

**ASSOCIATION OF PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTERS
U.S. CLASSICAL MUSIC LEADERSHIP THINK TANK 2005**

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The classical music field is in a period of flux. Classical music professionals face a shifting and fragmented recording industry, an eroded touring circuit, and a glut of performers. Audiences show broadening tastes but diminishing musical education. A flood of new technologies for listening and learning is changing the media landscape and helping to sweep away familiar genre boundaries.

The field constantly plays catch-up with the larger culture, which now moves at a breakneck pace. Not surprisingly, the field often assumes a defensive, even reactionary position within the larger culture. Partisans assume the value of classical music is self-evident. But contemporary culture does not. And classical music does not happily justify its position of prestige.

Yet, despite some doomsaying, chamber music, vocal recitals, orchestras and classical music radio continue to draw audiences.

CHANGE AND OPPORTUNITY

Change offers the opportunity to retreat, or to advance. The Association of Performing Arts Presenters assembled a cross-section of classical music professionals to brainstorm on the theme of change and opportunity. Think Tank participants gathered in San Francisco May 19-21, 2005, to wonder aloud with each other:

- Who are the existing audiences for classical music?
- Who are untapped or potential audiences?
- What do they need to feel welcome?
- How can we deepen their appreciation?
- How can our beloved art form flourish in an increasingly crowded cultural arena?

As classical music professionals – presenters, managers, agents, performers, composers and others – how are we equipped also to create change and seize opportunity?

Implicit in these questions is the feeling that old methods of discovery, programming, and promotion are decreasingly effective. The intent of the Think Tank was not merely to air frustrations, or to raise more questions, but to capture some real answers. Which perhaps may provoke changes in programming, audience development, and community engagement.

CHANGE

A survey of the classical music ecology

Astounding changes have swept the field over the last half-century. The recording industry is undergoing a sea change, away from major labels and toward DIY (Do-It-Yourself) recordings, niche marketing, and online or regional distribution. The touring opportunities for young classical musicians are fewer. And of the once-hermetic classical genre increasingly incorporates jazz, world music, rock and electronica.

To demonstrate the effect of this blurring on classical music, facilitator Richard Kessler introduced an exercise called Fresh Ear. For each of ten musical excerpts, participants were invited to guess the piece and composer, or just the historical era. The results were surprising. A room full of classical music programmers, managers, and agents had difficulty identifying wildly diverse strains of traditional and contemporary classical music. But a hopeful sign: the Steve Reich remix included among the examples also demonstrated an unforeseen popular interest in contemporary classical work.

Global issues through the lens of local circumstances

During this session on overarching issues, each participant briefly introduced a pet hot topic.

A number of troubling changes were identified by participants.

- Most cited was the decline of music education among K-12 students and the larger public.
- A close second was the slow-moving, conservative, even “fundamentalist” outlook within parts of the classical music industry establishment.
- This was closely linked to a perceived decrepitude of the term “classical music.” Many felt it was inaccurate as well as freighted with class associations.
- An overall cultural devaluation of fine art and artists was also noted.
- The flipside of this devaluation is the emergence of the “star system,” wherein big name performers (and the competition to become one) outshadow other selling points of the field.
- The rise in demand for non-Western and contemporary music forced some presenters and artist managers outside their areas of comfort or expertise.
- Some noted a lack of presenter commitment to classical music, possibly caused by uncertainty about finding audiences.
- And of course, a funding drought cast all the above in sharp relief.

Yet opportunities were also detected amongst the challenges.

- The internet (and related technologies such as the iPod and podcasting) offers a versatile, global tool for distribution, marketing and outreach to new and existing audiences.
- A larger and enthusiastic audience could be cultivated if presenters adopt a more catholic concept of “audience,” to include musically curious young people (whose broad enthusiasms are apparent from iPod culture) and amateur musicians.
- This may necessitate a redefinition of the art form: an abandonment of complacency, entitlement, propaganda and unhelpful jargon; plus an embrace of contemporary artists, interdisciplinary artists, and those changing the field from the margins.

- Such “evangelistic” tactics could result in a fresh infusion of passion, energy, and even fun to the field.
- Because public school systems have phased out music curricula, some ensembles have found an unexpected welcome from school administrators. (Though such access is threatened by certain provisions of Federal ‘No Child Left Behind’ school reform.)
- Several advocated competitive approaches to ticket pricing, including pay-what-you-can performances.
- Other opportunities might include: teaching musicians about the needs and expectations of presenters; self-producing recordings; working with radio in new ways; and convening more “think tanks” outside the booking conference setting.

So, what happened to classical music?

