Regenerate!

Making Music in a Time of Disconnection

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Music and The Big Empty

When we remember our favorite concerts, music is only part of the memory. The constellation of experiences around the performance— the company, the architecture, the street outside the venue— these shape us as much as the music does. If you ask friends about the best concerts of their life, you might hear something similar. "*It was really nice to see everybody*." "*The venue had the best energy.*" "*We got dinner across the street*." What the band plays is often important, but it's rarely the *most* important thing.

I think of an evening in San Juan, Puerto Rico, a bomba night at a low-key, outdoor venue. Arriving early with a dear friend, we heard the boisterous crowd of about a hundred onlookers a few blocks from the venue. Attendees spilled out of the open-air venue into the street, eating fried snacks and chitchatting. By the time the musicians started, the audience seemed happy, energized, and at ease. Musicians sat in a tight circle on a small stage, beating drums with intense physicality and singing cheerful melodies in unison. They pulsed in time with the music, meeting eyes and smiling. The music animated the audience. The sounds of drums were interwoven with the sounds of skidding shoes against the street's rough gravel. We all gathered, in twos, threes and larger circles, to dance, hoot, holler, yell, jump, and wiggle.

Surrounded by high spirits, the energy infects you. We are affected by our immediate environments more than we might think. The cues we see around us— facial expressions, body language, architecture, weather— shape how we perceive the world, how we process the raw information we glean through our senses. Surrounded by solemn faces, a drumbeat can sound "ominous," or "menacing." Surrounded by joyful dancing, it can be "ecstatic," or "entrancing."

Mid-show, I walked down the road and took in the whole sight from a distance. Viewing the musicians, the audience, the venue, the street, and the neighborhood as a whole, every element appeared to feed the others, the music feeding the dancers, the audience feeding the musicians, the people animating the venue, the venue enlivening the neighborhood, the neighborhood cradling the a spontaneous human ecosystem. By stepping back, I saw that the music was not just *content,* but was the beating heart of a vastly complex organism, one we were all living inside. I felt *fed* by this organism. It gave me life.

Has a concert ever made you feel more alive? For as long as humans have lived together, these moments of collective ecstasy have represented high points in life, moments of wonder, of abundance. The ritual of music-making allows us to transcend our illusory seperatenesses and sublimate into something bigger than ourselves. We are a profoundly social species, and music's presence in every culture testifies to its enduring ability to scratch a deeply human itch, the need to connect, to belong. When everything with a concert is going right, every one

of its constituent human parts leaves with more energy than they brought into it. It can be a miracle of energy creation.

As people in the business of making concerts happen, recognizing this abundance, noticing it, spending mindful time with it, is the most important thing we can do. Knowing this feeling is on the table when making art reminds us of the incredible *power* concerts can wield, and gives us something to which we can aspire to as creators. We can use our craft to create more of this feeling, to give it to others. To make the world more full.

In the country I see around me, this spiritual fullness is made even more precious by its apparent scarcity. We live in the time of "*The Big Empty;*" a time where a perfect storm of economic inequality, widespread work-life imbalance, poorly built cities and transit systems, an ailing planet, and the general alienation associated with late-stage American capitalism all collide, leaving many feeling disconnected, worn down, empty. We have built for ourselves an environment poorly suited to meet our deepest human needs.

The Big Empty is being too tired after a day of work to go to your book club. It's the absence of a cafe or grocery store you can walk to in your neighborhood. It's in the physical distances between people in a low density, car-centered city, and in always-in-the-background anxiety that comes with economic precarity. The Big Empty is working seventy-hour weeks to make ends meet, and in the feeling you get from a too-long commute. It's the loneliness that hits when you wonder why you don't see your friends all that much.

As U. S. Americans, the big empty is lurking under ever sphere of life. It's a defining affliction of my generation. No, everybody doesn't laze around all day feeling mopey and vacant— we can, and do, fill our lives with joy and meaning, even in difficult environments. But by all metrics, we live in a time of ever-encroaching isolation, tribalism, disaffection, and even despair. There is a heaviness weighing on our collective spirit, and I long for a world where our load is a little bit easier to carry.

Live music, live performance in general, can be a powerful tool for subduing The Big Empty. A concert plucks us out of our disparate lives and brings us into shared place, shared time, shared attention. Going to a concert is something outside of the world of labor and productivity, something we do to enjoy ourselves, something that feels good. We go to concerts in pursuit of joy, meaning, or simple hedonic enjoyment.

In a time when tribalism and alienation abound, the magic of resonating with others can help us feel connected, part of a whole. In a built environment that pulls us apart from each other, live music gives us a reason to come physically together. In a world focused on productivity at all costs, concerts are distinctly un-productive, frivolous. In a world of commutes and medical bills, live music can give us bit of wonder, of awe. If The Big Empty has an antidote, perhaps we can find it at a concert.

If musicians *can* create feelings of connection in a world bereft of them, do we have an *obligation* to create them? An obligation at least to try? Whenever someone is granted

dominion over powerful tool, our culture generally recognizes some kind of obligation to use that tool for good. The owners of our nation's healthcare infrastructure have an obligation to use this power not just for personal gain, for the betterment of collective health. The owners of our country's agricultural infrastructure have obligations as stewards of the land, to care for it so that we all might be fed. What obligations do we, as caretakers of our country's cultural infrastructure, have to the country's social health, our collective spiritual wellbeing?

There is no one right way to answer this question. Music is an experience so broad it can't be pinned down to one function, one use. Despite this, I know my life has been immeasurably enriched by thinkers and musicians who have *tried* to answer this question, who have deeply considered how we might better employ our craft towards some common good, how we might give that precious gift of fullness to the ailing world around us.

The Power and Shortcomings of Classical Music

I first came to know this great power of concerts through the world of classical music, the world of string quartets and symphony orchestras, the world of Bach and Brahms and Sibelius. The tools available at the classical musician's disposal are immense, potent. The instruments we have inherited are some of the most incredible machines ever built. As classical musicians, we're given incredibly flexible frameworks to manipulate form, affect, content. Many of us are given space to spend years thinking about music deeply, listening to all the sounds the world has to offer. Going to an orchestra concert, we're treated to what amounts to a magic trick— all this inanimate wood and metal is willed to life by a team of sorcerers. The orchestra, one of this tradition's most wonderful gifts to the world, is an embodiment of the idea of humans coming together. Despite their individual backgrounds, the swirling chaoses of everyone's life, we have devised a way for all these people to unite and harmoniously occupy the same sonic space. That orchestras exist at all is a triumph.

Classical music, with all of these wonders, has great potential to attract people from all walks of life into the same space, to be the grain around which the pearl of community can form. I have seen this potential go mostly unrealized. Despite the efforts of many, classical music occupies a marginal role in our culture. Classical music doesn't inspire the same widespread excitement, the same devotion, that more mainstream genres do. Laypeople and non-musicians can get worked up to see a local band play, to see a stadium show by a national touring musician. People talk about these shows with excitement, hold the memories tenderly through rose-colored glasses. In contrast, the work we do as classical musicians often lands with a soft thud in the culture at large. Going to a classical music show remains a niche and quirky activity, one distinctly more sedate and intelecualtized than the visceral joy of more relevant genres.

To highlight how different the experience of a classical music show is to, say, bomba night, I like to run a thought experiment. I run through a whole concert in my mind, from the first person in the venue in the morning to the last one out at night. We image the whole evening taking place, but with the performance itself removed from the equation. We watch what the attendees do, without the music to distract us. This frees our attention to watch how the audience behaves throughout the evening; how they relate to each other, trends in body language, how people move and engage.

When we do this experiment with bomba night at the Bonanza in San Juan, we notice first the *shape* of the audience. A big crowd, moving fluidly. The audience does not all uniformly face the stage. Instead, people clump up, in little groups that face each other. They talk. They wiggle. They come and go. Their body language is more of what we expect from an excellent party. People *smile*. They laugh. The lighting allows you to see people's faces. The crowd burbles and flows. We see the evidence of people connecting, of joy.

Running this experiment on, say, a symphony orchestra concert, the audience's behavior could not look more different. From the moment patrons enter the room, they are ushered to assigned seats. Those who try to chitchat with a friend might find it physically difficult to do so; the the chairs take up the whole room, leaving the crowd stuck to one awkward orientation. The room just isn't built for mingling. Fixed seating means that for the majority of time, people have a hard time interacting with anyone other than their immediate neighbors. For those who don't know their neighbor, the interaction is often strained, as they're forced to share an area the size of an airplane bathroom.

Escape from the seat is costly. One must file past the other's seats, eliciting judgmental stares form all effected. The body language is guarded, tense.

