

Massive Attack or Mendelssohn?

Six teenagers talk about 20th century classical music, new media and the similarities between classical music and football

Winning over teenagers and young adults as a reliable audience is a mammoth task for most concert halls and orchestras. Against a backdrop of dwindling attendance figures, attracting this target group should not be seen as a necessary evil, but as an investment in the future of the concert hall business. Above all, the challenge lies in the fact that not all teenagers and young adults can be lumped together under one umbrella and that the programmes have to make allowances for the diversity of the target group. Those who have never heard of the word "symphony" will gain very little from an introductory excerpt. But even those who, whether on a private basis or through school, devote their time to classical music, do not find it easy. This is an interview about classical music from the viewpoint of a group of grammar school teenagers, who are all involved in music.

Gotja (19 years old), upper sixth form, listens to everything from classical to metal, has had singing lessons for 10 years, sings in a girls' choir, plays the piano and flute.

Ole (19 years old), upper sixth form, plays the flute in a youth symphony orchestra, as well as the piano, listens to electronic music, in particular hard style

Daniel (20 years old), upper sixth form, doesn't listen to much music in his spare time, maybe listens to classical to unwind, plays the oboe in the youth symphony orchestra, as well as piano

Till (17 years old), lower sixth form, likes metal and modern classical music, plays the piano, guitar, keyboard and produces metal-electro music on the computer with his two-piece-band

Aaron (19 years old), upper sixth form, plays the violin and piano, attends a music theory course at a music school, gave up the orchestra due to time factor, likes listening to chamber music

Kai (18 years old), lower sixth form, has played the piano for 10 years and drums for 1½, likes 20th century classical music

CS: If you were given free tickets for a concert, who would you go and see?

Ole: I'd go to a live Headhunterz concert – they're the best-known band for hard style. Or maybe David Guetta – he does house, electro-club music.



Gotja: I'd like to hear Matthias Goerne with Hanns Eislers "Ernste Gesänge". I've already been to the concert and thought it was great. But unfortunately I haven't found it on YouTube. And then I'd like to hear a performance of Dvořák's Symphony "From the New World". And I'd really love to see Wacken, because I like metal.

Daniel: That's a really difficult question. I wouldn't choose any of today's pop or rock singers. The only thing I'd like to see, which unfortunately isn't possible any more, is a concert directed by Herbert von Karajan. The way he interpreted music is really impressive.

Till: I'd probably choose the most expensive. I often go to concerts in small clubs, which cost around 10 to 15 euros – I can afford that. I'd probably choose the most expensive seats for the New York Philharmonic Orchestra and

then sell the ticket on. Or I might go to see The Prodigy, because I thought that was pretty impressive.

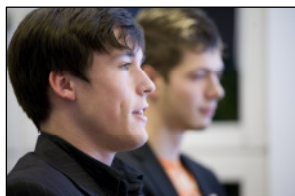
Aaron: I'd choose a ticket for a chamber music concert. No fuss, small room, not many people, - that's exactly what I really like.

Kai: I couldn't tell you who I'd go and see, because at the moment I don't have a favourite band. Perhaps I'd do the same as Till – take the most expensive tickets and sell them to buy 10 cheaper concert tickets.



CS: Classical music doesn't hold the same attraction as popular music for many young people. Classical music isn't cool. Do you feel the same? If so, why?

Till: I'd make a distinction between classical music in the sense of baroque, renaissance and classical and 20th century classical music. Modern music means more to me than classical music. The differences between entertainment and classical music are becoming less clear. I enjoy listening to avant-garde metal or rock music, dissonant, atonal electro-music and sound art. It's not that different from Stockhausen. But Mendelssohn, for example, has no relevance to me. I associate Mendelssohn with images that have nothing to do with the world I live in. When I listen to Massive Attack, for example, it reflects an image of urban life that Bach and Beethoven don't.



Daniel: Classical music is simply inaccessible for many young people. I have

the feeling though that the problem is they don't spend enough time listening to it. But I wouldn't describe classical music as not cool; you just have to put enough time into it.

Ole: The best thing about classical music is performing it yourself. I'd compare it to football. If I just sit in front of the telly watching football – I don't find that very interesting. But if I play football myself, then it's great fun.

