

Conceptual mapping of the „artist-audience” relationship. Managerial perspectives in „music mediation”

Oana BĂLAN-BUDOIU¹

Abstract: *Building on historical case studies, documented by practice, the present article identifies two recurring typologies through which the artist-audience relationship has been negotiated: the responsive-formative model and the influence-network positioning model. Sociological analysis reveals that the cultivation of musical taste is an acquired social construct, one that may develop through education and musical immersion. Considering this, knowledge of music mediation becomes a significant element in musicians' lives, with the artist-audience dialog representing an important step in the management of contemporary music careers. This article examines the historical evolution of the artist-audience engagement, tracing the mechanism underlying this phenomenon.*

Keywords: music mediation; music management; sociology of music; artist-audience relationship;

Introduction

The history of music has consistently recorded the stylistic evolution of musical genres, but has rarely examined the role audience have played in shaping the artistic creation. The way in which great musicians have built their relationship with the public have remained in the shadow of historical analyses. However, recent researches focused on music-reception theories, enriches our understanding of these relational dynamics. The premise of this article rests on the idea that the mediator) regardless of their position, musicologist, manager, critic or impresario), plays a particularly important and decisive role in connecting musical production with the community. Our aim is to investigate these aspects by following three complementary coordinates: mapping the historical development of musical mediation form 18th century to present, examining the mechanism through which artist-audience relationship has been shaped over time, and identifying the managerial perspectives these dynamics generate for contemporary cultural practice.

1. Methodology

With the aim of reconstructing the historical path of the „artist-audience relationship”, we will address a conceptual and theoretical approach, focusing on the analysis of specialized literature in the field of music management, the sociology of music and musicology, comparing a corpus of academic sources. Our study is rooted in an examination of European concert life from 18th century onwards, followed by a social perspective in audience-development and the shaping of „musical taste”. It concludes with a third layer in which we will discuss the aesthetic reception and the transformation of the artist's engagement in community. The conclusions outline a strategy for repositioning the professional artists within contemporary musical life, to encourage a reconsideration of the dialogue that should be built and maintained with one's audience.

¹ The National Academy of Music „Gheorghe Dima” Cluj-Napoca, oana.balan@amgd.ro.

2. Historical perspectives on the „artist-audience relationship”

In the early centuries, a bidirectional and formative orientation in the relationship between artists and the audiences of classical concerts can be readily identified through the musical creation of Haydn. Analyses conducted by leading musicologist² on the London Symphonies highlight several key points suggesting that „audience taste” was extensively studied prior to the composition of Haydn’s works. The most widely debated example in this regard is *Symphony no.95*, which was harshly received by contemporary audiences, a moment considered a turning point in the compositional writing of the great Haydn. What followed at the level of creation after this event, which practically consolidated his reputation, was considered “accepted” and far more responsive in its address to the public. In Haydn’s period, we can identify what we today call “audience segmentation”, between the noble public (conservative, traditional-oriented) and bourgeois audience (which anticipates modern concepts). In the second half of his life, we can observe Haydn’s desire to transform his musical language into an intelligible and relevant act for his contemporary audiences. In his correspondence with Maria Anna von Genzinger³, as well as in his London notebooks, Haydn makes observations regarding the attitudes of English audiences in the 1790s, highlighting their enthusiasm and their harsh reactions. In a letter sent to Musikverein, Haydn noted that his wish was to offer “moments of rest and comfort” through his music. But was Haydn alone on this journey of audience understanding? The impresario Johann Peter Salomon, one of the most influential managers of that time, the one who guided Haydn through London society, was the figure who decisively shaped this social philosophy within the composer’s work frequently challenging him to take into account aspects related to the taste and expectations of his audience.

