

12. MANAGING THE CHANGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY PERFORMING ART. METHODS OF ELIMINATING SOCIAL BARRIERS IN THE CONSUMPTION OF CLASSICAL MUSIC PERFORMANCES

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Abstract: *In the unfortunate circumstances of the current declining consume of classical music, the intention to facilitate the access of the young, uneducated audience to classical music is becoming increasingly visible in the practices of the local, national and international cultural operators. Identifying the optimal methods around which unconventional, innovating artistic events can develop is essential in order to shape the audience of the future. The consumer needs to be educated progressively in order to accept what some call “elite art”. The mediation of the education process must be initiated from a point that places the audience in a comfortable position, even though this may, on the other hand, represent a compromise for the artists. From this perspective, the classical artistic product must become flexible, must outgrow patterns as well as traditional social constraints and adapt in order to be closer to the community. The research relies on a survey involving a sample group of 571 people, study aimed to measure the individuals’ propensity to consume symphonic music, opera and classical ballet. The mission consisted in highlighting the reasons that cause consumers to move away from classical music as well as searching for solutions to lure them and win their loyalty, in order to be transformed into an educated audience capable of understanding and processing artistic emotions.*

Key words: *Music, educated audience, cultural mediation, flexibility, unconventional spaces*

1. Introduction

The artist has always depended on the social context and regarding music as an “entertainment commodity” has been an element of normality for many centuries. The current dynamics of the cultural consumption and the challenges that this field has to overcome have their precedents in history. In ancient Rome and Greece, then in the Middle Ages, the musicians were invited to give performances in the houses of rich people, in banquet halls, for entertainment and even for therapeutic purposes. For several hundred years, music survived thus in the aristocratic context, serving to educate the nobility, to sustain physiological and psychological development for those who needed a cultural education as solid as their scientific one.

For the social life at the palace, the symphonic and opera music was an mandatory element for social events, even if their actual purpose was political, military or administrative. In the Middle Ages the Catholic Church took music under its wing. With this mutation, schools and cultural centers adopted and developed it into an independent branch of education. In the Renaissance it extended towards the military services as well, being admitted to the royal courts, where it was maintained until deep in the Baroque period. In mid-17th century the first commercial promoted opera, *Andromeda*, was written by Benedetto Ferrari and Francesco Manelli, and the event was staged during a carnival. After that, the “court” operas and the private commercial opera houses coexisted for over a

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century. There was an obvious difference even at that time between the rigid system imposed by the aristocratic institutions and the flexibility with which the autonomous, private companies that performed for the masses managed to develop and adapt to the artistic challenges in the social milieu. The process of creating the “aristocratic operas” was obstructed through a rigid set of rules that hindered a rapid development of the repertoire, while the “community operas” thrived very successfully, due to the flexibility and receptivity they manifested with regard to the audience’s reactions and necessities.

The development of the private musical services triggered an unprecedented side effect: the expansion for music instrument companies. In middle of the 19th century Parisian and Viennese manufacturers were producing and selling over one thousand pianos every year. After the French Revolution, a large part of the royal orchestras were dissolved, forcing composers and instrumentalists to look for other sources of income. Thus, a few locations with permanent concert seasons appeared at Leipziger Gewandhaus (1780), École Royale de Chant et de Déclamation Paris (1793), Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien (1813), leading to the establishment of the first companies that resembled Philharmonics, which also organized master classes for people who had no access to royal courts but nevertheless wanted to receive a good quality music education. In order to support the same lines of development, dedicated institutions were later opened in London (the Royal Academy of Music) and Leipzig (Leipziger Konservatorium under the patronage of Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy).

In 1712 George Frideric Handel was appointed director of the Royal Academy of Music in London, a new founded company that financed Italian operas. When the Academy no longer had the means to finance the commissioned performances and went bankrupt, Handel invested all of his savings into a new private company which he led together with John Jacob Heidegger, until 1733, when Farinelli’s Opera of the Nobility moved to London and bought all the valuable artists. Handel’s entrepreneurial spirit did not stop here, as he continued even after these two failures to act as artists’ agent and event organizer for businesses that sold symphonic concerts and oratorios.

