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Artistic innovation from within the cracks. Unlocking musical creativity

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Under pressure of declines in the cultural sector, many classical music organisations are reacting similarly with a turn towards predictability regarding both organisational model and artistic output. Through a single-case-study of the business model of artist-run music venue Splendor Amsterdam, this article explores the internal architecture of an alternative practice that is designed to unlock possibilities for artistic innovation in the most unrestricted form.

De culturele sector blijft onder druk staan. Veel klassieke muziekorganisaties reageren op dezelfde manier op die situatie. Ze nemen hun toevlucht tot voorspelbaarheid, zowel wat betreft hun organisatiestructuur als hun artistieke output. Dit artikel bespreekt het businessmodel van Splendor Amsterdam, dat gerund wordt door kunstenaars. De case brengt de interne architectuur aan het licht van een alternatieve praktijk die erop gericht is de mogelijkheden te ontsluiten van artistieke innovatie in haar meest onbelemmerde vorm.

In a cultural field that significantly relies on performances that do not cover their production costs, artists depend on institutions to that extent that their artistic endeavours are mediated by those institutions.¹ Therefore, any disruptive change in the organisations' institutional environment (in the form of policy measures,

austerity, labour conditions, etc.) will have an impact on the artists' creative options. Aphoristically, one could say that the production side (artist) and the presentation side (the artist's arena) of the art world are closely connected and depend on each other's fluctuations. The reciprocal nature of this truism, however, holds an often-underestimated potential, as creativity often emerges from the cracks of this principle. While traditional institutions such as the symphony orchestra, the museum and the theatre are renegotiating their role in the face of possibly fatal budget cuts, alternative organisations are taking shape outside of the traditional and largely subsidised art institutions. However, as new creative possibilities emerge, so do new organisational constraints. Tensions between aesthetics and pragmatics have been well-described in macro-sociological terms as well as at the microlevel of artistic innovation, but there seems to exist little meso-level research that assesses both discourses on the level of the specific organisation.² The question arises as to how, and to what extent, a business model may help in providing an optimal balance between artistic autonomy and the pragmatic necessities associated with operating an arts organisation.



Splendor Amsterdam ©Foppe Schut (courtesy of Splendor Amsterdam)

Over the last decade, classical music organisations have been struck particularly hard by declines in the cultural sector. Arguments over government funding, homogeneous audience bases and the perceived irrelevance of a reproductive institution in an innovation-oriented society dominate the global classical music scene.³ As this broader socioeconomic environment seems to be globally universal, a collective mindset within the music industry also can be identified, often denoted as the 'dominant logic',⁴ or the 'industry recipe'.⁵ This dominant logic is reflected in shared beliefs across firms, and collective responses, causing music organisations around the world to largely react similarly to the current situation by adopting the same organisational structure. At the heart of this industry-wide adoption of a certain dominant logic is the concept of legitimacy.⁶ Glynn asserts that conflicts over legitimacy (which she calls 'identity') easily translate to conflicts over crisis management: legitimacy issues bring into conflict the dual elements of economic utility (where financial return symbolises success and grants legitimacy) and normative ideology (where creativity and artistic pertinence symbolise success and grants legitimacy).⁷ Various studies agree that economic crises in particular tend to favour the business mentality within an art organisation.⁸ Problems regarding income and resource acquisition like subsidising money or private funding prompt managers to favour predictability over uncertainty. As such, an organisational profile is a product of implicit (spontaneous) or explicit (strategic) exchange with a competitive or associated environment. DiMaggio and Powell affirm: 'Organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness'.⁹ This Darwinist quest for fitness goes beyond issues of economic sustainability. As Stinchcombe asserts, a high degree of formal and industry-homogeneous organisation usually correlates to a high level of product uniformity.¹⁰ Traditional art institutions generally operate under relatively strict constraints, which often makes them incapable of providing the logistic and organisational flexibility that is required for experimental, often capricious artistic production.¹¹ In the aesthetic domain, this turn to predictability has favoured a certain selection of artworks from the past, a canon, over contemporary works of art that have not yet endured a historical selection process.¹² Symphony orchestras and music venues, for example, have thus evolved from actively producing cultural bodies to gatekeepers of intangible cultural heritage

that strategically stand beyond any argument over legitimacy; a pragmatic-aesthetic compromise that grants short-time benefits to the organisation but, in many cases, jeopardises the prospect of sustainable creativity. As such, artistic parameters have been receptive to the dominant logic laid out by organisational rationalism.

