

How much can arts education affect the decision-making process when choosing classical or pop music?

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Introduction

Music has become an unavoidable part of our everyday life. It is not just the music that we choose to listen to, but also the music we hear in public spaces like public transport, restaurants, shops, when we don't have any influence on the choice. In some places we hear classical and in others popular music. But which genre of music would we choose willingly and under which circumstances? Does music education affect our decision-making process when choosing between classical or popular music and if so, how?

Whether or not we enjoy elite culture (Johnson:2002:69, Avery&Prnjat:2008) usually depends upon our previous arts education, while the products of popular culture, made for much wider audience (Edensor:2002:14, Strinati:2004:10), do not require any arts education. This phenomenon is particularly obvious in music. Not many people listen to classical music (Kramer:2007, Bennet:2008, Peterson & Kern:1996), but it is hard to find a person that does not listen to popular music, at least on some occasions (Shuker:1994, Looseley:2003).

Our cultural needs are shaped by several vital elements, among which the family is perceived as the most important factor (Nemanjic:1974). If we do not acquire our cultural habits at an early age, it is more likely that school, friends, mass media or creative artistic experience as an amateur (Colbert: 2005) will have more influence in creating our attitude toward culture and arts as we grow older.

Due to electronic and digital media, especially the Internet, today it is easier than ever to have access to almost anything written, composed or filmed. So, the question is what kind of content would the consumer like to see or hear?

Method

This paper seeks to identify the criteria audiences use when choosing between classical or popular music. It is based on two focus groups. The first group was comprised of young people considered to be professional musicians - people who graduated or are about to graduate from music academy, and the participants in the second group were arts students of different majors, without music education, except through the regular educational system (elementary and high school). All participants were between 20 and 30 years old, and each group consisted of nine participants.

The main part of the research took place in February and March 2010 in Belgrade, Serbia, but some additional work was done in the first two weeks of April 2010. Both of these focus groups' discussions were moderated by the author of this paper.

Findings

The consumer insight information concerning listening to classical music was grouped into three major segments:

1. Identifying the main criteria when choosing between classical and popular music
2. Influence that participants' surroundings (parents, friends, partners, children) have on their decision to listen classical music
3. How often the participants listen to classical music?

1. Identifying the main criteria when choosing between classical and popular music

In the first group 8 of 9 participants said that the main criteria for choosing to listen to classical music depended on their mood, and 4 participants in the second group enjoy much more popular music, especially as they can dance. It seems that most participants in the second group have contact with classical music only by chance.

- "It depends on the mood (whether she/he would listen to classical music)" (the first group eight respondents)
- "You feel more alive when listening to popular music. And it makes you dance" (the second group female respondent)

- “Sometimes you just want to relax, to dance... That is why I listen to popular music” (the second group female respondent)
- “I like it (classical music) as background music in a restaurant. It makes you feel more important. I like to listen to it sometimes when my friends are around, but when alone, I prefer to listen something that makes me dance” (the second group female respondent)
- “I know classical music is supposed to be more valuable, but you can’t listen to it all the time. You have to be in some specific mood I guess... and popular music makes me feel full of energy” (the second group male respondent)
- “I would go to a classical music concert if a famous foreign musician was performing” (the second group female respondent)
- “I don’t like it (classical music). It is not fun” (the second group male respondent)
- “Classical music sounds as if it is for older people” (the second group female respondent)

2. Influence that participants’ surroundings (parents, friends, partners, children) have on their decision to listen to classical music

It is interesting that participants in the first group listen to classical music when they are alone (7 of 9 stated that they listen to classical music exclusively when they are alone), and participants in the second group generally choose to listen to classical music when they are with their friends, relatives, but hardly ever when alone.

When it is about classical music concerts, participants in the first group attend them with or without a companion, and it seems that participants in the second group think of classical music concerts mostly as a function of social activity.