This is to say nothing of perhaps the most salient feature— the hours of unyielding, motionless silence. Those who make a blip of sound at the wrong time experience abject ostracization, hostile glares and sneers (sometimes the sound is so reviled, people write about how bad you are in the paper.) Everything from the architecture of the room to the strictly followed social codes point to one message: pay attention. The whole time. Or else. For those of us accustomed to attending these events, all the rules determining audience behavior slip into the realm of the unseen, the unnoticed. But for those approaching a classical concert from the outside, the pressure to follow the rules and conform can be unignorable, oppressive.

If you know what people look like when they enjoy themselves, this is *not* it. Disengagement abounds. Those paying the most attention are experts, and even some of them are struggling. A constellation of negative cues cast a subtle pall over the whole concert. Focusing on this side of the concert, we might well conclude the classical show *feels* very different than a more recreational show might.

Is this a problem? Many argue no. Perhaps our art form exists for a different purpose than to excite and animate. Our music is a music of the mind, one that requires more careful

and restrained consumption, lest we miss any of the myriad details the brilliant composers have carefully inset into the scores. Our shows might are not optimized for communal joy because they are optimized for different things, for the sublime, for refinement, for precision, for *class*.

I suspect the work we as classical musicians do might matter more if these concerts were a bit easier to enjoy. Our habits of presentation seem to be preventing audiences from deeply connecting with the music on offer. In the "new music" world, (a term invented to rebrand classical music for modern times), conversations about audience engagement abound. How can we introduce classical music to new audiences? How can we get people to come to the symphony for the first time? If we don't broaden our appeal, will our art form have a future?

Not so abundant are viable solutions. While many recognize our discipline's self-marganization, the amount we are willing to change about how our music is constructed and presented remains trivial. I've seen presenters bring classical music into spaces associated with more passionate engagement, only to import the sedate feel of the concert hall. Playing Berio in a bar might seem like a good first step, but if our presence makes that bar feel like a funeral home, we've done nothing to ignite sparks of interest in our work in the culture at large. An orchestra playing a live soundtrack to a popular movie might seem like a sneaky way in to broader cultural relevance, but when we force people to consume this pop media in motionless, uncomfortable silence, disengagement is likely. We want new people to engage with our work, but too often, we ask them to come to us, to step into our world, to sit in our specially-designed room, to follow our rules. Too often, our rules make the whole affair feel lifeless, tedious.

The root of this problem lies not in the parameters programmers are most willing to change, but in the parameters we all take as givens. The enterprise of classical music is often mired down in a number of "default settings," modes of presentation present at nearly every show that work *against* the music's ability to spark genuine human connection and communal joy. The way people dress, the stiffness imposed on the audience, the expectation that people pay continuous attention, the stillness, the one-sided-ness, the stage, the separateness of the stage from the audience— these are elements of presentation we cling to out of habit, out of some fundamental conservatism. As a result, potential communities remain ununited, hearts remain unstirred. The potential is unrealized. Among the public, interest flags, and engagement diminishes. Rather than occupying a place at the center of our culture, it remains a music largely enjoyed by a select, aging elite.

When we as classical musicians decide what to play and how to present it, connections to place and community are far from top of mind. We put a lot of thought into orchestration, into harmonic content, to tone, to acoustics, to dress codes. We focus on whether our music is fashionable, meets professional standards, ideas of sophistication, complexity. We care about

whether performers play the score with acceptable accuracy. These efforts might help us do classical music precisely, but focusing on these elements while ignoring the broader concert experience does little, if anything, to fill people up spiritually, to make them comfortable, to connect them more deeply to their fellow human.

The sense of aliveness, that every-part-feeding-every-other-part quality I remember from bomba night at The Bonanza— I've somehow learned never to expect that feeling at a classical music show. It's just not on the pallet of potential emotions these shows regularly evoke. I think our discipline has forgotten that those feelings are an option.

I want to bring those feelings back into our shows. To do so, we need to rebuild our model from the ground up. We must build it not on a foundation of precision, class, efficiency, or luxury, but on a foundation of human connection, aliveness, communal joy. In doing so, we dares to imagine a future for our music at the *center* of American life, not on the margins. We seize this incredible machine and point it right at the heart of The Big Empty. We can build a music that offers respite and escape from the disconnections that surround us.

To get there, we need to reexamine of some of our sacred cows, to challenge the "default settings" that limit what our music can be, how it occupies space in the world. We strive towards this reanimated classical music music not just for ourselves, nor to sell more tickets, nor out of some obligation to the part. Our society needs us. The Big Empty looms. The answer won't be found in more precision, more expertise, more aspirational consumption. We need to reach out to each other and feel someone reaching back. We need to hold on to each other and not let go. We need to see each other and feel seen. We need to connect to place in a world where place is just one more thing to consume. Classical musicians have inherited a powerful tool. It's time we put it to better use.

Classical Music's "Default Settings"

Before a composer sets pen to paper, a hundred choices about how the music will be presented, distributed, and listened to have already been made. It's hard to write into a symphony that you want the performers to all wear jeans, and convention advises against writing a string quartet that must be played in a cave. Such prescriptions would hamper the efficient distribution of the work, likely hampering the composer's professional prospects at the same time.

If we're going to build a more humanist classical music, though, we need to take a long hard look at what might be holding us back. Often, most limiting are the parts of the process that get the least amount of attention. When a composer begins a new piece of classical music (especially one intended for widespread consumption,) one assumes the performance will adhere to a number of *"default settings"*, elements of presentation that are baked into how most practice classical music. These parameters set limits on what the performance can feel and

look like, thus setting limits on how the piece can be perceived and experienced. As I've gone through a life of concerts, I'm come to believe that uncritical adherence to these default settings produces performances that actively work against human connection and spiritual fullness, regardless of what the music sounds like or how well its played.

With the construction, distribution, and presentation of classical music, time and time again, the default settings forgo human connection in favor of sound quality, class signaling, habit, and efficiency. If we're going to build a more connection-centered practice, we need to grab hold of these invisibelia and wrestle them out of the shadows, look them squarely in the eye, and ask if they are working towards or against our humanist aspirations.

Some default settings include:

- A classical concert played by experts sounds better than one played by amateurs.
- Classical music should be more complex than vernacular music
- The music should be listened to by a silent audience
- Its best to communicate your composition using "standard," universally understood notation
- The music should be played in a concert hall
- The music should be performed from a stage
- The audience should listen from fixed seating
- The audience should remain politely still
- The audience should stay for the entire program and pay attention from start to finish
- The performers should dress formally for the event (and maybe the audience should too)
- The production should adhere to a strict division of labor; composers chose what the music sounds like, performers and presenters decide how it will be shown to the world.

These describe classical music as it is. However, I don't want to dwell on the world as it exists. I want to define an alternative, and explore steps we can take that make that alternative possible. In short, we're looking for ways to turn classical music into a *regenerative* practice. A concert is *regenerative* when it deliberately subverts the default settings in favor of choices that better facilitate feelings of human connection and communal joy. To be regenerative, the concert must look and feel meaningfully different than classical music as commonly presented. It must give a community energy, support the human ecosystem around it. It is built in direct response to the isolation and disconnection that characterize contemporary American life, and seeks to turn the classical music concert into a refuge from the spiritual afflictions specific to this moment in history. It understands that the content of music is only a small part of the overall artistic gesture, and that changing the way our music sounds is insufficient. It is a utilitarian model, one that measures artistic success by how people *feel* leaving an event, how it makes their lives different, better.

An Answer: The Regenerative Immersion

The idea of *regenerative* music has been the animating force behind my own musical practice, though I didn't always have a word for it. I've spent the past decade trying to figure out how to make classical music that brought that *alive* feeling into the spaces and communities I loved. It's been a stumbling, chaotic period of exploration, with many missteps and creative dead ends. My loadstar has been the pursuit of that every-part-feeding-every-other-part feeling, one where the performance leaves everyone feeling more full and connected. There are many shapes these values can take, and there are musicians across the country working in their own regenerative practices. For me, my work has drifted towards the form of *regenerative immersions*— community-wide, open-to-all workshops and performances that provide a structure for creatives of all backgrounds to inhabit the same sonic world. I produced my first immersion in September 2014 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and have spent the intervening time developing and improving the model.

These immersions take the form of site-specific large ensemble concerts somewhere other than a concert hall. The music is played by an ensemble made up not only of experts, but also hobbyists, folk musicians, the self-taught, beginners, and non-musicians. The musicians are assembled from the community though direct outreach and a structured recruitment campaign. The instrumentation of the ensemble is determined by who can be convinced to participate. Anyone who asks to join is given a part to play. The music is conveyed through a specialized notation system that works for all members of the ensemble, including those who don't read music, read only tabs, or have a non-standard practice. The notation means the music can be learned quickly, which leaves more down time for participants to chitchat, mingle, and get to know each other.

