

Audience Development in Symphony Orchestra — a Case Study of the iOrchestra Project

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Abstract—The percentage of people who attend orchestral concerts is plummeting every year. Some organizations have already found approaches to overcome these obstacles, but many of them are still struggling. The first part of the study presents different approaches to audience development in the previous research. Throughout this dissertation, the following question is explored: “What audience development strategies are being used by Philharmonia orchestra?” This work focuses largely on the iOrchestra, one of the Philharmonia’s audience development projects, through a case study analysis. This study involves document analysis and observation as well.

Keywords—audience development; symphony orchestra; iOrchestra; strategy

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Today, declining attendance in concert halls is threatening the development of symphony orchestras. It is argued that cultivating the audience is more important than ever in the performing arts industry (Bedell 2012: 2). iOrchestra is such a project that aims to increase and strengthen audiences for orchestral music in England. This 5-year project ran from 2014 to 2018. iOrchestra is a big touring project from the Philharmonia Orchestra (London, UK). The Philharmonia Orchestra (PO) was founded in 1945, based in London and is one of the world’s most famous symphony orchestras. iOrchestra uses the latest digital technology, aiming to appeal to different target audiences in identified regions. I undertook my placement in the iOrchestra project in 2016, thus I got a chance to observe the whole project. Edward Mackay, the project manager, offered the evaluation reports and all figures of iOrchestra, which allowed this study analysis the existing materials. This study will research the effectiveness of digital and multi-media resources in generating interest in classical music.

The concept of “Audience Development” was initially used in the performing arts field in the 1980s (Morison & Dalgleish 1993). The Arts Council of England define audience development as taking a specific action to meet the needs of current and future audiences, and helping arts organizations develop relationships with the audience. It consists of marketing, programming, education, customer care and distribution considerations (Arts Council of England 2011: 2). This paper attempts to show that audience

development needs different approaches to come together to attract as a broad range of people as possible. In modern society, audience development could be more innovative, such as embracing new technologies to attract a younger audience or breaking the market segmentation divide and trying to engage the whole community.

B. Approaches Used by Different Orchestras

To compensate for the shrinking classical music audience, many organizations have begun exploring new and innovative audience development strategies. In the next part, this paper will introduce some successful audience development approaches by other symphony orchestras to serve as a guide on how a symphony orchestra can get out of a given predicament.

1) *Education projects*: Many orchestras provide proactive education projects to cultivate children’s interest in classical music to build future audiences. “Young people’s concerts” at the New York Philharmonic is an example of successful programming for children: When Leonard Bernstein held a concert live on TV in 1960, it achieved worldwide success. Even today, a young people’s concert arouses curiosity in children about music and lays the foundation for future enjoyment of orchestral music. Orchestras also invite children to come earlier so that they can meet the musicians, try some instruments, play music games, explore the theme of that day and be ready to enjoy one perfect concert. In recent years, the New York Philharmonic has been offering a very young people’s concert as well aimed at 3-5 year old children. In this one hour concert, children play games, make music with the staff from the Philharmonic Orchestra and the Teacher College Columbia University. Each concert has a host and one theme, with the host explaining the orchestra and themes such as “fast and slow”, “loud or soft” or “high and low” (Bernstein J. S. 2014: 74).

2) *Programming for families*: London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) offers a variety of activities for children, from infants to 12 years old, including Family Concerts, Concerts for Under 5’s and Early Years Workshops. The Early Years Workshops targets 1-5 year old children, running every Monday. There are 15 children in a group and they explore new sounds and music with their families. The

concerts for the Under 5's are an interactive concert, with children following the storyteller's instruction to sing and dance with the music. There are three Family Concerts a year, with each season having a performance in the Barbican Centre. This concert is presented in an interesting and informative way, offering a chance to everyone to get involved by playing or singing along with the audience participation piece (London Symphony Orchestra, 2015).

3) *Performing in public places*: In recent years, many orchestras have been trying to perform in public places, such as shopping malls, plazas or train stations. In 2011, Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO) gave a performance of flash mob in Glasgow International Airport. RSNO chose Ravel's Bolero for the flash mob. It begins with a drum solo and gradually involves more players to reach a peak, before fading out. Flash mob use an unusual way to bring orchestral music to people. It was quite successful, with people saying that they changed their opinion about classical music, felt very happy and enjoyed it. After that, many orchestras left the concert hall briefly and gave flash mobs performances to the public (Donald & Greig 2015: 262).