These stated concerns neatly anticipated remarks by Joseph Horowitz – author, former New York Times music critic, and programmer for the 92nd St. Y, the Brooklyn Philharmonic, and Washington, D.C.’s Post-Classical Ensemble.

Horowitz’s observations were rooted in his own experience. Boredom with relentlessly redundant programming led to his resignation from the post of New York Times classical music critic. Programming at New York’s 92nd Street Y, Horowitz discovered that even a somewhat stale symposium topic (e.g. “Schubert the Man”) could generate enthusiasm by incorporating other disciplines (film, dance, visual art), an irreverent approach, and nods to popular culture. But it was his work with the Brooklyn Philharmonic that led to a programming breakthrough. The Philharmonic was hemorrhaging subscribers. Thematic events that juxtaposed classical with popular music and culture became his working template. This less “hermetic, marginalized and trivial” approach to classical programming led to a rejuvenating audience.

So what went wrong with classical music in the first place? Horowitz found a metaphor in the “cult” of Arturo Toscanini. Widely considered the greatest musician of the early 20th century, he was neither a composer nor a performer. And as a famous conductor, he concentrated wholly on masterpieces by “dead, white, European” composers. Horowitz noted, “Never before had a conductor of such prestige been so divorced from the music of his own time.”

In contrast, the period before World War One had been a fertile one for living and recently deceased composers. Antonin Dvorak, for example, was the most popular, accessible musician of his day. But his 1890s mission to cultivate an American canon – and ideally to produce an American Beethoven or Wagner – failed, overrun by orchestras and soloists competing to “perfect” the European repertoire.

By the 1950s, no less a master than Aaron Copland had given up on creating popular works for enthusiastic laymen and had turned instead to atonal pieces for a hermetic audience of his peers. Today, the sense of occasion that once accompanied classical music performances has become rare. Premieres are few and a hard sell. Reprises of warhorses by pyrotechnically-inclined “performance specialists” (performers who do not also conduct or compose) has long been the norm. And yet, today there is movement away from specialists towards composer-conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen and Daniel Barenboim, or composer-performers like Steve Reich, John Adams and Philip Glass.

Significantly, Horowitz noted, these latter all began their careers on the fringes of the classical music establishment. In sidestepping the twelve-tone and neo-classical orthodoxies of that establishment, they refreshed classical music culture. And so it is the fringe – which draws on non-Western and popular music – now become mainstream that answers Leonard Bernstein’s famous Unanswered Question: “Whither music?”

Thus, use of the term “classical” to describe modern music seems outmoded, according to Horowitz, who employs the term “post-classical.” Nor have classical music institutions evolved to meet the post-classical age. Audiences look to tastemakers for guidance. When audiences set tastes, programming tends to suffocate in an ever-tightening spiral of familiarity. Large unmalleable orchestras are caught in just this vortex. So the most obvious hands to shape tastes are the nimble ones of presenters, who can gauge their local constituents. “Whether or not you need classical music,” said Horowitz, “classical music needs you – to save it from itself.”

“Classical” refers to a moment now passed. Whatever comes next, Bach, Beethoven and the rest won’t be abandoned, says Horowitz. But renewal will come from outside the pantheon and its pull. Tastemakers will lead the charge. Traditionally, according to Horowitz, “high culture institutions have benefitted from leadership, or succumbed to the vicissitudes of the market.” Our direction, he said, is suggested by today’s successful composers, who incorporate the classical as one element of their eclectic approach.

Horowitz suggested that presenters rely less on pre-packaged programming. Instead, presenters (individually or in consortia) should initiate and produce thematically tailored programming. Partnerships with universities and artist residencies (as opposed to one-night stands) provide greater opportunities for involvement by new audiences.

Also, he said, music, rather than celebrity performers, should form the basis for programming. Thematic programs that bridged classical and folk styles were particularly successful for the Brooklyn Philharmonic. Examples include: Bartok’s “Romanian Folk Dances” played by both string orchestra and gypsy band; Native American paintings and Longfellow’s “Song of Hiawatha” to illustrate Dvorak’s “New World” Symphony; re-enactment of an ancient Russian virgin sacrifice ritual to contextualize Stravinsky’s “Rite of Spring.” Such thematic programs allowed audiences to intuitively connect classical with popular or folk forms.

It was suggested that the music also form the basis of the marketing. For example, Horowitz said, the Brooklyn Philharmonic chose a theme first, decided repertoire second, and only then (if at all) sought big names. Polled audiences said celebrity names were of minimal interest, and showed little effect on sales. (It should be noted that these practices—as well as extended artist residencies, partnerships with universities, and contextual materials for audiences—has been common among multidisciplinary presenters for over ten years. However, this is less dominant in the world of classical music presentation.)

