

# Challenging the Listener: How to Change Trends in Classical Music Programming<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This article aims to provide the first large-scale description of current trends in classical music programming. The purpose is to analyze an issue commonly associated with the critical state of concert venues today, which is to say, the predominantly conservative aesthetic of performed repertoires. This paper attempts to go further than previous studies by looking at a larger group of repertoires and institutions, examining data from some 4,700 concerts performed between 2010 and 2015, randomly gathered by the database [www.bachtrack.com](http://www.bachtrack.com). No other source in this field enjoys its sheer size and wide variety.

The first section demonstrates that an extremely small handful of composers dominate the musical landscape, and that patterns of association between programmed composers within individual concerts are highly predictable. Against this problematic backdrop, the second section proposes possible remedies to balance this disproportionate concentration of specific styles, composers, and associations by focusing as a case study on the innovative music program at the Juan March Foundation in Madrid. The overall results are both original and valuable, as they reveal otherwise undetected trends in music programming, while providing practical strategies to re-engage audiences and encourage different cultural policies at concert halls.

Keywords: concert, programming, repertoire, audience, concert format, listening experience.

## 1. Introduction: The Role of Programmers

It is nowadays commonplace knowledge that the live classical music concert is in crisis and that some of its core elements are in desperate need of revision (Tröndler 2009; Sloboda 2013). The most visible evidence of this critical state is the steadily dwindling numbers of people attending concerts in some countries, sometimes linked with the increasing age of the average audience and socio-demographic changes in the audience profile (Kolb 2001). This situation does not affect all countries to the same extent. To give some varied examples,

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1. The author is extremely grateful to Luis Martínez-Urbe from the library at the Juan March Foundation for his invaluable help in preparing the data for analysis, and to Bachtrack for allowing me to use their database. The research for this article was supported by the Spanish Ministry of Economy under the R+D Project HAR2014-53143-P, and by the Madrid Community and the European Social Fund under the R+D Project MadMusic-CM, S2015/HUM-3483.

in the United States, for instance, the percentage of the population that attended at least one concert per year in 1982 was 13%. By 2008, it had dropped to 9.3%, according to the National Endowment for the Arts from 2009 (as cited in Pompe, Tamburri & Munn 2013, 2016). In Spain, the number of attenders dropped 22.4% between 2006 and 2015 (Sociedad General de Autores y Editores 2016), and in Australia, it dropped 22.1% between 2012 and 2015 (Live Performance Australia 2015). Despite the fact that considerably more people are listening to recordings of classical music through new digital media, statistics on concert attendance show that the current conventional format of live classical music is losing its appeal and that it is time for an overhaul. The exact causes underlying this unfortunate situation affecting classical music in general are diverse and need to be ascertained; a variety of social, cultural, aesthetic, and economic reasons should be considered (Botstein 2004).

At the same time, concert programming has become increasingly conservative, tending to obsess over just a limited handful of composers, whose pieces are played *ad nauseam*. The next section of this article provides a critique of the empirical evidence gathered from more than 4,700 concerts held between 2010 and 2015 in different cities around the world, with a particular focus on London. The analysis, based on relevant statistical data from this six-year sample, sheds light on how cultural policy in the field of live classical music is implemented and, in particular, elucidates key trends in programming choices. It also demonstrates the degree to which repertoires, composers, and styles are canonized within concert venues. The evidence points to the hypothesis that a highly conservative conception of program can be a significant agent in the apparent crisis of the classical concert and audience decline. Pompe et al. (2013, 227) suggested that "to ensure future audiences, symphony orchestras will need greater innovation to interest younger audience members", while at the same time admitting that "orchestra management recognizes that audiences prefer the standard repertoire and would rather not take the chance of alienating patrons by straying far from the standard repertoire" (223).

In the final section, this article analyzes the case study of the Juan March Foundation (Madrid) and proposes that one possible way to overcome this critical situation can be found in music itself, in other words, in how musical works are both selected and presented on a program. Many institutions have directed their efforts toward well-planned marketing campaigns, aggressive communication tactics, and attractive prices, but it could be argued that programs conceived to challenge the listener are just as effective at engaging audiences, by creating new listening experiences and varied opportunities for emotional and intellectual responses. The more intense and rewarding the experience of listening to live music is, the higher the chance that audience numbers will be sustained or even increase (Brown 2004). Thus, those who make decisions about which works are performed (and the order in which they are performed), are as vital a part of the solution as those who actually perform them.

