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THE WEB 2.0 SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SPACE FOR THE CREATION OF CLASSICAL MUSIC EXPERIENCES IN THE TIME OF THE PANDEMIC – THE CASE OF THE BELGRADE PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA ***

Abstract: This paper shows how classical music left its canon-guaranteed spaces of the concert hall and stepped toward a broader community of audience using the virtual sphere of Web 2.0 social media tools, on the example of the work of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra. We analyze how this orchestra uses social media to present and promote its repertoire and work during the period of pandemic measures and

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restrictions. The analysis indicates that in all its social media activities the orchestra was guided by the preservation of an autonomous aesthetic quality of classical music, as its value must remain present in whatever tools and formats an art institution presents itself. Various tactics of using social media tools were the opportunity to position classical music from the art of performance into a system of mediated and information-distributed culture along with the development of participatory turn as a wider audience engagement in classical music through producing social media user-generated content. The orchestra's use of social media during the time of the pandemic reflects several ways of changing classical music practice: connecting to new audiences in new ways, moving out of the concert hall, redefining the community relevance of a classical music institution, and initiating paths for collaboration between performers and the audiences.

Keywords: Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, pandemic, Web 2.0 social media, classical music performance, participatory turn, promotional and educational activities

Introduction

The idea of adapting old media and conventional ways of performance to new technological circumstances is a mechanism that we recognize in different periods through history, especially with the expansion of digital technology.¹ Classical music is no exception to these changes. On the contrary, with the development of technology and media through the 20th century, classical music steps forward from the strictly marked spaces of its canon and its 'comfort zone', reaching new contexts and scenes. The musicologist Nicholas Cook explains this clearly with the following words:

In Beethoven's time, and right through the century, the only music you could hear was live music, whether in a public concert hall or a domestic parlour... But nowadays, it is as if the imaginary museum of music is all around us. We can watch grand opera (or the Balinese 'monkey dance', based on the Ramayana) from the comfort of an armchair.²

Electronic mediatization of classical music is becoming an essential basis for its sustainability, and thus its accessibility to a broader audience. As Brian Kavanagh claims:

¹ Cf. Richard Grusin, Jay David Bolter, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1999.

² Nicholas Cook, *Music. A very short introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998, 40.

The digital space can surely help break down commonly perceived barriers to classical music, which, as an institutional field, has often epitomized the thorny concept of 'high' art but is now motivated to be more democratic and accessible.³

Digital concert halls, live concert broadcasts, and online platforms for music content presentations are just some examples from the Western European context in the last two decades that bring classical music closer to the wider community.

However, such contents were rarer in the Serbian music scene. One of the leading causes is the constant turbulent socio-political circumstances after the 1990s and insufficient investment in culture and art. Even in such conditions, leading national music institutions managed to resist the challenges of that time. One of them is undoubtedly the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra (BPO), the most representative symphony orchestra in Serbia and the region.

The time of the Covid-19 pandemic, as a period of our contemporaneity, has made the issues of crisis and borders – as different kinds of constraints, but also as borders that separate activities in the realm of the physical and digital world – more relevant than ever. In all spheres of life, the speech about borders inevitably imposed the crisis as a central topic of discussion, and this is, of course, reflected in the realm of classical music too. Concert activities felt silent; numerous ensembles and performers stopped working temporarily or permanently; the audience remained outside the concert halls. While the physical world has become unsafe for life and health, the digital world has emerged as a more secure place, full of potential and new opportunities for overcoming emerging barriers in the field of classical music. From mid-March 2020 – when the Covid 19 pandemic was officially announced in our country – digital concerts and online communication with the audience were becoming essential activities. This paper will show how classical music left its canon-guaranteed spaces of the concert hall and stepped toward the broader community of audience using the virtual sphere of Web 2.0 social media tools, on the example of the work of the BPO. We analyze how this orchestra has used social media resources – Facebook, the YouTube channel, Instagram, Twitter, and blogging, to present and promote its repertoire and work during the period of pandemic measures and restrictions.

