

SUSTAINING THE SOUND: BUSINESS STRATEGIES AND EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH
IN CONTEMPORARY WIND CHAMBER ENSEMBLES

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Abstract

This lecture-document examines the growing misalignment between the classical music industry and contemporary audiences, with particular attention to the implications these misalignments pose for wind chamber ensembles. While existing scholarship on audience development largely focuses on large institutional organizations, relatively little attention has been given to the unique challenges chamber ensembles face. The first step this lecture-document takes is identifying the key conceptual and organizational misalignments between traditional concert practices and training pathways, and the ways in which modern audiences engage with cultural experiences. Building on this, the following chapter proposes a framework for audience development centered on proximity, embeddedness, and mission-driven organizational models. Rather than positioning repertoire as the primary product, this framework offers the concert as an experience shaped by context, accessibility, and social engagement. This is then examined in practice through the lens of a US-based chamber ensemble, Akropolis Reed Quintet, whose activities demonstrate how these principles can operate. Finally, the study applies this perspective to [nonesuch.reedquintet](https://nonesuch.com/artists/reedquintet), developing a model for a recurring, community-embedded program designed to support long-term audience development. While not proposing a universal solution, this lecture-document outlines a set of organizational and programmatic considerations through which chamber ensembles may more effectively align their activities and pursue sustainable careers in the industry.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 The Position of Chamber Music in the Classical Ecosystem

Contemporary chamber music ensembles operate within distinctly unique economic and institutional conditions, yet much of the scholarly and professional discourse surrounding entrepreneurial thinking and sustainability in classical music all but ignores chamber ensembles. In practice, chamber ensembles operate on a wide range of revenue streams, project-based partnerships, and self-managed administrative labor. These structural conditions directly shape not only how these ensembles generate income, but also how they build audiences, present performances, and define their artistic identity. As a result, business models and audience cultivation strategies derived from practices developed for entities such as orchestras, festivals, and other large institutions cannot be applied directly to chamber music ensembles without different considerations. Despite the distinction between these business models, existing literature addressing the future of classical music entrepreneurship overwhelmingly disregards chamber music, leaving these conditions comparatively underexamined.

This gap in the literature becomes more significant when examined within the broader context of the classical music industry landscape. Decline in ticket sales, contraction of institutional and governmental support, and the erosion of viable career pathways have pushed growing numbers of musicians toward freelance and self-employed modes of professional life.¹ These career pathways require additional competencies beyond those prioritized by traditional performance training, including audience development, organizational planning, project management, and community engagement. Within this context, entrepreneurial thinking emerges not as an otherwise optional commodification of music, but rather a structural

¹ Philip Kotler, "Defining the Mission," in *Standing Room Only: Strategies for Marketing the Performing Arts* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press, 1997), 1–47.

adaptation to changing professional landscapes. For chamber music organizations in particular, entrepreneurial thinking functions as a mechanism of artistic survival and agency, rather than optional career competencies.

This lecture-document examines whether nonprofit, mission-driven organizational frameworks can support long-term sustainability for contemporary chamber ensembles by reframing the classical concert format from a self-contained artistic product into a community-embedded experience. It further investigates how such an approach addresses the misalignment between traditional training, inherited concert practices, and modern audience behavior. While the study engages with broader structural questions facing the chamber music field, it is also grounded in the practical development of *nonesuch.reedquintet*, an ensemble founded in 2023 seeking to develop sustainable audience infrastructure through community-embedded programming and a mission-driven organizational strategy. In this sense, the document functions not only as a theoretical investigation, but also as a practical outline of the organization's philosophy, programming considerations, and audience development strategies that may guide the ensemble's long-term growth.

1.2 Research Questions

This study investigates the extent to which specific organizational strategies and structures can align contemporary wind chamber ensembles with modern audience expectations and contribute to long-term sustainability within the current classical music landscape. In particular, it investigates how industry standards within the field shape ensembles' viability and how alternative business model approaches may better align classical music with contemporary audiences and market demands. The project first considers the extent to which inherited institutional practices and professional performance training structures, including performance conventions and competition culture, discourage practices that prioritize

sustainable chamber ensembles' business models. It then explores how adopting a nonprofit, mission-driven framework directly affects the ways in which ensembles create value, cultivate audiences, and position their artistic identity within communities. Closely related to this question is the role of experience-focused and community-embedded programming in developing long-lasting audience relationships rather than episodic attendance. Finally, this study addresses how sustainability should be evaluated in the context of chamber ensembles. Traditional metrics such as ticket sales or attendance totals do not adequately capture long-term viability, prompting the need to consider alternative metrics capable of assessing demographic reach, audience retention, and community impact. Together, these questions seek to identify business strategies capable of supporting enduring artistic engagement for contemporary wind chamber ensembles.

1.3 Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, practice-based methodology to examine the structural conditions affecting the sustainability of contemporary wind chamber ensembles.² It begins by identifying key misalignments within the classical music industry, particularly regarding inherited concert practices, organizational structures, and contemporary audience behavior. The study examines organizational structures and models that may address these misalignments, with particular attention to mission-driven and community-embedded approaches. To ground these concepts in practice, several initiatives created by the Akropolis Reed Quintet will be examined through a case study focusing on how its programs create proximity, embeddedness, and non-profit economic structures. Finally, the study applies these findings through a design-based approach, developing a proposed recurring, community-embedded program for *nonesuch.reedquintet*. This application translates theoretical and observed principles into an

² Practice-based research methods refer to research done through work within the field of study.

actionable framework, demonstrating how such considerations may inform sustainable program development.

Chapter 2: Structural Misalignments in Classical Music

2.1 Cultural Misalignment: The Museum Problem

Chamber ensembles operate within a cultural landscape shaped by repertoire and inherited listening conventions that were created by a vastly different artistic and social environment. The traditional classical concert functions not only as a performance format but as a preservation practice, prioritizing historical figures, context, and fidelity to canonical works rather than viewing classical music as a living art form. While this model has long served as a marker of artistic seriousness, it increasingly produces a misalignment between how music is presented and how contemporary audiences engage with live experiences.

The modern concert tradition emerged from a nineteenth-century shift that positioned musical works as revered cultural objects. Within this framework, often described as the “imaginary museum” of musical works, music came to be treated as something to be preserved and reproduced rather than continually reshaped.³ This museum and the preservation-focused model of much of the classical music industry create an undeniable diversity problem that recent research shows audiences have become increasingly aware of. NPR reported that in the 2018-19 season, neither the Philadelphia Orchestra nor the Chicago Symphony Orchestra programmed a single work by a female composer.⁴ Additionally, the League of American Orchestras reported that in the 2015-16 season, BIPOC, women, and non-binary composers

³ Petzold, Denise. “The ‘Museum Problem’ Revisited: Learning from Contemporary Art Conservation.” Essay. In *Classical Music Futures*, 229–52. Open Book Publishers, 2024.

⁴ Tom Huizenga, “Our Biggest Orchestras Are Finally Playing More Music by Women. What Took so Long?,” NPR, October 17, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2022/10/17/1124501259/women-composers-symphony-orchestras-diversity>.

accounted for just 4.5% of U.S. orchestras' programming.⁵ While there has been a significant increase in representation in recent years, audiences still feel the museum's exclusionary nature. Audience behavior research suggests that consumers actively interpret institutional signals and are not passive recipients of these changes.⁶ Consumers have made their demands for representation loud enough that orchestras simply cannot ignore them.⁷ However, the consumer can also sense when these programming changes are made to check a box and meet a quota. Therefore, this change must be systematic and will take considerable time to shift the perception of classical music from exclusive to inclusive.

