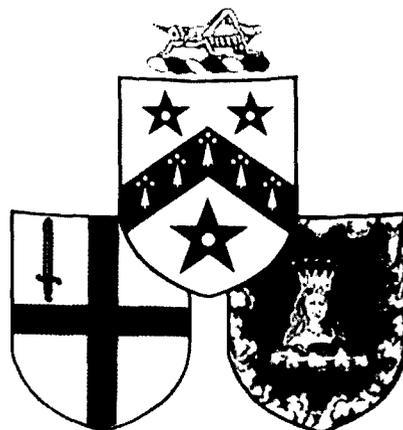


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WHAT THE AUDIENCE WANTS

A report by

PROFESSOR DAVID OWEN NORRIS

Gresham Professor of Music

on a series of three symposia

4 March 1997

Added Value

11 March 1997

Recorded Live?

18 March 1997

An Interim History of the Great Radio 3 Debate

What the Audience Wants

A report by David Owen Norris on a series of three symposia organised by the ISM and Gresham College.

The musical world is changing. Some changes are imposed upon us, some creep up unawares, and others are the piecemeal efforts of individual musicians. Consider, by way of example, the de-regulation of broadcasting, the National Lottery, the proliferation of record companies hungry for new repertoire, the growth of a public emphatically interested only in old repertoire, the complex social reasons behind the efflorescence of opera, the rise of the festival at the expense of the music club, the new informality, the formal backlash, the sterile insistence on uniformity fostered by competitions.

The reaction of the musical world to these changes is sometimes merely to mimic an imperfectly understood modern world, sometimes to deplore, often to ignore whilst strengthening a failing status quo. The changes themselves are rarely personally experienced in their social context, for the demands made of the musician - maintaining complex intellectual and manual skills, seeking the true vision of the artist, juggling with unsociable hours, the pressures and paperwork of self-employment, even the happy convention of treating rivals as colleagues - mean that musicians find little time to come out of their own world. What's more, theirs is a world that offers, for all its complications, a peace that the real world cannot give, and provides scant motivation to exchange the certainties of a Bach fugue or the glorious licence of a Wagnerian orgasm for the dreadful mess we see in the newspapers. It is hard for the pressures for change to be absorbed, mastered, perfected, built upon, till they can be used as a springboard for the unknowable musical life of the future.

Musicians know the problems, of course. But what are we to do about them? It is clearly a topic of current concern, for David Owen Norris was conceiving an exploration of these issues as his last lecture series as Gresham Professor of Music, when Dominic McGonigal at the ISM asked if he would contribute to a similar exercise that our professional association was undertaking. They quickly agreed to collaborate on a series of three symposia.

Added Value

Patrick Deuchar (Chief Executive, Royal Albert Hall), Raymond Gubbay (Raymond Gubbay Ltd), Rt Hon David Mellor, QC, MP, chaired by Professor David Owen Norris

The first symposium concerned the live concert, and how we can add value to the musical experience. The tone of the debate was interesting. The panel agreed that the ready availability of home entertainment was a double threat to live music, not only offering an alternative, but leaving people unaccustomed to, and ill-prepared for the inconveniences attendant upon concert-going. These inconveniences included out-dated etiquette, extreme formality of presentation and dress, and an atmosphere of elitism. David Mellor lamented the loss of a Golden Age of performers and a contemporary hide-bound uniformity. His views were hotly contested from the floor.

The panel seemed to expect the musicians in the audience to be hostile to their ideas, and indeed some were. Others in the audience added extra topics for consideration: intelligible programme notes, educational activity, and, most importantly, the role of amateurs. Patrick Deuchar spoke forcefully of the disdain for new ideas shown by many musicians, and of their snobbish ambivalence about the sort of new audience they wished to attract. No-one had ever asked him for Raymond Gubbay's box office address list, though they were always trying to get the one for the Proms. Mr Gubbay spoke matter-of-factly and convincingly about fulfilling the audience's desires, drawing warm support from some of those present. The fragmentation of the audience, and how to cater for niche-markets, was discussed, with several personal examples from the audience, including subscription CD clubs and particular educational projects.

The conclusion could be drawn that there are various different audiences out there, susceptible to the idea of attending a live concert. Performers should try every way they can think of to appeal to any audience they can identify. Scepticism persisted, with some calling attention to the greater public subsidy elsewhere in Europe, and its amelioration of the cold wind of the market place. This depended on a general acceptance by society of the importance of classical music to civilization. The panel felt that no-one owed us a living.

