



Article

'McDonald's Music' Versus 'Serious Music': How Production and Consumption Practices Help to Reproduce Class Inequality in the Classical Music Profession

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Abstract

This article draws on two empirical studies on contemporary engagements with classical music in the United Kingdom to shed light on the ways in which class inequalities are reproduced in practices of production and consumption. It discusses three ways in which this occurs. First, classical music was 'naturally' practiced and listened to in middle-class homes but this was misrecognised by musicians who labelled families as 'musical' rather than as 'middle class'. Second, the practices of classical music production and consumption such as the spaces used, the dress, and the modes of listening show similarities with middle-class culture. Third, musicians made judgements of value where classical music was seen as more valuable than other genres. This was particularly visible in studying production. In data on consumption, musicians were careful about making judgements of taste but described urban genres as illegible to them, or assessed them according to the criteria that they used to judge classical music, such as complexity and emotional depth. This hierarchy of value tended to remain unspoken and uncontested. Studying production and consumption together allows these patterns to emerge more clearly.

Keywords

class inequalities, classical music, consumption, education, family, legitimacy, listening, musical genres, production, social class, socialisation, taste, United Kingdom, value

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Introduction

Inequalities in the cultural industries have appeared on the agenda in the United Kingdom in recent years. Academic research, but also debates in the media and the cultural sector have for example highlighted the lack of diversity in the cultural workforce and stratification in cultural consumption. As Kate Oakley and Dave O'Brien (2016) have, however, shown, the fields of cultural production and cultural consumption tend to be considered separately in the context of research on inequalities. While research has traced and explored inequalities in production (Banks and Oakley, 2015; Conor et al., 2015; Gill, 2014; Hesmondhalgh and Saha, 2013; Taylor and Littleton, 2012) and consumption (Bennett et al., 2009; Friedman et al., 2015; Miles and Sullivan, 2010; Tampubolon, 2010), the interplay between these practices and the ways they contribute to or alter existing inequalities have rarely been explored. By focusing on production and consumption in contemporary classical music practice, this article adds to our understanding of inequalities in the cultural industries more widely, and the ways they manifest themselves in the interplay of production and consumption more specifically.

There is a range of cross-cutting dimensions of inequality in cultural production relating to gender (e.g. Conor et al., 2015), race (e.g. Consilium, 2014), class (e.g. O'Brien et al., 2016), and disability (e.g. Consilium, 2014). Studies of cultural consumption and arts participation show there are large inequalities in relation to class, race, and disability, while consumption and attendance by gender is more equal (Consilium, 2014). Of course, other axes of differentiation, such as age, also affect practices of production and consumption (Consilium, 2014) and often, these axes intersect with each other in complex ways. Our focus in this article is on class inequalities. By drawing on two distinct, empirical studies on contemporary classical music practice, we aim to shed light on the ways in which class inequalities manifest themselves in practices of production and consumption. As such, we do not intend to explore different forms of inequalities in contemporary classical music practice; elsewhere, we have focused on the ways in which class, race and gender affect experiences of music education and professional careers (Bull, 2015; Scharff, 2015a, 2015b). Instead, we limit our inquiry to class in order to contribute to qualitative inquiries into class inequalities in the cultural industries (e.g. Allen and Hollingworth, 2013; Ashton and Noonan, 2013; Burke and McManus, 2009). Our research – both in terms of the empirical cases that we discuss and the scholarly debates that inform our analysis – is embedded in the United Kingdom and thus is specific to a particular, cultural context.

There is a dearth of critical, empirical sociological inquiry into classical music practice (for some notable exceptions in other national contexts, see Baker, 2014; McCormick, 2009; Wagner, 2012, 2015; Yoshihara, 2007). When we embarked on our separate research projects, we were surprised to find that there has been comparatively little research on classical music practice and even less of an emphasis on inequalities. By focusing on the classical music sector in this article, and by shedding light on class inequalities in the production and consumption of classical music, we add to a cultural sociology approach to understanding and researching the cultural industries. In order to make this contribution, we firstly outline the existing literature and research on inequalities in the production and consumption of classical music. Second, we discuss the research methodology that underpins this article, paying particular attention to the ways

in which we brought two separate studies together. The main part of this article analyses our empirical data to foreground the ways in which class inequalities manifest themselves in the production and consumption of classical music. More specifically, our empirical analysis consists of three sections which explore the role of family socialisation, practices of performance and listening, and hierarchies of value in the context of class inequalities in contemporary classical music practice. As we show, the value of classical music is often uncontested, both in practices of production and consumption. This, we argue, is one of the key ways in which class inequalities manifest themselves in contemporary classical music practice.

