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Arts and the Market



**Understanding the liminality of individual giving to the arts**

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# Understanding the liminality of individual giving to the arts

## 1. Introduction: individual giving as part of audience membership

Membership and individual giving schemes are a commonplace feature of charities and arts organisations in the UK and worldwide, and have a strong place in raising funds, securing loyalty amongst donors, and promoting the values and ideals of the organisation. In the performing arts, membership schemes offer one form of resilience in a climate where public funding is declining, as acknowledged by Arts Council England in their recent launch of training programmes intended to increase charitable giving to arts organisations **through legacies and corporate sponsorship** (see also Woodley et al., 2018). Research into membership and donation schemes therefore has both urgency and impact, since by understanding the experiences of members, organisations can gain greater insight into the qualities that attract audiences and promote individual giving.

Audience research is a fast-growing sub-discipline of arts management, sociology and cultural studies, as well as in the scholarship of individual art forms; within this diverse field, our study is an interdisciplinary collaboration between music psychologists and a cultural sociologist, working in music and management schools respectively. Our case study of the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group (BCMG) 'Sound Investment' individual giving scheme emerged from the pilot phase of a larger, ongoing research project, investigating audiences for the contemporary arts in four UK cities and across multiple artforms (*ref to be added after review*). Our close focus on individual donors to a contemporary music organisation highlights distinctive features of that particular scheme, but also offers insights on how audience members can become aligned with and committed to the organisations they support, through the access and acknowledgement afforded by their fundraising contributions to a membership or similar scheme.

Our analysis took place in two phases, initially undertaken by Authors 1 and 3 as part of the broader investigation of contemporary arts audiences' experience, and secondly in collaboration with Author 2, as an exploration of how the framework of 'liminality', sometimes used in management literature to describe the roles of freelance staff (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003), could provide a new way to understand and promote individual giving to arts organisations. **By interpreting the experiences of BCMG Sound Investors as 'liminal', we show how individual donors are positioned at the threshold of arts organisations, brought into the fold far more than regular audience members, and yet never fully 'insiders' in the organisation, since their interactions are still highly managed by the organisation staff (Tempest and Starkey, 2014).**

In this article, we present our analysis in its two chronological stages, first reviewing the existing literature on membership and donation schemes, then reporting our methods and findings from the BCMG case study, before introducing **a further stage of analysis which tests the idea of liminality as a framework for understanding and retaining donors to the**

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2 **organisation.** We propose a new positioning of individual donors in a 'liminal' role: attached  
3 on one side to the organisation they are supporting, and on the other to the wider audience  
4 of which they remain a member. Our in-depth interview data illustrates the ways in which  
5 BCMG Sound Investors (SIs) navigate their liminal roles, and the extent to which the  
6 motivations and hopes that bring them to membership are fulfilled in their experiences of  
7 the scheme. We therefore demonstrate the value for audience research in gathering  
8 detailed, reflective accounts of audience and donor experiences, and the application of  
9 these findings for arts organisations in the future.  
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## 16 **2. Literature review: membership, crowdfunding and individual giving**

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18 The following review of literature on membership schemes critiques the traditionally  
19 transactional nature of their structures and the language used to describe them: members  
20 are portrayed as consumers who contribute money in return for privileges, access and  
21 recognition, and these benefits cease if the financial contribution is withdrawn. Within arts  
22 organisations, members are typically positioned in the role of enhanced audience members,  
23 who are encouraged to attend more often and more reliably than the average ticket booker,  
24 becoming part of a membership community that might act as an enjoyable social network  
25 for the members and a source of advocacy for the organisation. Through our literature  
26 review, we identify some key research questions that are addressed in the case study that  
27 follows: a) what are the social and cultural drivers to individual giving to an arts  
28 organisation?; and b) to what extent do members and donors experience a changed  
29 relationship with the organisation they support?  
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### 38 *2.1 Motivations and benefits*

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40 Fundraising membership schemes in arts organisations are typically intended to raise  
41 income, increase audience attendance, and promote the ethos and activities of the  
42 organisation. Participation in such schemes is voluntary, but members are offered a series of  
43 exclusive benefits in return for their contribution. Many of these are tangible and can  
44 include a reduction in ticket prices, priority booking, discounts at cafes and shops, and  
45 similar privileges at other arts venues. These benefits promote a transactional relationship  
46 with the organisation and appeal to members who are seeking value for money as a reward  
47 for frequent attendance (Maitland, 2011). However, a philanthropic attitude is another  
48 driver to subscribe, and benefits which align donors more closely and exclusively with the  
49 values and activities of the organisation appeal to this motivation: invitations to private  
50 events such as rehearsals or exhibition openings, organised cultural outings, social  
51 networking events and access to news and insight relating to the organisation (Sargeant and  
52 Jay, 2014). These latter experiences can also generate intangible benefits, including meeting  
53 like-minded people, establishing friendly relationships with organisation staff, and feeling a  
54 sense of contributing to a thriving local cultural scene (Bussell and Forbes, 2006).  
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2 Research on fundraising membership schemes has most often been undertaken with a view  
3 to maximising a scheme's fundraising capacity, and has therefore focused on identifying the  
4 characteristics and motivations of individuals that join, and the benefits most attractive to  
5 them (Slater, 2004). However, this research has paid relatively little attention to the  
6 experiences of members and their sense of identity in relation to the organisations they  
7 support. Questions therefore remain about how membership might change the arts  
8 consumption experience in ways that reveal broader insights on audience engagement. Our  
9 research aims to make a contribution by exploring members' experiences of one such  
10 scheme for audiences of contemporary music, focusing on how their experiences as  
11 audience members are changed by their status as individual donors and by the activities  
12 beyond the public performance in which they participate as a result.  
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## 21 *2.2 Affiliation and belonging*