The shows take place in venues that allows the audience to engage actively in the performance. The space is arranged so that performers and audience share the same area, with the audience free to walk around as they wish during the show. The group plays a unique hybrid of noise, improvised, folk, experimental, and classical music that usually takes the form of large, immersive soundscapes. Everything about the process is aimed at bringing new people into contact with each other in a healing, supportive, and creative way.

The Regenerate Orchestra of Southeast Michigan performed its first regenerative immersion in this model in the fall of 2022. It engaged about forty-five community musicians, only a few of which had formal training or considered themselves professionals. The project consisted of three meetings, hosted at a community center, and a show, held in a rock climbing gym. The project was preceded by an eight week long recruitment drive, in which my principal collaborator and I shared information about the event to our existing networks. We also recruited through an extended email campaign, postering effort, and robust social media presence. The rehearsal and subsequent show had incredible energy, and around eighty

audience members attended. I believe this event, and others the orchestra has produced since, can serve as a model for others wanting to build a more regenerative classical music practice in their own communities.

For this event, about one third of participating musicians had a formal, academic background, ranging from those currently employed as professional musicians to those who studied music in the past and were no longer actively playing. The group included about eight acoustic guitarists, ranging in from a doctoral composition student to a few complete beginners. Also represented were a number of Ukulele players, an instrument with an especially robust presence in Ann Arbor thanks to a popular meetup that teaches group lessons on the instrument. The ensemble included a small choir featuring both professional singers and those who mostly sang for fun. A few people showed up without giving prior notice and improvised along, which ended up working splendidly. All participants were volunteers, and participation was free to all. Each rehearsal also provided free dinner.

The concert filled all corners of a local rock climbing gym, with performers distributed in little clusters of three to six musicians. Chairs for audience members were distributed through the entire space as well. The performance venue had no obvious center, and the audience could walk thought the space along aisles that brought them near each cluster of musicians. The music performed contained lots of sonic detail that could only be heard when up close (speaking, quiet sounds), which incentivized the audience to walk around and "sample" the different clusters.

The music performed can be described as a series of noisy, ambient soundscapes, with thick layers of various textures, shifting and transforming slowly. The music came from all sides and reverberated in the hall, an effect that one must experience live to truly understand. It's certainly an experience with a bit of magic in it. Harmonically, the music featured modal drones and folk-like melodies. The rhythmic structure of the music was extremely disorded, with almost none of the music having any sense of pulse or rhythm. Very few of the parts lined up metrically with the others. The compositional language was overall very consonant, at many times conventionally "beautiful". The evening finished with a communal singing of a canon with both performers and audience members.

The performance appeared to energize and excite most of the people there, and many audience members seemed visibly uplifted. The audience largely took advantage of the playfulness of the space, with many laying down on large mats, or crawling up into the artificial cave at the center of the room. Many laughed, talked, or smiled.

The positive feedback from this event has motivated me to continue work on this model. The feedback from participants and audience alike has been extraordinary. I hear from people who say that that participating was one of the best creative experiences of their lives, and many audience members have said our performances have stuck with them, moved and inspired them. Most of the musicians clearly enjoyed themselves as well. One wrote:

I'm having so much fun!! THANK YOU. I love the feeling of inclusive community I've found here that I've really been craving. I love how playful it is— bringing back the joy of little things like making paper airplanes (my fave!) that I haven't even thought about for decades now. I love also, of course, being part of making music with others without having to worry that I'm not formally trained or "good enough." This just makes me happy and I'm going to be sad when it's over, but I'm so grateful to be part of it now! THANKS!!

—A Regenerate participant, December 2022

This is not the only message I've received that hits on these themes, and people seem to be really energized by the project. The enthusiasm has translated to momentum. Each time we iterate the project, we accumulate five to ten die-hard fans who sign up for every subsequent regenerate event. Audience members will often effusively confront me after a show, asking how they can get involved. "I saw your last show" is becoming a bigger and bigger reason I hear for why people join. Our first project required weeks of hard recruitment work to get to our fortieth sign up. Gearing up for our next project, we hit forty sign ups by day five, without much of an active campaign.

Since the first show, we've performed three of these *regenerative immersions*, with three more planned in the coming year. Subsequent iterations of the project built on the success of the first, and by the time we finished our third one in September 2023, we'd started to hone in on which elements were working and which were not. I've also personally been able to outline the key values and practices underpinning this music, the principals that were making these projects successful. What follows is an outline of what makes these immersions *regenerative,* how the model subverts classical music's most persistent default settings, and how these choices better facilitate human connection and communal joy in both rehearsals and performances.

What makes a regenerative immersion?

What follows is my best attempt to describe what exactly constitutes a regenerative immersion. I want to document the successes of this project, explain the reasoning behind our choices, and hopefully inspire other artists to give this model a try. It only represents *an* answer to the problem of alienation in classical music, and these pillars should be adapted to the specifics of your place and time.

Through the development of this model, I've sought to rebuild my own practice of writing and presenting classical music from the ground up, on a new foundation. I wanted a practice where a concert's ability to make people feel connected and full is of the highest

priority; higher than concerns of accuracy, virtuosity, and creative control. The model is still a work in progress, but I think it takes meaningful steps in the right direction.

It's also important to say that I don't think *all* classical music should take this form. There's room for every kind of music to exist in this big world, and spirited and professional mainstream classical music enriches the culture and brings joy to millions. But perhaps Regenerate can inspire us all to think about how to make our practices more vibrant, accessible, and inclusive.

A regenerative immersion is arranged with the following principals.

[1] **Every facet of the performance— musical content, venue architecture, who plays, who listens, how they listen, how the listeners behave, where the show takes place, how it's promoted, how it interfaces with the street and neighborhood around it— is engaged as a compositional element.**

We, as composers, pour ourselves into the minutia of our work. We can spend weeks refining just a few bars of music, and often try to pack in as much intricate detail into the pieces as we can. This care, however, tends to stop at the page's edge. Part of this is for professional reasons— composers often are not allowed to have a say in how a work is rehearsed or presented. A strict division of labor in our industry neatly defines what constitutes the composer's domain, and what is left up to other specialists.

The problem with this model is that the musical content and all the extramusical elements are not as separable as our professional habits suggest. The mind is a suggestible and malleable thing, and every element that surrounds the music informs how the music is perceived. It determines what the piece *is* when it lands in the heads of our audience. For this reason, a composition is not yet finished when the notes on the page are settled.

The regenerative model asks composers to wrest back responsibility for how their music will interface with the world. Anything that influences how the music is perceived must be through of as part of the compositional process. How the performers dress is composing. How the room is lit is composing. How the audience is seated is composing.

Practically, this means regenerative composers inhabit more of a composer/presenter model, in which choices about where the music will be played, how it will be contextualized, and who is invited to participate are part of a broad artistic gesture. This model is also a call for presenters to subvert the default settings that underpin their own choices, taking care to surround a piece of music with an environment tailor made to make it feel *alive*.

[2] Non-musicians, lay musicians (hobbyists, former musicians, folk artists) and experts (professionals and virtuosos) are all welcomed to join in the performance, with the contributions of each unique voice valued equally.

Regenerate is a fundamentally participatory tradition. It's founded on a belief that people connect most intensely with music with they are making it themselves. While the standard classical model is about a unidirectional transfer of content from creators to consumers, regenerate tries to dissolve these boundaries and get everyone involved on an equal footing.

The ultimate exclusion in classical music lies in who gets to make sound during the concert. Most of the time, it's only the experts. Community orchestras do exist, but there is an unspoken hierarchy of value, where the music made by experts implicitly sounds better than music made by the untrained. Classical musicians today talk a lot about making their music more inclusive, but's it's always a conversation about how to get different kinds of people in the *audience*. What if we instead turned our focus to getting different kinds of people in the ensemble?

The idea that an elite string quartet or symphony orchestra would invite laypeople to play with them might seem far fetched. Sure, that kind of thing might be good for a community orchestra or special engagement project, but for the real art, only experts need apply. They are, after all, the only ones who can execute the profoundly demanding scores composers typically produce with the appropriate precision.

The truth is, this model of hyperspecialization is an extremely abnormal way for music to exist in the world. Human history is full of examples of participatory music traditions, from drum circles to Irish sessions to congregational singing. It isn't by chance that music gravitates towards this model; for millennia, cultures have used collective sound making as a communal bonding activity. One of the things music is best at is bringing people together in this way. The visceral act of resonating with your friends and neighbors appeals to something deeply human in us, a part of us that isn't activated by sitting silently next to someone. If we are going to build a classical music that ameliorates the deep longing for connection that pervades our culture, then we need to take cues from the myriad participatory music traditions in the world around us.