OPPORTUNITY

Where might classical music go from here?

The ensuing discussion was spirited and wide-ranging. The conversation revolved loosely around change and its risks. Significantly, no one asked whether greater risk-taking was necessary.

Discussion began with the challenge to become tastemakers who create must-see events. But how to be more selective with so many performances per year? One answer to the perception of atomized concerts and seasons was themed programs – perhaps with new works next to established works - that allows audiences to make connections without didactic presentations.

Risk-averse programming was seen by some to reduce classical programming to the lowest common denominator. Likewise are factory-style conservatories and performer competitions that produce homogenous technical displays. But the point was made that when Toscanini was getting stale, bebop jazz was fresh. Music itself was evolving—with the composer as important as ever—but in a different arena. And composers like Miles Davis repeatedly risked alienating core audiences by trying new ideas.

However, it was said, few in the classical field are marketing those classically-trained performers who do innovate. There was much discussion about the difficulty and promise of programming music one is passionate about, as opposed to polling subscribers or choosing among pre-packaged tours. Such an approach requires new marketing language, a commitment to repeated risk, and budgeting for the occasional artistic failure.

It was noted that this resembles a curatorial model, which is more familiar to the visual arts. (The application to performing arts presenting isn't new: it was first articulated in the late 1980s by the National Task Force on Touring and Presenting administered by Arts Presenters and its publication of *An American Dialogue*.) But curators who find the intersection of their passions and the audience's passions—or the means to translate their passions for new audiences—more easily build an audience community. The curator's idea about a group of artists creates connections over the course of a performance season, which the audience may perceive. But that assumes the classical music curator knows music in depth and does not merely buy whatever tour package is available. Thus the music, not the interpreter, drives programming. In short, the curatorial model involves knowledge and risk.

Suggested strategies to lessen risk included: deepening one's knowledge of music and the gamut of musicians; using new media to discover exciting new, non-Western or non-classical work, thereby sidestepping heavily marketed mediocrities and stale repertoire; getting composers involved with the audience community before presenting their work; pairing new, non-Western, or non-classical works with established repertoire; using new media to spread excitement about fresh work; and penetrating and engaging local music schools and universities.

Of course, other questions were raised:

- Since young people are used to Netflix and internet service fees, could the concert subscription model be replaced by a monthly all-you-can-attend fee?

- Does the term “classical” accurately describe the music under discussion? Does it carry classist connotations that turn off potential new audiences? Likewise for terms such as “recital” and “service.”
- In the modern world, with its blurred genre boundaries, can classical music rely on suppositions of superiority over popular culture?
- Should the performer or the music drive the program?
- How can new technologies be effectively exploited?

Economics of touring and presenting

Since presenters rely so heavily on touring productions, a discussion of the economics of touring was initiated.

Michael Kondziolka (University Musical Society), Harold Clarkson (Konzertdirektion Schmid), and Bill Capone (Arts Management Group) shared from their experiences at the prompting of other participants. Several reasons for touring were offered by various participants:

- To make money
- To put great artistic performances on the stage
- To bring artistic value to locales visited
- To promote artists
- To increase artist prestige
- Validation outside home city
- Passion for new music

It was noted that different touring models – for instance, large orchestras versus smaller groups – likely affect the balance of profit and passion as reasons to tour. After all, Capone noted, the top three line item costs in his orchestra tour budgets are: air transportation; hotels; and per diems. “Before I jump through the economic hoops of the business plan,” said Kondziolka, “I have to believe that there is an essential point an artist is going to offer the audience that makes it worthwhile.”

Yet Kondziolka suggested that ensembles who are taking a progressive view of repertoire and audience-building are getting booked, because as a buyer he’s thinking about those things. “Having your values in the right place is becoming commercially attractive,” he noted.

According to Clarkson, a tour can be driven by interesting repertoire rather than sheer profit if it features the right material, a high-quality ensemble, and supportive presenters.

But where does the money come from? Historically, to book an orchestra requires fundraising by non-profits; extended negotiations among artists, managers and presenters; support by wealthy patrons; and marquee performers. Some suggested emerging tools, such as web and radio outreach to audiences and presenter consortia to spread costs around.

Yet what about younger artists such as cellists Maya Beiser and Matt Haimovitz and violinist Leila Josefowicz? Their performance fees are less costly than orchestras and also appealing to younger audiences. But often they’re less visible to presenters, or at least booked less frequently. Said one

participant, “They happen in spite of us, not because of us – like weeds in a sidewalk.” Additionally, their tech riders sometimes require equipment and stagehand expenses that can significantly increase the presenter’s financial risk on a show which makes any “savings” in the fee line item less attractive from a financial standpoint.