Following a similar profile, many other composers of that period were preoccupied with the dialogue with their public. Another illustrative example is offered by the British sociology⁴, which examines the Beethovenian genius, highlighting that the composer’s image was frequently shaped by social and political forces. In Beethoven’s time, the patronage system was in transition, and the Viennese nobility sought to assert its cultural status through the great artists of the day. Musicological researches have established that Beethoven was not one to embrace conformism. The public expectations played no significant role in structuring his creative output. Despite this, he distinguishes himself through other means. The relations with several key figures, such as Prince Karl von Lichnowsky (with whom Beethoven shared his home for a number of years), Baron Gottfried van Swieten (an organizer of musical events and a highly influential figure in elite musical circles), and Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, considerably enhanced his social and cultural reputation. Through the influential networks, Beethoven positioned himself on a visible and esteemed threshold. This was in fact due to the tendencies of the aristocracy on that period, which, by its very structure, was socially influenced by the position of the royal households, the inclinations of the nobility and the tastes dictated by monarchs.

Historical perspectives thus present us with two typologies through which musicians have engaged in dialogue with their audiences: a *responsive-formative model*, where composers integrated audience expectations into the artistic act (Haydn) and a model of social exclusivism, in which the musician constructs their status in the basis of influence networks and patronage.

² David P. Schroeder. 1985. „Audience Reception and Haydn's London Symphonies". *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 57-72; p. 58.

³ H. C. Robbins Landon. 1959. *The Collected Correspondence and London Notebooks of Joseph Haydn*. London: Barrie and Rockliff, p. 18.

⁴ Tia DeNora. 1995. *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius. Musical Politics in Vienna 1792–1803*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 8-15.

These are two models that still exist to this day, even though, in the meantime, aristocratic patronage has been replaced by the market, the state, and the music institutions.

Hector Berlioz applied similar strategies. For his *Symphonie fantastique*, for instance, he personally designed a programme booklet that went beyond a simple "concert story", crafting a narrative designed to bring audiences closer to the musical material presented and to orient the "unformed" ear toward the principal idea of the work. This initiative falls within what Botstein⁵ described among the typologies of musical mediation: the repertoire guide *Führer durch den Concertsaal* (1886), the programme notes of the Vienna Philharmonic (1894), and Henry Krehbiel's manual *How to Listen to Music* (1896).

Returning to Berlioz and his methods of educating public taste, we find his writings in music criticism published in the *Journal des Débats*⁶. As conductor of his own works, he initiated discussions based on musical materials with interested audiences in Germany, England, and Russia, discussions conducted primarily through publications and the press, or in the salons he frequented, where conversations about music were commonplace.

In the 1830s, an artist emerged who completely transformed the paradigm of classical music reception: "*Le concert, c'est moi*", declared Franz Liszt⁷. As a pioneer of what he called *Musikalische Soliloquien* (musical soliloquies, later termed recitals), Liszt also had the freedom to give a new direction to the entire concept of communication with audiences. He produced 56 transcriptions of Schubert's lieder because, as he noted, he had "heard in salons, with great pleasure and with tears in his eyes, a friend and artist, Baron von Schönstein, performing Schubert's lieder." Through this gesture, Liszt contributed to the popularisation of Schubert's then lesser-known works, rapidly elevating them to the rank of popular concert pieces. He did the same with the works of Beethoven. His transcription of Beethoven's nine symphonies for solo piano served an even more specific mediating purpose: it allowed aristocrats to enjoy these great works in the comfort of their own salons. The term "Lisztomania," coined by the writer Heinrich Heine to describe the outpouring of emotion that accompanied Liszt's concerts, appears in reviews of the 1844 musical season. The foundational academic study on Lisztomania is the chapter "Anatomy of Lisztomania: the Berlin Episode,"⁸ in which Gooley examines the world of debates, journalism, and controversies surrounding the virtuoso Liszt, reconstructing the multiple symbolic identities he fulfilled for his enthusiastic audiences. From the perspective of this research, Lisztomania represents an extreme case that reveals the upper limit of musical mediation. While Berlioz had constructed a controlled, unidirectional form of mediation, Liszt accidentally produced something altogether different - a mediation that had slipped out of control. Audiences no longer processed Liszt's music as music; they processed it as corporeal presence, as magnetic phenomenon, as collective symbolic construction. Mediation had moved beyond music toward something closer to what we today call the cult of celebrity. It was precisely for this reason that Heine had situated the phenomenon in the domain of pathology rather than aesthetics.

