



Notes from Australian Music Futures Classical Music Summit: Broadcast Forum.

Introduction

At the Music Council of Australia's Annual Assembly in September 2009, the Classical Music Working Group advised the council to host a think tank addressing the future of classical music in Australia. This summit will take place in July at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. In preparation for this summit, the Music Council of Australia is hosting a number of targeted forums with representatives from all areas of Australian classical music. These forums will provide recommendations to focus the July summit. The first of these forums was held in Sydney with key figures from Australian classical music broadcasting.

Executive Summary

The Broadcast Forum discussed the idea of establishing a media platform to develop a younger audience base for Australian art music. After some debate it was agreed that this platform would be most functional if it were established online rather than on radio. The platform would seek content from all interested broadcasters, music organizations, artists and other individuals. So far as is possible, it would be programmed and presented by young people and would present a very broad array of Western art music with some emphasis on performances and works by young people. Music organizations would also be approached for financial and other support to assist the platform to reach its goal of greater audience participation. Suggestions would be compiled and presented to the Classical Music Summit in July for debate and possible action by the MCA.

List of Attendees

Stephen Adams, ABC
Julian Day, ABC
Lynn Gailey, MCA
Graeme Hinckley, ABC
Chris Johnson, CBAA / AMRAP
Jehan Kanga, AYMC

Eve Klein, MCA
Richard Letts, MCA
Julie Simonds, 2MBS
David Worrall, MCA
Tom Zelincka, 2MBS

Location

MCA Office, Macquarie St, Sydney.



Introductory Remarks

The forum began with a short welcome from Richard Letts, Executive Director of the Music Council of Australia. Letts said that he would like to focus on the problem of diminishing audiences for classical music in Australia. Letts said that research was showing that while the Australian audience for classical music was being sustained, there is a decline in audience numbers of young people in their late teens and 20s. Letts expressed hope that a “scene” could be created, with a sense of ownership by young people, to “bring young people into the art music fold”. He saw this scene as being presented either via radio or the internet, potentially with young people presenting material and making decisions about the evolution of content with the support of broadcasters and classical music organisations. It was important that young people had control of key aspects of the initiative. Letts foresaw resource problems attached to establishing a radio-based project. Setup with an Internet based project would be easier, but audiences might be harder to cultivate.

Key Discussion Points from the Broadcast Forum

- Names of speakers are not revealed, under Chatham House Rules
- The premise of the discussion, a need for a platform or “scene” to engage young people with art music, was readily accepted. Talks began with people’s background and their perspective on the potential of community radio vs. a multimedia/ Internet platform for engaging a young audience.
- The view was expressed that selection of content was paramount; if 25% of music played on a station is “older” then it can solidify the perception that the station’s audience is also older. There were concerns that one broadcaster’s current broadcast audience was resistant to contemporary jazz and new music. There was potential to present more contemporary art music via their web streams. Concerning an online program, it was said “we just saw it as another stream” because “we don’t have enough volunteers to enable us to produce two radio programs simultaneously”. Even so, “A lot of our audience is coming in from around the world via streaming”.
- One argued strongly for a multimedia based platform, consisting of a combination of user generated content and overseen/ curated content in the form of audio and video to most effectively target a younger audience:
 - “ With the development of Internet media people want content on demand. It’s not about a passive engagement. People take what they want and leave the rest behind. Ultimately if you can create a place, an online community where classical artists are welcome and the audience is welcome, then it will be a more engaging way to serve that community”.
- One person sought to re-focus the conversation from implementation back on to the basic premise of several key areas:
 1. Understanding what is meant by content. Who defines content? Who controls who defines content?



2. The means of production and the effects of quality and quantity.
3. The means of distribution/ delivery mechanisms.
4. How each of those affects the other.
5. Ownership of material.
6. Possible means of syndication.

The person concluded with the question: “what can we do as people with knowledge, experience and control to enable youth to do what they want to do?” These questions were never answered in detail and the discussion was directed towards what kind of “youth” audience the project sought to develop and what kinds of content would develop this desired audience.

- Another said that he was interested in a space that promoted innovation in art music, but he disagreed with the fundamental tenet, that the demographic be limited to young people alone. Another noted that new, innovative content would naturally attract a young demographic if it were offered online. Another thought that it would be difficult to put a demographic on streaming. Attendance at ISCM World New Music Days festival held in Sydney from April to May was a much older demographic than this person expected.
- It was generally agreed that an audience for this project would, of necessity, begin with players, composers and others with an involvement in classical music and work outwards.
- It was stated by another participant that there are lots of layers involved in the process of generating content, from performance, recording, licensing, and beyond. He noted the two extremes of content production, from “entirely user generated content” where an undefined audience is involved at all levels, to broadcasters sharing their content with youth who can filter and edit it and have “a dialogue” with broadcasters. He suggested a position somewhere between the two extremes. Letts said that he had conceived that adults and industry professionals provide the “structural backing” to the project. It was noted that ABC Radio is considering for its digital radio space, a music, sound and ideas youth channel. This channel would be built from content offered by ABCs various program areas to youth presenters and program makers. Youth program makers would then put together “what they wanted” and “say what they wanted to say” about the content and offer feedback to the ABC about the kinds of content they would want in the future. Another person observed that projects like Flickr, where content is shared, work well online because the ABC, like everybody else, is only one contributor. All supported a model of pooled content from a variety of sources.
- A general agreement was reached that the project space would be most flexible and have the most longevity if it were established online. The reasons behind this were:
 - Adoption of digital radio has been slow. Access to spectrum is unlikely unless an established broadcast network like the ABC or MBS adopted the project. However housing the project within an organization exposes it to fluctuating agendas and priorities, or could geographic limits. Having organizations develop and contribute content is seen as more desirable.
 - Streaming of media is expected to overwhelm most other forms of media delivery in the coming years.
 - An online platform can be used to deliver radio content alongside other forms of audio & visual content within a single online environment.



