

Does classical music matter?

Ackworth School Fothergill Society
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What views are you bringing to the debate?

YES

“I enjoy classical music”

“Classical music is important for culture and society”

NO

“I’m not interested in classical music ... it’s just for old people”

NOT SURE

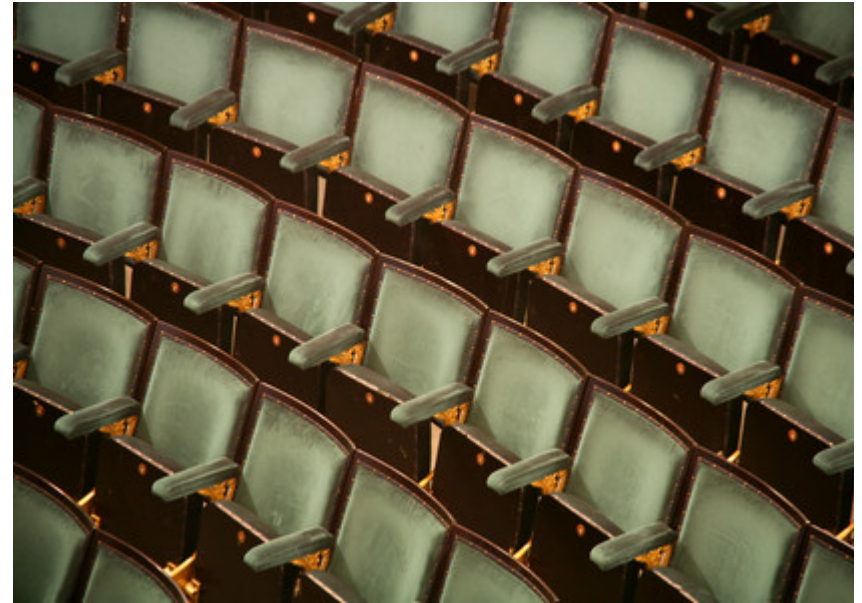
“All kinds of music matter”

“I don’t know enough about classical music to have an opinion”

In today's platform...

- I'd like to talk to you about my research with classical music audiences
- We'll think about who goes to classical music concerts – and who doesn't
- I'd like to hear about your experiences of classical music, and how it features in your life
- We'll share some ideas about how classical music could be made more accessible – and whether it should be

I'm interested in the audience experience:
who attends concerts and why?



What affects enjoyment of a concert?
*Repertoire, performers, venue, ticket price,
who you attend with ... what else?*

I've carried out studies with audiences for classical music and jazz...



... in collaboration with Dr Karen Burland, University of Leeds, and Professor Christopher Spencer, Dept of Psychology, University of Sheffield

... with funding from the British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Universities of Leeds and Sheffield

My research uses a range of methods to investigate people's experiences of music listening and participation and its impact on their lives



The Spin jazz club, Oxford

The Hub, Edinburgh
Jazz and Blues Festival



- Questionnaires
- Interviews
- Observation
- Diaries

Voices from the audience

“I think that is part of the magic of it – that you feel that you are, as the audience, you’re involved in some way, and you actually have a responsibility to be there with them. I don’t know what it is, but it’s something about feeling that you, as the audience, are important, and how you react is important to the way they perform, they react – respond, perhaps a better word.” [MitRI 17]

“On the way in I bumped into Ann who apologised for not speaking to me after last night’s performance. She said she was so choked up she could not speak. I agreed I didn’t want to talk to anyone either!” [MitRD 2]

“I fear [the audience] has probably got older. I mean I don’t really remember, but probably a lot of the people of my own and my wife’s generation that we see at the concerts were probably going to concerts you know when they were younger, like myself. I can’t help noticing the fairly significant age of lots of people at the last afternoon concert that we went to, which was quite recently.” [CBSOI 94]

Questions for discussion:

- Do any of these quotes change your view of live classical music listening?
- What would be your next question if you were interviewing one of these people?

What about people who don't go to concerts?