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23 Prior research has investigated how the tangible benefits of membership schemes generate  
24 intangible benefits, for example how access to news and insight relating to the organisation  
25 promotes members' sense of commitment and belonging (Glynn, Bhattacharya and Rao,  
26 1996). Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn (1995) suggest that art museums' membership schemes  
27 'draw consumers inside', a process by which individuals who are external to an organisation  
28 come to share a 'oneness with or belongingness to an organisation' (p. 46). Affiliation  
29 characteristics play a role in members' sense of identification: the length of time a person  
30 has been a member, how publicly their donation is recognised by the organisation, and the  
31 number of similar organisations an individual patronises. By contrast, members are most  
32 likely to lapse their membership when they lack a strong sense of identification with the  
33 organisation, for example, because they have received their membership as a gift  
34 (Bhattacharya, 1998). The extent to which tangible benefits cause members to identify with  
35 an organisation are therefore dependent on the close fit in values, and members'  
36 receptiveness to becoming affiliated emotionally and personally, as well as financially.  
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## 46 *2.3 Membership and crowdfunding*

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48 In their appeal to individual motivations for giving, membership schemes share many  
49 characteristics with crowdfunding, which has expanded in recent decades as another  
50 mechanism for donating to support the cultural industries, as well as other social  
51 enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures. Case studies of online crowdfunding platforms  
52 including Kickstarter and IndieGoGo have shown that while schemes often offer financial  
53 returns or tangible rewards to investors, donors are also motivated by the visible  
54 opportunity 'to interact with and contribute to a like-minded group of people' (Gerber and  
55 Hui, 2013: 17). In a study by Artsupport Australia, donors expressed a desire to support  
56 creative people in careers that were recognised to be financially precarious, giving the 'lucky  
57 break' to an artist who could be trusted to deliver a high quality product but who was not  
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2 yet commercially successful (Klaebe and Laycock, 2012). Characterising this as ‘prosocial  
3 behaviour’, Boeuf, Darveau and Legoux (2014) report that crowdfunders of theatre projects  
4 are least motivated by material rewards, preferring that ‘crowdfunding in the performing  
5 arts can be seen as part of the gift economy in a public environment where the actors on  
6 both sides are eager to demonstrate the disinterested nature of their gesture’ (p. 35). More  
7 highly valued was ‘being connected to the cultural production of the artwork’ (Klaebe and  
8 Laycock, 2012: 6), through regular updates from artists and public acknowledgement of  
9 financial support.  
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14 Crowdfunding can differ from membership schemes in offering a direct connection with the  
15 creative producers themselves, unmediated by an arts organisation or venue. On some  
16 online platforms, projects are funded only if they reach their specified target, so offering  
17 direct affirmation and endorsement to the artists who are successful and serving as a public  
18 declaration of group tastes and patterns of consumption (Kuppuswamy and Bayus, 2018).  
19 This could be viewed as the democratisation of culture, taking the decision-making out of  
20 the hands of publicly-funded organisations and encouraging a sense of ownership and  
21 belonging through small levels of donation. Behr, Brennan and Cloonan (2016) suggest that  
22 membership schemes are also an opportunity for audiences and donors to sidestep or  
23 subvert arts policy decisions, making their own judgements about what is valuable and  
24 worth supporting, and prioritising intrinsic over instrumental benefits of live music  
25 attendance. However, Brabham (2017) cautions against celebrating this change  
26 prematurely, seeing the risks in a discourse that values individual investment over  
27 government funding, since ‘the very language crowdfunding proponents use may well fuel  
28 politicians hoping to unravel public arts funding’ (p. 983).  
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36 As our case study will demonstrate, a hybrid model of crowdfunding for specific projects  
37 within an existing organisational structure addresses some of the risks of changing funding  
38 sources, cultivating new models of membership by harnessing the direct donor-artist  
39 connections of crowdfunding but mediating this through organisational relationships. In  
40 what might be considered as ‘curated crowdfunding’, targeted fundraising for new  
41 artworks, venue developments or learning and participation projects can have the qualities  
42 of membership in bringing donors closer to an organisation, while emphasising even more  
43 clearly the purpose of donations in a way that potentially reduces the desire for tangible  
44 rewards.  
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#### 52 *2.4 Critiquing membership schemes*

