

Response to Stella Duffy on the arts, elitism, and communities

Originally posted on blog *Desiring Progress*, on 6 July 2017, at <https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2017/07/06/response-to-stella-duffy-on-the-arts-elitism-and-communities/> . Some replies can be found at this link.

An article published in *The Guardian* last week by Stella Duffy (**‘Excellence in the arts should not be defined by the metropolitan elite’, June 30, 2017**) has generated a considerable amount of response on social media from musicians and academics I know. Rather than keep this debate within that social media bubble, I wanted to make public some responses to the thorny issues involved, so am printing these below. Personally, I can see how Duffy’s aims are well-intended and sincere, but the suggestions would create more problems than they solve (see my response below).

I am happy to print other responses, so long as they focus on the issues and do not entail any personal attacks – if people have some considered thoughts, please do post them below or e-mail me at ian at ianpace dot com , and I will have a look and may add them to these.

[**ADDENDUM:** Anna Bull has written a response to some of the posts below, which can be found **here**. Further responses to this blog post can be found **here**.]

Jim Aitchison, composer

It is disturbing that both the left (I assume here in this article) and the right seem to be marching together towards delegitimising aspects of education, specialisation, depth, command of material detail, dexterity, high levels of understanding and attainment and more challenging cultural substance. It seems to me naive to suppose that “genuine culture for all...and community-led culture” will see the demise of gates, shibboleths, exclusions, hierarchies, cronyism. It will simply be replaced by a different forms of ‘elitism’ (a new ‘elite’ of the rigorously and equally de-skilled and/or right-skilled, cleansed of supposed past forms of privilege, untainted by previous apparently bankrupt expert knowledge). I’m surprised to see what comes across as a very much left-leaning sensibility re-articulating sentiments that came out of the mouths of various well known right wing voices.

The kind of cultural practice I think she is referring to is already well in the ascendant – anyone who has to fill in an Arts Council GFA form will be aware of the necessity of the right kind of wider community engagement and that this has been a part of the application process for many years, and the rise of ‘collectivist’ community style work in visual art is definitely already present, ref Assemble winning the Turner Prize, and the activities of Open School East. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with these kinds of community artistic practices and approaches which can be valuable and fascinating. However, they are also open to being as flawed as any other approach to making art, and it becomes a serious problem if their ideologies ever become

mobilised as part of a process of cleansing out other approaches deemed unsound and wrong by some unaccountable panel of unchallenged 'new elite' arbiters spread out in the ether.... Hopefully the latter are as much a misleading generalisation as so-called 'metropolitan-based thinking'.

Bill Bamberger, unaffiliated writer and translator.

This question, this conflation, is a major element in what makes the article's arguments blurry and (in the long run, I think) subject to being abused for anti-intellectual and economic ends. "Culture" might best be considered anything that wouldn't exist without people—be it material, intellectual, et al. "Creativity," as she is using it, seems to mean simply making something, anything. If so, in that sense, everyone can of course tap into their "creativity." This is why so many who want to "work in the arts" (that is, get paid for doing so) are constantly having to drum up ideas that involve "outreach," usually going into a school or a community and having a group "create" while they direct in some way. "The arts" then become both a commodity, and a profession like any other. Something else that's conflated: "artist" with "someone who works in the arts." They are not the same, in my mind. The underlying resentment beneath much of what is asserted/included in the article is, for many, economic more than aesthetic— 1) "Why should so and so get money for making music/paintings/etc. when I don't?" & 2) The all-too familiar "Why does the government give some of my money to music/paintings/ etc. that nobody I know likes?" Such underpinnings do not "create inclusion" as much as they give everyone more justification to feel noble when they belittle or dismiss another's efforts and achievements, and encourage the pushing aside of work that's out of the ordinary. Obviously these are just a few facets of this big question, but, again, I think that yes, clearer terms would help immensely.

Geoffrey Chew, Professor Emeritus of Music, Royal Holloway, University of London

The Stalinist diktat of 1950 in Czechoslovakia: "Composers go with the people", delegitimizing various types of compositional activity and announcing that they were henceforth invalid, including some activities that had been undertaken before the war by leftists anxious to bring culture to the workers. Peer review was now required (another of the pamphlets in the same series put it succinctly by saying that "Party criticism is a co-creator of culture").

