

It is said that “While audiences for film, theatre and dance flourish, the same can’t be said for new music.’ While in general this contention may be largely correct, for me the very future of orchestral art music depends on us embracing contemporary music and featuring it in our programmes in an artistically attractive manner. I say this not necessarily as an advocate for contemporary art music but because I believe that our future box office success depends on presenting new work. I believe the public is hungry for new experiences and look to us to offer the best and most inspirational choices in new music. I agree with Verdi when he said the box office was the only barometer of success. I also agree with Wagner when he argued against clinging to the past in programming, rather telling performers to “make it new”.

I believe orchestral concerts are the most effective forum to bring the best in contemporary art music to a wider public. In fact because of this belief I also believe that we have a duty to do this. My experience shows that properly presented, audiences want to hear the music of today in all its variety. Orchestras have built an audience through the cannon of western art music but I would suggest that this approach must be modified if we are to continue to grow our audiences. Society is changing in myriad ways and to keep what we do in an “ivory tower” or a stuffy museum – where the same old works are presented over and over again seems to me to be a backward step. I see our challenge to be both a museum and an art galley. A museum in the way we continue to present the musical cannon and an art gallery in the way we present the very best in contemporary art music.

Our challenge is to first connect with our society in a meaningful manner – once we establish this we can move forward. This is a big challenge without any easy answers but the experience of cinema, theatre, the visual arts, literature and dance shows that it can be done in a manner which engages, confronts and serves as a kind of mirror to society. I would submit that it is because the public for these art forms have embraced the new that these art forms have thrived.

The idea that art music transcends social context still seems to have weight in orchestral circles and most damagingly in the public's perception. Thus the justifications for presenting concerts that have no cultural significance on a wider societal scale. In fact, it is clear that taken in a wider context the contemporary music that has had the deepest impact is that of the popular genre. The 12 bar blues has a greater social significance than the 12 note row!

This approach is nothing new. The codification of the classical canon and the elevation of the dead white German composer probably started around the time of the publication of the first biography of JS Bach in 1802 by Johann Nikolaus Forkel. In it he rightly praises Bach but at the expense of the contemporary music being written at the time. This music of course included Beethoven who working on his 3rd symphony!

During the decades following the publication of this book and the subsequent canonisation of the classical era concerts became far more formal affairs – in line with what we experience today. I believe this is a largely negative state of affairs and at odds with where culture is taking us.

A funny anecdote I have just read recently involves a performance at Bayreuth of Parsifal where after the Flower Maidens Scene an enthusiastic punter yelled out bravo – only to be hissed by his fellow listeners – the joke of course was the enthusiastic punter was Wagner himself! One knows things are going badly when the audience is taking the elitist social structure of the concert hall more seriously than the composer himself!

We need to throw away the strongly held belief of people like Adorno who, when attacking Toscanini – a maestro well ahead of his time in terms of his thinking of audience engagement – stated that any work of art that attracts large numbers of people must have no value. This applies not only to popular music but also art music that attracts a loyal following. I wonder what he would have made of the Gorecki 3rd symphony phenomenon! Speaking of the average punter as “retarded” he stated that the consumer is only worshipping the money that he spent on the ticket to the concert! Whilst I want the money of those people as well, it hardly seems a logical strategy for the long time survival of our art form.

Even before this time the concept of high art not needing to engage a wider audience took hold. The Victorians felt that popular music was subsidiary to more serious work. I believe a way forward is to question this hierarchy and to send this message out to the public who seem not to have heard! While most orchestras uphold this separation they are clearly far more advanced in this kind of thinking than the limited audiences that orchestras attract currently. Culture is moving and to ensure the expansion of art form we

must move with the times and educate our audience to what a concert experience can be.

How can we counter this concept that is prevalent amongst institutions and the general public?

Overall we still approach programming as a way of connecting the great traditions of music. I wonder if this idea of celebrating this sense of a linear progression in art music is the way forward any more. At its most banal this approach can regurgitate the same works from the classical music cannon over and over again.

For orchestral music to survive I believe we need to consider a pluralist approach to programming. Finding some way of maintaining our core repertoire while expanding the horizons and interest level of our audiences through top quality contemporary work. Turning on our audience must be of paramount importance.

The distinction between low and high music is becoming less meaningful. Recent notable successes with contemporary music have been through collaboration with artists in the pop field. Genuine collaboration with popular artists is one way of highlighting this fact. Works that explore this such as William Russo's concerto for Blues Band and orchestras or works such as Glass's Low Symphony or the Queen Symphony of Tolga Kashif speak to this kind of pluralistic approach that helps to break down these barriers between low and high.

I believe that an orchestra should not work with popular groups as a way of making money or bringing in the public. I suggest breaking distinctions down is the greater value. The fact that these concerts can connect with a different audience and provide excellent box office is only a side issue for me. It is about the context in which the work is presented.

Cross over goes both ways, of course and I am also interested in works by art music composers that play on these issues. I see works and concerts such as these, which question traditional barriers as one way forward.

I am in disagreement with performers, composers and arts management organizations that consciously or not uphold this distinction - looking with disdain towards "low" culture.

I believe what we do is as much about entertainment as is pop music and popular music can have as much to do with art as classical music.

