
CAPTURING LONDON'S AUDIENCES

Going to a classical concert: the relationship between audience perceptions of artistic identity and motivation for future attendance

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

When classical concert-goers attend the performance of a particular group of musicians, how aware can they become of the specific artistic ethos of that group, and how does this awareness affect their attitude towards future attendance at the group's concerts?

Building and maintaining a committed audience is a key priority of many classical music performance groups (O'Reilly, Larsen & Kubacki, 2014). Achieving a stable group of regular repeat attenders (e.g. subscribers) is at the heart of many organisations' business strategy, particularly in the context of low and declining audiences for live classical music. Common experience of major concert halls is that many attenders at classical concerts are one-time visitors who may have attended no previous performances. Indeed, the available data suggest that the proportion of the adult population of countries such as the USA and the UK who attend any classical concerts at all in any one year is low and declining (Martin, Bunting, & Oskala, 2009; National Endowment for the Arts, 2008, see also <http://www.statista.com/statistics/195186/classical-music-concert-attendance-in-the-us-since-1982/>). Understanding how "first timers" find their way to a particular artist or group of artists, and what might motivate them to book again, and potentially convert to loyal and regular "followers" is therefore of significant interest to classical music organisations.

This paper reports a collaboration between the authors, both research psychologists, and the leadership of a professional chamber orchestra. The questions that the research addressed emerged organically from ongoing dialogue between the partners and were highly influenced by the artistic and business priorities of the orchestra. As researchers we brought a particular orientation towards methodology, but no strongly predetermined theoretical or disciplinary position in relation to the existing literature. The initial trigger for the collaboration was the inauguration of a London residency of the orchestra within an arts and higher education hub where our research group is situated, and the mutual perception that this provided opportunities to collaboratively increase our understanding of audience experience and motivation, particularly in the context of a major world cultural city where audiences are faced with a huge, and often bewildering, choice of live events to attend. As the relationship matured, specific foci for different phases of the collaboration were clarified.

As researchers we brought to the collaboration the following orientations, which have been explicitly and progressively developed within the Understanding Audiences programme at our institution (see Dobson & Sloboda, 2014).

- 1) Our research aims to increase the artistically-relevant understanding that music professionals have of their live audiences, so that there is maximum chance of it impacting positively on artistic practice.
- 2) We therefore devise research questions and approaches in collaboration with the professionals we are working with.
- 3) Research data is fed back to music professionals which contains detailed information about the nature and meaning of the audience experience, before during and/or after a live event.
- 4) A central component of the data is qualitative discourse, being drawn from open-ended responses, augmented by quantitative data where relevant.

Britten Sinfonia (BS) is a professional chamber orchestra founded in 1992 that focuses its work around three residencies in the UK, in Cambridge (where the orchestra's headquarters are), Norwich, and London, where it now has a residency in the Barbican, dividing its performances between the Barbican Concert Hall and the smaller Milton Court Concert Hall in the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Its promotional material describes it having

'an inspired approach to concert programming which makes bold, intelligent connections across 400 years of repertoire, and a versatility that is second to none. Britten Sinfonia breaks the mould by not having a principal conductor or director, instead choosing to collaborate with a range of the finest international guest artists from across the musical spectrum, resulting in performances of rare insight and energy.'
(<http://www.brittensinfonia.com/about-us/#sthash.bSL4r2FX.dpuf>)

The specific interest of the orchestral management was to discover the extent to which attenders at their London concerts, particularly first-time attenders were aware of this specific ethos and character of the orchestra, and how this informed their motivation to attend future concerts by the orchestra. The London residency is relatively new compared to their more well-established residencies in Cambridge and Norwich, in both of which cities the orchestra has built up a regular and devoted clientele over the years. Britten Sinfonia feels it knows and understands its Cambridge and Norwich audiences very well, many of whom are regular long-term subscribers to its concert series, which represents one of the few opportunities in either of these cities to experience high-level professional chamber orchestra performances.

London is a completely different environment in which to offer concerts. It is an international centre of artistic excellence, where many world-class professional performances can be heard on almost any night of the year, and where Britten Sinfonia has to share the field with other outstanding and successful resident chamber orchestras such as the Academy of Ancient Music, the London Sinfonietta, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, to say nothing of numerous different sized groups. In that context, it is not enough for the orchestra to perform well - it has to offer something truly distinctive which makes it visible and attractive in the highly competitive and crowded market place. The orchestra believes in its distinctiveness and explicitly articulates its self-understanding in those terms, but has obtained little data beyond the anecdotal to identify the extent to which audiences (particularly London audiences) notice and respond to such distinctiveness.

This paper reports on the research process and outcome that was jointly devised to move forward the organisation's understanding of its audiences in this area.