The pamphlet in question was a speech by Miroslav Barvík at the first plenary meeting of the Union of Czechoslovak Composers. There is **an article online about it by Tom Svatos** though I think it is not very plausible that Barvík was primarily responsible for its contents – I guess he was jumping to orders.

Franklin Cox, Associate Professor of Theory, Cello, and Composition, Wright State University

I find the report painfully timely: “In the context of the deep and widespread political division expressed through the 2016 EU referendum campaign and vote, it is increasingly clear that new approaches to many of the UK’s political processes require urgent and radical attention. This includes how cultural policy operates – and who and what cultural policy is for.

I find this passage painfully obvious: the Brexit issue is going to be used as a wedge to push this person’s ideology. How is her ideology going to end the controversy over Brexit? Isn’t the issue controversial because people have radically different views on it? How will amateur art-making change that? How will it prevent Nigel Farage from lying to the public?

Culture shows us who we are; it reflects who we are now and supports us to become who we might be. then the culture we are sharing and consuming is not that of our whole society. It therefore not only fails to represent us, it risks contributing to the divisions we are now experiencing.

So according to this author, Shakespeare isn’t really culture, because it doesn’t reflect who we are “now” or support us in becoming “who we might be” (what a nonsense phrase!). This is a pretty obvious consequence of the thin notion of culture as “whatever people do”. So eating at McDonald’s is culture, too, as is shopping for designer handbags. I guess all we need now is to hold up a big mirror to reality and call it “culture”.

Why does this mirror need support? Culture is already going on all around us, and it doesn’t need any subsidies.

But this novelist – isn’t that an elite activity that doesn’t reflect culture as a whole? – wants funding for activities that she supports. Those evil old elite artists whose artwork evidently had something to do with Nigel Farage have to get out. Once we’re rid of them, there won’t be any more division in the arts community.

And let’s make sure to put up a big fence, too, so that can’t sneak back in.

Björn Heile, Professor of Music, University of Glasgow

Those of us working in culture talk a lot about the arts ecology, but in any ecology some parts must die for new ones to thrive. It might be time to let go of some of our outdated practices. Our commitment to “excellence and quality” as defined by mainstream, metropolitan-based thinking many decades ago, might need to shift to a new version of “excellence and quality”, one defined by a new generation of makers and creators – and this time from every part of society.

It’s hard to say what Duffy has in mind (the whole article never mentions what kinds of art and culture she does and doesn’t approve of), but doesn’t that sound a tad Stalinist? The various dichotomies between ‘elites’ and ‘people/communities/everyone’; metropolitan/old and makers and creators etc. are really troubling.

Because the pool we’re drawing from is wider, we’ll get better art and better artists – and because science is culture too, better science and better scientists.

We all want more people to engage with the arts, actively and passively, and this would have all sorts of positive consequences, but it isn't quite so simple, and the reason for that isn't that metropolitan-based thinking or elitism deliberately prevent this from happening.

The question is how quality is defined. There is silence on this here, but I guess what is implied in the text is: 'that which involves or pleases the greatest number of people.'

Stuart MacRae, composer

Regarding the use of the terms 'culture', 'creativity' and 'the arts': surely there are clear distinctions? I think it's partly the treatment of such terms as synonymous that leads to an either/or mentality in discussions about the arts and particularly their funding.

Michael Morris, Professor of Philosophy, University of Sussex

The argument for democracy in politics is not that it leads to things being done better, but that it's part of the goal of politics that everyone should be a part of it. Similarly, there's no reason to think democracy in art will lead to better art; and it's not obviously a goal of art itself that everyone should be a part of it – even if that's something we all might want for other (most obviously political) reasons. What this piece presents is a political goal presented as an artistic goal. The problem is that that then begins to look like a rather sinister politics, even, since it drills art, of all things, into conformity with politics.

Eva Moreda Rodriguez, Lecturer in Music, University of Glasgow

The work we are talking about – grassroots, created by professionals and non-professionals together, often in communities rather than on main stages and in recognised venues – largely takes place outside the funded mainstream. Allowing everyone to join in, not simply as audiences and consumers, but as active participants, as creators, will result in a far greater array of work to engage with.

How is this non-mainstream, I wonder? Every orchestra, opera, museum, writers' centre etc. etc. in the country has a thousand outreach programmes where children and adults can "do" things for themselves.