I am not a fan of the ghetto-isation of contemporary music. I believe it to be a turn off to audiences and the New Zealand experience backs this contention up. Contemporary music concerts struggle to attract an audience outside of a tiny and select group of aficionados and most contemporary concerts presented by orchestras attract audiences well below that enjoyed in their mainstream programmes unless the trust of the public is built up over time.

For me, the main reason why these approaches have not been particularly successful in building a willing audience for these works is the fact that groups have

not built up a level of trust with the public outside that of contemporary music cognoscenti.

How to build this trust is the challenge. I would suggest that programming these works in a more eclectic manner might be a way forward. Not worrying so much about what values we put on a work in terms of where they are included in programmes may be worth considering.

We must make music matter enough so that people invest willingly in it! To do this we must be a mirror of our culture. Communication is key – outreach is of vital importance. It has to give something to them if they are to support it!

I acknowledge that what we do is a sophisticated tradition but there are ways forward.

I believe that today's audiences are omnivorous in their tastes and it is our challenge to adapt to this change. Because of this I do see opportunities for presenting contemporary art music and also new approaches to production.

Radio New Zealand Concert does a great job in catering for this more omnivorous appetite for music. Its radio spots on world music, jazz, contemporary art music and a tremendous commitment to the composers of New Zealand in addition to the classical cannon shows a way forward to practitioners in my view.

We should consider music as relevant to cultural, social, and political contexts.

How can we present new work while exploring meaning of the work through other discourses?

I see huge possibilities in extra musical events that can bring resonance to the music. Collaboration with other art forms is one way in which we can widen the discourse. A possible way forward is to incorporate a pan-arts approach. I see no problem at all with collaborating with various art disciplines as they can broaden appeal and deepen the experience.

Orchestras should play upon ideas of cultural relativism. Are we representing a true New Zealand cultural voice – one that has resonance with the public - in our programming choices? How do we see outside influence on our music? How do we programme works that are foreign to our experience?

Successes achieved by Gareth Farr and John Psathas have brought in a major level of interest to classical music making in this county partially through the appropriation of different cultural influences seen through the eyes of their cultural perspective.

I see a parallel with these composers and the culture in which they find themselves. One commonality between the two of them is that they have come upon languages of expression that engage audiences.

I believe these successes not only bring in a new audience but also pave the way for an expanded contemporary programming approach. We build the trust and excitement of our audiences through great choices in repertoire and thus are able to continue presenting great works of value.

Matching the works to the culture is of huge importance and for me is the strongest possible recommendation for programming New Zealand works in NZ. I believe that our composers have something to say to us that is uniquely NZ and wonder if these wonderful works are to travel well must they first be completely accepted by our own culture?

The view that art music does not necessarily exist for the masses has been challenged by the introduction of recording and especially music downloads. There is a mass audience for what we do – just finding a way of tapping into it is the challenge.

Every professional orchestra in NZ has produced wonderful CDs in recent years. The NZSO and AP have recently begun pod-casting concerts with Radio NZ Concert and the CS performed the first ever video link up with Antarctica in 2005! I think there is huge potential in technology both for the dissemination of music as well as marketing angles that can capture the imagination of the public. The NZSO's recordings on the NAXOS label are available on streaming audio on the Internet and I certainly hope that in the future we can get many of our other recordings on such providers as iTunes.

Over the past decades art music has become as involved in the marketplace as pop and jazz – speaking from a New Zealand perspective, singers such as Kiri Te Kanawa and Jonathon Lemalu have become superstars of the art music world.

Classical and contemporary art music must also sell the cultural image surrounding the music – using diverse media to get the image across.

This similarity of marketing techniques between pops and art music is a step forward in my view. I have been impressed with the efforts that NZ's two finest contemporary music groups, 175 East and Stroma have produced in recent years. I believe that technology needs to be used even more. I believe that Internet, email mail outs and text messaging all have a place in what we do as much as more traditional forms of publicity in the print media.

While these approaches are great it is imperative that the product we present is first class. If we do not inspire an audience and build their trust through artistic choices it is likely that future marketing approaches will be less successful.

Music's meaning is found in the perception of listeners, more than in scores, performances or composers. This needs to be considered by programmers.

Musical languages develop in tandem with society and thus it makes sense as performers to present these works to our audiences in a coherent manner – one that does justice to the work.

If we are to build an audience for contemporary music, I would suggest that we do more than just play the occasional premiere (only to be promptly forgotten) or contemporary work and rather, put these works into a kind of context in which these works can be

appreciated. Presenting a work that lies outside the musical discourse experience of an audience without any context is bound to inhibit the works messages.

Audiences do not passively consume culture – we must actively engage an audience and bring them into the process. For me art music culture is not a one-way street but rather a dialogue with our audience. I believe that for the arts to bring in new audiences a deeper level of communication must be nurtured between the performers and audience. To me personally, bringing what we do into a wider social dialogue is of huge importance.

In my experience audiences want to be engaged and to feel as if they have a voice in the musical process. I am most certainly not speaking about catering to the lowest common denominator – although plenty of orchestras do just that – but rather involving an audience in much the way an art gallery does.