3. Social Mechanisms in the Formation of Artistic Taste

In one of the works considered foundational for historical music sociology, with reference to European concert life,⁹ the question of classical music's transition from an elite

⁵ Leon Botstein. 1992. „Listening through Reading: Musical Literacy and the Concert Audience". *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 129-145; p. 131.

⁶ A partisan publication of considerable stature and longevity, which published the most widely read and appreciated articles of the period 1789-1944.

⁷ Alan Walker. 1983. *Franz Liszt, Vol. 1: The Virtuoso Years, 1811–1847*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, pp. 235-242.

⁸ Dana Gooley. 2004. *The Virtuoso Liszt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 15-48.

⁹ William Weber. 1975. *Music and the Middle Class. The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830-1848*. London: Croom Helm Ltd., pp. 19-99.

category toward the broader community is raised. The social situation of music in London, Paris, and Vienna between 1780 and 1880 is examined in parallel, presenting several mechanisms through which the bourgeois public was formed and became loyal to a canon of composers. Weber demonstrates how certain musicians were accepted and others marginalised, according to criteria rooted in social subjectivity. In this context, the idea of "serious music", which held no appeal for the general public, began to take shape alongside so-called "popular," community music, which was starting to respond to audiences' demand for certain repertoires. The tendency of the general public was to seek a pleasant and uncomplicated atmosphere, since, more often than not, the artistic event became a pretext for meeting a certain social circle and building relationships. Accordingly, anything that engaged with complex content was considered disruptive in this context, with audiences preferring a "light music" that suited a relaxed atmosphere without pretension.

Several bibliographic references provided by Weber's work, drawing on French criticism (François-Joseph Fétis - founder of the *Revue musicale*, 1827) and Viennese criticism (Eduard Hanslick - *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, 1854), support the importance of the relationship between music and society, and the emergence of a movement toward the "canonisation" of works within the concert repertoire. It is thus revealed that around the year 1800, programmed music was largely contemporary or recent (and complex), whereas approximately eighty years later the proportion had reversed, with concert repertoires drawn predominantly from the past (and therefore familiar and accessible). This phenomenon generated tension between "new music," which asserted its right to be performed and appreciated, and "canonised" (lighter) music, which was increasingly favoured in socially prestigious contexts.

5. Contemporary Sociological Perspectives on the Formation of Musical Taste

Commentators throughout history have emphasised that recent, contemporary, and complex music demands a certain degree of understanding and knowledge. In this regard, it is widely acknowledged that a taste for new music is acquired through sustained education, and that a preference for such music serves as a marker confirming a certain level of cultural literacy.

The study by Markusen and Brown¹⁰ highlights that modernity, with the institutionalisation of art, inadvertently encouraged a symbolic distancing between artist and audience. The performance space and the behavioural norms expected of spectators have changed considerably from what they once were.

Contemporary studies addressing the phenomenon of "musical taste"¹¹ likewise demonstrate that artistic preferences are the result of a series of learned acquisitions, shaped by multiple stimuli encountered in specific contexts through exposure and education. What we define as musical "preferences" is in fact the outcome of social, cultural, economic, and individual factors that influence our lives and, implicitly, our capacity to appreciate beauty and artistic value. Whereas not long ago the family constituted an important pole in the formation and shaping of cultural tastes, in the modern era mass-media has become an extremely powerful instrument for imposing such preferences.

¹⁰ Ann Markusen & Alan Brown. 2014. „From Audience to Participants: New Thinking for the Performing Arts". *Análise Social*, Vol. 49, No. 213, pp. 866-883, p. 869.

¹¹ Vera Ikonomova. 1972. „Music and the Audience - Social Determinants of Musical Tastes". *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 121-126, p. 122.

We find ourselves in an age in which simple advertising is no longer sufficient to fill a concert hall¹². Today, complex and simultaneous strategies are employed, targeting education, audience dialogue, musical diversity, and intelligent artistic programming in equal measure.

