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The London Sinfonietta 1968–2004: A Perspective

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Abstract

The London Sinfonietta's reputation as a contemporary music ensemble comes from the continuing commitment by its players and artistic directors to its quality of performance. The ensemble also developed a sense of its musical identity by generating a repertoire of commissioned works. This article looks at some of the ways that the Sinfonietta defined its musical ideology and has functioned as a performance-centred art world in which composers are invited to collaborate but are not there by right. It examines the Sinfonietta's strategies for audience building, the ensemble's contribution to the development of London's concert life since its foundation in 1968, and looks at the ways that it has sought to renew itself in response to the different funding and aesthetic environments it has encountered in its history. The Sinfonietta's venture into Broadway repertoire is discussed in terms of social identity. The article argues, after Jürgen Habermas and T. W. C. Blanning, that one of the most significant contributions of the Sinfonietta has been its continued commitment to the concert event as a forum for critical engagement and cultural debate.

> Riddle: what equals the overwhelmingly large percentage (no less than eighty-five on the latest available figures) of public subsidies for London concerts swallowed by the city's four symphony orchestras? Answer: the equally large percentage of utterly aimless and conventional programmes they regurgitate for this support.[1]

Peter Heyworth's ironic 1969 puzzle catches London's concert life at a turning point. The status quo with concerts reiterating a core repertoire of exemplary works (with the cohesion of shared values it implies) was being countered by a pluralist musical culture, as early and modern music challenged the automatic primacy of the common practice canon. By the 1980s and 1990s the post-war and 1950s concert audience no longer existed, replaced – when it was replaced – by the spread of special-interest, or niche audiences. There had been an initial profusion of supply in post-Second World War London, from an abundance of concerts (often with pick-up orchestras using players just released from the forces) programming the standard classics.[2] These concerts were designed to cater for the enthusiastic new

I should like to thank the London Sinfonietta, particularly Cathy Graham (Managing Director) and Gillian Moore (Artistic Director) for granting me such generous access to their archives and placing no constraints on its use. I respected the fact that it is a working archive, and so did not seek to make use of 'live' material. I am very grateful to the London Sinfonietta staff for much encouragement, friendliness and kindness. Needless to say, responsibility for errors remains firmly with me, not least because there was never any sense of anxious prying into what I might or might not be discovering.

1 Peter Heyworth, *The Observer*, 16 February 1969.

2 A fascinating insight into programming around this time is provided by Potts, 'Analysis of 1948–9 Orchestral Programmes'. Russell is perhaps the most trenchant commentator of the post-war scene, lamenting the irresponsibility of the Royal Albert Hall, 'profiting by the amazing demand' while 'the public . . . gave it up in despair at the hackneyed programmes, and soon lost the habit of going to concerts', *Philharmonic Project*, 24–25.

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audience that had been generated out of subsidized provision, funded by CEMA as a wartime, morale-boosting measure.[3] But this audience was simply not sustainable in the longer term. For some, competing home and local entertainment attractions, radio, cinema and later the all-engulfing power of TV, were simply too much, and they soon fell away.[4] But the potentially more serious concert audience was to be undermined by the increasing availability of recordings and concerts transmitted by the BBC Home Service and the Third Programme on one hand,[5] and on the other, by the rising costs of tickets and refreshments – counterpointed by the urban inconveniences of concert attendance, such as unreliable public transport, difficulty of parking and personal safety. In other words, there were practical, social deterrents which ate away at the habit of concert-going, and which helped condition people to accept recording and radio broadcasts as a substitute, a trend reinforced by industry marketing using exaggerated claims such as Walter Legge's boast that the record listener would be placed in 'the best seat in an acoustically perfect hall'.[6]

The Sinfonietta: a case study

In the 1960s, London's concert life was invigorated by a new proliferation of specialist contemporary or historical performance ensembles. Characteristic was the vitality and commitment with which these groups pioneered then unfamiliar repertoires, infusing their concerts with a freshness and sense of adventure that grabbed attention and engaged inquisitive audiences. Most such ensembles were relatively ephemeral with a fairly rapid turnover of membership and identity. Little specific memory now remains of respected contemporary ensembles such as the Vesuvius and the Melos, for example. This ephemerality underlines how exceptional has been the unbroken existence of the London Sinfonietta since its foundation in 1968. To understand why the Sinfonietta managed to survive, where other ensembles worked for a time and then disbanded, we need to examine it in relation to the artistic, social and economic context in which it has operated.

The Sinfonietta makes a rewarding case study because a complex interaction of musical and extra-musical factors has generated multivalent processes. The ensemble's longevity prompts examination of both its survival strategies and the way its artistic and administrative policies have evolved to deal with changes in the surrounding aesthetic and funding environments. Its reputation as a champion of the modernist repertoire, both in performance

3 Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, the body set up to administer the first public subsidy to the arts. It was chaired by Maynard Keynes who oversaw the Council's transition into the Arts Council of Great Britain (incorporated in August 1946), and who was pivotal in securing the principle of public subsidy of the arts as an established feature of government expenditure.

4 1946 saw an explosion in cinema attendance which reached some 1,600 million, with many people going some three or four times a week, see Morgan, *Britain since 1945: The People's Peace*, 32–33.

5 The Home Service was created in September 1939 with the merging of the National and Regional Programmes; the Third Programme began broadcasting in September 1946. For an account of the Third Programme, see Carpenter, *The Envy of the World: Fifty Years of the BBC Third Programme and Radio 3*.

6 Schwarzkopf, *On and Off the Record: a Memoir of Walter Legge*, 16; Legge, her husband, was a producer for EMI and had formed the London Philharmonia as an EMI recording orchestra.

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and as a commissioner of new works, prompts enquiry into just how successful it has been in communicating and sustaining interest in the music it has played. The question 'how successful?' is here treated less in quantitative terms and more as an issue of significance; what has been the importance for new music of Sinfonietta concerts as a form of collective cultural experience in the age of recording? The Sinfonietta's repertoire falls firmly within the radical tradition of modernist concert music, but is not experimental in the sense of the work of counterpart collectives such as the Scratch Orchestra (founded in 1969 by Cornelius Cardew, Michael Parsons and Howard Skempton). Where such experimental music groups critiqued prevailing concepts of music and the social context of its performance, the Sinfonietta followed an essentially traditional pattern in establishing and presenting its repertoire; rather than questioning the basic premise and validity of the concert as an event, it brought innovations to the manner and format of the existing concert model (such as programme structure, platform choreography and dress code).

Origins

The precarious basis of most artistic organizations means that they require more than a share of good fortune to survive, and the Sinfonietta has been no exception to this. And part of the Sinfonietta's luck has been that each of the contrasting personalities responsible for its artistic and administrative direction over the different phases of its thirty-six-year lifespan has proved to be a good match for the cultural and funding ethos of their own particular time. The Sinfonietta was founded in 1968 as a vehicle for the conducting career of David Atherton, its artistic director, and as an arts management foothold for its administrator, Nicholas Snowman, both of whom had just left Cambridge University, and the Sinfonietta grew from a nucleus of Cambridge players. Atherton had caught early attention as a conductor after some successful productions of the University's Opera Society, going on to join the staff of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. Snowman persuaded prominent figures such as the wealthy benefactor Lois Sieff to join the Sinfonietta's Board and the influential George Christie of Glyndebourne Opera to become its first Chairman.[7] Snowman's savvy and contacts, together with Atherton's potential as a star conductor were crucial factors behind the early support of the Sinfonietta by the Arts Council and its endorsement by influential critics as a serious force.[8]

The Sinfonietta's approach was intended to offer a radical challenge to accepted patterns, as its prospectus made clear:

7 Every one of the Sinfonietta's own-promoted concerts in its early years made a loss that was not covered by the Arts Council or the London Orchestral Concert Board subsidy, and so financial support from benefactors was essential.

8 Reviews of the Sinfonietta's first concert, presented at London South Bank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall on 24 January 1968, include: Colin Mason, 'Impressive debut for orchestra', *Daily Telegraph*, 25 January 1968; Stanley Sadie, 'Ambitious and arresting cantata', *The Times*, 25 January 1968; Dominic Gill, 'John Tavener's Whale', *Financial Times*, 25 January 1968; Edward Greenfield, 'Tavener's "The Whale"', *The Guardian*, 25 January 1968; Stephen Walsh, 'A double first', *The Observer*, 28 January 1968; R. L. Henderson, 'Young man full of ideas', *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 January 1968. Edward Greenfield also previewed the concert in 'The electronic whale', *The Guardian*, 24 January 1968.

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> The London Sinfonietta is a new Chamber Orchestra, formed with the specific intention of playing music written in the twentieth century. Its programmes feature new works by British composers.

And lest there should remain any doubt, it sought to distance itself from historical instrumental patterns:

> It is not an eighteenth-century chamber orchestra based on strings, but a flexible combination of players able to deal with the often impractical demands of contemporary music.