The resulting gap between artistic aspirations and performance potential has sparked resistance and has provoked alternative assessments of musical practice to materialise. From the 1970s onwards, musicians have repeatedly voiced their wish to reconcile creative freedom with the pragmatic logic of arts organisations.¹³ The resulting discussion led to the reinforcement of boundaries between a small niche of specialised ensembles which were highly focused on artistic renewal and experimentation, and the larger field of traditional orchestras that increased their focus on performing the standardised repertoire. In the wake of the financial crisis of 2008 and the following austerity measures that took place within the Netherlands' cultural sector, increasingly alternative musical ensembles and venues have taken shape attempting to break open this stalemate between the experimental and the traditional realms. Through trial and error, models are being developed to shield art organisations from both organisational pragmatism and commercial attitudes, while keeping the level of creative freedom of the artist as high as possible. The emergence and advance of new organisational initiatives exemplify artists' ubiquitous urge to develop models that actively explore the possibility to foster their creativity in the most unrestricted form, while also being more adapted to the eclectic demands of the present-day audience and financial challenges of the current cultural environment. Motivation for engagement in an alternative circuit of musical production, is shown to originate in a perceived gap between the artist's aspirations and his actual performance.¹⁴ Although the long-term impact of these seminal initiatives is not yet clear, an understanding of their novel approach to music production, programming, management and financing might help explaining, on the one hand, why art organisations have generally remained tied to the dominant logic of long-established forms, and on the other hand, how adaptations and variations to the dominant logic occur in the face of mimetic pressures.

Approach: Business model lens

Through an in-depth case study of Splendor Amsterdam, this article attempts to explore the internal architecture of an alternative practice that challenges the classical music industry's dominant logic. As an organisation that tries to alleviate the artistic and institutional difficulties that are met by traditional organisations, Splendor illustrates the enablers, drivers and any significant barriers associated with this alternative manner of organising. The case-study method is particularly well suited for describing the mechanisms and context of a particular phenomenon in a specific setting.¹⁵ And, as the aim here is not to test existing theories, but rather to reflect on a new occurrence and to let the theory build by drawing links and conclusions based on what is observed, a single in-depth case study is especially suitable for observing and analysing new phenomena.¹⁶ Data on the Splendor case have been collected during several on-site visits in a series of three interviews with key representatives: the chairman and co-founder David Dramm, venue manager Norman van Dartel and co-founding Splendor musician Michael Gieler.



Main concert space before renovation © Foppe Schut (courtesy of Splendor Amsterdam)

To structure the analysis, this article takes on the lens of the business model concept. This concept is increasingly being used to document and analyse the inner

workings of an organisation, highlighting the ways in which specific activities performed by the organisation contribute to its ability to be of value to the organisation's main constituents, such as its audience and customers, its employees and partners, and its surrounding ecosystem. In the past two decades, many different approaches to the business model concept have been proposed in academic literature, with the commonality that most authors view the concept, directly or indirectly, as the core 'logic' or 'architecture' behind value creation.¹⁷ A business model in this sense represents the system that enables an organisation to be *valuable* to others, where the value generated goes beyond mere financial and economic connotations but rather includes the total combination of physical (products, services, monetary, etc.) and symbolic (e.g. pleasure, pride, entertainment, enlightenment, etc.) outcomes of the organisation's endeavours. In recent years, an 'activity-centred' approach to business modelling is gaining ground in which the concept has been defined as the bundle of specific activities that are conducted to satisfy perceived internal and external needs, including the specification of the parties that conduct these activities, and how these activities are linked to each other.¹⁸ The activity system enables an analysis of how the organisation, in dialogue with its environment, is able to create the bundle of different values and in what way the specific activities unlock the possibility to appropriate a share of that value. By focusing on specific activities that represent direct operationalisations of the organisation's core values – defined as shared beliefs held by the organisation's members – as well as on the manner in which these activities are bonded together in a larger coherent and reinforcing scheme, this perspective takes on a holistic approach towards an organisation's capacity for value creation and appropriation. This article follows this description of a business model as it breaks down the process of the transformation of core values into specific activities – which is an approach that is especially suitable for organisational fields that are highly value driven as is often the case in cultural fields.¹⁹ Moreover, it also highlights a fundamental issue that underlies cultural organisations: the distinction between value creation and value appropriation or capture. It is often suggested that the main purpose for artists is value creation by focusing on exploration and artistry, rather than value capture in the form of appropriating some of that created value.²⁰ Value capture can be seen as any returns flowing back to the organisation and its