In 1750, in a Leipzig coffee shop, Telemann and J. S. Bach opened the first season of paid concerts in an unconventional space followed by a similar one in London, hosting Carl Friedrich Abel’s and Johann Christian Bach’s concerts. These initiatives inspired others as well to use unconventional locations and organize this type of paid concerts, so that at the beginning of the 19th century blossomed a well-developed network for the distribution of music in unconventional venues. All this hustle and bustle of private networks encouraged the actions of artists’ agents and the organization of events with commercial purposes, so that grand names such as Niccolò Paganini and Franz Liszt were sold at very high prices. The idea of the “ambience Viennese Waltz”, which remains to this day emblematic in Austrian culture, was initiated with the purpose of attracting the audience by means of a social component.

At the beginning of the 17th century emerged a new phenomenon that lasted for two centuries: the superstars of classical music, the castrati singers. They were intensely promoted by the works of Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Haendel, Gluck and

even Mozart for the particular and extraordinary element characteristic to them that aroused the audience's curiosity. Due to their early emasculation, they were subjected to in their childhood, the technical vocal abilities these singers acquired were incredible. In the 18th century, the "vocal athletics" displayed in the concert halls had become a method per se of selling tickets and attracting new categories of the audience. The best-known explorer of this phenomenon was Haendel, who was the agent for Farinelli, Guadagni, Cafarelli, etc. in opera performances which were so successful that the audiences requested to be repeated over and over again. The fees of these castrati-superstars were fabulous, amounting to ten times more than a composer received for the opera to be performed.

In mid-19th century, the idea of attracting the audience to concerts through virtuosity was adopted by Liszt and Paganini. Liszt, a nonconformist by attitude and by the choice of repertoire, brought the instrumental concert closer to the masses, provoking them to accept the music he composed, played and presented in unusual ways. The spectacular symphonism that characterized his instrumental pieces was an expression of the turmoil of his social life, of the literature that he wanted to promote, of the nature he loved, of the hero-artists who were the model of his professional path, a transdisciplinarity – as we would call it today – translated into new and revolutionary sounds.

2. International models of good practices – The classical music close to society

Identifying unconventional venues for performances of symphonic music, opera, and classical ballet has become one of the essential concerns of cultural operators worldwide. The growing abundance and the easy access for artistic products over the past few years, encouraged by the appearance of the communication technologies and the internet, have resulted in a decreasing appetite of the public for the traditional reception in concert halls. The classic value indicators of quality and substance are nowadays challenged by the emergence of a new need which requires acts of culture to be accessible and flexible. The major challenge for cultural entities is now the manner through which they present and promote their products in order to deal with the variety and the competition on the entertainment market. The educational component, transposed into an environment where "the audience feels comfortable" becomes an essential element for developing visibility and increasing the educated cultural neediness.

The mediation of classical music concerts, very much exploited as a reaction to the retractile social phenomenon, is however not new to the world cultural life. At the end of the 19th century, Theodore Tomas, conductor and artistic director of the New York Philharmonic initiated the *Family Matinees*, an event dedicated to the education of the American public. These models were later adopted and developed by Josef Stránský and Leonard Bernstein in New York and Frederick Stock in Chicago, very well known today under the name of *Young People's Concerts*. In the middle of the 20th century, many European Philharmonics had already adopted the idea of the children's concerts and integrated it in their own seasons.

Another phenomenon noticeable in international cultural practices is the

decreasing interest towards the conventional venues in favor of performances on open stages with great audiences. The intention of taking music out of closed spaces and bringing it closer to the “mass” audiences is not new either. In the Middle Ages, the liturgical dramas meant to educate the population were presented in markets or other generous, accessible, and visible spaces. The same happened with opera performances in the Baroque period, when castles’ gardens were preferred for these events for the same reasons. The motivation for the presentation of cultural actions in “open spaces” is supported for multiple reasons, on the one hand because it offers other opportunities of recreation (Radbourne, 2009), on the other hand because of aesthetical reasons (Dobson, 2010). Moreover, as research shows (Green, 2006), the organization of events in open spaces has always counted on the power of music to activate emotions, stimulate neuronal activities, favoring changes in behavior and attitude in individuals and social segments they entered into contact with.