Regenerate is a model that takes the musical language of classical music— the instruments, the orchestrations, the textures, the magnitude— and rebuilds it as something we can all do together. It's founded on the radical proposition that an ensemble of only experts is not an ideal to strive towards, but an issue that needs addressing. It values heterophony— many types of voices coexisting— over uniformity.

Regenerate points to the rough and chaotic textures of an unpolished ensemble and says "this is beautiful *because* it is disorganized. It is beautiful because it is not refined". It

asserts that the sounds of a blended ensemble— one with experts, hobbyists, *and* beginners— are sounds of equal artistic merit to those produced by experts alone. In terms of connecting us to one another, these blended ensembles do the work far better than an elite ensemble can.

We have, as a discipline, been sitting with the work of Cage for the better part of a century. We superficially recognize that any sound can be art, can be music, can have value. However, in the world of classical music today, Cage's ideas remain marginalized. By embracing a radical democratization of the sounds that we consider art, we open ourselves up to a radical democratization of *who* is producing those sounds.

With a regenerate orchestra, anyone can join. Significantly, it features a robust, good-faith effort to spread word about the performance opportunity, especially among communities usually left out of the classical music making process. No one who wants to join is turned away, including those who need special accommodation and those who don't read music. It becomes the composer/presenter's challenge and responsibility to enfold everyone into their compositional plans in ways that prioritize *their* experience, not any one compositional outcome.

In our time launching the Regenerate Orchestra of Southeast Michigan, about a quarter of the work has gone into spreading word of the performance opportunity far and wide, making sure that the group truly features a balance of people of all backgrounds. We make sure the parts meet each performer where they are, with compositional intention always taking second seat to the comfort level of the hobbyists and amateurs.

Perhaps the most surprising boon of this more open process has been the discovery of a completely new sound, one chock full of creative possibilities and inspiring textures. An ensemble made up of whoever wants to play sounds unlike anything else in the world, and opens up whole new compositional possibilities. Few orchestras have a robust guitar section, but about 1/4 of a regenerate orchestra ends up being fretted instruments. Few classical composers are able to draw upon the expertise of several electronic musicians for each project, but a regenerate orchestra inevitably draws in a number of computer-based musicians who expand the creative and sonic possibilities. Significantly, each ensemble usually ends up attracting enough singers to assemble a small choir, and finding ways to work them into the group texture adds a whole new dimension to the orchestra's texture.

You'll also get people bringing all kinds of instruments rarely seen in classical music world, like recorders, accordions, tin whistles, dulcimers, non-western instruments, found percussion objects, and probably some instruments you haven't heard of. Different communities will also have wildly different distributions of instruments, giving each regenerate orchestra a distinct local flavor.

This is not about sacrificing artistic quality in favor of community engagement. What hobbyist musicians might lack in technical precision and familiarity with classical music techniques, they more than make up for with enthusiasm, creativity, and *LIFE*. They often

don't have the same baggage that professional musicians do, and can be less inhibited and more open-minded. This is also not about rejecting expertise. This is about seeing expert musicianship as only one perspective amongst many, with each perspective holding equal value.

[3] The music is part of repeated, long-term engagement with a community, rather than a one-off performance.

For our music to become a civic space, it's not enough for it to be performed once. A bar that is only open for one day won't incubate a place-based community. Neighborhood bars coalesce a community of regulars because the space is regularly available, because people can interweave that place into the rhythm of their daily lives.

From a regenerative perspective, a one-off project is not ideal. Programming a piece of new music on a single program leaves a touch so light it leaves no mark. Regenerate seeks to become like a neighborhood bar, where through repeated events, regularly spaced across the calendar year, people run into each other over and over. It's in this *consistency* that real community building can happen.

Community is a hard thing to build. One-off music events can sometimes activate community, or interact with an existing community in meaningful ways. For a composer or presenter to actually *build* a new community where none existed before, their engagement must be deep and sustained. It takes years. It takes a lot of time. It takes the work of convincing enough people of your vision that they actually show up.

This conception of the role of the composer transforms their work into that of institution building. This work is hard, often thankless, and requiring skills not taught in music schools. But if done consistently, over a few years, your music can be planted so deep in a community that it grows and lives long after you're gone. Your music will not merely exist to entertain, but will spiritually nourish the people and places you care about.

[4] The music happens somewhere other than a concert hall, somewhere where performers and audience can share the same physical space.

No default setting is more ubiquitous than the concert hall. These buildings are centered around a physical division between performers and patrons. A concert hall is perhaps the way to go if we're trying to optimize the performance for acoustics. In the regenerative model, acoustics are not the most important thing. If we're trying to optimize for human connection, a concert hall's about as bad as you can get.

The concert hall's design reflects one of the most sacrosanct elements in the presentation of classical music; the audience-performer divide. It's baked into the architecture

of nearly every performance space. The expansive room is bisected by the edge of the stage, separating those who payed to come from those getting paid to be there.

Just as the notation we use determines what sounds are possible, the architecture we use determines what *interactions* are possible. Architecture guides and shapes the concert ritual as much as any other element. Socially, there might as well be a wall between the performer's half and the audience's. Both even have their own entrances, their own waiting areas, so that interaction between performer and audience doesn't happen organically.

The architecture limits how the audience can interact with each other, too. It is very hard to mingle in a concert hall. Ushers are often present to spirit patrons away quickly to their seats. Once in your seat, only conversation between yourself and your neighbors is possible. The way the chairs are oriented makes other conversations difficult. Everywhere that's not a seat is a passageway, which must be kept as clear as possible. No one can hang out in the isleways during the show.

It's also worth noting the acoustic space up close to the instruments is always better than from far away. There are so many beautiful sounds you can only hear up close. The feeling of laying under a piano while someone played low notes, or the rich aura of a guitar strings reverberating next to your ear. The incredible detail in a quiet sul ponticello drone, or whistle tones on a flute. So much of the wonder in a classical music show doesn't make it past the first row. When the audience shares the physical same space as the performer, they're free to discover and engage with these beautiful up-close sounds.

This is why, for the regenerative model, we try to bring music into spaces with other architectures, buildings that don't separate audience from performer in the same way the concert hall does. Factories, museums, basketball courts, breweries, parks, libraries, gyms, community centers, maker's spaces— these are all options for a performance that don't carry the baggage of more prescriptive venues.

Of special interest are third spaces, a sociological term for areas outside the domain of home life (first spaces) and work life (second spaces). These are spaces that are already incubating community in your home place, and thus likely have an architecture much better suited to mingling and interaction. These places have the added benefit of having "regulars," people who might come to or participate in the show out of a loyalty to the venue.

Switching up the venue also adds an element of surprise to the concert. The audience can explore the unfamiliar space as they sonically explore the sounds you make. We can compose with architecture as a musical element by intentionally selecting our performance sites and adapting the ensemble to the specific of the venue. When this is done well, exploring the new space can be as much fun as listening to the music is, and it will create a much richer, much more memorable experience.

[5] The sound comes at the audience from all directions.

Another side effect of the concert hall's hegemony is that sounds at classical music concerts are almost always unidirectional. This is a fairly straightforward consequence of the architecture of the concert hall and the technical demands of the music. To keep up with the rhythmic complexity of modern compositions, performers need to be tightly packed if they want to stay tightly together. As a result, we hear the ensemble in what is effectively one-channel audio.

I first fell in love with music playing in bands and orchestras, an experience where you're surrounded by musicians from all sides. While hearing an orchestra from far away is nice, the experience is just not as good.

The most unforgettable sonic experiences of my life all involve space in some way. I remember Kentucky nights at marching band competitions, getting chills down my spine as six or seven marching bands radiated from all directions, blanketing the whole area with lush chords. I remember the haunting sound of two goat herds grazing on opposite banks of a river valley, each a mile away, the clanging of their slightly different-pitched bells echoing in stereo. The sound of a hundred celebratory bells ringing out over a lake at sunset. Sound are most powerful when they evokes a sense of space. Classical music shows are missing out on perhaps the easiest way to evoke wonder and awe through music, by spreading out the sound sources across a large area.

For me, this is where the gold lies in the regenerative immersion. This experience of spacialized sound, combined with the lush timbres of all the beautiful instruments, is what makes this practice so worth doing. At the end of the day, no one would sign up for these events without some substantial musical experience at its heart, and the awe a spacialized orchestra elicits is the heart of that substance. It's what makes me think others might like to do this for themselves, makes me believe regenerate has a future. This is not just a music of ideas. It really does feel different, often in magical or uplifting ways. You have to feel it live to know what it's like. It fills the room with an visceral sense of wonder brings everyone together by letting everyone share in a common, beautiful experience.

