



*Understanding Audiences Working Paper 3.*

*January 2013*

## **Musicians and their live audiences: dilemmas and opportunities**

**John Sloboda, Research Professor, Guildhall School of Music & Drama<sup>1</sup>**

### ABSTRACT

Audiences for live classical music events have shown a persistent and steady decline over the last few decades. If this trend is to be halted, and even reversed, musicians require a deeper understanding of their audiences – what motivates and nourishes them – and the willingness to explore new forms of engagement with their audiences. This working paper reviews a number of linked collaborative initiatives that are being taken at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama that are being undertaken within a practice-based research programme entitled “Understanding Audiences”. Four initiatives are described here. One is a project to better understand the impact of live classical improvisation on audiences and performers. A second is a project to understand the mutual awareness and impact of performers and audiences in live jazz performances. Another is a project to motivate 16-22 year olds into regular classical concert attendance. A fourth initiative has undertaken research into the ways in which audience feedback can be best mediated to musicians (for example through questionnaires and post-performance discussions) as a means of enhancing the live concert experience. These projects all lend detailed support the notion that contemporary audiences are most effectively engaged when live events contain elements of the new, the unexpected, the personal, and the active.

---

In supporting the arguments made in this paper I’m going to draw on several collaborative research studies that couldn’t have happened without the people listed here<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a lecture that was first given at the Nordic Conference on Aural Disciplines in Higher Music Education, Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo, 10-12 October 2012, and subsequently given as a public lecture at the University of Bristol, England, on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2012, under the title “Is the live classical concert dying?”.

<sup>2</sup> Collaborators at the Guildhall School were Helena Gaunt, Melissa Dobson, Biranda Ford, Alinka Greasley, David Dolan, Gail Brand, Martin Hathaway, Ben Saul, Julian Anderson, and Andrew Lawrence-King. Collaborators at Imperial College London were Henrik Jeldtoft-Jensen and Bjorn Crutz. Practitioner collaborators were Christopher Gayford, Trio Anima, Suzi Digby and Vocal Futures.

I am deeply indebted to them all – and I hope they will approve of the use I make of the work we did together.

I'm dividing this paper into three parts.

In the first part, I want to explain what's behind my title, and in particular identify a mismatch between what contemporary audiences want and what many classically trained musicians are equipped to give them.

In the second part I will summarise four research studies recently carried out at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama that probe the performer-audience relationship more deeply and, in three of those cases – document attempts to improve or enrich that relationship.

In the third and shortest final part I will try to summarise some of the implications of what I've laid out for those involved in making classical concerts work.

Most of what this paper contains is drawn from material which is published or publicly available, and referenced at the appropriate point.

## **Part 1: Understanding the decline in classical audiences**

There is one inescapable fact that gives many people in the classical music industry sleepless nights. The last few decades have seen a steady decline in audiences for live events. This decline has been substantial, and found in many countries. According to the regular surveys of the US-based National Endowment of the Arts the last 25 years has seen a 30% drop in attendance at classical concerts, opera, and ballet. This level of decline is not found in other fields of cultural activity, such as popular music, theatre, or museum and gallery attendance. It is specific to classical music. It is also age-related. The decline in attendance is most dramatic in adults under the age of 50. Young adults are not attending concerts in the numbers that they used to a generation ago. If this trend continues, in another 25 years there may be negligible audiences for classical concerts. If you are a classical musician, or work for an institution which trains or supports classical musicians, this can be seen as an existential crisis.

I'm starting from the assumption, which I hope is widely shared, that the live musical performance – where performers and audience are present together in a venue – is the seminal musical act, to which all others either lead, or from which they derive. Our conservatoires and other training institutions exist to ensure that professional musicians of the future can play their roles in live performance to the utmost of their ability.

I'm also making a second assumption, which is that there is something that musicians and conservatoires can do about this problem. Regretting the existence of cultural change is not productive. However, analyzing and

understanding it may be, to the extent that it then gives us some clues regarding how to respond.

I was first helped to think about the live performance by a collaboration with the conductor and trainer Chris Gayford that took place some years ago.

We started our collaboration from the observation that even the most well-rehearsed and highly trained musicians are not able to reliably produce performances that are optimal for intended expression. They have “good days” and “off days”, when a well-rehearsed performance just fails to come alive, for reasons that are elusive to both performer and listener.

We surveyed 53 musicians about this phenomenon. All were engaged in regular high-level classical performance. We found that, on average, less than 40% of their public performances were self-rated as optimal. More than 60% of performances thus failed to meet the performer’s own expectations. (Minassian, Gayford & Sloboda, 2003),

We were able to discover some of the factors that were statistically associated with optimal performance. Performances judged as optimal tended to be those where the performer had a clear intention to communicate (usually an emotional message), was emotionally engaged with the music, and believed that this message had been received by the audience.

Chris Gayford’s training work over many years with many levels of musician led him to believe that a significant hindrance to optimal performance was a very ingrained set of psychological habits in musicians. Perhaps the most pervasive of these was a narrow note-by-note attentional focus, driven by concerns over precision in accuracy and timing. This pulled attention away from the broader line and sweep of the music. He also observed musicians disappearing into their heads and into the score (“dot.dot.dot”) to the extent that they were not able to include their bodies, the audience and the environment in their attentional field.