Producing Classical Music

In recent years, there has been a flurry of writing on the lack of diversity in the cultural sector workforce in the UK. Academic research (e.g. Allen and Hollingworth, 2013; Conor et al., 2015; Gill, 2014; Taylor and Littleton, 2012) as well as cultural sector and policy reports (Consilium, 2014; Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2015; Warwick Commission, 2015) have shown that gender, racial and class inequalities continue to exist, particularly in relation to access to the cultural sector workforce as well as the under-representation of women, ethnic minorities, and individuals from working-class backgrounds. In relation to class, there is excellent qualitative research on the interplay between socio-economic background and aspiration to pursue a creative career (e.g. Allen and Hollingworth, 2013; Burke and McManus, 2009). However, statistical data on the class backgrounds of cultural workers is only now beginning to be analysed. A study of the class composition of Britain's creative workforce using data from the 2014 Labour Force Survey (O'Brien et al., 2016) found a general under-representation of those from working-class origins across the sector, which is especially pronounced in publishing and music.

A similar picture seems to emerge in the context of the classical music sector. Whilst there has not been a wide range of research on the lack of diversity in classical music, some studies have documented gender inequalities which for example relate to the under-representation of women in prestigious orchestras and in leadership positions (Osborne and Conant, 2010; Scharff, 2015b). Wider research on the UK music industry has also shown that ethnic minorities are under-represented (Consilium, 2014; Scharff, 2015b). In relation to the socio-economic background of classical musicians, we are not aware of any studies that contain statistical data other than O'Brien et al.'s (2016) data on the music sector as a whole.

However, more research on how participation in classical music varies by class background is available in relation to education and training. To briefly outline the UK educational context, instrumental and vocal music lessons are provided both privately and by publicly funded local authority music education services, the latter established between the 1950s and 1970s. The growth of the community arts movement in the 1970s encouraged local authorities to run participatory music schemes, among other projects (Higgins, 2012). Local authority music services provided free instrumental and vocal lessons within schools and ran centres where out-of-school music education took place including in ensembles such as bands, choirs and orchestras (Cleave and Dust, 1989).

This system was entirely separate to the mainstream music curriculum delivered in the classroom (Pitts, 2000: 214). It is also precariously funded; whether parents should be charged for instrumental and vocal lessons has been a point of contestation since the 1970s (Cleave and Dust, 1989), and today there are very few local authorities that provide free or subsidised lessons (Griffiths, 2014; Rogers and Hallam, 2010). In 2012, with the introduction of the National Plan for Music Education, local authority music services were reconfigured as ‘hubs’ which commission rather than provide services, and government funding was cut (Hill, 2014). As a result, many young musicians take instrumental and vocal lessons privately outside of school and take grade exams run by Trinity College London or the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), a system which was established in the late 19th century (Bull, 2015). It is not surprising, then, that a report by the ABRSM (2014) found that children from lower socio-economic groups are under-represented in music education.

These findings seem to suggest that class differences in classical music are in part about provision, but it appears that there is also a link between classical music education and middle-class culture. Bull’s (2015, 2016a, 2016b) study of young people playing in youth classical music groups argues that this link is evident in the long-term investment over time required for classical music; the embodied norms of restraint and control; and the formal modes of social organisation such as deference to authority. This link is significant because most classical musicians have to commence training at a very early age in order to compete professionally, as Wagner’s (2012, 2015) transnational research has shown.

The middle-class culture of music education is also visible if we look at higher education. Many classical musicians enter the profession after having attended a conservatoire, which offers education and training in the performing arts, including music. Notably, the backgrounds of conservatoire students are predominantly middle class (Scharff, 2015b). In the year 2012–2013, 3.9% of students came from a ‘low participation neighbourhood’ whereas almost a quarter of students had attended a private school (on the situation in music technology education in the UK see Born and Devine, 2015). Whilst we do not have any statistical data on the class background of professional classical musicians, as mentioned above, the importance of early music practice, coupled with the middle-class culture of music education, suggests that musicians from a middle-class background are over-represented in the sector. In the context of the classical music profession in the UK, higher education, but also early music education, seem to play a key role in creating and maintaining unequal access to the sector.

Consuming Classical Music

In addition to the production of classical music, consumption also plays a role in creating and sustaining inequalities in the sector. Much of the literature on cultural consumption in the UK follows Bourdieu to theorise the links between culture and inequality (Oakley and O’Brien, 2016). For Bourdieu, culture can be a form of capital that allows the dominant class to maintain and legitimise its position (Bourdieu, 1984). Patterns of taste and consumption are therefore important in so far as they work to legitimise the status of the dominant class. In the UK today, cultural tastes, and the consumption practices that are shaped by these tastes such as arts participation, are divided by social group, particularly along class lines (Miles and Sullivan, 2010; Warwick Commission, 2015: 33).