The methods of attracting audiences into concert halls took various forms, looking for added, recreational, touristic, scientific or social value with which to enrich artistic experiences. Austria was one of the first countries ever to approve the organization of classical events for pure social purposes, like the Viennese Opera Ball, remaining even today in the top of the most active countries which present unconventional classical productions for the sake of winning new audiences. In recent years, these various practice models have been adopted and developed in the entire world, so that nowadays the spaces chosen for performances vary from markets, castles’ yards, interiors of palaces and art museums, antic amphitheatres in the open air to newer options created particularly for this kind of representations: parks, spaces near or on lakes and rivers, natural caverns, pools, beaches, railway stations, amusement parks, exhibition centers, malls, royal pavilions, forest clearings and so on. Spaces are considered relevant if, through their destination, they can gather many people in one place for various reasons, such as tourism, trade, recreation.

The effects of these initiatives which try to dislocate from traditional patterns are always surprising. The eagerness which the audience demonstrates in accepting to receive these musical products is unexpectedly positive. Thus, beyond the barriers of the locations and of a social conduct imposed by the context of the traditional venues, this manner of approach has the highest potential to increase popularity and finally attract audiences to the concert halls. We cannot however disregard in our argumentation the vulnerabilities that implicitly this type of intervention brings with it. The cultural operators need to know them in advance, in order to be able to weigh the costs and the benefits and decide if these alternatives of the unconventional stages are opportune for the goals the institution and the artists involved have in the long run.

The challenges stem first and foremost from financial considerations, the open stages being harder to manage make financially profitable. The production costs are higher, the technical and logistic equipment is more demanding, the spaces reserved for the public have increasingly more special requirements. A factor not to be neglected is also the artists’ reluctance to exit the traditional space that provides all the conditions necessary to present the performance in the best

conditions regarding sound, technology, and logistics in exchange for an often-unwelcoming space. Nevertheless, in the lack of an educational system favorable to the artistic education of the audience, the cultural institutions have the mission to educate the tastes of the population by means of occasional events designed for the big audience in order to determine the people to step by step become faithful attendees willing to enter the concert hall. To this end, understanding the consumer's needs is essential if the initiatives taken are to meet the expectations of the audience.

3. Case study – *Do we still listen to symphonic and opera music?*

In October 2020 we conducted a study by distributing a questionnaire that aimed to measure the degree of availability for classical, symphonic, opera, and ballet musical consume. We started from the hypothesis that there is a certain social pressure which triggers the rejection of this field among the uneducated public, defined by a low level of understanding and acceptance of a too pretentious milieu imposed by the traditional pattern. More precise, a hostile environment that common people are not willing to look for, so that the international practices of bringing musical productions onto open stages are justified precisely due to the ascertainment of such attitudes.

We collected 571 responses which offer important information for professional musicians and for the representatives of cultural institutions in organizing their future artistic endeavors. The respondents have actually delivered the profile of the current cultural consumer, they have helped us understand which are their reserves and how important it is that the cultural operators support the process through which the public learns to understand and assimilate these musical genres. We can assess, based on the collected data, the actual dynamics of musical consumption, as well as a series of suggestions for a controlled direction of development that will correspond to their standards of acceptance.

The survey was distributed to potential Romanian audiences with ages ranging from 20 to 55 years. Of all the respondents, 70 are non-consumers (they do not attend any symphonic concerts, opera or classical ballet performances) – Category A; 119 are potential consumers (indifferent people, who have a minimal degree of availability) – Category B; the rest of them declared they are familiar with classical performances – Category C. For the first two categories of subjects we analyzed the cause for which they are unwilling to approach the classical music genres. By the answers provided, they complained of: much too high standards of social conduct (28.9%), the necessity of a dress code and of a compulsory behavior in the concert hall, (20%), the difficulty to understand what happens on the stage (39.3%), the musical genre seems outdated, too obsolete (11.8%). From this feedback we can extract a few problems and solutions that the field of art music in Romania might solve by adopting models of good practices from other countries:

1. Making the data more accessible by introducing mediation sessions tailored according to the children's concerts model, in which the audience are helped to understand "the musical story" (before, during, after the performance)

2. The social standards can be eliminated by moving the show to unconventional venues
3. Adopting modern ways of presentation and promotion that can keep up with state-of-the-art technologies and offer the audience a complex, syncretic, familiar experience.