Ian Pace, pianist and musicologist

Our commitment to "excellence and quality" as defined by mainstream, metropolitan-based thinking many decades ago, might need to shift to a new version of "excellence and quality", one defined by a new generation of makers and creators – and this time from every part of society.

If Duffy was saying that arts funding and decision making are too centralised, and more of this needs to be devolved to the regions, I could absolutely agree. But it doesn't sound like this is what is at stake?

If we want cultural democracy, genuine culture for all, elitism must make way for creativity and community-led culture. We need to offer everyone not only access to the products of creativity, but access to the means and processes of creativity – only then will we have an inclusive culture for, by and with all.

This is uncomfortably close to the view associated with advocates of *Hausmusik*, the *Jugendbewegung*, and so on – and their disdain for educated or professionalised cultural activity. In that context it was linked to a virulent anti-semitism, with education and professionalisation in the arts associated with Jewish people. There is no sign of any such racial ideology here, but one should be wary of viewing 'community' as necessarily a wholly benevolent or benign thing. Communities are frequently defined as much by who they exclude as who they include; appeals to 'community' and rejection of 'experts' are the bread-and-butter of populist politics. The debate about competing forces of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* never gained the same traction in the English-speaking world, to my knowledge, as it did amongst Germans ever since Ferdinand Tönnies framed the dichotomy in his 1887 book (even though it was taken up by US sociologist Talcott Parsons). For obvious reasons, this debate became more urgent in Germany in the twentieth century, but I believe it is relevant more widely.

I certainly believe art has, and should have, a social dimension, but this is by no means necessarily synonymous with its simply attempting to satisfy and second-guess the supposed desires of particular 'communities'. On the contrary, I believe it is vital that there can also be a critical art, which can deal with uncomfortable and unsettling phenomena, represent non-populist and minority perspectives, and look beyond the existing world (and existing societies) towards what might be, not just what has been. A space needs to be made for this in ways which are unlikely through the vagaries of the market, or for that matter through some types of community art projects.

The principle of facilitating art, especially the type of art I describe above, through money garnered through taxation and redistributed through public spending – via arts organisations administered by those with a regular day-to-day engagement with artistic activity, with politicians keeping some distance, is a good one, I believe, certainly better than relying on wholly undemocratic sources of private capital. Imposing narrow communitarian ends upon it is very limiting; art is not just a means for producing social harmony. The question of who gets to do the administering is a difficult one, and certainly it can lead to entrenched power, favoritism, and the like. Some mechanisms for periodic democratic review of funding decisions is necessary, and that does entail some oversight by politicians, who are at least subject to a democratic vote. But I believe this can be managed so as to be as fair and equitable as any rival systems.

Already there are many stipulations on arts funding, to do with access, outreach, education projects, demonstrating community benefit, and the like. I worry very much that decisions are being made on anything but the nature of the art being produced. Duffy's proposals are very vague – for example, who selects which 'makers and creators' get to be the new aesthetic arbitrators? – if well-meaning. But I fear they

would make this situation even worse. Placing populist stipulations upon artistic activity, as a condition of its being funded or otherwise supported, has a poor history associated with despotic regimes, mostly in order to marginalise and silence minority voices.

Camden Reeves, composer, Professor of Music, University of Manchester

‘I think people should create whatever they want to create. I think people should listen to, or go to, whatever they want to listen to or go to. I think people should read whatever they want to read. We don’t have to like what they all do. But I don’t really want any of us to tell artists what to do. That’s the fun of it: freedom.

Anyway, the only way to influence art is through art. If she wants to change culture, she needs to do that through her work. From what I know of Duffy’s work, she has every reason to have faith that it can do that.

Frances Wilson, who blogs as **The Cross-Eyed Pianist**

Today it seems to me that “excellence”, “achievement” and “inclusivity” are equated with commercial returns. It’s no longer “art for art’s sake” but whether the art (which has become “the product” is commercially viable. Will it create revenue, bums on seats, income. As I see it, this is the primary reason why arts subjects are being sidelined in education – they are not sufficiently “commercial” and do not bring obvious “returns”. Creativity is regarded as a dilettante activity because it does not necessarily produce visible, concrete commercial returns.

