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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

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

2. Literature review: membership, crowdfunding and individual giving

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money in return for privileges, access and recognition, and these benefits cease if the financial contribution is withdrawn.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

2.1 Motivations and benefits

Fundraising membership schemes in arts organisations are typically intended to raise income, increase audience attendance, and promote the ethos and activities of the organisation. Participation in such schemes is voluntary, but members are offered a series of exclusive benefits in return for their contribution. Many of these are tangible and can include a reduction in ticket prices, priority booking, discounts at cafes and shops, and similar privileges at other arts venues. These benefits promote a transactional relationship with the organisation and appeal to members who are seeking value for money as a reward for frequent attendance (Maitland, 2011). However, a philanthropic attitude is another driver to subscribe, and benefits which align donors more closely and exclusively with the values and activities of the organisation appeal to this motivation: invitations to private events such as rehearsals or exhibition openings, organised cultural outings, social networking events and access to news and insight relating to the organisation (Sargeant and Jay, 2014). These latter experiences can also generate intangible benefits, including meeting like-minded people, establishing friendly relationships with organisation staff, and feeling a sense of contributing to a thriving local cultural scene (Bussell and Forbes, 2006).

Research on fundraising membership schemes has most often been undertaken with a view to maximising a scheme's fundraising capacity, and has therefore focused on identifying the characteristics and motivations of individuals that join, and the benefits most attractive to them (Slater, 2004). However, this research has paid relatively little attention to the experiences of members and their sense of identity in relation to the organisations they support. Questions therefore remain about how membership might change the arts consumption experience in ways that reveal broader insights on audience engagement. Our research aims to make a contribution by exploring members' experiences of one such scheme for audiences of contemporary music, focusing on how their experiences as audience members are changed by their status as individual donors and by the activities beyond the public performance in which they participate as a result.

2.2 Affiliation and belonging

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

2.3 Membership and crowdfunding

In their appeal to individual motivations for giving, membership schemes share many characteristics with crowdfunding, which has expanded in recent decades as another mechanism for donating to support the cultural industries, as well as other social enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures. Case studies of online crowdfunding platforms including Kickstarter and IndieGoGo have shown that while schemes often offer financial returns or tangible rewards to investors, donors are also motivated by the visible opportunity 'to interact with and contribute to a like-minded group of people' (Gerber and Hui, 2013: 17). In a study by Artsupport Australia, donors expressed a desire to support creative people in careers that were recognised to be financially precarious, giving the 'lucky break' to an artist who could be trusted to deliver a high quality product but who was not

yet commercially successful (Klaebe and Laycock, 2012). Characterising this as 'prosocial behaviour', Boeuf, Darveau and Legoux (2014) report that crowdfunders of theatre projects are least motivated by material rewards, preferring that 'crowdfunding in the performing arts can be seen as part of the gift economy in a public environment where the actors on both sides are eager to demonstrate the disinterested nature of their gesture' (p. 35). More highly valued was 'being connected to the cultural production of the artwork' (Klaebe and Laycock, 2012: 6), through regular updates from artists and public acknowledgement of financial support.

Crowdfunding can differ from membership schemes in offering a direct connection with the creative producers themselves, unmediated by an arts organisation or venue. On some online platforms, projects are funded only if they reach their specified target, so offering direct affirmation and endorsement to the artists who are successful and serving as a public declaration of group tastes and patterns of consumption (Kuppuswamy and Bayus, 2018). This could be viewed as the democratisation of culture, taking the decision-making out of the hands of publicly-funded organisations and encouraging a sense of ownership and belonging through small levels of donation. Behr, Brennan and Cloonan (2016) suggest that membership schemes are also an opportunity for audiences and donors to sidestep or subvert arts policy decisions, making their own judgements about what is valuable and worth supporting, and prioritising intrinsic over instrumental benefits of live music attendance. However, Brabham (2017) cautions against celebrating this change prematurely, seeing the risks in a discourse that values individual investment over government funding, since 'the very language crowdfunding proponents use may well fuel politicians hoping to unravel public arts funding' (p. 983).