constituents, which could be in tacit form (financial/monetary gains) or – often equally important in artistic fields – in more symbolic form (gains in the form of room for creativity, increased reputation, feeling of achievement, etc.). Zott and Amit's description, however, highlights the importance of the combination of both value creation and value capture in a healthy and long-term sustainable business model.²¹ Furthermore, this approach to business models also emphasises that value creation occurs in dialogue with an environment and thus highlights the necessity of not focusing on the organisation as a stand-alone entity, but on the behaviour of the organisation within the specific context of its (institutionally induced) environment, including residing norms and dominant logics on how to behave.²² Therefore, in this article, the concept of the business model is used to analyse which specific business model actions are undertaken by our focus organisation, and how they relate to the residing dominant norms within the sector.

Case study: Splendor

In the Splendor initiative, an old centrally located Amsterdam bathhouse was transformed into a professionally equipped music house, which is operated in its entirety by a group of 50 top-flight professional musicians (among them players of the main Dutch orchestras such as the Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Rotterdam Philharmonic, as well as names from the jazz world and the indie music scene) who felt the necessity of having a place for experimentation outside of the institutionalised environments in which they are employed. As such, Splendor brings together composers, musicians and sound artists to jointly operate an artist-run cooperative that independently exploits a music venue in which the musicians have maximal autonomy. The main goal, therefore, is for the venue to act as a facilitator that allows the musicians room for personal artistry and exploration in the broadest sense. Important, however, is that the venue itself is not an artistic experiment: there are no overarching programming, identity or other predefined artistic determinants.

In their specific organisational model in which 'commoning' is an integral part of their business model, responsibility for all aspects of the organisation is shared among all members. Through their organisational decisions, Splendor is able to fully utilise the twofold character of a common good: on the one hand Splendor

exemplifies a use value for a plurality (by providing artistic freedom to all connected artists), on the other it requires a plurality claiming and sustaining the ownership of the common good.²³ Therefore, a strive for maximal personal artistic freedom and autonomy and a shared sense of ownership and responsibility together form the core elements of the Splendor business model. Through operationalising these core values, the artists have created a venue through which they are free to practice and perform, as well as capable of re-evaluating and changing the often-perceived gap between the artists and the public.

In order to make the Splendor business model financially viable, the organisation has developed a financial model that is dependent on different types of income. The city of Amsterdam carried the renovation costs of the building, which they in return rent out to the Splendor organisation. As a start-up investment, Splendor needed EUR 300,000 for further adaptations to the building, and for the purchase and installation of materials. The initial capital input came from the 50 musicians, who each invested EUR 1,000 in the form of a corporate bond, giving the organisation an instant, one-time capital input of EUR 50,000 while utilising the cooperative rationale. The remaining EUR 250,000 was raised through private investors, who in return for providing capital – in the form of purchasing a ten-year bond – received a private concert by one or some of the musicians at home as dividend. Operational costs are covered by a combination of individual ticket sales for concerts (of which 70% goes to the organising musician, and 30% to the venue) and income coming from the approximately 1,200 Splendor members, who in exchange for a yearly contribution of EUR 120 are entitled to designated free concerts, as well as reduced ticket prices. Finally, income through the in-house exploitation of food and beverages goes to the venue.