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54 Membership schemes are generally presented in the literature as being overwhelmingly  
55 positive for organisations and audiences, but this uncritical approach is open to question.  
56 While research with non-members is understandably limited, there is some evidence of  
57 distrust or exclusion in relation to membership schemes to be found in studies of audience  
58 loyalty to specific organisations. In a study with a UK orchestra, for example, both  
59 performers and audience members expressed some ambivalence to the sponsorship of  
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2 individual players through the chair endowment scheme, noting the risks of creating cliques  
3 or a 'celebrity culture', though acknowledging the benefits of breaking down audience-  
4 performer barriers when the scheme worked successfully (Pitts, Dobson, Gee and Spencer,  
5 2013). With donor retention an acknowledged problem across the charitable sector  
6 (Sargeant and Woodliffe, 2007), formulating a membership scheme that appeals to new and  
7 continuing donors is a challenge for organisations.  
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11 Membership schemes can become a burden if the benefits to members begin to outweigh  
12 the gain for the organisation: the ballet company Sadler's Wells recently relaunched their  
13 membership scheme with an explicitly philanthropic agenda, emphasising charitable giving  
14 as the key motivator (whilst retaining early booking), and so ending a cycle of losing ticket  
15 income to unaffordable discounts and offers (Cheswright Cater, 2018). Appealing to donors'  
16 intrinsic motivations, such as the desire to support a prestigious arts provider, over the  
17 extrinsic benefits of discounts and privileges, has clear cost advantages for organisations,  
18 and has also been shown to increase satisfaction after giving and therefore strengthen the  
19 likelihood of continuing to donate. Put the other way around, 'those donors who experience  
20 a decrease in intrinsic motivation may be less likely to donate again in the future unless  
21 comparable extrinsic rewards and benefits are offered, regardless of their original  
22 motivation for donating' (Wiggins Johnson and Ellis, 2011: 6). Membership schemes bring  
23 organisational risks, both financial and reputational, in the way they position their members  
24 in relation to other audience members and existing patterns of ticket purchasing behaviour.  
25 Our case study will explore the costs as well as benefits of running and belonging to  
26 membership and donation schemes, and the ways in which their existence highlights  
27 tensions in the dual role of arts organisations as fundraisers and cultural providers.  
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### 37 **3. Research case study: introducing Sound Investment**

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39 The case study presented here focuses on Birmingham Contemporary Music Group<sup>1</sup>  
40 (BCMG), a new music ensemble based in Birmingham, a large regional city in the UK.  
41 Founded in 1987 by musicians from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra who  
42 wanted to commission and celebrate new music, BCMG actively champions established and  
43 emerging composers, and has commissioned over 175 pieces to date. Many of the works  
44 have been commissioned through the Sound Investment (SI) scheme, which invites donors  
45 to contribute directly to the cost of commissioning a new piece of music. Unlike many other  
46 schemes run by ensembles and orchestras, Sound Investment invites donors to choose a  
47 particular piece to support, purchasing 'Sound Units' for £150 each.<sup>2</sup> In return, they receive  
48 regular updates on the progress of the piece, are invited to attend its rehearsals and  
49 premiere, and are named as a contributor in the score. At the time of our interviews in  
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57 <sup>1</sup> BCMG is a publicly-funded arts organisation, receiving around half its annual income from Arts Council  
58 England as a National Portfolio Organisation.

59 <sup>2</sup> The Sound Investment scheme has been redesigned since our research was carried out: we address the  
60 reasons for this and its possible ramifications for liminality and audience experience in our conclusions, but the  
SI details described here are those in place during data collection.

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2 2016, over 400 donors had contributed more than £250,000 to the commissioning of over  
3 90 new works.  
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6 Sound Investment was established in 1991, in a financial and political climate in which  
7 privatisation and share investments were prominent: its launch concert generated the  
8 headline 'Never mind British Telecom, you can now sink your cash in new music' (Grimley,  
9 1991). The scheme was explained in the press as an opportunity for individuals, schools and  
10 companies to 'buy shares' in new music, though there was careful emphasis on the fact that  
11 no financial return on investment could be expected, with the application form featuring  
12 legalistic terminology to clarify that SIs did not own any copyright to the works they  
13 supported. The pun on 'sound investment' and the related headlines put the financial  
14 element of the scheme to the fore, but also hinted at the solidity and forward-thinking of  
15 spending money wisely, invoking a moral imperative to support the arts. The scheme has  
16 lasted beyond the share-buying milieu of the 1990s and now blends easily with the climate  
17 of crowdfunding, appealing to the sense of supporting developing artists within a trusted  
18 environment.  
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25 BCMG introduce the Sound Investment scheme on their website with an invitation: 'Have  
26 you ever wanted to support a composer writing their next masterpiece?' Sound Investors,  
27 the invitation from BCMG continues, 'follow the journey of a new work, supporting  
28 composers at all stages in their careers': this invitation offers not only an enhanced  
29 audience experience, but also a close alignment to the stated aims of the organisation,  
30 namely contributing to the future of new music. The benefits on offer promote 'insiderness',  
31 through their access to rehearsal and social spaces that are usually off-limits to audience  
32 members, and the provision of updates and insight on the sponsored pieces, which is  
33 knowledge not usually made publically available. SIs become familiar with BCMG musicians  
34 and staff, and experience the performance venue as a rehearsal space, so gaining a different  
35 physical positioning in the organisation. By hearing 'their' music as it is being rehearsed,  
36 they are given permission to watch musicians in the early, messy stages of the creative  
37 process, where they may be more exposed or liable to make a mistake.  
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44 Sound Investment is not marketed by BCMG as a membership scheme, but has notable  
45 similarities in its tangible benefits of organised events and a regular newsletter, and in the  
46 sense of affiliation to the organisation that is experienced by donors. At the same time, the  
47 scheme shares some characteristics of crowd-funding, since donors are encouraged to  
48 contribute directly towards a specific activity, and can opt in and out rather than  
49 maintaining a long-term commitment - though many contributors choose to sustain their  
50 giving over many years. Our SI participants' experiences (see Section 4) show how they  
51 identify most strongly with the membership-like elements of the scheme, most notably the  
52 tailored, experiential engagement with BCMG and its activities. The organisation also  
53 benefits from the sustained involvement of its regular contributors, and indeed has  
54 encouraged donor loyalty through its redesigning of the scheme (see Section 6) to include  
55 opportunities for regular, monthly giving. Sound Investment therefore illustrates the blurred  
56 boundaries between different types of individual giving, with factors of commitment (length  
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of time), investment (amount of contribution) and engagement (level of involvement and activity) being variously determined by the organisation, the individual donors, and the purposes that the scheme is intended to serve for them both.