As our case study will demonstrate, a hybrid model of crowdfunding for specific projects within an existing organisational structure addresses some of the risks of changing funding sources, cultivating new models of membership by harnessing the direct donor-artist connections of crowdfunding but mediating this through organisational relationships. In what might be considered as 'curated crowdfunding', targeted fundraising for new artworks, venue developments or learning and participation projects can have the qualities of membership in bringing donors closer to an organisation, while emphasising even more clearly the purpose of donations in a way that potentially reduces the desire for tangible rewards.

2.4 Critiquing membership schemes

Membership schemes are generally presented in the literature as being overwhelmingly positive for organisations and audiences, but this uncritical approach is open to question. While research with non-members is understandably limited, there is some evidence of distrust or exclusion in relation to membership schemes to be found in studies of audience loyalty to specific organisations. In a study with a UK orchestra, for example, both performers and audience members expressed some ambivalence to the sponsorship of

individual players through the chair endowment scheme, noting the risks of creating cliques or a 'celebrity culture', though acknowledging the benefits of breaking down audience-performer barriers when the scheme worked successfully (Pitts, Dobson, Gee and Spencer, 2013). With donor retention an acknowledged problem across the charitable sector (Sargeant and Woodliffe, 2007), formulating a membership scheme that appeals to new and continuing donors is a challenge for organisations.

Membership schemes can become a burden if the benefits to members begin to outweigh the gain for the organisation: the ballet company Sadler's Wells recently relaunched their membership scheme with an explicitly philanthropic agenda, emphasising charitable giving as the key motivator (whilst retaining early booking), and so ending a cycle of losing ticket income to unaffordable discounts and offers (Cheswright Cater, 2018). Appealing to donors' intrinsic motivations, such as the desire to support a prestigious arts provider, over the extrinsic benefits of discounts and privileges, has clear cost advantages for organisations, and has also been shown to increase satisfaction after giving and therefore strengthen the likelihood of continuing to donate. Put the other way around, 'those donors who experience a decrease in intrinsic motivation may be less likely to donate again in the future unless comparable extrinsic rewards and benefits are offered, regardless of their original motivation for donating' (Wiggins Johnson and Ellis, 2011: 6). Membership schemes bring organisational risks, both financial and reputational, in the way they position their members in relation to other audience members and existing patterns of ticket purchasing behaviour. Our case study will explore the costs as well as benefits of running and belonging to membership and donation schemes, and the ways in which their existence highlights tensions in the dual role of arts organisations as fundraisers and cultural providers.

3. Research case study: introducing Sound Investment

The case study presented here focuses on Birmingham Contemporary Music Group[1] (BCMG), a new music ensemble based in Birmingham, a large regional city in the UK. Founded in 1987 by musicians from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra who wanted to commission and celebrate new music, BCMG actively champions established and emerging composers, and has commissioned over 175 pieces to date. Many of the works have been commissioned through the Sound Investment (SI) scheme, which invites donors to contribute directly to the cost of commissioning a new piece of music. Unlike many other schemes run by ensembles and orchestras, Sound Investment invites donors to choose a particular piece to support, purchasing 'Sound Units' for £150 each.[2] ~~In return, they receive regular updates on the progress of the piece, are invited to attend its rehearsals and premiere, and are named as a contributor in the score.~~ At the time of our interviews in

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[1] BCMG is a publicly-funded arts organisation, receiving around half its annual income from Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation.

[2] The Sound Investment scheme has been redesigned since our research was carried out: we address the 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.

2016, over 400 donors had contributed more than £250,000 to the commissioning of over 90 new works.