It is appropriate to begin by providing a definition of music programming; the process can be summarized as the selection of a coherent and attractive range of works, performers, and concert formats, in accordance with an institution's economic capacity and profile, as well as its target audiences. Programming has historically been a decision-making process (Weber 2009), currently determined and shaped by six main variables: the repertoire, the performer, the budget, the market, the listener, and the format of the concert. Programmers can't always control these variables, although they can contribute to shaping some of them at least on a small scale (for instance, the repertoire or the format of the concert). This job demands a high

level of planning and strategic thinking, and it also carries the responsibility of molding an individual institution's distinctive character.

## 2. Trends in Programming (2010-2015)

Trying to identify patterns in classical music programming is no easy task, mainly due to the lack of systematically-gathered statistics over a substantial period of time. Most of the studies available cover only partial repertoires, mostly symphonic music performed by a particular group of orchestras (see Mueller 1973; Thuerlauf 2008); however, even these partial studies reveal astonishing results. During a recent season in the world's most prominent opera houses, around 75% of the operas programmed represented the work of only ten composers: Mozart, Verdi, Puccini, Wagner, Rossini, Donizetti, Richard Strauss, Bizet, Janáček, and Handel. Furthermore, the first four composers on the list alone represent over 50% of the works staged (Agid & Tarondeau 2011). The analysis in this article attempts to go further than previous studies by looking at a larger group of repertoires and musical institutions, including opera houses, auditoriums, and chamber music halls. By examining a vast amount of data taken from the Bachtrack website ([www.bachtrack.com](http://www.bachtrack.com)), founded in 2008, otherwise undetected trends in music programming and a more complex picture of the musical life as it currently stands emerge.

The characteristics of this statistical survey can be summed up as follows:

- Time period: January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2015
- Concerts recorded: 4,761
- Composers performed: 1,914
- Performances of works: 18,779
- Institutions mentioned: 785
- Cities: 283

Bachtrack is not an academic database in the sense that it does not set out to be systematic, homogenous, and complete. Rather, it provides a mixed sample of concerts produced in different contexts and somehow randomly gathered, but there is probably no other source in this field with its sheer size and wide variety. Thus, for research purposes, several biases or distortions must be clarified: (a) it does not include every classical music concern in any single city, but rather only those reviewed by Bachtrack's non-professional critics, and it is possible that only the most popular or anticipated concerts have been reviewed; (b) the website is focused on classical music, so it overlooks an increasing tendency at concert halls to program other genres, such as film, non-classical works, or world music; (c) a substantial number of the 283 cities represented are located in Northern Europe and in North America, particularly in Great Britain, the United States, Germany, and Canada. London alone accounts for 31.5% of the performances, followed by New York at some distance (6.5%). The next 20 cities in the list, with at least 1% of the performances each, represent a combined total of 33.59%. In order of decreasing percentage, these cities are: Amsterdam, Edinburgh, Paris, Birmingham, Bristol, Vienna, Montreal, Sydney, Cleveland, Manchester, Gateshead, Madrid, Toronto, Dublin, Berlin, Leeds, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Oxford. Thus, the top 22 cities alone on the list account for 71.6% of the performances. Bearing in mind that twelve of them are in Great Britain and the United States, this analysis therefore pertains mainly to the Anglo-Saxon

world, with a particular emphasis on London. And finally, (d) it does not offer information on audience size or experience, and thus the success or failure of programs cannot be evaluated. In other words, Bachtrack provides a huge amount of data on concerts regardless of the length, status, or resource of the musical works performed. It is in this purely statistical sense that Bachtrack is used in this research. Setting aside its representativeness, this database's extraordinary wealth of data offers a particularly wide-lens picture and produces compelling evidence to help identify at least some relevant trends in classical music programming.