³ Brian Kavanagh, "Reimagining Classical Music Performing Organisations for the Digital Age", in: C. Dromey, J. Haferkorn (Eds), *The Classical Music Industry*, New York – London, Routledge, 2018, 134.

The BPO was founded in 1923. The orchestra's initiator, artistic director, and chief conductor was Stevan Hristić (1885–1958), one of the most significant Serbian composers and conductors. In the years that followed, the Philharmonic gained a reputation as a professional and international orchestra, which performed with the world's most famous soloists. During the Yugoslav war years (since 1994), stagnation and crisis marked the orchestra's work. The new phase in the activities of the BPO followed the breakdown of the socialist government and the arrival of pianist Ivan Tasovac in the position of director, who held that function for 20 years (2001–2021) until his sudden and premature death. During this period, the orchestra's management reformed the concert repertoire, improved the ticket sales system, procured instruments, planned educational activities, and created creative promotional marketing activities to reach the broadest possible audience.⁴ Since 2013, a public relations manager, Jelena Milašinović, has been engaged in the work of the BPO to deal with the branding of the orchestra, communication strategies, and development projects of social responsibility. These actions include, among other things, presentations on social media. According to the official statistics of the Philharmonic, this type of promotion is the most represented (the web 855, TV 91, press 99, and radio 19⁵). In this paper, we will try to follow the intensity of these activities since the beginning of the pandemic and see the strategies and mechanisms that the BPO used to overcome the new circumstances of crisis through online presentation strategies.

Theoretical background, aims, and method

In defining our theoretical background for conducting this study, we have started with Boris Groy's thinking about contemporary art as *art in the Internet age*.

In our days there are basically two channels through which art production is distributed: the art market and the Internet. On the art market the artists function as producers of images and objects – of the artworks. The artists produce the 'content' on the Internet – as so-called 'content providers'.⁶

⁴ Danica Maksimović and Asja Radonjić, "About us. History", <https://www.bgf.rs/en/about-us/history/>, accessed to 22 January 2023.

⁵ Darko Krstić, "Izveštaj o radu Beogradske filharmonije u 2021. godini" [Belgrade Philharmonic Annual Report for 2021], <https://www.bgf.rs/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Izvestaj-o-radu-BF-2021.pdf>, accessed to 22 January 2023.

⁶ Boris Groys, "Art in the Internet Age", 2018, <https://www.are.na/block/2814007> <https://www.are.na/block/2814007>, accessed to 22 January 2023.

We question this double orientation of art activities within the Internet space as follows: the Philharmonic activities on different social media provide a different type of digital content on the primary type of artistic activity of this institution – classical music live concert performance. However, since we are focusing on the ways how this orchestra uses social media tools in the time of the Covid 19 pandemic – when concert activities fell silent – the question also triggers whether there is some specific type of digital content that is participatory-orientated toward the digital practicing of traditional aspects of classical music – live performing – that is, making music performance online, within the new, virtual context of digital space?

Concerning this, the second theoretical background for this research comes from questioning the phenomena of meaningful participatory orientated technology of Web 2.0, that is, the relation between a culture presented on social media and social media users. “Social media are understood to be applications of the Web 2.0 that enable and support communication, interaction, and creating relationships between users.”⁷ There are a lot of systematizations of different media types. For example, Constantinides and Fountain divide Web 2.0 social media types into five categories: “blogs, social networks, content communities, forums/bulletin boards, and content aggregators.”⁸ These all have a single common characteristic:

the user is a vital factor for all categories of Web 2.0 applications, not only as a consumer but mainly as a content contributor. User-Generated Content (UGC) is often used to underline this special attribute of all the above Web 2.0 application categories.⁹

Having in mind these facts, the phenomena of using different social media tools by the BPO – as a representative institution that is the guard or keeper of the artistic music tradition as a highly professional and aesthetically valued practice of creating and performing music – could be understood as a part of the *participatory turn* – as a much broader phenomenon within the

⁷ Andrea Hausmann, “Creating ‘buzz’: opportunities and limitations of social media for arts institutions and their viral marketing”, *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 17, 2012, 174.