✦ The Splendor model almost literally emerges from the cracks of the dominant system; not as a parasitic actor, but as a bridge between traditional institutions that offer

stability and security, and the alternative field that offers more prospects for artistic development but is often withdrawn in artistic isolation. +

The organisational form of Splendor is that of a foundation, consisting of two parallel layers: the musicians on the one hand, and a facilitating small management team (fully composed of trained musicians) that support daily operations on the other hand. As artistic autonomy is at the core of the project, all artistic decisions are distributed among all the musicians, exemplifying a genuine form of shared leadership. The group of musicians displays a high degree of diversity, both in terms of instruments and of musical styles employed. This diversity offers unique opportunities for cross-fertilised artistic innovation through unexpected combinations. For the opening event of Splendor, several small-scale concerts had to be organised on short notice. To highlight Splendor's spontaneous way of operating, ad hoc musical ensembles were formed by drawing names out of a hat. Many Splendor concerts originate in random encounters of musicians, who happened to run into each other at Splendor while practising, then listened to each other's work in progress and ended up developing an idea together. A signature event was the 2019 concert called 'Polyphony and Eccentricity', in which baroque music was combined with electronics. The first part of the concert was curated by Splendor musician Sarah Jeffery, who plays the recorder in minimal and synth-pop styles. Her programme combined songs by the medieval female mystic Hildegard von Bingen with loop station improvisations. The second part of the concert featured BLOCK4, a British recorder quartet (invited by Sarah Jeffery) that combines old repertoire with electronics.

Moreover, the diversity of musicians also provides possibilities to fully utilise the venue's capacity and opportunities, as various musicians tend to use the building in different ways, and different moments of the week (e.g. some concerts are more suited for a Sunday afternoon, while others might be more appropriate for a Friday

night). For Gieler, the main value of Splendor is precisely the fact that there is no interference whatsoever with regard to artistic output and planning:

Every Splendor musician employs the venue as he sees fit, and most of them do not even have the explicit goal of doing something together. The outcome on an artistic level, therefore, is very diverse and lacks any kind of logic. Splendor is primarily a facility: there is space to do things, there are plenty of interesting figures walking around, and from time to time an interesting project comes out. Everything happens by chance, and I would not have it otherwise.²⁴

Additionally, the diversity of musicians combined with their connection to established institutions (e.g. large orchestras) provides Splendor with a large and diverse audience base.

Artistic freedom and autonomy

Splendor is meant to be a place free of institutional and artistic boundaries, where anything is possible and appreciated. Therefore, the organisation has the general rule of not making any formal procedures unless it is absolutely required. The open agenda, a simple online document accessible to all Splendor musicians, dictates organisational requirements, and the 50 Splendor musicians never had a formal meeting. In terms of musical programming, there are no limitations: repertoire and newly composed avant-garde music are equally welcomed, and experimentation in content, concept and artist-audience relationship is embraced. Everything is welcome as long as it is initiated by one of the 50 Splendor musicians and fits into the planning. Such a place was missing in the Amsterdam musical landscape: 'We needed somewhere to play little ideas, and make small concerts. That was important. And maybe a place to work', Van Dartel states.

Splendor has made several business model decisions that enable the organisation to further exploit its vision towards artistic autonomy. First, Splendor has decided to employ a 'no-programming programme' for the venue. An open agenda, in which each of the 50 musicians can reserve a slot for any of the three possible performance spaces (housing an audience of 100, 60 or 30 people) in the building

on a first-come, first-served basis allows the musicians to reserve a place for their rehearsal or concert. They are also free to programme a concert played by external musicians that they deem interesting to showcase. By lack of a Splendor programmer, all partaking musicians are free to develop any project they want, without having to answer to anyone but themselves. As such, every musician is both artistically and financially responsible for his/her own projects. Based on the same logic, Splendor has deliberately decided to not make a claim for any subsidies or sponsorships. All operational costs are covered by the membership fees, ticket sales and income generate from the bar. External financing, for instance in the form of subsidies, has the potential to push Splendor into an unwanted context of more institutionalisation as this often comes with its own set of stipulations towards the organisation concerning elements such as organisational structures, reporting, expectations and a certain balance in musicians, concerts, outreach, etc.²⁵ As such, the autonomy which forms the essence of this endeavour could be compromised drastically.