An additional facet of the museum problem faced by the classical music industry is the context in which music is performed. Not only is the performance defined by the concept of *Werktreue*, the obligation to remain faithful to the composer's presumed intentions, casting musicians as transmitters rather than interpreters, but performance is also typically constrained by the historical contexts in which music is expected to be consumed.⁸ These constraints give rise to recognizable concert conventions: disciplined silence, minimal interaction between performers and audiences, and an emphasis on historical repertoire. Such practices reinforce the perception that the value of classical music lies in accurate preservation. The resulting experience privileges those with knowledge and familiarity, rewarding experienced audiences while offering few entry points for those without prior exposure.

The preservation-oriented concert model contributes to a form of cultural distance felt by audiences. Concert halls are often perceived as formal or intimidating environments, and

⁵ Joanna Bettelheim, "2024 Orchestra Repertoire Report," [americanorchestras.org](https://americanorchestras.org/2024-orchestra-repertoire-report/), October 16, 2024, <https://americanorchestras.org/2024-orchestra-repertoire-report/>.

⁶ François Colbert and Alain d'Astous, "The Psyche," essay, in *Consumer Behaviour and the Arts* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2022), 17–28.

⁷ Huizenga

⁸ Petzold

listeners may assume that specialized knowledge is required to understand the experience. In this context, the repertoire can appear less as a living art and more as a historical artifact. When artistic legitimacy is closely tied to tradition and correctness, unfamiliar audiences may feel positioned outside the intended community of listeners. For chamber ensembles, which lack the institutional prestige of large organizations, this distance presents a particular challenge. Without the symbolic authority that helps sustain orchestral attendance, small ensembles depend more directly on immediate audience connection. A listening etiquette built around observation rather than interaction, therefore, becomes a barrier to sustainability rather than an inconsequential aesthetic choice.

Recent audience research supports this interpretation. Studies of concert memory indicate that listeners most strongly recall elements related to connection rather than specific repertoire details. Visual presence of performers, emotional trajectory of the program, and the intimacy of the venue consistently outweigh precise musical content in long-term recollection.⁹ Smaller performance settings cultivate a sense of proximity in which listeners feel both socially and emotionally involved, and these experiences correlate with increased likelihood of future attendance.¹⁰ These findings suggest that engagement depends less on familiarity with the canon than on perceived closeness between performers and audience. The traditional concert format, designed to maintain reverential distance, therefore conflicts with conditions that foster lasting audience relationships. In response, many artists have begun modifying presentation practices. Performances in informal venues, integration of storytelling or multimedia, and participatory elements reposition the listener from observer to participant. Educational

⁹ Böndel, Hanna, Christian Weining, and Martin Tröndle. "Immediate and Lasting Experiences of a Classical Concert." *Journal of Cultural Management and Cultural Policy*, (2025). Accessed April 15, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27018466251350288>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

programming similarly reframes canonical works as tools for exploration rather than objects of preservation. In such contexts, the music itself remains unchanged, but the surrounding context alters its experience. These approaches demonstrate that audience engagement depends not solely on what is performed but on how the performance situates the listener within the event. Recontextualizing the concert can therefore transform perception of the repertoire without necessarily abandoning tradition. The implication for contemporary ensembles is not that repertoire lacks importance, but that artistic legitimacy and audience engagement are shaped as much by context and framing as by canonical authority alone.

2.2 Audience Misalignment: The Limits of the Traditional Concert

The cultural tensions surrounding the classical concert are compounded by a related problem: a mismatch between what organizations believe they offer and what audiences perceive themselves to be receiving. Even when presentation practices evolve, many classical institutions continue to treat repertoire as the primary product. Yet broader patterns of attendance suggest that listeners increasingly evaluate live events according to experiential rather than purely artistic criteria.¹¹ From an economic perspective, the classical music sector displays characteristics of a mature industry entering decline. Attendance has decreased, audiences have aged, and institutions repeatedly attempt to extend the life cycle through market stretching, such as modified programming like popular repertoire concerts or film-with-orchestra presentations.¹² While such initiatives can temporarily boost attendance, they typically preserve the underlying assumption that the concert itself is the product being sold and bought. The persistence of declining engagement suggests that these strategies address symptoms rather

¹¹Williams, James. *Embracing the future with confidence: The evolution of the orchestral audience in the digital age. A research study by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra*. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 2024

¹² Levitt, Theodore. *Marketing Myopia*. Harvard Business Review, 1960.
<https://seekscholar.com/sites/default/files/Myopia.pdf>

than causes. They alter repertoire while leaving the underlying value proposition unchanged. As a result, organizations refine delivery without reconsidering what audiences truly value. The marketing theorist Theodore Levitt argued that industries fail when they misidentify their product. Railroads, he noted, declined not because people stopped traveling but because companies believed they were in the railroad business rather than the transportation business.¹³ Similarly, classical music organizations often assume they are presenting musical works, whereas audiences frequently approach attendance as a social or experiential activity; in other words, classical music is situated in the entertainment business. Under this framework, improving repertoire selection or performance quality does not necessarily resolve declining engagement. Listeners may not primarily seek canonical works but rather meaningful outings, shared time, or an emotional atmosphere. When institutions focus exclusively on the musical object, they risk refining a product whose perceived value has shifted. Evidence of this shift appears in performance environments where music functions as one component within a broader experience. Events framed as social gatherings, date nights, or immersive environments often attract attendees who would not otherwise attend a traditional concert. In these contexts, music retains artistic importance but operates within a wider network of motivations that include atmosphere, interaction, and shared activity.

Rather than diminishing artistic value, this reframing changes how audiences engage with the experience. The performance becomes the focal point only after the audience has already committed to the event for other reasons. Engagement, therefore, arises through context rather than prior familiarity with repertoire. Chamber ensembles possess structural characteristics that make this reframing particularly accessible. Their small scale allows performances in varied environments and closer interaction between performers and listeners.

¹³ Ibid.

Because they do not rely on large venues or fixed seasons, they can more easily integrate performance into broader social settings. This flexibility suggests that sustainability may depend less on attracting audiences to traditional concerts and more on embedding music within experiences audiences already value. In this sense, chamber music's adaptability is not merely logistical but conceptual: it enables organizations to redefine what they are offering rather than attempting to preserve a single presentation model. The challenges facing classical music are therefore not solely artistic or economic, but conceptual. When repertoire is treated as the product, declining attendance appears as a failure of appreciation. Orchestras, due in part to their structural inflexibility, often respond with marketing strategies aimed at persuading new audiences to reconsider their preconceptions about classical music. Even within arts consumer research, audience perception is sometimes framed as incorrect rather than informative. One study of museum attendance observes that young people perceive museums as spaces for "older, wealthier, more educated people," and characterizes this perception as "selective" and "wrong," even while acknowledging that it is not far removed from reality.¹⁴ The factuality of this perception can be debated; as stated this is besides the point as stated earlier in the article, attendance decisions are shaped not by institutional self-definition, but by the meanings audiences attach to institutions.¹⁵ To treat those meanings as errors to be corrected is to misunderstand the mechanism of participation itself. Sustainability cannot depend on persuading audiences that their perceptions are invalid; it must instead account for how those perceptions influence motivations. Large institutions with fixed venues, subscription models, and inherited presentation norms are often constrained in their ability to adapt to these perceptions.

¹⁴ François Colbert and Alain d'Astous, "Introduction," essay, in *Consumer Behaviour and the Arts* (New York, New York: Routledge, 2022), 1-13.

