

final word

Reaching a target

Arts organisations need to have a clear idea of who they are trying to attract to each of their events, says Jodi Myers

WE ALL WANT TO FIND WAYS of encouraging more people to participate in the arts, but do those of us responsible for programming really consider the audience we want to attract? If we are going to appeal to new audiences, as well as retain existing ones, then I would suggest that more marketers should have some input into the programme planning process. In return many marketers need to attend more performances in order to develop their understanding of the work.

In the case of classical music, while we may have developed a broad range of marketing initiatives to appeal to very diverse audiences, most of us are still not offering different programmes to appeal to different interest groups. In London the existing audience broadly falls into four groups:

The conservative fanatic – he, and it is predominantly he – is over 50, with a deep reverence for classical music and he feels part of an exclusive club, someone ‘in the know’. He is a very regular attendee, seeks authenticity and feels threatened by any sort of change.

The mainstream stalwart – can be found in a much wider age range but is generally over 30. He or she comes infrequently to familiar programmes, is wary about experimenting and doesn’t like “sandwich” programmes, which include something contemporary with Beethoven or Tchaikovsky. He/she is influenced by well-known repertoire or artists, but the whole experience, including the venue, is important.

The new modernist – tends to be younger, say 25-35, with an intense involvement in 20th and 21st century music. He or she is open-minded, seeking challenging experiences; can be dismissive of mainstream work, but is interested in collaborations with other artforms. He/she likes the intimacy of chamber work, is especially interested in hearing



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from the composer, but also dislikes “sandwich” programmes but for different reasons – this group doesn’t want any Brahms with their Birtwistle.

The good-time novice – can be any age; is looking for relaxation, recreation and the opportunity to socialise. Drinks and food are important and this person is attracted to big names, either performers or composers, and often appreciates guidance on concert protocol – when to clap, what to wear.

Given the resistance to “sandwich” programmes, is it surprising that conductors, orchestra managers and funding bodies still think that is what we should be offering. While public subsidy comes with responsibility to present challenging programmes, this is probably the only industry which persists in supplying something because we think it’s good for customers.

On a more positive note, there have been some spectacular successes in attracting new audiences in recent years, such as the series developed by the South Bank Centre and the London Sinfonietta, where, for example, Ligeti and Cage are presented alongside Aphex Twin and Squarepusher. Strong and sensitive visual presentation work with the music; the houselights are out and the audience can

take drinks into the auditorium as if they were at a rock concert or club.

Here we come to another key concern of many potential younger audience members – the ambiance in the hall and the opportunity to socialise after the concert. It may not be so important to Mr Conservative Fanatic but it is to young people, and if we want them to come we need to find a way to listen to their concerns. This is not about dumbing down – the most exciting aspect of this series has been the large and wide audience attracted, who listened with rapt attention to all the music. There is considerable demand in Europe for these events and *La Repubblica* reported that the Rome performance had changed the way future contemporary classical concerts would be programmed in Italy.

I am not advocating playing to the lowest common denominator and only doing concerts that can attract big houses – far from it. But I do believe all of us involved in programming need to think about for whom we are putting on each and every event. It may realistically only be for a maximum audience of 300 people in a hall which seats 1,000, and this has to be allowed as long as it can be made to work in the context of a mixed programme capable of sustaining financial stability.

We have to get away from the thought that marketing is only interested in selling every seat – it is about maximising sales and finding the right audience for an event. If we can achieve this, programmers will have a great opportunity to extend the programme, and in partnership with marketers, to develop the audience for that programme. **IAM**
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