He has developed an innovative training programme entitled “Feeling Sound” to assist musicians to refocus their awareness. This has been trialed in two UK conservatoires (see [www.feelingsound.net](http://www.feelingsound.net)).

My specific contributions to understanding the power of live performance went dormant for a few years until I moved from the University world to work myself in a conservatoire, starting in 2009. There I discovered a broad range of teachers and scholars who, in their different ways, had observed exactly the same phenomenon that Chris and I had documented, and were struggling to overcome it in a variety of ways.

At the Guildhall School Biranda Ford is a sociologist who has been investigating the culture of conservatoire-trained musicians, its strengths and its weaknesses. Her findings were summarised thus in a joint paper:

“Through the writings of Adorno and others from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, audiences were characterised by having the worst kind of popular taste, symptomatic of the commodification of culture. They couldn’t be relied upon to know what was good for them. In this zeitgeist composers could be seen as separating themselves off, both from performers and audiences. The performers’ mission came to be a medium for the composer’s voice. The audience, which was not to be trusted, was kept at arm’s length.

These values, a duty to the composer’s score rather than the audience, were reproduced and institutionalised in the Paris Conservatoire model, still very present in today’s conservatoires. Getting the composer’s score right was a hallmark of the new conservatoire education which also saw the shift from performers as ornamenters or improvisers or composers, to being faithful interpreters of other people’s music.

This was encouraged through an emphasis on specialism in a single instrument or vocal type, a pursuit of virtuosic technique, and a standardisation of musical performance... as monitored through exams and prizes. Conservatoires became to be seen as protectors of certain musical standards, both of technique and in interpretation.

This worked for earlier audiences who were happy to receive canonical works from great composers via technically accomplished performers acting as mediators, according to the relatively narrow parameters of accepted interpretation. However, the majority of today’s younger audiences may want something different. In the absence of deference for these cherished works and composers they are seeking a relationship with the performer”. (from Sloboda and Ford, 2012)”

Are we right to characterise the shift in audience attitude as we do?

Well, there is converging evidence from a number of sources that live events that appeal to modern audiences score highly on four key dimensions. This evidence comes from interview studies with concert attenders, particularly those who are new to it, but also the observations of promoters and arts organisations.

The first dimension is *established work versus new work*, and in what proportion. Established work means work in repertoire of tried and tested value, often by authors or composers no longer alive. In general the programmes of major classical venues concentrate on established work. In contrast, programmes of major theatres and galleries have a very high proportion of new work alongside the established.

The second dimension is *predictable versus unpredictable*. This is determined by such factors as the nature and order of the programme, whether known in advance or not, and the level of improvisatory or ad-libbing moments to be found. Very often there is no advance programme at a pop, folk or jazz concert. In theatre, audiences go to see a named play, but elements of the production are often highly unpredictable, with huge variation in sets, lighting, costume. Classical concerts by contrast, are often highly predictable. The programme specifies exactly what will be played, in what order, and the degrees of freedom

for the performers are quite limited. The more predictable, the less easy it is to generate the sense of an event – something special.

The third dimension is *personal versus impersonal*. This relates to the level of personal engagement of the projection of performers; how far performers stay in strict performer roles, or step outside the role and project themselves as people. One kind of projection is talking directly to the audience either from the stage, or more informally, before or after the performance. Another kind of projection relates to the degree of self-conscious acting e.g. projection of emotional and other qualities through such things as body movement, facial expressions, or vocalisations. In classical music this is often restrained or idiosyncratic. In theatre these things are generally highly consciously managed as part of the stagecraft.

Fourthly, *active versus passive*, which is about the level of audience behaviour and communication. In some events active behaviour is allowed, or encouraged, for example clapping or cheering at points where you feel someone has done something particularly excellent or moving. In classical concerts you generally wait until the end of a work, even if the work has multiple movements. Then there are the so-called promenade events where it is permitted or encouraged to move. There are issues of authority, which impinge upon many venues and events. These place audiences in the position of humble viewer, coming into the presence of greatness. In this mode, the audience may feel it has nothing to give, only to receive.

It wouldn't be unfair to say that classical music events are, in general, established, predicable, impersonal and passive, by modern standards, in comparison to what else people can pay to go to. Audience inclusion and participation is more likely to occur at events that contain elements of the new, the unpredictable, the personal and the active. This means that classical events struggle to give many types of audience the experience that they want and seek.

How can more of what audiences seek be added to live events? We'd like to argue that one way to do this is by shifting the event along one or more of the dimensions identified above. Our research explorations at the Guildhall are focused on what musicians and creative artists can contribute to this (separately or in collaboration with promoters, venue managers, curators etc.)

## **Part 2: Research projects on audience engagement**

### **2a Classical Improvisation**

I'd like to start with some work on a very important attempt to challenge the core of the prevailing conservatoire culture. This is the work led by David Dolan, Head of the Centre for Classical Improvisation and Creative Performance.

