. The same is true for places like La Scala in Milan or Covent Garden or the Concertgebouw. Can you have bad concerts in these places? Is it possible to have a bad experience? I had a bad experience at Carnegie Hall with a quintet by Giovanni Sollima but the same piece sounds great on my Walkman...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I think of course you can have a bad concert at those reverent spaces because if the artist is irreverent and does not tune in to the natural feeling of the place, then they can quite abuse the space and come out with a sound that is unappreciated by an audience that would otherwise be appreciative. I think you can, a performer, a poor performer who's not clued in can really create a bad environment.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I'm going to hazard a guess about Masur and St. John the Divine. My guess is that when he's getting ready to take the New York Philharmonic up to St. John, he is extremely conscious of what work or works he's going to take up to St. John the Divine. And he picks works that he feels will work fairly well, as well as possible, in the very, very reverberant acoustics of St. John.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: So it comes right back down to careful curation, careful selection.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I know him just well enough to be absolutely certain that this is very much on his mind whenever he has a date coming up at St. John the Divine.

FRANK J. OTERI: Of course, the old joke with that is, "Oh, I missed the concert at St. John the Divine last night." "Quick, if you get up there by five you can still hear it." Well, you know, that's the thing. What works in certain spaces and what doesn't. Part of it is the acoustics and part of it is the environment. How would you feel if you heard the Bang On A Can All-Stars at Preservation Hall in New Orleans? What kind of experience would that be and why?

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I think Bang On A Can would overfill the space with sound. The space couldn't contain them. It's a small space; it's full of dark wood. It's heavily clothed; it's quite claustrophobic. And I think their sound would just overfill it and be inappropriate. Not because of the musical content but because of the volume of the space.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, what about then hearing the Emerson String Quartet in Preservation Hall?

COLETTE DOMINGUES: That acoustic set would fit very nicely into Preservation Hall.

FRANK J. OTERI: But the hall is so set up just for one thing, traditional jazz. It would be like going to an Italian restaurant and being served lamb vindaloo! All of a sudden you have this incredible disconnect, which has to do with the venue as not necessarily the acoustics but what the expectations are of the audience that's there.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I guess I would take more risks than you as a diner then, because I can see the Emerson String Quartet there. I mean last weekend I placed a pipa player, an electric guitarist, and a trombonist trio in Liberty Science Center in New Jersey, in the Health Floor Theater, with the doors open so that the constituents of the science museum could be attracted by the sound through the open doors and come in and see what was going on. It was a totally ridiculous environment in which to have these musicians, but it worked like a charm. It was a charm. It drew people in and it kept them there. We had just a few seats in a semi-circle, but you know, just imagine this is the middle of a science center where you just don't expect to hear pipa, trombone, and guitar and it worked beautifully.

FRANK J. OTERI: So fantasy venue-performance pairings. A) for quality; B) for shock value. One that sounds a little bit of both. Would the Emerson Quartet at Preservation Hall have some shock value?

LIMOR TOMER: I don't know. Why are you doing that? Just for marketing purposes or you know what I'm saying? I mean, if there is an organic reason to do something, well then by all means, let's do it. But if it's just to see...and also what would the Emerson be playing? Would they be playing a piece that was written by somehow who was doing an homage to that kind of music? Are they doing Don Byron's take on do-do-do, or is it just Emerson playing Beethoven at Preservation Hall to sell more tickets or less tickets or...I don't know, for me it has to be organic.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: For me at the Liberty Science Center, it was because the performance was part of a 48-hour webcast, so we were trying to make the connection for the Liberty Science Center between art and technology. So here we had a webcast using computer technologies on a health floor because the piece was a sonic meditation, so it was respectful of the environment insofar as the subject matter was conducive to the health floor. It was a sonic healing and it was a perfect choice. Liberty Science Center was a perfect choice for the art-technology combination. So it wasn't purely for shock value, although the doors were open and people didn't know what to expect. But it was part of organic whole; it had a purpose.

LIMOR TOMER: Right, it sounds to me like there was very conscious thought about how these whole, these points are connected, and so that makes perfect sense to me.