Participants broke into groups to consider three aspects of this discussion.

Group 1. Engagement

How do we engage with: audiences, each other, new media, schools and the community? What are the challenges and opportunities of engagement?

Participants cited a number of challenges. The most quantifiable was declining sales even for artists with strong track records. Some attributed this to a decline of media interest in classical music, or decreased government support. Others suggested that in the current economy, often the lowest-priced tickets sell best. But shifting demographics and the graying audience also was noted. Plus, new visual elements often associated with younger performers require additional funds for production and tech support . Unfortunately, some smaller institutions with tech savvy and supportive audiences were not represented in the room.

Some suggested that many smaller presenters engage new audiences more creatively than most large ones. They buck the myth that young people lack the capacity for engagement with classical music found in older generations. Such presenters reach beyond old methods of presentation, never relying on tired notions that classical music is “good for you” or even necessarily better than other kinds of music.

The effort to engage and understand the work presented can no longer rest solely with the audience. Instead, artists, managers, agents and presenters should create opportunities, remove cultural barriers and make people feel welcome. One experiment suggested was “come as you are” events, possibly on Saturday mornings or at other non-traditional hours. Another was collaborations with museums in which curators draw connections between the music performed and the collection; afterwards concertgoers can explore the museum. Others cited methods like viral marketing and street teams, perfected by nightclubs, which might be modified to fit target audiences. But most emphatic was the need to contextualize performances, by any means – whether notes, pre-performance talks, use of PDA (oersibak dugutak assistant) handheld technology, or others.

Group 2. Definition and Message

What are we saying, and to whom? Is our intent clear and understandable? Is our language, including the term “classical music,” in need of change?

Participants had difficulty with this topic. All agreed that each presenter is best suited to tailor the message to its unique audience. However, the term “classical music” was found to be deeply problematic.

No other art form, it was said, has been labeled “classical;” no one goes to classical dance recitals or classical museums. Common jargon (“New Music”), code words (“recital,” “soloist”) and labels (“classical”) can be turn-offs to the uninitiated. Since people today are highly sophisticated about how

they receive and understand information, it was suggested that marketing that uses elite or traditional terms will only reach a specific, limited audience. Such terms often sound meaningless or even patronizing to a broader audience.

Since people attend shows for a variety of reasons, a diversified message may be required to broaden the audience. For the uninitiated, protocols (How does one dress? When may one clap? Is my candy wrapper really so loud?) can feel uninviting. But addressing that unease can be an opportunity to win over new concertgoers.

Another opportunity would be to partner with outside communities (ethnic organizations, clubgoers, rock musicians, etc.) who can help translate the classical music concertgoing idiom for new audiences. But to evangelize requires that the unified message of the artist, manager and presenter be communicated not just through a brochure, but through every avenue – including receptionists, ushers, and anyone who encounters concertgoers.

Group 3. A Field of Learners

How do we organize and learn – about new artists, new repertoire, new means of dissemination – as a field? Are we in stasis? How can we learn from and share information with one another?

Participants complained of a lack of passion within the field. With an overabundance of artists and disciplines to track, it was suggested that passion - which naturally inspires a hunger to learn – should be a guide for cultivating musical curiosity and professional development that can counter feelings of inadequacy. Passion, rather than polling, also was said to be key to improved curatorial decisions. But an increased closeness to audience members – one participant cited follow-up calls to donors – also offered the opportunity to learn, and to be surprised by audience likes and dislikes. Those who market classical music performance were encouraged to seek outreach ideas beyond the performing arts – in popular art forms, other locations and countries, and other industries. For example, the British Council and the BBC often ask popular recording artists to name classical music artists who have influenced their work. Presenters were also encouraged to learn from producers of experimental works in non-traditional spaces such as The Kitchen (New York). Another way to learn would be through exploratory alliances and presenter consortia– after candid, assumption-busting conversation.

WISH LIST

Participants were given the opportunity to create a wish list for classical music.

Many fell under broad categories:

- *Greater government arts support.* Including: mentions of the arts in presidential State of the Union addresses; more generous NEA budget to support American music; greater state arts funding; a fund for civic leaders to visit countries that support the arts.
- *More widespread arts education.* Including: a shift from marketing toward extended artist residencies in schools; for every artist to work with a local teacher; to develop meaningful programs in cooperation with schools; public schools that deem the arts deemed as important as math, English and science; to lead a movement to put the arts back into the public psyche.