To be perfectly frank I want to stop having to read articles like this written by people who exist in a precious Uber middle class intellectually elite bubble and who exert their own view of what constitutes “culture” on the rest of us. In my romantic cultural utopia art galleries, theatres and concert halls are welcoming and open to all, not places that are guarded by the “educated” or intellectually elite (and I know plenty of people who’d like to keep them like that = exclusive). Many “ordinary people” do not engage with “culture” because they feel people like the author of the article do not think they are sufficiently “qualified” to engage with that culture.

Marc Yeats, composer

Choice. Everyone needs to have the widest possible choice when making decisions about what art and culture they enjoy and appreciate. Choice enables people’s participation in, and creation of art to develop across a lifetime.

For many, cultural choices are increasingly defined by what they are given. More precisely, what they are exposed to from an early age and throughout their lives through advertising, the media, fashion, block-buster films and various forms of music, for example. All too often, these experiences are guided by commercial considerations. In the case of music (and many other cultural outputs), there is a strong financial value backing the saturation of these perceived iconic forms of

culture – it is all around us and product-placed in exactly the same way as a washing powder, new car or ‘can’t live without’ gadget. We are brainwashed into believing these products make our lives better, enhance our kudos or sexiness and most of all, represent our ‘relevance’ in modern society to the degree that the products ‘speak’ of whom we are and what we aspire to be. This is easiest to see where music is placed with products to enhance their value and where ultimately, the music having become recognisable through repeated exposure in advertising (or appropriation from elsewhere because of its recognisable qualities) can call to mind the product even when the product is no longer present – the music has taken on the marketed values that the product was deemed to possess. So it is with various strains of culture we are exposed to. It is easy to believe that in experiencing these cultural products and deciding which ones we need, we are exercising some kind of choice. It is true we are exercising a choice, but it is extremely limited and often belies a corporate ideology that is driven by profit. By its very nature of ‘flooding’ the market, this ‘profit motive’ drives out everything else. We end up having no choice at all, or rather, only the choices those who manipulate the cultural markets allow us to take through their forms of familiarisation.

It is easy for those who consume such culture to place a strong value on it, to invest in it, and of course, the marketing that envelops such cultural outputs easily becomes a self fulfilling prophecy inasmuch as the more people invest, the more they believe the product to be of a good quality, as we all get pulled into the market value system. And these cultures amass huge numbers of devotees, too, bringing further strength to the argument that it must be a good product because so many have invested in it. We end up with the scenario that we know what we like and we like what we know. When this reasoning becomes the new ideology to rationalise and give quality to a product, or in the case of this article, arts and culture, we are in a very dangerous position, not least because all objectivity is lost, replaced solely by the weight of financial investment, numbers and populism.

I’m not for one moment saying that all popular culture is not of quality, as that is blatantly untrue; but to assume, as in this article, that a new definition of quality needs to be established purely around many people having had a good time with an art experience, sets my alarm bells start ringing. And they ring even louder when this new definition of quality is accompanied by the rhetoric around ‘elitist art’ and ‘metropolitan based thinking’ which (exclusively) supports this ‘other’ non-popular art, being taken out of the picture completely, their perceived power base and value system destroyed and their work shown for the hollow, self indulgent sham it obviously is.

At the back of all this there is something fascist emerging – a compulsion to dictate, justified through mass appeal, what good art is, and how appallingly irrelevant elite art (whatever that is), has become, that it should be reappraised, downcast and even (as a sub text) seen as something filthy that represents everything that’s wrong with society’s pernicious divisions. It most certainly shouldn’t be supported with public money, as it doesn’t represent the people! Let’s put elite artists in the bin along with ‘experts’, but hang on to our beloved elite athletes, as they are loved by millions.

Change ‘elite’ for ‘minority’, and you can see where I’m heading.

Access, learning and participation in the arts are, I believe, an essential, life-enriching entitlement for everyone that should be accessible across a lifetime. Such opportunities are not just about fun (although it is a great starting point), but also about stimulating further interest, inquisitiveness, understanding, reaching out, challenging, gaining a context of your own culture set among others, development and aspiration. Most of all, participation and access, not least arts education in schools, is about exposing students to an informed and supported wide-ranging variety of cultural outputs that following explanation and discussion, ultimately equip individuals with the discernment and tools to make up their own minds about what holds value for them. Being able to contrast and compare empowers people to make the very choices I'm so keen on; choices that fewer children and adults are able to exercise with each passing year.