Shared ownership and responsibility

Shared ownership and responsibility forms the second foundational element of the Splendor business model. Propelled by the aforementioned legitimacy crisis in the classical music field, and its resulting pressure on the subsidising system on which it relies, many organisations within this field are increasingly requiring additional tasks and responsibilities from their musicians (e.g. playing commercially popular music to attract new/young audiences, engaging in educational activities, etc.). This has been known to lead to friction, as this increase in responsibilities is often not met with a corresponding increase in artistic ownership: musicians in traditional institutions tend to be barely involved in programming decisions, which are, as argued, increasingly dictated by a pragmatic logic. Splendor, on the other hand, has devised a system of obligations as well as rights: each musician has certain duties towards the organisation as a whole, which collectively unlocks possibilities for unrestricted personal artistic endeavours. The agreed upon responsibilities for each musician are comprised of two elements. First, they concur to give their commitment to the project, and make the initial EUR 1,000 investment. In return for this, each musician

literally received the key to the building. The venue is available to them for 365 days per year, day and night for any musical endeavour, from rehearsals to performances, to create and explore, to produce and to programme in whatever manner they find interesting. Second, each musician commits themselves to giving one 'member-concert' per year, to which the Splendor members have free entrance. On average a Splendor member attends six out of the possible 50 member-concerts yearly. The collective mentality is not only cultivated among the musicians, but the organisation deliberately attempts to induce a sense of co-ownership among the audience (especially among the frequently attending members). Splendor concerts are often purposefully organised to enhance the artist-audience connection. The informal setting during the concerts – which frequently includes many moments of interaction with the audience – as well as after the concerts, when artists and audience meet at the bar for discussion, induces a sense of artistic exchange. For example, concerts often have intermediary discussion moments in which the audience can offer suggestions for improvements, after which the same programme is repeated taking into account the provided feedback. Such a 'work-in-progress' approach enables feedback loops between artists and audience that is nearly impossible in the more distant institutionalised classical music settings. As such, Splendor is more than a one-way music venue, but it profiles itself as a peer-to-peer as well as an artist-to-audience meeting and workspace where musicians can freely communicate with their audience and with each other.



Main concert space after renovation © Foppe Schut (courtesy of Splendor Amsterdam)

By collectively taking up the aforementioned responsibilities and investing in the project in terms of time and effort as well as financially, combined with the foundational choice of having no programming, the organisation is able to unlock the room for personal artistic freedom. In this manner, Splendor is truly a representative of a 'common good': it is owned, produced and sustained by all.

Key in making this system work, is that all musicians through the sense of ownership understand that the organisation as a whole needs to balance personal artistic freedom with certain pragmatic issues (availability of time and space, and overall financial viability). Splendor will never interfere with the content of the programming of the individual musicians, but the venue manager – one of the fifty musicians who takes up a facilitating role on the practical side of the organisation – does give suggestions on how to maximise the use of the building. For example, it is always allowed to give a concert that will probably only attract a very limited amount of

people, but then it might be suggested to plan it on the same evening as another small concert so that they can work with just a limited staff for the bar that day.

Discussion

In March of 2018, the 1000th concert was performed in Splendor's main hall, kicking off the musical festivities of the organisation's five-year anniversary. Throughout their short existence, the organisation has managed to develop a model that presents a model that goes beyond the traditional combined market and state approach, seemingly avoiding the artistic constraints that are commonly associated with both. Splendor does also attract criticism, and continues to face limitations and difficulties along the way.

Firstly, Splendor realises that neighbouring organisations in the Amsterdam region might feel that their alternative concert circuit contaminates the music market. Currently, Splendor strictly follows its policy of having a 'no-programming' programme: all musicians have maximal freedom to plan concerts at the venue as they see fit. On some occasions, Splendor musicians performed a low-threshold try-out of a concert that was programmed in traditional venues such as The Royal Concertgebouw just one day later for up to three times the Splendor ticket price. Although these overlaps are avoided in the form of an informal gentlemen's agreement, the lack of any programming strategy hinders this distortion of competition.