FRANK J. OTERI: Plus, perhaps you're making a statement about tradition or about context. The thing I always love to say about Lincoln Center is that architecturally it's a celebration of high modernism yet the majority of the music you hear there has nothing to do with high modernism. In a way, you know, the best possible music you could possibly hear in Lincoln Center would be music by Donald Martino or Charles Wuorinen because that music is sort of the sonic equivalent of what these spaces are visually. And...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I would push it further and say Kyle Gann and William Duckworth also. *The Time-Curve Preludes. Custer's Ghost...* To push it a little further.

FRANK J. OTERI: Even further into kind of minimalist or post-minimalist music, but yet at the same time, here you have this disconnect, you're in a modern space and you're hearing Brahms. That's almost as disconcerting as going to La Scala and hearing *Einstein on the Beach*! I mean that's sort of, but that's what people go there for. I think most people would feel rather disconcerted if most of the programming at Lincoln Center, all of a sudden, was music written in the last 25 years, because that's not the context of the place.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: You're trying to match architectural style with music and what you're overlooking is that once a building gets built it's very, very rarely destroyed. So, civilized society always has a catalog of rooms that date from almost every style of the last 200-300 years. Now you don't want to go around tearing them down just because the architecture of the façade doesn't match the music on the inside. It's that simple.

FRANK J. OTERI: There was a fantastic series of concerts produced in Europe a few years back in which there were concerts of chamber music from the 17th through the 19th centuries performed in rooms from those periods specifically designed for this music...

RUSSELL JOHNSON: Well, there are a lot of new operas on DVD that are performed in the very spaces that the action took place: *Tosca* and *Don Giovanni*, there are many, many DVDs of operas that are photographed, filmed in the appropriate, still-existing, physical surroundings.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's almost taking the notion of period instruments to the next step: period venue to these works. But this brings us back full circle to this question of the ideal place for new music. Maybe the ideal halls for new music haven't been built yet.

LIMOR TOMER: Well, you know, there used to be, there isn't anymore, there used to be the worst venue for music, the worst! Worse than Lincoln Center or the Knitting Factory but they used to have the most interesting programming consistently eclectic new music, openness, just the most fabulous thing and that was the old Winter Garden, which is gone. The worst! I mean I wouldn't even call it acoustics, I don't know what it was! It was just awful and the program was just the most consistently brilliant from season to season, within the seasons, each concert crafted, presented, not in a condescending way to the audience, not being insiders but in an open and in a context...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: A beautiful offering.

LIMOR TOMER: A beautiful, gorgeous, open series that I think did more to bring new audiences to the music than any other place and it was the worst acoustically.

FRANK J. OTERI: Yet some things acoustically worked there. The Stephen Scott Bowed Piano Ensemble concert that was there, it sounded fantastic. That worked.

LIMOR TOMER: Part of it is that they, as opposed to a lot of other places that use amplification, their sound guys were so conscientious and the team was just so, worked so hard to compensate and to bring things out. And that helps a lot. But yeah, ideal venue, I don't know if there is such a thing. I think it's curation and an openness and a willingness to go there and a willingness to pay for rehearsals, that helps a lot in creating the perfect venue.

6. Rehearsal Time

FRANK J. OTERI: There are so many venues that won't even let the performers in until the day of a concert. How much time ideally should a performer have in a space before giving a concert there?

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I try and create the day of from ten in the morning until the time of the performance, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but that's what my ideal time is. It would be spectacular to have the day before but, you know, budget funds don't allow.

LIMOR TOMER: Yeah, I mean, absolutely, if a group or a performer can spend some time getting adjusted and understanding the space, that is really important, but just having the resources to rehearse so that we get to hear the actual piece, not the potential of the piece.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: We're mixing up all kinds of music.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Yes.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: But I'll go to the Conservatoire in Paris, when the Beethoven Fifth was first played there, the orchestra rehearsed for fifteen solid months before they asked the audience to come into the hall. It's one of the longest periods of rehearsal I've ever read about.

LIMOR TOMER: Well, I'll sign right now for three rehearsals. I'll take it!

