Contemporary Societal Viewpoints Towards Classical Music And Orchestras

I. Context & Problem/Opportunity

Worldwide, a clear trend can be seen as classical music orchestras are experiencing declines in attendance, and the ageing population attending is not being replaced (Saquilayan, 2015). In Australia, “those aged 55-64 years and 65-74 years were those most likely to attend classical music concerts”, and this is more than double the rate of those aged 18-24 years and 25-34 years (ABS, 2011). The ageing demographic of classical music audiences creates a predicament for classical music performing organisations, because as Baby Boomers and members of Generation X grow older, the organisations must shift their focus to Millennials. The demographical changes to Millennials have been dramatic, with the introduction of a new “digital age” of entertainment (Frantz, 2015). The introduction of the “digital age” was dramatic for millennials, and this technological change that occurred has caused a shift in focus to entertainment that is instantaneous and easily available (Frantz, 2015). Consequently, societal viewpoints towards classical music and orchestras have changed over time, especially among millennials. Therefore, in order to increase single ticket attendance, the Queensland Symphony Orchestra needs to target the age demographic of 18-30 year-olds, or more commonly known as “Millennials”.

II. Literature review

The future of classical music is becoming more and more uncertain, with scholars and researchers arguing on whether or not classical music will last. A particular article by Slate in 2014 triggered a lively conversation surrounding this topic, with their article proclaiming, “Classical Music is Dead” (Vanhoenacker, 2014). Slate’s article found that as the audience for classical music ages rapidly, the Millennial generation is not participating to compensate, and at the institutional level, participation has decreased, with the biggest decline in the Millennial generation (Legeros, 2016). A highly publicised and reliable author also stated, “the demand for live performances of classical music will drop 36% in the next 30 years” (Hamann, 2005. pg. 10, Clouse trans). While statistics may seem grim, there is also evidence showing that as the music industry entered the “digital age”, classical music is consumed more than originally thought (Frantz, 2015; Damron, 2019). The League of American Orchestras compiled research to find that Millennials are more likely to stream classical music than to attend a live concert (Legeros, 2016). A contrasting figure is that while classical music concert attendance by Millennials is decreasing rapidly, there is still roughly three in ten who consume classical music online (Brown, 2013). Academics are quick to point out that as the notion of participation is adapting, benchmarking indicators such as ticket sales are becoming less accurate with the introduction of digital media in the growing technological landscape (Li,-Liu,-Dinesh,-Duan,-&-Sharma,-2018). The emergence of recent research indicates signs of growing engagement among Millennial listeners, and Classical Orchestra’s need to be able to tap this market for the future of live classical music is uncertain.

The term “musical omnivores” can be used to describe Millennials, as they are the first

generation to be fed music by the increasing use of platforms such as YouTube and Spotify (Legeros, 2016). Because of this, it can be argued that there is a potential lack of motivation to attend live music as they can simply consume it wherever and whenever, unlike in the past (Flanagan 2012). However, a recent report by Eventbrite (2017) suggests the opposite, as approximately 89% of millennials are attending a live event annually.

There is general agreement that there are barriers to the attendance of live classical music events by millennials (Toma-&-Meads,-2007; Lin,-2008; Boyle,-2007). However, addressing this problem proves ambitious for Orchestras around the world (Stadler, 2008) as the perception of classical music concert etiquette by Millennials may influence their decision to buy a ticket (Graham, 2015). The classical music concert etiquette consists of largely unwritten rules such as not making unnecessary noise including feet-tapping and conversation with others, with clapping only at the end of a piece or performance (Christiansen, 1984). Some even argue that this unwritten etiquette holds people back from attending classical music concerts (Dearn & Pitts, 2017). The concert puts pressure on the audience to observe the performance, which is usually devoid of visual stimulation, and avoid concert hall behaviours that are considered inappropriate, such as any form of socialisation (Botstein, 1999). This is a stark contrast to how current millennials experience live music, where they mention benefits of live music including experiencing joy and entertainment, social interaction, satisfying curiosity (Damron, 2019). Kruger and Saayman (2015) found that Millennials consider entertainment and socialisation to be the highest factor in concert attendance. This is further corroborated by research stating that more than 80% of millennials attend music festivals for social interaction with community members who share the same mindset (Eventbrite 2017). This is extremely relevant to increase attendance because it shows the importance of changing how millennials perceive classical music events, and marketing towards their current mindset of social interaction.

