

AUDIENCES AND WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSIC: PAST SEPARATION, PRESENT AND FUTURE RECONNECTION

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The separation of audiences in the past

Although musicologist Christopher Small once said, “Our present-day concert life consists of a talented few producing music for the untalented majority” (Small 1998, 8), in the past, music life was very different.

In early European societies, music was part of everyday life. There was no distance between music creators, performers and audiences, and no audience gathered for the sole purpose of silently listening to music. By the first half of the 17th century, two phenomena began to change this: the birth of conservatories and the creation of the first operas with paid admission (Small 1998, 71).

The word “conservatory” is itself derived from *conservati*, which literally means “the saved”. The term was often used to refer to orphanages, and the Ospedale della Pietà, Ospedale di San Lazzaro dei

Mendicanti, Ospedale degl’Incurabili, and Ospedale di Santa Maria dei Derelitti—the first institutions to offer musical training—were also protective asylums for young women. As described by Jane Baldauf-Bardes describes them in *Women Musicians of Venice: Musical Foundations, 1515-1855*, these institutions, founded in the 14th century, served as alternatives to the convent.

Italian composer, Antonio Lucio Vivaldi, taught at the Ospedale della Pietà and wrote many pieces for the women there. In 2015, the Hong Kong Arts Festival presented *Chiara’s Diary – My life at the convent in Venice*, featuring compositions for one of the orphans, Chiara, whose own compositions were discovered along with her notes and diaries in the archives of the orphanage. Back in the 17th century, Chiara and others were known and admired for their talent, attracting tourists and patrons from across Europe to hear them perform.

7.3.2015
歐洲嘉蘭古樂團
《新亞娜的日記——我在威尼斯孤兒院的一生》(1730-1780)
Europa Galante
Chiara's Diary – My life at the convent in Venice

《新亞娜的日記》電影放映
由魯克麗亞·莫、羅利及法比奧·比昂迪
製作；音樂由歐洲嘉蘭古樂團演奏及錄製

— 休息 Interval —

<p>龐他 D 大調弦樂交響曲 (修改：比昂迪) 快板 廣板 快板</p> <p>韋尊第 G 大調弦樂交響曲，RV149， 《穆思合唱團》 總快板 行板 快板</p> <p>朴邊拉 G 大調三聲部交響曲 慢板 快板</p> <p>馬田尼利 E 大調小提琴協奏曲， 《獻給新亞娜》 (修改及華彩段：比昂迪) 壯麗地 極端地 神氣的快板</p>	<p>Screening of Chiara's Diary A film produced by Lucrezia Le Moli and Fabio Biondi, set with music performed and recorded by Europa Galante</p> <p style="text-align: center;">— 休息 Interval —</p> <p>Giovanni Porta (1675-1755) Sinfonia for strings in D (rev. Biondi) Allegro Largo Allegro</p> <p>Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) Sinfonia for strings in G, RV149, <i>il Coro delle muse</i> Allegro molto Andante Allegro</p> <p>Niccolò Porpora (1686-1768) Sinfonia a tre in G Adagio Allegro</p> <p>Antonio Martinelli (1702-1782) Violin Concerto in E, <i>dedicato alla Signora Chiara</i> (rev. and cadenzas by Biondi) Maestoso Grave Allegro spiritoso</p>	<p>韋尊第 D 大調小提琴協奏曲，RV222， 《獻給新亞娜》 快板 行板 快板</p> <p>馬田尼利 為柔音中提琴及弦樂而寫的 D 大 調協奏曲， 《獻給新亞娜》 甚快板 慢板 快板 (原華彩段：新亞娜)</p> <p>伯納史康尼 D 大調弦樂交響曲 (中途部分修改：比昂迪) 快板</p> <p>歷維拿 G 大調弦樂交響曲 (修改：比昂迪) 快板 輕柔的小行板 急板</p> <p>柏勞提 為小提琴及管風琴而寫的 G 小調權鐘板 (原華彩段：新亞娜) 慢板</p> <p>伯納史康尼 D 大調弦樂交響曲 (中途部分修改：比昂迪) 小行板 極急板</p> <p><small>小提琴獨奏：法比亞·比昂迪 Violin soloist: Fabio Biondi 樂團演奏曲目及次序僅供參考。Program and their order of performance are subject to change.</small></p>	<p>Antonio Vivaldi Concerto for Violin in D, RV222, <i>Per la Signora Chiara</i> Allegro Andante Allegro</p> <p style="text-align: center;">— 休息 Interval —</p> <p>Antonio Martinelli Concerto for viola d'amore and strings in D, <i>Per la Signora Chiara</i> Allegro assai Adagio Allegro (original cadenzas composed by Chiara)</p> <p>Andrea Bernasconi (1706-1784) Sinfonia for strings in D (rev. and reconstruction of viola part by Biondi) Allegro</p> <p>Gaetano Latilla (1711-1788) Sinfonia for strings in G (rev. Biondi) Allegro Mezza voce andantino Presto</p> <p>Fulgenso Perotti (fl. 18th) Grave for violin and organ in G minor (original cadenzas composed by Chiara) Adagio</p> <p>Andrea Bernasconi (1706-1784) Sinfonia for strings in D (rev. and reconstruction of viola part by Biondi) Andantino Presto assai</p>
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Figure 1. *Chiara's Diary – My life at the convent in Venice*, featuring compositions for one of the orphans. Image courtesy of Hong Kong Arts Festival.