Sound Investment was established in 1991, in a financial and political climate in which privatisation and share investments were prominent: its launch concert generated the headline 'Never mind British Telecom, you can now sink your cash in new music' (Grimley, 1991). The scheme was explained in the press as an opportunity for individuals, schools and companies to 'buy shares' in new music, though there was careful emphasis on the fact that no financial return on investment could be expected, with the application form featuring legalistic terminology to clarify that SIs did not own any copyright to the works they supported. The pun on 'sound investment' and the related headlines put the financial element of the scheme to the fore, but also hinted at the solidity and forward-thinking of spending money wisely, invoking a moral imperative to support the arts. The scheme has lasted beyond the share-buying milieu of the 1990s and now blends easily with the climate of crowdfunding, appealing to the sense of supporting developing artists within a trusted environment.

BCMG introduce the Sound Investment scheme on their website with an invitation: 'Have you ever wanted to support a composer writing their next masterpiece?' Sound Investors, the invitation from BCMG continues, 'follow the journey of a new work, supporting composers at all stages in their careers': this invitation offers not only an enhanced audience experience, but also a close alignment to the stated aims of the organisation, namely contributing to the future of new music. The benefits on offer promote 'insiderness', through their access to rehearsal and social spaces that are usually off-limits to audience members, and the provision of updates and insight on the sponsored pieces, which is knowledge not usually made publically available. SIs become familiar with BCMG musicians and staff, and experience the performance venue as a rehearsal space, so gaining a different physical positioning in the organisation. By hearing 'their' music as it is being rehearsed, they are given permission to watch musicians in the early, messy stages of the creative process, where they may be more exposed or liable to make a mistake.

Sound Investment is not marketed by BCMG as a membership scheme, but has notable similarities in its tangible benefits of organised events and a regular newsletter, and in the sense of affiliation to the organisation that is experienced by donors. At the same time, the scheme shares some characteristics of crowd-funding, since donors are encouraged to contribute directly towards a specific activity, and can opt in and out rather than maintaining a long-term commitment - though many contributors choose to sustain their giving over many years. Our SI participants' experiences (see Section 4) show how they identify most strongly with the membership-like elements of the scheme, most notably the tailored, experiential engagement with BCMG and its activities. The organisation also benefits from the sustained involvement of its regular contributors, and indeed has encouraged donor loyalty through its redesigning of the scheme (see Section 6) to include opportunities for regular, monthly giving. Sound Investment therefore illustrates the blurred boundaries between different types of individual giving, with factors of commitment (length

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.[3]

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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[3] 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).

experiences that had shaped their cultural interests and habits.[4] In relation to the SI
scheme, we asked questions about donors' decisions to 'invest' and their experiences of
attending rehearsals, meeting composers and performers, and being involved in BCMG
priorities and activities. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts was undertaken (by hand
and using NVivo) to identify trends in SIs' decisions and experiences, and later to test the
theory of liminality as a framework for understanding members' organisational relationships
and identities.

4. Thematic analysis: motivations and values in the SI experience

4.1 Integration and socialisation

In reporting their decisions to participate in the Sound Investment scheme, our interviewees
showed a range of motivations, expressing altruism from the local level to the conceptual;
namely the desire to help finance BCMG's work, to provide opportunities for composers,
and to support the continued creation of new works of contemporary classical music. This
alignment with the values of the organisation was usually balanced by an enthusiasm for the
benefits to themselves, which variously conveyed status, through acknowledgement in the
score and recognition by staff, musicians and/or composers, and opportunity, in the form of
invitations to rehearsals and receptions associated with the performances of 'their' new
piece. Some interviewees wrestled explicitly with the tensions between altruistic and
transactional behaviour, as if needing to justify their choices to themselves or to us as
researchers: "You like to think you do it altruistically, and that's a big element of it, yes you
want to help people, and you want to help produce something in this specialised field that
you're interested in, but that in its turn gives you pleasure" (Bh29). On the one hand,
therefore, their donation is philanthropic and intended to ensure the organisations'
continuing success. On the other hand, as audience members, they are customers and
consumers, and therefore wish to benefit from their donation, whether that is through
enhanced status or simply enjoyment of the work they have helped commission. For the
participant above, the commitment made in donating to pieces that they would not
necessarily enjoy was depicted as "fun" or a gamble, and that there was "always something
[to] get out of these things" anyway (Bh29).