¹⁵ Ibid.

As a result, they may rely on strategies designed to bypass resistance rather than transform relational distance.¹⁶

2.3 Pedagogical Misalignment: Competitions and Professional Formation

If contemporary chamber ensembles are expected to function as self-directed organizations, a central question emerges: why does professional training rarely prepare musicians for that role? The answer lies in a structural mismatch between the values reinforced by classical training environments and the competencies required for long-term sustainability. Classical performance education has historically emphasized fidelity to the musical work as its primary evaluative standard. Rooted in the ideology of *Werktreue*, Marya Martin, the flutist and artistic director of the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, states that performers are encouraged to approach repertoire as “fixed objects whose ideal interpretation already exists”.¹⁷ Within this framework, the performer’s task is not to construct meaning but to reproduce it accurately. Instruction, therefore, prioritizes correctness, technical control, and stylistic conformity.

Chamber music competitions reinforce these priorities. Given that awards depend on the consensus of multiple judges, ensembles are incentivized to adopt interpretations unlikely to alienate any listener on the panel. In practice, this often favors technically immaculate yet stylistically neutral performances, leaving limited space for interpretive ownership. When disagreement arises, judges frequently defer to measurable criteria, such as intonation precision or rhythmic accuracy, thereby encouraging conservative artistic choices. Students thus learn to minimize deviation rather than cultivate artistic identity, and success becomes defined by

¹⁶ Relational distance refers to physical, social, and interpretive distance, see section 3.3

¹⁷ Brian Wise, “In It to Win It,” Chamber Music America, December 13, 2023, <https://chambermusicamerica.org/articles/in-it-to-win-it/>.

avoiding error rather than communicating perspective. Competitions, therefore, reward reliability over individuality. Musical risk, theatrical presentation, unconventional programming, or audience-oriented communication, qualities that may attract new listeners, become liabilities within adjudicated environments.

The behavioral outcomes of this system extend beyond the competition stage. Ensembles trained under consensus-based evaluation often approach repertoire selection, programming, and presentation with similar caution. Programming gravitates toward familiar works that signal legitimacy, and interpretive decisions favor stylistic neutrality. The resulting performances may demonstrate high technical achievement while offering limited differentiation from peer ensembles. This dynamic produces a paradox. The professional pathway rewards musicians for becoming interchangeable at precisely the historical moment when survival depends on recognizability and audience connection. Skills necessary for sustaining an ensemble, such as curation, communication, contextualization, and community engagement, are largely absent from the criteria used to validate artistic success.

Evidence suggests that competition success does not reliably translate into long-term ensemble viability. While awards provide visibility and short-term credibility, many ensembles do not convert recognition into long-lasting careers in chamber music. A review of major chamber competition outcomes shows that only a minority of prize-winning groups remain active over extended periods; however, assumptions about why cannot be made without further investigation. Such patterns indicate that competitions function more effectively as launching mechanisms than as foundations for sustained artistic activity. These outcomes are consistent with the values that competitions measure. Technical excellence may open initial opportunities, but maintaining an ensemble requires organizational strategy, audience development, and adaptable artistic identity, qualities that competitions rarely evaluate. Taken together, these

pedagogical and professional structures prepare musicians for validation systems rather than for audiences. Training emphasizes preservation, competitions reward consensus, and career advancement depends on institutional approval. Yet contemporary chamber ensembles operate in environments where legitimacy must be derived directly through public engagement rather than passed down from institutional endorsement. The resulting misalignment is not a failure of musicians but a consequence of educational design. Ensembles are evaluated according to standards optimized for historical continuity, while operating under conditions that require entrepreneurial adaptability. Understanding this discrepancy clarifies why many highly skilled groups might struggle to achieve sustainability: they have been trained to succeed within a system different from the one in which they must ultimately survive.

Chapter 3: A Framework for Sustainable Chamber Ensemble Practice

3.1 Reframing the Artistic Product

The sustainability challenges outlined in chapter two suggest not simply a decline in demand but a misalignment between how classical music organizations define their product and how audiences value cultural experiences. Marketing theorist Theodore Levitt argues that industries falter when they define themselves by the form of what they produce rather than by the function they serve.¹⁸ In the context of classical music, declining attendance can therefore be understood not as a rejection of the art form, but as evidence that the traditional concert retains a historically defined value proposition that no longer corresponds to market demands. For chamber ensembles, which operate without institutional buffering, the consequences of this misalignment are particularly acute. Reframing the product, however, does not necessarily require altering the repertoire itself.

¹⁸ Levitt

Historically, art music rarely existed as an isolated object of contemplation. It functioned within rituals, religious practice, civic ceremony, education, and social gatherings. In such contexts, the value of music derives from the role it plays within shared experience rather than from its autonomous presentation. Even canonical works illustrate this dynamic: the significance of Sibelius's *Finlandia* emerged from its symbolic function within Finnish resistance to Russian censorship, not solely from its musical structure.¹⁹ Over time, institutional concert culture reoriented listening toward preservation and presentation, positioning repertoire as the primary object of value. While this model still has a place within the industry landscape, it cannot be assumed to motivate broader audience development. The issue is therefore not musical content but the conditions under which value is created.

Layer	What it is	Who cares most	Result of change
event	why are people there?	audiences	behavioral change
performance	how it is played?	critics/experts	interpretive novelty
repertoire	the composition itself	musicians	artistic novelty

To clarify this distinction, chamber music can be understood through three interrelated layers. The foundational level is the repertoire, the musical material itself. Above this sits performance, the ensemble's interpretation of that material. At the highest level is the event, the social and contextual environment through which audiences encounter both. Classical training and professional evaluation overwhelmingly emphasize the first two layers, and innovation in the field most often occurs through new works or novel interpretations. These practices expand artistic possibilities but do not necessarily alter audience behavior, as attendance decisions are focused primarily at the event level rather than the repertoire level. Sustainability problems arise

¹⁹ Schwarm, Betsy. "Finlandia." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, March 17, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Finlandia>.

when organizations attempt to address an event-layer challenge with repertoire-layer solutions. Declining attendance often prompts ensembles to pursue more adventurous programming, yet from the listener's perspective, the concert's structure remains unchanged. The artistic offering varies, whereas the reason to attend remains the same. Entrepreneurial sustainability, therefore, depends less on altering what music is performed than on redefining the circumstances in which it is experienced. The central challenge for chamber ensembles is not only to innovate within the artwork, but to redesign the framework through which the artwork acquires meaning for the public.

3.2 Degrees of Reframing: From Repackaging to Recontextualization

Classical music faces sustainability challenges because there's a misalignment between how music organizations define their product and the product audiences are interested in consuming. Responses to this misalignment can be understood as a spectrum of depth; not all innovations achieve the same degree of recontextualization. Some changes modify how music is presented while leaving the underlying function intact, whereas others rethink the functional relationship among music, listener, and event. The spectrum of responses would range from strategies that preserve the concert as a presentation of works to those that alter its surface characteristics. At the other end are practices that reposition repertoire as a component within a broader experience, thereby changing how audiences derive meaning from the performance. Both approaches may increase attendance temporarily, yet they differ in their capacity to produce sustained engagement because they operate on different levels of artistic function.