7. Amplification and Multi-Purpose Venues

FRANK J. OTERI: One thing we haven't touched on yet is amplification. It certainly was a factor in the negative experiences I've had at Carnegie Hall—I don't think amplification works there. There are a lot of attitudes among performers, among listeners, among composers, among music critics that amplification is the great evil. Amplification is wrong. And I thought it would be interesting to address that in terms of can you have a hall that works for unamplified music and amplified music both? Is that possible?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: Yes, you incorporate in the design a tremendous amount of physical adjustability. And then you can get very, very good results for certain kinds of music without amplification and where the performer needs amplification and wants amplification and demands amplification you can adjust the room to work with amplified sounds.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I agree, yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now clearly both of you present music that features amplification, so you don't think amplification is evil.

LIMOR TOMER: Well, it seems to me that amplification doesn't work in the traditional, large opera house size venues like Carnegie Hall, the BAM Opera House, or Avery Fisher Hall. It doesn't seem to work, probably because it wasn't designed to work.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: Yeah, BAM isn't what we call fixed acoustics. Fixed environment. Carnegie Hall is a fixed environment; Avery Fisher Hall is a fixed environment. The halls we've done in the last 20 years, essentially we never use the fixed environment approach. Our hall, our concert halls in Dallas, Calgary, Edmonton, Birmingham, England, Lucerne, Lahti, Finland, uh, everyone of those halls has a tremendous range of adjustability which is why some evenings you can get the amplification working very well in a room.

FRANK J. OTERI: I think we're really spoiled in New York City. We've got halls that have really specific audiences and specific targets, but all around the country you'll have a hall that one night is being used for a symphony orchestra concert, the next night it's going to be used for Garth Brooks when he comes to town that night, and the next week it will be a touring Broadway show that will be there and every one of these scenarios requires a very, very different acoustic environment. And I always find it interesting what happens with chamber music, because chamber music is most poorly served by most of the halls that we're currently in, because you can't really build a hall that's only for chamber music because it's economically unfeasible.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: No, that's wrong. That's absolutely wrong. What's happening is in the 1920s, practically every community in North America built one room and the concept was that each community could only raise enough money for one room. Therefore, everything had to happen in that one room. Communities today have learned that that is not the way to go. So, in most of the communities where we're working, the building owners are building four rooms or five rooms in a center—even in relatively small communities. In Kansas City, the building owner, which is a foundation, the building owner is projecting a pure concert hall and next to it a pure opera house and next to it a pure drama hall and in between the two a very small recital hall and then also down the hill, just a few feet a very small experimental room for contemporary dance. And this is the new pattern. In 1925, it was certainly not

what was being done, but in the next 10, 20, 30 years this is going to be the construction and design pattern in North America and it's well on it's way.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Well, I hope the recession doesn't affect those plans. Those are beautiful plans.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: This foundation, this particular foundation has its money invested in the right places.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Good, good.

8. Web-based Concerts

FRANK J. OTERI: Of course, now there's also so much music on the Internet and this has turned people's personal computers into a new kind of concert venue. Of course, at this point, it's still mostly a very acoustically poor environment.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Having had this 48-hour experience of it last weekend with the Cathedral Project, you know, the sound is only as good as the bandwidth and I think as soon, if we push the envelope, the development of a better quality sound will have to follow. It's not a matter of the art following the technology, it's a matter of the art pushing the technology so that the technology can meet the demands... This weekend we engaged, we haven't got the stats yet, we engaged the audience interactively, so it wasn't a passive experience sitting on the other end of a computer, you could actually start to work with a virtual instrument and have some input into the whole experience. So I think if we push the technology to meet the needs of the art and if we engage the audience in an interactive experience, then we're creating this vast new audience that has the mindset to appreciate the sounds that the musicians are making on the Web.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I can't add anything to that.

LIMOR TOMER: Um, I guess I'm an old-fashioned girl. I just consider the computer the tool that I use for my work and I resent having to go to it for my artistic experience. And when I go to an art gallery or a visual art exhibit where there are computer terminals where you're invited to engage in an interactive art experience, I just avoid it and I know it's me and I'm probably old, and there's a whole generation that has a completely different relationship with computers and digital technology, but I just can't go there. And I consider the Internet absolutely valuable in archiving music, in making it available and all of those kind of library functions, but it's not a venue for me and I resent it when it becomes the venue.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: In this particular project—I can only talk about this particular project—the venue was the hub. Every single performance wasn't in the studio, it was in front of a live audience, in a real venue, Taipei Theater, Galapagos here in the States, and many other really live venues. No studio environments, the audience coming and going. So, for us, the Web was an additional audience development and outreach procedure. It wasn't the only place. It was the place where people who were geographically ill-located or physically confined or in jail (laughs) could join in and be part of the audience.