METHOD

The research process had three phases:

- 1) In-depth semi-structured interviews with orchestral management and players in order to achieve insight into the orchestra's understanding of its artistic identity, its

audiences, and where it had insufficient knowledge. These interviewed informed the way the subsequent phases were carried out.

- 2) An anonymous questionnaire, delivered to all attenders at a London concert of the orchestra (June 2014) who had provided an email address for communications from the concert promoters (the Barbican Arts Centre).
- 3) In-depth semi-structured interviews with a sample selected from the respondents to the 2nd phase to represent a range of ages, genders, and degrees of experience with the orchestra.

The results and analysis section of this paper focuses on data from phases 2 and 3, with information from phase 1 being used to frame and focus the questions asked in the subsequent phases.

Phase 1 comprised interviews with four members of Britten Sinfonia (3 managerial and 1 artistic), each lasting about one hour. Interviews were transcribed and key themes were fed back to orchestral management in the context of jointly planning phases 2 and 3.

Interviewees shared a belief in the principle that faithfulness to the strong existing vision (artistically and artist led) and to the ethos of the organisation hopefully translates into a commitment to that from audiences, but stated that this is being tested by the unique challenges of London. In particular, the plurality and diversity of the programming creates tensions and dilemmas - and a question which arises from this for Britten Sinfonia is whether it can tap into niche audiences and at the same time create a sustainable, loyal following based on a distinctive identity and ethos as an ensemble.

There were six specific elements of orchestral ethos/identity that were highlighted in the interviews:

World class performers (and guests)	Soloistic (often conductorless) playing	Enthusiasm/commitment / freshness/charisma of players	Democratic participatory ethos	Diversity in styles/genres	Innovation and aesthetic unity in programming (whole greater than parts)
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Interviewees shared a strong belief that firm commitment to this ethos and its associated artistic values will translate into audience engagement. In particular there was a belief that this ethos is more important than particular repertoire *per se*, e.g. audience members might not like some music in a programme but won't mind, because they will 'have a connected experience'; 'there will be something there that will captivate'.

However, these beliefs were tempered by a cautious assessment of the London audience. There existed among orchestra personnel a sense of the unknown, and uncertainty about establishing this identity in the London scene which presented challenges for both management and players. Restrictions over access to (and control of) data contributed to this uncertainty. There was a recognition that, unlike Cambridge and Norwich, there was likely to be a smaller proportion of the audience who "go to everything that BS does in London". Whilst the typical audience in Cambridge and Norwich is known to be white, professional/retired, aged 45-75, and middle/upper-middle class, interviewees sensed that the London audience may be more diverse. But the London audience was also seen as

somewhat 'faceless', largely unknown other than when players have personal contacts or friends in the audience (something which is likely to happen more often in London than in the provinces). Thus, the degree to which audience members were aware of, and susceptible to, the ethos and identity of the orchestra, over and above the specific programming which brought them to a particular concert, remained largely unknown.

It was mutually agreed to proceed in the investigation by focusing on the audience of one particular concert in the London series, held in the Barbican Concert Hall on 6th June 2015 (<http://www.barbican.org.uk/music/event-detail.asp?ID=15934>). The centrepiece of this concert was a new commission 'Sentences' by the composer Nico Muhly, with libretto by Adam Gopnik, and sung by the countertenor Iestyn Davies, with a solo instrumental part for violist Lawrence Power. The libretto focused on the life and persecution of the computer scientist Alan Turing, and built on the strong interest in Turing stimulated by his posthumous pardon (2013) and the film about his life, the Imitation Game (2014). The concert also contained works by Dowland, Vivaldi, and Britten, thus well representing the eclectic cross-period programming that is characteristic of Britten Sinfonia.

On the day following the concert a link to an on-line questionnaire was sent to all attendees whose email addresses were known to the Barbican Marketing department and who had given permission for communications to be received from the Barbican. The full questionnaire is given at Appendix 1. Questions included demographics (age, gender, postcode), frequency and variety of attendance at live arts events in London, number of prior attendances at a Britten Sinfonia concert, reasons for attending this concert, aspects of the concert that were enjoyed and not enjoyed, interest in future attendance, and an opportunity to characterise their understanding of Britten Sinfonia through a question worded thus:

If you had to describe Britten Sinfonia to a friend in a couple of sentences, in a way that would be helpful to them in deciding whether to come to one of their concerts, what would you say?

Finally, respondents were asked if they would be willing to be contacted by the research team to participate in a more in-depth interview. Interviews were semi-structured, lasting between 30 and 45 minutes, and covered the following areas:

- How did you come to attend that event? Was Britten Sinfonia a factor? Was it your idea or someone else's?
- What stayed in your mind from the concert experience? Who did you tell about it, discuss it with?
- How did attending a Britten Sinfonia concert compare to other live events you have attended? Did it meet, or change, your expectations?
- Since that concert have you purchased tickets for other Britten Sinfonia events, or made plans to do so? If yes, what and why; if no, why not? What would entice you to go again? Have you studied the 2015-16 programme?
- How prominent is Britten Sinfonia in the mix of things you go to? Is the Barbican location a factor?