His work encourages students to radically challenge the notion that faithfulness to the score is a core or abiding value. His work is based on the historical fact that until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, improvisation was considered to be a core

attribute of live performance. Mozart and Beethoven would have been astonished with the contemporary reverence accorded to their scores. They expected performers to take liberties with the score, as they did themselves in performance.

It could be argued that historically authentic performance of much classical repertoire requires (rather than invites) an improvisatory approach, which Dolan defines as a spontaneous, in the moment, musically informed variation in expressive parameters of timing, loudness, and timbre, along with actual new notes.

Not only is such an approach more historically authentic, it does, he has argued, have the power to provide a more intense experience for all concerned in live performance. This would fit, a-priori – with the four dimensions that Biranda Ford and I identified. Improvised performances are newer, more unpredictable, more personal, and – arguably – invite more audience engagement.

Recently David Dolan pulled together a research team to evaluate these claims in an experiment conducted during a live concert given by one of the chamber groups he trained for several years, which is now operating professionally.

His basic method involves teaching students how to do Schenkerian reductions on the music they are playing, and then reconstruct performances that share the same reduction. All this is done practically, through hearing and playing, with textual backup, but the main mode is experiential.

We recently presented the first results from this experiment (Dolan, Sloboda, J.A., Crutz, B, & Jeldtoft-Jensen, H, 2012). Our overarching hypothesis was that improvisation, and improvisational state of mind during performance is associated with heightened musical experience in terms of both performers' engagement and audience response.

Our specific predictions were for (a) increased (more varied) and more “risky” use of performance related parameters (Timings/tempi/rhythms, dynamics timbre and actual extemporized notes) by the musicians; (b) increased ratings for judgments of “innovative”, “emotionally engaging” and “musically convincing” from audience members; and finally (c) increased activation of certain brain areas in both performers and audience and increased synchronization in brain activity between performers and listeners.

Our research setting was a live concert by the “Trio Anima”. In that concert, five pieces were each performed twice in two modes: ‘strict’ and ‘letting go’ (improvisatory state). The order of two modes was switched around from piece to piece and was unknown to audience and any co-author other than David Dolan.

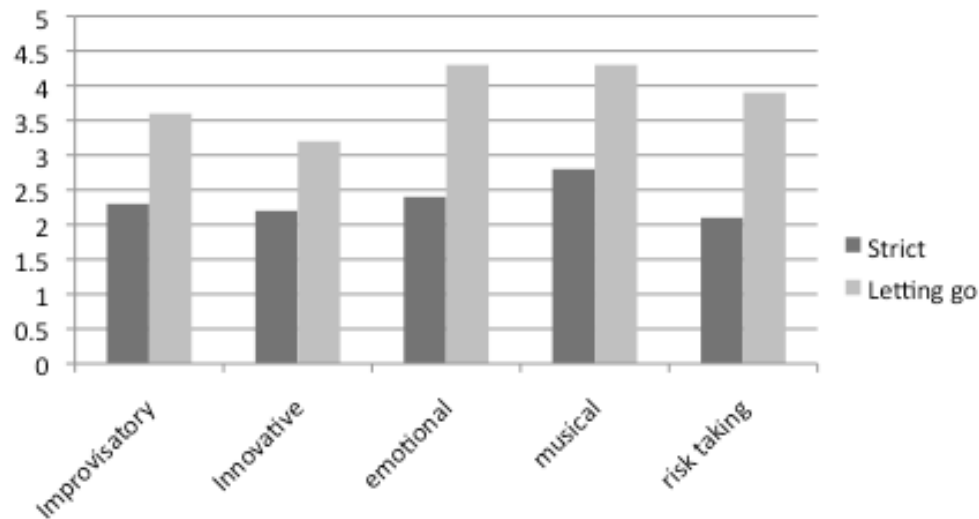
Questionnaires were administered to all audience members, who filled in a number of responses after each pair of performances. We also took Brain measurements (EEG) from performers and two audience members

Our results actually confirmed all three specific predictions.

First, the performances had clear objective differences. We found greater expressive variation in the 'letting go' version than the strict version, and also embellishments of the score.

How did the audience react to these differences? Well, they were asked to rate each performance on five separate dimensions, Improvisatory in character, Innovative in approach, Emotionally engaging, Musically convincing, and Risk taking. On all these dimensions the improvised pieces scored substantially higher (see figure).

## Average audience ratings



The ratings were supported by numerous written comments; of which these are two which exemplify the very different feel of the two types of performance.