4) *Letting the audience decide*: The Fort Wayne Philharmonic (FWP) symphony orchestra in Texas maintains an 85% subscription rate for its concerts. It achieves such success because the orchestra investigates what the audience wants to listen to. Each season, FWP surveys what guests, performers and the audience want to see the orchestra play. The administration observes the survey results and invites visiting musicians. FWP distributes questionnaires during the first few concerts of the season and generally receives a 20-25% response rate. The audiences know that their answers are the determining factor in the programming. At the beginning, the orchestra took some financial risk with the programming but it has now become a valuable approach to promoting subscriptions. It allows the audience to feel that they are involved in the orchestra, rather than being a passive guest.

5) *Arts institutions using digital technologies*: The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra uses the 'Digital Concert Hall' to bring the orchestra's current and archived concerts to global audiences in high-quality audio and video capture. Through this, Berlin Philharmonic gets more subscribers on digital concert hall and has significant increase in revenue.

II. CASE STUDY

This section will give insight into the iOrchestra project by the PO. This case study will introduce the strategies that the iOrchestra has used to appeal to audiences and the outcomes.

A. *The Elements in IOchestra*

IOchestra, as a five consecutive year touring project, carried out many activities. The virtual orchestra was its main elements. In the virtual orchestra, a 10-room installation showcases the internal workings of the Philharmonia as the Orchestra performs Holst's The Planets,

conducted by Principal Conductor, Esa-Pekka Salonen. The Music Tent is a digital experience, recording the entire orchestra from every angle, including the musicians who are not playing their instruments, unlike a traditional televised performance in which the lens only focuses on the musicians currently playing. Each section of the orchestra is filmed in close-up and screened in a separate area of the marquee. The idea comes from art galleries but this exhibition uses screens and sounds that offer visitors a space to see, hear and experience. When visitors are walking through, it is like they are standing inside the orchestra. Each area has posters introducing and explaining each section's instruments, with the music scores on a music stand offered for reading as well. On some days, the iOrchestra invites musicians to play along with the screen and talk to visitors about their instrument or playing. Visitors can try to play with the orchestra in the percussion room and there is also a podium for people to practice conducting.

This installation was placed in a large marquee for two weeks in different regions, such as London, Bedford, Leicester, Plymouth and so on. The iOrchestra sets the marquee in a central place, an area that has high foot-fall in which a diverse range of people will pass through during their usual daily activities. This place also aims to be 'art neutral' and avoid existing cultural venues because the project aims to attract people who are unused or uncomfortable with traditional cultural facilities.

Front of house staff use a click counter to count the total number of visitors. A person visiting more than once will be counted again. The records also count all pre-booking groups as well. When people finish their visit, the project invites them to fill in a feedback card in an evaluation area. The virtual orchestra had been a resounding success, building on the learning of the first year. This meant that the installation significantly increased its range of work, visitor numbers and visitor engagement. In 2014, there were 20,123 visitors to RE-RITE and 56,238 visitors to the Universe of Sound in 2015, which is a 193% increase above those visiting during year one. The figures indicate that the number of visitors continues to rise in the past four years. In addition, 76% of people indicated that they enjoyed the visit very much. Furthermore, 90% of people enjoyed the visit very much on average (N.B. the raw data provided by the PO).

The iOrchestra also held live concert, it includes public open-air concert and school concert. On the last day of each virtual orchestra, the whole PO comes and gives one and a half hour public concert. The school concert is planned to be for the 'core' schools and their students, as well as students' parents, siblings and other close relatives. This enables the children to share the experience of attending the classical music concert with their family. Two kinds of concert are programming fun, interactive and familiar music. They are mainly tailored to families and new audiences.

B. *Target Audience*

IOchestra aimed to appeal to a wide range of people instead of a specific group. The project initially studied different segments of the target population to understand the

drivers and barriers to participating in arts events to help them devise the most appropriate ways to engage each group's interest.

Target A: Younger school children

Children are unaware that orchestral music already exists in their daily lives, such as movie soundtracks, programmes and other musical activities that take place in school or at home. Generating a discussion at home helps make music relate to children and families' lives. Although trips to the iOrchestra are led by schools, it can quickly be extended to the family in the first year and reach out to families and the community in the second year.

The project equipped teachers with skills and resources to carry out classroom activities, and visit the virtual orchestra, which helped school groups identify with orchestral music. The school concert allowed children to invite their immediate family members to create a musical discussion atmosphere in the home. Children were encouraged to visit the installation again with their family or friends. The end of the project revealed that those children who attended the project improved their listening skills to orchestral music, knew how music makes and had a sense of involvement in creating a live music concert as an audience.