Interviews took place in October 2015. Following thematic analysis of the questionnaires and interviews, main findings were fed back to orchestral management in February 2016. A

summative assessment of the value of the data, and its implications for future artistic and marketing strategy is expected from Britten Sinfonia Management.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

One hundred and eight questionnaire responses were accumulated in custom audience-feedback software owned by the Barbican Centre, and passed on to the researchers in spreadsheet form with name and contact details removed. From the 49 respondents indicating a willingness to be interviewed, the research team identified 18 individuals for potential interview in Phase 3, selected to represent a range of age, gender, and prior attendance at Britten Sinfonia concerts. Barbican management then supplied names and email addresses for those 18 individuals, who were invited to contact the research team and make an appointment for interview. Seven of the 18 individuals both responded positively and were able to find a mutually acceptable interview time and place. Interviews were face to face and were all conducted by one or other of the authors. Interviews were recorded, and later transcribed for qualitative thematic analysis.

Participants (demographics)

The Barbican recorded an attendance of 538 paying audience members at the concert (i.e. excluding complimentary tickets). Of those, 296 (55%) were sent an email inviting them to participate in the survey. These were all individuals who had supplied an email address and given prior permission for mailings to be sent to them. The 108 individuals who returned completed surveys represented 36% of those invited, a relatively high return rate for surveys of this kind. Of those who answered the question on gender, 45% were male and 54% were female. Age range showed a uni-modal distribution, with the modal age range being 46-55 (24%), with 5% in the 16-25 range, and with 3% in the 75+ range. Of those providing post-code data, 70% gave a London postcode, with a predominance of North and East locations.

The seven interviewees represented a range of age, gender, and prior attendance at Britten Sinfonia concerts. For reference, their details are given in the following table, names are researcher-assigned pseudonyms.

Table 1 - Interviewee details

Pseudonym	age	gender	Prior attendance at Britten Sinfonia	comments
Simon	26-35	M	1st time	Attended with partner
Flora	26-35	F	1st time	Attended alone
Matteo	36-45	M	1st time	Attended alone
Jon	16-25	M	1st time	Attended alone
Antoine	26-35	M	2nd time	Attended alone
Claire	56-65	F	Repeat attender	Attended with partner

Deborah	36-45	F	Repeat attender	Attended with relative
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We present the results of Phase 2 and 3 together, organised according to specific areas of analysis, rather than separately.

1. BACKGROUND AND EXPERIENCE OF RESPONDENTS (WHO ARE THEY?)

Respondents showed some areas of commonality, but also significant diversity on key measures.

All but one of the respondents were regular or frequent attenders at live classical concerts, with more than half attending something at least once a month, and no-one for whom this was their first classical concert.

<input type="checkbox"/> once a month or more	61 (58%)
<input type="checkbox"/> several times a year	33 (31%)
<input type="checkbox"/> once or twice a year	10 (10%)
<input type="checkbox"/> less than once a year	1 (1%)
<input type="checkbox"/> this is my first classical concert	0 (0%)

Respondents also showed significant commonalities in what other live art forms they had attended in the last year, with 95% of respondents having gone to the theatre, 94% having attended an art gallery, and 75% having attended live opera. Although other art forms had been attended (i.e. dance, ballet, pop/rock, musicals, jazz) none of these was attended by more than 40% of respondents.

Some clustering in venue attendance was noted in responses to the question about the location of the last-attended live event. Most frequently mentioned venues were Barbican (19), Royal Opera House (10), South Bank Centre (10), Wigmore Hall (8), and Coliseum/ENO (5). The Barbican is clearly a salient and positive venue for some respondents, who mentioned their relationship to the Barbican in their response to this concert:

'...the Barbican is always fun to visit (Mum and Dad use to take me as a kid, so it brings back happy memories). Lovely meal, brought a great earring from the shop that turned out to be designed by a friend of mine'.

In contrast, respondents were diverse in relation to previous attendance at a Britten Sinfonia concert, with over one third being first-time attenders, but with another third having attended four times or more.

<input type="checkbox"/> this is my first Britten Sinfonia concert	37 (35%)
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-3 prior attendances	29 (28%)
<input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 prior attendances	20 (19%)
<input type="checkbox"/> 7-9 prior attendances	9 (9%)

□ 10+ prior attendances 10 (10%)

Respondents were also demographically diverse on the measures taken. Males and females were equally represented among respondents, and 30% of respondents were under 45.

Thus, in comparison to Britten Sinfonia understandings of their established Cambridge and Norwich audiences, London respondents were more age diverse, and contained significant numbers for whom this was the first experience of Britten Sinfonia. However, respondents were very firmly in the “classical music lover” camp, with little evidence of people new to classical concert attendance.