The "movies in concert" format illustrates the more surface-level-oriented end of this spectrum. These performances frequently generate immediate audience interest and can produce measurable short-term increases in ticket sales. However, the underlying concert

model remains largely untouched. Audiences attend the same venue, sit at the same physical and symbolic distance from performers, and engage with the music as accompaniment to a pre-existing visual narrative. For the classical music expert, the film is merely a visual enhancement to the concert experience, and for the film fan, the concert is a secondary component of the film. Additionally, because the event remains centered on reproducing a culturally meaningful work of art, the format relies on a limited number of suitable films and tends to lose novelty with repeated exposure. Such initiatives, therefore, operate primarily as repackaging: they alter the concert's presentation without redefining its function. Further supporting this conclusion, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra's 2024 Insights Report noted that from 2018 to 2023 there was a 3% decline in interest in film screenings, with live orchestras dropping to 25% interest (25% of people polled expressed interest in attending).²⁰

A different level of reframing appears in interdisciplinary productions that integrate music into dramatic narrative. Recent ballet adaptations of culturally familiar stories such as *Peter Pan*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *The Jungle Book* demonstrate this shift. In these productions, newly commissioned works and music drawn from the established canon, including Debussy's *La Mer*, function not as autonomous concert repertoire but as expressive material within theatrical storytelling. Audience engagement emerges from the cultural relevance, within which the music acquires meaning through association and dramatic context. Canonical works are neither simplified nor replaced; rather, they are repositioned as components of a broader artistic encounter. To a classical music expert, this recontextualization may still be perceived as superficial; however, to fans of these stories, these productions are unique additions to an intellectual property (IP) they already value, thereby changing their motivation to attend.

²⁰ Williams, James. *Embracing the future with confidence: The evolution of the orchestral audience in the digital age. A research study by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra*. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 2024

The contrast between these formats suggests a difference in audience motivation. Repackaging strategies primarily attract listeners who already value the concert and seek variation within it. Recontextualized experiences attract listeners whose primary interest lies outside traditional concert conventions and who encounter the music through another meaningful activity. The distinction, therefore, reflects not artistic quality but motivational alignment. Taken together, these examples indicate that innovation to traditional presentation is not a binary opposition between tradition and change. The crucial difference lies in whether the concert is preserved as an end in itself or functions as a medium through which a broader experience is constructed. When attendance depends on the inherent value of performance itself, engagement will remain episodic, but when value is added, engagement becomes repeatable.

3.3 Proximity and Embeddedness

The key feature of this proposed model is framed in terms of audience motivations for attending. Reframing succeeds when the audience does not decide to attend live music, but instead attends an activity in which music is encountered as one component of the experience. The effectiveness of this model hinges on proximity: the reduction of physical, social, and interpretive distance between listener and performance. Traditional concerts require the audience to overcome various measures of distance: selecting an event, entering specialized, potentially intimidating spaces, and accepting increasingly antiquated etiquette traditions. Events that prioritize proximity invert this. Rather than demanding that audiences approach music, the music operates in spaces audiences already inhabit.

It is critical to understand all the ways chamber ensembles can create proximity. In the 2025 article “Immediate and Lasting Experiences of a Classical Concert,” proximity is defined as

a multidimensional phenomenon comprising spatial, social, and interpretive dimensions.²¹

Together, these dimensions determine not only how audiences access performances but also how they perceive their relationship to them. Spatial proximity, in this regard, is defined by the concert venue. The proximity of a concert venue depends on multiple factors: location, accessibility by public transit, and location in relation to additional infrastructure such as restaurants, hotels, and residential areas – all factors that can make going to a performance convenient. Architecture and interior design are also aspects of proximity; formal environments can create emotional distance, and seating and staging create literal distance.

Social distance, defined here as the degree of emotional and physical separation between audience members, performers, and the space, shapes concert experiences. Social proximity, or the sense of connection, typically begins with the audience-performer relationship. In post-concert surveys conducted by the Experimental Concert Research project, concertgoers reported that being physically proximate to performers enabled them to observe the performers' facial expressions and empathize with them. Elements of spatial proximity, namely, the physical closeness between participants and performers, directly affect social dynamics.²² For example, traditional seating arrangements discourage social interactions. Much of the ritualized process of attending classical music concerts (for example, lowering one's voice before entering the concert hall, waiting in line at the box office, sitting still, and observing clapping etiquette) limits the physical and sensory experience. Finally, interpretive or musical proximity refers to the degree of familiarity an audience feels with the music. In this context, familiarity refers to the recognition or resonance elicited by narrative or association, rather than by prior knowledge of the specific musical work. Proximity includes multiple dimensions—spatial, social, and

²¹ Böndel, Hanna, Christian Weining, and Martin Tröndle. "Immediate and Lasting Experiences of a Classical Concert." *Journal of Cultural Management and Cultural Policy*, (2025). Accessed April 15, 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1177/27018466251350288>.

²² Ibid.

interpretive—that occur simultaneously but operate independently. For example, creating spatial proximity (physical closeness) does not necessarily create social proximity (a sense of connection between participants). Sustainable audience engagement emerges when these various aspects of proximity are addressed together.

While proximity can explain why an individual event is successful, long term sustainability depends on its continued significance beyond the event itself. Creating proximity for your audience does not, in itself, guarantee continued attendance. Countless studies have demonstrated that audiences are increasingly feeling disconnected from live classical music. Therefore, it should not be assumed that the general audience will simply change behaviors. It is when chamber ensembles become a familiar and expected feature of the community that sustainable attendance can be achieved. I will refer to this concept as embeddedness, or the ways in which ensembles can embed themselves into their communities. Embeddedness refers to repeated encounters between an ensemble and a community within the normal routines of daily life, whereas proximity refers to how close audiences feel during an event. Audiences may enjoy a close and meaningful performance, yet still refrain from returning if attending requires deliberate effort. Whether encounters recur depends less on artistic impact than on the effort required to experience the music again. The attendance model presented by institutions such as orchestras is a high-friction customer experience. In this model, potential audience members must select a show, plan their attendance, attend the event, and then evaluate their enjoyment against the cost of attendance. The embedded model functions as a low-friction encounter: audiences are already present and experience the music without first making a deliberate attendance decision, so the encounter is not evaluated primarily against ticket cost, and repetition becomes habitual. This approach can be implemented in communal environments, such as shopping centers, which offer high foot traffic and demographic breadth. The purpose of

such activity is not immediate revenue generation but audience acquisition. Exposure precedes valuation: individuals encounter the ensemble before deciding whether to seek it out again. While these performances rarely maximize short-term profit, they maximize first contact with potential listeners. As a result, they function as a strategic investment in future attendance within more specialized performance contexts rather than as isolated performances evaluated by their single-event earnings.

Chamber ensembles have a clear and distinct advantage regarding the embedded model. The small scale of not only the actual ensemble, but of the organization itself, makes chamber ensembles easily integrated into existing spaces. Performing for comparatively smaller audiences also has advantages, as chamber ensembles can not only create greater spatial proximity to smaller audiences but also foster social proximity through access to non-traditional concert spaces. Most importantly, chamber music has a distinct advantage in regard to integrating with existing activities. An Ohio-based jazz ensemble exemplifies this embedded model. Although jazz is certainly a distinct economic space, this art experiences similar economic pressures and public perceptions. This Ohio jazz band created a concert series at a local bar in which they perform the music to Mario Kart Live. During these performances bar goers can sign up to play the video game while the auditory experience is rendered as they race. This event created overnight exposure, leading to multiple articles from sources such as The Guardian and NPR, in addition to the millions of views the videos of the event generated.²³

This exemplifies the embedded model as it addresses the three dimensions of proximity, spatially, socially, and interpretively, through integrating their music into a pre-established place

²³Matthew Viriyapah, "Jazz and Video Games Take the Stage with Live Mario Kart | Kosu," <https://www.kosu.org/>, July 11, 2025, <https://www.kosu.org/podcast/okie-geek/2025-07-11/jazz-and-video-games-take-the-stage-with-live-mario-kart>.

to gather and socialize. Interpretive proximity through familiar music and IP creates a new value proposition for potential attendees. Additionally, this event type occurs at a location with built-in customers, reducing marketing pressure. This model thus produces more enduring audiences and reliable outcomes. Additionally, in this model, audience development is framed as ecological rather than promotional.

