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Loyalty and longevity in audience listening: investigating experiences of attendance at a chamber music festival

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Biographical notes

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Christopher Spencer trained in social psychology at the University of Oxford with Henri Tajfel, and helped set up the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* in the 1980s. He has published on children's understanding and use of their environments, as well as in other areas as diverse as primate field research, traditional healers'

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Loyalty and longevity in audience listening:
investigating experiences of attendance at a chamber music festival

Abstract
There is currently much concern amongst arts organisations and their marketing departments that audiences for classical music are in decline, yet little research has so far investigated the experiences of long-term listeners for insight on audience development and retention. This paper presents a case study of the Music in the Round chamber music festival, conducted over a three year period which included the retirement of the host string quartet, the appointment of a new resident ensemble, and associated changes in audience attitudes and priorities. The interaction between individual listening and collective membership of an audience is discussed, and the potential considered for understanding classical concert-goers as 'fans' or 'consumers'.

As an audience gathers for a chamber music concert, their motivations for being there might be assumed to be largely musical: a desire to hear particular repertoire or performers, to affirm or challenge existing musical tastes, and to critique, enjoy or maybe learn from the interpretation of familiar or previously unheard music. Some listeners will arrive alone, sitting apparently engrossed in reading their programmes as they wait for the concert to start – temperament and habit dictating whether they bring a book to avoid the need to meet with strangers, or otherwise choose to engage in some people-watching or to strike up a conversation with a fellow listener. Other audience members arrive with friends, or greet acquaintances across the auditorium, finding their allocated seat, or selecting one which places them a comfortable distance from the performers, preferably with a good view, some leg-room and easy access to the area used for interval refreshments. And so the musical reasons for attending are intertwined with personal and social considerations: for different people in the concert hall this might be a sociable night out, a chance to escape from worldly pressures, an evening laden with obligation or sense of duty, or an impulsive decision to fill a few hours in which the television schedules looked unappealing.

Being amongst other listeners – whether friends or strangers – is a qualitatively different experience from listening alone, its effects manifest through the distractions of neighbours' coughing, the intrigue of watching others as they listen, the participation in collective applause, and the opportunity for interval conversations about the performance. Yet empirical evidence for the experiences of being 'in audience' is notably lacking, and there remains a need to answer John Carey's call to

'create a body of knowledge about what the arts actually do to people'.[1] Where research has considered physical and emotional responses to music – most notably using psychological methods – there has been until very recently an absence of 'real world' investigations of listening in live, social settings.[2] With audiences for classical music allegedly in decline[3], there is both a practical and a research imperative to understand the experiences of concert listeners and their implications for nurturing audience attendance and enjoyment.

In 2003, a case study of the Music in the Round audience at the Crucible Studio in Sheffield revealed close links between social and musical satisfaction in experiences of a chamber music festival.[4] Audience members, many of whom had attended the festival throughout its twenty year history, felt themselves to be active participants in the event, and valued the intimacy and intensity of their collective listening in the small 'in the round' venue. They felt a sense of friendship and like-mindedness amongst their fellow listeners, which in turn contributed to their loyalty to the festival and the performers. Concerts given by the string quartet who had founded and hosted the festival were typically sold out early in the booking season, with slightly more cautious responses to visiting performers or unfamiliar repertoire. Long-term attenders at the festival viewed it as a vital part of their ongoing musical education and development, trusting in the Artistic Director of the festival to bring them quality performances of stimulating music.

At the time of that study, the host string quartet had recently announced their retirement, prompting concern amongst the audience over the future of Music in the Round. The follow-up study reported here investigated the process of transition that has occurred in the intervening three years, as a new resident ensemble of strings, wind and piano has been auditioned and appointed, and audience members have re-evaluated their relationship with the festival. The findings shed new light on how