Strict: "Pleasantly played, though tame and conventional"

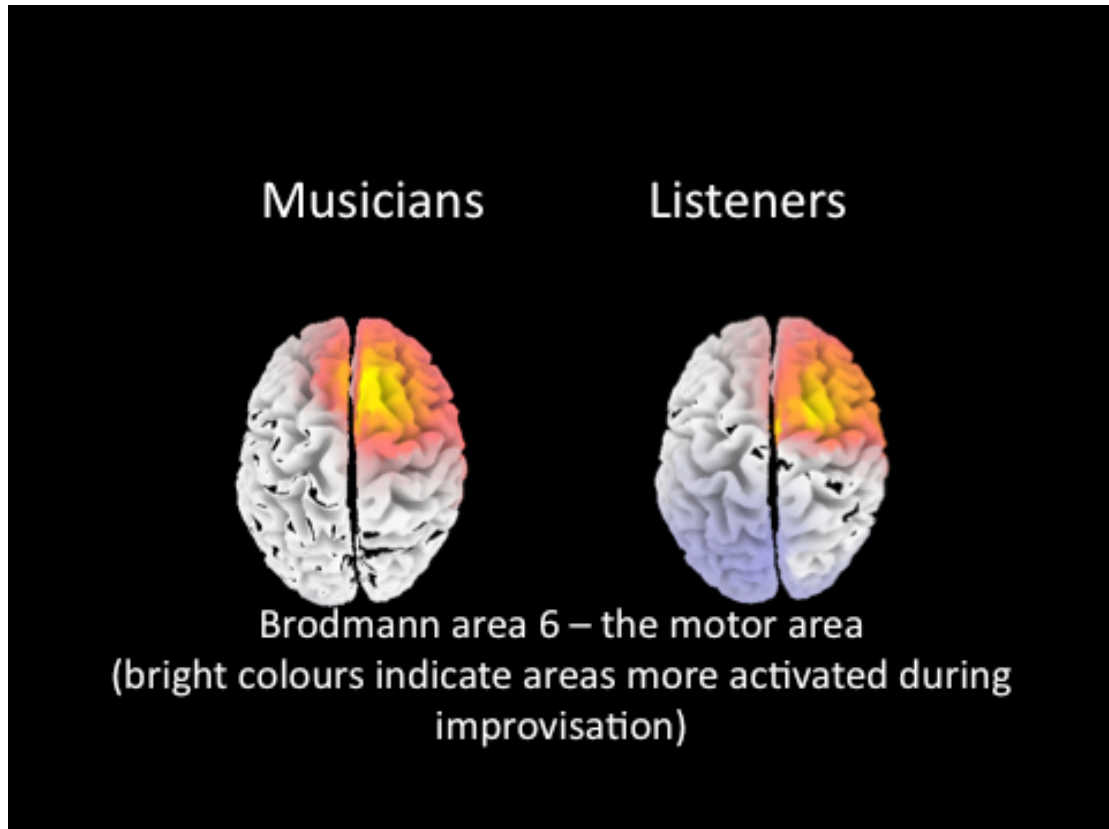
Letting-go "It was very intense. Musically a lot happened. The musicians were really making music and telling a story together"

Finally, the EEG data also showed numerous differences between strict and improvised performances, for both performers and listeners.

One particularly striking finding was a contrast between performers, whose brain centres for focused attention were less active during improvisation, and

listeners, who showed more activity in these areas (signaling a greater attentive involvement).

A second finding was that improvisation yielded greater activation in areas of motor control for both performers and listeners, even though listeners remained very still. It seems like listeners mirrored the movements of the musicians in their imagination.



In conclusion, we have found consistent evidence that improvised classical performances are experienced as significantly different by participants, as indicated through both conscious verbal and unconscious brain responses, as well as the musical features of the performances. This is the first study to demonstrate this combination of effects and in a live concert situation.

Is adding an improvisatory element to live concerts the answer to all classical music's woes? Of course not! It's one element in a tool kit.

## **2b Jazz performers and their live audiences**

Improvisation is at the heart of contemporary jazz. Yet attendance at Jazz concerts is not particularly healthy, and jazz has always been something of a fringe pursuit.



We have a jazz course at the Guildhall, and I've recently collaborated with three of the School's jazz staff to explore what goes on between jazz performers and their audiences (Brand, Sloboda, Saul & Hathaway, 2012).

The study involved in-depth interviews with professional jazz players and audiences that attend their gigs.

We found that jazz performers are very aware of their relationship to their audiences. This is not least because much jazz is performed in small venues where performers and audience are very physically close to one another.

One audience member said

"I really like that it's intimate and quite small. You're pretty much on top of the audience and vice-versa. I like that, it's great that you can go and see your heroes and they're 2 feet away from you and not only playing, they're kind of relaxing, and you can go up and just say "hi, I really enjoyed that set"

This proximity encourages a personal exchange between audience and performer: they are much more aware of each other and each other's reaction.

One musician remarked that the smaller the audience, the more intense the relationship:

"There's a paradox in this, because the more people that are in the audience, the more impersonal the experience gets for the performer. If you look out and see just half a dozen people there, it's for real isn't it!.... There is a certain sense in which the experience is more acute with a smaller audience. I actually prefer it, to be honest"

But a closer relationship with an audience can also have challenges which need to be managed.

One performer remarked:

"You do get people that very much think music, especially with Jazz. where they'll tell an artist what he should or should not be playing, and that's completely unhelpful for everyone I think"

Just as often, however, musicians are able to relate the very special benefits which playing for a live audience bring to them.