One interviewee, Jon (age range 16-25, first-time attender), who was also the youngest, had very little experience of classical concerts but a little more knowledge of opera, which he had come to via music theatre. Another interviewee, Matteo (age range 36-45, first-time attender), was largely uninterested in classical music (though he had experience of listening to it growing up), going mainly to jazz-rock and small intimate performances in niche contemporary venues. Britten Sinfonia has an opportunity with people like Jon, and those like Matteo who are pretty numerous in the London scene, but not so much in the provinces. But at present, there is little evidence that these constituencies are being reached in any numbers.

It also appeared to the researchers, who were present at the concert, that this was not an ethnically diverse audience. The ethnic composition appeared typical of general attendance at flagship London classical venues (i.e. predominantly white caucasian).

2. RESPONDENT MOTIVATION FOR ATTENDING THIS CONCERT, TO WHAT EXTENT BRITTEN SINFONIA WAS AN EXPLICIT FACTOR.

The question “What were the main things that attracted you to today’s concert?” allowed respondents to check pre-specified responses but also make free comments. The numbers checking each response is given below

Nico Muhly	75
Iestyn Davies	58
The Turing connection	43
Britten Sinfonia	32
The venue (Barbican)	30
Particular work(s) in the programme	26
Overall programming	22
Particular players	2
Other - please specify	4 (Premiere, Lawrence Power (2), I like to see opera)

Although Britten Sinfonia was an explicit reason for some 30% of attendances, other more concert-specific features predominated in responses. Of these, the composer Nico Muhly received the most frequent mentions. One respondent remarked:

'I've seen Nico Muhly's work live before (most recently during the Mountains and Waves sessions at Barbican), and this was a great occasion to see his latest piece. I booked my ticket right after going to Mountains and Waves and picking up a flyer there.'

In relation to Iestyn Davies, responses included:

'...I booked it because of Iestyn Davies, the countertenor, who I think is wonderful. (Laughs.) So anything he does I book. So I have to say it wasn't because of the Britten Sinfonia. It was actually because of Iestyn Davies. [...] singing's my thing – singing is what I like – so opera is my great love. And then choral, and then individual recitals. So I always go for the voice' (Claire, age range 56-65, regular Britten Sinfonia attender)

The Turing connection was another strong feature, although usually in conjunction with a musical interest: e.g.

'As a gay man and scientist from Manchester I have an interest in Turing and I also enjoy opera'

Where Britten Sinfonia was explicitly mentioned, it was also usually in conjunction with a concert specific feature, e.g.

'The Britten Sinfonia are outstanding and in his pre concert talk Nico Muhly described their programming as awesome which it is. Nico Muhly is an exciting composer'

'As soon as I read about the new piece, I knew it was likely to be interesting. I also went to a Britten Sinfonia concert with I Davies at St Lukes a while ago, and liked the slightly experimental but still very accessible programme'

These data confirm that stated motivations for concert attendance relate more to concert-specific factors (soloists, repertoire) than to general features of the orchestra. Although some respondents indicated strong loyalty to specific performers, such as Iestyn Davies (*'I go to all his concerts'*), no such loyalty to Britten Sinfonia as an ensemble was expressed in this sample.

3. RESPONDENT EXPERIENCE OF THE CONCERT, TO WHAT EXTENT BRITTEN SINFONIA ETHOS WAS NOTICED/VALUED

All questionnaire respondents were asked to 'state one thing about the concert that you enjoyed'. 90 respondents wrote something in response to this question. Many of the responses highlighted a particular work or a particular performer. But a substantial proportion of the responses mentioned more general and overall features of the performance. Eight responses explicitly mentioned the orchestra, either by name (Britten Sinfonia in 4 cases), or in a more general way (e.g. 'the players', 'the orchestra').

'Britten Sinfonia playing - intimate and responsive'

'The enthusiasm and skill of the players'

A significant cluster of responses (n=22) chose the programming, an identified core feature of the Britten Sinfonia ethos, as a positive feature.

Responses which highlighted the orchestra and the programming were spread across all levels of prior experience with the orchestra, indicating that a meaningful proportion of first-time-attenders were able to identify these features and rate them positively.

To obtain a more fine-grained picture of the perceptions of Britten Sinfonia, one question posed to all respondents was: 'If you had to describe Britten Sinfonia to a friend in a couple of sentences, in a way that would be helpful to them in deciding whether to come to one of their concerts, what would you say?'

Responses ranged from the concise (e.g. '*committed, musical, intelligent playing*') to the elaborated (e.g.