The average number of works performed per concert is 3.94, which is considerably lower than the eight to fifteen works that was standard at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Weber 2009). Even more striking is the fact that works by 1,914 different composers were programmed, a very considerable number, *a priori* suggesting a rich music scene. However, a more detailed look reveals that this initial assertion is problematic. Of the 18,779 performances registered in the database, only 33 composers appeared on more than 100 occasions. Expressed in statistical terms, only 1.72% of composers accounted for 53.33% of the total number of performances. This situation is not entirely unprecedented, as a very similar scenario was documented in past decades. In the nineteen-fifties, Beethoven was already the most popular, accounting for 12% of the repertoire in the major U.S. symphony orchestras (52% went from Mozart to Franck), and by the early nineteen-seventies, compositions by only 28 composers, principally from the nineteenth century, accounted for over 50% of their concerts (Mueller 1973). In descending order of performance percentage, this "golden" list of composers consists of: Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, Brahms, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, Rachmaninov, Schumann, Handel, Richard Strauss, Mahler, Stravinsky, Britten, Haydn, Dvorák, Wagner, Sibelius, Chopin, Liszt, Prokofiev, Vivaldi, Mendelssohn, Bartók, Bruckner, Purcell, Verdi, Elgar, Fauré, Berlioz, and Rossini. There were 10,015 performances of works by these 33 composers, more than doubling the total number of concerts recorded (4,761) (Table 1). On average, then, two of these composers were represented in each of these concerts. This concentration of works by just a handful of composers is yet more disproportionate given that the first ten on the list alone (from Beethoven to Rachmaninov) account for 4,999 performances; a mere 0.52% of composers account for no less than 26.6% of the performances. This means that on average, in every one of the 4,761 concerts, a work by one of these composers was performed. It is interesting to note that this list is very similar to the ten most frequently performed composers cited in other research on symphony orchestra programs in the two contrasting cultural contexts of the United States and Spain (Heilbrun 2004; Thuerauf 2008; Fundación Autor 2003; Sánchez Quinteiro 2016). Between 2001 and 2008, the ten most frequently performed compositions by orchestras in the United States in a single season were all by composers listed in the top ten composers, except for Dvorák (Pompe, Tamburri & Munn 2011, 171). All these revealing coincidences with other similar statistical research show that Bachtrack seems to be a faithful tool to detect the main programming trends regardless of the aforementioned biases.

Composer	No.	Percentage
1. Beethoven	859	4.6%
2. Mozart	746	4.0%
3. Johann Sebastian Bach	637	3.4%

4. Brahms	573	3.0%
5. Schubert	472	2.5%
6. Debussy	371	2.0%
7. Ravel	366	2.0%
8. Tchaikovsky	351	1.9%
9. Shostakovich	314	1.7%
10. Rachmaninov	311	1.7%
11. Schumann	310	1.7%
12. Handel	308	1.6%
13. Richard Strauss	295	1.6%
14. Mahler	288	1.5%
15. Stravinsky	276	1.5%
16. Britten	271	1.4%
17. Haydn	263	1.4%
18. Dvorák	257	1.4%
19. Wagner	256	1.4%
20. Sibelius	256	1.4%
21. Chopin	243	1.3%
22. Liszt	233	1.2%
23. Prokofiev	221	1.2%
24. Vivaldi	208	1.1%
25. Mendelssohn	199	1.1%
26. Bartók	187	1.0%
27. Bruckner	161	0.9%
28. Purcell	148	0.8%
29. Verdi	142	0.8%
30. Elgar	139	0.7%
31. Fauré	129	0.7%
32. Berlioz	124	0.7%
33. Rossini	102	0.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,015</b>	<b>53.3%</b>

**Table 1** / 'Golden' list of most performed composers (2010-2015).

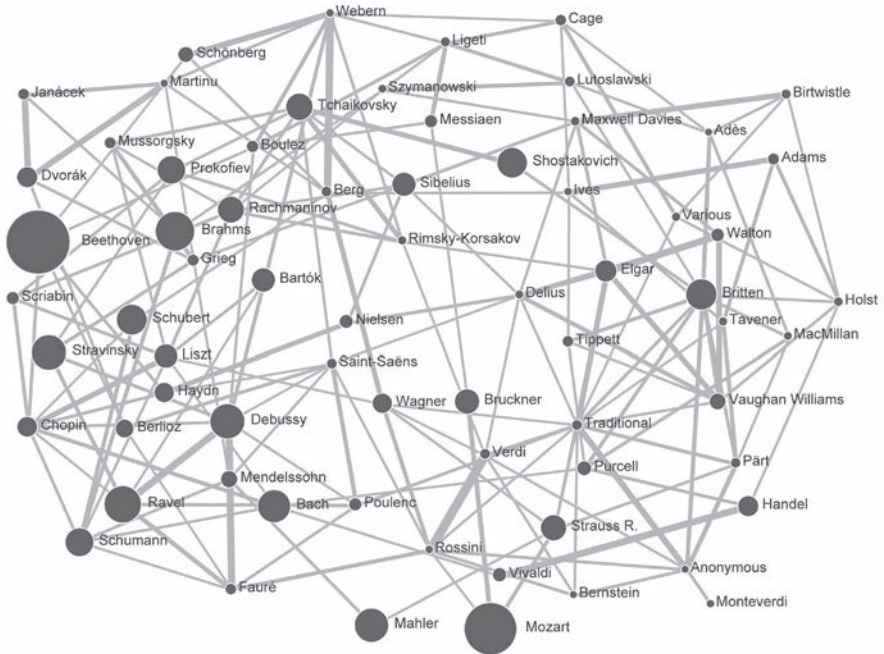
Following this dominant group of ten, an intermediate group of 443 composers (23.1% of the total) consists of those whose works have been performed anywhere from four to one hundred times (6,760 performances, approximately one third of the total). At the bottom of the table are 1,438 composers (75.1%) whose music was performed on three or less occasions (2,004 of the total, a mere 10.67%). Of these composers, 1,018 (53.1% of the total) were performed only once. In other words, the variety of composers in programs is considerable, yet most of them are scarcely presented on more than a few occasions (Table 2).