Yes, let's absolutely acknowledge the areas of exclusion that exist across the arts and do everything we can to make them inclusive. However, you cannot achieve true inclusion or true choice through a pro-active agenda to exclude minority (non-populist) arts.

All people are capable of being creative, but not all creativity will lead to great art unless all criteria, discernment and objectivity is lost and ALL creativity equals great art. This article appears to suggest that a 'democratic', popular realignment of values will ultimately lead to everything becoming great because everyone enjoys it and says it is such.

Consequently, nothing will have any value at all.

Here are some further responses since the blog was originally posted:

Rose Dodd, composer

Stella Duffy writes a considered article on the current cultural landscape in the UK, as she sees it, from her area of activity. From my perspective 'creativity and community-led culture' has already made great inroads into places where elitism used to preside like an archaic old great uncle presiding like a boring, overbearing and outmoded oaf at the dinner table. Things have moved on. The UK is increasingly diverse and represented increasingly well in all areas of community arts practice to more specialist, niche artistic endeavour, including music. It is perhaps utopian to dream of a world where 'all ages' are engaged in further developing our cultural landscape. With inflationary pressures many are scraping just enough money to put bread on the proverbial table, while the few busy themselves in creative endeavour. Stella Duffy's article outlines just one view of utopia; utopia being sought should surely be applauded by us all, in this dismal political climate. The Guardian could commission a series following on from this, expressing many views drawn from our contemporary cultural landscape, opening a proper conversation on the arts, shining as a hopeful beacon into the future. I for one, would advocate an overhaul of GCSE Music curricula, as these lessons are where music is first encountered in any formal sense to so many children. If the Music curriculum at this level were more relevant at this tantalising moment in a child's life, there would be greater potential impact. There is

so much to talk about in this vast sea of cultural exchange, (as is evidenced by the brilliant and strong opinions as initial replies/comments), Stella Duffy's article is a solid beginning.

Max Erwin, PhD student, music, University of Leeds

If this article is dangerous, it's not because it portends a sort of beer hall putsch of people who do pitch class set theory or whatever; it's because it clothes itself in this particularly rarified language of condescension (although I believe this accusation has now been flung at the objections to it as well). Rephrased, the real threat of this article is not to the arts, but to the effectiveness of left-wing causes. There's a sort of neoliberal hangover that media like The Guardian (and, in America, The New Yorker, the NYT, etc etc) have never really recovered from, this thinking that culture is at once popular, direct, monolithic, necessary, and emancipatory, that Stephen Fry and J. K. Rowling are important voices and thinkfluencers. Under this mode of thought, culture is not something that is participated in but rather hoisted upon the people, Adorno-and-Horkheimer-style. This is the thinking that allows liberals to chide Corbyn for quoting Shelley, as if a quip from Wonder Woman would somehow connect better: the idea that there's one mass culture, that zeitgeist is a zero-sum game.

Frankly, I'm concerned that both the article and the responses to it are perhaps a bit wide of the mark. Brexit and Trump didn't show that culture is elitist, they showed that there is no culture in the singular. Beyoncé's support of Clinton was no less effective than Ferneyhough's. The desire for "more people to engage with the arts" is itself the problem. It's a blinkered transactional view: you read some Dickens, you gain x amount of empathy points; you binge Doctor Who, you're plugged into the cultural mainframe. If arts and/or culture are truly worthwhile (and, you know, jury's still out I guess), surely that worth is not best served by practitioners doing the sort of "outreach" done by knockoff-Rolux salesmen. If engagement is desired, it is served not through outreach, but economic reforms that restore the free time to the workweek of lower and middle class workers – artists and academics among them – that current deregulation and austerity has obliterated. Art and culture will always be there, the issue is creating a society where the enjoyment of life and all that comes with it is maintained to a degree that enables people to, as Camden put it, "listen to, or go to, whatever they want to listen to or go to.

Frances M. Lynch, singer and composer

It makes my heart sink to think of this – far from being a fashion, quality and skill are the backbone, the essence of arts going back through the mists of time – without it we face a future of mediocrity not of new and innovative ideas – as someone who rarely performs or writes these days for the so called elite I can see that everyone just knows and feels that quality when they experience it – regardless of background or education – without necessarily knowing why they know it (not always aligned with liking it.....)

