

Programming

Programming can no longer be strictly understood as the choice of works and artists for a concert. It has to be considered as an orchestra's or a concert hall's artistic project, which contributes to defining its identity, its originality, its personality. Now in a context where orchestras are increasingly torn between contradictory strengths, how is it possible to ensure coherence and inspiration to a programming choice ? What could be an “art of programming” today ?

Patrick Garvey, President of the European Association of Artist Managers, considers that the first condition is to entrust the task of programming to one single person : it is a full job, neither musician nor administrator, nor marketing or fundraising manager. The artistic project of an orchestra will be all the more striking if it corresponds to one person's vision, based on competence, experience as well as passion. Wanting to satisfy the different departments or investors of an orchestra leads to blurring the significance of a programmes' choice, and little by little, losing the audience's support.

At the level of a concert, the art of the programmer consists in finding a balance between interpreting the repertoire's key-works, exploring forgotten territories of symphonic heritage and promoting today's music.

Playing repeatedly the same programmes can be an answer to short-term constraints but cannot be held on the long-term : “If you eat tin cans, you'll end up by losing your teeth ! “ says René Koering.

How is it possible to reconcile expectations of a sometimes conservative audience with the will to promote a repertoire beyond the musical *clichés* ?

Two answers are discussed. First of all, some people defend “mixed” programmes, where contemporary or underrated works are played alongside less controversial scores. The art of the programmer, says Laurent Bayle, Director of the Cité de la Musique, is to make this combination graceful and significant, namely by revealing filiations. As for the Concertgebouw Orchestra, represented by Jan Willem Loot, it has chosen to define two distinct series : one centred on a “standard” repertoire, the other leaving a large place to today's music. However, such an option is only possible because there is a solid audience for contemporary programming.

The place left for creation is a central question. Supporting creation is constituent of an orchestra's nature : today's creations are tomorrow's heritage, reminds Sally Groves, from the Schott Publishing Group. The different orchestras' accounts highlight the extent and diversity of the means used in this field.

The ways to back creation are indeed well in place today : commissions, composers' residencies, collaboration with specialized ensembles, support to diffusion, and educational

programmes centred on creation... In this respect the BBC's policy is exemplary : from 1999 to 2005 Radio 3 commissioned works from more than three hundred composers. However, efforts could be made in three different fields, namely by helping future orchestra musicians become more sensitive to contemporary music, by reviving creations often forgotten once performed, and by providing for young composers access to orchestras : as reminds Olivier Bernard, from the Sacem, Olivier Messiaen, Pierre Boulez, Henri Dutilleux or Pascal Dusapin were under twenty-five when their first orchestral works were created !

As the debates continue, it becomes apparent that one of the main problems confronting the programmer is indeed the question of audience : must one free oneself from the audience's expectations or on the contrary consider these as a basis to present a programme in full line with the community ? Or, using the expression of Edward Smith, from the Göteborg Symfoniker, should one guide the audience or follow it ?

Composer Jean-Louis Agobet warns of a too narrow interpretation of the audience's expectations : the audience does not express, or does not even know what are its expectations. The governing idea is experimentation : experiences must be attempted in order to realize what is successful and what is not. The audience's taste is not fixed : it is created along with concerts. Speakers' and delegates' speeches testify to the diversity of the experiences carried on by orchestras throughout Europe in order to widen audiences : much more than plain publicity operations, these original experiences have proved their capacity for making it possible to meet new audiences.

Florian Wiegand, from the Dortmund Konzerthaus, gives the example of a concert combining symphonic music with circus, making it possible to attract an audience which normally doesn't go much to concerts. Etienne Reymond mentions the "Tonhalle Late" experience in Zurich : the concert begins at ten in the evening, then the hall's foyers turn into discotheques open until three in the morning ; these concerts, which take place three or four times each season, have proved to be remarkably successful. As for the Orchestre national de Lyon, it decided to set up a partnership with the city's soccer team : buying a ticket for one of the orchestra's concerts gave entrance to a game of the Olympique lyonnais ; tickets were sold out... Dimitri Semsis, from the Athens National Orchestra, relates another experience : a film is shown before or after the concert. David Butcher, from the Britten Sinfonia, proposes concerts combining classical music with jazz or rock. Jean-Pierre Rousseau mentions "les Dessous des quartes" in Liege. Rosemary Gent describes in detail the Proms Festival in Great-Britain...

Of course, taking a risk is easier when the orchestra has its own concert hall or benefits from a comfortable financial base : many speakers agree on this. But beyond this fact, originality, personalization of programming, and quality of the offer make it possible to develop a relationship based on confidence, familiarity and proximity between the orchestra and an audience which, in turn, enables risk to be taken. In this respect is the example of the "Concerts du sauvage" in Montpellier, described by René Koering, representative : the

audience goes to the concert without knowing the programme beforehand and accepts to leave the entire choice up to the programmer.

Thus, rather than opposing a “supply” approach -guiding the audiences- with a “demand” one -following the audiences-, a dialectic position should be adopted : taking into account the audience’s expectations incites renewing the processes of an artistic project whose quality is linked to coherence, ambition and continuity with the orchestra’s history. Programming is thus in the centre of an exchange between an orchestra and its audiences, where the terms are constantly renewed.

Echoing to Mario Vieira de Carvalho’s magnificent plea *Educating the ear*, isn’t the art of programming finally another expression of the art of listening which orchestras have for mission to pass on to future generations ?