+ In that sense, the strength of the business model stems not from focusing on a planned outcome, but rather on being true to the foundational premises: the Splendor core values - shared ownership and artistic autonomy -, which have been stable, well-defined and broadly recognised among all

participating partners - musicians and audience alike - +

Secondly, the Splendor committee acknowledges that the pragmatic side of running an art organisation inevitably interferes with the artistic policy at some point, and that the organisation therefore has a somewhat limited growth potential. The question arises whether the idealised manner of non-programming can remain manageable as pragmatic issues (e.g. economic viability) impose themselves, as pragmatic considerations are sometimes necessary to guarantee the artistic freedom. Even within the current model, there are also some minor restrictions in terms of programme feasibility. As a minimum of pragmatic necessities has to be considered (bills have to be paid, staff has to be compensated and the building needs to be maintained), a certain balance has to be struck that maximises the use of the building. While Van Dartel contends that a learning curve irons out most asymmetries, he equally admits that he sometimes applies a 'soft coaching' to fully exploit the building's possibilities. 'The goal is not to do as many concerts as possible, but to keep this freedom we need to make it work. We need to make some choices'. Manifestly, upholding the organisation's core value of shared ownership (as opposed to the organisation's dependence on external sources of income) requires compromises on the side of full creative autonomy.

These choices also manifest themselves as practical restrictions. For example, only 50 musicians can take part in the Splendor system. An increased number of participating musicians would require a larger building, logistic upgrades, more sophisticated planning tools and all the wage costs associated with these changes. A democratically chosen representative committee of Splendor musicians decides on the eligibility of candidates who show interest in joining the Splendor team, when a position becomes vacant. As this selection process is unavoidable, certain criteria have to be met in order to be considered as a Splendor musician. These selection criteria do not consider musical virtuosity – as a high level of excellence is an a priori requirement – but mainly cover the musician's intrinsic motivation, capability to

inspire and complementarity to the existing group. Thus, despite the adage of radical artistic openness, the Splendor model is enclosed by the 50 professional musicians. The question arises whether the current organisational model has the potential to upscale beyond this number. As stated, the Splendor project only works through shared responsibility of all members, as it requires all of them to claim and sustain the ownership of the artistic premises. Van Dartel: 'Everybody is responsible for the building; everybody is an owner. It's not my party, it's everybody's'. The Splendor representatives agree on the improbability to upscale this model in a manner that the plurality still works as a plurality and feels as one. Upscaling the model would most likely amount to assuming the organisational model of the traditional concert venue, which would position Splendor in direct competition with more muscular players in the field. As such, the artistic independence that is the added value of the Splendor business model, would be compromised.

Thirdly, there are uncertainties over the possibility to duplicate the Splendor model or even deploy it as a new standard model. As the unique possibilities of the Splendor model seem to resonate with many more musicians, requests came to see whether the model could be copied in other cities. Specifically, a funder in Rotterdam has made a venue available and inquired whether Splendor's initial drivers would be willing to duplicate the model there. As the Rotterdam situation is launched from a more top-down approach than the bottom-up initiative that started Splendor Amsterdam, the organisation is faced with many questions that can only be answered over time. For example, questions arise surrounding what organisational and business model elements are opportune to be copied, and what elements need to be adjusted to the particular contextual situation. The imperfections of the Splendor model, and the inevitable compromises with regard to the organisation's core values, suggest that the model only works when it is cautiously adapted to the specific institutional context in which the model is embedded.

Finally, similar to the previous point, there is an anxiety both within and without the Splendor ranks that the organisation's business model might become a harmful precedent that can be strategically used by policy administrators to justify the abolition of subsidies. If the Splendor model would be put forward as an exemplary design for self-governance, the model could easily be appropriated by a logic of

austerity. In 2015, the city of Amsterdam awarded its annual Amsterdam Prize for the Arts, the most important cultural prize in the city, to Splendor. In the jury report, the artistic and creative profile that Amsterdam cultivates as a city, is explicitly referred to:

I AMsterdam: that is the motto to promote Amsterdam and to profile the city as an international, dynamic environment (...) and a laboratory for innovation. These qualities can be brought back to the present sub-climate in which creative people find themselves at home. People who not only make beautiful things, but also show what they like and, that way, reflect upon the city and society.²⁶

Further on, the report emphasises the exemplary role Splendor plays in the city of Amsterdam:

Splendor reflects the spirit of our time in the best sense: independent, through all musical genres, professional and cooperative at a high level. (...) The jury hopes that Amsterdam will be woken up by your work, time and again.²⁷

This calling to the entrepreneurial attitude, formulated as the emblematic spirit of our time, can lead to the perverse result that artists and organisations are now expected to fully maintain themselves. Applied on a larger scale, this would arguably enhance market conformism of creative organisations, undermining the artistically emancipatory movement of the alternative organisation. The aforementioned coordination problem between pragmatic necessities of the presentation sphere and artistic aspirations of the production sphere can thus take the form of a vicious cycle: creative solutions to institutional crises may in time lead to the intensification of the very same crisis.