"I reckon half of it is the audience, yeah? Half of the gig's the audience and the feedback you get from them... you say "vibe" or something, but it is that thing, isn't it when you can feel that the people are going together on a journey and you can go more and more and more"

So jazz shows us something about the value of intimacy and mutual awareness between players and audiences. However, in common with classical music, it is a challenge to attract young audiences to jazz. Many of the committed gig attenders are in their 40s, 50s or over.

## **2c Inspiring young adults to attend classical concerts**

A third project I've been involved with is an attempt to directly address the challenge of encouraging the concert-attending habit in young adults, focusing on major works from the standard repertoire.

Alinka Greasley and I were commissioned to undertake an evaluation of Vocal Futures, a new London-based artistic charity. We recently reported our overall findings (Sloboda & Greasley, 2012).

We've known for some time that young people are deserting classical concerts. Recent research has begun to give us some specific insights into what puts young people off (Dobson, 2010; Dobson & Pitts, 2011, Kolb, 2001). This has identified two main factors.

Some young people felt that in order to enjoy classical music properly, they would need more prior knowledge of the music. They talked about feeling that classical concerts were designed for 'people who have studied music' or 'intellectuals with cultural backgrounds'. This is likely to be exacerbated in a culture that prioritises the performance of established works, where regular concertgoers may be assumed to know much more about these works than newcomers.

Another barrier is the prevailing audience culture, the etiquette one has to display – many young people find the lack of communication between conductor, performers and audience confusing, and find themselves anxiously waiting on the behaviour of others to ensure that they don't do anything embarrassing. Further barriers appear to be the physical space in which performances are held and the lack of social activity/socialising the concerts afford. To sum this up, they felt unwelcome in the space.

There have been a number of artistic initiatives to address and try to reverse audience decline. For example, the US based Knight Foundation published a report under the sub-title "Innovations to save our orchestras" (Philliber & Whitaker, 2003). They summarise a number of approaches they observed as having potential.

Firstly, they argue for non-traditional and enhanced concerts that provide classical music performances in innovative formats. This may include the integration of other art forms, themes from popular culture and other types of expression and communication.

Secondly, they argue for relationship-building activities – which seek to initiate and nurture relationships in the community in order to build public support, and offer what they call "gateway experiences" that introduce an orchestra to future ticket buyers.

Thirdly, they advocate educational strategies to strengthen people's knowledge and connection to classical music.

These are direct attempts to address the barriers that young people experience. Vocal Futures (VF) is a new London-based charity whose aims fit well with that of the Knight Foundation precepts (see [www.vocalfutures.org](http://www.vocalfutures.org)). It sets out to identify, involve and inspire young people to engage with classical choral masterpieces. It aims to do this by involving 16-22 year olds in a set of preparatory activities followed by attendance at a fully professional ticketed performance.

Its first project was a staged performance of Bach's St Matthew Passion in November 2011, held in a non-traditional venue, and involving an innovative audience participation element (virtual choir). These 16-22 year olds were then provided with further opportunities to engage with the project via email and social media (twitter/facebook), and were sent invitations to participate in around 30 concert-going opportunities in the first 6 months of 2012.

We were asked to provide a research evaluation of the project, and particularly its impact on the future attitudes and behaviours of the young people involved.

There were three phases in the research.

Phase 1 data was collected prior to the concert to identify pre-existing behaviours and attitudes in respect of classical concert attendance.

Phase 2 data was collected shortly after the concert (early December 2011), and explored experiences of the preparatory activities and the concert itself.

Phase 3 was a six-month follow-up (May 2012) that explored the extent to which attitudes and behaviours changed. Did the young people become more positive about classical concert attendance, and has any increased positivity actually translated into increased attendance?

118 of the 230 young attenders completed phase 1 of the research, but by phase 2 the number of participants in the research had dropped to 47, and by phase 3, 25. Sadly that meant that we could not gain a reliable insight into group change as a whole.

Keeping people involved in longitudinal research is a persistent headache of the research community, particularly as it is ethically unacceptable to require participation, and very often researchers do not have the funds to pay participants for their time.

Nonetheless, we can highlight a few findings that seem to indicate that the VF initiative had some clear positive effects.

We tested future intentions to attend classical concerts with precisely the same questions at all three times. At phase 2, immediately after the Vocal Futures

concert, there was a modest increase in those intentions among those who had answered at both times. This increase was not sustained 6 months later, however.

We ran focus groups with selected young people to identify what barriers to attendance they experienced. The findings mirrored those of earlier studies. An additional factor mentioned was that of the perceived high cost of concert tickets.

Participants were offered educational workshops – run by professionals involved in the Matthew Passion production and by leading experts in their fields. These took place in the 3 months preceding the concert. Each young person attended one workshop.

The workshops were designed to give the young people an introduction to the music; the context; the staging; the production; and audience engagement (e.g. front of house, marketing, press team). In one of the workshops, participants took part in recording a virtual choir version of one of the chorales.

The most valued parts of these workshops included the opportunity to interact with and get to know performers, and active participation in music-making.

The performance itself was staged, with actors miming elements relevant to the action/emotions being expressed in the music/libretto. There was a brand new modern English translation. It involved international-level performers including Willard White and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. The soloists and choir members were purposefully young, to increase likelihood that audience could identify with them (and some of these interacted with the young people during the educational phase). It was in a trendy non-traditional venue, Ambika P3 (University of Westminster, London) with a specially constructed arena.