LIMOR TOMER: It's the great democratic tool and...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Yes.

LIMOR TOMER: ...and I appreciate that and I think it's for sort of a perspective and a broadening, and all that, great.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: It's not instead of, it's as well as.

LIMOR TOMER: Right.

FRANK J. OTERI: I think the irony of course is, you know, I always like to say that the Internet is this great democratic tool but it only works if you have a computer or have access to one...

COLETTE DOMINGUES: There were people at public libraries in Portugal, public libraries in Africa who were using a public computer, with maybe 20 people standing around one...

FRANK J. OTERI: With a 28.8 modem?

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Yeah, 28.8.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow!

COLETTE DOMINGUES: With all the plug-ins. I mean, yeah, RealAudio 8 and then sharing it within community environments.

9. Finding New Audiences and Creating New Venues

FRANK J. OTERI: There's a specific demographic to the kind of person that will attend a concert, and that might vary according to who is the typical classical concert-goer, who is the typical jazz club attendee, who's the typical rock concert goer, etc. The Internet has kind of opened that up a bit. I'm not sure we have a demographic yet on who the person is who listens to music over the Web, but I think we can be relatively sure that they're younger people for the most part, but that's going to change too...

LIMOR TOMER: Younger and older. Both ends.

FRANK J. OTERI: We could also determine the demographic of somebody who doesn't go to concerts at all. Should we be concerned about bringing them in? Does it matter that there are people who don't listen to music that way?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I look at people like Simon Rattle. Simon has a great drive to bring music to more and more people. It's almost the core of his musical life. He's constantly campaigning for bringing music education back into the school systems. I think that a musician who devotes his life to the performance of music, has an innate, overwhelming desire to have music mean more to more and more people as the years go by. You can't avoid it.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: There are many Simon Rattles out there.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: If you're onstage performing the Beethoven Third, you don't want to really sit there playing your violin thinking that in forty years that institution will be almost gone. You just don't want to, you know, that's not human nature. So I think everyone wants music to matter more and more.

MOLLY SHERIDAN: We were talking about the new venues where there are multiple rooms. If you had the chance to design a room for new music from scratch, realizing that new music is a broad term in and of itself, what sort of things would you want that facility be equipped to do?

COLETTE DOMINGUES: I would have a committee meeting immediately with all of the musicians that I was going bring into the space and find out their needs, put it all together and put someone in charge to have it made. I wouldn't make those decisions on my own. As a curator, I would have big, relative lobbies come and we'd have a democratic decision about it and build the perfect environment for all.

LIMOR TOMER: I would start by firing the soundman. That's where I'd start. I'm not as democratic as you Colette, I don't know about committees. But I'd definitely be open to listening to what composers and musicians are going for and try to build a room that allows them to do what they need to do...I'd think in terms of smaller rather than bigger because I'm just more comfortable in smaller environments.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Yeah, me too. I like small art. Make the cameo perfect.

LIMOR TOMER: Yeah and minimize ambient noise. Have the bar outside. And the team has to be committed and all sort of have the same agenda. If there are other things going on like visual art or food—fine, that's great, but everybody has to have the same agenda. The most important thing is the music presentation and then everything else takes a backseat to that. So...

FRANK J. OTERI: So are you going to build this hall for us?

RUSSELL JOHNSON: I'll answer another question. New music created in 2050 will lead someone to design a space appropriate for that type of new music, the spaces, the design of the spaces will always be following the nature of the creation.

COLETTE DOMINGUES: Yeah, it's behind, yeah.

RUSSELL JOHNSON: So whatever the composers are doing with new music in 2050, within a few years or a few decades after that, someone will be designing the appropriate spaces for that particular format of music.