⁸ Efthymios Constantinides and Stefan J. Fountain, “Web 2.0: Conceptual Foundations and Marketing Issues”, *Journal of Direct Data and Digital Marketing Practice*, 9/3, 2008, 233.

⁹ Ibid.

contemporary, digital culture. The participatory turn has been defined as “fuelled by discourses and rhetoric regarding social media [...] and enrolls to some extent then idea of being able to deploy networks to achieve institutional aims”.¹⁰ This turn was provoked in the early 2000s by funding cuts in arts and cultural sectors by artists and institutions to “improve the efficiency of their operations, improving their respective audience experience and ultimately increasing audience size and engagement”.¹¹ It is symptomatic that the relevant academic studies on these are predominantly focused on using the marketing potentials of social media to *promote* cultural institutions and reach a wider audience.¹² On the contrary, concepts such as the “participatory turn”, “networked public”, and “audience engagement” should broaden the focus of critical academic thinking towards the issues of potential and the limitations of social media tools “for audience development and engagement beyond the marketing paradigm”.¹³

The situation of government lockdown and social isolation was inevitably a challenge for classical music performers to think ‘outside the box’ about reaching audiences using digital technology, pushing ensembles to keep current audiences engaged, broadening their audience with interesting materials, and sustaining classical music performance relevant in the time of the pandemic. All these brought to light many examples of innovative activities that are related to the mass media representation of classical music concerts. The digital activities of classical music institutions on the international scene have been present for a long time, but the pandemic, for sure, was the trigger for their rapid development and complexity, and for social media tools to become the primary media through which concert institutions address the audience. That means the breaking down of classical music concert borders. In a very paradoxical way, the Covid-19 pandemic influenced some distances to be established but also abolished. It forced musicians to present classical music through widely available digital tools. This led to the temporary sus-

¹⁰ Garry Crawford, Victoria Gosling, Gaynor Bagnall, Ben Light, “Is there an app for that? A case study of the potentials and limitations of the participatory turn and networked publics for classical music audience engagement”, *Information, Communication & Society*, 17/9, 2013, 1072.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Jari Salo, Mikko Lankinen, Matti Mäntymäki, “The Use of Social Media for Artist Marketing: Music Industry Perspectives and Consumer Motivations”, *International Journal on Media Management*, 15/1, 2013, 23–41.

¹³ Garry Crawford et al., op. cit. 1072.

pension – or, maybe extension – of the classical music concert as a traditional musical event, a unique meeting place for performers and audiences. At the same time, it led to increasing access to classical music within the digital space. Thus, we found ourselves in some new and, in many ways, paradoxical circumstances of experiencing culture during the time of the pandemic. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the dynamics behind classical music practices in the digital space, in the local context, during the time of the pandemic. We intend to rethink several questions, as follows: how the paradigm of the aesthetic experience of classical music concert performance has changed within the time of the pandemic, how the social media were used for creating a new sort of aesthetic experience that needed to substitute the traditional one, what kind of strategy lay behind it, and what the characteristics were of that new, digitally mediated classical music experience?

As for conducting this study in terms of methods, we combined several types of research materials and analysis. We have made a critical crossing and connecting of different materials in making our analysis and conclusions. First, we used a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the content published by the BPO on different social media – YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and blog – from the first total pandemic lockdown, which started on March 19, 2020. That means successfully navigating through diverse strands of data – recorded video, live video, images, and stories – in textual and visual – formats. To reach this, we did a two-step treatment of the research materials. Firstly, numbering quantifications of content shared were determined by the frequency of posts in a specific period, also by comments and the number of reactions/likes. Secondly, we used content identification and description across different social media in three directions:

- 1) recordings of music performances as digital presentations of primary music activities
- 2) *documenting* and *curating* music online, orientated to promoting music but also to creating the situation for a better understanding of classical music concerts and reaching the *educational potential* of social media networking
- 3) activities concerning audiences' music participation, such as involvement in creative, music engagement activities.

