

# The experience of new audiences at classical music performances

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This research was conducted by **Melissa C. Dobson** at the **University of Sheffield, UK**.

## Summary

How can culturally active but non-classical-concert-going people appreciate orchestral music? This study investigates the perceptions and reactions of nine such individuals at three different orchestral concerts, with music ranging from well-known to previously unheard classical pieces. This study reinforces the idea that the habits of dedicated attendees of classical concerts are not created overnight. The process of appreciating classical music is gradual and is not simply a consequence of being culturally active.

## Other audience members' enthusiasm made new attendees feel like outsiders

'Lack of knowledge' was a key factor that influenced the feeling of being morally obliged to like the music being performed. That feeling was amplified when the audience would enthusiastically applaud at the end of a piece, creating the impression that concert audiences possess a 'special knowledge' that newcomers do not.

## Informal explanations of the programme enhanced attendees' experience and enjoyment

Although the concerts would offer programme notes, the participants in the study responded negatively to these as they demanded a significant amount of prior knowledge to be fully understood. Some additional explanation given at one of the concerts was welcomed by the participants in the study: the concert

director provided an informal demonstration of three different ways of playing the same passage, as well as highlighting its connections to jazz (such associations are known to increase the perceived accessibility of classical music). This extra information gave the attendees a feeling of involvement with the performance.

This summary is by **David Kohan Marzagão, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

## Keywords

**audience** **experience** **Classical Music** **Study**

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