Recorded Live?

James Jolly (Editor, Gramophone), John McLaren (Deutsche Morgan Grenfell), Mike Spring (Sales Manager, Hyperion Records Ltd), chaired by Professor George Pratt.

In the second symposium, *Recorded Live?*, the value of recordings came under scrutiny. Huge technological advances in the last 40 years provides enormous possibilities for recording engineers, producers, artists and record companies, but state-of-the-art technology alone does not guarantee a good recording. The panel agreed that even a good recording, played back on top-of-the-range hi-fi equipment, could not replicate the live experience, although it had many advantages which the live concert could not match.

James Jolly reminded the audience how far we had come since the 1950's when listening to a recording of a Bruckner symphony might involve playing 34 separate 78s. Modern recordings offer high quality and convenience, which means that different rules apply to the success of recorded music as opposed to live concerts. In the pop world, live tours are primarily a means of promoting the band's latest album. In the classical world, recordings can stimulate interest in specific works or genres of repertoire. For John McLaren, the early music revival was a good example of recordings generating interest in new repertoire. He observed that many listeners had used recordings to expand their knowledge of the standard repertoire, working from music they knew. Now there is a pent-up demand for some new music. Mike Spring noted that the audience were prepared to take risks with recordings, exploring lesser-known works by composers they know they like.

Record companies such as Hyperion aim to capture the live performance, and modern techniques such as 3-D sound and the ability to record in venues ideally suited to the music, enable them to produce an attractive and convenient product for listeners. Another major advantage of recordings, clearly demonstrated by Professor George Pratt, is that the tastes of small, widely-scattered minorities can be catered for. Ten people in one town with a passion for one type of music are not enough for a live concert, but multiplied across the country, might make enough of a market for a CD. The hope was expressed by the audience present that record companies might work with composers and recording artists to meet the expectations of listeners searching for new music.

An Interim History of the Great Radio 3 Debate

Rt Hon Gerald Kaufman, MP, Professor David Owen Norris, Robert Ponsonby (former Controller of Music, Radio 3), Natalie Wheen (Broadcaster), chaired by Guy Woolfenden.

Gerald Kaufman opened the third symposium with his case against the reforms at Radio 3. They had diluted the intellectual content of the network in an attempt to gain listeners. That attempt had been unsuccessful. In answer to the point that it was a necessary exercise from the point of view of a BBC keen to renew its Charter and ensure the continuation of the licence fee, he replied that the political vulnerability of a small, elitist network had been overestimated, and that Parliament would have been content with whatever Radio 3 was doing, providing it was good. The BBC clearly had a different analysis of the measure of the political threat.

Robert Ponsonby deplored the standards of elocution and knowledge in radio presenters. He defended the idea of an elitist, 'difficult' network, as had Mr Kaufmann. Much of the audience was in agreement with him.

Natalie Wheen spoke of the irrelevance of the 'boring old farts' of the past, and of her own wish to enthuse her audience with her own discoveries. Radio 3 had almost put her off music when

she was a child. Its present audience was overwhelmingly white, male, elderly, and living in the South of England. A member of the audience who perfectly fitted this description intervened with the question 'What are you going to do then? Shoot us?' There was a feeling that Radio 3 was the only network that, in its search for new listeners, was openly contemptuous of the old ones.

David Owen Norris said that when he presented a weekly programme on Radio 3, *The Works*, the musician guests were invited to select something they would listen to on the radio in the week ahead. In two years, only one guest selected something on Radio 3. All the others chose Radio 4 programmes. Was classical music ideally suited to 24-hour broadcasting? Walton, for one, had expressed worries about people having his music on in the background rather than actually attending to it. The future of non-live music was perhaps not so much with CDs, which were undergoing something of a crisis, but with down-loading from the Internet. This idea was not given serious consideration, and the meeting remained in the two camps it had started in.

The symposia demonstrated that there are real issues for musicians and all who care about music to tackle, but that there are many possible answers.

GRESHAM COLLEGE

Policy & Objectives

An independently funded educational institution, Gresham College exists

- to continue the free public lectures which have been given for 400 years, and to reinterpret the 'new learning' of Sir Thomas Gresham's day in contemporary terms;
- to engage in study, teaching and research, particularly in those disciplines represented by the Gresham Professors;
- to foster academic consideration of contemporary problems;
- to challenge those who live or work in the City of London to engage in intellectual debate on those subjects in which the City has a proper concern; and to provide a window on the City for learned societies, both national and international.

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