- “I ask different friends of mine to join me at classical music concerts, so that I can spend some time with them and also hear the concert. If they can’t, I really don’t mind going by myself” (the first group female respondent)

- “I really don’t need company when listening to classical music. That is the best way to concentrate on what I am listening to” (the first group female respondent)
- “It is a good idea to impress your date, but personally, I think classical music is a bit boring” (second group male respondent)
- “My girlfriend plays clarinet, and sometimes we watch some musician playing clarinet at her computer” (the second group male respondent)
- “Not really (she doesn’t listen to classical music), but sometimes I watch operas with my Mom, as she likes them” (the second group female respondent)
- “Sometimes my sister gets tickets for classical music concerts at her work, so we go together” (the second group female respondent).
- “I used to go more often (to classical music concerts), but now I don’t have anyone to go with... and I have no money. I listen to it at home.” (the second group male respondent)

3. How often people listen to classical music

It is important to notice that the group of professional musicians listens to classical music also as part of their professional life, as in preparing for a concert or for an exam. It is found that most of the participants in the first group listen predominantly to music written for their own instrument.

In the second group only one participant goes about 6 times in a year to concerts of classical music, but very often listens at home to famous arias. Two participants in this group do not like classical music at all, and they even show strong resistance to the idea of listening to it. The rest of them listen to the Vienna Philharmonic’s New Year concert and if it is some special event for example if the musician is very famous or it is the premiere of a festival. Otherwise, it seems that they do not listen to classical music.

- “I enjoy listening to great musicians before I have my concert, they are inspiring. You can always learn something new” (the first group female respondent)

- “Every time I prepare an exam I watch video tapes with various interpretations of the composition I’m going to play” (the first group female respondent)
- “I listen to it (classical music) every day. It relaxes me. I forget all my problems” (the first group male respondent)
- “I like to see how my colleagues play live” (the first group male respondent)
- “I like classical music very much. I used to go to Kolarac in the morning to listen to concerts... entrance was free. I do not go to many different classical concerts because I don’t have the money.” (the second group female respondent)
- “ I have to admit I don’t listen to it all the time, but I went with my cousin to Pavarotti’s concert a few years ago, and I always watch the Vienna Philharmonic’s New Year concert” (the second group female respondent)
- “I really don’t like it (classical music). I think it is boring” (the second group male respondent).

Conclusions:

The results of the research clearly show that the level of arts education affects the decision-making process when choosing classical or popular music, especially in the group consisting of professional musicians. Obviously, it is not possible for this paper to identify all of the criteria that regular and potential audiences use to make a decision on listening to classical or popular music, but four major issues are identified.

1. People whose background is in formal education are more likely to choose which music to listen to according to their mood, whereas, those without a formal music education make their choice depending on the event.
2. Professional musicians listen to classical music almost exclusively when they are alone, and people without formal music education are more likely to listen to it when they are in a group;
3. How often people listen to classical music depends very much on music education. According to the results of this research most professional musicians listen to classical music on a daily basis, and those people without music education typically listen to the

Vienna Philharmonic New Years' Concert, the premiere of a festival or a performance of a famous foreign musician, and some of them never choose to listen to classical music.

4. Even though it was not the intention of this research to explore the link between parents' and children's choice of music, the results clearly show that all of the participants in the group of professional musicians were exposed to classical music at an early age. They all have at least one parent who loves classical music, and they often listened to classical music in their homes.

In fact, the research showed that more than half of the participants in the first group have parents who play an instrument. More precisely, one of nine participants has a parent who is a professional musician, three have parents who have some formal music education, but are not professionals, one has a parent who learned to play an instrument himself and the rest of participants have parents without any formal music education but who love classical music.

In the second group only one participant's parent has formal music education, and parents of two respondents like to listen to classical music, even though they don't have formal music education. Parents of the rest of the participants don't like classical music.

It could be said that the important position that family role has in scientific literature concerning the shaping of our cultural needs and preferences can be applied on this case as shown in parents' influence on children's attitude toward classical music. The sample is very small and so the result is not conclusive, but it is still provocative and it calls for further research.

It is also interesting to note that almost all the participants from both groups would always choose the video over the audio tape of a concert. Participants from the first group watch various music concerts, especially when they are preparing for their own concert or exam, and most participants in the second group like to listen to famous parts of classical compositions.

This study should be considered as an exploratory study and a first step towards getting an insight into the mechanism of how people choose to listen to classical music.

Key words: music, arts education, artists, audience

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