Frankel Lauren

***The Ensemble as Institution: Funding New Music in the U.S.***

In the Unites States today, the greater part of what are commonly considered musical institutions—as well as cultural and educational institutions in general—operate as legally recognized nonprofit organizations. As “nonprofits,” institutions ranging from neighborhood choirs to large conservatories to major opera houses are all regulated by the same portions of the U.S. tax code, laws which were largely codified between 1917 and 1969. The establishment of the country’s nonprofit sector had a strong impact on the structures of institutional funding for music in the U.S. in the twentieth century, with nonprofit status affecting not only the taxes an organization pays, but also the types of government funding, private grants, and individual donations it receives. I argue that the development of these funding structures was a significant factor in the rise of the “ensemble-institution” in the U.S. in the twentieth century. That is, not only large collectives, like orchestras, but also much smaller chamber ensembles, such as string quartets, were incentivized to establish themselves as nonprofit organizations and thus as institutions in their own right. This trend toward the institutionalization of smaller ensembles has in turn had a significant effect on the development of contemporary music in the U.S. Their increased financial agency encouraged a model of increased creative agency for such ensemble-institutions, resulting in greater collaborative input into composition and driving the growth of new repertoires through institutional commissions. This paper will trace the development of this institutional model and its influence on contemporary composition from the mid-twentieth century to the present day, using several nationally and internationally prominent ensembles as examples. These will include the Kronos Quartet (founded 1973), eighth blackbird (founded 1996), Alarm Will Sound (founded 2001), and Roomful of Teeth (founded 2009). While all performing within different genres, each of these nonprofit organizations illustrates the effect of the institutionalization of ensembles on the ways in which new music is being conceived, created, and consumed.

Lauren Holmes Frankel received her PhD in musicology from Yale University in 2016, with a dissertation that explored the relationships between musical institutions, nationalism, and the production of new music in Finland during the second half of the twentieth century. She is currently an independent scholar based in San Francisco and also works for the Kronos Performing Arts Association, the nonprofit organization that manages all of the activities of the Kronos Quartet. Her work has been supported by grants from the Fulbright foundation, the American-Scandinavian Foundation, and the Lois Roth Endowment.