The majority of young people's responses were very positive, including comments about the interpretation of the music, the quality of the singers and performers, the use of Baroque instruments, the atmosphere in the venue, the proximity of audience to performers, the scenery and how emotionally moving the performance had been. One young person described it as *"the BEST performance ever attended"*.

They were asked to rate a number of statements on scales. They rated highly on their degree of attentional involvement during the concert, and on how much they talked about it afterwards.

In the 6 months after the concert, the young people were offered a series of further opportunities to attend classical concerts for free or at a significantly reduced rate.

There were 30 specific offers including, free mailing lists, free or reduced price tickets to orchestral concerts, chamber groups, and operas.

There was modest uptake of these offers. We learned that in some cases young people would have liked to attend, but practical problems (homework, clashes, distance) prevented them.

What we can say without any doubt is that when young adults attend a high quality performance of a major classical work, even one which could be seen as challenging in its length and cultural specificity, they have a wonderful experience, provided that they have been properly prepared for what to expect, and thought has been given to how to make the ambience one in which they feel comfortable, welcomed, and “on a par” with more experienced and elderly concert attenders. For instance, in this performance, the young people were given all the best seats at the front. Paying older adults had to sit at the back!

What I was also able to find out, additionally, from interviews with some of the young professional singers involved, is that they were greatly affected by performing to people hardly younger than them. They felt an even greater obligation to give of their absolute best, knowing at first hand what barriers and difficulties young audiences might experience.

Thus, performers and audience knowing something about each other, and having opportunities for enriched connections might be a potentially important element of a fully satisfying concert experience for everyone. There is a hint that it might encourage performers towards optimum performance.

This line of thinking has stimulated a new line of research at the Guildhall, looking at how these connections might be brought about in a particularly focused way, through the use of post-concert events which bring artists and audiences together to talk about what they have just experienced together.

## **2d. Obtaining artist-directed feedback from live audiences.**

Classical musicians generally have rather limited means of obtaining direct and detailed feedback from their live audiences. This is often restricted to applause at the end of the piece and the somewhat intangible “the feel of the room”. This is in contrast to some other genres of music, where through movement, clapping, or vocalizing, performance conventions allow audience members to respond in real time to the music-making unfolding on stage (Small, 1998).

Many research studies exist which collect detailed evaluative responses from music listeners. But these have mostly been carried out without reference to the specific concerns or interests of the musicians involved, even when the event is a live performance. In fact, in the vast bulk of existing music perception research, the musicians involved in making the music don’t even know that the research on their music is taking place.

Our research approach looks at the potentials that can be realised when musicians themselves take a lead in the formulation of the research questions that are posed to the audience, and are centrally involved in the review of the data so obtained.

We have now worked across five different artistic projects in a process which involves (a) discovering artistically relevant questions which can be validly posed to audience members, (b) collaboratively devising appropriate means of collecting this data (always a post-performance discussion, augmented in two cases by a questionnaire), (c) jointly reviewing the outcomes of the event, and the audience data, (d) obtaining reflective feedback from those involved regarding the value of being involved in the exercise. In 2011 and 2012 we worked across five artistic events, summarised in the table below.

Date/Location	Event	Artistic collaborator/data collectd
July 2011 Guildhall School	<b>(A) "For Summer is a come O and Winter is a gone O"</b> World premiere, chamber ensemble conducted by composer.	Composer/ Questionnaire Post-concert discussion
November 2011 Guildhall School	<b>(B) "Movers and Shakers"</b> Workshop to explore potentials of music-related movement for audience members during a Bach solo violin suite performance.	Directors, performer / Audience questionnaire, Post-concert discussion
February 2012 Guildhall School	<b>(C) "The Seven Deadly Sins"</b> Staging of Kurt Weill's Ballet Chante, with orchestra and singer/actors.	Directors. performers/ Post-concert discussion
May 2012 Wallace Collection	<b>(D) "Combattimento"</b> Site-specific staging of Monteverdi's one-act opera with orchestra and singer/actors.	Directors, performers/ Post-concert discussion
June 2012 Queen Elizabeth Hall	<b>(E) "Debut Sounds"</b> A London Philharmonic Orchestra concert of new works by young composers.	Composers/ Post-concert discussion

Here, we propose to focus in on what this process has yielded in more detail by looking at one of these events (some of the other events are described in more detail elsewhere, see Sloboda & Dobson (2012) and Dobson & Sloboda (2013).

Event C was a new staging of Kurt Weill's Ballet Chante, the "Seven Deadly Sins". Our collaborators were the directors, the actor/singers, and the conductor of the orchestra.

"Seven Deadly Sins" is a satirical sung ballet, composed to words by Bertholt Brecht, and first performed in 1933. The plot depicts the fortunes of two American sisters in the Great Depression who set out from their family in Louisiana to earn enough money to send home to allow the family to build a little house on the Mississippi. The work is primarily a critical commentary on the way in which capitalism dehumanizes people and commodifies personal relationships.