Furthermore, we started this research assuming that the BPO social media activities are strategically planned to compensate for the silence of the sym-

phonic concert hall and preserve the social value of artistic music during the pandemic time. Thus, an important source of data came from the official, publicly available Philharmonic annual working reports for 2020 and 2021.¹⁴ Also, of special importance for us was to get an ‘insider’ perspective. Therefore, we realized a one-hour interview with the PR of the BPO, Jelena Milašinović. The interview was conducted based on a set of pre-prepared written questions that we designed for the needs of this research, having in mind the specific subject and goal of the research. The questions were an inspiration for Jelena to – in a live dialog with us – tell us an interesting story from the position of a person who is crucial for the conceptualization and organization of digital activities.

Analysis and discussion

The leading institutional aim of the BPO is to keep the high aesthetic value of artistic music, both in pre-pandemic as well during the pandemic period. That means preserving the high-performance quality of sound, especially once the classical music concert goes digitally mediated through social media. Other institutional goals are to promote music, educate the listeners in music, and develop social responsibility, especially during social distancing. Social media networks are strategically deployed to reach all these aims.

The BPO started to use social media networks a decade ago, when using these media was still not a standard of communication and presentation in the local art context. During 2010 and 2011, the orchestra’s Facebook and Twitter accounts were launched. The Instagram account was created later, reflecting the difference in the number of followers on these three social media: Facebook – now almost 50,000 followers, Instagram – about 16,300, and Twitter – about 10,000. Spotify was added during the pandemic as a kind of home radio platform, which proved very successful too through analytics and the number of reviews. Recently, a profile was launched on the LinkedIn network. The practice of posting high-quality video recordings of live concert performances on YouTube has been activated since 2013. During the pandemic, different social media came to the fore and became the dominant channels of communication between the Philharmonic and the audience.

¹⁴ Ivan Tasovac, “Izveštaj o radu Beogradske filharmonije u 2020. godini” [Belgrade Philharmonic Annual Report for 2020], <https://www.bgf.rs/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Izvestaj-o-raduz-a-2020-godinu.pdf>, accessed to 22 January 2023; Darko Krstić, op. cit.

To stay responsible and bring online high-quality recorded music performance

The official Report on the work of the BPO for 2020 and 2021 highlights several mechanisms implemented to overcome the pandemic challenges.¹⁵ Primarily, the first approach was to adapt existing programs and events once the total lockdown had been officially declared. As stated in the Report for 2020: “due to the interruption of concert activities, an intensive PR activity was considered, which moved the creative content into virtual space and enabled the audience to enjoy music ‘at a distance.’” The Report also adds:

Faced with the challenges of not having a digital concert hall practice, and the need to find a way to be present with the audience, as well as the lack of a budget for any more ambitious planning, the BPO moves all content online and creates a completely new content for digital platforms.¹⁶

This approach also reflects socially responsible behaviour and the necessity for the orchestra to make a supportive contribution to the whole community to overcome difficult circumstances as soon as possible.¹⁷ In this regard, the BPO redefined the visual presentation and the orchestra’s motto, putting a mask on Beethoven’s face with the message: “Stay at home and listen to music.” “Stay responsible.” In addition, an account was activated on the GIPHY platform by placing a set of three stickers with Beethoven with a mask, which was a kind of visual trademark of the concert season. This account gained the greatest popularity during the Covid pandemic.

During the pandemic, the orchestra received a systemically organized digital department. Knowing that we could not produce live concert performances during the lockdown period, the whole strategy – approach to the promotion and design of content for digital platforms and social networks – has been set to create the effect of a digital concert season. We have made a weekly, fully digital repertoire, where every day has its theme and a different type of content. Everything about music – that the audience was used to on Fridays in the concert hall, through live concerts – was generated through different types of digital forms, throughout the whole week, day by day, through social networks, from week to week [...]. The pandemic was a period of planned networking of all the social media that we used until then.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ivan Tasovac, op. cit.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Interview with Jelena Milašinović, PR of Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra conducted on April 18, 2022.