- *More opportunities for contemporary music.* Including: a network of presenters committed to a slot for contemporary music artists; to live in a country where musicians are respected and paid like doctors and lawyers; to retire “classical” as a catch-all term for this music; for a “meta-creativity center” to serve global artists in the creation of new work and to benefit the public with new ways to experience art; a “perfect funky music space embedded in the community” where friends can create and explore ideas; a fully funded “cocoon farm” for musicians and composers that produces new work without funder restrictions; a private American new music ensemble that enjoys even half the resources of a European one; for the U.S. to match Europe in support for artists; a program to enable amateur and professional musicians to meet and play music together; to create an environment that would eliminate the gap between composers and performers and allow an organic creative process; to eliminate the borders between musical genres.
- *Innovative media outlets.* Including: a worldwide foundation to heighten the medial profile of classical music; a one-hour NPR program during drive time that explores a different composer each day; an online or cell phone-based radio stream that partners with musicians to bring classical music anywhere.

Then there were specific wishes:

- *An APAP-led mentor network.* Including: funders, service organizations, artist managers, presenters and educators.
- *Zealous arts evangelism.* Including: an aggressive public relations campaign to confirm the public value of classical music; a national body for promotion and advocacy; some mechanism – perhaps podcasts – by which amateur music lovers can act as evangelists.
- *The return of passion and joy to the classical music world.* Including: for the U.S. to become a country where people turn to the arts to be stimulated by new ideas and turn to creativity for problem-solving;
- *Residencies for artists from Islamic cultures.*
- *Young fans.*

Case studies from Bay Area participants

These hypothetical and anecdotal suggestions were illuminated by the concrete experiences of two Bay Area presenters, Ruth Felt (San Francisco Performances) and Adam Frey (San Francisco Contemporary Music Players), and corporate, new media and philanthropic consultant Andrew Blau (Global Business Network).

Ruth Felt went to work for the San Francisco Opera in 1971 after a stint at UCLA. After leaving the Opera, she formed San Francisco Performances (SFP) to address the local drought of recitals by major artists. In time, SFP added an informal “after work” concert series at which guests could unwind with a drink, a performance, and conversation with the artists. . She created a curriculum for school visits along with San Francisco State University’s music department; then a Saturday morning concert series; Saturday night piano recitals; Friday night artist talks; and a series on ‘Blues, Jazz, Rock ‘N’ Roll.’

Adam Frey inherited the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, a program begun by Darius Milhaud in 1971. Its slogan, “Listen to Modern Art,” originated from early concerts at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. The organization enjoyed a progressive community, which included New Music champions like The Kronos Quartet and the San Francisco Symphony. The organizations

established the pattern of trading mailing lists and coordinating concert dates to avoid competition. Since New Music rarely features famous guest artists, Frey quickly learned the benefit of thematic programming and how to talk convincingly about music. The ensemble's longevity suggests he also learned the value of knowing 200 subscribers by name.

Andrew Blau, of Global Business Network, came to California in 2003. As a former New Yorker, he was impressed by the open, vibrant feeling of the arts scene. But a lingering unease about the broader media world led him to professionally study the reasons some organizations grow stagnant. According to Blau, an assessment of the factors one can and cannot control offers useful insights. In the changing culture of creation, less and less control lies in the hands of artists. A recognition of that frees them to pursue their passions, which then bubble up from below to affect the culture.

The modern media glut means the pie is getting bigger, said Blau, but individual slices are getting smaller. It's a "noisy, hyper-competitive environment." So any artwork released into the world is in a precarious position. The artist, manager, and presenter must work collectively to organize attention around such work. But there is a lot of competition for audience attention. The hope is that where work once found only centralized audiences in a venue or a store, new distribution models allow work to reach fragmented audiences. A few works may sell in huge numbers, but the aggregated "long tail" (see sidebar) of obscure works outperforms those best-sellers at the "head." (Amazon, Netflix and iTunes are good examples.) Therein lie opportunities to develop new markets.

In Blau's related concept of Three Horizons, the closest horizon reveals the immediate steps needed to stay in the game; the second horizon reveals what is coming; and the third horizon offers space to experiment without commitment, to test the waters. Sometimes, Blau said, pleasing one's current customers (first horizon) keeps organizations from the leap to a new sales plateau of new customers (second horizon). For example, the people who like an artist's early work may complain when the artist moves forward. Unfortunately, incremental growth rarely goes very far; the next level requires a jump. So the third horizon allows space for small-scale experimentation in preparation for a larger leap.

Felt, along with other participants, noted the difficulties of adjusting to the changing cultural landscape. Even simple changes, such as a brochure re-design, encountered resistance. Likewise, Frey's board struggled to formulate a five-year plan.