A viable solution to increase attendance of symphony orchestras may be to change or mix the genre of music being played by the orchestra and branching out to reach not just the classical music fans, but also fans of other genres. A very successful example of this was the 2015 collaboration between the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and the Australian electronic music producer duo Flight Facilities (ABC, 2015). This involved Flight Facilities' songs being played live with the orchestra, and later inspired a collaboration with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 2016 (Adams, 2016). Normally, a symphony orchestra would play in a small concert venue such as QPAC with a capacity of 1600 seats (QPAC, 2019). However, with the combination of musical genres, the event was met with extreme popularity, as all 12,000 tickets at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl were sold in three hours (Sydney Morning Herald, 2015). As experienced by myself, the atmosphere was electric, resembling nothing close to an orchestral event, but more a rock/pop concert, and this can be corroborated by video footage of the event (Youtube, 2016).

III. Theory/Model/Framework

The theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen (1991) outlines three determinants which can predict a person's intention to participate in a certain activity: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control. The attitude refers to the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour. Subjective norms represent the social pressures of performing a behaviour and is linked to the belief of whether peers will approve or disapprove of the behaviour. The perceived behavioural control refers to the individual's perception of the level of difficulty when performing the behaviour. If individuals perceive themselves to not have

the resources, opportunities or skills required, they are unlikely to form strong intentions to follow through with the behaviour (Ursin, 2016).

In the context of attending a live symphony orchestra, Organisations should be aiming to influence the attitude aspect by increasing people's favourable evaluation of attending their live concerts and reducing their unfavourable evaluations. For example, if a person has a favourable evaluation of listening to classical music, and an unfavourable evaluation of the typical classical music concert being devoid of social interaction, they may not want to attend. Organisations should be willing to change this aspect in order to ensure the favourable outweighs the unfavourable aspects, therefore influencing more people to attend.

For subjective norms, individuals want their actions or behaviours to be approved and validated by their peers, and it is important to note that Millennials usually do this through social media. Over 90% of Millennials own a smartphone, with 85% using social media, and this usage shows the extent to which Millennials desire to feel a sense of belonging (Jiang, 2018; Pearson, Carmon, Tobola, & Fowler, 2009). With Orchestral events not allowing any use of technological devices during the performance, the individuals may not feel inclined to go. Furthermore, if they are participating in a behaviour with their peers who are also participating, they are more inclined to believe that their behaviour will be validated.

When an individual is intending to attend a live orchestral event, their perceived behavioural control may stop them from following through with this behaviour. This may be due to a number of factors, for example, time, money, or friends to attend with (Jiang, 2018). Even if an individual is willing to attend a live orchestral concert, they may be time-poor, willing to spend their money elsewhere, or not have the right people to go to the concert with. Orchestral organisations have been attempting to increase perceived behavioural control through aspects such as price and changes in program structure, however more proposals may be needed to increase the likelihood for Millennial attendance.

IV. Recommendations

IV. 1. Recommendation 1: Casual Dress Code and Different Timing Schedule

For the Queensland Symphony Orchestra to increase single ticket sales, they can change specific aspects of the product to entice interested consumers who previously did not want to attend or were unable to attend. From a marketing perspective, the attendees are paying for a service provided by the orchestra, and thus we can provide recommendations based on two of the key characteristics of services: inseparability and perishability (Wyckhan, Fitzroy & Mandry, 1975).

An important marketing aspect of live orchestral music is inseparability, meaning that when attendees are consuming the live music, the orchestra is not separate, but in the same space as them. Consumers are influenced greatly by the people around them, and when attending the orchestra, they may feel intimidated by the people around them dressed in fancy clothes (Christiansen, 1984). For people who do not like to dress up, this may mean they will not attend the concert for fear of ridicule. A way to challenge this issue is to introduce a casual dress code where both the performers and the attendees all dress in casual clothing. This is extremely relevant to the attitude aspect of the theory of planned behaviour, because people may reduce

their unfavourable evaluation of orchestral music events, and increase their favourable evaluation instead, leading to higher likelihood of attendance. This could be a reoccurring event, ensuring the people who do like to dress up are not alienated, and still entices people who enjoy casual clothing to casually dressed events.