The financial decision to contribute to BCMG was not necessarily an easy one, and while
some interviewees described it as "a relatively small financial commitment" (Bh19), there
were others for whom "in the current economic climate, things are very tough"(Bh20).
Some interviewees reported making a careful assessment of whether they were getting
enough in return for their money and there were examples of this changing over a lifetime:
"I did for a few years, I'm not at the moment, just because I'm trying to sort priorities [and]
finances out" (Bh39). These fluctuating priorities were also dependent on available time,
since full participation in attending rehearsals and performances could involve "a lot of

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[4] More information on the methods employed in this project can be found at *(link to be added after review)*

travelling to and from Birmingham, staying overnight and so on" (Bh19), all of which would incur additional expense. Becoming an SI was therefore not a decision taken lightly by many, and it was important to them that BCMG recognised their contribution through being warm and welcoming in their communications and events: one SI praised "the management" for "the interest that they take in us as people" (Bh18), contrasting this with membership of another arts organisation where "they didn't seem to be all that interested in the people who were commissioning pieces, it was very much more […] like a financial arrangement" (Bh18). In these examples, a personal connection to the organisation is an important part of the experience of donating, with participants resistant to being treated as just a customer.

Whatever their social experience as a donor, SIs had different interpretations of the extent to which their investment was vital to the organisation. While some had a strong sense that "if we don't invest, [new music] won't happen" (Bh36), others were "quite happy that I probably pay for the tea bags" (Bh20). There was appreciation that small donations from many people added up to "more than the tea bags" (Bh20) and also that cuts to arts funding meant that BCMG "need the support, they need the money" (Bh23). SIs' financial commitment was seen as a social imperative as well as an individual one, making a difference to sustaining composers' careers and contributing to cultural life: "you only have very few really successful composers who actually make a living out of it, so I suppose it's that sort of grassroots support more than anything" (Bh37). Here the SIs are acting upon their heightened awareness of the pressures facing contemporary music organisations and composers, so taking on a perspective that is closer to that of the BCMG staff than of a less highly engaged audience member.

Trust in the organisation also meant that the SIs were open to the possibility that their commissioned piece of music would not be to their own musical taste: as one SI put it, "they're all different: I don't think there's any I actually regret, though there are some I probably don't like" (Bh32). In some cases, this lack of constraint upon the composers was an explicit part of wanting to support the scheme, by enabling the avoidance of commercial ties so that composers "can just do whatever stupid thing they have got in their brain and see what happens!" (Bh36). Reconciling personal enjoyment with altruistic motivations was not always easy, however, and one SI referred to the "terrible moment when you sit down to listen, you think, 'I've paid money for this, I could have paid for a holiday,' and then you think to yourself, 'was this worth it?'" (Bh20). Here again SIs express conflicting motivations for donating, partly out of the desire to join with and support the organisation, and partly for their own enjoyment as a customer of the organisation. The SI activities themselves helped towards resolving some of this tension, since the repeated engagement with a new work in rehearsals could cause a change of opinion: "my ears were initially saying 'no!!' but actually it was all right in the end" (Bh20). SIs therefore acknowledge that they influence the success of the organisation through their financial contribution, while recognising their limited influence on the outcome of that investment.

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

with the composers were more fleeting and often "fairly stilted" (Bh32), with the SIs finding themselves "usually a bit tongue-tied" (Bh23) and the composers varying between "very approachable [and] a bit reserved" (Bh23). Access to composers was less individual, often involving group discussions at rehearsals, or pre-concert talks "which anyone can go to, that's not exclusive to Sound Investors" (Bh05). These varying depths of relationship with the staff, performers and composers show the SIs' awareness of the boundaries of their roles as investors: they expect their financial contribution and organisational loyalty to be recognised by the staff, and their interest in the music to be acknowledged by the performers, but are accepting of their greater distance from the composers.