To make that jump, said Blau, requires that an organization *not* be driven by the people who love it now. Blau's example was Diamond Rio, who made early MP3 players for tech enthusiasts. They never thought beyond their niche market. So Apple, by considering the mass market, eclipsed them with the iPod.

Frey noted his organization's difficulty attracting new subscribers. With an 85% return rate, his organization experiences little turnover. But they also lack "fresh blood." A participant noted that New Music attracts listeners both from a pool of classical music aficionados as well as from partisans of avant pop music such as Radiohead and Bjork. What about Frey's audience? Frey said 70% of his audience goes to the symphony at least once per year. But, he noted, even more go to the Museum of Modern Art.

A media survey by Blau entitled *Deep Focus: A Report of the Future of Independent Media* (see sidebar) revealed that while people and organizations always thought about their individual futures, they almost never thought about the future of their field or how they fit in.

Those elusive “second horizon” listeners are not found in the traditional classical music venues. Moderator Richard Kessler recalled that Philip Glass’s early concerts at museums were more favorably received than his concerts presented by chamber music societies. Similarly, he noted, the Steve Reich Ensemble even today finds a substantial audience at underground rock festivals like Austin’s South By Southwest.

The third horizon – low-impact experimentation – was acknowledged to be even more troublesome. Both Frey and Felt cited institutional reluctance to stretch beyond conservative, low-risk plans for the future. Blau pointed to the Deep Focus study, which helps readers focus beyond their individual roles to imagine the future of the field as a whole.

Internal vs. External opportunities – Taking concrete action

In response to these broad discussions, breakout groups were formed to identify opportunities for the field – from within and without. The goal was to propose concrete steps. In short, what can be done – internally and externally? This proved to be a struggle for Think Tank participants.

External Opportunities

Participants proposed certain tactics for arts touring and presenting professionals. Arts Presenters’ 1996 Masterplan for Education by the Wolf Organization (see sidebar) revealed that contemporary presenters want expert instruction, delivered on demand, close to home for low cost. This creates a need for professional development across the field, though many arts professionals may resist learning outside their specialty. But as genres blur, increased understanding of other musical styles is crucial. For example, when classical music managers met with jazz managers to compare booking calendars for a collaborative tour, they discovered that where classical presenters book a year or two out, jazz presenters book only three months in advance.

Such anecdotes also suggested the need for reality-checks among conservatory musicians. Conservatories were contrasted with art schools which teach artists about the business realities of their field. Participants proposed “cold, cruel world specialists” to visit conservatory students.

This begged an examination of the “economy of excellence,” and how it might work in a world that’s redefining excellence. Similarly, a study was proposed on kids and classical music, which would listen to what kids say about it. Such data could arm a rejuvenated arts lobby to proactively offer legislatures a favorable blueprint for arts funding, rather than lamely accepting some bureaucrat-generated half measure.

This kind of focus on hard data, including changing racial demographics throughout the U.S., also suggested useful audience-building tools. For instance, the San Francisco Arts Commission supported an

initiative to have symphony musicians play on the street in Chinatown. Their mix of classical music pieces and Chinese folk music proved to be hugely popular. This inspired discussion of other ways to take performances to people, rather than waiting for them to discover the concert hall. For instance, musician-led listening parties in private homes, residencies in schools, and performances in hospitals and nursing homes. One particularly innovative program had brought a composer from the MIT Music Lab to teach kids to make their own music using a Fisher-Price toy (created by composer Morton Subotnick) called Symphony Painter.

Other proposals included subtitles for lieder performances; artist-led discussions of contemporary and genre-busting music; and opportunities for amateur musicians to play with professional ensembles.

Such proposals might present media opportunities as well. For instance, San Francisco Performances created an essay contest called Cultural Makeover. In partnership with SFGate.com, readers took a quiz (“True or false: pizzicato is a small pizza?”) and wrote an essay about why they needed a cultural makeover. Four winners and their guests were invited to five performances, which included pre-performance dinner and discussion with experts in each style of performance. Afterwards, winners met the artists. By all accounts, it was a successful experiment.

But Think Tank participants felt inadequately media-savvy, overall. For example, a missed opportunity was seen in a Vogue magazine print advertisement that featured actress Drew Barrymore with the Orion String Quartet. The actress and her shade of lipstick were identified, but the quartet was not.

Some felt a change in media perception of classical music might require a “Got Milk?”-style campaign where pop musicians, actors and celebrities join classical musicians. Or pop musicians with classical music backgrounds might be enlisted to talk to kids, live and on radio and TV.

One existing resource is a booklet called Classical Radio 101 (see sidebar), from American Public Media. It offers insight into the radio producer’s role, tips for getting on the air, and other radio opportunities. It was noted, however, that fragmenting audiences and niche markets may require entirely different methods for reaching those audiences.