[6] The audience able to move around freely during the show, including entering and leaving the performance space whenever they want.

Perhaps more than all else, a concert hall's architecture limits what you can do during the show. The structure of the space pretty much forces you to remain seated, still, and facing the performers. For many, not being able to move freely is an active impediment to paying attention. These kinds of spaces only make room for one kind of listener, when many exist. Many can engage much more deeply when they're able to pair listening with physical motions.

The connection between movement and cognition is well documented. Incorporating periods of motion into a work routine boosts concentration and creativity. Contemporary pedagogues recognize that many students learn much better when movement is incorporated into the learning process, from accompanying vocabulary with dance moves, or placing reading material around the walls of a room. From my experience, listening to something while walking is a great way to have the information really sink in, and I often pace when I want to think really hard about something.

This is why a regenerative performance is one that gives the audience freedom to move around. This doesn't mean eschewing fixed seating altogether, for many, this is still a preferred way to listen. By presenting in a room that also gives space for people to walk around, crouch, stretch, lay, dance, or wiggle, we set everyone in the audience up for an engaged listening experience.

If you plan your own regenerative immersion, you'll find that getting an audience to move harder than it sounds. A simple "feel free to walk around" won't suffice. It helps to give them a reason to walk around, some task that incentivizes them to leave their seats.

One great way is to invite them to walk up to the performers. Create broad, *accessible* isleways running though the orchestra. Tell people there are many sounds and "easter eggs" you can only hear up close. Tell them they're free to listen to the details in any instrument's sound by getting near the performer. Tell them they can pretend each performer is a sculpture in a museum, and they can meander and peruse to better appreciate each individual's contribution.

Another tactic is to give them a task, something many will want to do, that requires leaving their seats. Put poems on little cards that you hang around the room. Include interactive sound making elements on stations dispersed throughout the space. I once put a hundred dahlias in buckets and told the audience they were first-come, first serve. Draw a labyrinth on the floor and invite people to walk it while they listen. Give them something to read that they have to get from the other side of the room. You can be endlessly creative, and it often does't take more than a little nudge. Many will then discover they enjoy perambulating and stay mobile for the rest of the show.

Giving the audience freedom to move should include giving them freedom to leave. At standard classical music shows, escape is difficult, distractions are hard to come by. The norm is clearly that one should pay attention the whole time. As a presenter, though, the last thing you want is someone paying attention to your music who would rather be paying attention to something else. Every single person in a room contributes to the group energy, and how the weight of this energy has a lot to do with how everyone experiences the concert.

When planning a regenerative immersion, you should take steps so that coming in and out of the venue is comfortable and easy. With a lot of non-standard venues, it's quite easy to give the audience discreet ways to slip out and return. Prop a door open, or post a sign. Make

sure there's an exit that won't have everyone's eyes on it. By doing this we accommodate diverse minds and and diverse kinds of attention. Many will listen better if permitted to give themselves breaks. Some may be eager to attend, but don't have a full program's worth of active listening in them at the end of a long day. Some have sensory issues and need an easy out if the sounds are too much. Some will listen better if they can use the bathroom as needed.

Importantly, a lot of meaningful human connections occur among those who slip out of the venue for a little break. If we're building a practice that maximizes the potential for human connection, these moments outside the venue with others are just as important as the music. For me, hearing distant music drift out of the venue and mingle with sounds of the street is a heart-wrenchingly beautiful way to hear music. By letting people freely move and leave, we give them the gift of these liminal soundscapes.

For all these reasons, regenerate does not see people slipping out as a sign of disrespect, but a sign that they are actively participating in all facets of the concert experience. If we give concertgoers the ability to choose when and how they give their attention, that attention will be of a much higher quality, and their memories of the event will be fonder. Too much of classical music is listened to by a captive audience— let's let our patrons engage on their own terms.

[7] Making noise or talking during the performance is permitted, encouraged, and comfortable.

It's an unspoken rule that classical music must be performed against a backdrop of silence. The sounds we make are often so delicate that we go to great lengths to make sure our's are the only noises happening. We want the listening space ideal, with a completely blank sonic canvas for us to paint upon.

Silence is not something that exists naturally, at least not in places where humans congregate. Everywhere we go and gather, we bring a background hum of noise. Street noise, air conditioning, footsteps, coughs, conversation, car horns— we're surrounded at all times by a cocoon of background noises. Not all noises are anthropogenic, either. The natural world is abuzz with blowing wind, chirping birds, croaking frogs, bugs, thunder, and rain. If we want silence, that silence must be imposed.

Part of the silence-making process is done when a concert hall is built, insulating the inside from the noises of the outside world. The rest is created by imposing a stringent social code governing audience behavior. There's a widely shared understanding that a single cough can mar an entire performance. We need people to be *quiet,* lest they ruin the performance for everyone else, and people will communicate clearly with gestures, body language, and the occasional harsh whisper. If you want to see how these codes are enforced, I recommend trying to unwrap a cough drop during an especially quiet moment at a symphony orchestra.

A perfectly silent backdrop might be the best for preserving the detail build into the music, or for helping people with concentrate. I personally have been very moved by classical music's most quiet moments, which really do sound and feel better when painted on a canvass of silence. There is a place and a time for these environments. However, if we're designing a concert that privileges human connection, the silent backdrop might not be worth all we must give up to attain it.

If we really want silence, then most of the alternative venues outlined above are off the table— few can match the quiet of a sound-engineered hall. It also places extreme limitations on what people can do. You can't really have people move, and certainly can't have people talk. It also forecloses on those beautiful liminal experiences, where the music from a show bleeds into and dances with the sounds of the outside world.

For this reason, regenerate posits that the ideal background for our music is a noisy one. A room with a constant background burble, a room with glasses clinking and street noise rumbling and people scuttling about: these are all signs that the ecosystem at our shows are alive.

Importantly, we want people be able to talk *during* the performance. This common behavior at more mainstream concerts can really boost a crowd's energy. When folks can talk to each other at a regenerative immersion, they can feed off each other's excitement, and connect to each other in meaningful ways. This might entail having a designated zone set a bit aside from the main concert space, or just have the music be loud and dron-ey enough so that the talking doesn't get in the way. I will often add a backdrop of performers reading text to regenerate-style pieces so that people can talk a bit without feeling too exposed.

One of my favorite moments at a regenerate show was seeing an attendee start banging on his folding chair in response to the music. He was tentative at first, but after I have him a thumbs up, he started banging with more intention, more abandon. At the climax of the composition, he yelled at the top of his lungs. That I was able to create a space where doing that felt safe felt like a huge success of the project. Regenerate views our role as composers as adding meaningfully to an acoustic and social ecosystem that already exists, rather than clear-cutting the sonic environment to take up all the room for ourselves.

[8] The music is prepared with an audience of lay listeners in mind, drawing on the musical vernacular whenever possible.

In contemporary classical music today, all elements of a composition are usually much more complex than what is found in the music vernacular. This complexity of musical language makes sense; it's written by people who have studied the craft for years, have immersed themselves in the musics of the world, have challenged their ears so that they might

grown as listeners. They have training in advanced music theory and aural skills, and are able to easily pick up on the subtlest compositional gestures.

With all this training, the way music sounds to a composer is radically different than how it lands in the heads of laylisteners. The world has an incredible diversity of human minds, and each of us have wildly variant experiences listening to the exact same piece of music. When people without academic musical backgrounds listen to our music, they hear it completely differently than an academic composer would. Unfortunately, most new classical music has been calibrated for an expert's ear, not theirs. Many of contemporary music's more complex compositional devices are not legible to those who don't share our backgrounds.

I'm not saying that we should stop writing complex music— there is room in this world for every kind of music. The world is made infinitely better by music that challenges us, stretches us, imagines new sounds and possibilities. However, if we are designing a practice around inclusion and accessibility, its worth asking if our stylistic choices could alienate a portion of our potential audience. Going to a show and feeling like you don't understand what your hearing can make you feel very, very bad.

Regenerate seeks to use the musical language we all have in common whenever possible. Most people in the U.S. listen to music with relatively simple modal harmony, a somewhat regular meter, and intelligible, song-like melodies. When we use these as the staples in our compositional pallet, we invite make room for more kind of people in our shared experience.

Regenerate tries to inhabit a compositional space that is intelligible to experts and lay listeners alike. In regenerative pieces, quickly shifting functional harmonies are dropped in favor of slowly shifting modal chords and drones. The abstract, angular melodic fragments that abound in new music are forgone in favor of simple, singable melodies. The compositions use simple rhythms, or none at all.