Still, professional musicians frequently composed and performed with amateurs and patrons. For example, Frederick the Great of Prussia, not only employed Franz Joseph Haydn but also played the transverse flute and composed more than four symphonies and 100 sonatas himself. The first performances of Ludwig van Beethoven's symphonies were also interpreted by amateur musicians. This was the tradition of chamber music: it would be played inside of homes, even if some of these homes were the homes of kings.

In the 1830s, informal promenades began appearing in European cities. These were earliest form of mass concerts. Admission was inexpensive and there were no seats so people stood or walked around, socialising and enjoying music at the same time (Cafiero 2005, 28-30, 43-44). It was only after 1850 that these were gradually replaced by formal orchestral

concerts with classical programmes (Weber 1977, 183).

The first half of the 19th century also saw classical music included as a subject in general schools. However, in the second half of the century, separation between music-makers and audiences became accentuated by the growing complexity of compositions and the growing virtuosity of professional performers.

The first batch of professional symphony orchestras was founded in 1842. Back then, paying audiences in halls were seated and stayed silent (Weber 1977, 18, 37). Some efforts were made to bring opera and classical music to a broader audience, such as through the English Opera Company, which offered low prices and a full English-language repertoire, but these were exceptions (Gooley 2013, 537-538). For the large part, the practice of fixing musical compositions in scores,

freezing repertoires, and the increasingly imposing figure of the conductor, served to distance classical music from the general public.

Between the 1850s and 1860s, a group of deceased composers rose to importance in musical culture. In the words of William Weber, "Their works came to dominate the concert repertoire, and their names were put up on high for all to behold" (Weber 1977, 175-176). Between 1817 and 1826, 56 per cent of the works played by the Philharmonic Society of London were by living composers, and just 43 per cent by deceased composers. Between 1853 and 1862, the proportions flipped and just 30 per cent of the works were by living composers, 70 per cent were by deceased ones. This act of playing the works of just a few deceased composers and rarely playing those of the living ones, is what Small argues to be a key factor leading to the distancing from and disinterest in music (Small 1998, 155).

When it comes to addressing challenges with music education and musical elitism, Small, amongst others, holds that every human being is born with the gift of music and that it is no different from the gift of speech. Small states that many people of Western industrial societies believe they are incapable of participating in musical life "because they have been actively taught to be unmusical". With the loss of amateur orchestral music practice, the feeble musical education provided in general schools, and the rooting of the idea that classical music is destined to

be played by and for elites, it is inevitable that music has become detached from the lives of the majority. In fact, it is arguable that this manner of approaching Western classical music—to view it with a specialist lens—has spread to other parts of the world alongside larger geopolitical movements.

How classical music became accessible

There have been various efforts to make classical music more accessible, in part because of the ageing populations and growing need to reconnect. This has led to three major trends across the globe: the creation of education departments in orchestras and concert halls; the advent of projects based on the principles of El Sistema, and the decentralisation of music halls from the heart of cities.

