



New age markets for classical music

PREMIUM CONTENT

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FRIDAY 26 JUNE, 2015

Are meditation, mindfulness and therapeutic audiences the next growth market for the classical music sector?



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Like all arts organisations, practitioners of classical music are always looking to expand their audience beyond traditional subscriber bases and the concert hall. Some, like the Sydney Symphony, are seeking to attract [new audiences online](http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/audience-development/richard-watts/attracting-culturally-curious-audiences-digitally-248311) (<http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/audience-development/richard-watts/attracting-culturally-curious-audiences-digitally-248311>), or overseas, in [growth markets like China](http://performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/performing-arts/richard-watts/china-market-looms-large-for-classical-sector-243179) (<http://performing.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/performing-arts/richard-watts/china-market-looms-large-for-classical-sector-243179>). Others, like Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, have had marked success by targeting younger, [more specialist audiences](http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/all-arts/richard-watts/capturing-the-nerd-audience-195958) (<http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/features/all-arts/richard-watts/capturing-the-nerd-audience-195958>) through programs like the *Doctor Who Symphonic Spectacular* and *Video Games Unplugged*.

With the release of her latest CD, *Heaven on Earth*, soprano, business woman and social entrepreneur Tania de Jong has identified another growth market –

audiences keen on mindfulness and meditation.

Featuring a blend of original tracks and covers alongside new interpretations of works by Beethoven, Mozart, Faure and Dvorák – arranged by jazz pianist Joe Chindamo and featuring new lyrics by de Jong – the album is designed to appeal to audiences who are seeking to transcend or escape the stresses of everyday life.

But while de Jong believes the meditation and mindfulness audience is definitely a growth area for classical music, she has also had to vault a few hurdles along the way, including negative preconceptions about classical music.

‘It’s, in a sense, a lack of knowledge, I guess; a lack of knowledge of classical music ... from the mindfulness, spiritual side of the world. And because it’s foreign to some of those people they don’t accept it readily. They almost have this set against classical music, like a lot of people are set against opera, which is one of the reasons why it’s so important for classical music to make the first move here; because a lot of people put classical music into a certain box. People who don’t love it, and don’t know it, put it in a certain box. “Oh that’s like opera, it’s not my thing,” which is really sad and disappointing,’ de Jong told ArtsHub.

She’s also struggled against some negative reactions towards the new CD from the classical music sector.

‘The classical world tends to be so compartmentalised about what constitutes classical music, so that as soon you create something that has a bit more of a mindful, spiritual side to it, all of a sudden there is a purist classical crowd who say this no longer fits the label of classical music. Which is really short sighted.

‘At the end of the day, we have an ageing population, we have less and less people who are engaged with classical music to begin with in any case, so it stands to reason that if we want to develop new audiences for classical music – which surely we do, because classical music is timeless and it does have a beautiful, spiritual quality to it – then I guess the classical world needs to think about its future and its sustainability.’

Heaven on Earth was released last month, but de Jong said she has faced an uphill battle to have played the CD played on some classical stations.

‘It’s been really hard to get it played, for example, on Classic FM. And some of the comments have been “well, this is more spiritual, more meditation than classical music,” and well actually no. These are some of the most famous classical music pieces ever written. We’ve just happened to write some lyrics in Italian and English that are, you know, not naff, they’re actually quite meaningful,’ de Jong laughed.

Anne Frankenberg, General Manager at Melbourne’s community radio station 3MBS Fine Music, notes that while some people have rigid views of what classical music should sound like, the art form itself has always been open to experimentation and rearrangement.

‘Most of the great classical composers themselves were arrangers, of their own work and others. Bach recycled a lot of his works, Mozart rescored *The Messiah* and added clarinets; it’s not a new thing at all to treat a work as not necessarily the final, pristine end point that must never be tampered with. Composers have been doing that for centuries, Frankenberg explained.

