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A symposium dedicated to developing a shared manifesto for contemporary classical music presented by the **Association of British Orchestras** with **ACCORD – The Alliance for New Music** in association with the **Canadian High Commission** supported by the **Performing Right Society**

## REPORT

WEDNESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2004, LONDON

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### WELCOME AND CONTEXT

**Susannah Simons** *Head of Public Affairs and Outreach, BBC Radio and Music (Symposium Chair)*

**Simon Crookall** *Chairman, Association of British Orchestras*

Simon welcomed delegates and said that he hoped this day would begin to bring the whole sector together for fruitful and meaningful collaboration in the future now that the ABCP/PRS dispute had been settled. He welcomed the formalisation of Accord and emphasised that the symposium was the first of a number of events the steering group was planning.

**John Axon** *Executive Director, Performing Right Society*

I really am pleased to be here at the ABO Seminar today. As most of you will be aware, this time last year many of those affiliated with the ABO, especially the more famous classical venues and promoters, were in dispute with the PRS. The issue was the PRS rate for larger classical concerts, an issue resolved at a high level mediation on 3 and 4 December last year. I am delighted to say that since that date we have detected little difficulty with our classical concert licensees in reporting to us and paying PRS fees.

I know these are relatively early days, and that concert programmes can sometimes be fixed years in advance, but I am optimistic for the future collaboration and goodwill between PRS, classical venues, and the promoters, including of course increasingly the orchestras.

So what has PRS done, to restore the confidence of the classical concert community? Based on our forecasts of where we think PRS classical revenues are going we improved dramatically from the start of this year the arrangements for ensuring that monies from concerts reach only the persons whose works featured in concerts.

Any concert licensed under a PRS formal classical or popular concert tariff is being paid to the relevant interested parties provided we get payment for the event and a bona fide programme. There is no sampling of programmes.

We have ensured continuing funding, £1.5m a year, for the PRS Foundation whose initiatives include –

**Composer in the House:** funded with the Royal Philharmonic Society - a series of short composer residency programmes. BBC Radio 3 has undertaken to broadcast the premieres of the new orchestral works that emerge from this.

**Encore:** an initiative again with the Royal Philharmonic Society and BBC Radio 3 to address one of music's harshest realities: getting repeat performances of new works. A distinguished jury has selected 15 Encore works from over 130 nominations to be performed by some of this country's leading orchestras over the next 3 years.

And of course approximately a third of the PRS Foundation's funding still finds its way towards supporting the classical genre.

As to the PRS itself we rapidly renewed for this year our commitment made last year to the BBC Radio 3 British Composer Awards. And we are starting to ensure that, where we can, we make a contribution to an event such as today's Symposium.

It is not my intention to hijack this event but I do want to stress that the strains of the years 2001 – 2003 are behind us and that our perception is that the relationship between the creator whom we represent and the performers and promoters who are represented here today is improving for the benefit of both sides. I welcome the title of this Symposium: New Music: A Concordant Approach.

## **THE NEW MUSIC SNAPSHOT: CREATOR AND ENABLER**

*Cathy Graham Managing Director, London Sinfonietta in conversation with  
Richard King Managing Director, Faber Music*

### **Cathy Graham outlined on orchestras' considerations during the commissioning process.**

- It can be one to several years from commission to performance. Orchestration, length and possible dates need to be discussed but there needs to be room for flexibility and awareness of how changes can impact negatively on the orchestra's budget.
- The cost of player's fees plus the use of technology and additional percussion hire can add 50% to fees. A new work generally needs eight to ten rehearsals.
- Will the composer take part in education work?
- Will the composer be prepared to speak about the new work before a concert?
- Fundraising. It is difficult to commission within core grants and trusts, donations etc, are needed to generate the required funding.
- When a piece finally arrives, the budgets for rehearsals etc are reviewed. This is where orchestras can find out that more funds are needed than were budgeted for.
- If a new music concert gets a full house, once the VAT and commission have been taken out, 15% is left to cover the costs of the concert which means it is very unlikely to make a profit.