The principle governing rehearsal time for each new work defined the idealism of the Sinfonietta enterprise. Enough time was to be allocated to ensure that audiences would hear and assess new and complex music presented in performances of the highest quality. (This concern for the quality of performance was an ambition that carried resonances of Schoenberg's *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*.) The investment in rehearsal time immediately distinguished the Sinfonietta from other professional London music-making, and the seriousness of this intention is illustrated by the fact that Roger Smalley's complicated *Pulses for 5 x 4 Players* was allocated four full rehearsals before its première in June 1969. This rehearsal policy was not only challenging in the financial sense, it also tested the commitment of individual players to the Sinfonietta ideal: fees for the 1968–69 season were £8 per performance but £4 per individual rehearsal, and it was pointed out that the clashes caused by the larger than customary number of rehearsals put players at a disadvantage in securing other, effectively more profitable, freelance engagements.[9] But despite the difficulties it caused in operation, this policy enabled the Sinfonietta to make its reputation quickly on the basis of generating and establishing new repertoire, while also setting new standards of performance. And in these days, when we have become accustomed to hearing modernist music in fine, idiomatic performances, it is easy to forget the revelatory impact that the Sinfonietta's playing made on its initial audiences and on the composers concerned. In 1971, Pierre Boulez and Luciano Berio conducted the Sinfonietta in London and then across Europe, to festivals in Perugia, Rome, Florence, Amsterdam and in France. This tour and the association with these icons of the avant garde established the ensemble's international reputation, important not only for the prestige it brought, but also for generating international engagements that produced the income necessary to cross-subsidize the ensemble's own promotions in London.

Snowman left the Sinfonietta in 1972 to go to Paris as the first artistic director of Boulez's IRCAM (where in 1976 he helped to established the Ensemble InterContemporain on the Sinfonietta model). He was succeeded by Michael Vyner, who also became the Sinfonietta's artistic director when Atherton resigned as Music Director in 1973. With his flamboyant charm, adroitly persuasive manner, and understanding of the value of image and presentation, Vyner was vital in establishing the Sinfonietta's identity as a new music ensemble,

9 London Sinfonietta Council (LSC), minutes of meeting held on 27 February 1968 (London Sinfonietta Archives [LSA] Council 1968–72).

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and networked to build effective bridges with the funding masters of his time. Whereas Atherton's and Snowman's programme building mixed twentieth-century works with music of other periods, Vyner believed he needed to construct an uncompromising identity for the Sinfonietta if it was to achieve a niche in the performance market. One aspect of this identity was the distinctive sound of its core ensemble, based on Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony, and this was the instrumental foundation on which many works were commissioned.[10]

Commissioning and gender issues

Vyner's success in developing relationships with figures who then led the European avant garde, such as Berio, Stockhausen, Boulez and Xenakis, in conjunction with the quality of the ensemble's performances, gave the Sinfonietta an unquestioned primacy in this repertoire. Although the Sinfonietta was not the first such specialist contemporary music ensemble (there were precedents in Boulez's Domaine Musical and Friedrich Cerha's Die Reihe), its mix of individual players' expertise and standards of ensemble playing made it the most influential of a galaxy of groups which followed, such as Speculum Musicæ in New York (1971), the Schoenberg Ensemble in Amsterdam (1974), and others such as the Ensemble Modern, Asko Ensemble, Ictus and Scandinavia's BIT 20.

While Vyner's commissioning decisions involving avant-garde figures from Europe and the United States were relatively uncontroversial, his choice among British composers was bound to arouse strong feelings. These reflected the disappointment of those who felt their work deserved the support of a Sinfonietta commission (with consequent speculation about the whys and wherefores of a composer being 'in' and 'out' of favour), as well as a sense of gender discrimination provoked by the Sinfonietta's reluctance to commission women composers. Over time such resentments led to divisive characterization of 'Sinfonietta composers' as cliquish males playing a particular sort of commissioning game, their music privileged because it conformed to a certain type of modernist idiom. Vyner's carefully publicized successes in securing for the ensemble subsidy and standing within the official art world compounded the bitterness of this representation. Vyner had clearly signalled which composers he preferred in an interview in *The Times*, in which he is quoted as saying:

> The music being written now is even more wonderful than before. We've entered a phase of the most ravishing diversity: Brian Ferneyhough, James Dillon, Simon Holt, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Oliver Knussen, Nigel Osborne, Colin Matthews, Robert Saxton, Chris Dench, Michael Rosenzweig . . .[11]

Looking at the Sinfonietta commissions from the 1980s, we see that (except for Knussen) all these composers are featured. In this decade, there were three commissions to Nigel

10 This core grouping is variously described by commentators as involving fourteen or fifteen players. The Schoenberg First Chamber Symphony is scored for '15 solo instrumentalists' (an ensemble based on single strings, with horns and woodwind), and the Sinfonietta practice was to include an additional percussionist.

11 Michael Vyner, '. . . a new golden age', *The Times*, 15 January 1987.

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Osborne and Harrison Birtwistle, and two each for Mark-Anthony Turnage and Simon Holt, Jonathan Lloyd, Dominic Muldowney, Simon Bainbridge and Robin Holloway. Composers with one commission during this period include Martin Butler, Michael Finnissy, Brian Chapple and Rupert Bawden. Only one commission was given to a woman, and that was to Elena Firsova for Chamber Concerto No. 4 (in 1989).

The gender issue raised by the virtual exclusion of women composers from the Sinfonietta's concerts, despite the prominence that several had demonstrably attained, was foregrounded by Nicola LeFanu in 1987. In a widely drawn and balanced discussion of the representation of women composers in the life of contemporary Britain, which originated as a paper given as part of the 'Women in Music' weekend held at the South Bank Centre (6–8 February 1987), LeFanu calculated that within a ten-year span of the Sinfonietta's own-promoted concerts containing some 250 hours of music, only fifteen minutes of music was by a woman.[12] LeFanu argued the unacceptability of such blatant inequality, stating:

> If we are going to break the stranglehold of what, in new-music circles, has come to be known as 'the mafia', then we must begin by opening our eyes and ears to all that music by women, but also by men, which at present only circulates in *samizdat* manuscripts or tapes. We must alert ourselves to the discriminations of a system which we all foster, willy-nilly, by acquiescence; a system which is claustrophobic for men as well as for women.[13]

LeFanu's criticism, with its telling reference to *samizdat*, underlines the extent to which, nineteen years after its foundation, the Sinfonietta was cast as the 'official' organ of contemporary music, with those outside it the dissident voices.[14] The fact that the Sinfonietta was perceived to be the maker (by commissioning or performances) or breaker (through disdain or neglect) of composers' reputations and careers, underlines the single-mindedness of the Vyner operation. Vyner's reputation as a shrewd spotter and encourager of creative talent was gained on the back of the critical success accorded to the scores he commissioned. These successes were achieved within the power structures of the prevailing British new music system – a system which LeFanu considered inherently unfair. But Vyner himself had to work with the incongruities of this system, with public subsidy dependent upon continued critical acclaim.

One of the clearest demonstrations of Vyner's strategy is the triumphal tone set in the anniversary season booklet, *London Sinfonietta: 20 Years*.[15] The congratulatory mood is sustained by messages from composers and vignettes of Sinfonietta life from players; the

12 LeFanu, 'Master Musician: an Impregnable Taboo?', 4–8. LeFanu does not cite the woman composer concerned, but it is likely to have been Thea Musgrave, whose *Space Play* was premièred on 9 October 1976. Between 1968 and 1972, the four years before Vyner, the Sinfonietta performed five works by Elisabeth Lutyens (including a commission, *The Tears of Night* for voice with mixed ensemble of renaissance and modern instruments, premièred 3 March 1972). LeFanu's statistical basis was that women counted for about 15 percent of working British composers.

13 LeFanu, 'Master Musician', 7.

14 *Samizdat* refers to the practice of clandestine copying and distribution of material (usually literature) banned in former Communist states.

15 *London Sinfonietta: 20 Years*.

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roll-call of authors is impressive, and the players tell an astonishing and committed story. Yet, despite such artistic gloss, the ensemble's financial structure was more tenuous – indeed the organization was more hand-to-mouth – than ever Vyner's critics imagined, with constant overspends to secure artistic objectives that earned him and the Sinfonietta several rebukes from successive Arts Council's music officers.[16] There is an alternative, but perhaps more valid, way of interpreting that anniversary booklet, viewing its triumphal surface as the anxious closing of ranks of an organization whose survival was under constant threat. The significant changes in cultural and political atmosphere in the UK that began taking hold in the 1980s and were firmly in place in the 1990s, underlined how much Vyner's attitudes, rooted on the basis of his own idea of cultural imperative, were of an earlier time; the sands were running out for publicly funding the sort of high art exclusivity that it was felt his tenure actively promoted. And to underline this point, the Arts Council's 1990 appraisal of the ensemble raised two uncomfortable issues: firstly a perception that the Sinfonietta's programming lacked breadth, and secondly, concern at the 'notable lack of women's music'; it was made clear that future grants depended upon a response to these concerns.[17]

In some respects, the fertility of Vyner's imagination ensnared him in grand visions that were well beyond the capacity of the underfunded ensemble to realize in any sustained way. His conception of the Sinfonietta grew until he represented it as a 'multifaceted' performance organization with the capacity to render the entire range of twentieth-century musical genres. In addition to the instrumental ensemble, he identified the LS Voices, the LS Chorus, the LS Dance, and the Opera Factory–London Sinfonietta (OFLS) collaboration.[18] Vyner used this vision as a means to argue with the Arts Council that the Sinfonietta 'was no longer just a small orchestra playing a handful of concerts. We are a national resource and should be used as such.'[19] By 'used' Vyner meant funded.

In 1978, well before David Freeman and his Opera Factory were influences, Vyner presented a paper, 'Music Theatre and the London Sinfonietta', to the Board, together with plans to present a Festival of Music Theatre in the 1980–81 season.[20] Funding issues prevented this, but music theatre pieces and short operas were occasionally presented by the

16 It may help the reader if the routes for public funding to the Sinfonietta are identified at this stage. In its earliest days, the Sinfonietta received funding on an *ad hoc* basis from the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) and from the London Orchestral Concert Board (LOCB). The LOCB was established out of a recommendation made by the 'Committee on the London Orchestras' (1965) commissioned by the ACGB and chaired by Arnold (later Lord) Goodman, commonly known as 'The Goodman Report'. The LOCB was to be a conduit for the national funding given by the ACGB and the local funding given by the Greater London Council (London's local authority). It was intended that the LOCB would maximize the effect of both funding streams by coordinating the allocation of grants to the London orchestras in such a way as to minimize duplication of concert programmes. The Sinfonietta was funded by the LOCB until the LOCB's abolition in 1986. After 1986, the Sinfonietta became a direct client of the Arts Council of Great Britain (which became the Arts Council of England in 1994).