Our interview analysis explores SIs' reported experiences, as they navigate their changed positions within the audience and organisation, and reflect on their motivations to 'invest', and their valuing of the tangible and intangible benefits, including their access to rehearsals and premieres and the proximity this brings to musicians and staff. We consider the temporally bounded nature of these activities, and the longer-term perspective that SIs have on their past and future membership of the scheme. Following this thematic analysis of data, we consider the extent to which these interactions could be considered as a liminal positioning of SIs, and explore applications and limitations of a liminal framework for designing, promoting and belonging to membership and donation schemes. Finally, we reflect on the broader questions of access and inclusion that are prompted by organisations' dependence on the resources of their most loyal audience members.

#### 4. Methods and participants

Our case study interviews were undertaken as part of a larger project on contemporary arts audiences in Birmingham, which used an in-depth, qualitative approach to investigate 56 audience members' routes into live contemporary music attendance (*ref to be added after review*). A subset (n=16) of this larger interview sample were members of BCMG's Sound Investment scheme and are the focus for this analysis of membership and donation experiences. The SI interviewees were all aged over 55 and all but two were fully retired, from jobs including education (5 participants), managerial roles (4 participants), and social care work (3 participants); none had prior professional involvement in the arts or arts management. In these respects they were distinctive amongst the wider sample (n=56), being fairly typical in age and recent work occupation, but less connected to the professional arts world than many highly engaged contemporary arts consumers. Most lived locally to Birmingham, with four having grown up in the city, and were regular attenders of arts events including concerts given by BCMG and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Participants were recruited via arts organisation newsletters (including the SI mailing list), social media, and announcements at events, inviting audience members to email the researchers if they were interested in taking part. All participants who volunteered were invited to interview.<sup>3</sup>

The research approach was qualitative, using a life history approach (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) in interviews averaging one hour in length to elicit stories and experiences that explored participants' current engagement with contemporary arts and the past

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<sup>3</sup> Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of XXX. Participants were assigned an anonymous code during the analysis of the data, used here to distinguish quotes from different respondents (Bh1-56).

1 experiences that had shaped their cultural interests and habits.<sup>4</sup> In relation to the SI  
2 scheme, we asked questions about donors' decisions to 'invest' and their experiences of  
3 attending rehearsals, meeting composers and performers, and being involved in BCMG  
4 priorities and activities. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts was undertaken (by hand  
5 and using NVivo) to identify trends in SIs' decisions and experiences, and later to test the  
6 theory of liminality as a framework for understanding members' organisational relationships  
7 and identities.  
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#### 15 **4. Thematic analysis: motivations and values in the SI experience**

##### 16 *4.1 Integration and socialisation*

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19 In reporting their decisions to participate in the Sound Investment scheme, our interviewees  
20 showed a range of motivations, expressing altruism from the local level to the conceptual;  
21 namely the desire to help finance BCMG's work, to provide opportunities for composers,  
22 and to support the continued creation of new works of contemporary classical music. This  
23 alignment with the values of the organisation was usually balanced by an enthusiasm for the  
24 benefits to themselves, which variously conveyed status, through acknowledgement in the  
25 score and recognition by staff, musicians and/or composers, and opportunity, in the form of  
26 invitations to rehearsals and receptions associated with the performances of 'their' new  
27 piece. Some interviewees wrestled explicitly with the tensions between altruistic and  
28 transactional behaviour, as if needing to justify their choices to themselves or to us as  
29 researchers: "You like to think you do it altruistically, and that's a big element of it, yes you  
30 want to help people, and you want to help produce something in this specialised field that  
31 you're interested in, but that in its turn gives you pleasure" (Bh29). On the one hand,  
32 therefore, their donation is philanthropic and intended to ensure the organisations'  
33 continuing success. On the other hand, as audience members, they are customers and  
34 consumers, and therefore wish to benefit from their donation, whether that is through  
35 enhanced status or simply enjoyment of the work they have helped commission. **For the  
36 participant above, the commitment made in donating to pieces that they would not  
37 necessarily enjoy was depicted as "fun" or a gamble, and that there was "always something  
38 [to] get out of these things" anyway (Bh29).**  
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48 The financial decision to contribute to BCMG was not necessarily an easy one, and while  
49 some interviewees described it as "a relatively small financial commitment" (Bh19), there  
50 were others for whom "in the current economic climate, things are very tough"(Bh20).  
51 Some interviewees reported making a careful assessment of whether they were getting  
52 enough in return for their money and there were examples of this changing over a lifetime:  
53 "I did for a few years, I'm not at the moment, just because I'm trying to sort priorities [and]  
54 finances out" (Bh39). These fluctuating priorities were also dependent on available time,  
55 since full participation in attending rehearsals and performances could involve "a lot of  
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<sup>4</sup> More information on the methods employed in this project can be found at (*link to be added after review*)