Those methods may involve new and emerging media, which are trickier to master. Participants discussed the success of Do-It-Yourself grassroots political organizations such as MoveOn.org in mobilizing people and resources. Also the success of touring rock bands with street teams, who download posters and promote locally in return for tickets; and trackable emails that allow the sender to learn whether the receiver opened it, clicked on links, or just deleted the message. Once a listener is in the seat, a handheld PDA device (i.e., Personal Digital Assistant, such as a Palm Pilot), which offers audiences web-style program information, might serve as an alternative to printed notes.

Internal Opportunities

A number of participants observed that the loudest voices in the classical music field are the purists – or perhaps, fundamentalists – who balk at any change. The discussion noted that while smaller presenters can change directions quickly, universities and orchestras change slowly - like a speedboat versus a cruise ship. More nimble presenters play an important role: to push the field forward on behalf of

audiences. They act as a gateway to draw younger or more adventurous audiences, who may then feed into the more traditional performances. So they shouldn't speed ahead, out of sight of larger ships.

The more important, then, to communicate with other cultural workers – in schools, radio, and other organizations – about how to best contextualize the classical music presenting market as a whole—from conservative to progressive—rather than any individual organization. This, then, requires increased attendance across disciplines and at other presenters' shows, some said.

If this seems like a hardship, the group noted, consider those who don't work in cultural fields. Those unschooled in the arts often feel unsophisticated, even unwelcome, at classical concerts. It's important, therefore, to create space for the uninitiated.

Suggestions included: organized pre- or post-concert activities; new materials to enable greater understanding among the uninitiated; brochure copy that goes beyond the press kit to create context. Also, potential audience members are often unaware of free and affordable programs.

Participants perceived a need to explode (mis-)conceptions of what classical music is. This can be daunting. Southern California presenters commissioned a Los Angeles Times study that found recent concertgoers always remember the venue they attended, but not always the performer. In another study, commissioned by Society for the Performing Arts (Houston), ticket buyers compared the orchestra and the ballet to elite cars like the Lincoln Town Car and the Jaguar. Happily, they saw the local performing arts society as diverse and fun, like a Mini Cooper.

This was good news for participants who advocated a more evangelical approach to promoting classical music. They noted that universities sell the idea of a liberal arts degree not as a technical achievement but as the key to a richer life. Likewise, technical mastery need not be necessary to enjoy and discuss music. Education can begin with simpler issues.

Or it can begin from outside the classical establishment altogether. One participant noted that the NARAS Foundation, which hosts the Grammy In the Schools music education program, has held panels with hip-hop musicians who have attested to the value of learning a classical instrument in school. Many classical music evangelists might have assumed hip-hop could play no role in their efforts. But unorthodox approaches to attract audiences are overdue, some said.

At the same time, some said, there's room to re-appreciate established audiences. Increasing numbers of young touring artists can play the traditional hall, then cross town to work with different kinds of artists. So rather than change what's good, find parallel approaches for new audiences.

DID WE FIND ANSWERS?

While suggested remedies took many shapes, the opportunities perceived by Think Tank participants fell under these headings:

Explore

- Learn more. Presenters, artist managers, agents, and other arts professionals should deepen their curatorial knowledge of classical music and its relationship to other art forms, especially as genre boundaries become increasingly blurred.
- Take risks. Let genuine passion for the music, rather than packaged tours, guide programming.
- Question orthodoxy. Reassess stale language, venues and habits. In a time of rapid change, successful professionals can't rest on their laurels.
- Move forward. Don't just stay in the game, or tread water. Change will overtake you. Anticipate, watch others, and do controlled experiments to find suitable new directions.

Invite

- Go to audiences. Don't wait for them to come to you. Understand their backgrounds and meet them halfway.
- Make strangers feel welcome. It's unrealistic to assume prior knowledge of classical music culture. The music itself is the only essential element.
- Think ahead. Serve established audiences, but simultaneously create parallel approaches to new audiences.
- Educate. Thematic programs allow listeners to make connections without resorting to didactic methods. Don't be celebrity dependent.

Communicate

- Work together. A presenter consortium offers opportunity for frank discussion, better ideas and shared costs.
- Talk together. Organize more Think Tanks - outside the pressures of booking conferences. Visit each other's shows. Share stories and data.
- Grasp new media. There are more ways than ever before to make music heard. But to compete in the noisy marketplace requires facility with all the new tools for communication.

