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### Classical Music in the Modern Era

Classical music in today's America is often seen as being old-fashioned, conjuring up images of whiteness and eliteness not relatable to young people. The reality, however, is more mixed. Classical music has its own niche, and there are many young artists carving their own path in this seemingly traditional world. These young artists have learned to weave a fine line between respecting a centuries old tradition, and choosing to love it unabashedly. And it seems that younger people are responding favorably as well— rates of youth listening to classical music for their own enjoyment were significantly higher than they were ten years ago. Yet, it is also a fact that on the larger scheme of the music scheme, classical music has seemed to have fallen out of favor in the cultural zeitgeist. According to the New York Times, only 2.5% of album sales in 2019 were classical music. But, at its time, classical music was popular music. I would like to begin my research by examining this seeming paradox in the simultaneous modern accessibility and historical inaccessibility of classical music, and the factors that have led to this point. It seems that organizations are realizing that young people need more encouragement to listen to classical music, and such concerts are often cheaper than popular music concerts for students. For a local example, Los Angeles Opera has their \$25 ticket program OperaU and the Los Angeles Philharmonic has student rush tickets for \$10 or \$20. Yet it also is true that historically, classical music was restricted to white, upper-middle class males, and so, I will examine how these disparities have affected the demographics of artists and listeners in historical and current

times. After my exploration into the current scene, I will turn my focus to potential methods of encouraging younger listeners to listen to classical music and to stick with it. In addition to classical music's exclusive image, listening to classical music requires different abilities than popular music. This can lead to people who do not listen to classical music being inclined to not listen to it, and so I will examine strategies such as young people's concerts and other forms of educating youth who may not be accustomed to listening to classical music. Finally, I will finish by exploring this topic from a musician's perspective: examining a few case studies to determine how the modern classical artist can market themselves to the youth of today. Social media such as TikTok has massively affected the consumption of music, and artists who have been able to effectively use it have oft proven to be successful. Classical music has so much to offer our generation, and understanding this genre's legacy will help preserve and innovate this important tradition. It is a niche yet thriving genre, and I want to see how social media's newfound hold on our lives can positively enrich the modern classical music scene. The growing diversity – of all types – in classical music is essential to its survival and is the best way to celebrate such a tradition for the future generations to come.

Classical music seems to exist in a paradox of simultaneously being shunted yet recent trends seem to seem to attract a diverse, younger audience. It is no secret that the current working professional world is primarily white and Asian, with some progress made for women over the past few decades. According to the DONNE foundation, in their survey of one hundred international orchestras, only about five percent of compositions were by women. and a little over three percent of pieces were by black and Asian composers. Perhaps even more striking is the study performed by the Danish Composer's Society, finding that 99.9% of minutes of music played by major classical music organizations in Denmark were composed by men. Yet, the

scene also seems to be shifting. Due to the historical exclusion of certain groups, organizations and programs have been started to be targeted towards them. The false dichotomy of “diversity versus high quality” seems to be breaking down, and must continue to do so in order to preserve and continue the legacy of classical music. Brandon Farnsworth, a musicology postdoctoral fellow at Lund University, argues that there is a “persistent [erroneous] belief in the universality of classical music itself.” Classical music, like all genres, exists in its own musical canon. There was a time and place in which such music was written, and is best understood when taking that context into account. Even a precursory examination of the classical canon will review a history of discrimination – from Putin’s claim that Russia is not homophobic due to the love of Tchaikovsky to the prominent racial discrimination of influential black American composer Scott Joplin. It is only now that such prejudices are being brought to light. My own organization I interned for this quarter, Salastina, even mentions this changing trend in several blog posts. My boss, Maia Jasper White, talks about her own experiences when she was just starting career and a “married first violinist of a well-known American string quartet” offering to give her “private lessons -- with repeated invitations to the hot tub afterward.” These occurrences are of course, not new, but I do believe it is a good thing that it is being spoken about more freely now. There are countless stories of young, female musicians subject to sexist experiences, and a long (often open) list of the men who have perpetrated these actions. Most recently, the awful sexual misconduct perpetrated by a trumpeter and a principal oboe player in the New York Philharmonic have finally been brought to light. The two were fired in 2018, but when the local musician’s union ruled in favor of them, they were reinstated– those unrelated to the case were kept in the dark until just a few months ago. Many musicians voiced their outcry and disappointment at this, yet also with the recognition that such an occurrence is nothing new. In