Musical taste is one of the most strongly divided forms of cultural taste (Bennett et al., 2009). As we discuss below, this can feed into production through the influence of parents' consumption practices on their children's musical taste and practices. Within this, classical music has particularly distinctive patterns. Savage (2006) found that it is actually a relatively popular cultural taste, particularly as regards 'light classical' as represented by the radio station Classic FM. Despite this popularity, he still found strong correlations with particular social groups, both when asking about classical music as a genre, and about named musical works. Most notably, those with a university education were six times more likely to indicate a liking for classical music than those without.

While it seems to be clear that classical music consumption in the UK is associated with the middle classes, the question of whether this contributes to hierarchies of musical taste – certain genres of music having more value than others – has attracted a considerable literature. Savage concludes that musical taste remains 'highly divided' and that 'classical music emerges as still the clearest marker of "educated" musical taste' (2006: 173). Chan and Goldthorpe (2007) support this link with an examination of education, but add the caveat that there is no 'elite' taste visible in their sample; those who consume highbrow culture tend *also* to consume popular culture. This evidence supports the 'omnivore' thesis (Peterson and Kern, 1996) that cultural consumption is now primarily divided between 'omnivores' who consume a wide variety of culture, and 'univores' who consume narrowly, with these divisions occurring along class lines. However, Tampubolon (2010) has demonstrated that omnivores do not consume all forms of culture equally; they are aware of different forms of culture being differently valued. Other authors have similarly rejected the evidence for the omnivore thesis (Atkinson, 2011; Prieur and Savage, 2013). The question of how hierarchies of musical taste can carry or confer value therefore requires further exploration. Furthermore, many of the studies cited above take a quantitative approach to studying cultural consumption, focusing on large-scale patterns in tastes and/or consumption practices. This body of work has been criticised as reductive, in failing to examine *how* people consume or interact with cultural objects (Prieur and Savage, 2013). While we appreciate quantitative studies for their ability to trace large-scale patterns of tastes and consumption, the qualitative focus of our article sheds light on the ways in which value is constructed and attributed in classical music practice today.

Research Methods

The empirical data presented in this article are based on two distinct studies of classical music practice in the UK, namely Bull's (2015) research on classical music education and Scharff's (2015a, 2015b, 2017) study of the classical music profession. Whilst the two studies were distinct in focus, we believe they can be usefully brought into dialogue to explore common themes around class inequalities in practices of producing and consuming classical music.

Bull's (2015) study explored classical music education, focusing in particular on the ways in which gender and class are reproduced among young people playing classical music in England. Her empirical data, collected in 2012–2013, are based on an ethnographic study into young people aged 16–21 involved in youth classical music groups in the southeast of England: a youth choir, two youth orchestras, and a youth opera group.

Bull participated as a musician in the two youth orchestras and the youth opera group and observed rehearsals and performances with the youth choir over a period of 18 months. In addition, she carried out 37 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with young people,¹ as well as interviews with nine of the adults involved in running these groups. Participants in these groups were aged between 12 and early 20s, but interviewees were all aged 16 or over due to ethics considerations. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with permission. Thematic analysis was carried out in dialogue with field-notes from observations and participant observations.

Scharff's (2015a, 2015b) research on the classical music profession explored various contemporary issues, such as the subjective experiences of precarious work, how urban contexts affect cultural work, as well the ways in which musicians negotiate inequalities. The main part of her study was based on 64 semi-structured in-depth interviews with female, early-career classical musicians. The interviews covered a range of issues, such as music education and training, precarious work, and inequalities. The research was conducted following research ethics guidelines and analysed using discourse analysis (Taylor and Littleton, 2012). Research participants came from a range of national backgrounds, but all were based in London ($n = 32$) and Berlin ($n = 32$) at the time of interview to explore how artistic lives are experienced in different urban contexts. In relation to many of the key themes explored in the wider project, including the negotiation of inequalities as discussed in this article, national differences did not strongly come to the fore (for a more detailed discussion, see Scharff, 2017). Most research participants were in their late 20s/early 30s at the time of interview in 2012 or 2013. The sample consisted of musicians who played a range of instruments, as well as singers, conductors, opera directors, and composers. Reflecting the under-representation of working-class and black and minority ethnic players in the classical music profession, the sample was overwhelmingly white and middle class.² As such, the research participants represented a comparatively privileged group.