17 London Sinfonietta Council, minutes of meeting, 27 January 1992 (LSA, Council Papers, 26/11/91–16/10/95).

18 London Sinfonietta 'Three Year Plan' covering 1989/90–1991/92 (LSA, Council Papers 1/3/89–17/9/91). The first Opera Factory was originally established in Sydney by David Freeman (1973–76), he started the second in Zurich in 1976 and established the third in London in 1981. Between 1984 and 1991 there was a formal partnership between it and the Sinfonietta, with Freeman and Vyner as joint artistic directors.

19 Letter dated 6 June 1984 from Vyner to Luke Rittner, Secretary-General of the Arts Council (LSA, 'Arts Council 1985' [the file runs from 1980–85]).

20 Minutes of meeting of Board of Directors, 23 June 1978 (LSA, Board and Council Meetings, April 1977–March 1979).

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Sinfonietta in staged versions, notably during the two-part Stravinsky festival held in 1979 and 1981. The Sinfonietta provided the pit band for some Glyndebourne Touring Opera productions (including the first complete performance of Oliver Knussen's *Where the Wild Things Are* in 1984) and for a *Rake's Progress* at La Scala, Milan (May 1979), engagements that brought important income to the Sinfonietta. The OFLS collaboration ran from 1984 to formal separation in 1991, in order to 'take a new look at the presentation of opera and to reach new audiences'.[21] This association was intended to facilitate a sustained exploration of music theatre repertory and twentieth-century opera.[22] Additionally, OFLS performed Mozart's *Così fan tutte* (August 1986) and *Don Giovanni* (February and March 1990) and Cavalli's *La Calisto* (January 1986), all in David Freeman's provocatively modernist productions. These brought much needed box-office revenue to both organizations, with the performances of *Don Giovanni* playing to nearly full houses in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London. But it was clear that funding requirements were pulling the organizations in different directions artistically and threatening to overwhelm the Sinfonietta financially; so, with the support of the Arts Council, they agreed to continue independently in 1991.

In 1983 the Sinfonietta established an educational programme, taking its lead from the education departments found in theatre and dance organizations, but not yet a feature of orchestras. Gillian Moore was appointed education officer, and during her ten years the Sinfonietta's concept of participatory educational work (with the emphasis on practical involvement in creating and performing music) quickly spread across schools, higher and adult education, and community outreach projects. Educational work not only provided a means of engaging and communicating with wide cross-sections of adults and children outside the concert hall, but also gradually built an important income stream for the organization. This was an example that other orchestras followed.

Broadway

Significantly, Vyner's policy of programming only twentieth-century works (making an exception only for some OFLS repertoire) was not infringed when the Sinfonietta performed and recorded works by Jerome Kern, Cole Porter and other Broadway composers. This apparently schizophrenic juxtaposing of high modernism with Broadway musicals can be read in different ways. First, it could be regarded as having no other meaning than as being a straightforward strategic response designed to help secure the Sinfonietta's future, 'softening' its image (and so making it more attractive to industry sponsors), widening the audience base and boosting cash flow. But another, more socially subversive, interpretation is that Broadway repertoire introduced a specifically gay association at exactly the time that the onset of HIV and AIDS were beginning to have a devastating effect on the contemporary creative and performing arts. Phillip Brett and Elizabeth Wood point to elements of Broadway and West End musical theatre as offering a particular arena for gay identification, citing Cole Porter and

21 'Three Year Plan', 1989–92 (LSA, Council Papers: 1/3/89–17/9/91).

22 Works performed included Tippett's *The Knot Garden* (1984), Nigel Osborne's *Hell's Angels* (1986, an OFLS commission), Birtwistle's *Yan Tan Tethera* (1986) and Maxwell Davies's *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* (1987).

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Bernstein, among others.[23] Michael Vyner initiated a series of Sinfonietta recordings of popular Broadway musicals, including *Showboat*, *Brigadoon* and *Kiss Me Kate,*[24] and it can be argued that the campness of the high crooning and close harmonies of some of the items included on *The Jazz Album* (1987) also gave that disc a specifically gay aspect.[25] The introduction of this repertoire at this time suggests that it stands as coded solidarity with the plight of fellow artists facing an illness (then still characterized as a 'gay plague') for which there was little alleviation, let alone a cure. Vyner himself died of AIDS in 1989.[26]

Pianist Paul Crossley became joint artistic director with Vyner in 1989, and continued in the role until 1994. Aware of views that the Sinfonietta had lost its cutting edge, and perhaps even its way, Crossley designed the 1990 season to counter such negative criticisms. For three concerts he programmed works by British 'Sinfonietta' composers,[27] while in two others he mixed Stravinsky with music by Kaija Saariaho and Magnus Lindberg.[28] But for the Sinfonietta to avoid being typecast as the ageing curator of a circumscribed repertoire and to engage with new stylistic parameters, it needed to reorient itself by working with the emerging generation of composers, on their terms rather than its own. The first stage in this process was the appointment in 1994 of Paul Meecham as General Manager (previously he had been head of marketing and sales at the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra). The second was the appointment, also in 1994, of the twenty-nine-year-old Markus Stenz as Principal Conductor. Seen as an exciting conductor with links to a generation of under-thirty-year-old composers the Sinfonietta would seek to commission, Stenz's appointment was strongly backed by the players. He took responsibility for programming and conducting about half the Sinfonietta's own promotions in the year, he controlled important instrumental appointments, and he had advisory input over commissioning. Overall artistic policy was part of Meecham's brief as General Manager, but Crossley and composer-conductor Oliver Knussen assisted on an informal basis.[29] By this means, commissioning and artistic policy became more collaborative processes within the organization.

23 Brett and Wood, 'Gay and Lesbian Music'.

24 Jerome Kern, *Showboat* (complete 1927 score), Frederica von Stade, Jerry Hadley. Ambrosian Chorus. London Sinfonietta/John McGlinn. 1989. Compact disc. EMI. CDC7498472; Frederick Loewe *Brigadoon*, Brent Barrett, Rebecca Luker. Ambrosian Chorus. London Sinfonietta/John McGlinn, 1992. Compact disc. EMI. CDC7544812; Cole Porter, *Kiss Me Kate*, Josephine Barstow, Thomas Hampson. Ambrosian Chorus. London Sinfonietta/John McGlinn. 1990. Compact disc. EMI CDS7540332.

25 *The Jazz Album*. Various soloists/Simon Rattle. 1987. Compact disc. EMI. CDC 7 47991 2.

26 Part 3 of the Sinfonietta's 25th Birthday Gala concert (23 January 1993) was titled 'On Broadway' and consisted of music by Jerome Kern, including 'Till the Clouds Roll By' (lyrics by P.G. Wodehouse) from *Oh,Boy!* (1917), Victor Herbert ('Toyland' and 'March of the Toys' from *Babes in Toyland* 1903), Cole Porter and Kurt Weill. In his Preface to the programme booklet, Paul Crossley wrote, 'So, this is both a happy occasion and one on which to remind ourselves, not just us within the organisation, but also us as an entire artistic community, what the Sinfonietta stands for'.

27 Commissions for British composers in 1990 went to Martin Butler, Geoffrey King and Jonathan Lloyd.

28 The programme on 16 April 1990 (conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen) was titled 'Stravinsky and Young Finnish Composers' and consisted of the world première of Magnus Lindburg's *Marea*, the UK première of Kaija Saariaho's *Grammaire des Rêves*, and Stravinsky's *Cantata* and *Pulcinella*. The design of the concert brought together two composers with a reputation of being creatively at the cutting edge (one a woman), with two Stravinsky works (one popular, to help with the audience, and one less familiar), directed by one of the leading young generation of conductors.

29 LSC, minutes of meeting on 5 July 1993 (LSA, Council Papers 26/11/91–16/10/95).

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Competition and reassessment

Meanwhile, 1990, the year after Vyner died, had been one of such severe crisis for the Sinfonietta that it nearly collapsed, a low point intensified by surrounding years that were almost as hard. Things had been difficult for the group because of Vyner's illness, but other factors contributed, too. For the first time, the Sinfonietta faced serious competition from other ensembles, such as the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, founded in 1987. Competition meant that it was harder to secure the out-of-London engagements the Sinfonietta relied upon to pay for its own-promoted concerts, particularly as more concert promoters expected this long-established ensemble to bring sponsorship of its own to underwrite its fees.[30] Also the Sinfonietta's Queen Elizabeth Hall concert base was coming under threat as the South Bank Centre raised concerns about audience decline and artistic policy.[31] There were also fewer BBC broadcasts, prompting a concerned letter to the Arts Council about funding implications:

> Up to 1988 the Sinfonietta was able to promote its main season with others, principally the BBC. Hidden subsidies therefore concealed the true cost of our season of own promotions. This no longer happens.[32]

In other words, the financial shoestring on which the ensemble had always run was becoming so attenuated as to be unfeasible – and this happened just as questions were raised about standards.

