

Magic Flutes, bottom lines and composers' end products ~ an examination of music and marketing from 1791 to 2004.

Example 1

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Overture: *Magic Flute* [Die Zauberflöte]

(Movement 1)

When coming to a pre-concert talk I often look at the works, which is usually wise when you think about it. Often a theme comes to me straight away – which can mean that it is the most obvious one – and possibly the one to avoid.

Other times I am singularly uninspired and sweat over how I am going to discover even one interesting thing to say to a waiting audience. This variety of reactions is usually directly related to how a concert has been planned: some have clear and accessible threads connecting each work no matter how disparate. Sometimes you look at the list of pieces and think to yourself 'What was the programmer thinking – was he on drugs or something?'

As it happens no such difficulties today but it does raise the point as to how music is programmed and for what purpose – beyond 'simple' and I use the term advisedly, entertainment...

Example 2

Mozart

Overture: *Magic Flute*

No, I have not pressed the wrong button – though it happens sometimes. I am just reminding you of one of the works you will be hearing today. If you are familiar with the overture, you will be reminded of Mozart's musical simplicity and if you are unfamiliar, you will at least recognise that this piece is theatrical in origin. A real curtain-raiser when an overture acted as notification that the performance was about to begin and to hide the noise of

late-comers as well as preparing the audience for entertainment by 'warming them up.'

The *Overture* works in much the same way in its placement in this concert as well as pointing to the 'flute-centeredness' of the overall program.

The programming of any concert will be thought of in the context of several variables. After all much of what takes place in the creation and execution of a performance has to do with the successful placement of a product.

Sound familiar? Well it is safe to say that increasingly symphonic concerts are viewed as not just an expression of culture, or as an exercise in artistic excellence but as ways to attract new buyers into a market without alienating loyal and informed regular customers. Moreover, of course this is new – classical music up until the post-Second World War did not have to compete at all. Rubbish.

Two of today's composers were inventors and occasional entrepreneurs at a time when the word was almost unknown though the concept was well understood.

Example 3

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Symphony No.3 'Scottish' Allegro (Movement 2)

That both Mendelssohn and Mozart died in their 30s shouldn't be seen as an indication of failure of product - though perhaps it does point to a lack of awareness of the market.

One was an independent thinker in a time when thought was allowed to those who were titled – not servants who wrote music.

The other was equally as brilliant (as children both men wrote symphonies...) but the later man was too able and too much of his time to succeed in creating a life that was to go beyond the *zeitgeist*. It was a Romantic time – creative-types died early as a rule - and true to type Mendelssohn's fate was to die appropriately and Romantically early – with much of his best work behind him but with his musical development arrested.

Of course we know well that Mozart died early – the film *Amadeus* made sure of that – and would that he could have got some royalties.

However what isn't clear to many listeners and what also didn't really come through in that, now two-decade-old, film is the extent to which Mozart was a pragmatist – and how pragmatism was forced upon composers of that time.

In a way, this explains the reason why classical music and its composers have lost the connection and interconnectiveness with society to a degree that no other art form has.

Again, there is at least a seminar waiting to be held just on that premise alone. However what needs to be said is that while market forces aren't the solution to everything it is a fair bet that what has enabled some composers to live beyond the grave and others to moulder in obscurity is the excellence of the product – rather than the excellence of the marketing behind it...

Therefore, what does this have to do with us, our appreciation of these composers and their music and why we should regard them, as exemplars of the way music should be presented?

Put simply these two German composers – (we will look at the Swiss Frank Martin briefly and separately later) – were successful beyond their time

because they understood, like all great artists in history, the impact of their art and what it was for.

It is a simple big question that one: 'What is art for...' but the answer is actually simple too if a little shocking in its simplicity: Art is to entertain. Certainly nothing less – and only afterwards is it something more.

Think about it. Why do we go to concerts; buy CDs, talk to others about the art? It is a shared experience sure but more importantly it's an experience.

It is also important to remember that these composers were in the business of business – sure it was entertainment and personal fulfilment and all those things that we want to secure for ourselves before our life ends. Put simply, writing music was the way that these composers paid the bills – and it goes on today – the only difference is in our perception of what is music rather than the reality.

Mozart did, toward the end of his life, put integrity over the need to satisfy the market, and it clearly killed him as surely as if he had placed a gun at his head. In previous times, though he had written impressive works for an instrument he privately denigrated...

Example 4

Mozart

Flute Concerto No.2 in D K314

(Movement 1)

By composing to commission two flute concerti and a flute and harp concerto, Mozart created three of the greatest pieces for the flute in all classical music. In addition, he was well paid for it – something over \$25,000 per concerto – so around \$1000 a minute. Not bad going when you put it like that.

He knew what the market wanted and the price it could bear and composed accordingly, even though, as implied earlier, Mozart despised the flute. It was only as he got older that he ceased to be able to make artistic

compromises but that honestly says more about him than the worth of his works.

Haydn – a seriously gifted composer and born twenty years before Mozart – wrote vast amounts of stunning music but did so under strict control of either noble patrons and dubious entrepreneurs. He died a vastly wealthy man – a decade after Mozart.