3.4 Nonprofit Mission as Economic Strategy

This concept of the embedded model reframes audience development as a process of repeated relationship formation rather than isolated transactions. If long-term sustainability depends on audiences encountering the ensemble regularly in their lives, then the organization's economic logic must support activities that do not immediately generate ticket revenue. This requirement exposes the structural pitfalls of traditional concert-centered business models: practices that cultivate enduring audiences, accessibility initiatives, educational engagement, and community presence are treated as auxiliary activities because they do not generate short-term income. Bruce Coppock argues that arts organizations often mistake themselves for being in the concert production business when, in fact, they are in the patron development business.²⁴ Financial stability, therefore, comes not from maximizing revenue per performance but from maximizing the number of individuals who form an ongoing relationship with the organization. Under this framework, the nonprofit model is not primarily a legal distinction, but an economic strategy: one that allows resources to be directed toward activities that create long-term audience investment rather than short-term transactional return.

If the nonprofit structure enables the organization to invest in long-term audience relationships, education becomes the primary mechanism for building those relationships.

²⁴Bruce Coppock, "Radical Revenue | Symphony.Org," <https://symphony.org/>, January 2008, <https://symphony.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Radical-Revenue.pdf>.

Current models rely on attendance that hinge on a series of intentional decisions, from allocating the time and buying the ticket, to accepting the uncertainty of enjoyment. Education-first programming, by contrast, operates differently. These programs occur in environments already inhabited by audiences such as schools, libraries, and community centers, and therefore precede evaluation. In this scenario, familiarity with a given ensemble precedes consumption, reducing the barriers typically associated with first-time concert attendance. Repeated educational interactions also change the listener's relationship with the repertoire. Rather than experiencing a performance as an isolated aesthetic event, audience members begin to associate the music with a known group of individual musicians and prior shared experiences. This effectively shifts the motivation for attendance from curiosity to recognition. The performers are no longer just strangers playing music; they are part of the community. Education in this regard generates both interpretive and social proximity simultaneously, while building the framework for repeated encounters necessary for achieving embeddedness.

From a purely economic perspective, the distinction is important. A concert leads to a singular transaction, but a communal and educational relationship produces future transactions, each one with decreasing acquisition costs for the audience. Over time, the marketing burden shifts from persuasion to a simple reminder. Attendance is not a consequence of a newfound appreciation for classical music, but rather stems from prior valuation of the organization that offers it. Given this structure, education functions as long-term patron development infrastructure rather than supplementary programming. The nonprofit model uniquely supports this framework. Because revenue is reinvested in mission-driven activities, organizations can prioritize practices that generate measurable community impact rather than immediate financial returns. Sustained relationships produce repeat attendance, repeat attendance produces

demonstrable public value, and demonstrable public value supports funding through grants and philanthropy. In this way, educational engagement becomes not only culturally meaningful but economically foundational to ensemble sustainability.

3.5 New Measures of Success (SROI)

As this lecture-document has thoroughly demonstrated, traditional success metrics do not adequately capture the value created by a mission-driven business model. Thus, the need for a new measure of value must be utilized. Within a conventional return on investment (ROI) framework, performance success is measured by a single metric: the ratio of operating costs to revenue generated. A program that fails to generate profit, therefore, is categorized as a commercial failure regardless of its cultural or communal impacts. Social-return-on-investment (SROI), comparatively, focuses solely on measuring the social impact value generated by mission-driven models.

The core idea of SROI is to calculate the social impact value relative to the initial investment amount. This measurement model relies on quantifying the value created through the public's well-being, access to education, and access to culture. For example, an event that brings classical music to an after-school program can be measured from the number of students reached, how many of those students had never seen live classical music, how many of them developed a new interest in it, all the way to the decrease in crime by way of after-school engagements. This method of measurement hinges on the service provider to identify all the key stakeholders involved in the offered programs. For the after-school program example, the key stakeholders would be the students involved and their parents, who derive value from the direct benefit of their children having a place to be after school, as well as from the culture they access. The after-school program is also a stakeholder, as this offering bolsters their value

proposition. The school itself can also be a stakeholder, as students' access to cultural events, such as classical music concerts, has demonstrated measurable effects on student success.

Critically, SROI does not claim that music, or any single community or cultural offering, produces large social effects in isolation. Rather, it assigns proportional value to documented contributions within the broader social environment. An ensemble's activities constitute an element of social well-being, the aggregate of which can be quantified and compared with costs. Within this framework, a concert can be economically unprofitable while simultaneously generating positive social value. Extensive research has quantified the value of various aspects of social well-being. While it falls outside the scope of this research, the value of educational and cultural programs can be estimated using widely available online valuation tables. Additionally, professional services are available to arts organizations that calculate SROI for potential programs. These services are invaluable as small arts organizations and potentially even larger institutions are not equipped to conduct the research necessary to adequately estimate these values. However, small ensembles can utilize these core principles of SROI to develop programs that maximize SROI without directly measuring values. That said, when applying for funding from foundations and grants, obtaining an accurate SROI calculation will be of the utmost importance; engaging professional services to accomplish this is advisable. For mission-driven chamber ensembles, systematic data collection will be an absolute necessity. Funding from grants and foundations can account for a significant percent of an ensemble's annual budget, thus sustainability will be dependent on demonstrating quantifiable social value rather than short-term profits. Without consistent and long-term measurement, community impact remains anecdotal which is unconvincing in grant applications. Additionally, these data points will also be key insights on how to evaluate an ensemble's strategies and refine programming. The embedded framework proposed in this lecture-document identifies five

primary data categories through which chamber ensembles can evaluate SROI: access expansion, proximity creation, embeddedness, educational depth, and patron development and organizational conversion. Together, these categories translate mission-driven ideals into measurable outcomes, an essential when applying for grants, forming partnerships, or justifying resource allocation.

Access expansion serves as the foundational metric within this model. The downstream impact, such as educational development, community embeddedness, and long-term patron conversion, cannot occur without the initial access. By measuring the key data points shown in Table 1 in Appendix A, ensembles can demonstrate a broadening of cultural participation rather than a fixed audience base, quantifiably showing that the ensemble is meaningfully expanding classical music encounters. Regarding SROI, this metric provides evidence that cultural access is being distributed more equitably, offering a stronger foundation for building social value. See Appendix A for the tables corresponding to the remaining four categories.

Chapter 4: Application

4.1 Akropolis Reed Quintet

This sub-chapter examines existing examples of the proposed model of proximity and embeddedness in the current US classical music landscape. This chapter does not aim to evaluate artistic excellence, nor does it aim to prescribe a universal model for success. Rather, the goal is to examine whether the structure and mechanisms outlined in the previous chapters can be observed working simultaneously within an existing ensemble. While there are many examples of ensembles that demonstrate artistic excellence and innovation, there is only one example of a reed quintet operating primarily in the US market as a full-time chamber ensemble—the Akropolis Reed Quintet. While there are wind quintets operating at an organizational level

similar to that of Akropolis (namely the Imani Winds), for this study, I will examine only the former, as the scope of this research is limited to reed quintets. Additionally, I have chosen to exclude the Calefax Reed Quintet as they operate primarily in the European market and therefore experience different institutional pressures and market demands, conditions that fall outside the scope of this research.

