

Audiences

How is it possible to sustain audiences' renewal ?

Getting down to this task requires deconstructing certain myths which still today are deep-rooted. Andrew Bennett, consultant at the Casa da Música, identifies three of these myths : the audience would be limited to concert-goers ; this audience wouldn't be aging but aged structurally ; true marketing couldn't apply to orchestras because of the importance of art.

Such statement had led to a rather consensual communication, essentially aiming an audience over fifty, whose precise composition and motivations are unknown and unanalyzed.

In order to understand an audience policy, a distinction should be made between the audience which already exists and what is commonly named the “non-audience” or non-attendies.

The need to capture the non-attendies is shared by all orchestras and is already subject to actions : numerous examples have been given during the workshops on the programming theme. But today, isn't the main question more about how to keep these new audiences, as suggests Sarah Gee ? Thus, she explains that at the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), the development of the existing audience's loyalty has become the main objective. Because a rise of 5% of the loyalty rate from one season to the other makes it possible to improve the profitability by 85 %. The means used range from the welcome-pack offered to new audience members up to a subtle management of client relationship using adapted databases.

Regarding the second myth, the traditional outline of a natural audience reproduction is becoming contradicted – if it has ever really worked that way. According to this idea, people go to concerts at a specific moment of the cycle of life : quite elderly concert-goers would be more a structural fact than a one due to a specific situation. But nothing indicates that nowadays, forty or fifty-year-old people are an audience captured beforehand.

Andrew Bennett lists the facts questioning the mechanism : news generations are increasingly at odds with their parents' generation ; concerts don't meet their needs, namely because of a lack of interaction, an impressive conformism and the absence of a visual dimension in a society dominated by images ; the increase of the leisure-offer exposes orchestras to a rising competition against other types of art.

Studies done in Finland on the “non-audience” confirm part of this statement. During one of his researches, Timo Cantell brought people to a concert and noted their impressions before and after the performance. What emerged is that adults do not attend concerts because of a lack of time and fear of not having the necessary knowledge, whereas young people criticize the lack of opportunities to socialize, and lack of novelties as well as creativity.

Beyond the policy of prices, the matter is to convince the audience to spare some time to the orchestra and for this it is important to understand the logic that manages time-consumption.

Timo Cantell concludes on the necessity of making more efficient a communication hardly remarked in a context where cultural offer bursts. Thus, some orchestras try to renew their approach : the Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège organizes the season's presentation on television ; for the "Tonhalle Late" in Zurich, information is diffused in discotheques ; in some neighbourhoods the CBSO uses slogans deliberately provocative...

Beyond the definition of a communication policy, two management cultures arise during the debates, coming close to the last myth mentioned by Andrew Bennett. The British representatives totally assume their entrance in an all-marketing era : the concert is a product, the orchestra a brand, the audience a market divided into different categories of consumers which have similar profiles ; the marketing study is of use to increase the product's notoriety, to develop the intention of purchase, and to establish a maximum client loyalty ; it precedes and orients the programming choice. Another model highlights the supply policy which, if coming from an opposite logic, aims at the same goal of personalizing the relationship to the audiences.

In both assumptions, the development of new technologies is a wonderful opportunity for orchestras to renew their processes. Management software, online ticket selling or marketing databases make it possible to increase their efficiency tenfold. But the stakes go far beyond that.

Richard Crossland, Director of ABL Cultural Consulting, names three of them : the development of interactivity, the question of record labels and online concert broadcasts.

The interactive possibilities offered by the Internet are illustrated by the project "Sound Exchange" of the Philharmonia Orchestra, presented in detail by Myles Jackson : apart from an orchestra handbook for neophytes, a library of thousands of music samples is available online for free.

Concerning record labels, the example is the one of LSO Live. Chaz Jenkins, the Director, reminds that the number of listeners for recorded music is clearly higher than the number of concert-goers. In a context where the record industry is declining it is essential that orchestras succeed in managing their own record policy, fixation aiming at a double goal of communicating and teaching. Moreover, the LSO project couldn't have come into being if beforehand the musicians hadn't accepted to base their payment on the long-term exploitation rather than on the recording sessions.

The last example of the possibilities offered by new technologies is online communication. Thus, Myles Jackson mentions the live broadcast of a concert conducted by Esa-Pekka

Salonen in April 2005 : the success is principally due to work before the concert and the adding of interactivity to the broadcast.

The speakers agree on one same statement : new technologies are an opportunity to better control their communication, to develop new audiences and to experience new relationships with the audience. Moreover, in a technological transition period where the future platforms remain widely uncertain, it is essential to explore all possibilities, to show imagination in order to create an own original form for the new media.

Both workshops are filled with ideas and proposals to modernize management and the image of orchestras and to capture tomorrow's audiences. But all speakers insist on one point : renewing the audiences presupposes a precise knowledge of how they are composed, their habits and their motivations. Collection and analysis methods are widely recognized : good practical experiences should be exchanged and results shared.