As this overview indicates, our article is based on empirical material that was collected at the same time (2012–2013) and in overlapping places. Whilst Bull did not conduct research in Berlin, both of us collected qualitative data in the southeast of England. Furthermore, both studies were critically concerned with contemporary classical music practice, animated by similar theoretical frameworks, and embedded in current debates about inequalities in the cultural and creative industries in the UK. Both studies focused on younger people who were either currently or recently engaged in classical music education. This allowed us to reflect on the role that education plays in the reproduction of inequalities in classical music. Of course, there are also differences between the two studies. Bull's research drew on the voices of young women and men who were involved in classical music training, but Scharff only spoke to female musicians. And whilst both studies were mainly qualitative in orientation, Scharff's research was interview-based and Bull's study was ethnographic, including observations, interviews and focus groups.

Similar methods were used across both studies to categorise participants by class, drawing on both subjective and objective measures of class. Participants were asked for self-definitions of their class position and data were also gathered about parents' occupations. Bull also gathered data about parents' education and type of school attended, and

drew on Reay et al.'s (2011) typology of new versus established middle class to identify class fractions. Limitations of this approach include its relative synchronicity as it does not take into account a family or individual's class trajectory over time, as well as the issue that British people tend to deny class (Savage, 2000; Skeggs, 1997). However, by triangulating self-definitions with parental occupation we have minimised this issue.

Despite the differences between our studies, our extended conversations over recent years have brought to the fore common themes. In drawing on two distinct studies, we do not believe that all of our findings can be integrated seamlessly. Instead, we focus on similar patterns that we discerned in relation to negotiations of class inequalities in classical music practice and consumption. In order to bring our two studies together, we have made one key methodological choice: we only focus on the interviews which Scharff conducted in London in order to allow for more comparability between the geographical location of our research participants. This methodological choice firmly embeds this article in the contemporary UK context.

Finally, we use the term 'classical music' (rather than, for example, 'Western art music') as it reflects the terminology used by our participants. Gilmore (1987) helpfully created a typology of three classical music 'subworlds' in New York in the 1980s, characterised by 'repertory', 'academic' or 'avant-garde' practices. This typology, if amended to include the early music scene as described by Wilson (2013), appears to be a good description of the classical music subworlds in the UK. Our studies sit firmly within the 'repertory' practices Gilmore describes, which encompass the major orchestras and venues in Manhattan where musical practices are 'highly conventionalized' (Gilmore, 1987: 214). Across both studies, the majority of repertoire played was 19th- and early-20th-century Romantic music; in Bull's study, the composer most often named as a favourite was Gustav Mahler. This article therefore does not encompass practices relating to early music or new/contemporary classical music.

Growing up in a 'Musical Family': Producing and Consuming Music at Home

In Scharff's study, the ways in which class plays out in the production and consumption of classical music was highlighted in research participants' discussion of their families' attitudes towards classical music. There were strong contrasts between the accounts of research participants who came from a so-called 'musical family' and those who did not. The former felt that playing an instrument was somehow natural and that they could count on their parents' support. The latter, by contrast, often had to struggle to pursue classical music professionally, against their parents' will. Crucially, these accounts mapped onto differences in class background: those who were from a musical family were middle class whilst those who were not described their backgrounds as lower middle class or working class. Being from a musical family meant that classical music – both as an active pursuit and as a form of consumption – was valued, often in unspoken ways. By contrast, the opposite seemed to apply to the experiences of research participants who came from lower-middle-class or working-class families. In presenting this analysis, we do not argue for a direct relationship between class and musical taste. By contrasting the findings of Scharff's study with Bull's research at the end of this section, we aim to offer

a nuanced approach to analysing the links between class background and the value attributed to classical music.

When Kelly was asked about her family background, she said that she ‘grew up in a musical family. My mom teaches piano and when we were younger she used to do the recorder groups at the primary school I was at, so music was always part of my upbringing’. Also talking about her family background, Rose said:

I come from a musical family, so it just – I always thought it [playing a musical instrument] would be part of my life, so it didn’t seem like something I had to make an extra effort to be, to really try and get good at. I just thought it was one of the things I had to do.

Similarly, Faith told me that she had started playing the piano at age three:

I actually don’t remember how music started. I think because I was kind of born into it, in the sense that my parents would encourage – like music was always on in the house, and my mum would always be singing to me, so it was quite natural.

In these accounts, music is presented as a part of one’s upbringing or life and as something ‘quite natural’. These research participants were surrounded by and exposed to music from an early age. Crucial to our argument, this engagement with classical music was perceived as something natural and therefore uncontested.