Rather than evaluate ideals, this section evaluates actions. The concepts of reframing, proximity, embeddedness, and nonprofit economic models are measurable patterns of organizational behaviors, made visible by how an ensemble spends its time. In looking at how Akropolis Reed Quintet spends its time, it is clear that many of the variables noted in the previous chapters exist within their business model. The ensemble has consistently performed more educational and community-focused performances, by a factor of six, in comparison to traditional concerts. In their last two seasons alone, the ensemble has performed more than 400 educational/community events and approximately 60 traditional concerts. Without further investigation, this statistic alone demonstrates the ensemble's commitment to audience development and a mission-focused business model. The ensemble has several projects that perfectly demonstrate the proposed model. One of the ensemble's notable projects demonstrating community embeddedness is their Detroit High Schools residency and composition program, which was established in 2017. Through this program, Akropolis visits each of three Detroit-area high schools approximately twenty times per year; the group has premiered and recorded works by more than fifty high school students. This is paired with their "Together We Sound" festival where they premiere music by local and national artists alongside music by students in their composition program. These works are then performed in public spaces throughout Michigan. This initiative alone accounts for a larger percentage of the ensemble's engagements as compared to traditional performances. The ensemble's website

notes that several students pursued music and composition at universities, including Oberlin Conservatory of Music and Florida State University, thanks to their instruction. This program not only offers significant social value but also positions the ensemble as a stable feature of their community. The reach of this program extends throughout the community, as opportunities to attend premieres of the music by their young protégés are a value proposition that precedes knowledge of the ensemble themselves, creating social proximity.

Embeddedness can also be created within professional communities, as demonstrated by the ensemble's chamber music initiative, *Akropolis Chamber Music Institute* (ACMI). The institute invites individual musicians, pre-formed ensembles, and composers to collaborate, offering opportunities to train performers and ensembles through coaching and extensive performance opportunities with the members of Akropolis, and offers composers opportunities to have their works critiqued and premiered. This model has positioned the ensemble as an invaluable resource for education and career development. The ACMI not only extends the ensemble's embedded reach beyond their geographic community but also diversifies revenue. As of 2026, AMCI has also partnered with the Interlochen Center for the Arts, further bolstering the ensemble's prestige, which would not have been possible without their commitment to giving back to the musical community. This demonstrates the alignment between mission-driven models and sustainability. Not only does this program serve to create proximity and embeddedness within the professional communities, but it also serves as a significant form of revenue diversification. Unlike many outreach initiatives that rely primarily on grant funding, institutes of this kind bring in earned income— in this case through tuition. This serves as a relatively stable source of recurring revenue while remaining aligned with the organization's mission. By positioning itself as a provider of high-level training to emerging musicians and composers, the ensemble reinforces its status within the industry while simultaneously

supporting its operations. The visibility of ACMI in the industry, evidenced by their flyers present in music institutions across the nation, further amplifies the effectiveness of the program. The ensemble becomes embedded within educational and professional pathways, which increases demand among presenters, including the same institutions from which they recruit their participants, increasing opportunities to generate earned income.

More simply, they create proximity with their community by performing at hospitals, office buildings, and public parks. Their website beautifully sums this up: “Our most powerful musical encounters often happen off the stage — a quiet corner of a hospital, a bustling bike path, a noisy band room. We believe that music isn’t just something to be presented; it’s something to be shared. When we step off the stage and into our community, we do it not just to perform, but to co-create — turning sound into conversation, and performance into participation”.²⁵ It is because audience motivation is established at the event and relationship level that repertoire assumes a different economic role. Akropolis can program adventurous and contemporary works not because audiences are primarily motivated by repertoire novelty, but because engagement has already been secured through proximity and embeddedness. In this model, artistic risk is subsidized by relational stability. This confirms a central claim of the study: sustainability does not arise from promising familiar repertoire or by attracting audiences to challenging repertoire, but from creating conditions in which audiences already value the organization presenting it.

It is important to realize that each of these projects targets a very specific demographic. The effectiveness of these initiatives is in part due to the ensemble’s ability to identify the demographic they aim to engage. In the case of the Detroit High Schools Residency, the demographic reached is, of course, Detroit-area high school students. When considered in

²⁵ <https://www.akropolisquintet.org/educationandcommunity>

tandem with their “Together We Sound” festival, they also reach the families and friends of those students. This is an important distinction. When reaching students in schools, the engagement typically does not extend beyond the campus grounds. While a student may go home and tell their family and friends about the experience they shared with Akropolis, there are no opportunities for those family members and friends to engage with that experience for themselves. For those students who do not share their experiences with others, the engagement ends the moment they leave the classroom. When Akropolis goes into classrooms and works with students to compose new music and then goes into those students' communities and performs those works with them alongside preeminent composers, this invites family members and friends to engage with the experience themselves and personally see the outcomes of Akropolis's twenty school visits. The benefit of those twenty visits becomes immediately clear and tangible, thus demonstrating the value of the ensemble within the community. While the embeddedness is taking place within school grounds, the concert's following brings the outcome to the community.

4.2 nonesuch.reedquintet

Founded in 2023, nonesuch.reedquintet is a young organization, yet it has already achieved a level of artistic recognition that indicates the ensemble has substantial musical potential. The ensemble has performed internationally, working with organizations such as the Singapore Army Band and Singapore National Youth Orchestra in association with the Singapore Symphony. They have also performed as guest artists at universities in the US and abroad. Recently, the ensemble was invited to the live rounds of the 2026 Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition, further signalling the artistic quality of the ensemble. However, these accomplishments were accompanied by significant operating costs. The organization's

operating costs are primarily funded through its own fundraising efforts, including support generated through free educational programming for a range of communities. These efforts have enabled the ensemble to finance international travel, invest in their own recording equipment, and pursue increasingly ambitious artistic projects. At the same time, the ensemble is in an early stage of development. While the organization has created meaningful individual projects, it has yet to create a recurring initiative that is community-embedded, scalable, and capable of generating recognition beyond isolated performances. For this reason, *nonesuch.reedquintet* provides a useful case study for the application of the proposed framework in this lecture-document.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, *nonesuch.reedquintet*'s mission is to increase access to high-quality classical music through free educational programming in the Pacific Northwest and beyond. This mission is important not simply as a statement of values but as the framework through which the ensemble's growth and development must be organized.²⁶ Given that the ensemble seeks to increase access, it is critical that recurring projects not be centered on traditional concerts or on audiences already patronizing classical music organizations. Rather, this project must be structured to reach listeners where engagement precedes interest in the musical offering. As this document argues, access is most successfully expanded when music is embedded within environments that are already populated by the communities the ensembles want to serve. For *nonesuch.reedquintet*, this means a scalable long-term initiative must do more than present excellent performances; it must also create repeated, low-friction encounters with music in places where people already gather, learn, and participate.

²⁶ "While the IRS does not require a minimum program expense ratio, industry standards have emerged... Arts & Culture: 70% program, 15% management, 15% fundraising." <https://www.pbmares.com/the-importance-of-the-program-expense-ratio-for-nonprofits/>

It is important to understand that no single project can effectively reach all intended audiences. Attempting to design a program that serves every demographic risks diluting both its clarity and its impact. Instead, organizations must approach project development systematically, first identifying the communities that an initiative is well-positioned to engage, but also those it is unlikely to reach. Because factors such as location, cost, and program format inherently shape who participates, these biases must be acknowledged as a structural condition rather than a failure of design. Rather than abandoning projects that do not reach every demographic, organizations should adopt an iterative approach, developing multiple initiatives over time that collectively address gaps in access. This strategy also aligns with practical funding realities. Demonstrated success in focused, well-executed projects provides a much stronger foundation for future support over prolonged planning aimed at universal reach. In this sense, sustainability depends not on a single comprehensive program, but on a portfolio of complementary projects.