Group	No. Composer	Frequency (performances of works)
Over 100 performances	33 (1.72%)	10,015 (53.33%)
From 100 to 4 performances	443 (23.14%)	6,760 (35.99%)
3 or less performances	1,438 (75.13%)	2,004 (10.67%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,914</b>	<b>18,779</b>

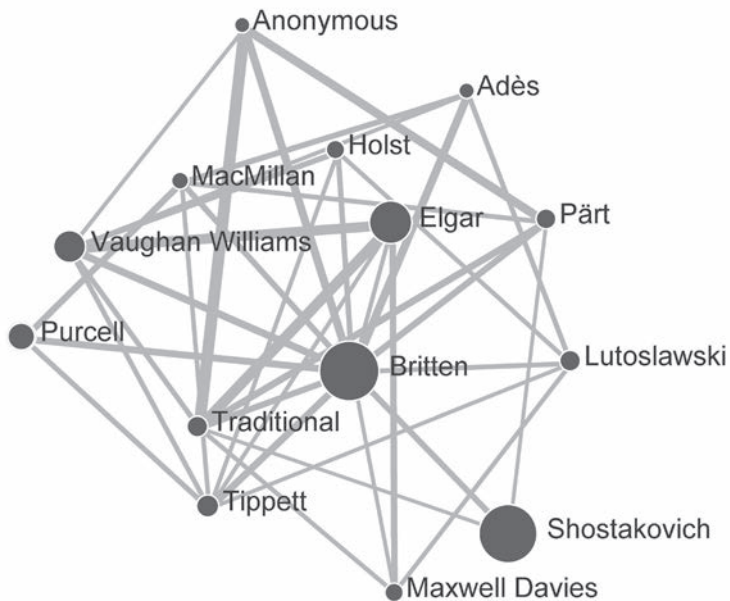
Table 2 / Groups of composers according to frequency (2010-2015).

Local traditions may slightly sway these general trends. Explicit or implicit nationalistic views determine the selection of particular composers. For instance, in London, Britten is ranked 10<sup>th</sup>, Elgar 25<sup>th</sup>, and Vaughan Williams 33<sup>rd</sup>, while Adams is 55<sup>th</sup>, Carter 136<sup>th</sup>, and Zorn 231<sup>st</sup>. Quite a different scenario appears in New York, where Britten is ranked way down at number 43, Elgar at 216, and Vaughan Williams is completely absent, while Carter is at 19, Zorn at 20 and Adams at 26.

This data also allows us to go further by examining the combinations of composers within individual concerts. This can be facilitated by Network Coincidence Analysis, a set of statistical methods used to assess coincidences in data. The framework used with the help of Luis Martínez in this article, developed by Modesto Escobar (2015), explores the relationships across composers in the programs by producing interactive network graphs. The visual representation of coincidences of composers within the same concert helps to elucidate hidden patterns of association and refined programming criteria. For example, in the case of London, so well represented in Bachtrack, it is obvious that nationality and style are two central criteria in the selection of composer combinations for concert programs. Composers more frequently performed, represented with larger circles, tend to function as axes to which composers of a similar aesthetic or from the same country are linked (Figure 1). For instance, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev, and Rachmaninov form a Russian network to which Shostakovich, Rimski-Kórsakov, and Mussorgsky are clearly linked. Pairings of composers that occur frequently within the same programmer include Debussy and Ravel, Verdi and Rossini, Adams and Ives, Handel and Vivaldi, as well as the Austrian trio of Webern, Schönberg, and Berg, and the Czech triangle of Dvorák, Janacek, and Martinu. The case of Britten is very revealing, as he appears at the center of an area largely dominated by other British composers who were either contemporaries or are still alive, with the significant exception of Purcell (Figure 2); this is a historically supported association, given that Purcell was taken as a model by many English composers, Britten in the first place.