Kelly, Rose, and Faith were all from middle-class backgrounds and their accounts contrasted with statements from lower-middle-class or working-class research participants. In telling me how her parents felt about her pursuing music professionally, Isabella stated: ‘I don’t come from a musical background. Nobody understood why I wanted to do that. Nobody supported it because it is not a safe profession’. Isabelle described her class background as ‘lower middle class: my parents are educated, but they do not have much money’. As opposed to some of her middle-class peers, music was not a natural part of Isabella’s upbringing. In fact, she stated that her dad had actively tried to stop her from playing the violin: ‘Actually, my dad did everything for me to quit the violin, for a very long time. Not because he hates music, but he just doesn’t understand it and mostly he is just worried that it’s a very unsafe profession’.

A sense of not understanding classical music, as well as concerns that being a classical musician is not a secure job seemed to make some working-class parents uncertain about supporting their children’s aspirations. June had told me that her parents ‘weren’t well off. They were hard working, working-class type’. Reflecting on the different ways of getting into classical music, June stated:

And often, again, it’s families who are quite familiar with classical music, that sort of thing. My parents didn’t want me to go down this road. They were very worried about it because it was unfamiliar to them. They wanted me to get a real job, and be secure.

Elaborating on her parents’ unfamiliarity with classical music, June said: ‘The classical music world was just so – they had not grown up with anything like that, so it was a bit – my first proper classical concerts, they were a bit like “What is this? We don’t understand this”’. Comparing Isabella’s and June’s statements with the stories of the research

participants from musical families demonstrates that classical music was valued differently in their upbringing, and that this difference mapped onto different class backgrounds. In the middle-class, musical families, classical music was part of life, whereas it was quite unfamiliar to lower-middle-class and working-class families.

The different value attributed to classical music also came to the fore when research participants reflected on their parents' consumption practices. Emilia had described her background as middle class and when I asked her whether she was from a musical family, she said: 'No, my mom is like tone-deaf. And my dad really likes classical music and he listened to it a lot when I was younger'. Some parents of middle-class research participants had actively honed an appreciation of classical music and sometimes this intersected with ethnic background. Liz's father had grown up in India, but came to London to study medicine:

When he came to London to pursue medicine, I guess he wanted to fit in with Western culture, and he became very very interested in Western classical music. So although he can't really play a note himself, he is very passionate about some Western music [...] So as a young person I was introduced to a lot of things, and sort of told 'Come and listen to this!'.

The aspirations of Liz's father to 'fit in with Western culture' meant that she was exposed to classical music at an early age. Similarly to her middle-class peers, consumption of classical music formed part of Liz's upbringing.

By contrast, several research participants from a working-class or lower-middle-class background stated that their parents did not listen to classical music. According to Daniella, her family 'listened to nice music, but not classical. It's hard to really start appreciating and really understanding that music'. Eve's upbringing in terms of music consumption was similar: 'My family enjoy music, and there's quite a lot of relatively different styles going on. It all seems to be quite mainstream and based around pop'. In a similar vein, June told me that her father's taste in music was 'a whole eclectic mix from country music right through to Rock & Roll. But actually, very little classical. In fact, none, almost none'. According to these research participants, classical music was not played at home.

Arguably, a link between class background and the value attributed to classical music transpires in several ways: for the middle-class, musical families, classical music was part of life. And for those middle-class families that were not musical themselves, classical music was still appreciated as a consumption practice. By contrast, classical music was unfamiliar to most of the parents of the working-class or lower-middle-class research participants. Based on these accounts, attributing value to classical music seems to be a classed practice. Interestingly, the classed aspects of this practice often remained unacknowledged, with participants referring to 'musical families' rather than 'middle-class families', thus adding to the often-unstated value of classical music.

In analysing and discussing these patterns in Scharff's data, we do not suggest that the value attributed to classical music is congruent with class position. Bull's study, for example, found that young men from established middle-class or upper-middle-class families chose to go into professional careers outside music, due to higher earning potential and status (Bull, forthcoming), engaging with classical music as a form of 'serious

leisure' (Stebbins, 1982: 251). Some of their female peers, by contrast, did opt to pursue careers in classical music. The link between class background and the value attributed to classical music – in terms of pursuing it professionally – is, therefore, not a direct one, but tenuous and, in this case, also intersects with gender.