Within this framework, *nonesuch.reedquintet*'s project must be designed for a clearly defined audience: families with young children. This focus reflects the ensemble's mission to expand access to high-quality classical music through educational engagement, particularly at early stages of development. While visiting schools offers a direct means of reaching students, it does not necessarily create sustained relationships beyond the classroom without additional infrastructure in place. To cultivate longer-term engagement, it is necessary to reach students in environments where they are present with their families and where participation is voluntary rather than institutional. Interactive children's museums, such as science centers, offer such a context. These spaces are explicitly designed to attract families seeking educational enrichment outside of school, making them an ideal environment for introducing music as part of a broader learning experience. In this context, the Eugene Science Center offers a particularly effective

site for a recurring, community-embedded initiative, combining consistent foot traffic, educational alignment, and opportunities for repeat exposure.

At the same time, the limitations of this approach must be acknowledged. Science centers, like many museums, tend to attract patrons that are predisposed toward educational enrichment and possess the financial resources required to attend. Research from the American Alliance of Museums indicates that such institutions disproportionately serve white, well-educated families²⁷. As a result, while the science center model effectively addresses access within a specific demographic, it does not reach communities that face greater structural barriers to participation.²⁸ Recognizing this limitation is essential. The goal of this initiative is not to provide universal access, but to function as one component within a broader strategy. Future projects must be developed to engage communities not served by this model, ensuring that the organization's overall portfolio addresses a wider range of audiences.

With a well-defined audience and site of engagement, the next question becomes one of program design. The effectiveness of this initiative depends not only on who it reaches, but on what it produces for the ensemble, its institutional partners, and the larger field of chamber music outreach. In addition to expanding access, the program must generate artistic, organizational, and economic value. A central component of this initiative is the commissioning of new works. As a recently established type of chamber ensemble, the reed quintet lacks the depth of repertoire available to more familiar ensemble configurations. Therefore, commissioning serves multiple functions. Artistically, it contributes to the continued development of the repertoire. Organizationally, it allows nonesuch.reequintet to position itself as a primary

²⁷Jessica Strube, "Demographics of Us Museum-Goers: A 2025 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Story," American Alliance of Museums, September 12, 2025, <https://www.aam-us.org/2025/09/12/demographics-of-us-museum-goers-a-2025-annual-survey-of-museum-goers-data-story/>.

²⁸The Eugene Science Center does offer free admission in December for their holiday showcase which could be an opportunity to address the accessibility issues that come with spaces such as museums.

source of interpretations of newly composed works, particularly through first recordings and repeat performances. This establishes a form of authorship and authority within the field, embedding the ensemble not only within its local community but also within the broader professional landscape. Commissioning works designed for specific performance contexts, such as educational or science-based programming, also creates opportunities for target application and repeat use. Programs developed with clear use cases can function as adaptable models, increasing their potential for replication across venues.

This approach is reflected in existing large-scale initiatives such as the Carnegie Hall Link Up program, which provides structured, participatory music education experiences for students in grades three through five.²⁹ By offering a ready-built framework that orchestras can implement locally, the program simultaneously expands access and creates institutional value. A similar format, adapted to the scale and flexibility of a chamber ensemble, enables modular programming that is plug-and-play for reed quintets looking to participate in the program. In this sense, commissioning becomes not only an artistic investment but also a mechanism for scalability. Equally important is the program's alignment with the mission of the host institution. For a science center, this mission is to foster curiosity and excitement about scientific discovery. Integrating musical programming with science-based themes creates a shared framework through which both institutions can achieve their goals. One effective strategy is to design events around STEM-related holidays, such as Earth Day, Pi Day, and Women and Girls in Science Day. These occasions offer natural opportunities to connect musical material with scientific concepts, creating interdisciplinary experiences that resonate with existing programming within the science centers. By aligning with these institutional priorities, the ensemble is no longer positioned as an external addition but as a contributor to the space's core

²⁹ <https://www.carnegiehall.org/Education/Programs/Link-Up>

mission. This alignment increases the likelihood of sustained partnership and recurring engagement, reinforcing the embedded model described in previous chapters.

4.3 The Event

To understand how this program functions in practice, it is useful to examine the design of a single event. As outlined in the previous section, STEM-based holidays provide a strong framework for program design due to their built-in thematic alignment with institutional partners. For this study, Earth Day serves as a representative example. Its emphasis on environmental awareness, sustainability, and recycling lends itself particularly well to interactive and interdisciplinary programming and aligns closely with the Eugene Science Center's existing educational initiatives.

A defining feature of this program is the audience's point of entry. Families do not necessarily arrive with the primary intention of attending a concert; rather, they attend the Science Center for Earth Day programming and encounter music as part of a broader educational experience. This distinction is critical. Engagement with music does not require prior interest in classical repertoire but instead emerges through participation in an activity already valued by the audience. The event begins with a pre-concert interactive demonstration focused on the fundamental principles of sound production. Using recycled materials to create handmade instruments, ensemble members can introduce concepts such as vibration and resonance through simple, tangible examples. Children are then invited to construct their own instruments from these materials with instruction from ensemble members. This activity serves multiple purposes: it aligns directly with the Science Center's mission, creates interpretive proximity by connecting abstract musical concepts to physical experience, and subsequently establishes an immediate sense of participation.³⁰ These handmade instruments are then

³⁰ <https://eugenesciencecenter.org/visit/about/>

incorporated into the performance itself through a co-created musical work. In this segment, audience members actively contribute to the sound environment alongside the ensemble, transforming the concert from a passive listening experience into a collaborative event. This participation strengthens social proximity by fostering direct interaction through hands-on engagement. In turn, family members experience the outcomes of the educational component directly, observing both the process and the artistic result through their participating children.

The concert program integrates this participatory work with both existing repertoire and newly commissioned compositions related to Earth Day. Commissioning plays a critical role in the design of the program. New works can be written specifically for this context, incorporating educational elements, interactive structures, or thematic material related to science and sustainability. This approach allows the ensemble not only to expand the repertoire for the reed quintet but also to do so with clearly defined functional applications. Over time, these works can form the basis for a modular, repeatable program that may be adapted for use beyond a single event. By commissioning works tied to specific use cases, the ensemble creates material that can be packaged alongside lesson plans or activity guides and distributed and/or sold to other ensembles. Additionally, these modular program materials have the potential to create embeddedness within the professional community like that of the Link Up program. Importantly, this establishes a potential secondary revenue stream while expanding the program's reach beyond its original venue.

Taken together, this event design demonstrates how proximity can be created across multiple dimensions. Spatial proximity is achieved by situating the performances within a familiar and accessible environment. Interpretive proximity is established through thematic alignment with Earth Day and through the integration of scientific concepts into the musical experience. Social proximity emerges through participatory elements that position the audience as active

contributors rather than passive observers. By aligning these dimensions within a single event, the program creates a cohesive experience that supports both immediate engagement and long-term audience development.