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2 travelling to and from Birmingham, staying overnight and so on” (Bh19), all of which would  
3 incur additional expense. Becoming an SI was therefore not a decision taken lightly by  
4 many, and it was important to them that BCMG recognised their contribution through being  
5 warm and welcoming in their communications and events: one SI praised “the  
6 management” for “the interest that they take in us as people” (Bh18), contrasting this with  
7 membership of another arts organisation where “they didn’t seem to be all that interested  
8 in the people who were commissioning pieces, it was very much more [...] like a financial  
9 arrangement” (Bh18). In these examples, a personal connection to the organisation is an  
10 important part of the experience of donating, with participants resistant to being treated as  
11 just a customer.  
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17 Whatever their social experience as a donor, SIs had different interpretations of the extent  
18 to which their investment was vital to the organisation. While some had a strong sense that  
19 “if we don’t invest, [new music] won’t happen” (Bh36), others were “quite happy that I  
20 probably pay for the tea bags” (Bh20). There was appreciation that small donations from  
21 many people added up to “more than the tea bags” (Bh20) and also that cuts to arts funding  
22 meant that BCMG “need the support, they need the money” (Bh23). SIs’ financial  
23 commitment was seen as a social imperative as well as an individual one, making a  
24 difference to sustaining composers’ careers and contributing to cultural life: “you only have  
25 very few really successful composers who actually make a living out of it, so I suppose it’s  
26 that sort of grassroots support more than anything” (Bh37). Here the SIs are acting upon  
27 their heightened awareness of the pressures facing contemporary music organisations and  
28 composers, so taking on a perspective that is closer to that of the BCMG staff than of a less  
29 highly engaged audience member.  
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36 Trust in the organisation also meant that the SIs were open to the possibility that their  
37 commissioned piece of music would not be to their own musical taste: as one SI put it,  
38 “they’re all different: I don’t think there’s any I actually regret, though there are some I  
39 probably don’t like” (Bh32). In some cases, this lack of constraint upon the composers was  
40 an explicit part of wanting to support the scheme, by enabling the avoidance of commercial  
41 ties so that composers “can just do whatever stupid thing they have got in their brain and  
42 see what happens!” (Bh36). Reconciling personal enjoyment with altruistic motivations was  
43 not always easy, however, and one SI referred to the “terrible moment when you sit down  
44 to listen, you think, ‘I’ve paid money for this, I could have paid for a holiday,’ and then you  
45 think to yourself, ‘was this worth it?’” (Bh20). Here again SIs express conflicting motivations  
46 for donating, partly out of the desire to join with and support the organisation, and partly  
47 for their own enjoyment as a customer of the organisation. **The SI activities themselves  
48 helped towards resolving some of this tension, since the repeated engagement with a new  
49 work in rehearsals could cause a change of opinion: “my ears were initially saying ‘no!!’ but  
50 actually it was all right in the end” (Bh20).** SIs therefore acknowledge that they influence the  
51 success of the organisation through their financial contribution, while recognising their  
52 limited influence on the outcome of that investment.  
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#### 4.2 Space, place and time

The attendance at rehearsals offered to SIs was a valuable part of the relationship with BCMG for many of our interviewees: one described how the “privilege” of being able to access rehearsals had led to him feeling “envious of the people who were investing before I could actually afford to do it” (Bh36). For this SI, the pre-performance insight increased the enjoyment of the performance by providing multiple opportunities to hear a new work, and others talked similarly of being “just fascinated to watch the thing coming to life” (Bh31). Their financial investment was therefore bringing them into the position of a more engaged audience member, by offering experiential benefits that enhanced their listening to this newly composed music, which they might otherwise hear only once in a concert. SI membership was seen as an opportunity to have “complete” (Bh36) or “intimate involvement” (Bh31) in the creation of a new piece of music: “to actually, you know, go to the rehearsals, and know that when you heard the music no one else had heard it before either” (Bh05). In addition to this sense of newness, there were fresh insights on the processes of composing and performing, with the first rehearsal giving a chance to “see how far the players already comprehended what the final thing was going to be, and to see how much was done – it was just a fascinating process” (Bh18).

Since the majority of SIs did not have professional or participatory experience of the arts, access as a ‘non-musician’ to the backstage processes of creating new work was highly valued. Many spoke of the fascination of hearing the performers interpret the music together, and finding out where the difficulties lay in the piece, in ways that would be resolved and invisible by the time of the first performance: “when you see musicians play, it’s so easy, so, it’s a little bit soothing to see ‘oh, I see: they do have to work at this stuff a bit’, they don’t just pick up the instrument, read the music and they’re off; there’s a bit of thinking and development and teasing out the problems involved in it” (Bh31). The access to rehearsals brought the SIs closer to the musical process than would otherwise be possible, illustrating a transition from being a regular audience member to having what might be termed a musicians’ eye/ear view of the performance. Their experience of the rehearsals was a material and sensory one, closely connected to the feelings of being in the rehearsal space, the visual aspects of seeing the musicians interacting with each other and their instruments, and the enhanced auditory experience of repeated listening to fragments and changes in the music.

Relationships with the people involved in the creation of new music operated at different levels for the SIs, who enjoyed familiarity and connection with the BCMG staff, access and sometimes recognition from the musicians, and a more distant connection with the composers. SIs referred to BCMG administrative staff by name and recalled moments of personal attention, such as the celebration of birthdays and contact made after concerts missed through ill health. Relating to the musicians took the form of coming alongside their activities: inhabiting their rehearsal space, witnessing the usually private interactions of the rehearsal, and sharing coffee breaks in which the players “know they don’t need to be diplomatic in our hearing. They know nothing would be passed on” (Bh18). Connections