Education in Orchestras and Concert Halls

In the 1980s, Richard McNicol, a London Philharmonic Orchestra flutist and music teacher, began revolutionising music education in the United Kingdom, setting the stage for how it is practised today. His work focused on revitalising the relationship between classical music and youth and he was responsible for the huge success of the LSO Discovery education programme. In 2002, Sir Simon Rattle took McNicol to Berlin to spread the movement, starting orchestra music education programmes in Germany, and in other orchestras and concert halls across various European cities, including the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Philharmonie de Paris, and Carnegie Hall

in New York City—the current home to the Weill Music Institute. Credit to this work, today, the majority of orchestras and concert halls have their own education programmes.

El Sistema and Community Education Programmes

In 1975, a project called El Sistema began promoting classical music engagement across social classes in Venezuela. Its founder, the maestro Antonio Abreu, shares the project is based on the belief that “[M]usic has to be recognised as an...agent for social development in the highest sense, because it transmits the highest values—solidarity, harmony, mutual compassion. And it has the ability to unite an entire community.” (Bernstein 2014, 367).

To date, El Sistema has inspired projects in more than 60 countries (Tunstall & Booth 2016). We can see the fruits of the project through Gustavo Dudamel, Music and Artistic Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Rafael Payare, Music Director of San Diego Symphony. The results can also be found beyond the stellar music careers of El Sistema’s students and in the words of Joanne Bernsteins: “The impact of the programme can be felt beyond the orchestra room. In a community with limited resources, YOLA (Youth Orchestra Los Angeles) at HOLA (Heart of Los Angeles) has brought classical music into the neighborhood [centres] and to the homes of hundreds of families” (Bernstein 2014, 367).

This movement complements the wave begun by McNicol. It breaks the barrier of social class—one of the greatest stereotypes in Western classical music attendance, instead, prioritising how to bring this musical genre to people of different walks of life.

Decentralising the Orchestra

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Today, 55 [per cent] of the world’s population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68 [per cent] by 2050” (United Nations 2018). This means cities are growing and creating larger suburbs. If classical music venues want to survive and earn a place in the everyday lives of citizens, they must follow the trend of decentralising and moving away from city centres, while still building solid education programmes.

Cité de la musique, a Paris-based group of classical music institutions that began in 2015 and is located in the middle of Parc de la Villette in the 19th *arrondissement*, is one example of the decentralisation efforts of concert halls in that region. Casa da Música, which opened in 2005 in Porto is another. In fact, by illustrating the possibilities of serving a wider community, it catalysed a discussion about the purpose of arts infrastructure development and redefined its reason for existence: to serve the public. Decentralisation efforts are also apparent in the United Kingdom’s creation of the LSO East London Academy, which opened

in 2019 to provide young people with free music training, regardless of their financial situations.

Notably, for decentralisation to be most effective, it must combine the first two trends of offering solid music education programmes while still benefitting every social class.

Thoughts for the future

The performing arts has taken huge damage from the wrecking ball of COVID-19. When I had the honour of speaking at the Academy pre-pandemic, I discussed the desire for meaning in contemporary society, and the possibility that the human connections offered at live performances could be shared with the more fragmented and isolated parts of the population through digitalisation. I also described the value of shared experiences and suggested that to be in the same space at the same time, and to be moved by creative expression is a way of connecting us with both each other and ourselves.

Today, isolation is far more severe, and at times the sole form of connection is through digital means. In this context, I am inspired by and in awe of the responses of artists and arts lovers, and overwhelmingly grateful for the wealth of performances available online today, whether archival or newly created.

To me, this speaks not only of the desire to connect but also the need to do so, against all odds, in any way possible, and under whatever circumstances. This also gives me hope that Western classical music, along with many other genres in the performing arts, will be able to meaningfully enrich the lives of many more if it is taken out of isolation and embraces all who come to share in the experience—regardless of their social status. For this, the need is for policy support to make the means and measures available and accessible, and an understanding that the rewards of community building and enhancement of human capital may far exceed the investment.

After all, Mr Ong Teng Cheong, one of Singapore's founding fathers and its first elected President, advocated music for all as part of nation building. He is also credited for developing the blueprint for the nation's cultural institutions, including the National Arts Council and the Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. As Secretary General of the Singapore National Trades Union Congress, he took a personal interest in introducing music into the lives of Singaporean workers, commissioning the orchestration of Singaporean songs to be played by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. Of all of his legacies, this promotion of music is one that stands out until today, and is one that the nation can continue to build on.

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