Socialising with other SIs was not cited as a motivation to join the scheme, but had emerged as a side benefit through long-term participation for some: "there are the incidental pleasures of, of course, sharing with other people, which can be quite big, but I don't think they're the starting point for me. I think the top thing is the music" (Bh29). Several respondents rejected some of the words commonly used in talking about connections between audience members: "the word 'friend' gets used an awful lot […] when it doesn't really mean that at all. It means yes, quite a warm acquaintance, which is a bit different" (Bh21) and "I don't mean a family, because I've got a family" (Bh20). Nonetheless, being among "folks of like or like-ish minds" (Bh21) was an unanticipated pleasure of being an SI, though, like the music supported by the scheme, recognised to be an acquired taste: "the people you bring as guests don't actually perceive it as being the same treat as I do" (Bh20). The assertion of a group SI identity is therefore expressed in contrast to other audience members, rather than as a strong social bond, and is dependent on the time-bound experiences of rehearsals and premieres.

For the SIs who spoke of valuing the social element of their participation in the scheme, this was strongly connected with their musical engagement, in that assumed shared values created a conducive atmosphere for listening and being open to the challenge of unfamiliar new music. Some SIs contrasted the experience of hearing new music in a "mainstream" concert, where it might be "liked by hardly anybody in this hall" (Bh29), with the spirit of "generosity" shown by the players and audiences of BCMG concerts: "you get the impression very often in a mainstream concert that the minute anything cacophonous comes on, most of the audience are sitting there gritting their teeth thinking 'my god, when's this gonna finish?' […] But here you're in a sympathetic audience. And that makes a difference" (Bh29). Through their collective financial contributions, the SIs were therefore creating an ideal audience of which they could be a member: one which was well-prepared for a performance, through access to rehearsals and opportunities for repeated hearings of a new piece, and in tune with the values of the organisation and its commitment to supporting contemporary music. As acknowledged by the SIs, these values are already prominent amongst BCMG audiences more widely, and the sense of 'otherness' from the rest of the audience is therefore not as strong as it might be in audiences for more mainstream classical music, where greater varieties of motivation and experience will be evident. Nonetheless, having aligned themselves more closely with the ethos and values of

the organisation through their space- and time-limited interactions as SIs, they also seek a way back to blending in with the audience, secure in their enhanced knowledge but still desiring to be part of an audience community.

5. Discussion: liminality as a new framework for understanding individual giving

Having considered the motivations and experiences of SIs that were foregrounded in our thematic analysis, we observed the ways in which audiences were brought closer into the organisation through their membership, in which they were afforded opportunities and access usually reserved for BCMG staff and players. Their position on the threshold of the organisation, somewhat insiders and somewhat outsiders, displayed a close fit to theories of liminality, which offer a new way to consider the roles and status of individual donors within arts audiences.

Derived from 'limen', the Latin word for threshold, 'liminal' was first used by French anthropologist Van Gennep in *Les rites de passage* (1909) to describe the period of transformation when participants entered new life stages (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003). Van Gennep identified three rites of passage: **separation** from social environment and way of life, **transition**, and **incorporation** into a new group. In the middle transitional phase, individuals experience liminality, meaning that they sit on the threshold of the old and new social group, not fully belonging to either. Turner's work (1969, 1982) in social anthropology used liminality to describe 'the state and process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states' (1969: 33), a sort of social limbo in which individuals were 'temporarily undefined, beyond the normative social structure' (Turner, 1982: 27). Both authors demonstrate how these liminal experiences are temporary, happening in delineated times, spaces and places.