**Figure 1** / Network Coincidence Analysis of the Top 70 Composers Performed in London Concerts (2010-2015).  
Note: Circle diameter indicates frequency of performance and width of links indicates strength of the connection.



**Figure 2** / Network Coincidence Analysis of Composers Performed with Britten in London Concerts (2010-2015).

Bach and Mozart, listed among the top ten composers (Table 1), do not show strong patterns of coincidences with any other particular composer, which means that they have often been programmed in a wide variety of combinations. By contrast, Beethoven, by far the most performed composer, is regularly associated with other Classical composers such as Haydn (but tellingly not Mozart), symphonists (Nielsen, Berlioz), Romantic composers (Chopin, Brahms, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Scriabin), and, surprisingly, two avant-garde composers, Schönberg and Boulez (Figure 3). Further research along this line would provide a more detailed picture about this fascinating analytical perspective and the historical, aesthetic, or practical explanations behind these connections. For instance, the recent consideration of Nielsen as a fine symphonist or the career of Boulez as conductor might account for their associations with Beethoven.

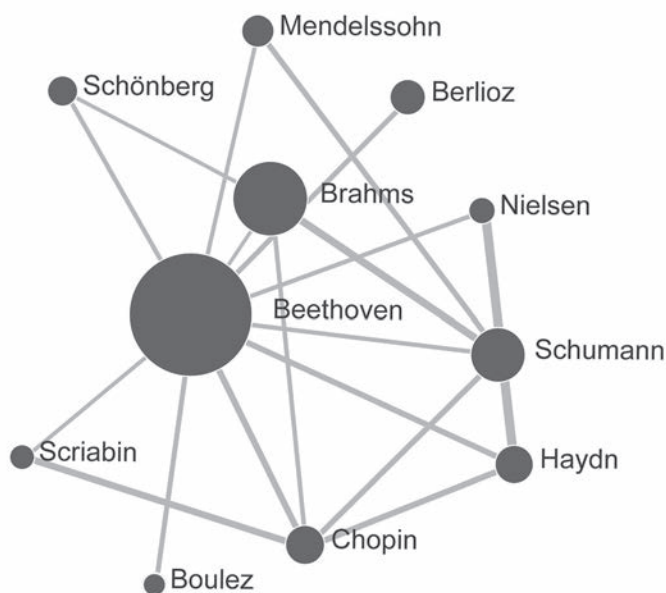


Figure 3 / Network Coincidence Analysis of Composers Performed with Beethoven in London Concerts (2010-2015).

Another aesthetic consideration which can be drawn from this survey relates to the year of death of the 33 most-often performed composers (Table 1): the majority of them belong to the period between the early nineteenth century and World War II, from Haydn (†1809) to Richard Strauss (†1949). Only nine of them are outside this timeframe: Purcell, Bach, Handel, and Mozart are earlier composers (three of them Baroque) while Prokofiev, Sibelius, Britten, Shostakovich, and Stravinsky are later, though their composing styles are not today generally deemed avant-garde in the Adornian sense (Adorno 2002). This chronology gives an elegant indication of where the main focus of music programming is concentrated, but this is more clearly defined by a further significant detail: seven of the ten most often performed composers died over a century ago (the other three are Ravel (†1937), Rachmaninov (†1943), and Shostakovich (†1975)). In fact, this is a reflection of the scenario of classical music's position in modern-day society: "by the last quarter of the twentieth century, music from the late 1700s to the early 1900s had come to be viewed as aesthetically normative" (Botstein 2004, 52) due to a complex set of cultural, economic, and social reasons.



It would appear that programmers' usual *modus operandi* reveals a disproportionate concentration on a very small group of composers who are presented in regular associative patterns, with rarely heard works by a distinguished group of diverse (and very often living) composers used to complete the concert program. The hegemonic concentration on the Classical-Romantic repertoire in concert halls today is startling, particularly when compared with most other artistic disciplines which are more closely in tune with contemporaneity (Botstein 2004; Turrini, O'Hare & Borgonovi 2008). This situation is fed by a variety of difference causes. Firstly, the training of performers in music conservatories is based heavily on these repertoires, and the technical rudiments of many instruments are still learned through the same studies used during the nineteenth century. Secondly, unstable financial circumstances – as have recently afflicted many musical institutions – have a significant impact on programming choices, increasing the likelihood of a more conservative selection of standard repertoire (Pompe et al. 2011, 183). Furthermore, the very idea of the concert as both a social and artistic event, as well as the ritual that accompanies it, are products of the nineteenth century (Small 1998; Weber 2009), which may explain the predominance of music from this period. A fourth factor to bear in mind is the importance placed on the anniversary of a composer's birth or death, very frequently taken as an obvious theme (or a simple excuse) for programming without exploring fresh perspectives. We can assume that a composer's performance count increases in his anniversary year: Chopin and Schumann in 2010; Mahler in 2011; Debussy in 2012; Britten, Verdi, and Wagner in 2013.