If *these* elements (harmony, melody, rhythm) are intelligible to the laylistener, you can get away with a surprising amount of experimentation in the other elements without losing people. A regenerative piece uses conservative rhythm, harmony, and melodies so that it can go wild in the realms of texture, duration, space, instrumentation, text, intermedia elements, and structure.

[9] Elements are included that privilege in-person listeners over consumers of recorded media.

A regenerative practice is inherently a live music practice. Composers often try to write music that works equally well in recorded and live formats. Making music that doesn't translate well to recorded media can make that music really hard to distribute— the most common way to get someone interested in playing your piece live is by sharing a recording.

Professional demands can make the experience of listening to these recordings more important than the experience of live listeners. I often hear that a successful performance is one where you "get a good recording out of it."

From a regenerative perspective, these two formats are not at all interchangeable. They are as different as reading a recipe and dining with friends in a restaurant. With a regenerative composition, the art is carved into the medium of the concert itself, working with and shape an in-person experience.

At the core of the regenerative ethos is that music is something we all do *together.* It centers itself on the premise that because concerts require us to gather in the same time and place, they are ripe for repurposing towards goals of social and civic healing.

Making documentation of your projects can be an important way to support the in-person practice, but recordings should never take precedence, never be mistaken as a stand-in for the experience itself. In regenerate, the fact that it is in-person is the whole point, and we should fill our shows with elements that make the in-person experience indispensable.

If the experience of hearing a piece live is too similar to listening at home, something might need to change. Possibilities abound for elements that privilege in-person listeners, from spacialization, to cool venues, to blocking and choreography, to interactive audience behavior. One of the best compliments you can hear about a regenerative piece is "You really have to see it live to know what it's like."

[10] The music mimics the form, pacing, and organization of natural soundscapes.

A spacialized (physically spread out during performance) ensemble like a regenerate orchestra does certain things well and certain things poorly. A big challenge is metered music and rhythmic material. Rhythm in new classical music can by highly complex, and that complexity takes a high amount of expertise to execute well. Many people who join our group have never played with another person before, and asking them to stay in time the same way a new music ensemble does is not particularly realistic. These issues are compounded when the group performs all spread out, with sometimes hundreds of feet between performers.

With my ensemble, I've found a solution in embracing the form, pacing, and textures of *natural soundscapes.* Imagine listening to a thunderstorm approach— an incredibly emotional experience of great beauty and value. The sound is made up of an uncountable number of little sound events happening randomly— a single raindrop striking the window, or two leaves rubbing against each other in the wind. All these little sounds build up to an infinitely rich soundscape, one that shifts and transforms with patience and organicism not often found in the concert hall.

These sounds are ordered differently than how most classical music is ordered. Think of the sound of rain. Moment to moment, the sound is highly variable, infinitely detailed, as individual raindrops splat chaotically against a window. Listen at a bit broader scale, though, and the overall sound is pretty static— a constant unchanging drone. Broadening our perspective more, we hear that minute-to-minute broad gestures are played out, with changes happening very slowly, outlining gradual, organic gestures. This nesting of chaos, stasis, and patient change is something we find with any number of natural sensory phenomena, from listening to the tide come in, hearing the wind blow through the trees, watching a fire burn out, or watching the sun rise.

A regenerate orchestra is much better suited to play music that mimics these more natural structures. Layering a bunch of very simple musical actions on top of each other, we can mimic the infinite detail we hear when we pay attention to a natural soundscape moment-to-moment. Parking the whole ensemble in one sound world for a few minutes, we free up the ears and minds of players to sonically explore the environment. Stasis gives us space to interact musically with others, to soak it all in, to get in the zone. Broad, large scale structural changes (such as a swell over three minutes) are much easier to coordinate with an ensemble like this than are quick, angular changes, especially when the ensemble is using stopwatches that may be a little out of synch.

The sounds of the natural world can teach us a lot about alternative ways to organize sound, ways that suit the peculiarities of this kind of ensemble particularly well. There is something to be said of the artistic value of music that mimics the natural world's structures. Not everybody knows how to listen to Mahler, but everybody knows how to listen to the rain. By giving people permission to listen to music the way they listen to rain, we build a music big enough to hold us all.

[II] The music, while structured, allows for freedom and spontaneity on the part of the performers, existing in the space between composed and improvised music.

Classical composition is often an exercise in control. The most common paradigm is one where, through fastidiously notated scores, the composer tries as best they can to plan out every single sound that will happen. It seeks an infinitely repeatable performance, in which a specific arrangement of sounds can be perfectly replicated, regardless of who is playing or where they play it.

As a side effect, the ability to accurately realize such precisely notated scores becomes something only achievable by experts, often only with utmost concentration. Our habit of writing difficult, prescriptive music makes blended ensembles impossible, and often results in stiff, esoteric performances.

If we are to rebuild a new classical music that prioritizes human connection above all else, we need to abandon the fetishization of control over the note-to-note specifics. Scores that allow for a broad range of valid interpretations open up the music-making process to those who have traditionally been shut out, as they are able to bring to the ensemble sounds they know how to produce, sounds that fit into their own practice, their own bodies. Such scores might include music with aleatoric textures, opportunities for performers to generate their own material, text scores, and options for performers to simplify or advance material as they need.

The regenerative model abandons the ideal of composer as master watchmaker, intricately planning every element of a tightly choreographed design. Instead, a regenerative composer seeks to give their ensemble the gift of *just* enough structure to facilitate a positive collective experience. The fact that everyone is able to participate is more important that the music being reproducible, highly ordered, or intellectually sophisticated.

One of the highlights of my time as director was when a performer surprised me by passing out recorders to his section. The score didn't tell them to play recorders, but we had successfully created a "culture of yes" to an extent that performers felt comfortable playing around, exploring, taking a chance. The resulting texture was more interesting and facilitated group cohesion better than anything I could have ever planned myself.

[12] The performance includes elements that resist standardization, departing in meaningful ways from standard notation and rehearsal techniques.

A regenerative composition, by definition, cannot *only* use standard notation.

Notation is standardized for the same reason that lightbulbs are standardized: to make the distribution of a product more efficient between different markets. Before standards were introduced regarding the screws on a lightbulb, you could never know if a lightbulb bought somewhere could be used somewhere else— the economy of lightbulbs was inefficient.

Notation has been standardized for the same reason. If everybody uses their own notation conventions, then a composition can not be efficiently distributed across a variety of markets. If you want the economics of composing to work out, it's best to *only* use conventional notation so that you can "plug and chug" from one ensemble to the next.

For composers making classical music today, their ability to work is predicated on their ability to efficiently distribute music from place to place, and from ensemble to ensemble. Unfortunately, when pieces are made with standardized notation, elements that would otherwise enhance the work are stripped away. You might have access to a group of instrumentalists who can enthusiastically double as singers, but since that might not be true of *every* orchestra, an especially delicious choir section gets left on the cutting room floor.

When you strip away every element that can't be standardized, the creative parameters you're left with end up being pretty limited. For largely this reason, I feel I'm rarely surprised at a classical music show. Each time, the musicians walk on stage, play hard music on nice instrument, then bow. No props, no shouting, no gritty spoken work elements, no light show, no choreography, no site-specific processionals, no blocking, no having everyone pull out kazoos, no surprise recorder consort, no regional in-jokes, no pouring water on the floor, no audience participation sing-alongs. In our quest to write music for every place, for every ensemble, we end up writing for no place, for no ensemble.

Regenerate seeks a vibrant, chaotic alternative. If we're going to build a music that works differently, we need to cultivate a different relationship to notation in general. Perhaps we think of a score less like a baking recipe that must be followed precisely, and more as the script to a play. Plays are not plug-and-chug, they require careful adaptation to a specific cast, time, venue, and audience.

Regenerate seeks to reclaim those elements of performance traditionally excluded from classical music in our quest for ever-more efficient standardization. It embraces new notation methods, and the new sonic and social possibilities they unlock.

It embraces new techniques for rehearsals as well. Classical music has rigid orthodoxies about how new music gets put together, usually in a notation-centric, highly efficient process that leaves little room for play or exploration. Building a classical music with new values means finding a new ways to teach the music to each other, ones that leave more room for interpersonal interaction.

Importantly, regenerate embraces non-standard instrumentations. The unique, quirky assemblage of instruments that characterize these projects are often wild and impractical instrumentations that exist nowhere else. Embracing what makes your specific ensemble unique allows you to engage participants not as interchangeable cogs, but as full human beings. It personalizes the music-making process in a way that makes deeper human connections possible. It makes room for surprises. Mainstream classical music, because of standardization across regions, can end up being placeless, uniform across disparate geographies. A regenerate project makes room for the local specificities, adding a local color and vibrancy to performances.