Table 1: Weekly plan of the BPO activities on social media during the time of the pandemic

Day	Social media activities
Monday	A day to introduce musicians to the audience, mostly in the form of a blog. The musicians wrote a text on a blog or recorded themselves from their homes and referred to a blog that they wrote.
Tuesday	Day of connecting with the regular concert season which was interrupted by the lockdown; broadcasting video messages from guests who were booked to perform with the orchestra – conductors, soloists – they recorded a short video greeting to the audience or a segment of what they were supposed to perform with the orchestra. Thus, contact ‘at a distance’ was made with that guest performer from the local context or abroad.
Wednesday	Audio day – opening the archive of audio recordings of the BPO concerts and placing the best ones on YouTube.
Thursday	A day for digital video workshops – an educational one – when different instruments were introduced to children – the video recording were made by Philharmonic musicians from their homes.
Friday	A day for a regular concert when the orchestra concert hall was transferred to YouTube. Representative videos were released that were present before or new chamber programs that were visually very attractive.
Weekend	Fun days – sharing fun content from the portal that the orchestra follows (such as Classic FM, with a comical approach to music); sharing interesting fun facts from the world or recommending something attractive for listening to.

During the first months of the pandemic, audio and video recordings were broadcast from the ensemble’s archives (14 of them in 2020)¹⁹ on the YouTube channel (Philharmonic Online Season) and SoundCloud platform due to the cancellation of the live concerts. The announcement of these events took place through social media. By enjoying Philharmonic concerts in the traditional term, but in a non-traditional, virtual space – instead of at the Kolarac Concert Hall on the YouTube channel – ‘the illusion of normality’ was enabled, as the management points out in the Report.²⁰ While on the one hand, this approach reveals a strategy of adjustment to the specific circum-

¹⁹ Ivan Tasovac, op. cit.

²⁰ Ibid.

stances, on the other, it represents a strategy to retain the old audience and attract new ones. Hence, it turned out that this newly established and challenging situation for live performances to become recorded yet has significant and unexploited marketing potential. Despite the shortcomings of the video presentation, this method brings advantages. Brian Kavanagh confirms this when he says: “The immediacy of the video is unsurprisingly crucial to many contemporary strategies, despite the needs and expectations of audiences and other stakeholders, varying tremendously across the sector.”²¹

The practice of video recording concerts professionally and posting a recording on YouTube existed as a well-established practice from the time before the pandemic. During the lockdown period, such a practice with the entire symphony orchestra on the stage was no longer possible. On the other hand, there was a general tendency to preserve the practice of making music and performing in any way. As a result, the musicians themselves faced the problem of two different aesthetic levels – the high quality of the professional live performance to which they were accustomed, and the average quality of the recording obtained by smartphones or other amateur recording devices. This led to a paradoxical dimension – the tendency of a classical music institution to use social media in such a way that its public appearances ‘avoid’ formats in which an audio recording made by amateur devices and of poor quality comes to the fore and to appear more frequently on platforms that emphasize the image and the story, such as Instagram and Twitter.

The Philharmonic is quite *instagramic* – through photography, you offer a world that you do not have the opportunity to see every day – each photo of an instrument or a photo from behind the stage is potentially interesting. I think that Instagram is a platform where the Philharmonic can be represented in the best way, due to short-term story formats that allow the sound quality not to have to be perfect, although it bothers our musicians a lot, but the audience doesn’t mind.²²

After modifying the existing program and the standardized way of thinking during the first months of the pandemic, a new approach emerged in September 2020. Instead of adapting the existing materials, the BPO management created a new season in line with the new reality and the uncertain days ahead. Although live performances were still relevant – for a smaller number of performers and audiences – the concerts needed to become as accessible as possible to consistently preserve musical life regardless of the obstacles,

²¹ Brian Kavanagh, op. cit., 134.

²² Interview with Jelena Milašinović, op. cit.

and keep the musicians in performing form. Following the new requirements and goals, the mostly chamber performances were recorded and broadcast on the YouTube channel and SoundCloud platform, while some were realized remotely. For example, guest conductor Gabriel Feltz and soloists Tijana Milošević and Nemanja Stanković performed the second movement for the violin, cello, and piano of Beethoven's Triple Concerto from different locations – Dortmund and Belgrade, in real-time. This virtual meeting was then edited and broadcast on the YouTube channel.