CONCLUSION

As this music that springs from the classical tradition moves into the 21st century, the industry that claims it faces a host of Darwinian pressures. Like any organism—or business—the classical music

industry will adapt or face the consequences. Happily, however, there is no evident lack of passion among the classical music professionals who gathered for the Think Tank.

While proposed strategies varied, one theme was echoed by all the participants: a need for closer cooperation among the field's partisans. The studies cited during the Think Tank, as well as common sense, suggest that a unified field is most likely to thrive. To that end, the most crucial outreach effort undertaken by the classical music industry is likely to be among the artists, managers, presenters, and others who comprise it. The music itself is naturally infectious.

As we look forward to the next season of performances, conferences and Think Tanks, each of us can ask ourselves three questions that are crucial to the future of the field: How can I explore more deeply the rich veins of this art form? How can I invite the curious listener to join in? And how can I clearly, openly and regularly communicate with the professionals who share my passion?

As the field changes, we resolve to change with it, and so we seize the immense opportunity that comes our way.

Bob Massey splits his time between music-making and writing for Spin, The Washington Post, and others. His music steals shamelessly from the visceral impact of post-punk, the emotional palette of classical, and the sonic range of experimental music. Massey tours and records with the Gena Rowlands Band (Lujó/Autoclave). He is the composer and librettist of *The Nitrate Hymnal: A Dying Dream in Four Acts*, a collaboration with filmmaker David Wilson (www.nitratehymnal.net). The multimedia opera received its World Premiere in January 2003 in Alexandria, Virginia. Commissioned by Washington Performing Arts Society, produced by Anti-Social Music, and supported by Creative Capital, music from the work will be released on CD in March, 2006, by Lujó Records. His video operetta with visual artist Althea Thauberger, *A Memory Lasts Forever*, opened February 2005 at the Berkeley Museum of Art.

SIDEBAR WITH LINKS TO ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CLASSICAL RADIO 101

<http://classicalmusicinitiative.publicradio.org/>

http://classicalmusicinitiative.publicradio.org/media/cmi_0622_brochure.pdf

WIRED: *The Long Tail*, by Chris Anderson

Forget squeezing millions from a few megahits at the top of the charts. The future of entertainment is in the millions of niche markets at the shallow end of the bitstream.

October 2004, Wired Magazine

<http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html>

THE INDEPENDENT: *Is Classical Music Really Headed Toward Extinction? There's More Creativity in the Field Than You May Think*, by Robert Maycock

April 26, 2005, The Independent (London) <http://www.andante.com/Article/article.cfm?id=25444>

THE GUARDIAN: *How pop and television damage our culture*, by Peter Maxwell Davies

Davies explains why 'serious music' is struggling for survival.

April 25, 2005, The Guardian (UK)

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,1469384,00.html>

NAMAC (National Alliance for Media, Arts and Culture) REPORT: *Deep Focus*, by Andrew Blau

Communications is rapidly changing. How can independent media players—from filmmakers and bloggers to arts organization executives and funders—turn this into an opportunity to gain influence and reach a new audience, rather than get swept aside by the nature, dynamics and pace of change?

Available for \$29.95

<http://www.namac.org/>

ASSOCIATION OF PERFORMING ARTS PRESENTERS: www.artspresenters.org/

AMERICAN PUBLIC MEDIA: *Classical Music Initiative*

Radio is the number one entry and major access point for millions of Americans to experience classical music. More people hear classical music on the radio than in any other setting. It is the "way in" to classical music and a great daily companion. More than a format, radio is an important classical music community resource.

<http://classicalmusicinitiative.publicradio.org/>

FUTURE OF MUSIC COALITION: *Mapping The Effect Of Consolidation On Classical Radio*

Future of Music Coalition's 2002 Radio Study and 2003 Analysis of Public Comments to the FCC on the Ownership Proceedings documented how consolidation has hurt diversity on the airwaves and that public support of further consolidation is virtually nonexistent. According to the FCC these studies took radio off the table in discussions on further consolidation. In 2005, in partnership with Meet the Composer, FMC is undertaking a study to look specifically at the effects of media consolidation on classical and jazz radio.

<http://www.futureofmusic.org/research/>

CLASSICAL RADIO PROGRAMMING: STRATEGIES FOR DIVERSIFICATION *The Future of Classical Radio*

Robert Patterson has an interesting article on the recent trend of "lightening up" classical radio programming with suggestions on how to diversify radio.

<http://www.robpaterson.com/writings/article-futureradio.html>

Arts Journal blogs:

Greg Sandow on the future of classical music

<http://www.artsjournal.com/sandow/>

Drew McManus on the evolution of orchestra management

<http://www.artsjournal.com/adaptistration/>

PostClassic

Kyle Gann on Music After the Fact...

<http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/>

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