Target B: Older school children and teenagers

Older school children and teenagers tend to be more interested in other music genres or other activities, such as gaming, movies, sports, fashion and so on. For this group, if they encounter installations, musicians and a symphony in a comfortable environment, the place outside the formal education settings will be more effective. The 'technology' aspects of this project are particularly important and the key to engaging them. The location of the installation was selected for where this age group goes during their everyday routines, as well as investigating the approximate time they pass through. The project uses digital resources to help this group explore music technology. iOrchestra uses public relations resources afforded by the PO, increased the project's exposure on youth-center radio stations, in young people's magazines or TV programmes, and on social media networks. The project supports young people to continue to learn from the PO and partners with musicians to develop their own interests. It is aimed at providing them with enough familiarity with orchestral music that the barriers to re-access classical music in their future lives will be lower. The end of the project envisages that this age group will be comfortable listening and discussing orchestral music, and consider this as a leisure activity choice or career aspiration.

Target C: Parents of children

Parents are concerned about their children's development and educational attainments. The only difference is the financial, time, educational, confidence and other resources they put in. For example, white-collar parents are more likely to send their children to private school, while low income families may choose traditional public school instead. Therefore, by emphasizing the high quality of the iOrchestra through the local press, TV and radio, making all events free and explaining and demonstrating the effects of music on a

child's brain encourages parents to take their children and join the project. It is important to choose a site that parents usually go, such as the city center or supermarket parking lots, allied to attracting the attention of their accompanying children. A live concert complements the installations. Parents are able to attend the school concert and community concerts held in the installations.

Target D: Older people whose engagement with classical music has lapsed

Elderly people who have attended orchestral concert before may gradually cease attending for various reasons. Research shows that this lapse may be due to lifestyle changes, such as moving away from friends to be nearer their children, the death or illness of people who attended concerts before, worry about attending events in the evening, transportation difficulties or hearing deterioration (London Theatre Consortium 2009). Those who enjoyed the orchestral music but now no longer have the chance to engage will feel their quality of life being impoverished. This group is not inactive or house-bound, with the project attracting them via publicity, encountering the installations in familiar places and the public concerts. The project conducted a survey before deciding when the concerts should start and end, the location and the acoustics.

Target E: Older people who may not have engaged with music previously

The iOrchestra aims to increase engagement particularly among people who have not attended live orchestral music concerts before or who attend very little. The project focuses on the activity leaders in care homes or residential homes by making contact with these leaders, with the iOrchestra staff introducing the web-based resources to older people in care homes and organizing small groups to visit the installations. This group can take part in the community concerts; in general, these concerts are timed more appropriately and have more relaxed expectations in both behavior and attention span. Owing to it being in their own local communities, the older people may be the grandparents of the children taking part in the projects, finding out about the project via conversation, encouraging them to engage in the project.

Target F: Socially motivated adults

Generally speaking, these audiences are composed of 20-35 year-old young adults who neither have children nor seek family entertainment. The motivation for this group is mostly based on social reasons, i.e. a night out with friends or partners that includes food and drinks at an event (Arts Council England 2011:18). These people are usually looking for new or different things and want to become leaders in their peer group. Although this age group is less likely to become regular attendees of classical music events, the project aims to place orchestral music concerts onto their menu of acceptable and interesting events to attend. The strategies used to appeal to these young adults include an innovation design and new technology use at the installations, high profile PR campaigns around the tour, promoting the public concerts on social media networks and advertising.

C. Results Achieved

The overarching aim of the iOrchestra is to increase and strengthen audiences for live orchestral concerts in the regions concerned, so that PO's future tour can be benefit from this project. In order to realize this goal, generating financial profit is not this project's primary purpose. Admission to all iOrchestra concerts is free. Hence, this research pays more attention to the social and cultural outcomes that iOrchestra achieved. In summary, iOrchestra achieved the following objectives:

- IOrchestra aroused people's attention to the existing music provision by collaborating with local musicians.
- Generates a profile by bringing a world-class orchestra to the region.
- Strengthened the music venue network, music provider educators, and promoters in this region. Developed a more viable infrastructure to attract future tours and performances.
- Increased the exposure of orchestral music in unique ways and places. For example, installing the PO's 'virtual' orchestra installations in locations the non-classical audience using walk.
- Using technology installations and online resources to improve people's understanding of what orchestral music is and how it works, thus breaking down the barriers to classical music.
- Created a model of engagement that can be replicated in other areas affected by rural isolation or neighborhood barriers.
- Left a framework of networks, relationships, tools and a methodology to engage people in orchestral music, which can be easily adapted for use by other touring orchestras in the future.
- Used school concerts associated with the installations to attract a younger audience.
- Strengthened and broaden teaching skills in the region, including community or informal teaching and musician-led teaching.
- Strengthened the marketing and audience development techniques in the region, and put structures in place for joint marketing and audience development initiatives.
- Shared skills and raised ambition about audience development approaches with musicians and music organizations in the region, particularly among the strong local amateur musician network.