addition, the creation of programs such as the Emerging Black Composers Program and GALA Choruses for LGBTQ+ musicians. I suspect that purposeful inclusion of minoritized groups as well as pushback against morally abject men in power are social factors that have encouraged the most recent boom in Gen Z classical music listeners. A Polish study found that K-12 students who listened to classical music were also more likely to be politically active. Yet social reasons are not the only reason for classical music's recent boom: technological factors are also at play.

Today's youth are exploring classical music more than ever, and in a manner unique from previous generations. Previously, technology did not exist in the way it does now. My professor John Buffett, who is middle-aged, told the class that music is so much more accessible now than before. "Back in my day, we had to go to the library to check out CD's," he says with a chuckle. We have just finished listening to five renditions of Schubert's classic *Die Forelle*. He mimes opening a CD case. "You could only get two or three at a time." Our gray-haired accompanist Victoria Kirsch chimes in from the piano bench, "And when I was a student, we had to use cassettes!" Buffett acknowledges that the modern listener is near spoiled for choice: more mediums are available more than ever. Since my professors were students, platforms such as YouTube and Spotify have risen, and perhaps one of the most prominent modern technologies is TikTok. As such, youth with such inclinations are able to not only listen to more recordings, but also easily educate themselves on the pasts of these works – whether good or bad. In addition, the rise of Spotify has induced what is known as "playlist culture." This seems to be a dual edged sword for listeners. On the one hand, algorithmic data is being used to create a positive feedback loop for these younger playlist users. However, this can also trap users into only listening to certain kinds of music. For example, a listener who starts using classical music as a way to study could potentially just get more "boring" music and treat it as background noise. Anecdotally, I

have heard comments from my peers saying that they “love” classical music, but when asked further, they simply state that they “love it for studying.” Though I acknowledge that some younger listeners of classical music may relegate it to a background music, I am happy to say that this does not hold true as a national trend.

To better target their younger audiences, current classical musicians are working to incorporate traditional videos along with flashier “reels” into their marketing strategies, with some even changing formats of their actual concerts. However, the classical music industry as a whole is rather resistant to change. Traditions still play a huge role in the scene. One more traditional example of a young classical musician who shot to stardom is Spanish violinist María Dueñas , a fiery prodigy who is most notable for winning the 2021 Menuhin Violin Competition at eighteen. Traditionally, winning a prestigious competition and then using that momentum to propel a soloist career has been a viable option. Dueñas has followed such a trajectory, capitalizing on the virality of her winning performance. Her YouTube channel has remained active for a few years even after her win, featuring performances alongside Behind the Scenes videos and a short “day in the life” clip. She keeps her branding consistent, presenting herself as a very classy and well spoken young woman. Although all top tier soloists have mastery over all techniques, they still have individual musical personalities and Dueñas has a uniquely vivacious one. She performs Paganini, a fiendishly difficult composer known for writing some of the most virtuosic music known to man with ease and power, and her stage presence is deeply arresting. She is the kind of violinist that both judges and audience members adore— also winning the audience favorite choice vote in the Menuhin Violin Competition. Though she has an active online presence, her concerts remain very traditional. Nevertheless, I am certain that she will find even more success as she gets older and I look forward to seeing her career develop. Perhaps to