Before the definitive establishment of a historical consciousness in music at the end of the nineteenth century (if not earlier), this dominance of a small group of composers from the past could only be understood as an anomaly. For centuries, the conventional practice was to perform music of the present in the various spaces with which it was associated on an everyday basis: the church, the court, the drawing room, and, starting at the end of the eighteenth century, the concert hall. Listeners expected to encounter works composed in the style of their time by their contemporaries. As the nineteenth century wore on, the notion that the music of the past warranted revival gathered strength (Ellis 2005). It was only with the emergence of the avant-garde in the early twentieth century that the distinction between the concert hall program and the music of the present was firmly established. Since then, far from abating, this gap has widened, peaking during the post-war period (Botstein 2004). At the same time, interest in the music of the distant past increased with the spreading of the early-music movement, the origin of which dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, but which only gained real momentum in the nineteen-seventies and eighties.

To sum up, trends in classical music programming are characterized by fairly heavy concentration on three areas: a group of 30-or-so composers active from the late-eighteenth century to the early-twentieth century; a Classical-Romantic repertoire with occasional incursions into the most "classical" writing of the twentieth century; and regular patterns in the association of composers by nationality and style. Based on solid statistical evidence, this survey confirms two of the key dimensions of live concerts deduced by John Sloboda (2013) from interview studies: established works and predictable programs. These tendencies would surely not come as a surprise to any regular concertgoers. But the assumption that this widespread cultural practice is the best way of maintaining audience numbers and promoting innovative musical experiences in concert halls begs a challenge. How, then, can a programmer change these trends?

### 3. The Programmer as Curator: Challenging the Listener

Programming, the specifically artistic side to the broader field of music management, ultimately implies the undertaking of an explicit or implicit negotiation among the three agents active in the execution of a concert: the programmer, the performer, and the audience. The concert can be seen as the end result of a kind of three-way agreement comprising: (a) which repertoires and performers to include in a concert (decided by the programmer); (b) which works are suitable for preparation and public performance (decided by the performer, including the music director or principal conductor in the case of orchestras); and (c) which concert is worth attending (decided by the audience). In this process of artistic negotiation, the positions of the programmer, performer, and audience are unbalanced, insofar as their influence over final decisions is not equal. Moreover, these agent's interests in terms of specific details are not always aligned (and not infrequently opposed). Their roles sometimes overlap, too, as when the musicians themselves act as programmers.

In this scenario, the programmer's basic function is two-fold. On the one hand, it is to give the listener (and possibly also the performer) opportunities to discover unknown or little-known works and composers; and on the other, it is to construct novel listening itineraries, for example, by remodeling program structures and using unconventional staging to challenge the listener's expectations, presenting them with perhaps previously unexplored new forms of musical engagement (Mortier 2009). The resemblance of the ideal concert programmer to an exhibition curator – a well-consolidated profile in the art world – is a valuable one in terms of tapping the potential of programming. The former would do well to imitate the latter in proposing new or unfamiliar ways of engaging with their art, creating thought-provoking and potentially surprising journeys of experience that are not simply "enjoyable" or "nice". The choice of works, the order in which they are presented to the audience, the perspective encouraged and, ultimately, the "narrative" the program tells are aspects that should be as creatively explored by programmers in concert halls as they are already by museum curators.

Some cases in point will help to illustrate how this premise can be set in motion. The following examples are drawn from recent concert projects I had the chance to conceive and implement in my capacity as Director of the Music Program at the Juan March Foundation in Madrid, a non-profit, family-run institution that has been operating in the fields of science and humanities for more than six decades. All concerts are free, so the need to sell tickets has not been a restrictive factor in artistic decision-making. From its inception, music has been a regular ingredient of the foundation's activity, and since 1975, it has organized a regular chamber music season that currently consists of some 150 concerts with a wide variety of styles and repertoires performed by musicians from a diverse range of backgrounds. One central criterion is that concerts are always conceived in series around themes, perspectives, or concepts, with the final aim being to encourage critical listening – to promote not only an aesthetic approach to music, but also an intellectual one.