With the imposition of social restrictions, as an effect of the Covid-19 pandemics, big entertainment companies have developed the so-called “virtual concerts”, so that the audience can watch and listen to productions on their own phone, computer or tablet. It goes without saying that, in order to determine the consumer to pay for tickets for virtual performances streamed via the internet, their presentation has to be sufficiently engaging and attractive. Some institutions, such as the Berlin Philharmonic, have come up with an alternative in offering access to their archives at a discounted price, uploading on their own platform performances they had broadcast in the past. Others have utterly developed the technical components, placing cameras on stage and backstage in order to offer the audience 3D experiences. With the same purpose of enriching concert participation they created filters for the audience to “manually select the musical ensembles” so that they can extract and listen to, separately, groups of instruments, vocal ensembles, soloists, etc., read information about the music, the performer or the composer, the construction of the instruments, the elements of choreography, the lighting or the settings. The access to this “backstage” information has significantly increased the public interest in virtual paid consumption.

The research also proposed to the respondents to evaluate the utility of the music consumption, regardless of genre. Without being constrained by limits or affiliations the subjects agreed, almost entirely, that one of the most important roles of music is its capacity to arouse, maintain, and transmit emotions:



Fig. 1:

Do you think music is capable of transmitting emotions?
 • Yes, to a very large extent • Maybe, I don't know • No

In order to take advantage of this availability, we insisted on analyzing the situations in which the respondents become aware of the role that music has in everyday life. Thus, 87.8% of the non-consumers declared they use music for ambience purposes, when they work, exercise, drive, being aware of its potential of superior neuronal stimulation, which is activated by the contact with comfortable auditory elements. The varied musical genres used for ambience range from jazz and blues, pop, rock, rap, folklore, Latin, trance & progressive, techno, indie, classical music (associated particularly with moments of mental overstrain), opera, oldies, reggae, dance, gospel, electronic music, film music, flamenco, hip-

hop, medieval music, cafe concert, country, chill, mantra, reggaeton, to R&B, a very generous list abounding on the consumption market that forces quality music to enter a fierce competition.

Taking the awareness exercise even further, we challenged the respondents to define the reason for which they feel the need to consume music, regardless of the genre they choose. We started from the premise that choosing the right music is not rational, but rather the effect of a drive that the subjects cannot define concretely. The hypothesis was confirmed, the reasons for which they prefer a certain musical style are rarely presented explicitly. The great majority of the respondents defined their conduct in simple terms: “it defines me”, “it calms me”, “it relaxes me”, “it arouses emotions”, “it fills my soul”, “it refreshes me”, “it charges me with positive energy”, “it helps me focus”, “it makes me dream”, “I resonate with it”, “it fills me with emotions”, “it fascinates me, it is complex”, “it gives me a special feeling, an air of royalty”, “it inspires me”, “it makes me a more optimistic person”, “it fulfils me”, “it honors me”, “it offers me inner harmony and profundity”, “it enhances me”, “it motivates me”, “it challenges me”, “it offers me spiritual and mental freedom”, “it energizes me”, “it induces various states that I cannot find anywhere else”, “I like it, it makes me feel better after listening to it”.

Interpreting these responses, we can reach the conclusion that the manner to address the uneducated public must be simplified, so that it can spontaneously generate the emotions described above, within an environment that they can identify themselves with. In order to support this assertion, we formulated another question, intending to return to the classical standard, namely to measure the availability for the consumption of symphonic music, opera and ballet. 74 people from the category of the uneducated public would be willing to attend a classical musical performance if it were combined with one of the genres that they already know and consume frequently, 41 if the concert were placed in the context of a film (soundtrack repertoire), 50 if the show were in the open air, on the terrace of a restaurant where they could socialize and only 22 would be willing to go to a concert hall for an educational event meant to teach them theoretical concepts underlying classical composition and performance.