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[1] John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (London, 2005), 167.
[2] See Eric F. Clarke, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (New York, 2005) for a theoretical discussion of listening experiences, and a further call for empirical work in this area (p. 192).
[3] Bonita M. Kolb, 'The decline of the subscriber base: a study of the Philharmonia Orchestra audience', *Market Research*, 3 (2001), 51-59; and Bonita M. Kolb 'The effect of generational change on classical music concert attendance and orchestras' responses in the UK and US', *Cultural Trends*, 41 (London, 2002).
[4] Stephanie Pitts, *Valuing Musical Participation* (Aldershot, 2005); and Stephanie Pitts, 'What makes an audience? Investigating the roles and experiences of listeners at a chamber music festival', *Music and Letters*, 86 (2005), 257-269.

concert-going habits and expectations are shaped over time, raising questions about how audiences acquire a sense of loyalty and longevity through their musical and social experiences of listening. Conclusions will be drawn about the extent to which classical music audiences can be viewed as 'fans' or 'consumers', and what this means for the future preservation and rejuvenation of such audiences.

Understanding audiences

Investigations of audience behaviour are most often prompted by an apparent or feared decline in audience attendance, with the topic receiving greater attention from leisure management researchers than from musicologists. Perhaps there is some embarrassment – reinforced by Christopher Small's characterisation of the classical concert as 'a very sacred event in Western culture'[5] – that classical music audiences are typically amongst the more privileged members of society, with the time, wealth and level of education that is assumed to be necessary to gain full enjoyment from a professional performance. Researching the experiences of these established listeners might seem to run counter to the ongoing efforts of arts organisations to broaden access to cultural events through reduced ticket prices, targeted marketing and changes in format and presentation. But given that so little empirical evidence exists to interpret the experiences of long-term concert-goers, a greater understanding of their attitudes and motivations is needed to offer insight on classical music audiences as they currently exist, and so to identify the barriers and opportunities for future audience growth and satisfaction.

The obstacles to audience research are both conceptual and methodological: the recognition that music can be studied through its activities and events, rather than solely as sound artefacts, is relatively recent, and methods for gaining access to audience experience are also in their infancy. The same is true in relation to theatre audiences, where 'empirical research has been of little value beyond establishing the particular cultural construction of mainstream audiences'.[6] In particular, there is an absence of research considering the effects of audience members on one another, and the nature of the communities and friendships that can arise as a result of sharing in collective musical experiences. Writing on 'fan' behaviour comes closest to

[5] Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH, 1998), 14.
[6] Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London, 1997), 89.

analysing the sense of belonging and community that arises from pursuing shared interests with like-minded people[7], but has tended to focus on popular music only, with strong interest in classical music being viewed instead as 'the obsession of the aficionado [which] is rational (high class, educated) and therefore benign, even worthy'.[8] Classical music audiences may not rely so obviously on the media networks and 'fanzines' associated with admiration for a celebrity figure, but their appetite for news of recordings, concert schedules and reviews can be just as voracious, stemming from the same desire to connect more closely with performers (or perhaps composers) for whom they have a high regard.

If classical concert-goers are rarely conceived of as 'fans', they are more often thought of as 'consumers', with their attendance and purchasing habits followed closely by marketing and leisure analysts. Such research confirms the aging and declining nature of classical music audiences, and cites the perceived formality of the concert hall as a significant obstacle to audience diversity.[9] Presence at a concert, together with continued attendance at similar events, is a common measure of success in audience monitoring, but offers little insight on how enjoyment is influenced by the environment, ethos and quality of the listening experience. Attempts to investigate these variables further have identified factors as diverse as the listener's level of anticipation for the concert, the players' apparent engagement, as well as the repertoire and quality of the performance, and suggested that generalisation is complicated by the individuality of listeners' experiences: 'perhaps when a performance is very engaging, wrong notes and technical errors have comparatively little impact on the listener's enjoyment, and vice versa'.[10] Classical music audiences may be 'consumers', in that they make a financial commitment which can easily be withdrawn on future occasions, but their behaviour is influenced by such a wide variety of factors that 'brand loyalty' cannot be readily predicted or guaranteed.

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[7] See, for instance, Daniel Cavicchi, *Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans* (New York, 1998).

[8] Joli Jenson,'Fandom as pathology: the consequences of characterisation', in Lisa A. Lewis (Ed) *Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London, 1992), 21.