A prime example was the series of five concerts titled "Chopin and Posterity",<sup>2</sup> performed in January and February 2016 which explored Chopin's musical legacy as well as the different perspectives with which he has been regarded over a century after his death, at times shaped by nationalist and ideological overtones. The expressive heights, the refined sense of

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2. [www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100137&l=2](http://www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100137&l=2).

melody, the harmonic sophistication, and the intuitive use of the rhythmic motifs of Chopin's pianism significantly influenced successive composers in various countries. Following this narrative, one program paired mazurkas, polonaises, preludes, and sonatas by Chopin and his fellow countryman Karol Szymanowski. Another program explored the connections with other composer-pianists of *fin-de-siècle* Paris where Chopin's traces lingered, as nocturnes, preludes, and barcarolles by Gabriel Fauré and Claude Debussy showed. A third concert turned the spotlight on the output of the mystic Alexander Scriabin, the so-called "Russian Chopin", who composed under clear Chopinesque influence. A fourth recital focused on several Polish virtuosos, such as Godowsky, Paderewski, Moszkowski, and others, who had all, with Chopin as a source of nationalist inspiration, sought to expand the limits of the technical possibilities of the piano. As a preamble, the series started with a concert devoted to Bach as Chopin's antecedent. The intertwined selection of Bach's preludes from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* (without the fugues) and Chopin's *études*, performed without a break, revealed how surprisingly closely the Baroque composing techniques of the former were updated within a Romantic idiom by the latter.

Each of these five programs included works by Chopin and by another 13 known or unknown composers, very often presented in unexpected combinations. This type of programming strategy greatly fosters comparative listening. The series offered many audience members the opportunity to hear works by rarely-performed composers for the first time in a concert hall. Equally important, it encouraged fresh engagement with familiar works by Chopin in the different light diffracted by the association with other related compositions. Ultimately, it promoted creative listening: audiences were actively required to adopt a constructive role in the artistic process.

Another case in point is the three-concert series "The Musical Universe of Thomas Mann"<sup>3</sup> (December 2014). This was one of several series in recent years devoted to artistic figures whose creativity has been shaped strongly by music, such as Paul Klee, Alejo Carpentier, Bertolt Brecht, Julio Cortázar, Boris Vian, Marcel Proust, or Friedrich Nietzsche. For them, as for Mann, music was not a mere pastime, but a central constituent of their sensibility. Mann himself noted that music had always had a strong formative influence on his style of writing: "To me, the novel was always like a symphony, a work in counterpoint, a thematic fabric; the idea of the musical motif plays a great role in it" (Mann 1952, 722). This phrase inspired this series, with each concert revolving around an aspect of the complex relationship between (mainly German) music and Mann's literature: a selection of Lieder evoked by the characters of *The Magic Mountain*, the compositions that marked Adrian Leverkühn's diabolic career in *Doctor Faustus*, and Wagner's operas (presented here in piano arrangements) discussed in Mann's writings. The crucial point in this series was that the performances of musical works were interspersed with dramatized readings of carefully selected passages from Mann's novels. Listening to *Die Lindenbaum* by Schubert after the passionate description of Hans Castorp to his friends at the sanatorium in Davos (*The Magic Mountain*), or the *Piano Sonata op. 111* by Beethoven after the talk given by the organist Kretzschmer to a young Leverkühn in his hometown Kaisersaschern (*Doctor Faustus*), unveiled underlying connections among these works and exposed the profound influence music exerted on Mann's creative universe.

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3. [www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100046&l=2](http://www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100046&l=2).

Other series with a similar approach to programming could also be mentioned: "With the Name of Bach"<sup>4</sup> (February 2015) featured works by more than 20 composers, each utilizing the B-A-C-H motif, presenting listeners with the challenge of identifying it in each piece; "Unfinished Works"<sup>5</sup> (May 2012) challenged the standard practice of performing whole pieces of music by programming works that were left incomplete by their authors, interrupting the performance precisely at the point they had stopped composing; or "Fighting for the Applause"<sup>6</sup> (February 2012) which, based on historical evidence, reconstructed famous duels between four pairs of composer-performers who, at a particular point in their careers, were pushed to publicly compete for the approval of the audience: Mozart vs. Clementi (Vienna 1781); Haydn vs. Pleyel (London 1792); Beethoven vs. Wölfl (Vienna 1799); and Liszt vs. Thalberg (Paris 1837). Unexpected or novel combinations of better-known composers with others less widely known remain at the core of these projects.