With the development of art works and the change in audience demand, the product oriented approach no longer meets the arts market's needs. Audience development has become increasingly important in helping organizations establish long-term relationships with consumers. The significance of audience development lies in helping remove barriers and building bridges for audiences to access the arts.

This research focuses on developing an audience development strategy to help cultivate future orchestral audiences. It attempts to act as a guide for arts managers to understand different strategies, and more specifically, intends to become a source for orchestras seeking to build and enhance their patrons. This paper began with an extensive literature review to ascertain insight into audience development in the performing arts sector. In order to understand the types of strategies that should be cultivated for future music audience patronage, it analyzed different types of audience development strategies used by different symphony orchestras. The next step concerned an in-depth case study to explore audience development strategies in the iOrchestra project, to investigate communication, interaction and other factors that can impact on increasing orchestral music performance audiences in an area rife with disengagement. IOrchestra demonstrates the value of a 'whole family' or 'whole community' approach rather than limiting it to school based projects. In the meantime, iOrchestra explored new and innovative strategies, such as using technology to outreach and engage.

III. CONCLUSION

The key audience development principles underpinning the iOrchestra were:

- Bring music into people's own places, to overcome barriers of travel or reluctance to enter unknown places.
- The greater depth of engagement possible when an experience is shared and reinforced within a person's family or trust circle. This is especially, but not only, shown to be the case where things children encounter at school are reinforced in their home environment.
- Enabling people to control their own engagement level and style by being flexible, drop-in and having a variety of ways to participate, with no 'right' or 'wrong' response.
- Understanding that repetition, i.e. repeat involvement with an art form or activity — helps embed familiarity and confidence. For people new to or uncertain about an art form, the ability to direct their own level of engagement with it and journey into exploring it further if they wish (and given the opportunity) also contributes to a stronger and more lasting relationship with the art form.
- Placing art in locations where they can 'interrupt' people's attention or behavior, by being something unusual in a place of normal day to day activity: the virtual orchestra installation was placed in a central location in each region, an area with high foot-fall that a broad spectrum of people from the region would use or pass through while going about their normal activities such as shopping, going to work or going out socially.
- Locating events in 'art-neutral' spaces, for example, not associated with an existing arts and cultural offer,

because of the aim of attracting people unused to or uncomfortable with traditional venues.

- Placing the focus of publicity and marketing on emotional responses to the experience and the ability to share an experience with others (rather than on repertoire or performers, as is traditional), as a way of developing audience interest in orchestral music amongst the large, 'somewhat engaged' sectors of the population for whom arts and culture is one among a number of social, leisure, entertainment or sport choices they may choose to enjoy with family or friends.
- Linking all aspects of the project together in people's minds, so that people feel part of a bigger and shared experience, and that the audience development and educational aspects were seen as of equal value as the public installation and concert by an orchestra of the Philharmonia's standing.
- Sharing skills and training with teachers, group leaders, care workers, local musicians and orchestras, and with volunteers, to help them prepare for and make the most of the opportunity, and to increase the chances the project initiative might continue beyond this period, through local agency.

iOrchestra united three individual elements: the virtual orchestra installation and live concerts to provide orchestral music to all people. The PO implemented the project in different regions around the England. Some of regions had limited engagement with orchestral concerts, partly or mainly because of a lack of access to regular, high-quality performances. iOrchestra aimed to change people's perception of orchestral music and increase their willingness to listen to this kind of music, and achieved considerable success. However, there is still room to strengthen and improve both in the artistic products it offers and in how it engages the audience. The inadequate allowance made for the human resource costs of delivering a project of this nature has been one main cause of this deviation from the strategy and targeted achievements. Another cause has been difficulty among the regional partners to grasp the scale and opportunities afforded by the project until the iOrchestra was actually happening. Resource constraints of their own also prevented them from supporting the project to the extent that was built into the bid. It should be clearly recognized that the project aimed to engage some very difficult communities experiencing often complex issues, to interest them in an art form that carries a very 'non-popular culture' reputation. The degree to which it has already made inroads into this should be commended.

With audience expectations about participation having changed, current artists and practitioners need to adjust their attitudes and develop new skill to face the flexible environment.

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