'I'd start by saying how lucky we are in the UK to have two world class sinfonias: The Britten Sinfonia and the Northern Sinfonia. I'd explain that the smaller scale of a Sinfonia lets you see the detail of pieces, instead of the wall-of-sound one sometimes experiences from a huge orchestra one can instead see and hear the relationships in the work more clearly. I'd mention that their programming is a real joy – they often work closely with really exciting performers and composers (like Muhly or Kuusisto) and put together evenings where a particular work is brought to life through its relationship to the other pieces played (i.e. the Serenade for Tenor Horn and Strings)'

A content analysis was undertaken on the responses, to identify any reference to one or more of the six defined features of orchestral ethos/identity. Ninety-nine respondents offered a comment. Table 2 shows the number of mentions of each feature, broken down by number of prior attendances at Britten Sinfonia concerts.

Table 2 - Orchestral ethos features noted

Feature of orchestra identify/ ethos	World class performers (and guests)	Soloistic (often conductor-less) playing	Enthusiasm/ commitment/ freshness/ charisma of players	Democratic participatory ethos	Diversity in styles/ genre	Innovation and aesthetic unity in programming (whole greater than parts)	Total (mean)
First attendance (n=37)	11	2	4	2	8	2	29 (0.78)
1-3 prior attendances (n=25)	13	2	8	1	3	3	30 (1.20)
4-6 prior attendances	7	1	4	2	3	2	19 (1.00)

(n=19)							
7 or more attendances (n=15)	11	5	5	1	8	5	35 (2.33)
Total (proportion)	42 (37%)	10 (8.8%)	21 (19%)	6 (5.3%)	22 (19%)	12 (11%)	113

The data show that some participants at all levels of prior attendance were able to identify each of the six defined features. However prior experience with the orchestra was associated with mention of more features. First timers mentioned an average of less than 1 feature per respondent, whereas those having attended 7 or more prior performances mentioned an average of more than 2 features. Thus repeated exposure to the orchestra appears to make more of the features salient and memorable.

Not every feature was equally salient. The world class quality of players and guests was mentioned by 37% of respondents, more than any other feature. In contrast the democratic and participatory ethos was mentioned by only 5% of the respondents. This ranking was similar across all experience levels, suggesting that audience members find some features easier to notice and characterise than others. In particular, the democratic and participatory ethos seems particularly hard for the majority of the respondents to point to and succinctly characterise, whether because it is not noticed, or because once noticed it is hard to put into words.

4. RESPONDENT FUTURE INTENTIONS VIS A VIS BRITTEN SINFONIA ATTENDANCE

Respondents were all asked the question “How interested are you in attending another Britten Sinfonia concert in the next 6 months”. Of the 90 respondents who provided an answer, 12 had already booked something, and another 70 stated that they were very or quite interested.

A very small number of respondents cited general orchestral features as the reason for this: e.g.

‘we liked their ensemble feel - no hierarchy, sense of really listening to each other’ (repeat attender 1-3 performances)

‘I really like this orchestra. Very passionate and very good performers. I would like to see them again.’ (first-timer)

Others identified specific performers, or types of performance.

‘I’m not a great attender of orchestral concerts - I mostly go to things that involve singing - but if something involving singing came up I’d be interested!’ (first-timer)

‘Would be most likely to attend if Nico were involved’

There were also a considerable number of responses that indicated a level of uncertainty about what the orchestra stood for

'I'm not entirely sure what the mandate of the group is? My preference is for baroque so if they focus on 20th C. then I'm likely not very interested.'

Or simply lack of detailed engagement:

'I haven't looked into the scheduling closely yet'

Exploring these matters in more depth through interview we found that both of the regular attendees interviewed (Claire and Deborah) had booked for a future BS concert (*Messiah* and James MacMillan respectively). Two of the first-timer interviewees (Simon and Matteo) definitely did not plan to come to any more BS events; it was clear that 'Sentences' was a one-off that they had enjoyed, but they did not see any likelihood of returning in the future. The other interviewees had varying degrees of interest and intention.

Jon, the youngest interviewee (16-25 age group), had firm intentions to book for 'The Importance of Being Earnest' and had looked at 'Messiah'. He was very new to classical concert going and felt most comfortable with, and most interested in, opera and events with a theatrical and/or vocal element.

Antoine was not particularly into classical music, and said that a classical concert would need to be something he recognised and liked. However, he was interested in events that seemed special, one-off opportunities.

'I've taken a look at...the programme, and...well, I didn't see anything ...that really caught my eye that much. I think...[...] I could go to another one, but it would be kind of a last-minute decision, and what I would be interested in would be kind of a...more of a one-off event, of playing more contemporary music. Like...like exactly this one. If the same sort of event was happening again, having...erm...one of today's composers write something for Britten Sinfonia, I would probably be very interested to see that' (Antoine, second timer)

Flora had a vague idea that she might be interested in attending again if there was something in the programme that stood out for her - particularly interesting 20th century or contemporary pieces. But her considerations were also practical and social - finding an event that someone else might come to with her, and the right date. Prompted to look at the upcoming events during the interview, she identified Knussen as one she had noticed, but this was clearly not enough for her to have acted on it:

...so the...the Oliver Knussen, I definitely remember looking at that and thinking...