Beyond the Home: Practices of Classical Music Production and Consumption

Once musicians move out of their family spaces and into the wider classical music world, there are strongly codified practices of both producing and consuming classical music that are required of performers and audiences at classical music institutions. Researchers have documented the confidence and 'assured optimism' into which middle-class and upper-class young people are socialised both by their families and through elite schooling (Bourdieu, 1984; Forbes and Lingard, 2015), while O'Brien and Oakley (2015) suggest that higher education is a key site where consumption and production come together to reinforce inequalities, we would suggest that in classical music, it is not only higher education institutions but cultural institutions more generally that perform this function.

One practice associated with both classical music production and consumption is being comfortable in the grand spaces in which classical music tends to be performed. For the young people in Bull's study, this was not simply a one-off chance to visit the Albert Hall, but a long-term process of becoming habituated to spending time in venues associated with legitimate culture such as large concert halls, cathedrals, churches, and other prestigious venues. As Skeggs (1997) and Hoggart (1984), have described, this right to inhabit space without being challenged, and the sense of entitlement to be present in such spaces, is less available to working-class people.

As well as gaining the right to these spaces, what links production and consumption in classical music's spaces are the practices of classical music. These of course only apply to live classical music; we discuss private listening below. Practices of attending classical music concerts such as knowing when to clap have frequently been cited as putting off the non-initiated from classical music attendance (Molleson, 2013). Also important is reverent, still and silent listening (Levine, 1990). This forms a contrast to working-class cultural consumption, which has been described as prioritising pleasure, irreverence, informality, and give-and-take with performers (Bailey, 1978; Barrett, 2016; Dueck, 2013).

The highly ritualised production practices within these spaces have associations with class. One clear example is the requirements of dress for classical music performers. Standard concert dress is dinner jackets for men (which includes black dress trousers, white shirts and black leather shoes), and 'long black' for women, which means wearing black clothing such as ankle-length dresses, skirts or trousers, covering elbows and knees. While Charles Rosen (2002: 118) suggests that this dress code draws attention to musicians' historic status as members of the servant class, we would suggest that these associations have changed over time and now have a different signification. In particular, for women, classical music's mode of dress makes visible the associations of respectable middle-class femininity with classical music, as described by Bull (2016a). For example, during a concert in which Bull was playing with one of the youth orchestras in her study,

the young women all wore modest clothing except one young woman who stood out for having very high wedge heels and bright peroxide blonde hair. These differences operated as transgressions within this social environment because they are signifiers that are attached to working-class femininity (Skeggs, 1997).

The unspoken value of classical music was also apparent in the modes of consumption described by the young people in Bull's study. These varied across genres of music, revealing a 'hierarchy among the omnivores' (Tampubolon, 2010). The most important narrative of consumption of classical music, which demonstrates its unspoken value, was discourses of its emotional 'depth'. Brass player Owen, from a lower-middle-class family who did not listen to classical music at home, described why he started playing classical music: 'I think the fact that you could actually respond to the music in terms of the depth of the music, emotional depth [...] It's quite a personal thing, I think'. A violinist, Jenny, couldn't understand why people listened to commercial pop music, saying:

I think people love it so much but really there's no depth to it. I don't necessarily now think that's a bad thing because it's for enjoyment, so if it brings joy to people then fair enough, but when it's really deep music ...

Jenny is suggesting here that classical music, because of its depth, is about more than simply enjoyment. Instead, the 'depth' of this music connotes a seriousness and an importance which enjoyable music such as pop music do not allow.

Other studies on classical music and listening confirm this link (McCormick, 2015). DeNora (2000) describes how one woman listens to Schubert in private to remember her father, who loved this music and who has passed away. DeNora contrasts this with other musics whose 'affordances' lend themselves to embodied activity such as aerobics. Similarly, among Bull's participants, pop music genres were linked to embodied modes of listening; one young woman described how she listened to 'offensive' (i.e. sexualised) rap while she was running; another young man described how he only listened to pop music when he went out dancing. As well as a discourse of 'depth', some young people described listening to classical music as 'work' and said that they did not listen to it for pleasure. What we would add to DeNora's account, therefore, is an attention to the differential value attributed to genres through these listening practices, in which 'deep' emotional experiences were associated with classical music, while embodied activity or enjoyment were associated with other genres. These discourses of seriousness and depth that are used to describe people's experiences of classical music demonstrate its unspoken value; rather than being consumed for leisure or enjoyment, classical music allows access to a mode of selfhood of 'inner depth' which, as Skeggs (2003) describes, has historically been afforded to the middle class rather than the working class.

Hierarchies of Value in Production and Consumption

In Bull's study, judgments of taste and value emerged in data on both production and consumption. Hierarchies of musical value were clearly visible within production practices. While young people's judgements of value in relation to taste were more

circumspect, they nevertheless revealed different types of value attributed to certain genres of music over others.