- What reasons can you think of that would put people off attending a classical music concert?
- *Cost of tickets*
- *Lack of information*
- *Feeling out of place*
- *Having nobody to go with*
- *Not knowing when to clap*
- *Not knowing whether it will be enjoyable*



Voices from first-time attenders

“I think I enjoyed it more when I was actually paying attention properly to the music, but I couldn't like sustain it, my mind kept wandering. I was getting annoyed with myself, because I was like, every time I properly listened to it it was really good, but my mind just kept going off anyway. It was a bit annoying.” [Bryony, SFG1]

“Honestly, I don't know what to do with the performers, all the time I went to concerts, I don't know what to see [i.e. where to look] – I thought it was performers, but I don't know how to play the violin, so they're just moving, but it has no meaning to me.” [Akasuki, FG3]

“You usually don't go there just for the music, it's also the atmosphere – I mean this is not like the normal life we live everyday, so when you go there it is different I think. You can deal for a couple of hours without doing the things you are used to doing all the time, like at the cinema or something like that”. [SFG2]

Questions for discussion:

- Do you identify with any of these viewpoints?
- What would be your next question if you were interviewing one of these people?

As an audience gathers for a chamber music concert...

their **motivations** for being there might be assumed to be largely musical: a desire to hear a particular repertory or **certain performers**, to affirm or challenge existing **musical tastes**, and to critique, enjoy, or maybe learn from the interpretation of **familiar or previously unheard music**.

Some listeners will arrive alone, sitting apparently engrossed in reading their **programmes** as they wait for the concert to start - temperament and habit dictating whether they bring a book to avoid the need to meet strangers, or otherwise choose to engage in some **people-watching** or to strike up a **conversation** with a fellow listener.

Other audience members arrive with friends, or **greet acquaintances** across the auditorium, and find their allocated seat or select one that places them a comfortable distance from the performers, preferably with a good view, some **legroom**, and easy access to the area used for **interval refreshments**.

And so the **musical** reasons for attending are intertwined with **personal** and **social** considerations: for different people in the concert hall this might be a **sociable night out**, a chance to escape from worldly pressures, an evening laden with obligation or **sense of duty**, or an impulsive decision to fill a **few hours** in which the television schedules looked unappealing.

Stephanie Pitts and Christopher Spencer, Loyalty and longevity in audience listening: investigating experiences of attendance at a chamber music festival (*Music and Letters*, 2007)

To conclude...

- We've talked about **established audiences** for classical music and their experiences
- We've talked about **new audiences** and how different the concert experience feels to them
- There are other discussions we could have about classical music in **everyday life** ... in film, on television, in shops and restaurants
- Have you **changed your mind** about whether classical music matters?

YES

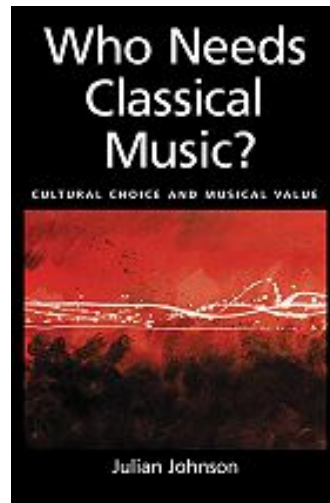
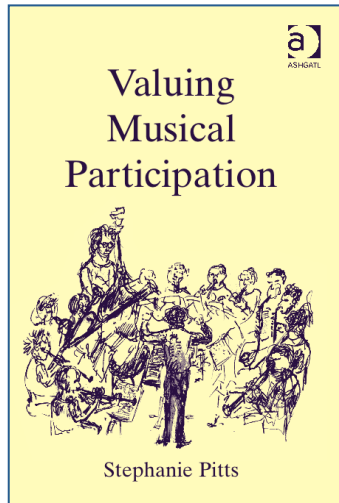
NO

NOT SURE



University of Sheffield music students in performance – all kinds of music matter!

Some further reading...



Stephanie Pitts (2005) *Valuing Musical Participation*.

Julian Johnson (2002) *Who Needs Classical Music?*

Christopher Small (1998) *Musicking*.

And if you're interested in studying music – come to Sheffield!

www.sheffield.ac.uk/music

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