Sasha Valeri Millwood, musician & musicologist; doctoral researcher, University of Glasgow

Arnold Schoenberg, in his essay ‘New Music, Outmoded Music, Style and Idea’, argues “if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art.”. This chiasmus is an apposite corrective to those who claim that art could be an universal means of communication and engagement — even language cannot achieve that! There are as many interpretations of a work as there are interpreters; therefore, to speak, as Duffy does, of “culture by and for all”, is naïve at best and doctrinaire at worst (others have already commented eloquently on the political repression with which such paradigms have been associated). No society consists of a single, immutable “culture” (nor has any such society ever existed, notwithstanding the claims of some xenophobes), and a society which did consist thereof would not be a desirable outcome. Duffy’s rhetoric of “ecology”, and her argument that “some parts must die for new ones to thrive”, alludes to the natural environment. If one were to take that allusion further, one would observe that a thriving “ecology” in nature, rather than being a monoculture, consists of a variety of species (and indeed sub-species) which are, to various degrees, interdependent. Correspondingly, then, it would be the height of vanity and folly to require (whether through force or through funding pressures) all artistic endeavour to be conducted according to a fixed set of precepts and values, no matter how well intentioned.

Therefore, I find Duffy’s call for re-evaluating the criteria for “excellence and quality” to be suspect. Her conception appears (although does not claim explicitly) to be grounded in measuring the quantity of people directly engaged in the making of a work of art. Yet, it is possible for such direct engagement to be superficial; equally, it is possible for less direct forms of engagement to be profound, locupletative experiences. Leaving aside the issues of evaluating the quality of direct or indirect engagement, the fact remains that the impact of artistic endeavour is unamenable to quantitative measurements, and no amount of so-called “smart” technology, tracking, and surveillance will alter this fundamentally. Consequently, any attempt to implement a criterion such as, to quote Heile’s interpretation of Duffy’s article, “that which involves or pleases the greatest number of people” would end up becoming “that which can be measured by some objective, albeit potentially crude and unrepresentative, means as appearing to involve or appearing to please the greatest number of people in a demographic that matters, ostensibly at least, to policy-makers”. In reality, this latter criterion is already far too influential.

Whilst I dissent from Duffy’s conception of artistic excellence in terms of popular appeal, I am not against her suggestion that “We need to offer everyone not only access to the products of creativity, but access to the means and processes of creativity”. However, to suggest that only so-called “community-led culture” can achieve this would be myopic. One has to distinguish between socio-economic “elitism” and artistic rigour, the latter of which depends on elite training (which, inevitably and necessarily, is an expensive and time-consuming process). As Morris observes, Duffy has conflated political and artistic goals. So-called “accessibility” is often touted as a solution, yet what is really needed from creators and audiences alike is patience, a virtue which is all too scarce in a modern consumerist society which has moulded people to demand instant gratification and, as Yeats so eloquently explains, disenfranchised them from making meaningful choices. To create meaningful art (whether in an amateur or professional capacity) in most mediums or traditions

depends on the protracted cultivation and development of intellectual and vocational faculties; similarly, connoisseurship of a given artistic tradition (or subset thereof) depends on a long-term education in the precepts, works, and contexts thereof. Thus, art can never be wholly “accessible”, for, to engage therewith (at any level, and from any perspective) requires some effort (however minimal or unconscious). That effort can be facilitated by others — for example, through research, teaching, and the mitigation of arbitrary impediments (determining which impediments are arbitrary may be a subjective matter in some cases) — but cannot be shirked. Ultimately, artistic endeavour is a process of striving, and one which rarely yields complete satisfaction. As the pianist Cyril Smith suggests in his autobiography, “even with eight hours’ practise [sic] a day, few pianists are able to achieve more than ten consecutive seconds of absolutely perfect playing a year

Michael Morse, musicologist

1. If we are not engaging everyone in the creation of culture .. then the culture we are sharing and consuming is not that of our whole society

Two mistaken assumptions for the price of one here. Who says that culture, never mind “the”culture, singular, should be for “our whole society” in the first place? It is ridiculous on its face to believe that adolescent dance music shouldn’t be different than Catholic church music and night club jazz and 19thc. Concert music. We are a diverse population, and diverse society; attempting to create a single culture for all of it all the time denies that truth at best, and forcibly and unjustly suppresses it at worst. Second, the division of labour between professional artists and audience members has been vital to culture of all kinds for centuries now. That professionalism has been seen to interfere with the cultivation of amateur, “do it yourself cultures,” and is usually just anti-intellectual snobbish masquerading as populism when it does. But the advent of computer tools has made this problem virtually disappear. If someone is really dissatisfied with the music of Mozart or Thelonious Monk, or feels their own genius somehow oppressed by the accomplishments of Titian or Paul Klee, there are dozens and hundreds of programs that offer a short circuit to self-expression, and offer a quick way around the years of dedication and hard work that go into great art; if that’s what we want. Again, even if it is, there is a perfectly adequate solution in place, and one that does not call for any state support whatsoever. Thus:

2. “a move away from culture by and for an elite, however well meaning, to culture by and for all” is dishonest and wrong. The contrast of “elite”and “by and for all” is a specious contrast that rests on deliberately misformulated opinion. Especially thanks to the internet, where the literature, art, architecture, music, film, and television of the entire world is available to us all, the notion that culture could be confined to an elite is preposterous. By now, “culture”is for anyone who cares to explore its possibilities in their own lives. Cultural gatekeeper is not a job with any security or fringe benefits!

3. “The work we are talking about – grassroots, created by professionals and non-professionals together, often in communities rather than on main stages and in recognised venues – largely takes place outside the funded mainstream. Allowing everyone to join in, not simply as audiences and consumers, but as active participants, as creators, will result in a far greater array of work to engage with.”

The obvious rejoinder to the first statement is to restore and expand arts education

funding. The time for universal creative activity and expression is in childhood. Countless studies now show that artistic activity among the young sharpens their minds and enhances their performance even in the skills that matter, to this society, so much more than mere art, the playground of life. Science and math scores are raised when student learn art and music. The statement's mandate could be further enhanced by expanding adult art education, too. The second statement is purely speculative. It does not tell us what "a far greater array" entails or looks like, or in particular what is missing from the presently available range of options. Would we all be better off with artworks from our neighbours than from professional artists? Even if we agree for the sake of argument that we might, there would have to be some kind of evidence for the claim. Unsurprisingly, this document offers none—because there is none.

4. "We desperately need to bring everyone into the cultural ecology, not for audience development (though that's a happy by-product) but as artist development." As above; the desperation here is pure fiction, based on misguided populist ideology, not on anyone's artistic experience.

5. "If we want cultural democracy, genuine culture for all, elitism must make way for creativity and community-led culture. We need to offer everyone not only access to the products of creativity, but access to the means and processes of creativity – only then will we have an inclusive culture for, by and with all." A final resounding statement of the author's ill-informed prejudices, and one that at last reveals the problem, still unadmitted. Elitism" means the cultural products of the past, handed down to us from eras in which the artistic division of labour was indeed sharp. Even though most of Mozart's patrons could have played his simpler pieces, and even his harder ones with a bit of practice, and even though Frederick the Great was a better than decent composer for his beloved flute, the classes of professional artist, of patrons, and of audiences were distinct. We no longer feel that way about ourselves and each other, nor do we live that way. To love the music of Haydn is not to embrace the feudal absolutism of his era, nor its gender roles or racism, either. Neither is it an admission that our own creativity is deficient. Haydn and Picasso and Sonia Delaunay and John Coltrane are not threats to our personal autonomy, they are role models and consolations. To demand they be replaced by my shiftless brother-in-law (or yours) is mean-spirited and callous, not democratic. Matthew Arnold believed that the mission of culture was to become a beacon for all, that all of us must have access to and education for the richest possibilities of the human palette. Expanding that palette does not mean a new exclusivity based on destroying our history.

Nigel Simeone, writer, musicologist, author, teacher

The author of this article ends by saying: "We need to offer everyone not only access to the products of creativity, but access to the means and processes of creativity – only then will we have an inclusive culture for, by and with all." In terms of music, at least, I'd like to know what she thinks the "access to the means" is if it isn't the acquisition of the relevant and necessary skills to perform/create music. And this has absolutely nothing to do with the "metropolitan-based thinking" or "elitism" who have become a handy scapegoat for more or less anybody encouraging the pursuit of excellence wherever and whenever and however it is possible. As someone who taught in secondary state schools for 10 years, then in universities for 15 years, and now – very