According to the Arts Council, the organization was suffering from failure to respond to the conditions of an increasingly tough economic environment and a highly competitive leisure market; it needed to sharpen up marketing, develop a broader sponsorship base and run a leaner management.[33] While the Sinfonietta generally made a box-office return on its own concerts, this amount was insufficient to cover the overall cost of its administration. Furthermore, in its Arts Council grant for 1990–91 the Sinfonietta had been penalized by an uplift smaller than that given to other London orchestras, of 3.4 percent as against the average 4.5 percent.[34] On top of an accumulated deficit in 1989 of some £28,000, the much greater deficit projected for 1989–90 was worsened by a loss of some £27,000 incurred by the recording of Tippett's *The Ice Break*, and by deficits incurred by Opera Factory. There was, however, promise of financial alleviation in the form of substantial sponsorship from Nikko Securities: beginning in 1990, £450,000 was pledged over four years; without this additional resource, the Sinfonietta would have folded. The initial challenge was just to remain afloat in

30 LSC, minutes of meetings, 14 May 1991; 15 March 1993; (LSA, Council Papers 26/11/91–16/10/95).

31 The Sinfonietta had entered into a residency agreement with the Centre in 1987, but the renewal of this residency (which gave important profiling and financial advantages to the ensemble) was surrendered by the orchestra in the face of growing dissatisfaction by the South Bank Centre, in favour of a 'more informal arrangement at the Barbican Centre' from the beginning of 1993, minutes of meetings, 13 February 1991 and 31 March 1991 (LSA, Council Papers 1/3/89–17/9/91).

32 LSC, minutes of meeting, 20 July 1990 (LSA, Council Papers 1/3/89–17/9/91).

33 As reported to the LSC meeting on 6 June 1990 (LSA, Council Papers 1/3/89–17/9/91).

34 LSC meeting on 24 January 1990 (LSA, Council Papers 1/3/89–17/9/91).

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November and December 1990 in order to allow for recovery measures to begin taking effect, and to wait for the second tranche of Nikko sponsorship to arrive in January 1991.

Under its Chair, Michael Haines, the Sinfonietta now began a fundamental reform of its operation in a spirit of new realism. The senior administration was slimmed down, a December concert was cancelled, and the Elliott Carter concerts planned for February 1991 and future concerts in the ambitious Millennium series were reconsidered in terms of their financial viability. The formal separation of the Sinfonietta and Opera Factory was completed, ending their financial relationship.[35] In planning the 1991–92 season, the artistic management had to work within a budget fixed at £200,000 for ten concerts of the core ensemble, reduced from thirteen. There was no further money to invest in recordings or provincial promotions.[36] The Arts Council rejected the Sinfonietta's appeal for an immediate £100,000, but nevertheless responded positively in that it was prepared, on the assurance of an acceptable business plan, both to accelerate funds to prevent formal insolvency and to help the Sinfonietta secure exceptional overdraft facilities from its bank. Later, it awarded the Sinfonietta a £125,000 development grant. This crisis had coincided with the Sinfonietta's enforced move to the Barbican Centre in the City of London. A price for Arts Council assistance was that the Sinfonietta had to explore potential savings that might be made from possible administrative links with the London Symphony Orchestra, the Barbican's resident orchestra. The move to the Barbican raised further problems, as will be discussed later. However, the threat of a management merger, effectively an LSO takeover, which the Sinfonietta saw as a direct threat to its artistic independence, receded only when the Sinfonietta proved to the Arts Council that such a move was unlikely to result in administrative savings.[37]

A small specialist ensemble faces the danger of financial pressures driving its artistic strategy to a greater extent than is necessarily the case for a conventional symphony orchestra. This is partly because its specialist nature restricts its marketability and limits its opportunities for sponsorship. Until the Nikko Securities sponsorship (secured by a dedicated fundraising committee formed in 1987), the Sinfonietta had not had a major sponsor for its concert work, except for a grant from IBM for £50,000 in the mid-1980s – instead, the majority of its sponsorship was attracted by the more immediately appealing work of the Sinfonietta's education arm in projects for schools and community outreach work, including prisons, activities which sponsors felt gave them credit by association. When the Nikko sponsorship ended in 1994, the Sinfonietta had not managed to replace it and so was affected by another funding crisis. This it faced with a searching process of self-examination undertaken in November 1994 (discussed later), as well as the practical benefit of a return to the South Bank Centre.[38] But what the Sinfonietta has had to come to terms

35 LSC meetings, 6 June 1990; 27 July 1990; 30 November 1990; 8 January 1991; 13 February 1991 (LSA, Council Papers 1/3/89–17/9/91).

36 LSC meeting, 30 November 1990; 13 February 1991(LSA, Council Papers 1/3/89–17/9/91).

37 LSC meeting, 13 February 1991(LSA, Council Papers 1/3/89–17/9/91).

38 This new residency agreement offered financial support for the Sinfonietta to undertake more risk-taking programming, and also secured the use of the Queen Elizabeth Hall for a minimum of ten concerts per year, with rehearsal time.

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with since 1994 are the contingent realities of the turn-of the-century funding situation in which the 'Thatcherite' drive towards public-private enterprise subsidy have been replaced by the 'Blairite' virtues of inclusiveness and relevance. Cultural relativism has been accelerated by the new political climate and one consequence has been the increasing difficulty of representing the case for the public subsidy of music that is branded elitist and of only minority interest. Indicative of the adverse local climate that all London's professional orchestras faced in the early twenty-first century was that the Mayor of London's draft culture strategy, circulated in 2003, omitted any mention of traditional concert events as an aspect of the city's cultural life. The irony of this omission (later rectified in the published version after representation by the orchestras) was underlined by the document's grandiloquent title, *London – Cultural Capital: Realising the Potential of a World-class City*.[39]

Renewal: the late 1990s

Paul Meecham left to run the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in 1997 and was succeeded as General Manager by Cathy Graham, formerly of the Society for the Promotion of New Music. In 1998 Gillian Moore returned to the Sinfonietta as Artistic Director, Markus Stenz left and Oliver Knussen was appointed Music Director in his place, becoming Conductor Laureate in 2002. This teaming of Graham and Moore has proved an important influence on recent developments in the Sinfonietta's work, and particularly on the three areas that are central to the continuing effectiveness of any arts organization: its artistic identity, its means of income generation and its methods of distribution. Their work has changed the face that the Sinfonietta now presents to the different constituencies of audiences, sponsors and funders. There is the obvious point to be made that for the first time in its history, management and artistic decision-making rests with women rather than with men. But it may also be that this collaboration has helped to shape a genuinely more inclusive and negotiated artistic policy for the Sinfonietta's work – approaches that show more awareness of cultural expectations within today's consumer-focused, metropolitan society. The previous careers of Moore and Graham have certain elements in common: both have been focused on promoting the experience of new music to different types of audiences, and on helping young composers. In Graham's case, this had been in running the Society for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM), which had devoted much effort to developing opportunities for younger composers. Since leaving the Sinfonietta as Education Officer in 1993 (although she joined its Council), Moore had been Head of Education at the South Bank Centre and Artistic Director of the ISCM World Music Days in Manchester just before rejoining the Sinfonietta. This broader cultural interest has been reflected in new directions the Sinfonietta's programming has taken. New initiatives to broaden audience appeal also include crossover events and collaborations with different musical and performance traditions (such as the 'Ether Festival' and 'Warp Works/20th-Century Masters'), as well as schemes such as 'Blue Touch Paper' and 'State of the Nation' designed to assist the

39 Mayor of London, *London – Cultural Capital: Realising the Potential of a World-class City* .

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development of emerging professional composers. But the Sinfonietta's traditionally modernist repertoire has also been strongly maintained, and attempts to increase its accessibility to younger audiences have developed through educational programmes of considerable sophistication.

Comparison between the Sinfonietta as it is now and as it was some ten years ago shows the extent to which the organization has taken innovative steps to harness today's technology to distribute its work, offering new means of access, such as an interactive website and its own record label. The comparison also shows how much the Sinfonietta has indeed sharpened up its approach to the professional business of running an ensemble in the present climate. And where once the Sinfonietta had a single sponsor, now it draws on contributions from a wide range of sources. What we can observe from this is that the Sinfonietta has recognized the need to enter the arts marketplace in a wholehearted way if it is to survive as a specialist ensemble.

Contrasting frames

Even from this abbreviated account of the Sinfonietta, we see that the narrative is made up of a multiplicity of strands and sub-strands, artistic, administrative and financial. There are plural histories to be told here. But underlying and shaping them all is an economic rationale which has taken different guises according to the current nature of the public funding environment upon which the Sinfonietta is dependent. This point can best be illustrated by jumpcutting between three frames showing the Sinfonietta at significant stages of its development. Each frame illustrates how internal attitudes within the organization have responded – whether in positive or negative ways – to the external context, and the ways that the Sinfonietta is viewed by those outside it. The first frame, the early phase, 1968–80, is characterized by innovation and growth. Artistically vital, and confident of the essentially supportive attitude of the London Orchestral Concert Board, chaired by Sir William Glock, the Sinfonietta sets about establishing its reputation, firmly rooted on public subsidy. The second frame, straddling the twentieth and twenty-fifth anniversaries,1988–93, shows the Sinfonietta to be at a turning point. There is both the artistic achievement that the single-minded pursuit of the ensemble's goals have brought it, but also the fact that the Sinfonietta is at a low ebb, isolated for its perceived cliquishness within the wider contemporary music community (who also resent its claim on new-music funding) and now characterized by critics as an enervated force. Public subsidy is threatened because of the exclusiveness of its programming, and new sponsors are not forthcoming. The third frame, a current perspective, sees the Sinfonietta coming back from this isolation by working with new generations of composers, seeking to bring in new audiences, creating new systems to distribute its work and giving priority to broadening its income base.