4.4 Measuring Impact

The final consideration in designing this initiative is how success will be defined and measured. Traditional metrics in classical music, mainly revenue and ticket sales, do not fully capture the value of mission-driven, community-embedded programming. Since the primary goal is to develop long-term audience relationships rather than maximize immediate financial return, new success metrics are needed and should be understood before moving forward with the program. For this initiative, success is best understood through measurable indicators aligned with Social Return on Investment (SROI).³¹ These metrics focus on access, engagement, education, and long-term relationship formation, providing a comprehensive account of the program's impact.

A primary category is access expansion. This includes total attendance, the proportion of first-time attendees, and the number of individuals new to live classical music. Demographic data, such as age distribution and family participation, further indicate if the program reaches its intended audience. For the Eugene Science Center initiative, the target demographic is families and young children, making it essential to collect data showing that they are being reached. A second category is audience development and retention, reflecting the program's contribution to long-term sustainability. Metrics here include repeat attendance, continued engagement with the ensemble (such as joining mailing lists or attending other performances), and the frequency with which individuals encounter the ensemble over time. These indicators show whether the

³¹ "REDF Model for Social Return on Investment (SROI)," The Government Outcomes Lab, accessed April 23, 2026, <https://golab.bsg.ox.ac.uk/toolkit/wayfinder-assessment-resources/INDIGO-ARES-0077/>.

program is an entry point into an ongoing relationship or a one-time experience. Educational impact is another critical dimension of evaluation. It can be measured through participation rates in pre-concert activities, engagement levels during interactive components, and qualitative feedback from adult participants and family members gathered through surveys. Additional indicators include whether participants show increased understanding of basic musical or scientific concepts and/or express greater interest in future musical or educational activities. These outcomes reflect alignment with both the ensemble's mission and that of the partnering institution, the Eugene Science Center. The program should also be evaluated by how connected audiences feel to the performers and their experience. Surveys can assess enjoyment, sense of participation, and likelihood of attending similar events in the future.

Finally, embeddedness can be assessed through repeated partnerships with the host institution. These include repeat collaborations with the Science Center, participation in annual programming cycles like Earth Day, and the ensemble's growing reputation as a recognized and expected community presence. Over time, reduced reliance on intensive marketing and increased organic attendance may signal community embeddedness. Together, these metrics provide a multidimensional framework for evaluating success aligned with mission-driven artistic goals. Instead of asking if an event was profitable, this approach asks whether it expanded access, fostered meaningful engagement, and helped develop enduring relationships between the ensemble and its community. It redefines success not as a single outcome but as the cumulative impact of repeated, measurable interactions over time.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study examines structural misalignments between classical music institutions' definitions of their artistic product and how modern audiences engage with cultural experiences. Traditional concert models, formed by historical practices and preservationist values, often position repertoire as the primary product, while audiences increasingly demand experiences defined by context, accessibility, and social meaning. Within this landscape, chamber music ensembles have a distinct advantage due to their scale, flexibility, and organizational independence.

The findings of this lecture-document suggest that sustainability for chamber ensembles may be supported by programming approaches that prioritize audience experience, proximity, and community embeddedness. Rather than relying solely on repertoire or traditional presentation models, ensembles can consider designing events that align with existing audience motivations and reduce barriers to engagement. Mission-driven organizational structures further enable this approach by supporting activities that build long-term audience relationships rather than focusing exclusively on short-term revenue generation. Importantly, this lecture-document does not claim to provide a universal model or guarantee of success. Instead, it outlines a set of considerations and programming parameters through which chamber ensembles may more effectively align their activities with audience behaviors.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The program design model proposed in this lecture-document represents one possible approach to addressing the challenges facing chamber ensembles and should not be understood as a comprehensive or universally applicable solution. Audience behaviors and

community needs vary significantly, meaning programming strategies that are effective in one setting may not translate directly to another. As such, this framework is best understood as a set of guiding considerations rather than a prescriptive formula. Additionally, the implementation of this model demands a substantial investment of time, labor, and organizational capacity, often without immediate or guaranteed financial return. While the approach prioritizes long-term audience development and community engagement, it does not account for short-term economic pressures. This tension highlights the need for careful planning and consideration when allocating time and resources.

5.3 Future Research Directions

While there are multiple potential directions for future research, there are two that are particularly pressing in my mind. The first is the long term results of community-embedded programming on broader patterns of cultural participation. While this paper is focused on audience development at the ensemble level, the next step should be examining whether repeated exposure to a chamber ensemble translates to expanded engagement with the wider classical music industry. For example, data might show a relationship between individuals introduced to live classical music through community-embedded chamber ensembles and a higher likelihood to attend an orchestra, ballet, or opera production. If this relationship can be demonstrated through data collection, chamber ensembles can be positioned as critical audience development tools to the industry at large. Beyond consumer behaviors, future research could examine the role of chamber ensembles in participation in music itself. Again data showing a relationship between chamber ensembles and increased participation in school music programs, private lessons, or even the pursuit of a career in music would position ensembles as a key strategic tool for the industry. It is through this long-term data collection that

I hope to position myself as an expert of this sub-field and nonesuch.reedquintet as a model for emerging chamber ensembles.

A final area of future research concerns the integration of these models into higher education music settings. While entrepreneurial training for performers has become more common, it is typically considered separate from the core artistic training. Future research may consider how concepts of proximity, embeddedness and mission-driven practice may be incorporated into existing training structures. This raises further questions about how institutions might better train musicians to be not just high level-performers, but musicians who engage meaningfully with the communities they serve.

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Appendix A: Metrics of Success

Table 1

Access Expansion		
Structural Access	Demographic expansion	Geographic Reach
Total events per season	% first-time classical attendees	Prior exposure to classical music
Total attendance	% audience under age 35	Age Distribution
% of free vs ticketed events	% audience from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups	Household income range
Unique individuals reached	% audience without prior formal music education	Educational background
Average ticket price	Events in underserved zip code	
% of events in non-traditional venues		

Table 2

Proximity Creation		
Proximity predicts memory retention, repeat attendance and high emotional well being value		
Spacial	Social	Interpretive
Average performer to audience distance	% events with participatory components	% events framed around narrative/contextual themes
Average venue size	Post-event audience-performer interaction rates	% events tied to culturally familiar material
Events in informal/multi-use spaces		% events including educational framing or storytelling
Public transit accessibility		

Table 3

Embeddedness		
High embeddedness predicts increased habitual exposure, which in turn reduces future marketing costs and increases long term patron lifetime value		
Repetition	Institutional Integration	Encounter Friction
Average encounters per audience member per year	School residencies (frequency per institution)	% events requiring advanced ticket purchase
Multi-year partnerships	Healthcare partnerships	% events integrated into existing activities
Number of recurring venues	Civic partnerships	

Table 4

Educational Depth		
Educational programs produce increased academic engagement, reduced after school risk exposure, and increased cultural literacy		
Direct Metrics	Development Indicators	Long-Term Impact
Number of school visits	% students reporting increased confidence	Alumni tracking (college matriculation)
Number of students reached	% students pursuing further arts education	Continued participation in arts
Student specific repeat engagement	Teacher-reported engagement improvement	
Student composed works premiered		

Table 5

Patron Development & Organizational Conversion		
This demonstrates reduced acquisition costs, increased relational capital, and evidence of sustainable funding infrastructure		
Conversion	Long-Term Value	Revenue Diversity
% of ed event participants attending a public concert	Donor retention rate	% of revenue from earned income
% of attendees that attend other music orgs. events	Repeat attendance over 3–5 years	% of earned income from traditional concerts
Donor retention rate	Cross-program engagement over 3-5 years	% of revenue from contributions
		% of contributions from ed-related grants