### **Richard King outlined publishers' considerations during the commissioning process.**

- 100% of the commission fee goes to the composer, no commission is taken and it is required to support the composer whilst he or she is writing the work. Publishers help composers to negotiate the fee.
- Turning a manuscript into a score and parts can cost in the region of £3000 - £4000. If it is a computer file this does save money but it still needs editing at a cost of £1000 – £1500.
- A new work invariably needs 4 – 5 performances to become known and 15 or more to break even.
- Promoting a composer's career is expensive
- Establishing a new classical music publishing house today would probably not be viable because of the investment costs required. Classical music publishing cannot cover costs from performances and broadcasts alone and publishers have to develop other income streams.
- The sector is funded, although indirectly and all parties need to work together to improve this.

To make the most of today, Cathy Graham said that talking openly, tackling taboos and thinking widely of what can improve the situation of new music were vital. Richard King stressed that issues of funding needed to be addressed and the new music sector should work together to convince those with influence to increase it. Both agreed that reaching a wider audience was important.

## **THE WHY & THE WHAT**

**Why is new music important? What challenges face those working in the new music sphere?**

### **Sally Groves *Head of Contemporary Music, Schott & Co Ltd***

Looking after composers and helping to create a work, from initial idea to performance, was a different process to performing. Publishers have to take a broad spread of composers as they do not know when composers will be valued and not all great composers are published. A "success" can take a very long time to happen and it is easy for the work to "die." Publishers monitor standards and ensure composers receive their fees. However, when a composer was hired to conduct, the fee offered was three times the collective hire fees. All publishers want to do is to make things happen!

**Question posed: *How can we communicate what is happening in new music now to draw people in?***

### **David Whelton *Managing Director, Philharmonia Orchestra***

Orchestras have a responsibility to respond to and support the creative energies of our time by giving the audience a chance to engage with new music. There are a myriad of audience development initiatives but the main challenge is economic. A recent Philharmonia Orchestra Birtwistle concert cost £110,000 and the box office was a mere £10,000 (900 being the average attendance for a new music concert) therefore a new music concert is often run at a great deficit. 18% of the Philharmonia's overall income was from subsidy and the rest is obtained through sponsorship and the orchestra's earned income. Therefore the economics mean orchestras cannot do as much contemporary music as they would necessarily like to.

There are two ways to introduce new music to an audience:

- 1) Mixed programming. This can be successful if there are major artists and sponsorship. Regional audiences can also be more receptive to new work.
- 2) Specialist series. If this is led by a major figure with a supportive framework it can generate audiences for new music, especially if the series is over a few weeks. The Philharmonia's *Music of Today* series is presented by the Artistic Director, are offered free and therefore have less 'risk' attached for audiences.

The majority of audiences do not like contemporary music. Lack of familiarity and bad performances caused by too little preparation contribute to this. However, music with a visual aspect does work better. Audiences are the lifeblood of orchestras and without them, orchestras go bust. There is plenty of good music being written and orchestra's need to look at this before commissioning.

**Question posed: *How do you make new music universally attractive to audiences?***

### **Chris Craker *Director, Independent Music & Media Alliance, Record Producer and consultant to Sanctuary Records & Gramophone***

Classical sales have increased, but a proportion of the classical top 20 are not strictly classical and new music is only represented as film / TV soundtracks. There is no shortage of talent, creativity or audience but there are some hurdles, mainly financial. The costs of making a new music recording versus the income stream present a dilemma. Advertising, marketing and distribution costs are punitively high. Venue hire and artistic costs are also high if enough rehearsal time is provided. After this, there is nothing left for the manufacturer's costs, therefore donations or support from partners is relied upon. New music recording is unviable and a new business model needs to be developed.