[13] The instrumentation is a flexible as possible.

I have found, while experimenting with Regenerate of Southeast Michigan, that there is always a tension between *compositional control* and ensemble *flexibility*. On one hand, orchestration is my favorite part of writing music, and orchestrational gestures are an important tool in organizing regenerate-style music. We certainly can't to discard this element completely in favor of unorchestrated, open scores.

On the other hand, becoming too attached to a specific *personnel* can hamper your ability to care for the social needs of participants. With this type of ensemble, the personnel is fluid. You can't count on knowing the instrumentation in advance the way you can in standard classical music. Some people will show up to the first rehearsal, not like it, and drop out. Some will be busier than they thought and not ultimately be able to join.

When a musical environment is professionalized, all the expectations and responsibilities that come with work govern how performers act. A regenerate orchestra is not a professional group, and people will view it more like a social club. In this setting, expectations around attendance are more relaxed, and when people are volunteers, there's only so much consistency you can reasonably ask for. In many instances, going with the flow and embracing the variability of who shows up is the best thing you can do for your group and the project.

With the first immersion I did with RSEM, I wrote a part for every person who signed up. I orchestrated the short-score out to the exact instrumentation people had reported on the sign up sheet. I was approaching orchestration as you would for a standard non-regenerative orchestra. Writing this way looked great on paper, but we quickly ran into trouble when ten people dropped out the day of the first rehearsal. I had to scramble to fill in the orchestration holes, something that took time and attention away from the project's whole purpose; to be present with the community, and facilitate human connection.

Since, I've learned that this music requires flexibility above all else. Rather than starting by writing a composition for a specific ensemble, it's best to arrange a piece in advance for a *generic* ensemble. When you get your final list of sign ups, you can then assign the parts in such a way that conforms the specifics of your ensemble's unique orchestration, making orchestrational choices along the way. Most importantly, parts should be arranged and distributed with built-in redundancy, so when a performer calls in sick, you're not stuck scrambling to make sure an especially important part gets covered.

[14] The compositional structure makes space for different kinds of attention, and different ways of listening.

Classical music is almost always presented with the implicit instruction that listeners are to pay attention the whole time, from start to finish, without interruption. This makes sense, since this is the way we often listen to our own music, or when we listen to music with a critical ear. We set up shows in concert halls to cater to this kind of listening, with all possible distractions removed, the audience all facing forward, all background noise silenced. We imagine that people listen best when there's nothing to do *except* listen.

Unfortunately, this is based on a somewhat idealized view of human attention. Attention, in general, is a fickle part of the human mind. Our minds aren't really built for

constant, unbroken focus on a single thing. We naturally get tired, let our minds wander. Few people can maintain laser-like focus on something as abstract as a classical music show for more than a half hour or so. When the concert lengths climb above two hours, we get into the realm when only the most trained experts can maintain focus. By creating an environment that demands constant attention for extended periods of time, we create a situation where the *quality* of people's attention is diminished.

And yet, the music most composers write asks people for this constant, idealized attention. New classical music, while often only being one or two layers thick, will often be jam-packed with important details, speeding by every second. What matters here is that bits of information all happen one after each other, in a specific order. Once a moment is passed, you can't hear it any more. If the mind wanders, you've missed part of the piece. Your experience is incomplete.

With the regenerative immersion, we have to make space for divided and inconstant attention. We want to make music for people as they are, not as we wish they were. We want people to be able to let their mind wander, talk, or even leave the room and still have a complete experience.

Regenerative music makes space for divided attentions in two ways. First, we try to make the performance space a rich, multi-sensory environment, so that there's something soft for the attention to land on when it inevitability drifts away from the audio. Black-box concert halls leave nowhere for the attention to go except inside one's own head. Put on a show in a gallery or museum, though, and the attention can naturally wander between the music and the other parts of the environment.

Second, we compose music that unfolds non-teleologically, or without a linear development towards some ultimate goal. Instead of lining up the bits of material one after the other, we can stack several elements in thick layers, each event happening over and over, for minutes. The layers change and shift slowly, but it's not like watching a movie; it's more like moving slowly through a series of exquisitely decorated rooms. The order of events is not predetermined, and does not really matter. When the listener's attention is ready to go, their ear can dive into and unpack the complexities of the soundscape. If their mind wanders, all that material will be waiting for them when they return.

[15] The presenter pairs the piece with verbal instructions on how one might listen to the piece.

The regenerate model is often unfamiliar to people, and not knowing how to approach a new kind of art can be intimidating. If we're not careful, the strangeness of the work can push people who don't "get it" away. This is the opposite of what we're trying to do!

We try to start each show by giving some ideas to the audience for *how* they might engage with the music. I like to talk about how we listen to natural soundscapes, and to encourage to listen to the music the same way they'd listen to the wind through trees, or a thunderstorm. I give a couple of different lenses, so that everyone hears one that resonates with them. I tell them they can think of this as a sonic art museum, where each cluster of performers is a sonic "sculpture" and that they may peruse through the gallery at will. I say that all this music is about just taking in and noticing the beauty the different sounds, about enjoying the feeling of the sound coming at you from all sides.

I also explain how they can behave during the show, since it won't be immediately clear what the rules are. I invite people to walk around, get close to instruments, make sounds, talk, leave, or return. Despite this medium being unfamiliar, everyone has the tools to understand and fully experience a regenerative immersion. When you help people believe this, they approach the concert from a much more relaxed state of mind, and generally I think enjoy the performance more.

[16] The presenters make good faith effort to subvert the "class coding" present at most classical music shows.

Classical music has long added value to its music by associating it with the trappings of wealth. Part of this is how everyone involved dresses, but part is in other, subtler cues.

Part of the problem lies in classical music's deep and abiding relationship to formal wear. It's unthinkable that a major symphony orchestra would play in casual clothes; the formal uniform has been one of the most persistent default settings in the history of classical music.

The formality trickles down to the audience. There's an unspoken rule that you should dress up for classical music. People don't behave this way around "fun" music. At live music events attended for enjoyment, people are welcomed into the space as they are. An abundance of formal wear floods a space with subconscious cues that the space is heightened, stilted, professional. People wearing what they want sends the opposite message, that this is a space you can let your guard down, unwind, relax.

With regenerate, we want to cultivate an environment where nobody feel self-conscious, out of place, or unwelcome. For this reason, we've tried to dismantle the formal wear culture that pervades classical music by modeling free dress with the performers. We tell the participants that the dress code is "date night casual," ie., present yourself in a way that represents your best authentic self, in a way you want to be seen. If the performers start dressing casually, then the audience will follow.

Also of concern is the literal cost of entry for people to come to the show. Many orchestras have implemented programs that make some cheaper tickets available to the public,

but classical still presents concerts that unaffordable to many. Even a $20 ticket is enough to make many think twice about whether they really want to go. Even for those who can afford it, the high ticket price disincentivizes casual drop-ins. If one bar has a ten dollar cover, and another has none, which is more likely to become a vibrant community space? Regenerate aims to have the tickets be as free as possible, with a pay-what-you-can system implemented for events that cannot function without ticket revenue.

The regenerate model is also an active project in building an orchestra where *participation* is accessible to individuals regardless of class or socioeconomic status. Being able to play a concert instrument is often (though not always) the product of a lifetime of class privilege— buying the instrument, taking lessons, attending a college, traveling for auditions. The same is even more true for composers. The training and economic resources it takes to compose "properly" for the high-precision professional music groups is enormous. Those without this privilege are completely shut out of the process. They do not have a voice in our ecosystem. We wonder, as classical musicians, why our art form fails to achieve widespread cultural relevance, while we shut out an enormous chunk of the population from having a seat at the table. We are only getting the input and ideas from an elite sliver of the population, and the lack of diversity of perspective diminishes our tradition as a whole. Those of us who have made it into the professional world have an obligation to dismantle the class barriers keeping those without this privilege out.

I want to build a classical music that is cherished by everyone, that is a place where people of all stripes can interact with and get to know each other. A cultural practice that everyone in a community can share, regardless of class or wealth. Regenerate is an active practice that seeks to make the tent ever wider, to remove more and more of the barriers to entry.

[17] The creators don't try to make their music do the work of politics.

Many classical musicians today care about politics, and we tend to make music about things we care about. Our music practice is our platform, so why not use it to try to do some good?