go even further in this social media direction is Ray Chen, a prominent Taiwanese-Australian violinist who gained notoriety through his winning the prestigious Queen Elisabeth competition which has started the career of many a classical musician. Previously, he attended the Curtis Institute of Music, one of the most prestigious American conservatories at the ripe old age of fifteen. What particularly distinguishes Ray from his classical peers is his use of social media in a manner similar to pop artists. He creates YouTube videos and hops on trends, playing meme songs and other popular genres of music. He frequently posts on Instagram, and even started a side hustle with his social media practice app *Tonic*. As stated on his website, Ray truly “redefines what it means to be a classical musician in the 21st century” and “transmits his musicianship to millions” of people around the globe. I am deeply inclined to agree. There are many young, top classical musicians out there, and I have seen none of them use social media in the manner which Ray does. He is very warm and flashy, both in his online and physical presence. Even when giving a masterclass, he rhetorically questions one of his ten year olds, “Am I really allowed to show off? Yes, you are!” He then “dropped to one knee and slid, violin sky high, face ecstatic.” This sort of recklessness adds a magical touch to his character unlike any other classical musician. Unfortunately, in a performance setting, this can detract from the technical quality of his performance. This has not detracted from his popularity in the slightest. It is my opinion that Ray recognizes this aspect of himself, and thereby performs flashier yet generally less technically difficult pieces compared to his contemporaries. This is evidenced in his selling out his celebrity recital show with the LA Phil, playing flashy classics (his one difficult piece is flashy as well) alongside an arrangement of a Chick Corea song. His willingness to meaningfully engage with popular music in his repertoire is admirable and a good reminder to any young classical musician in this era. Now, contrast both of the aforementioned artists with

Polish countertenor soloist Jakub Josef Orlinski. Though Orlinski did not rise to stardom through winning a competition, he went to Julliard— arguably the most prestigious conservatory in the United States. His rise to fame came through a viral online video of a performance that happened purely by chance. He was filmed in casual flip flops and shorts while doing a last minute performance for French radio. His vocal and physical beauty, combined with the casualness of his demeanor, likely helped his video to go viral on YouTube. Since that video in 2016, he has gone on his first major world tour, which I had the privilege to see. Orlinski emerged barefoot, in a majestic cape. At one point, he lay down and emitted the most beautiful melisma I have ever heard. At another, he wove his way through the audience while traditional Baroque instruments played, seemingly in his own world. Though this interactivity may seem familiar to the pop world, such an artistry is considered novel and unusual to classical music. European music educator Gillian Howell comments on this ever-present “fourth wall” – “creating a sense of a separate world in which the performance exists.” Orlinski purposefully and skillfully shatters this barrier. A few weeks ago, he announced his “Ba-Rok Tour,” a pun on Baroque and rock, hinting at yet another blend from the charming artist. In conjunction with the awareness of the youth, taking into account their new ways of experiencing media, Orlinski’s novel concerts provide a way for listeners true to the tradition to enjoy his music, and also serves to bring in younger listeners who may be new to the genre with his magical performances.

And for myself, carving a career path as a musician who is interested in both traditional and modern styles may prove to be an interesting path. For more information on older journeys, I decided to speak with a few professionals in the classical music scene. My immediate go to person, coincidentally, was my supposedly unrelated major’s department counselor. Jessica Angus of the Ecology, Evolutionary, and Biology department is also a freelance vocalist,

obtaining her Bachelor's of Music in Voice from Cal State LA. She primarily works in the church, and is the alto section leader. She is also paid for weddings and funerals, "but funerals pay more," and stresses the importance of taking every available opportunity at a young age, affectionately calling the youth "gig sluts." Interestingly enough, she noticed that it is not necessarily about being the best vocalist, a lot more of being a working musician involves showing up on time and having a good attitude. When I told her I was enrolled in African American Music Ensemble as well as a traditional Western choir, she was happy to hear that I was versatile, noting how it was such a vital skill. Diversity is not only helpful within the industry, but also in regards to an individual artist in regards to their skillset.

Overall, being a classical musician in the 21st century is a battle of business and artistry; tradition and modernity. It requires tenacity in the face of a world seemingly stacked against oneself, and a willingness and openness to engage with people from many different backgrounds. The ivory tower of academia that surrounds even the industry of classical music can no longer exist. It is clear that in the future, classical music must evolve with the times, just like every other genre. I firmly believe that the young artist's way forward is through ingenuity and respect to traditions, and first and foremost, to the people around them. It is in this way that such an important cultural element can be kept alive for generations to come.



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