**Question posed; *How can we solve the problems with a new business model so first performances are not the last?***

### **Gillian Moore MBE *Artistic Director, London Sinfonietta and Project Manager, Music Audience Development, Royal Festival Hall***

Who is new music for? The good news is that audiences are getting bigger, London Sinfonietta's had increased by 30% over the last year and its audience had doubled in the past ten years. The Royal Festival Hall's Berio Festival has seen the best audiences for a long time. Generally, this audience is not the one which goes to symphony concerts; it is more likely to attend visual arts, theatre and dance and is hungry for challenge and the new with the emphasis on quality. Recent work with the WARP record label had been an enormous success, as had the Akram Khan Dance Company. Such events could sell out venues many times over. Given this, why is so much effort expended on the symphony orchestra audience that does not like contemporary music?

Perhaps this audience should be left alone and the effort put into taking new music to the mainstream of contemporary cultural life.

**Question posed:** *Should we be thinking of putting new music 'up there' in contemporary cultural life, instead of using energy on converting the symphony orchestra audience?*

During a general discussion various points were made from the floor:

- 'Contemporary music' puts people off as they think they cannot understand it
- The context in which music is presented is essential. If young people are educated in music at an early age they tend to be more accepting and do not differentiate between genres as much.
- Encouraging people to want to be challenged is difficult.
- Pre concert talks are an important part of presenting the 'human face' of the composer
- New music should not be ghettoised
- Does the presentation of concerts put off young people and should they be presented less formally?
- Visual art can be a way of engaging new audiences in new work
- Converting the existing audience is very expensive
- Is £100,000 for one concert for 900 people viable?
- To justify the expenditure, orchestra's have to make the most of a performance in other ways
- More partnerships, strategic commissioning and thinking are essential.

## **CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART: CAN IT SHOW NEW MUSIC THE WAY?**

**Norman Rosenthal** *Exhibitions Secretary, Royal Academy of Arts, London* in conversation with **Richard Bernas** *Conductor and Music Consultant, Tate Modern*

You cannot compare visual art to new music because visual art is a solid commodity which has a market value to manage. The key issue seems to be the audience - they complete a piece of art in some sense and there is no market for art without them. There can be a sense of worthiness in concerts and perhaps taking this out may help to reach audiences. Visual arts used to have some of the 'emptiness' of new music because the small audience becomes an elite. How to expand this elite and make new music attractive is a big question.

Visual art is on the whole free in contrast to concerts. The paid parts of an exhibition are often empty but the free parts are busy. There is a need to draw comparisons between the money that is thrown at contemporary art and the fraction of this that is given to contemporary music. Free access is very expensive but it does work for art. If the box office is representing only 10% of an orchestra's income then perhaps they should look at finding ways to cut prices.

The vocabulary of appreciation and analysis of the cultural experience is also very different. Music is very subjective and passive whereas visual art audiences are more engaged and explorative. This is paralleled at student level. All art students are creators and seem to be plugged into the contemporary arts world in a way music students are not. Even new music concerts in Music Colleges are only attended by a few students. Music students seem to be interested in practising their instruments for a career as a performer and it is mysterious that music education does not encourage them to engage in the contemporary art. Dancers also seem to be more open to the new and not always obsessed with the traditional and there is often a feeling that professional musicians are not happy playing new music. Richard Bernas commented that musicians are happy to play new music if they are confident they will not 'fall on their face'. Teachers can also be scared about teaching composition because their own education is more appreciation rather than creatively based. Hopefully this will change over the next few years.

Norman Rosenthal discussed the 'blockbuster' show: "these just happen in art" but they often spread new possibilities and help get art into the wider world and achieve new popularity. New media is also playing a big part in taking visual art to new audiences. New music should look at ways to break out of the traditional venues and there is a need to find new music that gives a sense of sound and vision that has not been heard before – one of the essential components for a successful contemporary art show. There are few stars around at any one time but it is an impresario's job to feel what is going to sell. Audiences are too sophisticated to be engineered and they know what they want to experience. In the end, quality will get through barriers and the wider audience will respond to this. Asked if the product of contemporary music is just not interesting enough, Norman Rosenthal said that it is often not marketed very well. Festival's should be 'cruelly' created, not with charity, and could happen on a regular basis. The new problem of contemporary art is with so many practitioners and so much art available, it can be very difficult to evaluate what is 'quality' and will sell.