[9] Kolb, 'The effect of generational change'; see also Policy Studies Institute press release, 'Excessive formality blamed as young turn backs on classical music' at www.psi.org.uk/news (accessed 7th February 2007).

[10] Sam Thompson, 'Determinants of listeners' enjoyment of a performance', *Psychology of Music*, 35 (2007), 20-36. See also Sam Thompson, 'Audience responses to a live orchestral concert', *Musicae Scientiae*, 10 (2006), 215-244.

Evidence for a generational shift in concert attendance prompts consideration of the contribution that concert-going makes to a fulfilling and sociable retirement, offering as it does an unusual combination of familiarity and challenge, friendship and individual concentration. The scope of activity in later life has changed considerably in recent decades, which have witnessed 'the cultural demise of the old age pensioner as emblematic of old age and its replacement by a "third ager" defined by a focus on self-realisation and an ongoing engagement with lifestyle, shopping, vacations, and lifelong learning'.[11] Concert attendance offers one route to maintaining musical interests and education in later years, and also provides a forum for casual friendships, often formed in later adulthood to supplement existing deeper relationships, whereby social interaction with new friends is relatively fleeting and focuses on shared interests rather than self-disclosure.[12] Studies of effective aging, however, have tended to classify 'music listening' as one type of activity, rather than distinguishing between attendance at concerts and solitary listening to recorded music – the latter of which may represent a loss of function and activity for some previously more active listeners or musicians. The evidence for the effects of concert-going on older listeners is therefore mixed: 'Although engaging in social and productive activities appears to have wide-ranging benefits, being related to greater well-being, reduced functional decline and reduced mortality, the potential benefits of more solitary activities may be restricted to psychological well-being'.[13]

The Music in the Round audience

The psychological, financial and social factors affecting concert attendance may seem to be something of a diversion from the musical considerations which are at the heart of the listening experience as it occurs. They offer, however, a broad framework within which the behaviour and experience of audience members can be interpreted, and the interaction of social, musical and personal factors in concert enjoyment can be understood. The case study of the Music in the Round audience presented here

[11] Chris Gilleard, Paul Higgs, Martin Hyde, Richard Wiggins & David Blane, Class, cohort, and consumption: the British experience of the Third Age. *Journal of Gerontology*, 60B (2005), S305-S310.

[12] Rosemary Blieszner & Rebecca G. Adams *Adult Friendship* (Newbury Park, 1992), 100. For an example of such non-obligatory friendships in action, see Michael Cheang, 'Older adults' frequent visits to a fast-food restaurant: nonobligatory social interaction and the significance of play in a "third place"', *Journal of Aging Studies*, 16, (2002), 303-321.

[13] Verena H. Menec, The relation between everyday activities and successful aging: a 6-year longitudinal study. *Journal of Gerentology*, 58B, (2003), S74-S82.

illustrates the themes and concerns raised so far in this paper by following the audience's development from 2003 to 2006, during a period of considerable change for the festival and a consequent re-evaluation of listening priorities for the audience members.

As a follow-up to the 2003 Music in the Round audience case study described earlier, a questionnaire survey of audience members took place in advance of the *Songs Without Words: Exploring Early Romanticism* festival in May 2006.[14] This generated a profile of long-term attenders at Music in the Round, with an average of 15 years' attendance, and a minimum of three, such that all respondents had witnessed the transition from the host string quartet to the new resident ensemble. Many valued the opportunity that festivals afforded for 'more intimate exploration of themes and composers' [Q11] in order to gain 'rich and deep knowledge of familiar and unfamiliar music' [Q49], but were equally committed to the broader Music in the Round series, which hosts a more diverse programme of concerts throughout the year. The intensity of a festival week, and the compulsion to feel fully involved, were described as follows by one questionnaire respondent:

> Festivals and weekends definitely have a soap opera quality […] or like being in a sweet shop – you have to sample everything! If you miss one item (episode) you feel cheated! [Q10]

Despite a widespread enthusiasm for the week-long event, some audience members noted the need for respite between concerts: 'Sometimes I feel that the festivals are too concentrated and by the end I am not listening so eagerly. I like more spaces between the concerts' [Q7]. This point emerged also in the interviews, where several audience members noted that after twenty years of festival attendance their stamina for twice-daily concerts had noticeably waned in recent years, and expressed a preference for pacing their concert-going through more regular events. Clearly, some re-evaluation of listening habits was taking place, as respondents reflected on their own age in relation to that of the new ensemble, and some were forced to take stock of their imminent or actual retirement coinciding with that of the string quartet.