In the first frame, we see how, at the earlier stages of its life, the quality of the Sinfonietta's artistic vision – voiced as the cultural imperative of art for art's sake – was used to claim and unlock additional funds for the Sinfonietta. Andrew Porter gives a clear indication of the cultural background to this early period:

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> In 1968 Britain had a high-minded Labour government [Jennie Lee was the Minister for the Arts]. The Arts Council, John Cruft its music director, was admired and respected as it provided ample but discriminating support for serious music-making. William Glock was music controller of the BBC, heedless of 'listener response' and thereby gaining it. Pierre Boulez conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra. . . . [A]nd in those days, the daily and Sunday newspapers and weekly magazines had long columns for rigorous, excited championship of serious new music. Essays in the *Times* and the *Telegraph* reflected on new compositions, and a learned *Listener* article prepared listeners for an important broadcast of the forthcoming week.[40]

And as Snowman himself later summed it up, 'we were innocents living in innocent times when astounding things could be achieved'.[41] But the Sinfonietta's founders were not entirely innocent of the ways of the world, as they launched the ensemble in a blaze of publicity that was fuelled by an astutely chosen first programme whose key work was John Tavener's unconventional, but essentially very approachable work for multi-media, *The Whale*, recorded at John Lennon's prompting for the Beatles' Apple label in 1970. It was all a very genteelly bourgeois revolution compared with the violence of the 1968 Paris *événements*. Although distance undoubtedly lent some enchantment to this representation of cultural Arcady, the time was undoubtedly propitious for the sort of cultural initiative that the Sinfonietta represented, as Snowman recognized.[42] Vyner continued to exploit the 'high culture' card as late as 1980, and a specific instance of this is his programming for the 1979–80 season. This season (which included phase 1 of the Stravinsky Festival) had a projected deficit of some £34,000 before sponsorship and a deficit of some £15,000–£20,000 even if all the planned sponsorship was raised. As the minutes expressed the situation:

> The [Sinfonietta] Council agreed that the plans for promotions for the year to 31 March 1980, reflected in the financial projections for that date, were too important to be altered from the sole point of view of financial saving; and that instead every effort should be made to correct the financial situation without artistic compromise.[43]

Subsidy was later sought and secured from the London Orchestral Concert Board, but this voicing of the primacy of artistic intentions above financial prudence, was made in the belief that the tab would somehow be picked up by others. At this stage, the stance taken by the Sinfonietta was to view public subsidy for its work as having a strong measure of certainty and

40 Andrew Porter, *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 February 1998. The flavour of the period is well conveyed in the Report by the Committee of London Orchestras (1965), chaired by Lord Goodman (soon to be appointed Chairman of the Arts Council) which famously fudged the issue of the appropriate number of London orchestras by concluding that, 'present work available justifies the existence of rather more than three but less than four orchestras'. Today, Goodman's report appears a last-ditch defence of high cultural values against the potent adversaries of the electric guitar and pop.

41 Nicholas Snowman, *The Times*, 21 January 1998.

42 *The Times*, 21 January 1998.

43 LSC meeting, 25 April 1979 (LSA, Board of Directors 1978–81).

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all the paternalistic benevolence of old style patronage. But Vyner had a rougher awakening to reality when he encountered the commercially focused attitude taken to the Sinfonietta by Decca records. Vyner had exerted all his charm in arguing the cultural benefits of having the Sinfonietta recordings re-released to mark its twentieth anniversary. In response he received a letter from Paul Myers (Manager of Classical Production at Decca) which stated baldly that Decca's marketing department had decided not to reissue the Sinfonietta recordings as their production lines were reserved 'for more commercial recordings'.[44]

The second frame sees the Sinfonietta at a crossroads. As reference to Nicola LeFanu's article in *Contact* has shown,[45] by its twentieth anniversary in 1988, the Sinfonietta's expectations of public subsidy, as well as its programming and commissioning policies were seen as arrogant and had generated strong resentment, a resentment that was further exacerbated by the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations in 1993. Critics perceived in these latter celebrations a mixture of complacency and loss of artistic nerve, and reflected unfavourably on the ensemble's dominance of the contemporary music territory, its cornering of public new music funding and its ageing players (a very negative view of the continuity of the players and performance experience).[46] Others saw the extravagance of the anniversary concert itself as an act of hubris, with the appearance on the programme of Ravel's G major Piano Concerto and smoochy songs from Broadway shows instead of more challenging fare, as an essentially comfortable, bourgeois, package that represented the betrayal of the Sinfonietta's philosophical basis and demonstrated a lack of confidence in its – and music's – future.[47] For Stephen Johnson, 'this wasn't a celebration, it was a wake', and Tom Sutcliffe's preview ended by saying 'A golden jubilee looks doubtful.'[48] By now, with the introduction of the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme in 1984, the Arts Council had adopted the language of business, and its 1986/7 Annual Report referred to art works as 'products' and audiences as 'consumers', with calls for value for money (understood in terms of consumer take-up).[49] It was clear that the Sinfonietta had to find some way back from its extreme position if it was to rehabilitate itself as a publicly funded organization, and the programme for the twenty-fifth birthday 'Birthday Gala' appears an attempt to do so.

The third frame, a capsule of the way the Sinfonietta presents itself now, shows that recent strategic objectives have been to reverse perceptions of the Sinfonietta as an isolated force within contemporary music. The evidence is that not only have more widely drawn artistic associations and creative relationships been created within what is now a considerably

44 Letter to Michael Vyner, dated 16 June 1987 (LSA, 'Decca Recordings 1979–1989'.)

45 See note 12.

46 Bayan Northcott, 'Tastes for all palates', *Independent*, 26 January 1993; Peter Paul Nash, 'The real thing', *Classical Music*, 16 January 1993.

47 Part 1 of this three-part concert consisted of Varèse's *Intégrales*; Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major; Berio's *Folk Songs*; the only commissioned work, Robert Saxton's *Psalm – A Song of Ascents*; Knussen's *Songs without Voices* (London première) and Schoenberg's *Chamber Symphony* No. 1. Part 2 consisted of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*. See note 26 for details of Part 3 ('On Broadway').

48 Stephen Johnson, 'One step forwards, two steps back', *Independent*, 26 January 1993; Tom Sutcliffe, 'Struggle for punters', *The Guardian*, 22 January 1993.

49 See, among others, Pick, *Vile Jelly: The Birth, Life and Lingering Death of the Arts Council of Great Britain*; Hewison, *Culture and Consensus: England, Art and Politics since 1940*; Witts, *Artist Unknown: An Alternative History of the Arts Council*.

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expanded contemporary arts field, but that there has been an important change in the way of setting about this. Whereas Vyner sought to establish matters on a nominally in-house basis by giving the collaborations he initiated a 'London Sinfonietta' title (such as OFLS and LS Dance) and so claiming ownership of them, this has not been a characteristic of current initiatives. By seeking to programme on a basis of cooperation and negotiation, rather than ownership, the Sinfonietta is better positioned to resist charges of building itself into a cultural ghetto, the situation that many felt the Sinfonietta had created for itself amongst the contemporary music community of the 1980s. Now its schemes to help young composers establish themselves, eclectic programming involving other musics that have filled the 3,000-seat Royal Festival Hall, and educational schemes for schools, communities and conservatoires have all been used to create contemporary vitality and artistic relevance. The Sinfonietta's greater attractiveness to sponsors is demonstrated by the fact that between 1994/5 and 2001/2 the funds above core grant it raised for itself increased by almost 600 percent.[50] But the uncompromising commitment to a rehearsal schedule that other ensembles would find economically prohibitive has remained one of the Sinfonietta's defining features, and a *raison d'être* for its applications for funding. In an analysis of its performance costs for its own concert promotions in 2000/1, a comparison was given between the Sinfonietta and an Arts Council subsidized small chamber orchestra playing mainly standard 'mainstream' repertoire familiar to most of its players. The average number of rehearsals per Sinfonietta concert was seven, while the mainstream orchestra had a total of forty rehearsals for seventy concerts.[51] This ratio of rehearsal to performance is perhaps the clearest indicator of the nature of Sinfonietta economics. It also signals the continuing primacy of the live concert as the core focus for the Sinfonietta's work.

By setting these three frames against each other, we see how the economic dynamic is playing. The important changes that we can see happening represent alterations of the Sinfonietta's strategic direction as it gears itself to meet the different conditions imposed by its income sources. The analogy that best describes what is happening here is one which Cyril Ehrlich characterized as the transition from patronage to the market-place.[52] Ehrlich argues that the changes from patronage to marketplace 'usually entail fundamental dislocations and readjustments in costs, opportunities and risks', and the evidence for this is clearly illustrated by each of these three frames.[53] For although the ensemble continues to remain dependent on public subsidy for its existence, the changed nature of today's funding environment, one that has particular consequences for specialist organizations, has created a context that replicates the marketplace. Public subsidy based on an essentially 'high art' view of what constituted artistic worth, in which minority cultural interests were considered on an exceptional basis, has been replaced by relative values in which the stated priority is for the arts to 'reflect the full range and diversity of contemporary society'.[54] The 'high art' model

50 'What are the reasons for the London Sinfonietta's performance costs', in *What Next? The London Sinfonietta Self-Assessment 2002*.

51 'How has the London Sinfonietta financed its activities since 1994?', *What Next*, section A.

52 Ehrlich, 'Market Themes', 1–5.

53 Ehrlich, 'Market Themes', 1.

54 Arts Council England, *Ambitions for the Arts 2003–2006*, 7.

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that operated when the Sinfonietta was founded, in which the funding competition was against claims for support from other western art forms, has been replaced by a situation in which the Sinfonietta has to bid on a wider, trans-cultural, and so more competitive basis.

