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Maxime McKinley

Volume 30, Number 3, 2020

Barbara Hannigan : les voix multiples

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1073931ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073931ar>

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Publisher(s)

Circuit, musiques contemporaines

ISSN

1183-1693 (print)

1488-9692 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

McKinley, M. (2020). Five Questions for Barbara Hannigan about Momentum. *Circuit*, 30(3), 87–88. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073931ar>

# Five Questions for Barbara Hannigan about Momentum

Maxime McKinley

*On August 28, 2020, while we were working on this issue of Circuit, Barbara Hannigan launched a new initiative called “Momentum: Our Future, Now.” The press release for Momentum describes the project as “an initiative driven by leading international artists supporting younger professional colleagues in the first substantial phase of their career. Created by Barbara Hannigan, the Momentum model is an urgent artistic and human response to the situation caused by the 2020 pandemic, yet devised with long-term staying power.”<sup>1</sup>*

*I sent five questions to Hannigan about Momentum. She answered by email on September 14, 2020.*

**Maxime McKinley (M. M.):** What is your reading of the impact of the present pandemic on young musical careers, and how are you caring for your younger colleagues in relation to it?

**Barbara Hannigan (B. H.):** From all the conversations I have had in the past 6 months with younger colleagues, the one thing they have all said is that they feel the reset button has been pressed in relation to their careers. They had started on their professional path, and suddenly they hit a brick wall. They were noticing that with many presenters at the moment, the

only artists being asked to perform are the “headliners” who might be able to draw the attention of audiences. While encouraging young artists to try to keep working, despite having no performances in sight, or to find side-interests that might feed into their performing careers eventually, I also had to admit that in the music career (as in some others) we progress and learn best when we are actually performing onstage.

**M. M.:** How did you evolve from feeling concerned and observing what’s going on to taking initiative and taking action to do something about it?

**B. H.:** It was quite immediate. I decided that leading colleagues needed to bring younger colleagues onto their mainstage events, now. Once I had the idea, I got on the phone to a few conductor/soloist colleagues, and their support meant so much. From a few major names it grew to more than 75 leading artists. It was 3 or 4 weeks of hours of daily phone calls to leading soloists, conductors, and presenting organizations. I encouraged their generosity, explained it was simple and easy to implement, and almost every phone call ended with a resounding YES. Several were especially active to help spread the word. I garnered advice from a few mentors and friends of mine who helped me shape the initiative, as well as a few younger artists

who could suggest which leading artists they knew who would be most open to the initiative. I engaged a team, which consisted of my PA and colleague Lora de Montvert who helps me run Equilibrium Young Artists (EQ), as well as Samantha Holderness to do PR, and David Skudlik to create the website and do social media. We worked fast and with passion and urgency and we launched the initiative online and in the press, with the first event led by Sir Antonio Pappano at Snape Maltings/Aldeburgh Festival in England on August 29.

**M. M.:** How do you define and weave the values important to you, such as *trust*, *relationships*, and *artistic authority*, into the Momentum project?

**B. H.:** Easy: leading artists choose younger artists to share the stage with them, giving them a part of their program, for example in the form of duets or a solo group of *Lieder*. It is integral that the younger artists have already embarked upon the first substantial phase of their career, and are ready to occupy the stage with authority. In the case of soloists, the younger artist's presence should excite the audience's curiosity and generosity. In the case of conductors, the younger conductor acts as assistant to the conductor, with the agreement that he/she will have podium time with the orchestra during the rehearsal period, and in some cases, will actually have a piece to conduct in the concert itself. The younger artists should be chosen from the network of the leading artist, or from the supporting partners of Momentum who have alumni artists. As a music career is based on trust and relationships,

we are helping the younger artists to continue building their networks and contacts, at a time when it is especially hard to do so.

**M. M.:** You created Equilibrium and now Momentum. Do these projects have points in common? Are they related?

**B. H.:** They have many points in common! While a totally separate organization, Momentum is in many ways a larger version of Equilibrium. With EQ, the artists were auditioned and all working with me in some way. With Momentum, the artists are working with various leading soloists and conductors. There are aspects of mentoring to both initiatives. But with Momentum, it is 100 percent work, and with EQ, there are also workshops involved in the venture. One could think of Momentum as a natural continuation of many of the ideals of EQ.

**M. M.:** Has momentum in music and in sound taught you something about how to engage with momentum in life, and vice versa?

**B. H.:** I have learned many important lessons from my musical experiences, which do not have everything to do with music, but rather with philosophy, psychology, love, flow, focus and discipline, honour and loyalty... the list goes on. So, the answer is a resounding YES!

1. See: [www.barbarahannigan.com/momentum-our-future-now-barbara-hannigan-creates-international-initiative-investing-in-the-future-of-classical-music](http://www.barbarahannigan.com/momentum-our-future-now-barbara-hannigan-creates-international-initiative-investing-in-the-future-of-classical-music) (accessed on September 14, 2020). See also: [www.momentum-now.com/about](http://www.momentum-now.com/about) (accessed on September 14, 2020).