8. Care ar fi varianta care v-ar apropia de muzica simfonică?

571 de răspunsuri

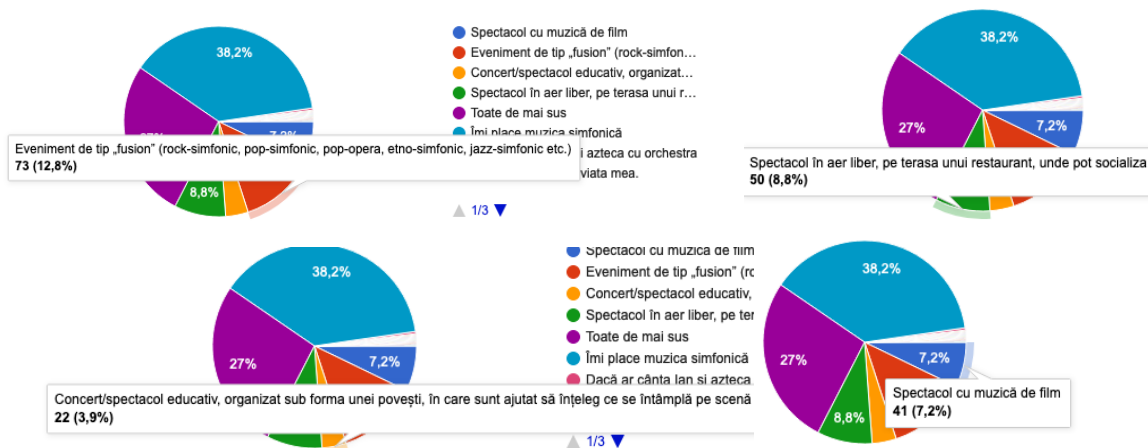


Fig. 2

8. Which variant would bring you closer to symphonic music?

571 responses

• a film music show • fusion events (rock-symphonic • educational concerts organized • open-air show on a restaurant's terrace • all of the above • I like symphonic music Fusion event (rock-symphonic, pop-symphonic, pop-opera, ethno-symphonic, jazz-symphonic, etc.): 73 (12.8%)

Open-air event on a restaurant's terrace, where I can socialize: 50 (8.8 %)

Educational concert/performance, organized in the form of a story, in which I am helped to understand what happens on stage: 22 (3.9%)

Music film show: 41 (7.2%)

Insisting on creating an affiliation, no matter how small, to the classical performance, especially for the uneducated public, we imagined a scenario in which the respondents had to decide if they would stop to watch a show on an open stage in case this would happen in a place where they would be present for another reason. 490 people declared they would remain unreservedly and watch the show; 73 people were hesitant and only 8 responded categorically that they would refuse. Returning to the initial numbers, in which we inferred that from the whole sample group, 70 are non-consumers of classical music performances, while 119 are occasional consumers, we think that 8 vehemently negative answers is a result with an excellent potential. In other words, of all these 189 respondents without a musical education 95.7% are willing to try and watch these performances in an unconventional venue, which requires no special effort of adaptation.

In this direction, another question was asked in order to sketch the context that would create comfort and attractiveness for the viewers. Besides watching the show, we also wanted to find out which are the factors that can influence even further the decision to consume. We thus discovered that 83 people would be interested in having this experience completed with information on artists and “backstage secrets”, for 74 people the modern manner of presentation is an essential component that can arouse their curiosity, for 35 people it is important to meet their friends at the event venue. These answers were joined by others, formulated directly by the respondents: the cast is very important, the duration must be limited so that they can attend the entire event, the music must be pleasant, the show must be complex, etc. The remaining respondents did not formulate special reasons that can determine them to accept this musical genre.