John: 'Possibly'.

Flora: Yep. (Laughs.) 'Possibly, possibly'. Erm... I can see 'Seven Last Words From the Cross', but I...I don't remember seeing that before. But I think, again, that would have [...] been the one that would attract me. [...] And then I

can see Alice Coote and Ian Bostridge, but I think I would see them and then think: 'Well, probably that's sold out', and I probably wouldn't...follow... (Laughs.) I probably wouldn't follow it up.

5. DIFFERENT BASES FOR REPEAT ATTENDANCE

Claire and Debbie were the two repeat attenders among the interviewees. Despite both attending Britten Sinfonia concerts frequently, their motivations appeared to be different. Debbie might be characterised as a Britten Sinfonia fan. While she did not attempt to attend every concert in the orchestra's series, it was clear that Britten Sinfonia itself was a significant factor in her motivation to attend, alongside other motivations to do with particular repertoire and guest performers:

I thought: 'Well, the combination of Britten Sinfonia and Nico Muhly, what more...I'm sure it's going to be a great concert,' [...] It was everything, you see! It was...er...Britten Sinfonia, Iestyn Davies. I love Lawrence Power, as well. You see, it had everything. Absolutely. And I love Dowland, Britten, Vivaldi, you know. (Debbie)

By contrast, Claire was motivated almost exclusively by factors other than the orchestra. Principally, she chose to hear vocal music, and in this particular concert it was Iestyn Davies who was the attraction for her.

It's mostly, in terms of music, vocal. I don't often go to purely instrumental concerts. But...er...because singing's my thing – singing is what I like – so opera is my great love. And then choral, and then individual recitals. So I always go for the voice. (Claire)

Although she had booked for another Britten Sinfonia event (*Messiah*) it was not primarily because of Britten Sinfonia, but because of other behavioural patterns and motivations:

I always try and see one Messiah at Christmastime. Because I'm Welsh, and we were brought up on the Messiah. (Laughs.) Especially at Christmastime. [...] I haven't lived in Wales for forty-five years; I still have that kind of association with it, and I do try and see it. Usually with some of my other expat friends. (Laughs.) We've all got that connection with Messiah. Erm...and given that it was the Britten Sinfonia, plus Iestyn Davies, plus Carolyn Sampson, I think...

In short, Claire's repeat attendance was based on Britten Sinfonia's offering happening to coincide frequently with the kinds of things she wanted to see, rather than any particular loyalty to Britten Sinfonia. The orchestra was a factor only in so far as it helped her to choose between a number of offerings (in the case of *Messiah*), and in guaranteeing a level of quality. Given this distinction between Claire and Debbie, it is worth looking in more detail at their accounts to see how these individuals relate to the orchestra's identity.

Both Claire and Debbie talked about a number of aspects of Britten Sinfonia's core identity, and in fact made some similar comments. They both noted the innovative programming, and the players' enthusiasm, especially remarking that the players did not look bored as in some other orchestras. They also noticed a positive working relationship among the players.

...I'd say they were obviously [...] good musicians. [...] I just think...there is a kind of interaction between them that...you know: that they play together, get on, like the music that they're playing. You know, [...]...sometimes you can see in orchestras they're a little bit bored with this, and...you know. But I think because they do adventurous programming, they...their musicians are always on their toes as well, really. (Claire)

...I think they're very vibrant as a group [...]...you get the sense that they really get on with each other. There's a lot of respect. And they listen to the...well, the leader. Thomas Gould, or whoever's the leader. I feel that everybody enjoys what they're doing onstage. That's...that's the feeling you get. Whereas sometimes when you go to a big orchestra...[...] sometimes you get the sense that they're just doing a nine-to-five job, and they're like: uuh (groans.) (Debbie)

However, Debbie's account also showed an awareness of other aspects of the orchestras identity. As shown in the quotation above she picked up on the soloistic (conductorless) playing and the democratic ethos. She was more aware of the ensemble's collaborative approach to working with guest artists, and also described them as an orchestra of individuals. This connection with them as individuals extended to her recognising them off the stage:

...if I'm in a café and I actually see some of them...like, I think once I saw like three of the violinists. I was sitting with my auntie going: 'Oh my God, that's Britten Sinfonia. What are they eating? [...] ...oh, poor things, they can't drink tonight. Because they're performing tonight.' (Claire)

She also described making an effort to go to Britten Sinfonia concerts in which Lawrence Power (principal violist) was playing solo, as he had in the *Sentences* concert:

Every time I see Lawrence Power [is playing], I try and be there. Because he's just a fantastic...performer...such depth and...he's got something extra, hasn't he?