Example 5

Franz Joseph Haydn (1734-1809)

Symphony No.26 'Lamentatione' *Allegro* (Movement 1)

Therefore, whatever we might think of the arts in general and music in particular classical composers were responding to the demands of the market. No one knew how to do a cost benefit analysis better than Haydn did – he had seen who outlived whom.

One of the best ways for a product to be successful is to have advocating testimonials from converted 'purchasers'. The Catholic Church knew this and how it applied to music in the 13th and 14th century and we know it now when tempting new audiences to a product.

The concepts are basic ones also – colour, brightness, movement, pageantry, incense – affecting and therefore effective. The Christian Church early on realised the usefulness of the senses in capturing the imagination and attention of the 'buyer' – now whether that buyer was looking for a job or security or education or salvation – sight, smell and sound were brought to bear on the market.

From that point, music began its journey from the tavern to the chancel until it arrived at the supermarket and the elevator – in the form of shopping music...

Why was Bach hired by the Leipzig church authorities back in 1723 but for his ability to produce attractive – and literally attracting – music? Get the congregation in and a host of benefits accrue.

This was also the case for the Archbishop of Salzburg some 50-odd year latter – he didn't hire Mozart for his humour – and didn't keep him on for it either. Mozart as a composer was not good in the sacred business: his 'functional' church works were perfunctory – while his best ones the *Requiem* and *Mass in C minor* regularly performed today – were neither complete when he died nor written at the Archbishop's instigation.

Example 6

Mozart

Requiem

Introit: 'Requiem aeternam...'

(Movement 1)

No, Mozart was more a man of the theatre – he wrote his first opera at seven – and his last a matter of weeks before he died. However even in opera, he was hired 'talent', headhunted by theatrical entrepreneurs with scripts that needed Mozart's musical punch. The impresari didn't die at 35 and *they* weren't buried in a paupers' grave...*they* left that fate to Wolfgang Amadeus.

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The great successful and down-right cunning entrepreneurs are there in classical music – and they're familiar names: Handel, Beethoven, Wagner...there's a whole book waiting to be written on the corrupt business practices of these guys – selling goods twice or three times over, fleeing creditors and backers, feigning illness to escape the law.

I could add some more modern names – but they're pretty litigious (another way to make money I guess) so I wont. You can ask me later.

We've heard it all before – but perhaps haven't realised how far to goes back in the arts (at least 250 years) and that composers were well ahead of and

more savvy than Christopher Skase or Robert Maxwell or the Enron executives.

You'd be hard pressed to believe 'rarefied' Classical music could have any connection to business but look at the success of Mozart's *Magic Flute* and the stretch is no stretch at all. An ill and under-employed composer – with a wife and two children to support as well as a position to maintain in the expensive city of Vienna (nothing's changed) wrote a musical-comedy which was a success not only in 1791 but has been so continually for over 200 years.

So why? It's particularly interesting because it is not opera as we have come to know it – and certainly wasn't opera as the conservative Viennese market would have judged it back in 1791. It was a melodrama on one level, a quasi-religious work on another and ultimately successfully appealed to a broad range of the population seeking entertainment. It wore its learning lightly – and made the backers of this venture wealthy. Mozart, however, was dead within five months.

Interestingly it was only a matter of decades later that Mendelssohn began to compose but already the change in status for the musician was significant.

Example 7

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Symphony No.9 Allegro 'O Freude, nicht diese Töne...' (Movement 4)

Much of this had to do with the fall in several absolute monarchies and with the growth of Romanticism – where the noble savage (and the slightly less noble peasant) could take his place (not too close to the centre mind) in the ranks of humanity.

For musicians Beethoven was the great champion – ignoring the power of the nobles to 'make or break', putting on three-hour concerts of his own music (regardless of sore arses and tired ears) and playing publishing houses off against each other to get the best price for his self-styled masterworks.

Haydn would have been horrified – and Mozart had tried it and basically paid the ultimate price.

Example 8

Mendelssohn

Symphony No.3 'Scottish' Allegro

(Movement 4)

What is a Scottish-themed symphony doing in the collected works of a German composer of Jewish origin?

It seems bizarre – and a marketing nightmare. How the hell do you get people interested in such a strange concept? Well one has only to look a little into the history behind this symphony to realise that this composition is not without marketing savvy. Things exotic have ever been appealing in the market – it is far easier to capture the buyer's imagination with difference than with similarity.

The exotic in the early 19th century was represented by the wild – not the so sensually free South Pacific explored by Gauguin or the Billy the Kid Wild West of the US – the wildness looked for by Europeans was closer to home – Scotland. Its attractiveness was similar to that which provokes us now to travel to wilderness areas of Tasmania – it is so close and yet speaks of a primitive possibility richer potentially less controlled aspect of our selves. It was also inhabited by strange rustic folk with customs, music and language close to civilisation – yet still at a distance (again the similarity with Tasmania is strong...)