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[14] Questionnaires were distributed through the Music in the Round mailing list to a random sample of 300 previous attenders, half of whom were subscribing members of the 'Friends of Music in the Round'. Seventy eight questionnaires were returned by post, and 16 of those respondents were subsequently interviewed in order to generate more detailed qualitative data. Quotes from the questionnaires are identified here by a code Q1-78, and where material is drawn from a subsequent interview, this is indicated as e.g. Q27-I.

As in the 2003 study, audience members commented extensively on the 'intimacy' and 'informality' of Music in the Round, attributing this in part to the venue, with its raked seating around a central performance area, and to the perceived attitudes of the performers:

> The high quality of the performers; the informality; and the educational approach through introductions, talks etc. The venue sets all these considerations in a sympathetic context. [Q13]

> You feel closer to the artists – more a part of the performance rather than just an observer. [Q62]

Physical and psychological closeness to the performers and to other audience members were intertwined in respondents' descriptions, and led to frequent mentions of 'the immediacy of the performance' [Q18] and 'feeling as if players are friends' [Q24]. This long-established view of the festival had clearly been challenged by the retirement of the host string quartet, which respondents reported had generated feelings of 'dismay', 'sadness', 'puzzlement' and 'regret', offset by a sense of being 'excited about the move to pastures new for everyone, and youth – future – longevity' [Q10]. The sensitive handling of the new ensemble's appointment had clearly been beneficial in transferring audience loyalty from the retiring quartet: 'audition concerts' were held in which audience members were asked for feedback on the potential new resident performers, leading to a sense of involvement and feeling 'pleased with the way it was done' [Q73]. The 'inspired' choice of the new ensemble was nevertheless entirely credited to the retiring first violinist, who remains in post as the Artistic Director, and was seen by the majority of respondents as the pivotal figure in the continued success of Music in the Round.

In their eagerness to learn from spoken introductions to performances, and to immerse themselves in thematic, often challenging programmes, the Music in the Round audience demonstrated in the 2003 study that they were keen to be educated as well as entertained by their concert life. The 2006 survey noted similarly that repertoire ranked more highly than artist reputation in decisions about concert booking, and interview respondents endorsed this with detailed comments about their musical preferences and a willingness to engage with the new programming opportunities offered by the larger ensemble. Attitudes towards the jazz, folk and world music concerts that form part of the Music in the Round series were generally

more conservative, however, with established listeners seeing them as 'important to "bring in" the next generation' [Q21], but lying outside their own engagement – 'it is good that they are included, but I rarely go' [Q6]. The concern to attract younger audiences also extended to support of the educational work carried out by Music in the Round, and emerged as a strong theme in the interviews, where the relative youth of the new ensemble was cited frequently as being likely to attract a new generation of listeners.

This overview of the questionnaire data confirms the findings of the 2003 study, in identifying a discerning audience who value the intensity and informality of the Studio setting. In addition, the appointment of the new ensemble was found to have been handled sensitively, ensuring a high transfer of loyalty, even while audience members reviewed their own listening habits and stamina, particularly in relation to the May festival. Concepts of friendliness and proximity to the performers remained intrinsic to the character of the festival, and here the audience members were still in a process of transition, where the challenge of forming relationships with the new performers was exacerbated by the generation gap between the youthful players and the aging listeners. The themes of aging and youth, listening context, and musical engagement also emerged strongly in the interview data, enabling deeper analysis of the social, emotional and musical aspects of audience listening. The discussion that follows will therefore draw predominantly on the interview data in considering further the processes and experiences of collective listening demonstrated by the Music in the Round audience, and their implications for wider understanding of audience behaviour.