Unfortunately, the abstract medium of classical music is not a very effective messenger for political ideas. Door knocking can be politics, and going to a city council meeting can be politics, but mentioning this or that political issue and then making people listen to some classical music feels like a forced proposition.

What's more, when we try to make music do the work of politics, we overlook the things that concerts actually *are* good at doing. Resonating with your community serves a function as important as and completely distinct from political activism. Giving our fellow

humans experiences of wonder and beauty is an act of inherent value; it doesn't need to be justified through attachment to a political cause.

Regenerate ensembles should be places where everyone feels comfortable, even if they have political opinions that differ from the composer's or the presenter's. Our society is afflicted by unprecedented polarization and tribalism, and it's in part due to the decline of civic organizations where folks can close personal contact with people different than themselves. When people make music with others of differing identities and worldviews, our society becomes a little less tribal, a little more connected.

This is not a statement against activism. By all means, protest, organize, vote and engage as a citizen. We desperately need more people doing that in our world. But we are also in desperate need of the neutral meeting places that hold our civic fabric together.

[18] The work celebrates heterophony— musically, spiritually, personally.

Heterophony is a musical term describing different things happening at the same time. I think of old-time bluegrass musicians playing the same melody in a slightly distorted unison, emphasizing little differences in their interpretation to make the melodies rub against each other. It's opposite is homophony, where everyone is playing the same thing, or monophony, in which only one voice is heard. The latter two are more ordered, but the former is a more honest depiction of the real, living world.

In shape note singing, you want your voice to stand our from the crowd, to sing distinctively so that God will hear you specifically. The unforgettable sound of shape note music is what happens when *everyone* sings that way. The result is a choir sound that's incredibly earthy, chaotic, and alive. It's one of the most beautiful sounds I've ever heard. It's an embodiment of heterophony, and the music tradition that most inspired work on this project.

I think of orchestras as little model societies. The way we organize the orchestra has some interesting parallels to the society we've built for ourselves. The orchestra, like the world we live in, is extremely hierarchical, with creative control over the group sound very unevenly distributed. Cohesion is maintained through conformity. Order is enforced from the top.

The regenerate model depicts a vision for society where everyone talks at once, where voices overlap in a jumbled mess. No two voices alike, yet all voices somehow are able to coexist. I think the regenerate orchestra shines most when exposes just how incredibly varied, incredibly unique humans are. It imagines a world where cohesion naturally bubbles up from the chaos. It is a affirmation that humans are capable of organizing themselves, of living together, of making room for everyone.

[19] The work aspires to give listeners a peak life experience, one that evokes wonder, awe, ecstasy, and bliss.

In gatherings of professional composers, you'll hear a lot of "shop talk," conversations about what ensemble is playing who's piece, the technical side of composing and rehearsing, gossip about other people's careers. I've started to notice that we rarely talk about the music itself, the work that excites and animates our practice, the feelings we get from the music we love. I rarely hear discussion of the moments of profound wonder, joy, and awe that have motivated us to pursue a life in music to begin with.

I get the impression that we have, as a discipline, forgotten about these feelings. We make classical music that is good at being classical music, that fills programs well, that get us noticed and ahead. I think we can set our sights higher, to try our damndest to make the performance of our music truly peak experiences for those present. We can aspire to change lives, to amaze and inspire.

There are plenty of inspiring artists who use their music in pursuit of these ends. But right now, going to a performance of mainstream, academic "New Music" just isn't the kind of experience that is all that meaningful to people. The music is, at best, interesting. For those without expertise, it's often confounding and alienating.

We as classical musicians have the tools to bring indescribable beauty into the world, to give our fellow humans the gift of pure magic. To make them feel less alone in a world of darkness and disaffection. But if we are to fulfill this unrealized potential in our art, we need to set the bar higher than just making classical music that is good at being classical music. We need to strive for classical music that matches the majesty and joy and electric energy of spending good time with friends, being at a party with loved ones, watching an incredible sunset over the mountains, listening to waves crashing over the shore. We must always be in pursuit of creating an experience that is a high point in the lives of our listeners.

Regenerate, is ultimately a utopian project, that strives to make the world a better place to live in. It is certain to fall short, but it's my hope that it will serve as a challenge for other artist to make work that is ever more enlivening, more meaningful, more connecting.

[20] The music practice adds energy to the lives of everyone involved, and leaves everyone better off.

Many of these twenty principals my current project, the Regenerate Orchestra of Southeast Michigan, exemplifies well. Others are a bit more aspirational.

This is perhaps the most important element on this list, and yet for myself, is the most difficult to attain. With the professionalization of music comes all the baggage that *work* brings with it in our present day economy. While Regenerate envisions a world that still has room for

professional musicians (I myself and one, and plan to stay in this profession as long as I can), I cannot overemphasize the immense heaviness that professionalizing music has on the work we put into the world. Having music as our job incentivizes overwork, and an atmosphere of scarcity leads us to push ourselves to our limits, for fear of being pushed out of the profession all together.

This tendency towards overwork, burnout, and disconnection from the output does not magically go away when one undertakes a regenerate project. Personally, it's hard to know how much work is "enough," and maintaining work/life balance with a project like this can be very difficult.

Regardless, a music that wears down those who are making it is, by its essence, not regenerative. This practice aspires to be something that anyone can do without it becoming draining, or worse, causing burnout. To get there, the model needs more refinement.

As I've built this project, I have found ways to make the process simpler, and to leave room for rest and downtime. I've found that many of the most time consuming elements of the process are not necessary to serve the ends of building more connective and enlivening concerts. As I've iterated the project over and over, I've found ways to work smarter, rather than harder, and a version of this practice that doesn't wear out the leader is in sight. Ultimately, if this model is to see widespread adoption, we will need to continue making the process simpler, especially for those who lead it.

Conclusion: Jane Jacobs, and The Deeper Order Struggling to Exist

There is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served.

— Jane Jacobs, the Death and Life of Great American Cities

The inspiration for this essay comes from Jane Jacob's urban planning polemic "The Death and Life of Great American Cities." At the time of its publication in 1961, the discipline of urban planning had calcified around certain orthodoxies, foundational beliefs that Jacobs (and most urbanists today) considered harmful to the communities subjected to them.

Jacobs did not have a formal education in planning. She was a *writer* far outside the planning establishment of her day. Her outsider perspective allowed Jacobs to see things that institutional thinkers like Robert Moses could not. She saw what was good and beautiful on her quiet Greenwich Village, a neighborhood she loved and that became the muse for "The Death and Life..." While planners in 1950's New York characterized densely inhabited, poorer enclaves as "slums", Jacobs saw how density in a neighborhood could foster resilience, safety,

community, and culture. While Robert Moses was razing parts of the city to facilitate automobile transit, Jacobs was advocating for the incredible civic good that came from wide sidewalks and walkable cities.

Despite an initial derisive reception from the planning establishment, her book eventually became the seminal text of American planning theory. In the face of attack and derision, Jacobs had the strength and clarity of vision to see beauty where others saw only ugliness and chaos. Jacob's made it her life's work to articulate and defend this vision of a livable American city, a mission driven by the hopeful joy she found on New York's lively streets.

Jacobs concerned herself with the health of cities and their sidewalks because she *understood the role a city's shape has on the lives of those within.* She saw how certain shapes — wide sidewalks, high-density medium-rise mixed-use development — eased and encouraged connections between people, between neighbors and between communities. She saw how other shapes could do the opposite — could isolate people from each other, could drive (often literally) communities apart. Through her work, she sought to improve the lives of her neighbors by advocating for human-friendly cities, where chance person-to-person connections happened often and easily.

It is in this understanding that Jacob's pertinence to music lies. A city and a music are both things we live inside, are both complex systems that need care and maintenance. The social needs that a human-scale city sates in an individual can also be sated by collective music-making. Since time immemorial, music-making events have served a vital roll bonding individuals together, giving people a sense of connection, of belonging. This need to belong to a broader social whole is an ageless facet of the human psyche, with roots in our time as tree-dwelling monkeys. Often, the stewards of both a city's public areas and a city's concerts are responsible for ensuring this need does not go neglected.

I see many similarities today between classical music and the world of planning in Jacob's New York. Like the streets of Greenwich Village, this country abounds with authentic episodes of joy sparked by live music. These moments of joy connect music to the deepest part of our own humanity, and an order of chaotic and good things is constantly bubbling up.

Like Jacob's New York, though, there is an institution largely ignoring this joyful order. It is an establishment deeply invested in a set of entrenched practices, practices rooted in misguided aims that misuse resources and leave our music's civic potential unrealized. Just as Jacobs put forth a vision of the city with human happiness and wellbeing at its center, I'd like to consider what the same might look like for classical music. Is there some deeper order yearning to break free?