Liminality has been used in management scholarship to designate those situations in which individuals and groups are positioned at the threshold of organisations, so that they are neither insiders (e.g. full-time permanent staff members) or complete outsiders (Tempest and Starkey, 2014). Casual staff, consultants and freelance workers all occupy a 'betwixt and between' role, neither inside nor outside organisational norms and cultures, but rather in a liminal space that is 'experienced differently by consultants than by regular employees' (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003: 273). We suggest that SIs could similarly be positioned as liminal actors within BCMG, since their access to private knowledge and spaces and their financial contribution places them further within the organisation than regular audience members, and yet these interactions are temporary and highly managed, therefore maintaining SIs' position as audience members and therefore 'outside' the organisation. Turner (1974) further distinguishes the term 'liminoid' as a type of liminal state experienced in leisure rather than work contexts, therefore entered freely and without a sense of permanence and responsibility (Roberts et al., 2015). The SIs' position captures the positivity of this definition, since they enter willingly into a liminal relationship rather than being held at the margins of the organisation as a deficit position: however, in their addition

of 'work' and responsibility to their audience membership they experience a liminal role that is close to that of a consultant or 'cultural intermediary' (Maguire and Matthews, 2012) and so we retain Turner's original term in our analysis.

Since liminal roles (such as consultants and freelancers) are commonplace in the arts world, organisations might be assumed to be adept at communicating their values and practices to the liminal associates who routinely contribute to the work of the organisation: however, research on the informal networks of cultural intermediaries (Perry, Smith & Warren, 2015) and the social inequalities of internships and volunteering in the arts (Taylor & O'Brien, 2017) shows that this is a problematic area. Organisations' understanding of their members' and donors' roles as liminals are likely to be even less developed, and the impact of these relationships not fully articulated or understood. Our case study illustrates this, not only in the ways in which SIs appear to be navigating their own ways through the social connections offered to them, but in their comparisons with other schemes where the liminal role was less prominent or developed.

Table 1 maps our analysis of the SI scheme to the key elements of liminality, showing how SIs experience a time-bound transition between their status as supporters willing to donate money altruistically to the continuation of new music, and their position as audience members who seek to find meaning and enjoyment in the commissioned work that results. Membership brings them closer to the organisation, while also delineating the boundaries of that relationship; it brings them into connection with the musicians, composers and staff, while also confirming their 'otherness' as donors and audience members.

< INSERT TABLE 1 HERE >

Liminal identity is most acutely felt in the delineated times at which SIs are given access to restricted spaces, have contact with BCMG staff and musicians, and are able to hear the commissioned works being rehearsed. In these moments, SIs experience a sense of community around the common aim of supporting new music, but remain aware of the boundaries of their integration into the organisation. For those SIs who have currently or previously paused their donations, liminality is also experienced as a transitory state, outside which they revert to membership of the 'regular' audience, with greater awareness of the 'backstage' processes of the organisation while no longer having an active part in them.

The Sound Investment case study illustrates the perceived benefits and boundaries of being in a liminal relationship with an arts organisation: the affiliation and access that comes with

membership or donation is tempered by the knowledge that this relationship has distinct limits, and is dependent on continued investment and active participation. The resulting readjustment of the relationship to the original site of interaction - here the regular audience - means that liminals are positioned 'betwixt and between' their former and future selves as audience members (Turner, 1969). For SIs who have remained in the scheme, their liminality becomes perpetual rather than transitional (Ybema, Beech & Ellis, 2011), necessitating a continual appraisal of conflicting loyalties and obligations by constantly switching from one identity to the other in their relational (self-other) talk, oscillating between 'in' and 'out', 'same' and 'other', and between an inclusive and exclusive 'us'.

6. Conclusions and implications

The evidence from our BCMG case study offers a framework for understanding other membership, 'curated crowdfunding' and donation schemes as creating liminal relationships for audience members: connecting them more strongly with the organisation through its staff and performers, and enhancing their experience of performance through a heightened awareness of the creative process underpinning the public presentation. The SIs' liminal positioning was strongly dependent on their access to rehearsals, where the materiality of the experience was key: they heard different musical and social interactions from those that the regular audience would witness, and so became 'enhanced audience members', taking their place amongst the regular, ticket-purchasing listeners, but with an additional insight that deepened their engagement in the final performance.

