

	Maastricht
•	• Centre for the
•	• Innovation of
	Classical Music

Rethinking Relevance: Breaking the Classical Frame

Classical Music, Communities and Connections

MCICM International Symposium — April 15–16, 2026 | Opus 9, Maastricht

Unlearn. Listen differently. Reimagine the future of classical music

Classical music is at a crossroads. Around the world, artists and institutions are reimagining what relevance means in a time of social fragmentation, climate anxiety, and digital transformation. Relevance is not a marketing problem, it's a moral and creative challenge. It asks us to unlearn habits of hierarchy, to open our institutions to the unknown, and to compose new relations between artist, audience, and society. How can classical music still matter — and to whom? What does it mean to perform, teach, or listen in ways that connect rather than exclude?

This two-day symposium is not just an academic gathering, but a meeting ground for those who want to shake up inherited traditions and recompose the role of classical music in society. During two days of keynotes, roundtables, performances, and workshops, we will explore how music can build bridges, challenge hierarchies, and create spaces of belonging.

The symposium builds on eight years of research by the Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music (MCICM) — a collaboration between the classical symphony orchestra Philzuid, Conservatorium Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, and Maastricht University. Combining artistic and academic inquiry, MCICM investigates how performance, education, and audience participation can be renewed in artistically and socially relevant ways. This edition focuses on communities and connections: how can classical music empower, include, and create spaces of shared meaning through collaboration and co-creation?

We call on musicians, makers, researchers, educators, and activists to join a collective rethink of classical music's future — not as a tradition to preserve, but as a living practice to reinvent. Together, we'll ask uncomfortable questions, share radical experiments, and imagine musical communities that resonate with the world as it is — and as it could be.

By confronting the historical power structures embedded in classical music, and by showcasing community-driven and participatory projects, *Rethinking Relevance* aims to move beyond the canon and open up new artistic, social, and educational possibilities. Expect co-creation, conversation and collaboration — and above all, a renewed sense of what classical music can mean today.

Call for Projects

Rethinking Relevance is a call to action — to make classical music porous, participatory, and alive. We invite musicians, artists and researchers to present their projects in an open format during our symposium. On 15 April 2026 between 14:00 and 15:30, we would like to give a space for short pitches or presentations. Each panelist gives a pitch of 5 minutes (with max. 5 slides) to introduce (one of your) ‘practices of engagement’. Afterwards a panel discussion structured through different key lessons that we have learnt within MCICM will give space for discussion and questions. Your pitch can include a poster no bigger than A1 (59,4 x 84,1 cm) that you bring yourself to the symposium.

If you would like to be part of our research fair, please submit a one-page document describing your practice of engagement, what you would like to share and what themes and/or areas of interest you think would best fit your pitch. To submit your proposal and for questions, please email us at mcicm-fasos@maastrichtuniversity.nl. The deadline for the call is **2 February 2026**.

Programme Overview

Day 1 – Wednesday 15 April, 2026

Theme: Listening Together, Listening Otherwise

9:30 – 10:30 | Arrival, Registration & Coffee Conversations

Opus 9 Kantine

10:30 – 10:45 | Welcome & Opening Remarks

Peter Peters on behalf of MCICM

Main Stage

10:45 – 11:30 | Keynote I – “The Hidden Musicians Revisited”

Stephanie Pitts (University of Sheffield, UK)

On amateur musical life, belonging, and place.

Moderator: Peter Peters

Main Stage

11:30 – 12:30 | Panel I – “Practices of Engagement: From Experiment to Connection”

Reflections on experiments in audience participation, new ways of collaborating, and co-creating with communities.

Moderator: Veerle Spronck

Main Stage

12:45 – 14:00 | Lunch & Informal Exchange

Opus 9 Kantine

14:00 – 15:30 | Research Fair – “New Voices, New Practices”

Musicians, artists and researchers present their projects in an open format.

Various Locations at Opus 9

15:30 – 16:00 | Tea and coffee break

16:00 – 17:00 | Panel II – “Unlearning Education”

Teaching, learning and listening

Moderator: Felix Havenith & Ruth Benschop

17:00 – 18:00 | Symposium Drinks

Opus 9 Kantine

18:00 – 20:00 | Dinner: restaurant options provided

20:00 – 21:00 | Evening Concert

Students from Conservatorium Maastricht perform innovative projects

Main Stage

Day 2 – Thursday, April 16, 2026

Theme: Reimagining the Musical Commons

09:00 – 9:30 | Morning Coffee & Networking

Opus 9 Kantine

9:30 – 10:30 | Keynote II – “Engaging with Audiences and Communities”

Axel Petri-Preis (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Austria)

On community engagement and the future of music mediation.

10:30 – 12:00 | Roundtable – “Elephants in the Concert Hall”

Can classical music be(come) decolonial?

Moderators: Denise Petzold & Jorge Lozano

12:00 – 13:30 | Lunch & Networking

Opus 9 Kantine

13:30 – 15:00 | Workshops

- *New Music: Problem or Solution?* — Neil T. Smith. Discussions of new music and living composers are often conspicuous by their absence in attempts to innovate classical music. This workshop will delve into the ways in which composers might help solve some of the issues of relevance raised in this symposium, while also looking critically at the ways in which standard performer-composer-commissioner relations might be holding us back from more equitable ideas of co-creation.
- *Classical Music & Storytelling* - Jorge Lozano. Recently, programming and educational strategies in orchestras and concert halls also incorporate forms of storytelling in some of their performances to attract and engage audiences, or experiment with concert formats. This workshop offers participants an opportunity to explore different approaches to the convergence of classical music and storytelling, and invites to adapt them and incorporate them in their own practice, even outside programming or education roles in an organisation.
- *Open(ing) Rehearsal* - Ruth Benschop. Open rehearsals are often seen as a playful way of lowering barriers and including audiences that require little extra effort: only the unveiling of the musicians before the concert commences. But what are the intrinsic qualities of backstage or at home rehearsal practices? What does it take to open up rehearsal? How might practices of practicing change, and how to assess such changes? In this workshop we will explore these questions by rehearsing together. We will collectively open up our own heterogeneous rehearsal practices (by rehearsing and documenting) to articulate existing qualities, explore new skills, as well as foster critical reflection on the performance of rehearsal.

15:00 – 16:00 | Tea and coffee break – Walk to Aula, Minderbroedersberg 4-6

16:00– 17:00 | Farewell Lecture Peter Peters – “New Variations: on innovating classical music”

Aula Minderbroedersberg, Maastricht University

17:00– 18:30 | Farewell Reception

Aula Minderbroedersberg, Maastricht University

About MCICM

The Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music (MCICM) explores how classical music can evolve through collaboration, imagination, and experimentation. Founded by PhilZuid, Conservatorium Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, and Maastricht University, the centre brings together musicians, researchers, educators, and audiences to rethink classical music as a living, social art — one that connects people, places, and ideas.