Hierarchies of value were clearly visible in rehearsals and discussions of repertoire around the youth music groups in Bull's study. Young people saw 'serious' or 'proper' music as distinct from 'cheesy' or 'jazzy' music, a boundary-drawing practice which worked to safeguard the value and legitimacy of classical music (Bull, 2015). One example of this came from rehearsals during a summer holiday orchestra course. The conductor, Olly, had chosen a programme of film music, including music from Spiderman and Pirates of the Caribbean. During rehearsals, Olly gave examples of how film composers had drawn on classical composition techniques, thus dignifying this music with a lineage that drew on the classical canon. Nevertheless, he made it clear to the orchestra that film music was not part of this canon, referring to it a couple of times as 'McDonald's music' because it had 'no nutrition value'. It was therefore acceptable to play film music as long as it was underpinned by a healthy diet of weighty, canonical orchestral repertoire; Vaughan Williams and Shostakovich had been included on the previous course.

By contrast, in discussing their own musical taste and consumption practices, the young people were careful about making value judgements, seeming to have an awareness of the complex moral politics involved in making judgements of musical taste. While many of the participants described their 'omnivore' musical tastes, this broad palette had limits. A large minority, around a third, reported that they would not listen to rap or urban genres, similar to the number that Savage (2006) found disliking urban genres in the UK population. What is significant therefore is not the fact that they said they would never listen to it, but the ways they narrated this. A common caveat was to narrate their preference as 'not understanding' urban music, with one young woman explaining that 'I just don't understand rap. I don't feel like I'm equipped to enjoy it, I can't really appreciate it', and another simply explained 'I don't get rap ... I can't listen to it'.

An elaboration of this position came from one young man, Adam, who was embarking on a successful career within classical music after having attended a top UK state school. He described his musical tastes as eclectic but said that he wouldn't usually listen to rap. He explained:

Sometimes I think that that sort of music is sort of aggressive without there being any benefit. There's no purpose to it. Aggressive for the sake of it. I mean, that's quite an uncritical thing to say, but I don't know, sometimes I feel that – aggression is driven by passion I think, and if you listen to someone like Eminem, see that, I think he's a very clever guy, you can hear the passion in the lyrics, and even if it is an aggressive sound, you're sort of willing to take it, because it's ... justified, it has some sort of ... I don't know, it has reason to be there, and therefore it's moving. I guess it's an emotional connection that I look for.

While tastes for rap and urban musics are also racialised (Rose, 1994), we focus on the dimension of class here. Bourdieu (1987) draws on a relational understanding of class whereby actors are distributed according to their varying degrees of capital to suggest that remoteness in social space can lead to aversion or lack of understanding of those who inhabit that space. People make classifications according to their own position

within social space. Adam's lack of understanding of the kind of 'aggression' he hears in urban music suggests that this emotion is illegible to him. By contrast, Eminem's music is valued by Adam because Eminem is a 'clever guy'. The lack of understanding of rap that Adam and others describe is a classification shaped by their distance in social space from those who predominantly produce and consume urban genres.

While Warde (2011) found that cultural dislikes such as this were generally not strongly marked by class (with some exceptions, including classical music), this example shows how classical music's value is shored up by comparison with other genres. First, the social distance of some of these young people from groups who consume urban genres renders this music illegible to them. But more importantly, there is a process of valuing going on, which, as Green (2003) describes, takes ways of assessing classical music and applies them to other genres. In this case, the value of complexity or being 'clever', which is important for judging quality in classical music, is used to negatively assess music from a different genre. A further example that we add to Green's taxonomy is the discourse of 'emotional depth'. Adam notes that he is looking for an 'emotional connection' with the music, and finds aggression justified when it is linked with 'passion'. This links into the discourse of 'depth' and 'serious music' described above, pointing towards a particular mode of bourgeois selfhood of 'inner depth' (Taylor, 1989: 111).

These examples demonstrate that despite reluctance to describe their musical tastes in terms of value judgements, the higher value accorded to classical music in production practices carries over into consumption. Examining production and consumption together, in this instance, helps to make visible the ways in which the more careful judgements of taste and value among the consumption data mirror stronger patterns in the data on production.