Social groups, both formal and informal, serve as vehicles through which taste is transmitted and standardised at both collective and individual levels. Recent studies¹³ adds an important dimension related to the active participation of the community within the context of the mediated concert. For new audiences, the assimilation of unfamiliar behavioural norms (how to listen, when to applaud, what attire is appropriate) must be acquired progressively, since knowing how to be an appropriate spectator is itself a learned skill. It is recommended that this process be supported through auxiliary materials (programme notes, artist-audience discussions) and educational initiatives (open rehearsals, masterclasses), in order to overcome social and psychological barriers. Access to classical music presupposes not merely exposure, but crucially the sense of belonging that audiences gain when they feel welcomed, informed, and integrated.

The historical analysis of musical mediation practices reveals that the effort to build a dialogue between artistic creation and the public is not a recent concern, but one constitutive of European art music. What we today call "musical mediation," with its entire contemporary vocabulary, has deep roots in the attitudes of musicians who understood, each within their own context, that art cannot survive in the absence of a public that comprehends and desires it.

Tracing this genealogy, several constants emerge. The first is that mediation has always been a response to a specific social context. Bach responded to Leipzig's commercial bourgeoisie; Haydn negotiated with the aristocracy; Leopold Mozart constructed a European audience for a child prodigy; Berlioz educated a bourgeois and informed Paris; Liszt transformed the concert into a spectacle of corporeal presence. Each employed different instruments (space, text, body, press, transcription) according to what could reach the audiences of their era.

The second constant is that effective mediation has always entailed a degree of assumed risk. Bach satirised his own audience; Beethoven refused to descend to the level of his listeners and compelled the public to rise to the level of his music; Berlioz prescribed the manner of listening; Liszt replaced the mixed concert programme with the solo monologue. The third constant, and perhaps the most significant for contemporary practice, is that the effects of mediation are never entirely controllable by the mediator. The case of Lisztomania illustrates this principle with a clarity that no theory could have anticipated: the public can take a performer, a work, or an artistic gesture and construct from it meanings that the author never intended and cannot prevent. The distinction between intended mediation and effective mediation is one of the central problems of any practice of artistic mediation, regardless of era.

6. Conclusions

Following this trajectory of the artist-audience relationship, from the direct negotiation of the Viennese Classical period with its London audiences to contemporary streaming platforms, several significant observations emerge.

Musical mediation has always constituted a specific response to a social context shaped by the history, culture, and economy of its time. Every musician who has tested their relationship with their audience has done so in awareness of that audience's profile. This

¹² Dragan Klaić. 2012. „Finding the Audience, Making the Audience". In *Resetting the Stage: Public Theatre Between the Market and Democracy*. Bristol: Intellect, pp. 119-134; p. 121.

¹³ Melissa C. Dobson & Stephanie E. Pitts. 2011. „Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members' Social and Musical Responses to First-time Concert Attendance". *Ethnomusicology Forum*, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 353-383; p. 361.

phenomenon has always entailed risk, and musicians have chosen gestures that, though sometimes atypical and criticised, were in essence acts of forming public taste. From a historical perspective, two models of negotiating the artist-audience relationship can be identified: the responsive-formative model (exemplified by Haydn) and the influence-network model (Beethoven), in which the artist constructs their status independently of the general public.

From a sociological perspective, musical taste has been shown to be an acquired construct, one that can be shaped and influenced through repeated exposure. The formation of taste therefore requires deliberate and multi-layered intervention, navigating symbolic barriers - such as a sense of belonging and the recognition of norms specific to the classical music listener.

The artist of our time is called upon to consciously embrace this dimension of their practice. Without making commercial concessions that would dilute their artistic language, they can position their interpretive performance in awareness of a social context that has its own profile, its own barriers, but also multiple openings. The acceptance of this dialogue - drawing on the historical lessons offered by the great musicians of the past as well as the contemporary methods now available - is one of the defining challenges of artistic career management in our century.

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