It is always important to remember that there is no moral imperative to like contemporary music; an audience will only go to concerts because they want to.

## THE HOW

How can different parts of the industry work together more effectively? How do we progress and build a thriving sector?

### David Butcher *Chief Executive, Britten Sinfonia*

Public taste and ways of receiving music have altered radically and some say that contemporary music is at a turning point. This affects composers because there is such a range of music available to inspire them. There are opportunities for widening the interest in new music and orchestra's need to put composers at the centre of their work. Britten Sinfonia's work with composers is increasingly at the centre of planning, reaching audiences and the type of player that the orchestra recruits. Composers can also do more than just compose, they can conduct, perform, and act and Britten Sinfonia like to make the most of them. There is also the ongoing problem of music education in schools where tuition needs to be increased but so does the culture of composition amongst young people.

**Question posed** *How do we raise the profile and status of composers?*

### Andrew Kurowski *Executive Producer for New Music, BBC Radio 3*

BBC Radio 3 has moved from being passive to being a 'reflective' broadcaster. Radio 3 has to be in partnership with the industry to fulfill its remit of using broadcasting to get new music to the nation rather than a local elite. The role of composer within the orchestra is important and the BBC orchestra infrastructure supports this. The key is to develop partnerships that are good for everybody, therefore commissioning has to have a purpose other than a studio performance. The role of studentship is also important and orchestra's need to engage with Music Colleges. Engaging composers in projects to discover their humanity and harnessing the possibilities of new media are all important to help bring new music to the public and develop their curiosity.

**Question posed:** *How do we harness public curiosity?*

### Colin Matthews *Composer*

**Recordings.** NMC Recordings requires the support of the Holst Foundation, an Arts Council England grant, sponsorship and sales to get by. The catalogue has 136 CDs exclusively of British composers. However, the economics do not make sense and the label's best hope is to break even. Orchestras cost £20,000 – 50,000; only 2000 CDs are circulated at £4 each. This raises questions:

- 1) Should performers share the risk and take royalties rather than fees?
- 2) How do we expand the audience?
- 3) Young composers have no market
- 4) What are the alternatives to record dealers?

**Orchestras.** Relationships with orchestras are good because the involvement in planning, audience development etc helps the composer get to know the orchestra from the inside. However, it is a difficult relationship and can be antagonistic if the orchestra does not know the composer well. New music is not the lifeblood of the repertoire therefore it is good that orchestras see composers as part of their work and you do need excitement to hear a new piece. New music needs to be promoted for its own sake rather than because it is worthy or has education projects attached. Composers have to be aware that they are a minority but their passion outweighs their size. Music has to be convinced of the need for the new.

## **SUMMARY AND CALL TO ACTION**

Susannah Simons *Head of Public Affairs and Outreach, BBC Radio and Music*

Partnerships and curiosity seem to be the key words of the day. More comments were received from the floor:

- Curiosity is important. Composers need to be put at the centre of music.
- Presentation. Context and ways to programme are vital for new music's success.
- The end use of music should be beyond the concert hall. Putting contemporary music into new contexts is vital.
- Communication. Composers with the public and within education, creating a sense of aesthetic value.
- An alliance with the record industry to sell tickets on the back of CDs and vice versa
- Education embeds the idea of music's past in children from the beginning, not creativity.
- Early Years Education. The availability and accessibility of music in education are important so people can take ownership. The importance of film and the visual can be used to get music out to people because these forms are seen to belong to everyone.
- Higher Education difficulties. Conservative staff are not always keen to push music unfamiliar to them.
- Why is contemporary music not cool? We need to work together to create a buzz for an arts event to reach new audiences. The product can speak for itself as the performance is one of the major marketing tools we have if it is done well.

Susannah Simons summed up the key words of the day:

➤ **Curiosity**

➤ **Communication**

➤ **Context**

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