This player, a member of the ensemble and perhaps less well known than the guests in the concert, did not feature in the account of Claire. Reading Debbie's account, one has the sense that she has more of a connection with Britten Sinfonia as personalities, while Claire regards them as a background to the soloists - albeit a highly skilled and enthusiastic one.

This analysis suggests that while both Claire and Debbie are repeat attenders to Britten Sinfonia concerts, there is a qualitative difference between them in what might best be described as loyalty, with Debbie feeling an affiliation to the ensemble not felt by Claire. This loyalty seems to come through in the motivations of the respondents, as well as the depth of their engagement with the ensemble's core identity. It is more than the simple behaviour of repeated attendance.

DISCUSSION

The specific interest of the orchestral management was to discover the extent to which attenders at their London concerts, particularly first-time attenders were aware of this

specific ethos and character of the orchestra, and how this informed their motivation to attend future concerts by the orchestra.

The data we have presented here shows that although a significant number of audience members were newcomers to Britten Sinfonia, this does not generally mean that they were newcomers to classical music. On the contrary, most were regular and recent attenders at a range of classical events, with opera-goers (and lovers of vocal classical music) being a very significant sub-group. For such people, the identity of Britten Sinfonia is likely to be seen through the lens of experienced classical music consumers. The positioning of Britten Sinfonia for first-time attenders of this sort will need to be articulated in relation to their likely knowledge base - and to provide answers (explicit or implicit) to the question of how Britten Sinfonia is like or unlike other orchestras that they would know and would have attended. That such comparisons are relevant is confirmed by the fact that some interviewees spontaneously mentioned other orchestras, and articulated how their experience of Britten Sinfonia distinguished it in their minds from those other orchestras.

All aspects of the Britten Sinfonia ethos and character (as pre-identified in our conversations with the orchestra) were noticed by someone at every level of prior engagement with the orchestra, including first-timers. This confirms that, to a greater or lesser extent, the features which management and players hope to be noticed are noticed. However, not all aspects were equally noted. Quality of playing, and diversity of programming were the most noted features, with the democratic and soloistic aspects being least noted. This ordering may have been contributed to by the specific features of this concert where the presence of Nico Muhly as conductor may have de-emphasised the democratic elements - in comparison with the substantial number of performances where the ensemble is conductorless.

In general, interest and motivation for future attendance at a Britten Sinfonia was high, and had already translated into future bookings in some cases. This interest, whether definite or more vague, was concentrated in those who were regular classical concert attenders. A small (and somewhat atypical) minority of respondents were less experienced with classical music, and came to this concert because of specific features it offered (e.g. the opportunity to see a new work by Nico Muhly, or providing a spotlight onto the Turing issue). The research provided little evidence, however, that such interest is sufficient to translate into longer-term interest in Britten Sinfonia, far less classical concert attendance in general.

An important motivation for the study was to provide information and insights that enriched Britten Sinfonia's understanding of its London audience, its composition and its motivations. We therefore invited Sinfonia management to review the data and analysis provided above and supply a short statement of the value and implications of the work to their artistic and marketing strategy. At time of writing (June 2016) this is still awaited. A revised version of this paper will incorporate their comments in due course.

Do our findings have resonance with previously published research? In relation to audiences for classical orchestral music, Crawford, Gosling, Bagnall, & Light (2015), investigated the impact of a new mobile telephone ("app") ticketing system for young (18-25) attenders of the London Symphony Orchestra. They identified a difficulty in expanding the orchestra's audience beyond its traditional market, and concluded that the "app" was not notably successful at bringing new hitherto under-represented constituencies to the

orchestra. The very few app users who were newcomers to the orchestra already regularly listened to recorded classical music at home, and were persuaded to attend by a more regularly attending friend. Crawford et al highlight features of classical concerts which have been noted by many as a barrier to new attenders (e.g. Small, 1998; Dobson & Pitts, 2011), a somewhat formal and reverential ambience which makes concert attendance seem rather similar to church attendance, experienced as off-putting and alienating to many younger first-time attenders. Making somewhat peripheral adjustments to pre-concert promotion may not be sufficient to attract new audiences in any numbers. This is hardly surprising in light of the present research, which suggests that substantial distinctions on stage in terms of repertoire and performer interactions, such as Britten Sinfonia embodies, may also be insufficient to “hook” substantial constituencies of newcomers to classical music.