Thus, we can see that new situations have led to changes in priorities regarding program formation and, especially, not forgetting the priority of quality in sound distribution. As the type of recorded music editing is demanding and expensive, BPO adopted the process of recordings in terms of the decreasing number of musicians and composition time duration. The priority was to stay responsible and, at the same time, provide both the sustainability of the orchestra's music live on the local music scene, as well as the high quality of recorded sound performance.

We cannot allow ourselves an amateur appearance. Either we simply enter the time of the pandemic with one full production and a clear message or not. The period of the pandemic was quite a fruitful period for those who do not maintain the criteria. During the pandemic, orchestras around the world reacted with different attitudes toward the quality of the recorded sound. We did not want to lower the criteria.²³

It is obvious that in all its activities the BPO is guided by the preservation of an autonomous aesthetic quality of artistic music, as its value must remain present in whatever tools and formats an art institution presents itself with. This is one permanent criterion that determines the work of the BPO at any time. Paradoxically, concerning the cost of a professionally recorded concert performance, the pandemic made things easier, because there were recordings of mostly chamber pandemic concerts – from three to a maximum of 30 musicians allowed on the scene, which was much easier than the recording of the symphonic orchestra in its full number of musicians on stage. As the PR manager also pointed out, the orchestra intended to keep the practice of recording in the future with more significant investments, bearing in mind the importance of permanent recording as an essential document for the history of an ensemble. This would certainly be the example of a positive view of the pandemic experience. Concerning all these, we could refer here to the

²³ Ibid.

article that presents the experimental work within the project Online Musicking during the 2020 lockdown in the Netherlands, that coped with technical and aesthetical challenges which the musicians encountered when trying to produce classical music videos for online audiences [...] and finding a meaningful digital strategy. The experiment shows how difficult it is to shape a digital offer for online audiences when the skills and abilities of those involved in the process are too closely tied to traditional symphonic values.²⁴

There was a general, traditional expectation of both musicians and audiences to have a high acoustic and sound quality of classical music concerts even in the time of the pandemic. Naturally, it is impossible to reach this standard with homemade videos on smartphones. Thus, rather than making a product for the traditional aesthetic experience and attentive listening, professional music institutions made different kinds of narratives around music as well as examples of uncommon, fanny-orientated musicians-audiences collaboration in online space.

Narrative on music and around music

As for all the above mentioned, it was an expected step forward for the BPO to introduce other forms of its players' creative practices that bring this institution closer to the community in a more direct and friendly way from the time of the pandemic. An example of this kind is the Philharmonic blog page called Metronome. Until the pandemic, this page contained texts by musicologists, music theorists, journalists, writers, music lovers, fans of the orchestra, and musicians about compositions, their impressions of performances, and statements about their experiences and playing in this ensemble. With the pandemic's beginning, the orchestra players' address received a dose of intimacy and a confessional tone. The blog segment was appropriately renamed with the title The Philharmonic Orchestra in Isolation. Here, we find the musicians' texts written during the isolation period about their everyday routines, inspirations, feelings, and thoughts in the form of a personal diary. On the one hand, such posts are an essential document about the specific time and memory of the performer as the author of the text. On the other, this kind of content allows the audience a whole new look at musicians

²⁴ Ties van de Werff, Neil Thomas Smith, Stefan Rosu, Peter Peters, "Missing the Audience. Online Musicking in Times of COVID-19 / Missing the Audience. Online Musicking in Times of COVID-19", *Journal of Cultural Management and Cultural Policy / Zeitschrift für Kulturmanagement und Kulturpolitik*, 21, 2021, 147.