The creative team consisted of a student artistic director, a student musical director/conductor, and two staff members acting as project advisors.

A member of the research team (JS) met with the creative team 6 months ahead to discuss collaboration. Thereafter one of the staff members in the team (an experienced social-science researcher) acted as performer-researcher liaison, and took primary responsibility for generating and passing on a set of agreed questions from the creative team.

The questions for post-performance discussion generated by creative team

- What do you think the message of the work that you have just seen is?  
Is the message still relevant today?
- Does Weill's music contribute to this message?
- What were some of the effects of this work and how we staged it on you the audience?
- How did you experience these? (for instance, did it bring the message out, or did it alienate/patronize you)?
- Do we still believe that theatre has the capacity to provoke political change amongst its audiences – or is it just another cultural commodity?

The creative team decided to invite a well-known classical performer/teacher to chair a post-performance discussion as the means of obtaining audience feedback. A member of the research team (JS) held two pre-event briefing meetings with the chair.

The post-performance discussion took place in the performance space immediately after the performance, and involved, in addition to the chair, three members of the creative team, and two of the singer/actors. It lasted about 30 minutes. Over half the audience remained for the discussion, which was pre-announced at the start of the performance.

A few weeks afterwards, post-event feedback was elicited from the artist participants in the discussion, four of whom attended a one-hour recorded meeting with the researchers, one of who sent in written comments by email. Thematic analysis of this feedback was undertaken.

Our treatment of results here focuses on the social factors that were seen as facilitating or inhibiting the process for the people involved.

Firstly, focusing the creative team on formulating research questions, which were known to the cast during rehearsals, sharpened the rehearsal process itself, and made it more goal-directed and self-reflective.

“Conductor: “But it was good though... because once we had those questions, it enabled us to shape the performance as well. So it gave us a direction for this and a direction for the performance.”

Singer/Actor: “It enabled us to make much clearer choices in the setting and things like that, yeah, certainly”

Secondly, participating in the post-performance discussion changed the power relationships between performers and audience, reducing the disparity, which was experienced as both positive but also anxiety provoking and challenging.

Conductor: “it’s a strange headspace to be in, suddenly conducting, and turn around and open your mouth. And I must admit, I was really nervous actually. But it was good. What I really like about it is that you get the immediacy of the people’s reactions”

Singer/Actor: “It was just odd. I had never experienced it before. It was almost as if instead of walking through the stage door after the performance, you walked through the audience door...It detracted from the post-performance high ... To be completely honest it took away from my ego.”

Additionally, the process involved transacting new power relations between researchers, performers, and curator/chair.

Staff Project Advisor: “I did ask a question of the audience. I think I wouldn’t have been comfortable to keep on coming up with more audience questions. Because then the question is, am I trying to take over [the chair’s] job. So I think there was a sort of thing...I suppose, [he] was chairing it, but he wasn’t actually... he hadn’t really been involved in the work.”

Thirdly and finally, prior knowledge of the post-performance element sharpened and focused the instrumentality of some audience members, facilitating a valued transition from “passive recipient” to “consultant”.

Singer/Actor: “I think, from my experience with my friends that came along, they changed... it changed the way that they approached the piece. They didn’t go out to be entertained. They went out to have some input. And it wasn’t in a negative way. They were ready for a post-performance, but it wasn’t like they were getting dressed up to go to the West End. It was that they were getting dressed up to go to a School and have an after-show production talk, which changed the way they approached it”

This project, as well as other studies in the set, show that when you empower your audience it can raise the game for everyone.

### **Part 3. Discussion**

Most of the work described in this paper has involved students and/or staff at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. What we are trying to do at the Guildhall, in addition to attempting to meet normal academic goals, is to make full



advantage of a conservatoire's unique position as a meeting place between researchers, professional musicians and other creative professionals, advanced teachers, and the students they teach.

This position allows us to observe professional performance and the development of emerging professionals. But more than this, it also enables us to help shape innovative practice. We see research as an integral part of an ongoing process whereby new means of relating to audiences are being devised, trialed, and embedded in the culture. We believe that a progressive conservatoire can be a crucible for pushing professional boundaries as well as evolving educational practices, and allowing experimentation in a context that is somewhat protected from the harsh winds of commercial imperative.

One of our aims is to help encourage an environment in which musicians are much more likely to engage directly with their audiences in adventurous ways.

Of course, applied or action research of this kind must still be subjected to the critical scrutiny of the academic community in relation to its research rigour. However, there is also a different tightrope we must walk. On the one hand an important constraint on such research is the need to respect the artistic process and not import research processes that come to "dominate" or distort the artistic outcomes. On the other hand, the very introduction of this interactive research process does have the capacity to alter the artistic process itself, as the interviews showed.

Sadly, however, as we have already stated, artist-led processes of the sort we have described are rare in classical music. Most musicians therefore don't have prior experience of such processes to motivate their involvement in such a process. To that extent, the process has still been more researcher-led than we would have liked. We are not yet in the enviable position where artists seek us out to help their reflective development. It is we who are still seeking out willing artist "guinea pigs".