A further pressure on the Sinfonietta came with the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986 which brought about the end of the London Orchestral Concert Board. The LOCB had been funded jointly by the Arts Council and the Greater London Council, which meant that the Sinfonietta made one application to access local as well as national funding. This effectively fudged the issue of whether, as the London Sinfonietta, it was a national or a local organization. After the demise of the LOCB, the Sinfonietta became a direct client of the Arts Council.[55] A consequence of this change to Arts Council England, London is the confrontational effect of bringing together very different types of funding clients within a single grants awarding arena. Represented on one hand are the London-based mainstream music organizations with international reputations (such as the Sinfonietta and the London symphony orchestras) while on the other are community arts groups. The invidiousness that comes from such a stark juxtaposition of relatively large and small amounts of funding can disadvantage the mainstream client: in political terms, it is very difficult to argue for grant increases to these bodies in the face of the small amounts awarded to the local companies. Thus London's political agendas of social inclusion and cultural diversity have become more directly reflected in policies for arts funding. And to secure an element of local funding, the Sinfonietta is therefore in direct competition with grassroots arts organizations for discretionary grants, a situation for which its musical profile does not make it a natural competitor.

The Sinfonietta as 'art world'

While one description of the Sinfonietta might be of an ensemble with a core instrumental make-up based on Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony, this mono-dimensional description gives no sense of the Sinfonietta operating as collaborative social organization. The Sinfonietta's artistic identity has always been articulated primarily through its choice of repertoire, and the decisions it makes about what to play have an obvious strategic significance as the organization navigates its way within the wider infrastructural and funding context of concert life. Although changes of artistic directors have brought some observable differences, the overall persistence of an identifiably 'Sinfonietta' fingerprint in its repertoire and programming points to an underlying continuity of musical and performance aesthetic. Fluctuations to this pattern are clearer in the case of the Sinfonietta than for orchestras whose work is based on the more transient musical identity of a succession of soloists and permanent conductors. Changes in the Sinfonietta's pattern are likely to be indicative of a management response to wider musical, financial or other extra-musical

55 When the Arts Council of Great Britain became the Arts Council of England (with separate councils for Wales and Scotland) it devolved further powers to different regions. For the Sinfonietta, this was to the London Regional Arts Board (2000–02) and from their abolition in 2002, to Arts Council England, London. (See also note 16 for the origin of the LOCB.)

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circumstances, and made in order to secure its continuing survival and prosperity as an independent artistic institution. As we have seen, a characteristic of its later history has been the ways by which it has sought to become a more genuinely integrated member of the artistic community, by widening its artistic framework and through collaborative projects undertaken on a partnership rather than an ownership basis. Such an important change has to be negotiated within the organization, rather than imposed, if it is to take root and to work. Where once Vyner was seen to operate as the Sinfonietta's determining force, the current partnership of Graham and Moore presents a more deliberately collective approach that has seen the Sinfonietta taking a more broadly based view of the musical idioms it has chosen to programme and the context they are presented in.[56]

The formulation of an interactionist 'art world' model by the American sociologist, Howard S. Becker, offers a usefully inclusive view of an arts organization.[57] Becker proceeds from the basis that artistic work involves the collaboration of a whole range of people and their activities, only some of whom fit the conventional description of 'artist'. In a discussion of Becker's approach, the British sociologist Peter Martin argues that Becker's concept of the art world is particularly valuable because 'it dissolves the distinction between the "art world" and its social context: the layer is no longer to be seen as the external environment *within* which the former is'.[58] In other words, the social factors that shape the context within which the art world operates – the economic and technological aspects as well as surrounding artistic and aesthetic ideologies – exert an inevitable influence on the performance outcomes, distribution and reception of its art. As collaborative organizations, art worlds generate their own conventions for what they do and how they do it, and so they become situations which foster particular types of artists whose work is compatible with the aims of that art world. Defining the Sinfonietta as an art world is thus to view it as an example of collective activity, a social organization that encompasses a wide range of perspectives, including the development and maintenance of traditions, the training and selection of new collaborators, the mechanisms of distribution and the audience and its taste.[59] This model therefore makes us more curious to see how the whole 'art world' process operates in the case of the Sinfonietta, and makes us more aware that the way it works will in turn feed into and become part of the music's performance.[60]

There have been many examples of composers who have formed their own performance ensembles as a vehicle for securing good performances of their music. This has often been

56 Recent examples have included collaborations with artists from electronic dance pioneers Warp Records and participation in the Ether festivals of 2003. 2004 and 2005. The 2005 Ether festival saw the London Sinfonietta collaborating with Jonny Greenwood from Radiohead.

57 Becker, *Art Worlds*.

58 Martin, *Sounds and Society: Themes in the Sociology of Music*, 173.

59 Becker, 'Ethnomusicology and Sociology: A Letter to Charles Seeger'.

60 Martin, 'Over the Rainbow? On the Quest for 'The Social' in Music Analysis', 133. Becker also sees the art world as offering an efficient means of production which 'loner' creators such as Partch and Nancarrow forgo: '[We] think of social organisation as the network of people who cooperate to produce that work. . . . They organize their cooperation by referring to the conventions current among people who participate in the production and consumption of such works. . . . Conventions make collective action simpler and less costly in time, energy and other resources; yet they do not make unconventional work impossible, only more costly and more difficult'. *Art Worlds*, 368.

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necessary in cases where the music has made new ensemble demands on performers (such as the Steve Reich and Philip Glass ensembles) or where composers have found it difficult to have their work taken up by others, particularly where they score for individual instrumental formations rather than established ensembles. British examples of the latter include the Pierrot Players (later The Fires of London) formed by Birtwistle and Maxwell Davies (1967–87), and the Campiello Band, later the Michael Nyman Band (1977–). So what distinctions might be drawn between these examples and the Sinfonietta? Essentially, if we think of the Sinfonietta in terms of the social and artistic structures suggested by Becker's idea of the art world, we might characterize it as a performance-based community in which composers are invited to collaborate, but are not there as of right. This overturns the traditional focus on the composer, and puts performance at the heart of what this Sinfonietta art world is about. The fact that Sinfonietta players typically stay with the ensemble over a long period of time reinforces its collective nature. There are two keys to interpreting the Sinfonietta's artistic and organizational behaviour. The first is that the activity of performance, and those things that are necessary to support and enhance its quality, forms the ensemble's *raison d'être*. The second key is that the Sinfonietta is repertoire-driven rather than composer driven. Combined, these aspects – the performance focus realized in terms of a particular repertoire – modify the conventional concert process 'composer-performer-audience', into a model that is more accurately expressed as 'performer-repertoire-audience'. This new model captures the essential dynamic of the Sinfonietta's art world, the drive to create a repertoire to serve its performance needs and style. It is the singularity of this as an achievement that accounts for the individuality of the Sinfonietta's profile in London's concert life spectrum. It also follows that the Sinfonietta's collaborations with composers are explicitly constructed, and the benefits of this interaction to the Sinfonietta itself are carefully calculated, and to a degree that it would not always be comfortable for the respective participants to acknowledge.

How has the Sinfonietta seen itself? The Arts Council's insatiable demands for strategic and self-assessment documents make these a useful means of tracking organizational change, although, by its nature, such material places a premium on the Council being reassured by its contents. But the most genuine and honest self-assessment came out of an internal discussion day, the first to involve players, staff and the Board together, designed to range across all aspects of the Sinfonietta. This happened in November 1994, when it was clear that the move to the Barbican in 1993 had been a disaster, and the Sinfonietta was seeking to return to the South Bank; with the end of the Nikko Securities sponsorship, and no new sponsor lined up, the Sinfonietta was staring at a substantial annual deficit from April 1995. It was a time for a plain collective response to a series of questions about the issues the Sinfonietta faced, which is why the record of the meeting is such a valuable document. In exploring the issues of the Sinfonietta's profile within a now crowded new-music market: presentation, stylistic diversity and balance in programming, the responses were that the ensemble's strengths were felt to be its flexible line-up and high standards of performance; that it needed to recognize that the range of contemporary musical styles – from minimalism or jazz to the complexity of a composer such as Ferneyhough – was much greater than it was when the Sinfonietta began;

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and that its concerts needed to be designed in a way that created a sense of event. Other questions asked whether the Sinfonietta should move away from its core instrumental formation; whether the early twentieth-century modernist repertoire of the Second Viennese School, Stravinsky, Ives, Gerhard, etc., was now in safe hands, so freeing the Sinfonietta to concentrate on music from the latter years of this century and the next one; and whether the ensemble should resume involvement in dance and music theatre projects. The answers were that the Sinfonietta needed to continue to provide a flexible resource to match composers' aspirations, and abandoning the core line-up might risk engagement opportunities; that while the early twentieth-century classics should still be programmed, especially abroad, they should be carefully selected for London audiences who were very familiar with them; and that selected stage projects could be undertaken but that there should be no formal affiliation with other organizations. The fact that there was such a discussion day marked a notable step in the development of the Sinfonietta as arguably one of the most integrated art worlds of recent years, able to recognize the dangers it faced and understanding the need to adapt itself to be able to mount concerts that generated audience interest and fulfilled their expectations.