and the understanding that they are ordinary people who have their daily routines, family, fears, and worries. For example, violinist Tamara Zivkovic shared with the audience what her days looked like through the quarantine days, what housework she did, what food she prepared, etc., and probably made people laugh with the statement: “Dear diary, today I did a good deed, so to speak, a small step for man and a great one for humanity – I washed my car.”²⁵ The Facebook page announced these contents with the hashtag #OstajemKodKuće [I’m staying at home]. “As for social media, we were the first to start direct, two-way communication with the audience. It was initially about promoting concert activities and then we introduced something called *employer branding* or presenting who our musicians are.”²⁶

It is certain that the pandemic brought a significant shift in the aesthetic experience of classical music performance concerning the role of digital devices in that experience. The unappropriated situation of using digital devices within concert halls and live music performances from the past time now becomes the preferable one, as a way of experiencing concert music performance in everyday life, in a condition of social distance. All different daily content – narratives about and around music – also had a weight of educational intervention within the audience which was gathered on the digital platforms. The institution systematically presented a work, a composer, a performer with a different kind of narrative – in a way that emphasizes something unusual and atypical. Thus, during the pandemic, the usual educational activities of the BPO dedicated to children also took place online. These activities included children’s introduction to instruments from the orchestra from the musicians’ homes as well as virtual concerts such as the New Year’s Music Fairy Tale project, which was recorded and broadcast on the YouTube channel at Christmas 2021. All children’s programs from 2021 have a digital version.

New steps in experiencing music as well as knowing something new about that music were the BPO’s social media challenges in which the audiences were invited to participate in performing music by themselves. The pandemic situation in which the orchestra could not hold its New Year’s con-

²⁵ Tamara Živković, “Filharmoničarka u izolaciji” [The performer in isolation], 4 May 2020, https://www.bgf.rs/tamara-zivkovic-filharmonicarka-u-izolaciji/?fbclid=IwAR3qeCi1yBeeSQZEL8n3eLanNsTTTOdLp5s4OL2DzhsbOuafzHcnt_jsDLUg, accessed to 22 January 2023.

²⁶ Interview with Jelena Milašinović, op. cit.

cert – which otherwise has a long-established tradition – led this institution to launch the musical entertaining event, that is based on improvisation – the New Year’s Challenge. The musicians invited the audience through social networks to conduct an orchestra New Year’s performance from their homes, using concert video recordings.²⁷ The entertainment events were organized to encourage greater audience participation – the audience almost became a performer. A similar thing was done with the first open-air concert, in 2017, when the audience was invited to create a program they wanted to listen to – engaging an audience to become the curator of their concert. A step further was taken during the pandemic period, when the audience was invited to challenge for the second time, to become a performer of the music they normally listen to. The New Year’s 2022 Challenge was a call for making a home video of performing music on everyday objects. The best video won a surprise award (“Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra New Year Challenge”²⁸). Thus, the ways of traditional classical music practice and social media have converged to produce unseen and uncommon examples of musicians-audience participatory experimentations.

Conclusion

Online performance statistics during the pandemic were monitored and analyzed by the orchestra’s management. The reports on the work of the orchestra state that there was an increased number of visits to the website, the retention time, the number of views on YouTube, the number of followers, and the most significant growth was recorded in interactions on social networks.²⁹ Thus, Web 2.0 social media were the BPO’s tools to bring music closer to everyone and everywhere during the strictly controlled time of social distancing. After the pandemic days, the Philharmonic continued with the same strategy through the project Music Everywhere – #MuzikaSvuda.³⁰ This project was designed even before the pandemic conditions, but it gained an entirely new meaning with the Covid situation, spreading the message “you

²⁷ “Radecki mix – izazov ‘Pokaži kako diriguješ Beogradskom filharmonijom’ [Radecki mix – ‘Show how you conduct to Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra’ video challenge]”, 2 February 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cyAnLsxsJM, accessed to 22 January 2022.

²⁸ “Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra New Year Challenge”, 2 January 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBRZspiKZFY>, accessed to 22 January 2022.

²⁹ Ivan Tasovac, op. cit.

³⁰ Ibid.

cannot go to a concert, but the concert will come to you". Within this concept, musicians organized surprise performances in public places – from the main city street to suburban municipalities, in various institutions and companies' locations (such as a bank). These performances were also promoted through videos and announcements on social networks and the YouTube channel.