‘And I think that Joe Chindamo and Zoe Black have made a huge name for themselves and gained a lot of respect in classical spaces for the work that they’re doing. I know I’m a big fan of their *Goldberg Variations* reinterpretations, and that’s certainly something that we have recorded and performed on 3MBS

and I know it's got a lot of fans. So I don't think [such rearrangements as appear on *Heaven on Earth* are] necessarily a terrible thing, or something that needs to be condemned.'

That said, she notes that the response to such works is always going to vary from person to person.

'And not everyone will like it, but that's ok,' Frankenberg laughed.

Nor is de Jong alone in experimenting with existing classical music standards in order to cater for new and different audiences. In 2001, the Hush Music Foundation – established by Dr Catherine Crock – released the first in a series of CDs featuring classical recordings designed to induce a state of calm in listeners.

'I was particularly worried about the environment in health care; it's quite a harsh environment, it's quite challenging – the noises and the spaces and the light and the things that are going on in the background actually raise people's anxiety levels. So you come in and you're not well; you're worried and you're vulnerable, and then you're put into this place where some of the normal home-like things are not there,' said Crock.

'And music is something that is an integral part of most people's lives in one form or another; then you go into somewhere where you're at your lowest ebb and none of that is there. So it seemed really logical to me to bring that back into the healthcare area, and use it to help get people into a calm place; and also to sort of transport them to somewhere else – and music can do that.'

Over the last 15 years, the Hush Foundation's repertoire has expanded to include new compositions as well as classical standards; indeed, one of the label's most successful albums to date – 2013's *The Magic Island* – featured 12 new works by contemporary Australian composers, performed by the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

'When I first started this, 15 years ago, it wasn't really recognised, the value of [this music] and what difference it was going to make. I mean, we didn't know either; we were just going to see how it went, basically. And now we've got extraordinary feedback from the families who found it so therapeutic,' Crock said.

So how do such recordings help soothe and calm the listener?

'When you're stressed you release certain things like cortisol and other hormones, and we can measure those and show that there's actually a reduction in these stress hormones,' said Crock.

'You can bring down people's pulse rate, their respiratory rate, their blood pressure, when they're in a calmer state ... It can be with the tempo that's being used or the keys that are being used – so the composers have to really think carefully about that. And I think having their extraordinary mental capacity to think through what are the rhythms and the keys that are soothing and those that sort of wind you up – I think that's been a real advance.'

For de Jong, collaborating with Joe Chindamo – who has also worked with the Hush Music Foundation – is helping bring classical music to a new audience.

'Sometimes people need a stepping stone; they need a bridge to cross art forms and suddenly see the true depth and meaning of these works,' she said.

'Joe Chindamo is the ultimate arranger, and he reinvents classical music in such a way that it does make it more accessible to a wider audience, and that's what classical music really needs. And you know what? When people actually hear that

sort of stuff, then they go to the symphonies and the concertos and all that, but for them to go to the symphonies and the concertos and the operas to begin with is a big leap.

'Mozart's Clarinet Concerto or Beethoven's Seventh Symphony or Dvořák's *New World* symphony – he looks at these classical pieces in a whole new light ... He's been completely respectful to those composers – it's just that instead of whole symphonies we have a song. Which doesn't mean the whole symphony's not valuable; it just means a song might be a way of getting into the whole symphony.'

Anne Frankenberg agrees that creating new pathways for people to discover classical music will help the art form endure – though it's already in a robust state of health.

'In terms of whether music needs to evolve – it *is* evolving. Whether it needs to or not, it absolutely is, and people are performing it in different ways. A lot of the arts organisations and individual artists are finding different ways to access music. I think the thing that will never change is how amazing music can be, the revelation of a piece that's performed in an incredible way; not necessarily differently but just incredibly well – I think that's something that endures and something that will always be there.'

'The death of music's been predicted for centuries, but it seems to be limping along,' Frankenberg laughed.

Tania de Jong's *Heaven on Earth* is available through MGM Distribution
www.taniadejong.com (<http://www.taniadejong.com>)

Hush Music Foundation
<http://hush.org.au> (<http://hush.org.au>)

3MBS 103.5 FM
<http://3mbs.org.au> (<http://3mbs.org.au>)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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