The activities offered to SIs, notably behind the scenes access to artists and the creative process, are not radically different to many membership schemes in the funded arts sector; arts organisations are highly aware that these activities are valued by their members, but are unlikely to have conceptualised them as 'liminal' experiences. Understanding that these activities can foster a sense of liminal identity, with one foot in the organisation and one foot remaining in the audience, can help organisations to promote and prioritise those membership activities which most help to foster that sense of liminality, in order to attract and retain members. Greater awareness of the changed sense of audience identity that comes with this experience of liminality may also help organisations to take more care in handling moments where boundaries are re-established, such as when a donor decides to discontinue their giving. On the other hand, through our exploration of the different experiences of a number of SIs, it is evident that not all donors seek liminal experiences, and therefore arts organisations may wish to think about the offer they are making to participants who have no desire to attend rehearsals, see behind the scenes, or develop personal relationships with those making arts events happen.

With policy and research placing increasing emphasis on promoting access and diversity, arts organisations could be criticised for making this liminal role available only to those who can afford to pay for the privilege (Jancovich, 2017; O'Brien et al., 2017). However, understanding the nature of the role as we have done through our case study helps to

highlight the similarity with other perspectives: the SIs in this instance gained a 'musicians'-eye/ear view' which is also the outcome of many learning and participation projects run by arts organisations, and which mirrors that of the amateur and professional arts practitioners who are highly represented in audiences for contemporary arts (Pitts, 2013). Membership schemes are typically understood as securing audience loyalty and affiliation, but this closer investigation of motivations and experiences for SIs as crowdfunders has also revealed the ways in which donors' perspectives as audience members are changed by the access and insight they gain, in ways that could be replicated more widely as part of audience development strategies. For the SIs, the physicality of being in the rehearsal room with the musicians was key to their liminal experience, but some of this insight could be made available to other current and potential audience members through digital streaming or video capture of moments in the rehearsals, without diminishing the value of the physical access and proximity experienced by SIs. Similarly, the value placed on facilitated conversation with other audience members has been highlighted in other research (Conner, 2013; Pitts & Gross, 2017), and the SI experience shows how extending this to include organisation staff and performers has the potential to deepen audience engagement.

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

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

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[5] See current details of the scheme at https://www.bcmg.org.uk/sound-investment

rehearsals during the working week, it is doubtful whether such a scheme would be so accessible or valuable to younger participants. Once the new scheme has been in operation for a few years, there will be interesting research to be done around whether the Note Makers feel 'invested' in the music they have sponsored, and whether the Sound Investors have experienced a change in their relationships with the organisation, and the framework of liminality could help to shape that analysis.

As changes to the BCMG fundraising scheme and others like it become more urgent in response to declining arts funding, the SIs' experiences illustrate the power of making visible the financial challenges facing the contemporary arts world. Our case study reveals how their investment has been motivated in part by an awareness of those financial challenges, and their knowledge of the arts sector and its operation is increased in turn by their investment. While some audience members will quite reasonably be seeking pure entertainment and enjoyment from their arts attendance, many of them – perhaps especially in the contemporary arts – are culturally- and socially-engaged arts attenders. Blurring the boundaries between arts producers and consumers by revealing more of the creative and organisational processes could increase the proportion of audience members who identify as liminals, with potential benefits to both parties. A more engaged audience, made aware of the intentions of the organisation and the perspectives of the art-makers within it, is likely to become a more loyal audience, aligned with the values of the organisation and prepared to support them through attendance and advocacy.

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Liminal elements in existing literature[1]	*Sound Investment* liminal elements	Analysis
1. Integration and socialisation processes: People	SIs are distinguished from 'regular' audience members in communications from BCMG. Language, personal deixis; 'Have *you* 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. Integration and socialisation processes: Communitas	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. Liminal places and spaces	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. Liminal rites and communitas situations	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. Involvement over time	'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

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[1] Guimaraes-Costa and Pina e Cunha, 2013; Ryan, 2019; Bhattacharya et al, 1995; Glynn et al, 1996.