Example 9

Mendelssohn

Hebrides Overture - Fingal's Cave

Finally it was something to experience briefly and to return from quickly with little personal risk (apart from a cold – and a desire for better food and shelter...) and of course far less challenging, costly, time consuming or life threatening than going into the African or South American hearts of darkness.

So all this vicariousness was entertainment – Mendelssohn was providing concertgoers with a travelogue – they might not travel to the outer islands of Scotland but by providing what we now would call a soundscape, audiences could 'see' the wildness. It was the same in landscape painting and of course in writing. Moreover, as society changed in what it found 'wild', so the arts could bring that wildness into the polite salons of Europe.

As such opera, art and literature in the late 19th century became more 'permissive' in response to society's desire to be titillated – Wagner's sensual *Tristan und Isolde* or Puccini's brutal and almost sado-masochistic *Tosca* could never have been written by Mozart or Mendelssohn – though they might have if the market had been willing. As it was, they contented themselves to judge what was appropriate and deliver accordingly.

Social change allowed Beethoven to turn the composer into something akin to a seer or guide – and the young Mendelssohn (already writing symphonies at the age of eight) saw that there was a path to be trod that could lead to emotional, social and financial success without the sacrifice of integrity. From here, he could join his love of Romanticism, composition and fiscal reward.

His *Third (Scottish)*, *Fourth (Italian)* and *Fifth (Reformation)* symphonies all point to artistic decisions made with an eye on independent money-making – something quite outside the experience of any composer before 1828.

He wrote music that made money, courted popular interest and satisfied his artistic ambitions.

The so-called '*Scottish*' *Symphony* is one of a set of what we would call 'companion' pieces. His Italian *Symphony* was meant to evoke the brightness of Italy as clearly as the opening of the *Scottish* was to conjure the cold Highlands mist – while his *Reformation* *Symphony* was a celebration of German Protestantism (complete with hymn tunes.) Thus his *Symphonies* are heavily programmatic – in other words have a literary or descriptive purpose beyond what we would call 'pure' music.

It is here that we are getting into musicological waters and if not yet too deeply we are at least in over our ankles. Pure music could be defined as music 'without a message' – some would give as an example of this much of the music composed by Brahms.

Example 10

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Symphony No.1 *Andante* (Movement 4)

Mendelssohn's music has a story – and both the Mozart pieces on the program have stories at their heart. Perhaps the Frank Martin *Ballade* is the only exercise in 'pure' music in the whole concert. But what is possibly most interesting about that work is that it is by far the most modern on the program (by over 100 years) and represents to me at least where much of modern classical music has gone...away from the general audience and toward something altogether smaller and less representational – the specialist.

We can debate its merits all day – or in a moment but perhaps it is just best to listen to it.

Example 11

Frank Martin (1897-1974)

Ballade

So what's the story we draw from all this music and all this talk about composing and selling? Possibly, it is that an important thing to remember is why a piece appears in a concert may have more to do with what precedes it musically than what it represents on its own.

Good music 'connects' – but I am not sure that we always make the same connection that we are 'expected' to make by programmers.

For me the Martin piece, *Ballade*, proves this point...nice composition for the composer's catalogue; suitably challenging for the soloist and intellectually stimulating for the musicologist – but have we forgotten someone in this equation?

The Sydney Symphony has never played the *Ballade* before this week. It is also worth noting that Mendelssohn's *Symphony No.3* hasn't been played by the Sydney Symphony in a decade.

So that makes either or both a neglected masterpiece or a deservedly marginalised composition depending, say, on your view of Mendelssohn, the period from which *Ballade* comes, how you are feeling on the day, how much you'd rather be at the Super 12s match or if you're thinking back to that time when you wish you hadn't had to practise the piano so much when you were a child on those sunny summer evenings. In short, we appreciate music as we appreciate anything else: in context.

So why these pieces and why today? My answer would have to be why not? All these pieces allow us to enjoy some seriously entertaining melodies and harmonies, some exciting rhythms and the spectacular combination of not just 15 blokes running up and down a paddock but something like forty or so women and men working together. Then there's the star soloist – who'll be tossing tunes around like a brilliant five-eight – letting the strings do all the forward-pack 'hard-yards' and, providing s/he crosses the metaphorical line of

audience approval, will win the game for his team (the orchestra) and draw applause from the crowd – that's you.

And all you will have needed to do is to sit back and enjoy yourself. When you put it like this it is a wonder that we don't market music a little like we have so successfully marketed Rugby, cricket or Aussie Rules – after all going to a concert is a lot like going into a stadium: perhaps you dress a little better and the beer isn't as cold – but the seats are softer and if it rains the shows still goes on (and you only get wet getting from the foyer to the ferry.)

OK so you don't shout as much during the concert (though go to an opera in Italy and you might think you're at Aussie Stadium) however being in the audience for Mozart and Martin and Mendelssohn requires you to take a stand, commit to your favourite player (or composer) and applaud if you like it or complain if you don't – it's up to you.

The composers have always written for us – go and claim the music – support your local team – it just happens that today it's not the Rabbits or the Swans or the Waratahs but the Sydney Symphony.

And sure marketing matters – but don't forget that music's the main-game: Go you good thing.

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