Perishability is also related to the time-poor aspect of classical music concerts. There are many people who may have inflexible work hours and are unable to attend events due to time constraints. A 2015 report by the NEA found that one in three people reported a lack of time being the largest barrier to attending arts programs. A way to counteract this is to start to vary the time of the musical events for the Orchestra. Currently, almost all Queensland Symphony Orchestra events start in the early afternoon or at 7:30PM (QSO, 2019). This fixed programming suggests a very rigid structure, and if varied, it can entice the demographic to attend for the first time. This could mean varying starting times later in the night, such as 8-11PM. A very successful example of this is the TSO's Late Night series, which starts at 10PM (Toronto Symphony Orchestra, 2015).

IV. 2. Recommendation 2: Collaborations with Established Australian Artists

Australian millennials resonate with popular music in live concerts, and as touched on in the literature review, they are very interested in live music. While classical music may not interest them, a way to get millennials to attend is to collaborate with popular and established Australian artists (ABC News, 2015). As seen in the success of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Australian producers Flight Facilities, the Queensland Symphony Orchestra should attempt the same thing on a much bigger scale. For this to occur, they should try to collaborate with artists that are appealing to Millennials, for example, Tame Impala, MGMT or Broods. These three groups would be ideal because they are all popular within the age demographic, and all have music set to be released or has released music recently.

These three groups also frequently play at festivals, giving the collaboration the opportunity to play to huge crowds of people. Millennials attend music festivals frequently, with 53% of the whole demographic having attended a music festival in the last 12 months (Hoffower, 2019). This huge market represents much of the demographic that is being targeted, and by performing at festivals, they can increase exposure and publicity. Subjective norms relate to this recommendation because at a festival, attendees are surrounded with like-minded peers who have very similar music interests, meaning their behaviour is seen as validated. As a flow on effect, the millennials who enjoyed the classical side of the festival gig, they might be enticed to start attending normal classical music events as well (Xu, 2015). A similar example of this was when electronic music producer Hayden James recently played at the 2019 popular Australian music festival, Splendour in the Grass (See Appendix 1). During one of his popular songs, he was joined by the Brisbane City Gospel Choir who performed one of his songs, therefore exposing this genre to the audience who most likely do not listen to gospel music (Youtube, 2019).

IV. 3. Recommendation 3: Change of Venue: House Concert

A problem that is faced by orchestras worldwide is the inflexibility of locations at which to play their concerts. Since venues for orchestras are so limited, it does not give much variety for consumers, especially if traditional concert halls are disliked by the age bracket in question. As

an alternative, house concerts should be implemented, where musicians will perform inside the homes of willing participants. This will eliminate the need for any sound equipment, lighting, venue overheads and other standard concert expenses (Chang, 2017). It creates a special relationship between the musicians and the audience, as these events will usually take place in a living room, where people sit on the floor and listen to the intimate gig. Since a living room is a very small space, the band could be broken up into different groups needed for a specific set list that can be played. The groups can be on average 4-6 musicians to each gig, and people (usually strangers) will pay an amount of money much less than normal concerts, to attend the house concert.

These particular events could be livestreamed, furthering the promotion of these types of concerts, and as seen in extant literature, millennials are more likely to stream classic music than to attend a live concert (Legeros, 2016). Livestreaming gives consumers who already interested in classical music, an insight into a completely new way to experience classical music, thus giving the concerts the opportunity to grow in the future. This strategy stems from an organisation in the US called “Groupmuse” (See Appendix 2) (Codik, 2015). It was stated that of the overall audience for Groupmuse, approximately 70% were born in the 80’s and 90’s, demonstrating a key market segment that can be targeted by the Queensland Symphony Orchestra (McMillan, 2018).