Thematic discussion

Listening across generations: aging and youth

Participants in the 2003 Music in the Round study had expressed a hope that the host quartet's retirement would result in the appointment of a younger ensemble, equipped to take the concert series into the next decade and attract a new generation of listeners. This hope was indeed met, and the youth of the players (all in their 20s or 30s) was referred to frequently in the 2006 questionnaire responses as a positive factor in securing the future of the festival and offering the chance to hear a fresh interpretation of familiar music. Nonetheless, the adjustment was not without its emotional challenges for established audience members:

> I think it is very much a new generation thing – people who are fresh and new and you hope will develop. It's very much a family occasion, I have seen elderly people who are no longer there any more. It's quite emotional, when you see it over a period of many years and all the, this is another detour, all these life events. I mean [the Artistic Director] and I are a similar age – our kids are a similar age. All that through spring, autumn, winter… [Q10-I]

The retirement of the established string quartet and appointment of their younger replacements had clearly caused audience members to take stock of their own life stage, noting the generation gap between themselves and the new performers, and re-appraising their own position in an aging audience. The language used to describe the performers was often paternalistic, even patronising: robbed of the first-name familiarity they had had with the retired quartet, listeners referred to the 'group of youngsters' [Q26-I], or the 'charming and enthusiastic young people' [Q3], and expressed hopes for their future development, noting that 'you can't expect them to have the same sort of depth of knowledge at their age' [Q26-I]. While this attitude is clearly supportive in intent, it highlights a new performer-audience relationship, in which the listeners are observing from a greater generational distance, rather than assuming a peer relationship or friendship as previously:

> Now we are sort of the grandparents' age, and some of them, well not quite – could we be grandparents of a twenty something or other? […] But at any rate, there is the feeling, well aren't we all grown and maturing, but they are very much in formation. […] Even their love life one speculates about, their hinterland and all of that. […] Become intensely interested, just involved and hoping for the best and hoping it works out. [Q16-I]

Understanding the significance of this generational shift requires further exploration of the audience's previous interactions with the retired quartet, and in particular the sense of 'friendliness' frequently cited as a vital part of the festival's ethos. While for some audience members this personal relationship with the performers was genuinely realised through neighbourly contact or friendships between children, for many others familiarity with the performers was assumed as a consequence of hearing them play, listening to their spoken introductions to concerts, and mingling with them in the foyer during intervals. Further sources of contact included the newsletter produced for the subscribed 'Friends' of Music in the Round, and regular features in the local newspaper. Audience members relished knowing

details of the players' health, relationships and personalities, and this apparent intimacy increased the sense of loyalty to the festival and to the players in particular. The need to negotiate social relationships and a sense of friendship with the new ensemble was therefore part of the post-retirement adjustment for audience members, bringing with it the challenges of getting to know a larger group of players; learning new names, having opportunities to watch and interact with them, and getting to know their characters. Some audience members viewed this as a fresh opportunity to feel involved in the festival, noting that the new ensemble were 'very happy to mix and move around' [Q48-I], by contrast with the reported in-group behaviour in relation to the retired ensemble – widely recognised as being problematic in attracting new audience members to the festival.

Occasional reference was made to changes in the political and social climate that had occurred in the twenty-odd years since the founding of Music in the Round, and to the different generational attitude represented by the new players. These centred upon notions of greater equality, with respondents noting with pleasure the inclusion of women in the new ensemble, and reflecting on the apparent lack of hierarchy amongst the players in comparison to the dominance of the first violinist in the retired quartet:

> I recall obviously that [the first violinist] used to take the lead in [giving spoken introductions], and that seemed fine at the time, but it was always fun when [the viola player] bobbed up and said something, it was quite refreshing. There is a much more flat hierarchy about [the new ensemble], which might reflect their age and a different political time, and also their personality. They obviously enjoy sharing the speeches, and tutoring and teaching roles. I have not seen them actually teach young people; certainly for us it's refreshing to hear the different sorts of perspectives that they bring. [Q16-I]

Other audience members were less convinced about the equality between players, recognising the extra challenge for those non-native English speakers in the ensemble in contributing to spoken introductions in concerts. There was consistency in the audience responses to show that some players were emerging more clearly as 'personalities' through their more frequent interactions with the audience.[15]

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[15] In the months since this study was carried out, the ensemble have established an internet blog in which they reflect on their rehearsals and performances. It is too soon to judge the effects of this new source of 'intimacy', but it seems likely that it will contribute further to the audience's sense of getting to know the performers, and reinforce the sense of virtual community amongst the audience.