The reality is that most of Splendor's 50 members are established musicians who have stable incomes elsewhere. For example, Splendor's musicians include musicians of the renowned Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and The Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra. The appeal of Splendor is not the financial return, but the fact that it provides musicians with a convenient space, in the material as well as in the non-material sense, to launch their creative endeavours in whichever way they see fit. This artistic rationale of creative freedom is generally weaker in traditional institutions, as a result of organisational inertia. The fact that large art organisations have larger financial resources principally enables them to engage in artistic experimentation, but the same secure comfort leads them to avoid changes that would potentially affect it negatively.²⁸

Conclusions and implications for management

Developed out of a sensed urgency among a group of musicians for more autonomy, the Splendor case is an example of an alternative artistic organisation that tries to counter one of the most crucial challenges of a modern arts organisation: how to develop and maintain a business model that shields the organisation from pragmatic pressures while unlocking possibilities for artistic autonomy. This article has tried to reveal the strengths and limitations of the Splendor model.

Central to Splendor's artistic profile is the open programme approach where repertoire and experiment are equally valued. This no-restriction policy cultivates a feeling of artistic ownership by the musicians that is often lacking in traditional institutions. Importantly, Van Dartel has stressed that the way Splendor works, is not the outcome of any organisational or artistic planning and preferences. The present situation, characterised by a heterogeneity of both musicians, concerts and artistic currents, is the accidental outcome of the open structure, and a product of what is considered artistically urgent by the artists themselves. In that sense, the strength of the business model stems not from focusing on a planned outcome, but rather on being true to the foundational premises: the Splendor core values (shared ownership and artistic autonomy), which have been stable, well-defined and broadly recognised among all participating partners (musicians and audience alike). Building up from shared core values as a consistent, impermeable base, the next steps in designing a

strong business model are closer to an art than to a science: many paths can be taken that possibly reach different conclusions. What is important is that all choices that are made together reinforce one another, and come together in a logical coherent manner. For example, Splendor's choice of limiting the group to 50 musicians reinforced their core value of shared ownership, which in turn ensures that all participants contribute to maintaining the system of rights and responsibilities that unlocks the possibility for artistic autonomy.

The Splendor model almost literally emerges from the cracks of the dominant system; not as a parasitic actor, but as a bridge between traditional institutions that offer stability and security, and the alternative field that offers more prospects for artistic development but is often withdrawn in artistic isolation. As such, the Splendor model of an artist-run cooperative has the potential to play an interesting complementary role in many cultural fields currently under pressure for innovation. However, caution should be placed in lauding the Splendor model as a *passé-partout* solution. No single strategy can guarantee that a viable economic and artistic balance will be reached within any artistic organisation. The complexity of the cultural field with its many actors, influences and context-specific tensions requires custom-made solutions that should be modified to cater to specific needs.

Despite limitations to the model, such as the uncertain potential for upscaling and duplication, the Splendor model enables cross-fertilisation between established institutions and the innovative field, because the same musicians are involved in both systems. The resulting logical story that is unlocked as a constant dialogue through the Splendor business model, is what ultimately creates and captures value for the larger community involved with Splendor, be it the artists, audience, or the larger artistic ecosystem of Amsterdam. In order to fulfil its prolific role, however, the Splendor model seems bound to remain complementary to the current dominant logic. Precisely because Splendor is unable to provide any financial security, the organisation can only survive by virtue of an institutionalised subsidising system, or at least an overarching system in which the partaking Splendor musicians have a guaranteed income. Should that larger environment collapse (be it as an austerity measure, as a result of the recuperation of alternative models like Splendor, or both), Splendor could only adopt the dominant logic of pragmatism and reconcile itself to

the constraints of artistic freedom. Within the current situation, the Splendor model provides a valuable, and perhaps even necessary addition to the wider music ecosystem, as it unlocks musical creativity with prospects for artistic development.

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Footnotes

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