The most valuable point of the inquiry was the collection of suggestions for development with a maximal degree of relevance, taken directly from the community. With the help of the last question, the subjects were asked to formulate successful scenarios by identifying the measures of increasing the appetite for the classical musical performance. Among the answers we often found the topic of early education, as many respondents felt that familiarizing children with classical music concerts at an early age and educating them in an environment in which going to a concert hall would become at least a monthly routine is an essential factor for cultivating the musical taste in the long run. The intense publicity regarding the beneficial mental and physical effects of practicing and experiencing quality music, of its potential to trigger emotions, to change states of mind, etc. should be on the list of recommendations.

Given this answer and making a parallel to the level of today's society, we believe that the organizational intervention can have a maximal degree of efficiency only if it approaches the problem from a wider perspective. The education of the public should not be done exclusively for children, but also for the parents and the teaching staff who are responsible for their education, as adults are the ones who coordinate and offer models of good practice. Lesson-concerts to which schools can bring groups of pupils or weekend matinees that families can attend together with their children are only a few of the ideas practiced successfully in many countries.

The issue of promoting classical musical performances was brought up with a similar frequency. Culture, in its most elevated forms, must find resources to help it stand out from among the profusion of commercial artistic products on the consumption market; it must find the right language to address all social classes and highlight the value that defines it. The science of marketing, which nowadays establishes hierarchies in all fields, relies on the vulnerabilities of people and the selling of competitive advantages. Everything that represents a cultural value with a potential of individual impact must be exploited in order to enrich the image and enter the market, starting from psychological, sociological, physiological and other factors mentioned above.

In the top of the respondents' preferences are also the performances given in unconventional venues - which contribute to a social, recreational, and touristic value - where the event organizers must search for and creatively exploit special spaces. Simplifying the content, diminishing the duration of the shows and offering explanations meant to transport the audience into the musical story are a few other elements which produce visible benefits. To this end, interdisciplinary dialogues in which the musical productions are enhanced within an educational context that resorts to comparisons with historical, geographical, scientific, theatrical, pictorial, choreographic elements can arouse supplementary curiosity.

4. Conclusions

For the current profile of classical music, society needs humanization, calm and tranquility, time and depth, respect, culture, and education (Johnson, 2002). Sensitivity, empathy, modesty, tolerance are valences that should be encouraged by any educational system.

The value of artistic beauty must be saved from the general tendency to minimize and limit individuals. In this context, the fight we are leading against the current technological stimuli is a tough one. We are dragged into systems that offer immediate gratification, in which society is taught to have no more patience, to no longer process value, to be satisfied by anything delivered at high speed.

We should not expect social harmony to be re-established by itself, in the absence of the individual contact and the direct emotions which can be experienced, for instance, during artistic performances. The cultural operators must gain awareness of the direction that society is following, of the responsibility they have, be disciplined in the plans they make, be brave, eager and determined to be a competitive presence on this huge market of artistic opportunities.

The cultivation of good taste cannot be taken for granted. Artistic value can

be maintained even if the classical show resorts to modern visual elements (laser projections, architectural lightings), to adaptations of stage settings and accomplishment of spectacular, modern sceneries, with subjects relevant for the current generations (for example a parallel between Macbeth and Game of Thrones), to rethinking social barriers by renouncing snobbery and providing more relaxed atmospheres by means of open-air shows.

Likewise, the international practice proposes several models for advertising classical performances through:

- Discussions before, during and after the performances with the conductors, the musicians, the artists, the actors involved, in order to understand which are the elements that they wish to accomplish in the show, from the story in the score to the knowledge of the characters and of the emotions they must convey
- Informative sessions “behind the curtains”, in which the audience is invited to discover production details (costumes, make-up, scenography, stage scenery, lights)
- Positioning the audience literally inside the show, by setting up the stage within the mass of people or by offering digital 3D experiences by which the audience can feel the pulse of the show very close to the leading artists.

At the same time, music education in schools must be reconsidered, regardless of the context in which it takes place, in favor of lowering cultural standards. It is necessary to start from the idea that music shapes the individual’s character and personality and that it is essential for it to be part of the daily routine, in a controlled manner. The music classes taught outside special music schools should be replaced by listening to concerts, watching performances, learning musical instruments, attending children’s concerts, all of which have the capacity to shape the educated audience of the future, while professional artists and cultural institutions must prepare the ground for these actions by organizing appropriate events.

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