happily – in an inner-city state school in Leicester, my current teaching has nothing whatsoever to do with any metropolitan elite and everything to do with trying to blow young people’s minds with the wonders of music – and to give them as many ways as possible of participating in that. What does that mean on a practical level? Exposure to all sorts of music they don’t already know themselves. And we use everything from plainsong to Gamelan (we are very lucky to have a Gamelan on long-term loan to my school), from Dufay to Miles Davis, from Elgar to Earth, Wind and Fire, from Janacek to the Jackson 5. With a composing task for students in, especially, Years 7-9, the idea is to aim for a creative response that aspires to some kind of artistry, discrimination, even subtlety. And if you have expectations of that, and the students know this, then it is perfectly possible to have entire classes who can produce interesting, surprising and sometimes beautiful work. I’m talking here about mixed ability groups of 11-13 year-olds as well as A-level students. Any teacher is going to want to share some of the things they love themselves – that’s not elitist: quite the reverse as the aim is to inspire and excite as many young people as possible about something about which the teacher is passionate. And they respond brilliantly to something out of the ordinary. Last week we had a visit from a young opera singer at the RAM and three classes of 11-12 year-old went berserk with enthusiasm in response to arias by Handel, Mozart, Verdi and (especially) Puccini. Exposing them to this kind of thing has a lasting impact on a significant number of our students – as does participating in performances of a wide range of music. How do we make that accessible? Well, where necessary, by teaching enough basic notation for students to be able to perform what they want to perform. That can be done quickly, it can be done for all, and it gives them wonderful opportunities to explore music of all sorts. I hope Stella Duffy understands that this sort of thing is going on, on a daily basis, and that it enables young people from mostly working-class families and a wonderfully diverse ethnic background (at the last count we had 64 first languages in our student population – not a Tower of Babel, but something to celebrate.

Below is a follow-up comment by **Eva Moreda Rodriguez** relating to an earlier article on the Fun Palace (**Stella Duffy, ‘Fun Palaces 2015: realising the excellence of local communities,’ The Guardian, February 19, 2015**)

My response above was based on the Guardian article from 30th June. My main issue with it was that it lacked detail and clarity around such loaded concepts as “community”, “creativity” and “culture”, among others, and by contributing to Ian’s original post and the ensuing Twitter conversation I was hoping to get more clarification around such concepts. However, having done some online research on Fun Palaces (which I don’t have any doubt is a fantastic initiative from which thousands of people derive enjoyment and reward), I came across **the following article**, which I find more problematic rather than it simply being conceptually unclear. Some of my issues with this article echo some of the opinions of my colleagues above, so I won’t repeat them again. I’d just like to add the following two things:

The expert simply reinforces the idea that the artist is other. The local person, on the other hand – perhaps not well-known or known at all, but expertly and compellingly enthusiastic – is a role-model who says: “I am from here, I am like you and that

means you can do this too.” The local enthusiast, rather than the flown-in expert, underlines the possibility that we can all be creative.

The paragraph above strongly implies that “the expert” and “the local person” exist in opposition. I fail to understand why we cannot have both. Having grown up in a relatively small town with few opportunities to access high culture, I felt enormously inspired when a professional performer, novelist or scholar visited the town and played a concert or gave a talk. They showed to me what sorts of things were possible in the realms of music/writing/scholarship beyond what I had access to through, say, local amateur music groups or the local weekly magazine. Of course the latter two were tremendously valuable as well in terms of encouraging me and others to engage in creative pursuits on a day-to-day basis.

We believe that there’s a serious problem with the concept of excellence as it is currently used in arts subsidy. The excellence of artistic quality can only ever be a subjective value.

There is no acknowledgement here that measurements of “the excellence of artistic quality” can go beyond “I like this, you like that”. This certainly tends to be the case in contexts such as funding decisions or academic training. In my own teaching of music history, discussions often start with an open dialogue along the lines of “I like this, you like that”, but this is normally an invitation to dig deeper: why do I like this? When I say that I like or dislike something, which criteria matter to me? And if someone disagrees with me – can I ascertain and understand which criteria matter to them, and maybe try to look at the work again from their point of view? If I learn more about the genesis of this piece of music, does this change my opinion of it? The aim is not just academic discussion for the sake of it, but hopefully to encourage students to engage with music and art they might not have considered before, and to have a genuinely open mind towards others who might have different opinions. If we want all sectors of society to engage in art, culture and creativity, we should not just should empower them to “do”, but also to “think”. To do the former but not the latter is, to me, reminiscent of irrationalism and anti-intellectualism.