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2 with the composers were more fleeting and often “fairly stilted” (Bh32), with the SIs finding  
3 themselves “usually a bit tongue-tied” (Bh23) and the composers varying between “very  
4 approachable [and] a bit reserved” (Bh23). Access to composers was less individual, often  
5 involving group discussions at rehearsals, or pre-concert talks “which anyone can go to,  
6 that’s not exclusive to Sound Investors” (Bh05). These varying depths of relationship with  
7 the staff, performers and composers show the SIs’ awareness of the boundaries of their  
8 roles as investors: they expect their financial contribution and organisational loyalty to be  
9 recognised by the staff, and their interest in the music to be acknowledged by the  
10 performers, but are accepting of their greater distance from the composers.  
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15 Socialising with other SIs was not cited as a motivation to join the scheme, but had emerged  
16 as a side benefit through long-term participation for some: “there are the incidental  
17 pleasures of, of course, sharing with other people, which can be quite big, but I don’t think  
18 they’re the starting point for me. I think the top thing is the music” (Bh29). Several  
19 respondents rejected some of the words commonly used in talking about connections  
20 between audience members: “the word ‘friend’ gets used an awful lot [...] when it doesn’t  
21 really mean that at all. It means yes, quite a warm acquaintance, which is a bit different”  
22 (Bh21) and “I don’t mean a family, because I’ve got a family” (Bh20). Nonetheless, being  
23 among “folks of like or like-ish minds” (Bh21) was an unanticipated pleasure of being an SI,  
24 though, like the music supported by the scheme, recognised to be an acquired taste: “the  
25 people you bring as guests don’t actually perceive it as being the same treat as I do” (Bh20).  
26 The assertion of a group SI identity is therefore expressed in contrast to other audience  
27 members, rather than as a strong social bond, and is dependent on the time-bound  
28 experiences of rehearsals and premieres.  
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36 For the SIs who spoke of valuing the social element of their participation in the scheme, this  
37 was strongly connected with their musical engagement, in that assumed shared values  
38 created a conducive atmosphere for listening and being open to the challenge of unfamiliar  
39 new music. Some SIs contrasted the experience of hearing new music in a “mainstream”  
40 concert, where it might be “liked by hardly anybody in this hall” (Bh29), with the spirit of  
41 “generosity” shown by the players and audiences of BCMG concerts: “you get the  
42 impression very often in a mainstream concert that the minute anything cacophonous  
43 comes on, most of the audience are sitting there gritting their teeth thinking ‘my god,  
44 when’s this gonna finish?’ [...] But here you’re in a sympathetic audience. And that makes a  
45 difference” (Bh29). Through their collective financial contributions, the SIs were therefore  
46 creating an ideal audience of which they could be a member: one which was well-prepared  
47 for a performance, through access to rehearsals and opportunities for repeated hearings of  
48 a new piece, and in tune with the values of the organisation and its commitment to  
49 supporting contemporary music. As acknowledged by the SIs, these values are already  
50 prominent amongst BCMG audiences more widely, and the sense of ‘otherness’ from the  
51 rest of the audience is therefore not as strong as it might be in audiences for more  
52 mainstream classical music, where greater varieties of motivation and experience will be  
53 evident. Nonetheless, having aligned themselves more closely with the ethos and values of  
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2 the organisation through their space- and time-limited interactions as SIs, they also seek a  
3 way back to blending in with the audience, secure in their enhanced knowledge but still  
4 desiring to be part of an audience community.  
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## 9 **5. Discussion: liminality as a new framework for understanding individual giving**

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11 Having considered the motivations and experiences of SIs that were foregrounded in our  
12 thematic analysis, we observed the ways in which audiences were brought closer into the  
13 organisation through their membership, in which they were afforded opportunities and  
14 access usually reserved for BCMG staff and players. Their position on the threshold of the  
15 organisation, somewhat insiders and somewhat outsiders, displayed a close fit to theories of  
16 liminality, which offer a new way to consider the roles and status of individual donors within  
17 arts audiences.  
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22 Derived from 'limen', the Latin word for threshold, 'liminal' was first used by French  
23 anthropologist Van Gennep in *Les rites de passage* (1909) to describe the period of  
24 transformation when participants entered new life stages (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003).  
25 Van Gennep identified three rites of passage: **separation** from social environment and way  
26 of life, **transition**, and **incorporation** into a new group. In the middle transitional phase,  
27 individuals experience liminality, meaning that they sit on the threshold of the old and new  
28 social group, not fully belonging to either. Turner's work (1969, 1982) in social anthropology  
29 used liminality to describe 'the state and process which is betwixt-and-between the normal,  
30 day-to-day cultural and social states' (1969: 33), a sort of social limbo in which individuals  
31 were 'temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure' (Turner, 1982: 27).  
32 Both authors demonstrate how these liminal experiences are temporary, happening in  
33 delineated times, spaces and places.  
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40 Liminality has been used in management scholarship to designate those situations in which  
41 individuals and groups are positioned at the threshold of organisations, so that they are  
42 neither insiders (e.g. full-time permanent staff members) or complete outsiders (Tempest  
43 and Starkey, 2014). Casual staff, consultants and freelance workers all occupy a 'betwixt and  
44 between' role, neither inside nor outside organisational norms and cultures, but rather in a  
45 liminal space that is 'experienced differently by consultants than by regular employees'  
46 (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003: 273). We suggest that SIs could similarly be positioned as  
47 liminal actors within BCMG, since their access to private knowledge and spaces and their  
48 financial contribution places them further within the organisation than regular audience  
49 members, and yet these interactions are temporary and highly managed, therefore  
50 maintaining SIs' position as audience members and therefore 'outside' the organisation.