Even further away is a culture in which audience members themselves are enabled to become co-participants in the design of feedback procedures. Yet the full and active engagement of all three apexes of that triangle – artist-audience-researcher – does not seem an unrealistic dream. How might that happen? Well audiences will take their own initiatives in their own way, but our research has suggested four ways in which classical musicians might make their concerts more compelling for audiences.

Some strategies are supported by our research. They are neither necessary nor sufficient, but there is evidence for their effectiveness

- Adopt an improvisatory approach
- Create intimate personal settings
- Allow audience to meet you and be informed of your enthusiasm
- Provide opportunities for the audience to give feedback on questions you want the answer to

Why are these effective? Our research team would argue, precisely because they move concerts along our four key dimensions in ways that engage and motivate audiences. They make concerts more unpredictable and new, more personal, and more active. And that's what today's audiences want. Perhaps it has always been what audiences want, and there have to be very specific cultural conditions to support what might be seen in years to come as a curious historical aberration, the polite, well-educated and repressed audience of the early and mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

We may need to connect with a more rumbustious tradition of earlier centuries where we could expect the audience to be somewhat more lively and demanding.

## References

Brand, G., Sloboda, J. A., Saul, B., & Hathaway, M. (2012) The reciprocal relationship between jazz musicians and audiences in live performances: a pilot qualitative study. *Psychology of Music, 40.5*, 634-651.

DiMaggio, P. & Mukhtar, T. (2004). Arts participation as cultural capital in the United States, 1982- 2002: Signs of decline? *Poetics, 32*, 169-194.

Dobson, M.C. (2010). New audiences for classical music: The experiences of non-attenders at live orchestral concerts. *Journal of New Music Research*, Special Issue: Understanding Audience Experience, 39(2), 111-124.

Dobson, M. & Pitts, S. (2011). Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members' Social and Musical Responses to First-time concert attendance. *Ethnomusicology Forum, 20(3)*, 353-383.

Dobson, M. & Sloboda, J.A. (2013, in press). Staying behind: Explorations in post-performance musician–audience dialogue. In K. Burland & S.E. Pitts (eds.), *Coughing and Clapping: Investigating Audience Experience*. Ashgate/SEMPRE Studies in the Psychology of Music series

Dolan, D., Sloboda, J.A., Crutz, B., & Jeldtoft-Jensen, H. (2012) Measuring the impact of live classical improvisation through EEG and Audience Feedback. Paper presented at a conference on “Perspective on Musical Improvisation”, University of Oxford, 10-13 September 2012.

Ford, B. (2011). *What are Conservatoires for?* PhD thesis, IOE, University of London, p. 128/153 for a discussion of the aesthetic and pedagogical drivers behind perfection as a cherished musical value.

Ford, B. & Sloboda, J. A. (2012) ‘Learning from artistic and pedagogical differences between musicians’ and actors’ traditions through collaborative processes’ in H. Gaunt and H. Westerland *Collaborative Learning in Higher Music Education: Why, What and How?*, (Ashgate).

Halsey, K., & Kinder, K. (1999). ‘I am new’: Young People’s accounts of accessing cultural venues. In J. Harland & K. Kinder (Ed.), *Crossing the Line: Extending Young People’s Access to Cultural Venues*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Kolb, B. M. (2001). The effect of generational change on classical music concert attendance and orchestra’s responses in the UK and US. *Cultural Trends, 41*, 1-35.

Kolb, B. M. (2001), You call this fun? Reactions of young first-time attendees to a classical concert. *Journal of the Music and Entertainment industry Educators Association, 1(1)*, 13-28.

Minassian, C., Gayford, C. & Sloboda, J. A. (2003) Optimal experience in musical performance: a survey of young musicians. Paper presented at a meeting of the Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research, London, March 2003. (unpublished)

Sloboda, J. A. & Ford, B. (2012) What classical musicians can learn from other arts about building audiences. Understanding Audiences Working Paper 2. [www.gsmd.ac.uk/fileadmin/user\\_upload/files/Research/Sloboda\\_Ford\\_working\\_paper\\_2.pdf](http://www.gsmd.ac.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/files/Research/Sloboda_Ford_working_paper_2.pdf)

Sloboda, J. A. & Greasley, A. E. (2012) Igniting the passion: exploring young people's attitudes towards classical music. Paper presented at SEMPRES Conference, London. [www.sempre.org.uk/resources/40\\_programme.pdf](http://www.sempre.org.uk/resources/40_programme.pdf)

Sloboda, J.A. & Dobson, M. (2012) How was it for you? Obtaining artist-directed feedback from audiences at live musical events. Paper presented to the 12<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition, Thessaloniki, Greece, July 2012

Whitaker, L. & Philliber, S. (2003), Bridging the Gap: Innovations to Save Our Orchestras. John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Retrieved 13th March 2012 from [http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/pubhub/pubhub\\_item.jhtml;jsessionid=DJTWKRPM2GUNPLAQBQ4CGW15AAAACI2F?id=400014](http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/pubhub/pubhub_item.jhtml;jsessionid=DJTWKRPM2GUNPLAQBQ4CGW15AAAACI2F?id=400014)