- An Internet space has no geographic limits, and can be relevant locally, nationally and globally, as driven by the interests of its participants.
- Some objections to online delivery were raised. Of particular concern was the lack of a physical/ real-world community workspace, which often forms the locus of community radio projects, and community feeling/ relationships. Some participants considered this a surmountable problem, partly because an online environment offers virtual community spaces, and partly because there may be the potential to promote attendance at local events, thus creating a sense of physical engagement & community.
- Emphasis should be placed on long-term *contributions* of content or other assistance from key organizations with an interest in classical music to develop young audiences. A network built upon *sharing*, with the long-term goal of benefitting through a larger, more diverse audience base, rather than on immediate returns & concerns.
- Organizations such as the ABC need to facilitate the process of presenting their content alongside content produced by other organizations. For this project to work it needs to sit outside the issue of different radio networks and competitive audiences. The site can then direct people who have engaged with content back to the website of the original content creator. This model is already being used by organizations like Opera Australia and the ABC to engage with young audiences on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook & MySpace and should work comfortably in this context. Potential content contributors present were ABC radio, MBS, and AMRAP who could network with community radio groups around Australia to provide content.
- Who would take responsibility for the project was discussed at length. It was suggested that 2MBS might be able to work it into part of 2MBS digital radio or online content, if it met the approval of the 2MBS Board. The group had concerns about the geographic limits of 2MBS. Richard Letts suggested that if the various parties saw it as a good idea, the Music Council might manage the project with input from the AYMC. The MCA has the advantage that it is not part of the broadcast sector and might build a role as honest broker in setting up the organizational structure etc. The AYMC, still in its start-up phase, is not currently in a position to take the project on but as it gains experience it could play a greater role. The AYMC representative also cautioned that the AYMC represented the diverse range of youth musical interests and the projects emphasis on classical music only would not address the interests of all of its members. He believed that it could have input in forming a small youth committee to play a role in the setup/ guidance of the project.
- There are issues of implementation affecting the setup of an online space:
 - The online platform needs to be built, hosted and maintained. Potential to do this with existing free software. Expertise & possibly finance needed.
 - The project would need a full time employee to hold it together as a point of stability.
 - The project will need volunteers &/or participant-contributors to make it effective.
 - Organizations who will benefit from the project need to be approached to contribute content or financial support. For example, it is in the interest of orchestras to develop their younger audience base, and many organizations run independent audience development programs. One person proposed that coming out of the meeting, the group should produce a statement to be put to the Classical Music



Summit in July which would charge the MCA to investigate further, the possibility of obtaining financial & or content contributions from the ABC and the large performing organizations. If the Summit agreed, then this point would be actioned. This group would prepare a statement by email after the forum.

- The type of content, how content would be curated and what mode of dissemination were discussed in detail throughout the meeting. There were lots of different models discussed:
 - A radio style of delivery, where preselected content is packaged around discussion by a host. This content could be provided by organizations like MBS, ABC or AMRAP, produced by the organization, or be donated by composers and artists.
 - The presentation of multiple streamed digital playlists that are separated by genre, area of interest, locality or other markers.
 - A YouTube style of presentation where site users can upload or link to their own content, which can then be commented upon by other site users via text or their own uploaded content.
 - The presentation of “live” performance events alongside content on demand.
 - In combination with discussion boards, blogs, or other modes of online discourse.Ultimately, no single model was decided upon because an Internet space does not exclude the implementation of all modes of presenting audio-visual content. However the need to involve young people in the process of content selection and presentation was discussed in a variety of ways:
 - As a participating audience of performers, composers or other content generators.
 - As presenters and producers.
 - As part of a committee overseeing the set up and maintenance of the project.

Recommendations

1. As a strategy to build young audience for classical music and new works, create a classical music multimedia internet hub, possibly with associated broadcast via internet radio and/or free to air radio, with strong control by young people of its identity, programming and presentation.
2. Seek financial support for the hub from organisations in the classical music sector that stand to benefit from its success, such as orchestras, opera companies
3. Seek programmatic contributions from individual artists, performing ensembles and organisations, and community and public broadcasters
4. Establish opportunities for people, especially young people, to learn to produce and present recordings and programs. Possibilities include community radio, conservatoriums and universities and others
5. Look for ways that the hub can offer reciprocal support to its supporters.

Authors Note

The session summary represents a personal overview of the forum, and does not necessarily represent the views of the MCA or individual participants. Recommendations suggested by Richard Letts of the MCA, and are open for comment.

This report was authored by Eve Klein, Assistant to the Executive Director, Music Council of Australia. Email enquiries are welcome: eklein@mca.org.au