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55 Turner (1974) further distinguishes the term 'liminoid' as a type of liminal state experienced  
56 in leisure rather than work contexts, therefore entered freely and without a sense of  
57 permanence and responsibility (Roberts et al., 2015). The SIs' position captures the  
58 positivity of this definition, since they enter willingly into a liminal relationship rather than  
59 being held at the margins of the organisation as a deficit position: however, in their addition  
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2 of 'work' and responsibility to their audience membership they experience a liminal role  
3 that is close to that of a consultant or 'cultural intermediary' (Maguire and Matthews, 2012)  
4 and so we retain Turner's original term in our analysis.  
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11 Since liminal roles (such as consultants and freelancers) are commonplace in the arts world,  
12 organisations might be assumed to be adept at communicating their values and practices to  
13 the liminal associates who routinely contribute to the work of the organisation: however,  
14 research on the informal networks of cultural intermediaries (Perry, Smith & Warren, 2015)  
15 and the social inequalities of internships and volunteering in the arts (Taylor & O'Brien,  
16 2017) shows that this is a problematic area. Organisations' understanding of their members'  
17 and donors' roles as liminals are likely to be even less developed, and the impact of these  
18 relationships not fully articulated or understood. Our case study illustrates this, not only in  
19 the ways in which SIs appear to be navigating their own ways through the social connections  
20 offered to them, but in their comparisons with other schemes where the liminal role was  
21 less prominent or developed.  
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27 Table 1 maps our analysis of the SI scheme to the key elements of liminality, showing how  
28 SIs experience a time-bound transition between their status as supporters willing to donate  
29 money altruistically to the continuation of new music, and their position as audience  
30 members who seek to find meaning and enjoyment in the commissioned work that results.  
31 Membership brings them closer to the organisation, while also delineating the boundaries  
32 of that relationship; it brings them into connection with the musicians, composers and staff,  
33 while also confirming their 'otherness' as donors and audience members.  
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45 Liminal identity is most acutely felt in the delineated times at which SIs are given access to  
46 restricted spaces, have contact with BCMG staff and musicians, and are able to hear the  
47 commissioned works being rehearsed. In these moments, SIs experience a sense of  
48 community around the common aim of supporting new music, but remain aware of the  
49 boundaries of their integration into the organisation. For those SIs who have currently or  
50 previously paused their donations, liminality is also experienced as a transitory state,  
51 outside which they revert to membership of the 'regular' audience, with greater awareness  
52 of the 'backstage' processes of the organisation while no longer having an active part in  
53 them.  
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58 The Sound Investment case study illustrates the perceived benefits and boundaries of being  
59 in a liminal relationship with an arts organisation: the affiliation and access that comes with  
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1 membership or donation is tempered by the knowledge that this relationship has distinct  
2 limits, and is dependent on continued investment and active participation. The resulting  
3 readjustment of the relationship to the original site of interaction - here the regular  
4 audience - means that liminals are positioned 'betwixt and between' their former and future  
5 selves as audience members (Turner, 1969). For SIs who have remained in the scheme,  
6 their liminality becomes perpetual rather than transitional (Ybema, Beech & Ellis, 2011),  
7 necessitating a continual appraisal of conflicting loyalties and obligations by constantly  
8 switching from one identity to the other in their relational (self-other) talk, oscillating  
9 between 'in' and 'out', 'same' and 'other', and between an inclusive and exclusive 'us'.  
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## 18 **6. Conclusions and implications**

19 The evidence from our BCMG case study offers a framework for understanding other  
20 membership, 'curated crowdfunding' and donation schemes as creating liminal relationships  
21 for audience members: connecting them more strongly with the organisation through its  
22 staff and performers, and enhancing their experience of performance through a heightened  
23 awareness of the creative process underpinning the public presentation. The SIs' liminal  
24 positioning was strongly dependent on their access to rehearsals, where the materiality of  
25 the experience was key: they heard different musical and social interactions from those that  
26 the regular audience would witness, and so became 'enhanced audience members', taking  
27 their place amongst the regular, ticket-purchasing listeners, but with an additional insight  
28 that deepened their engagement in the final performance.  
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34 The activities offered to SIs, notably behind the scenes access to artists and the creative  
35 process, are not radically different to many membership schemes in the funded arts sector;  
36 arts organisations are highly aware that these activities are valued by their members, but  
37 are unlikely to have conceptualised them as 'liminal' experiences. Understanding that these  
38 activities can foster a sense of liminal identity, with one foot in the organisation and one  
39 foot remaining in the audience, can help organisations to promote and prioritise those  
40 membership activities which most help to foster that sense of liminality, in order to attract  
41 and retain members. Greater awareness of the changed sense of audience identity that  
42 comes with this experience of liminality may also help organisations to take more care in  
43 handling moments where boundaries are re-established, such as when a donor decides to  
44 discontinue their giving. On the other hand, through our exploration of the different  
45 experiences of a number of SIs, it is evident that not all donors seek liminal experiences, and  
46 therefore arts organisations may wish to think about the offer they are making to  
47 participants who have no desire to attend rehearsals, see behind the scenes, or develop  
48 personal relationships with those making arts events happen.  
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56 With policy and research placing increasing emphasis on promoting access and diversity,  
57 arts organisations could be criticised for making this liminal role available only to those who  
58 can afford to pay for the privilege (Jancovich, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2017). However,  
59 understanding the nature of the role as we have done through our case study helps to  
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1 highlight the similarity with other perspectives: the SIs in this instance gained a ‘musicians’-  
2 eye/ear view’ which is also the outcome of many learning and participation projects run by  
3 arts organisations, and which mirrors that of the amateur and professional arts practitioners  
4 who are highly represented in audiences for contemporary arts (Pitts, 2013). Membership  
5 schemes are typically understood as securing audience loyalty and affiliation, but this closer  
6 investigation of motivations and experiences for SIs as crowdfunders has also revealed the  
7 ways in which donors’ perspectives as audience members are changed by the access and  
8 insight they gain, in ways that could be replicated more widely as part of audience  
9 development strategies. For the SIs, the physicality of being in the rehearsal room with the  
10 musicians was key to their liminal experience, but some of this insight could be made  
11 available to other current and potential audience members through digital streaming or  
12 video capture of moments in the rehearsals, without diminishing the value of the physical  
13 access and proximity experienced by SIs. Similarly, the value placed on facilitated  
14 conversation with other audience members has been highlighted in other research (Conner,  
15 2013; Pitts & Gross, 2017), and the SI experience shows how extending this to include  
16 organisation staff and performers has the potential to deepen audience engagement.