Before the time of the pandemic, social networking sites were usually used by artists to inform people about upcoming concerts or events. Their news updates usually included links to official websites or other related sites, YouTube links, program notices, performance photos/videos, and short appreciations. In the course of the pandemic, as the case of the BPO shows to us, social media turned to alternative performance stages, serving as an extension of the traditional performance space.

The emergence of the Internet has erased this difference between the production and the exhibition of art. [...] Art production, presentation, and distribution coincide. The artist becomes a blogger. Almost everyone in the contemporary art world acts as a blogger: individual artists, but also art institutions and in fact even museums.³¹

Various tactics of using social media tools were an opportunity to position classical music from the art of performance into a system of mediated and information-distributed culture along with the development of the participatory turn as a wider audience engagement in classical music through producing social media user-generated content. The music repertoire remains a traditional one of highly aesthetical value but the BPO parallelly and strategically offers itself as a 'product' of information due to which the audience wants to stay connected and engaged, even in the circumstances of social distancing and self-isolation. The orchestra's use of social media during the time of the pandemic reflects several ways of changing classical music practice: connecting to new audiences in new ways, moving out of the concert hall, redefining the community relevance of a classical music institution, and initiating paths for collaboration between performers and the audiences.

It is for sure that during the pandemic – but also in the uncertain times that follow – social networks will be successfully used as 'devices' whereby one representative art institution exerts a 'distance' and mediated influence on the community, focusing not just on the musical qualities but on artists'

³¹ Boris Groys, "Fiction Defictionalized: Art and Literature on the Internet", 20 November 2014, <http://fiktion.cc/boris-groys-2/>, accessed to 22 January 2023.

social engagement in critical times. The pandemic and current changing circumstances, situations, and ways of communicating classical music have set challenges and tasks not only to the well-established orchestra institutions but also to the music education institutions to encourage young musicians to question current norms in classical music. We certainly need more musicians who can connect to diverse community groups, by developing their skills from orchestra to community musicians. However, having community musicians on the one hand and orchestra musicians on the other would mean that there is community engagement on the margins while the core remains the same. Therefore, it is the further responsibility of a higher music education institution to transform curricula for musicians and also to transform the very notion of artistic excellence, aesthetic experience, and ways of mediating and communicating classical music to the public to elucidate and strengthen social responsibility and educational sensitivity to the crisis of culture in the times of crisis.

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Summary

In this paper, we analyze how the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra used social media – Facebook, YouTube channel, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and blog – to present and promote its repertoire and work during the period of COVID-19 pandemic measures and restrictions. The situation of government lockdown and social isolation was inevitably a challenge for classical music performers to think 'outside the box'. Thus, we intended to rethink several questions: how the paradigm of the aesthetic experience of classical music concert performance has changed during the time of the pandemic, how social media were used for creating a new sort of aesthetic experience that

need to substitute the traditional one, and what kind of strategy lay behind it? In terms of method, we used identification, description, and analysis of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra digital content across different social media in three directions: 1) recordings of music performances as digital presentations of primary music activities; 2) *documenting* and *curating* music online, oriented on promoting music but also on creating the situation for a better understanding of classical music concerts and reaching the *educational potential* of social media networking; 3) activities concerning audiences' music participation, such as involvement in creative music engagement activities. Before the time of the pandemic, social networking platforms were usually used by artists to inform about upcoming concerts or events generating links to official websites, other related sites, YouTube links, program notices, performance photos/videos, and short appreciations. Within the period of the pandemic, as the case of the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra showed, social media have turned to alternative performance stages, serving as an extension of traditional performance space. Various tactics of using social media tools were an opportunity to position classical music from the art of performance into a system of mediated and information-distributed culture along with the development of participatory turn by producing social media user-generated content. The Orchestra's use of social media during the time of pandemic reflects several ways of changing classical music practice: connecting to new audiences in new ways, moving out of the concert hall, redefining community relevance of a classical music institution, and initiating paths for collaboration between performers and the audiences.