In another shift in hierarchical attitude, some audience members were beginning to revise their opinions of the retired quartet, and while a great deal of respect for them remained, some listeners had welcomed the break in audience loyalty:

> It used to be a bit like a congregation, you know, over-sixties, pensionable. […] There was always this feeling at the end of a […] concert that you tried to see how long you could make the silence last before applauding, this sort of reverential silence. However good and wonderful some of the late Beethoven quartets are, they are not actually worth that much. I really do feel some of the more riproaring cheers that you have got at some of the concerts more recently, I mean, some of the concerts with piano quintet and trio were absolutely phenomenal and they really did bring the audience to their feet. That was fantastic. That is absolutely right. I think there is a lot of enthusiasm there and you get the feeling that there is a breath of fresh air running through things. [Q4-I]

Such a change in audience behaviour was attributed by many to the increase in younger audience members, and several interviewees in their 40s and 50s expressed the view that 'I am no longer feeling that I am the youngest person there' [Q56-I]. There were widespread hopes amongst the audience that the new ensemble would 'introduce chamber music to the next generation, as we get a bit more decrepit and die off' [Q16-I], and the high priority given to educational work in the players' selection was widely approved of as a means of making chamber music accessible and rejuvenating the audience.

Youth, aging and generation gaps were clearly prominent in the thinking of established audience members as they adjusted, socially as well as musically, to the new phase in the festival's life. The transition had demanded a re-evaluation of listening priorities and of the character of the festival, highlighting the concept of 'friendliness' at the heart of its ethos. Audience members had proved to be largely adaptable to their new listening circumstances, helped in part by its elements of continuity: the retired violinist's ongoing role as Artistic Director, the similarity of programming patterns, the retention of spoken introductions and, above all, the continued presence of fellow listeners. The loyalty was not unequivocal, however: the absence of a number of familiar faces from the audience was noted by interviewees, who were also aware that reduced ticket demand meant that prioritising and early booking of the festival was not such a compulsion as in the last years of the retired quartet. Nonetheless, the break in listening habits brought about by the change

in performing personnel appeared to have reinforced the loyalty of those still in attendance, not least because of the shared responsibility to secure the future of the festival:

> I think we go to concerts, partly, there are times, we haven't said this but there are times, being honest, when I don't want to go. I'm tired, I've got other things, it's a nuisance. But I go because I think I do feel a sense of commitment, to have supported them. Particularly this year. I know that they feel like they've been supported in that way too. There's nothing moral or wonderful about it, it's just a reality. I know that if you don't support them, they will go elsewhere and we will lose the whole thing. [Q49-I]

Such determined commitment to the festival can be viewed as a contemporary form of patronage, in which the audience's ticket purchasing contributes to the financial stability of the festival, and their presence and applause generates an atmosphere of success and enthusiasm. A sense of civic pride expressed in the desire to keep the performers in Sheffield was sometimes coupled with the view that the city is in other respects an impoverished centre for classical music, with a lack of suitable venues for opera and orchestral performances. Recent renovations to the City Hall were described in scathing terms – 'they have put new seats in and done absolutely nothing useful with the acoustics' [Q56-I] – and several interviewees noted the reduced number of visits made in recent years by both the Hallé Orchestra from Manchester and Opera North from Leeds. While some audience members were prepared to travel to hear these and other performers, others reported difficulties in getting to more distant venues, and some older listeners further restricted their attendance to lunchtime festival concerts in order to take advantage of cheaper ticket prices and more frequent public transport.