25 Since our case study data was collected in 2016, the Sound Investment scheme has been  
26 expanded with some changes that could affect the liminal experiences of its participants.<sup>5</sup>  
27 Much of the language is unchanged, so the invitation to ‘follow the journey of a new work’  
28 remains, and the experiences of our SI interviewees are still available at the same rate of  
29 monthly contributions of £15 for at least ten months. In addition, the option of a one-off  
30 ‘Note Maker’ donation of £20 has been introduced, with the benefits of updates on the  
31 progress of the work and an invitation to a reception at the premiere. At this lower level of  
32 investment, the liminal elements of integration and temporal involvement are prioritised  
33 over the spatial and proximal access to performers and staff, and the organisational  
34 relationships and musical insights that result from attendance at rehearsals. Conversely,  
35 with the newly introduced higher contribution rate of £500 to be a ‘Commissioner’, the  
36 integration and access on offer are increased: donors are promised ‘special opportunities to  
37 meet the players and/or composer and an invitation to a BCMG VIP event.’ BCMG’s  
38 Executive Director explained the multiple reasons for the changes: wanting to offer a lower  
39 price point at which more people could get involved in the scheme, providing the flexibility  
40 for some individuals to make a higher donation, and retaining the Sound Investment model  
41 in order “not to annoy or frustrate existing loyal donors” (Seb Huckle, personal  
42 communication, December 2018).

51 The thinking behind the redesigned scheme shows how the existing SIs are valued by the  
52 organisation, but also how their needs must be reconciled with a strategy for increasing  
53 both the number of investors and the financial worth of their contributions, in order to  
54 provide a “gateway to philanthropy” for different life stages and circumstances (Huckle,  
55 ibid). **That being said, given the age profile of the participants and the typical scheduling of**

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<sup>5</sup> See current details of the scheme at <https://www.bcmg.org.uk/sound-investment>

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2 rehearsals during the working week, it is doubtful whether such a scheme would be so  
3 accessible or valuable to younger participants. Once the new scheme has been in operation  
4 for a few years, there will be interesting research to be done around whether the Note  
5 Makers feel 'invested' in the music they have sponsored, and whether the Sound Investors  
6 have experienced a change in their relationships with the organisation, and the framework  
7 of liminality could help to shape that analysis.  
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11 As changes to the BCMG fundraising scheme and others like it become more urgent in  
12 response to declining arts funding, the SIs' experiences illustrate the power of making visible  
13 the financial challenges facing the contemporary arts world. Our case study reveals how  
14 their investment has been motivated in part by an awareness of those financial challenges,  
15 and their knowledge of the arts sector and its operation is increased in turn by their  
16 investment. While some audience members will quite reasonably be seeking pure  
17 entertainment and enjoyment from their arts attendance, many of them – perhaps  
18 especially in the contemporary arts – are culturally- and socially-engaged arts attenders.  
19 Blurring the boundaries between arts producers and consumers by revealing more of the  
20 creative and organisational processes could increase the proportion of audience members  
21 who identify as liminals, with potential benefits to both parties. A more engaged audience,  
22 made aware of the intentions of the organisation and the perspectives of the art-makers  
23 within it, is likely to become a more loyal audience, aligned with the values of the  
24 organisation and prepared to support them through attendance and advocacy.  
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Liminal elements in existing literature <sup>1</sup>	<i>Sound Investment</i> liminal elements	Analysis
1. <i>Integration and socialisation processes: People</i>	SIs are distinguished from 'regular' audience members in communications from BCMG. Language, personal deixis; 'Have <i>you</i> ever wanted to support a composer writing their next masterpiece?'	Implicitly sets up boundaries between members (SIs) and non-members. Denotes insiders and outsiders; boundary setting between 'you'/members and (implicitly) 'they'/non-members.
2. <i>Integration and socialisation processes: Communitas</i>	SIs receive updates on the progress of their commissioned work through newsletters and personal correspondence.	Acknowledges a common sense of purpose among SIs, players and staff, towards completion and premiere of new piece.
3. <i>Liminal places and spaces</i>	SIs are invited to attend music rehearsals; while there, they are allowed to come and go as they like e.g. helping themselves to tea and coffee.	Private conversations between SIs and players/staff suspend usual hierarchies. Temporary access to restricted artistic and organisational spaces.
4. <i>Liminal rites and communitas situations</i>	SIs are invited to a reception at the premiere and thanked personally in the score.	SIs join players, staff and composers to celebrate their achievement in premiering a new piece, with public acknowledgement of their contribution to the organisation.
5. <i>Involvement over time</i>	'Follow the journey of a new work, supporting composers at all stages in their careers.'	SIs brought into temporal journey of artistic creation, and invited to support composers' careers and development.

**Table 1. The liminal elements of the Sound Investment scheme**

<sup>1</sup> Guimaraes-Costa and Pina e Cunha, 2013; Ryan, 2019; Bhattacharya et al, 1995; Glynn et al, 1996.