Concerts

One of the changes to the cultural environment in which the Sinfonietta operates has been a perceptible difference in the attitude of bodies awarding public subsidy. Andrew Porter, describing the Sinfonietta's beginning, remarked upon an atmosphere in which Arts Council's officers were freer to exercise their professional judgement as John Cruft did when he provided 'ample but discriminating support for serious music-making'.[61] Post-1979, the market-centred philosophy of the Thatcher government meant that justification for the award of public subsidy became ever more driven by market-derived concepts of value for money, often related to audience size. But an approach that sees ticket sales as an important indicator of 'value', particularly when used to rationalize funding decisions, poses an insoluble dilemma to any specialist arts organization. Peter Heyworth's description of Sinfonietta concerts as 'programmes which are not only inevitably less popular but cost infinitely more to prepare' neatly encapsulates that dilemma.[62] We have seen that the Sinfonietta economics are driven by high rehearsal costs set against restricted box-office appeal, making the ensemble vulnerable to accusations of peddling musically exclusive programmes designed to cater only for elitist audiences. Certainly at different periods of its life, the Sinfonietta has been felt to be offering sometimes more and sometimes less 'value'. But it may have seemed to some that the situation was at its most paradoxical when critical reaction to the twenty-fifth anniversary concert in 1993 suggested that the Sinfonietta was being seen to be giving the smallest justification for its funding and to be offering least

61 See note 40.

62 Peter Heyworth, 'After the first five years', Sinfonietta programme booklet for 7 October 1972, reprinted from *The Observer*. This was a strong endorsement of the ensemble's achievements that also drew attention to its parlous financial state.

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musical value precisely when programming works with more popular appeal.[63] Is such a reaction valid, or merely perverse, especially at a time when, as D. L. LeMahieu succinctly expressed it, 'consumers replaced critics as the arbiters of success'?[64] To consider this, we need to introduce a different sort of critical approach; one that looks at how well the Sinfonietta fosters and deepens cultural debate about the art it is helping to bring into being.

In *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture*, T. C. W. Blanning offers an historian's perspective on the significance of cultural participation in shaping and influencing the life of European nations in the eighteenth century.[65] In making his argument, Blanning draws on Jürgen Habermas's concept of 'the public sphere' to examine the formative political and social influence exerted by different cultural institutions (the concert being one of these) as forums for the exchange of ideas.[66] In this model, the concert is important as an arena for cultural identification and 'as a medium through which private persons can reason in public'.[67] Blanning argues that it is the cohesion brought about by this exchange of ideas which distinguishes the concert audience from 'aggregates of individuals'.[68] One of the themes that Habermas develops in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is the decline of present-day cultural institutions, such as the concert, in functioning as an arena for serious critical debate. The trajectory of his argument is encapsulated by his chapter title, 'From a culture-debating (*kulturräsonierend*) to a culture-consuming public', and Habermas's diagnosis for this cultural decline is the fragmenting of opinion caused by individual consumerism ('rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption . . . unravelled into acts of individuated reception') and the process of 'dumbing down' dictated by the commercial imperatives of a mass culture market. As Habermas expresses it, before the grip exerted by today's culture industry took such a firm hold, it was more customary for the purchase of the ticket for the cultural experience to be the precursor 'for the conversation about what you had read, heard and seen and what you might completely absorb only through this conversation'. This he contrasts with the modern media, in which there is abundance of discussion, '[b]ut surreptitiously it has changed in a specific way: it assumes the form of a consumer item'.[69]

Hugely influential, Habermas's grand narrative has nevertheless attracted criticism for aspects of its social and historical representation.[70] But as shown in its treatment by Blanning, Habermas's conceptualization of a concert as a forum to bind together the music and debate about that music, argues for the concert continuing to have inescapable significance as a collective or social cultural experience and not just an individual one. And one reason why Habermas and Blanning are so relevant to a discussion about the London Sinfonietta is that

63 See note 48.
64 LeMahieu, '*The Gramophone*: Recorded Music and the Cultivated Mind in Britain between the Wars', 373.
65 Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660–1789*.
66 Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*; my references are to the English translation, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*.
67 Blanning, *The Culture of Power*, 8.
68 Blanning, *The Culture of Power*, 9.
69 Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 161, 165, 164.
70 See Blanning, *The Culture of Power*, 11–14.

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they prompt reconsideration of what ought to be (to borrow from Walter Benjamin[71]) the function of a concert in our age of mechanical reproduction if we are not to become the passive consumers of commercially manipulated culture.[72] Just as Benjamin argued that it was the 'aura' of the work of art which withered by its mechanical reproduction, so Habermas holds that consumerism has diluted the exchange of critical viewpoints that properly should surround the experience of music.[73] Effectively, Habermas is reminding us that it is because recording has become so ubiquitous and so attractive a means of representation through its convenience and cheapness, that we are in great danger of losing our awareness of its Faustian nature. Recording gains us the independence and freedom to consume our music as and where we want, but too often the price of that independence is isolation from the social experience as 'audience'. In the terms of this argument, notions of 'relevance' and 'audience size' have no part to play as criteria of 'value'. Rather, concerts continue to be important because they have the potential to draw together 'a diversity of social groups and ideologies' in cultural debate as part of the audience experience (and foster offshoots in reviews and articles).[74]

Do the Sinfonietta's programmes make the sort of impact that means they generate a real sense of critical engagement among their audience? And, given today's diversity of idioms, has the Sinfonietta done something more than privilege one particular type of contemporary 'classical' music (something that would be to replicate traditional patterns of canon formation)? There has been evidence in recent years of a more iconoclastic approach to Sinfonietta programming, not least because of its broader musical range. During much of its lifetime, the Sinfonietta's advocacy of a particular strand of the modernist tradition has been influential in securing the reputation of Birtwistle in particular (from among British composers). Similarly, it has also played an important part in establishing performance traditions for the works of many international avant-garde composers. For example, the Sinfonietta's championing of Boulez, Berio, Carter and Takemitsu at critical stages in their respective careers played a significant role in the way those composers were able to construct or reinforce their careers in relation to recording companies as well as to national and international grant or prize-awarding bodies. Under its present management, the Sinfonietta has produced more varied types of programmes. These include the patterning of forms of musical confrontation by making striking juxtapositions between compositional idioms. Other concert structures have been designed to produce a more systematic sense of context with satellite events generating fresh musical perspectives. These sorts of programmes, designed to challenge by the way they present pieces in a fresh light and in different contexts, certainly represent the sort of serious critical engagement that Habermas envisaged. In addition, it could also be argued that the Sinfonietta's educational and outreach work is an important tool in equipping and encouraging a similar process in a younger or less experienced audience. It is the concert's ability to create a space for the possibility of

71 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.
72 Blanning, *The Culture of Power*, 11.
73 Benjamin, 'The Work of Art', 215.
74 Blanning, *The Culture of Power*, 15.

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communal engagement about a shared, rather than an individual, musical experience that separates it so completely from that afforded by listening to a CD. And out of necessity, a CD is usually packaged in a way that gives priority to commercial reality rather than enterprising programming. [75]

The Sinfonietta's appearance in 1968 represented idealism and innovation linked to the ideology of the avant garde and the revolution in taste that William Glock was achieving through his radio and Proms programming at the BBC. Welcoming the Sinfonietta for bringing a new musical benefit to London's musical life, the critic Peter Heyworth contrasted the poor value (represented as predictably routine programming) of the £350,000 public subsidy going to London's orchestras, when compared to the artistic value of adventurous programming and quality performances achieved by the meagre £5,000 grant to the Sinfonietta.[76] There are some aspects of today's concert life that have been shaped or initiated by the Sinfonietta. First is a more adventurous approach to programming, and in this the immediate influence was Glock, who, with the resources of the BBC behind him, had set a new vision for the possibilities of creative programming.

Early on, the Sinfonietta learned that a themed series made better box office and the cumulative effect made a much bigger impact than individual concerts. Some of their most telling achievements came in festivals that featured the imaginative pairing of a well-known composer with a lesser-known one (Schoenberg/Gerhard in 1973, Weill and British Commissions in 1977, Schubert/Webern in 1978, Varèse/Ravel in 1984 as well as the more predictable Britten/Tippett in 1986), the surveys of music ('1945→' in 1980, '1952→' in 1982 and '1955→' in 1985) and the *Towards the Millennium* series planned in conjunction with Simon Rattle. The Sinfonietta and David Atherton were prime movers of the mammoth Stravinsky Festival, presented in two phases in 1979 and 1981, planned as the first complete presentation of his *œuvre*.[77] These concert cycles, constructed for their musical variety and their often provocative conjunction of works, made a telling contribution to the growth of London's reputation as the music capital of the world. The Sinfonietta was very conscious of how innovative they were being with the early festivals, and wished to make some form of more permanent record in the shape of the accompanying programme books. The Schoenberg/Gerhard was a bulky volume containing extended essays about the composers and analyses of the music. In conjunction with Faber and Faber, the Stravinsky festival featured a limited edition of Eric Walter White's book on the composer which included

75 The exigencies of raising the subsidy necessary to support the recording of a composer whose music does not have an obvious commercial appeal places an obvious premium on recording as much of it as is possible to fit on a CD, rather than programming it with other music. Similarly, where a contemporary composer has greater commercial potential, usually a CD is made exclusively of their music in order to facilitate marketing and to maximize the sense of good value to the potential purchaser. It is rare that CDs are made on the basis of a miscellany of short works making a programme that is interesting in its own terms. It is perhaps predictable that two examples to illustrate the exception come from an independent charitable company. *The Hoxton 13* preserves work of young composers from Hoxton New Music Days (NMC D076), and *Mary Wiegold's Songbook* contains 14 short songs that form a spectrum of British composition of the late 1980s (NMC D003).

76 Heyworth, 'After the first five years'.

77 David Atherton was the festival's artistic director and principal conductor. As well as the Sinfonietta, the London Symphony Orchestra, The Royal Opera House and Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet were involved.