Aaron: Generally I don't think the term is right for it; I don't think anyone would say "classical music isn't cool". No-one says that. But it's difficult to adapt to classical music because there are so many different sides to it. You have to spend time with it, then you listen to a recording and you like it. I think music teachers could do a lot there.

CS: Today the average age of the classical concert-goer is between 55 and 60. Statistically, that means that you seldom go to a concert. Is that right? What needs to change so that you go more often?



Gotja: We actually go to concerts quite often with the school, and also with the choir. It's mainly about price

for me, because I don't get very much pocket money. On the other hand, I don't like the fact that concerts are so long. If I go to an avant-garde concert which is 2½ hours long, I just can't listen for that length of time. So I usually leave after the interval. I'm generally exhausted after listening to 20th century music, because it's very tiring. But I think it's also really fascinating, especially when they experiment with sound.

I also really like meeting the musicians afterwards, so that I can ask them questions. What's absolutely amazing are those concerts that combine, for example, music and literature, but also with 20th century classical music.

Ole: I go to classical concerts with the school and I enjoy them. I'm a big fan of classical music, especially when it's been electronically altered. Look, 20th century classical music was

a scandal when it appeared, and the music of today is developing in the same way. It could even be the next scandal.



CS: That classical music will be "synthesized"?

Ole: Yes, it'll be remade. You can see that now if you look at club music. They haven't got anything new to offer, so they take all the old songs and

remix them. It's very popular, people go crazy about it. They know all the songs, but it's a completely new version.

A concert for young people – you could give a concert and charge a reasonable price, perhaps a price of 5 to 10 euros for young people and school-children, a concert which isn't too long, a maximum of 80 to 90 minutes. But what often puts people off are the clothes and the rules and regulations. Not many people have the right clothes or want to wear such clothes and therefore distance themselves from the music. It would be interesting to offer something in the interval, if there is an interval.

CS: What do you mean exactly?

Ole: For example, the drinks. Perhaps they should have cocktails, at least not just sparkling wine. Who at our age drinks sparkling wine these days? Rather Becks, Cola, Bionade. And reasonable prices are also important. It has to be within easy reach of public transport. I also think it's a good idea to be able to meet the musicians and perhaps a party afterwards would be great. That's all.

Till: I go to concerts where the composers were born after 1920, maybe also to Debussy or Stravinsky. The classical world of music is somehow very conservative – for them Schönberg is modern. All in all I think that's a great pity. In any case, it seems ridiculous to jazz it up in a trendy way for the middle classes. Give the kids something cool – that's

not my style. Bach for young people with a party afterwards – that's the kind of music that doesn't mean anything – it's too remote.

Aaron: I think it's great at concerts when you have an introduction to the piece or when short excerpts are played. In contrast, using a kind of put-on slang to advertise is dreadful. And neither am I convinced of crossover.

Kai: An introduction – I experienced that recently, it was great. You hear short excerpts and then you get a taste of what you can expect. And then the concert starts and you really recognise it again. You understand it better and it's much more fun. But it's mostly theoretical and someone who isn't interested in theory would find it difficult.

CS: Do you use online-forums such as facebook or schülerVZ regularly? Are they important for your spare time and the concerts you go to?

Till: twitter, schülerVZ, facebook, I haven't got them. I only really use them when it makes sense. I think that MySpace makes sense and also Wikipedia or YouTube, especially to find out information about music.



Kai: The only thing that's important for me is YouTube. If I want to listen to something by a particular composer, then I enter him in YouTube or MySpace. I don't use twitter at all.

Aaron: I do use facebook, but only really to keep in contact. But I could imagine that if advertising were smuggled in, then you could



attract a few people with it if the design is interesting enough.

Daniel: I use schülerVZ – but only to keep contact. I'd never think about swapping music there.

Ole: I'm probably the only one here, who uses these things most of all. I'm registered on schülerVZ, studiVZ, facebook and netlog. I use them on average for 1 to 2 hours per day – because I have friends all over the place. You get invitations on schülerVZ and studiVZ – not from one particular person, but for a party or concert.

Kai: I'd just like to say that these web-sites are very important for musicians and artists. I think there are a lot of musicians who have become famous thanks to MySpace or YouTube – even in classical music.

CS: Many thanks for the interview.

Interview: Caroline Steinhagen