The 2003 survey showed that attendance at Music in the Round was often the main event in audience's listening schedules, valued for its proximity and convenience for the largely local audience, as well as for its high musical standards. In these concert-going habits, established over years or decades, the festival has provided a geographical and cultural 'comfort zone', which appears in most cases to have survived the disruption of new performers and changes in programming. Environmental psychology research on 'place attachment' confirms that cognitive and emotional connections with a place are reinforced by positive memories of events which have occurred there, so increasing participants' tolerance for any deficiencies in

the place, and decreasing the likelihood that they will go elsewhere in search of similar experiences.[16] So while regular Music in the Round audience members frequently complain about the lack of air conditioning in the Crucible Studio, they overcome any physical discomfort because of their high expectations that they will have a pleasurable listening experience in that space. In attending another, less familiar concert hall, however, environmental barriers will be more apparent, and frustrations with parking, interval refreshments and so on could be sufficient to prevent repeat attendance. Place attachment could be less sympathetically labelled 'parochialism', and both highlight the same challenges of recruiting new audience members into an unfamiliar environment, and encouraging existing listeners to reach beyond the festival to achieve greater diversity in their concert-going.

Listening and learning: repertoire and programming

As the regular Music in the Round audience adjusted to their inter-generational relationship with the new ensemble, they faced also a significant musical change in the festival, both in terms of the repertoire now offered by a larger ensemble of strings, wind and piano, and in the interpretation of works – particularly string quartets – made familiar to the audience through their previous attendance at Music in the Round. Here, again, audience members commented frequently on the players' youthfulness, seen variously as bringing freshness and enthusiasm to their performance, or as showing promise yet to be fully realised. The string quartet who formed part of the new ensemble were inevitably subjected to most direct comparison with the retired players, often to favourable effect:

> Every musician has got to accept that we need a change of different sounds, different approaches and we are getting that, so I think that they ... I think its been a real joy to hear younger musicians playing works that we have come to know through the [retired quartet]. [They] are on record, it is an extraordinary gift for the future, they are there so you can go back to them. So now I am beginning to listen to the odd […] disc, just to compare what was it like. For a while I just moved away from them. [Q49-I]

[16] For examples of place attachment research, see Lynne Manzo & Douglas Perkins, 'Finding common ground: the importance of place attachment to community participation and planning', *Journal of Planning Literature*, 20 (2006), 335-350; also Gerard Kyle, Alan Graefe, Robert Manning & James Bacon, 'Effects of place attachment on users' perceptions of social and environmental conditions in a natural setting', *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24 (2004), 213-225.

> It has been very refreshing to hear the [new ensemble] begin to play some of the music that I have known from the [retired quartet]. I think that I have been quite encouraged by the difference that they can provide, and amazed at some of the technical virtuosity actually that they are able to produce, which has given a different slant on things. They seem to be able to do different things that are beyond the music. [Q4-I]

The new ensemble was seen as broadening the scope of the concerts, though there were varied opinions about the departure from the string quartet repertoire, with some listeners feeling that they were now getting 'a much more rounded chamber music experience' [Q4-I] while others expressed concerns at the lack of repertoire available for the whole ensemble. Indeed, many listeners referred implicitly to the new quartet when describing their responses to the ensemble, apparently seeing the string players as the direct replacement for the retired quartet, and the wind players and pianist as an additional bonus.

While some audience members were eager to see the ensemble performing as a whole, others had noted the unusual programming combinations that could result from having a resident group of performers: 'concerts which we have never really had before where you can have a string quartet followed by a wind [ensemble] or a sonata' [Q49-I]. Professional concert programmes are driven in part by the need to get 'value for money' from the performers – so a string quartet would be unlikely to split into solo performers for part of the concert, or to pause in their programme for a piano and clarinet item. Where all the performers are on hand, however, the versatility of the programming is increased, and the May 2006 festival included programmes in which the ensemble members played as duos, trios and in larger groups within one concert. For relatively recent attenders at Music in the Round, eager to broaden their knowledge of chamber music, this change was very welcome: 'just hearing different instruments being absolutely fantastic has been a real eye opener for me' [Q52-I]. Others amongst the established audience were inevitably dealing with another change in their expectations of the festival, and the unfamiliarity of players, instruments and repertoire presented a challenge to some long-standing listeners, who were still reserving judgement on the wisdom of the new appointments.