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programmes for the complete festival.[78] The Webern/Schubert festival represented a comprehensive survey of Webern's music, and the series was presented to the LOCB with a projected deficit of £13,000. The LOCB, chaired by Glock, awarded the Sinfonietta a 40 percent increase in its grant to help bring the series off. Despite this shaky financial basis, the Sinfonietta went ahead with the scheme to create a special paperback edition of Hans Moldenhauer's recent Webern biography.[79] It bought 500 unbound sets from the publisher, Gollancz, added sections on the Schubert works, on the Sinfonietta itself and some advertising and bound it within a special festival cover. As it needed to sell 300 copies to cover its costs, quite apart from the effort of creating the final make-up, this represented a considerable undertaking and something of a heroic commitment to Webern's music.

More recent programme building patterns have seen weekend events (variously called *Response*, *Explorations*, *State of the Nation*) that have mixed performances with workshops, discussion and a social environment seeking to develop a sense of a shared-interest community. Another feature has been the two-interval or triple-decker concert structures, something that aids programming flexibility while giving the audience a sense of occasion, as well as value for their ticket. An interesting example was the Hanns Eisler day on 9 May 1998, where the 7.45 evening concert was preceded by a consort of amateur singers performing a selection of Brecht/Eisler workers' choruses, a film of Eisler's life and a discussion about Eisler's life and work interspersed with chamber music from the 1920s. Also characteristic of Sinfonietta concert design over the years has been the stage choreography, sometimes building programmes that feature spatially separated instrumental groups playing successive works without the need to reset the stage. An early example was Birtwistle's *Verses for Ensembles* (1969) whose movement and reformation of players during its course, as a necessary physical counterpart to the interchanging musical relationships, was highlighted in the pre-concert publicity. The rationale for experimenting so regularly with programme structure and stage layout was articulated at the Sinfonietta's discussion day in 1994; audience research showed that each concert needed to project a sense of occasion, and in order to improve communication between platform and audience it was resolved that, 'the presentation of the event within the concert hall must be orchestrated'.[80] The Sinfonietta saw such innovation as the means to create different sorts of concert format that could be used more responsively to the musical possibilities and offered greater audience involvement.

Audiences and venues

So why does an audience pay good money for tickets to hear the Sinfonietta play unknown, newly commissioned works, or works perhaps of a ferociously modernist reputation? One reason lies in the ensemble's success in building a sense of artistic trust with its audiences. Bourdieu's conception of the workings of the 'field of cultural productivity' seeks to make explicit the range of consumer relationships between producer, purveyor and audience, and

78 White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works*.
79 Moldenhauer, *Anton von Webern: A Chronicle of his Life and Work*.
80 Minutes of the Discussion Day, 12 November 1994 (LSA, Council Papers 26/11/91–16/10/95).

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the nature of the currency governing this exchange.[81] This indicates a process which captures the fiduciary basis of the Sinfonietta's relationship to its audiences: the Sinfonietta 'brand' acts as the broker of the work/repertoire concerned, with its reputation standing as surety for the quality of the representation of the works it performs. The attractiveness of a particular concert then rests on the programme, and perhaps also on the conductor. But the Sinfonietta has recently shown greater adroitness in matching the appeal of the overall concert package with its intended audience type; and over time it has generated several audience constituencies. One type of audience goes for the traditional modernist concert package, and in recent years, the Sinfonietta has shown itself to be remarkably pragmatic and flexible in contextualizing different types of modernist core repertory. Some indicative dualisms include Birtwistle and Tavener, Carter and Adams, Feldman and Ferneyhough, Andriessen and Xenakis. Another, a newer younger audience, is drawn to crossover events, such as the 2003 'Warp Works/20th-Century Masters' concert with amplification and lighting effects which the Sinfonietta played to a capacity Royal Festival Hall audience in 2003. The programme for this concert included acoustic transcriptions of Warp records artists Aphex Twin, Boards of Canada and Squarepusher, but also Ligeti's Chamber Concerto and works by Nancarrow, Ives and Warp artist Mira Calix. The performance of Pärt's *LamenTate* in the Tate Modern (a musical complement to Anish Kapoor's installation on the subject of the flaying of Marsyas) attracted a third type, the general arts contemporary music audience, made up of those interested more generally in developments across several arts.[82] But as a common element across these varied constituencies, the Sinfonietta's reputation in performance, and its demonstrable consistency in its core repertory, have proved to stand as its strongest market assets.

An important aspect of audience building has been the location and appropriateness of the London concert base. The Queen Elizabeth Hall gives the Sinfonietta a central South Bank location that works well both for its repertoire and also for its size of audience in relation to the hall's capacity of nearly a thousand. However, when the ensemble moved to London's Barbican Centre in 1993, its customary audience size fell because of audience resistance to the Barbican venue at that time, and numbers appeared even more severely diminished in proportion to the larger hall with its capacity of some 2,000. The nadir came with the ill-judged 'Models of Invention' series; attendance went down to 10.5 percent as the Sinfonietta audience decisively rejected a neo-classical diet based on Stravinsky, Hindemith and Strauss. Bad psychologically for the players, this sort of programme and the box-office response suggested artistic and organizational enervation further undermining the Sinfonietta's case for public subsidy. When the South Bank Centre invited the Sinfonietta to return there in October 1995, it was a factor that contributed significantly to the ensemble's regeneration.

81 See the collection of essays published as Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*.

82 Interesting characteristics about the contemporary classical music audience emerged from a digest of audience surveys, *Audiences for Contemporary Classical Music: an Overview of Available Market Intelligence*, where they are characterized as younger than mainstream concert attenders (evenly spread between twenty-five and fifty-five years), enquiring, motivated, knowledgeable, eclectic in tastes and with 50–60 percent being men.

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Education

Since the Sinfonietta pioneered practice-based educational workshops in schools and the wider community (including prison programmes), the approach has been widely imitated with education and outreach programmes becoming one of most significant strategies in the wider attempt to revivify concert life. Now every publicly subsidized UK orchestra and opera house is funded to run such schemes, designed to foster a more integrated relationship between audiences and musicians. But the type of repertoire that the Sinfonietta plays has given its educational work specific focus, arguably distinguishing it from more general schemes, as two very different projects show. The following quotation explained the philosophical basis of the *World Music Project* (1991) run by Gillian Moore:

> This project aims to increase the choices available to pupils by introducing them to new ways of listening and new ways of putting sounds together. Practical involvement with music from other cultures should lead us to an appreciation and regard for the experience of others, as well as helping us to understand our own lives.

A pack for teachers gave them ideas for musical exercises based on different scales characteristic of different musics, and suggested follow-up listening of other different types of music that included examples from Varèse and Boulez. The way that this approach has been developed is illustrated by the project designed to complement the *Celebrating Pierre* festival at the South Bank Centre (March 2000). The aim was to make difficult work accessible, and the project, run by Fraser Trainer, took components from two Boulez pieces, *Dérive* and *Eclat*, for pupils to use in improvisation and then as elements from which to create pieces of their own. There was back-up with on-line and telephone support as well as extensive website materials, paid for by funding from an Arts Council *New Audiences* initiative. Written feedback from students at the GCSE and post-GCSE stage suggests that what they had most valued had been the process of familiarizing themselves and engaging with the Boulez works by playing around with basic material which had left them stimulated by the idiom, rather than daunted by it.

The infrastructure of British music education is in a very different state now to the situation in either 1968 when the Sinfonietta was formed, or in 1983 when Gillian Moore established the education wing. A marked decline in subsidized state-school instrumental teaching during the 1990s has been paralleled by increased opportunities for composition to be undertaken within the provisions of the National Curriculum for music. One consequence has been that new instrumental technologies have moved in to fill this skills gap, and the high costs of lessons and the purchase price of a conventional instrument have meant that instrumentalists moving to advanced professional training have come from a much narrower social base than ever before. This has led to the increasing characterization of playing an instrument as a middle-class activity, which, taken in conjunction with the routine accusation that the ensemble serves an élite audience, threatens the Sinfonietta with an ever-shrinking audience. The development of challenging, but technically well-supported educational projects, reflects the Sinfonietta's awareness of the consequences if it fails to stimulate the imagination of younger musicians by such practical experiences.

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Involvement in Sinfonietta education projects has also been a very positive experience for the players and composers, too; this type of work has proved an important benefit for the Sinfonietta as an organization, in terms of its players' relationships and commitment. Another aspect of the Sinfonietta art world is the training of new professional musicians in its repertoire: Sinfonietta players do this through their teaching and coaching at conservatoires, either as individuals or in workshops, passing on the instrumental techniques and performance practices of this specialist repertoire.

Conclusion

The avant garde's exploitation of the possibilities inherent in the mixed instrumental ensemble was a response to economic necessity that gave rise to new creative opportunities. The Sinfonietta's achievement was to set new standards of performance for the medium in a way that established its initial success, and its virtuosity, live and on disc, has been a basic reference point for other performers of its repertoire. Thus the focus that characterizes the Sinfonietta's art world is performance and from this has followed the drive to generate a repertoire that would be a vehicle for its performance style. Artistic vision – coupled with an ability to course its way through the rapids of changing attitudes to public funding – has enabled the Sinfonietta to create its own body of commissioned works, and to inspire other composers to write works that it could also champion. More contentious was the way in which its success tended to codify the Sinfonietta's core instrumental line-up as some sort of modernist archetype. It was the need to disseminate its work that prompted the Sinfonietta's management to take an innovative approach to the patterning and packaging of its programmes and to broaden this out into the opportunities for creating new audiences offered by education and outreach activities. The different ways in which the Sinfonietta has reformulated itself whilst retaining strong allegiance to its core modernist repertory, shows that so far it has been able to adapt to, and take advantage of, the changing realities of London's concert life. And by continuing to use concerts as its prime means of distribution, the Sinfonietta is as much the curator of established tradition as it is a proponent of new contemporary composition.

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