Conclusion

This article has focused on class inequalities in contemporary classical music practice. By drawing on empirical data from two separate research projects, it has linked inequalities in production and consumption in three ways. First, we explored the role of family socialisation in classical music production and consumption. For middle-class research participants, classical music was practiced and consumed at home. Engagement with classical music was perceived as 'natural', suggesting that classical music was valued, and that the attribution of value was uncontested. By contrast, research participants from working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds reported that classical music was unfamiliar; it was not listened to at home and research participants struggled to garner their parents' support. By discussing their families' attitudes towards classical music, the research participants talked about class differences, even if these often remained unnamed. Crucially, we contrasted this analysis with the finding from Bull's study that young men from established middle-class or upper-class backgrounds opted not to pursue careers in classical music. In doing so, our analysis has foregrounded the complex relationship between class background and the value attributed to classical music.

As the second empirical section showed, class inequalities also come to the fore in practices of performing and listening to classical music. Feeling comfortable and confident in grand spaces, as well as wearing appropriate dress, is not something that seems

to be equally available to musicians from different class backgrounds. There is continuity between middle-class culture, the spaces that classical music tends to be performed in, and the dress code, especially for women. This also highlights the role of cultural institutions as spaces where inequalities of production and consumption may influence each other and be reinforced. Thus, class inequalities also manifest themselves in the consumption of classical music. As we have demonstrated, the attribution of depth to classical music, and the resulting distinction between different genres, constitutes a further way in which practices of consuming classical music are classed.

The research participants' value-judgements, which we discussed in the third empirical section, revealed hierarchies where classical music was, through non-explicit mechanisms, situated at the top. While the young people in Bull's study often had omnivorous musical tastes, this did not mean they valued all genres equally. Furthermore, those who preferred not to listen to rap music explained that this was because they did not understand it. This appears to be because rap cannot be evaluated by the same criteria as classical music. However, this hierarchy of value often remained invisible. Arguably, this hierarchy is so taken for granted that individuals do not name it explicitly.

In discussing our empirical data, we foregrounded the unspoken and uncontested value of classical music and how this seems to map onto middle-class culture, albeit in non-direct and complex ways. Classical music was 'naturally' practiced and listened to in middle-class homes where the status of classical music remained uncontested, even if it was not pursued professionally. The attribution of depth to classical music gestured at a seriousness and importance that differed from other genres. The unspoken value of classical music was highlighted in listening practices, where classical music was not consumed for fun or for embodied leisure practices such as jogging, but was associated with people's identities and sense of self. Lastly, classical music was frequently and implicitly valued more highly than other genres, both in the production and the consumption of classical music. Young musicians were taught to see less value in 'McDonald's' music such as film music, and some described how other genres were illegible to them, and therefore they could not see value in them. Based on these examples, we argue that the uncontested status of classical music plays a key role in the ways in which class inequalities manifest themselves in its production and consumption.

There are several ways in which we could take our arguments further by, for example, exploring how the classed practices we have described intersect with race and gender. But for the purposes of concluding this article, we continue with the theme of the uncontested status of classical music and broaden it out to classical music funding. Historically and today, classical music has received disproportionate levels of state funding compared to other genres of music (Hodgkins, 2013; Laing and York, 2000; Monk, 2014). Analysing the value of music in London at the end of the last century, Dave Laing and Norton York (2000) showed that classical music attracted 90% of the available public subsidy, whilst only accounting for 10–15% of total annual ticket sales. Since then, there seems to have been little change with 82.7% of total Arts Council England portfolio funding for music in 2015–2018 allocated to orchestral music, opera and music theatre (Monk, 2014). In this context, we find it notable that – to our knowledge – the high levels of state funding for classical music are rarely critically discussed in media and public debates. Arguably, this opens up the wider question about the potential links between

the uncontested value of classical music in practices of production and consumption on the one hand, and its seemingly unchallenged status as recipient of public funding on the other. Crucially, this is not just a broader point about public funding and cultural policy in the UK. The question about the beneficiaries of public funding relates back to our concern with inequalities and the communities who are being served and excluded through cultural policies. If the value of classical music remains uncontested, existing inequalities in classical music production and consumption may become even greater.

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Notes

1. The young people were mainly white and established or second-generation middle class, with a handful of first-generation middle-class participants and one working-class participant (drawing on Reay et al.'s, 2011 definitions). One was from a working-class family, four from lower-middle-class families, 28 from middle-class families and four from upper-middle-class families. All were white except one who was South Asian but had been adopted into a white family.
2. Forty-four musicians identified as middle class, seven as working class, and two as lower-middle class. Eleven were not sure how to describe their socio-economic background, which resonates with broader arguments that popular awareness of class seems to wane (Bennett et al., 2009). Fifty-six described their racial background as white, four as mixed-raced, two as East Asian, one as black and one as Asian.

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