In addition to the critical tasks of selecting works and arranging the order of performance, decisions relating to the concert format can also be instrumental in challenging the listener. The choice of venue for the performance, the audience's seating arrangement in the concert hall, the time and duration of the recital, the lighting design, or the projection of images or videos are just some of the elements regularly mentioned (Idema 2012; Gotham 2014), and indeed already employed by some musical institutions around the world (Brown 2004; Brown & Ratzkin 2013). They not only help to enrich the aesthetic experience of a concert, but also filter and shape how music is perceived, and hence become a powerful tool for the programmer. The point though is not merely to embellish the concert, as if stripping it of some of its traditional labels would make it immediately more attractive to new audiences. The aim is rather to view these possibilities as a means to create new experiences for the accustomed listener, to encourage a different approach to standard repertoire and to explore new relationships between artists. This implies not using technology simply because it is available, but rather using it in a justified and appropriate way to truly strengthen and enhance a performance, the goal being always to guide the listening experience through new or little-explored paths.

An example of this approach is the series "Lights of the Day"<sup>7</sup> (March 2015), four concerts devoted to compositions inspired by the luminous or sensorial qualities of the different periods of the day: early morning, midday, late afternoon, and night. Each concert had a particular setting of lights that emulated the natural light at these four moments of the day. While music was being performed, an art video projected on a huge screen behind recreated a dawn, a siesta, nightfall, and moonlight with the sun or moon moving slowly across the picture. In another series, "Music & Sound Art: The Four Elements"<sup>8</sup> (April 2014), compositions directly inspired by the four elements of traditional Western cosmogony (water, air, fire, and earth) were performed intertwined with recordings featuring these elements. The changing states of water, birdsongs in their habitats, earth tremors, or the processes of combustion can of course be very audible events, although their presentation in this project made the appreciation

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4. [www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100055&l=2](http://www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100055&l=2).

5. [www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=1774&l=2](http://www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=1774&l=2).

6. [www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=1766&l=2](http://www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=1766&l=2).

7. [www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100059&l=2](http://www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100059&l=2).

8. [www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=11036&l=2](http://www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=11036&l=2).

of them much more intense. In the series “Synesthesias. Hearing Colours, Seeing Music”<sup>9</sup> (November 2016), this idea was taken even further. It attempted to recreate in a concert hall the synesthetic sensations of certain composers such as Scriabin or Messiaen by blurring the borders between sound and color, between compositions and painting, with multimedia features. This combination of live music, lighting design, recordings, images, and videos really emphasized music as performance, rather than the conventional concert-hall view of music as interpretation. It implied bringing Herman Danuser’s words into the foreground of programming strategy: “Music is extracted from its exclusively sonic domain and shifted, with the aid of multimedia, to the focus of a process of presentation that unites the audible with the visual” (Danuser 2015, 192).

These series of concerts, among many others, could be regarded as possible responses to tackle some of the critical issues derived from the programming trends disclosed in the previous section. For instance, they actively attempted to close the distance between audiences and repertoires beyond the established canon of the 30 or so composers mentioned earlier. This is not only a question of regularly incorporating contemporary and early music into the predominantly Classical-Romantic repertoire, but also about giving greater exposure to other under-represented or completely unrepresented composers from the same period. Furthermore, these series also encouraged vibrant engagement with listeners via the way works are selected and combined within a program, as well as how they are staged. Formulae of this kind would evidently need to be adapted according to different audiences and may need to be implemented over a long period of time before having a substantial effect.

Ultimately, the drive to create innovative listening itineraries to stimulate and entice audiences means turning attention away from who is performing towards who is listening (Pitts 2005 and 2014; Pitts & Spencer 2008). Several studies based on audience feedback have demonstrated that similarly innovative programming resulted in a more intense and engaging experience: concerts that feature new works and unpredictable program (Sloboda 2013), that provide audiences with more information about the music they hear using different technologies (Dobson 2010), that incorporate visual components, video projections, and lighting (Brown & Ratzkin 2013), that introduce something new or musically challenging for frequent attenders (Roose 2008), that develop audiences through the production of non-traditional and enhanced experiences, and that reach new and younger audiences by integrating programmatic themes and alternative forms (Whitaker & Philliber 2003). It would be interesting to find out in future research whether the audience at the Juan March Foundation also enjoyed similar experiences.

Ultimately, the tasks entrusted to programmers, however invisible they may seem to many concertgoers, operate fully within the artistic and curatorial territory. The principle of making a concert attractive to as large an audience as possible has remained integral two centuries after its invention. The threats to its existence are changing and, if anything, they are now more intimidating. This is yet one more reason for programmers to sharpen their wits and imaginations, and fully engage in their role: that of helping, together with the performer and the music itself, to make each concert a unique and intense live experience.

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9. [www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100164&l=2](http://www.march.es/musica/detalle.aspx?p5=100164&l=2).

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