In their reactions to the programming of the concert, the audience members show that their trust in the Artistic Director is nonetheless coupled with a strong sense of the direction that Music in the Round should be taking. One interviewee expressed particular frustration that the first festival with the new ensemble had not featured

more contemporary music: for him, the appointment of younger players brought with it the hope that the festival might become 'a bit more innovative and adventurous to reach a wider audience' [Q38-I]. His optimism that such views would be widely shared was somewhat misplaced: other listeners were more cautious about new repertoire, and admitted – sometimes with a degree of self-reproach – a tendency to choose concerts where familiarity with at least some of the programme offered a greater guarantee of enjoyment. They too were conscious of the need to broaden the audience, but viewed this in terms of drawing new listeners into the existing setting, rather than changing the musical character or aims of the festival. The urge towards the preservation and promotion of Music in the Round was strongly felt, expressed in different ways as enthusiasm for the future or a desire for continuity with the past.

Conclusions: 'fans' or 'consumers' in the concert hall?

The Music in the Round audience emerge from this study as a group of discerning and committed listeners – representative of classical music audiences in their level of musical interest and education, though perhaps more unusual in their loyalty to a specific event and its associated legacy of a particular group of performers. Their musical enjoyment is shown to be closely connected with the sense of community established over the years with fellow listeners and regular performers. These friendships have been disrupted by the retirement of the host quartet, and have prompted a re-evaluation of the audience's relationship with the performers and the festival, manifest as an eagerness to contribute to the continued success of Music in the Round by supporting and getting to know the new resident ensemble.

There are elements of both fan and consumer behaviour in the audience's developing attitudes to the festival, but neither characterisation quite captures the complexity of the individual and collective listening experiences reported by audience members. As 'fans', the audience members show a thirst for insider information about the new performers, and are challenged by the need to learn the names, characteristics and style of a larger group of players, while still coming to terms with the retirement of their predecessors. Loyalty to Music in the Round has generated a widespread willingness to engage with the new players, and an open-mindedness to the opportunities for more diverse programming and repertoire. The longevity of the audience's relationship with the festival and its Artistic Director is clearly a powerful force in ensuring continued commitment amongst the audience, overcoming the

reluctance to change which would otherwise be expected of 'consumers' dealing with a significant shift in expectations and experience.

Interpreting the experience of the Music in the Round audience is complicated by the need to understand them both as individual listeners, with distinctive preferences, habits and perspectives, and as a collective body or community of concert-goers, affected by one another's presence and by their shared history of association with the festival. The loyalty of the audience has been tested by the retirement of the established string quartet, and by the associated changes this has brought to programming and repertoire. In negotiating new listening relationships and a sense of developing friendship with the newly appointed ensemble, the Music in the Round audience appear to be seeking not so much to replicate the previous phase of the festival's history, but rather to re-adjust their expectations and priorities, prompted by the youth of the new players to acknowledge their own aging and development. This is a poignant reminder to arts organisations of the need to nurture established audiences as well as attracting new ones, since the longevity of these listeners' relationships with Music in the Round is a powerful factor in their continued support and acceptance of change.

These findings are generalisable beyond Music in the Round in that they reveal the value of understanding audience experience, and illustrate the importance of place, performers and fellow audience members as factors in the enjoyment of concert-going and the likelihood of repeat attendance. A sense of belonging and community has been shown to be vital in maintaining audience loyalty and longevity, both through interactions with like-minded listeners, and through a desire to establish a sense of friendship and familiarity with the performers. While musical motivations and interest remain at the heart of concert attendance, there is undoubtedly a need for further investigation of the social aspects of collective listening, which have previously been neglected, particularly in relation to classical music. Future studies could help to identify the critical factors in audience loyalty and, specifically, how quickly these can be established within a series of stand-alone concerts, rather than the festival experience studied here. To be truly informative for musicologists and other researchers, such research needs to be undertaken with a focus on individual and collective audience experience, rather than as an investigation of market forces and consumer behaviour. Investigating live listening as a central but under-researched

component of musical experience could have a valuable role to play in securing the commitment of classical music audiences for the future.

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