There is some earlier research on reasons why people attend orchestral concerts. Specific projects on a number of British orchestras are discussed by Baker (2000). Survey data show that specific works and, to a lesser extent, specific artists are the highest-cited reasons for attending a concert, with the particular character or ethos of the orchestra coming lower down. The one exception to this in the studies reviewed by Baker was a 1995 survey of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra audience, where more than half of the respondents gave the orchestra itself as the reason for attendance. This was during the time when Simon Rattle was the Principal Conductor and Artistic Director, and was arguably projecting a very specific and distinctive ethos through his long and celebrated relationship with this orchestra. This shows that loyalty to a classical performing group is certainly possible, given the right combination of circumstances. However the specific examples of loyalty outlined in recent empirical studies (e.g. Pitts, 2005, Pitts, Dobson, Gee & Spencer, 2015), including to niche music festivals, are mainly situated in provincial settings where the valuing is as much about commitment to high quality music making in that location as it is to the distinctive ethos of the artistic vision. Gaining similar loyalty in a crowded metropolitan setting, with many competing attractions, may add substantial levels of difficulty.

The conclusions drawn from this research must be limited by the fact that resources only permitted one concert to be studied in depth. Data collected across a range of different concerts, particularly those better highlighting the soloistic and democratic aspects of Britten Sinfonia, could clarify whether such aspects were least mentioned by this audience for reasons specific to this concert, or whether there is a more fundamental difficulty in noticing and describing such features.

Inevitably, in a volunteer sample, those responding may not be representative of the total audience, and may contain those who were more positively engaged. Thus the respondents might well have been at the “top end” of interest and involvement in what was going on in the room, with those not positively engaged simply not responding. It is, however, reassuring that the response rate was notably high for an impersonally distributed questionnaire such as this, and that within the sample both of survey respondents and interviewees were a number of individuals who were not regular attenders of Britten Sinfonia, thus giving some reassurance of breadth of experience in the sample.

We conclude by observing that the collaboration between a professional music organisation and an HEI has been experienced by both parties as positive, innovative, even exciting. This has been motivating for the mutual engagement. On the other hand, because this is a

new kind of engagement for both parties, there has been a somewhat experimental and provisional feel to some aspects of the joint work, which understandably poses challenges for the longer-term sustainability of such collaborations. Creativeworks London has been a valued opportunity for both partners to try out new forms of collaboration and learn from them.

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Appendix 1

BRITTEN SINFONIA/ BARBICAN NICO MUHLY PRODUCTION 6 JUNE 2015

This confidential survey is being conducted by researchers at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama to assist Britten Sinfonia and the Barbican in the programming and planning, to assist them to take better account of the interests and perspectives of their London audiences. The research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School.

By returning a completed questionnaire you are consenting to the researchers using the information you supply in anonymised form in both private reports to the two organisations and also in public presentations of the research. If you have any questions about the research, please write to john.sloboda@gsmd.ac.uk

1. Are you: male female prefer not to answer (please tick)
2. Age: 16-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 66-75
 76+
3. Please give the first section of your postcode _____
4. On average, how frequently do you attend live classical music performances?
 - once a month or more several times a year once or twice a year less than once a year
 - this is my first classical concert
5. How many times have you previously attended a Britten Sinfonia concert?
 - this is my first Britten Sinfonia concert 1-3 4-6 7-9 10+
6. What other artistic events have you attended in the last year. Please tick any of the following that apply:
 - Theatre
 - Dance
 - Ballet
 - Pop/Rock
 - Classical
 - Musicals
 - Opera/opera
 - Jazz
 - Art exhibition/gallery
 - Other, please

specify_____

7.. What was the most recent public performance before this one that you attended in a London venue?

Venue: _____

Event: _____

Date (year, with month if you can recall it) _____

8.. What were the main things that attracted you to today's concert?

- Nico Muhly
- Iestyn Davies
- The venue (Barbican)
- Britten Sinfonia
- Particular players
- Particular work(s) in the programme
- Overall programming
- The Turing connection
- Other - please specify

If you want, please explain your answer further

9. How much did you enjoy the concert. Please circle the term that applies most closely
extremely enjoyed quite enjoyed neutral didn't enjoy it much didn't enjoy it at all

10. State one or more things about the concert that you enjoyed

11. State one or more things about the concert that you didn't enjoy

12. How interested are you in attending another Britten Sinfonia concert in the next 6 months

I've already booked something very interested quite interested neutral
not very interested uninterested

If you want, please explain your answer further

13. How interested are you in attending another event at the Barbican in the next 6 months

I've already booked something very interested quite interested neutral
not very interested uninterested

If you want, please explain your answer further

14. If you had to describe Britten Sinfonia to a friend in a couple of sentences, in a way that would be helpful to them in deciding whether to come to one of their concerts, what would you say?

15. Would you be willing for us to contact you later this year to explore the issues raised in this questionnaire in more depth ?

If so, please provide contact details

Name _____

email address _____

phone number _____

Any details given here will be separated from survey responses, which will remain anonymous. We will keep your details confidential, and will not use them to contact you (except for the research), pass them to third parties, or place you on any mailing lists!