

How might a musician's work be affected by the development of new media? by Loris Grossi (Italy)

It is very difficult to forecast how a musician's work might change related to the development of new and unusual systems of diffusion of the musical product. In this moment, we are mainly talking about new technologies, or better of how the impact of new technologies could interact and change the actual system of supply and demand of live music, a combination of technologies actually, (Broadband and wireless Internet, Home networks, Satellite, Digital terrestrial, etc.), which is synthesized in a single term: New Media.

The term is controversial because in reality the technologies on which it is based are at least 25 years old and are therefore limited in the sense of recent innovation, real assessment requires substantial time. The constant growth of the use of its contents through the availability of Internet, fed by the ever growing availability of broadband Internet access in the home, poses the question if and how a musician's work will change in order to adapt to a format which is quite un-natural for the type of language which is proposed, based essentially on two requirements: quality of sound produced and live performance.

I will say immediately that my analysis stems from my experience as a professional musician and a member of the Orchestra of the Rome Opera Theater, whose main product is lyric opera, as well as ballet, symphonic and chamber music, where the market of recorded music has for many years registered a strongly negative trend in line with the international market tendencies. I will try to address myself to the new possibilities and risks, that the development of new media could bring to the spread of live classical music, which is shared with all spheres of musical performance, and principally of the modern representation of recitar cantando.

Thirty years ago, as I began my career in the Rome Opera Theater, when the lights went off before the beginning of the performance, the announcement that could be heard on the loudspeaker was to wish the audience a pleasant evening or to communicate that the singer was unfortunately ill and had been substituted. Today, before beginning a performance, an announcement is made reminding the public in various languages that it is prohibited to take photographs, to make unauthorized audio/video recordings, and obviously to turn off their mobile phones. Obviously, all of this does not make it impossible, despite rigorous controls, that one can find last night's performance illegally broadcast on Internet the next day. My direct experience can be summarized in an event that occurred last year during a performance of *Maria Galante*, an opera of Kurt Weill in which I played as a member of a small orchestral ensemble. I was a direct witness to a member of the audience who in the front row of the theater, only a short physical distance from me, filmed most of the opera and left the theater before the end of the performance, and one week later part of it was already viewable on YouTube. On my request our legal office took on the case the following week. When I visited the filmed performance online it already had had thousands of hits. Therefore a negative but also a positive result, the copyright and related rights were violated, but publicity was provided free of charge on a global level, an easy way to spread a cultural message and maybe to widen the base of fruition.

Certainly the facility with which modern technology permits the realization and the successive publication of audio/video recordings of an acceptable quality level, simply utilizing a device the size of the palm of one's hand, poses new problems on the protection of rights which have been recognized for the musical interpreter. Now, the key question is this: how can musicians get paid in a world of open access? How do we make money after we lose the control over access to our rights?

The transition to digital High Definition (HD) will make another step towards the improvement of the quality of audio/video devices, making the quality of recorded music played in the home more acceptable than today, now characterized by the low sound quality of our televisions and also computers. The improvement of supports and players and their diffusion on a global scale, as occurred in the past with the transition from analogical to digital technology, goes towards the twofold direction of augmenting the possibilities of high-quality supply versus a deep transformation of the final product.

One of the peculiarities of live performance lies in the magic produced by a multitude of sensations provoked by assisting a live performance. Sensations that stimulate not just, as is obvious, hearing but



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sight and smell as well. The unique quality of a special event is experienced as a member among members of the audience, but also as a live and vibrating fragment of a huge sound-box. Musical practitioners know what a big difference in sound outcome exist between performing in a full and in an empty hall, and it is not measurable just in decibels or emotions. Here, to attend a live performance is never a passive action, if not only because of the fact of being physically present at the event.

This partially is an issue for all kinds of live performances, actually, but it is particularly important for classical music. A three minute long song can be easily be heard in the earphone even while walking in traffic but a four hour long opera or even a two hours symphonic concert is different. Also, operas need the video as well as ballet. Moreover, if MP3 is a working algorithm to compress rock music and similar, it often results "spare of frequencies" if applied to classic music productions. But in order to broadcast music on the net, size and space are big issues even when broadband is available, for this reason it is virtually impossible to send uncompressed files, which are better in quality but ten times bigger in size then MP3s.

If, as I believe, Internet will not shortly become the new frontier for the circulation of live lyric opera and classical music, new forms could competitively enter into the European distribution system of musical offerings as, for example, opera telecast. Last year the at the Rome Opera we were able to telecast an opera from our theatre contemporarily in twenty different Italian cinemas. It was a big success both in terms of index of approval and audience attendance. The experiment followed the successful attempt that the Met profitably proposed in the United States and is becoming successful all over the world.

The novelty, as compared to Internet streaming, other than the higher quality of sound in the cinema due to the more sophisticated surround systems, I believe relies in being able to experience a low cost media event outside a theater while sitting in an audience, in a similar way of reproducing the event that partially approaches the original condition, at least in the public sharing of the sensations experienced. It is particularly appreciated in locations where opera theaters are not available.

The Rome Opera owns thousand of scenes and approximately forty thousand costumes in its storages, some of which are rented all over the world, that in the future could easily be publicized on the web, facilitating the choice and subsequent rental without it being necessary to come to Rome to see them. Moreover, the Rome Opera's historical and audio/video archive is opening a web portal which would offer the opportunity of consulting part of its huge and priceless catalog of documents, musical and non, that in the past hundred and twenty eight years of history it was able to preserve, like Puccini's *Tosca* or Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, that had their world premiere at the Rome Opera in nineteen hundred.

I don't foresee the arrival of new systems for the diffusion of melodrama that would make this form of art become a mass event in modern terms, assuming that the demand could significantly grow, something that must not be taken for granted. The diversity of this genre, compared to rock music for example, lies in the difficulty of reproducing it outside of the theater's walls, mainly, but not exclusively, for acoustical reasons. Maestro Arturo Toscanini used to say, when asked why he didn't like to conduct outside summer festivals, that "open spaces are good for bowling", underlining in this way how for him classical music could only be performed, and listened to, exclusively inside the appointed spaces. Today's technology allows an amplification of an outdoor orchestral performance with great technical results, that would have been impossible until just a few years ago, and almost all the major orchestras offer outdoor summer seasons to their public.

My point of view is that once more the challenge for our sector is to be able to bring more public to the theaters more than to offer alternative ways, which could compromise its quality, of enjoying our products. A cultural challenge more than a technological one, therefore. Diversity is our weakness but also our strength. In my opinion new media should move in the direction, more than to try to compress *Aida* or *Parsifal* inside a narrow 2,5 inch monitor of an MP3 player or inside a trendy mobile phone, of embracing the task to transmit in all different forms the advertising, promotional messages and advance sales, in order to be able to make known in real time, on a global level, the cultural and musical offering and to stimulate and to address the public choice processes. Everything once more relies on the quality of the artistic supply and the ability to reproduce it. Our duty as musicians is to preserve and to hand down to posterity an exclusive form of art, that sees in its performance the

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realization of its own essence, making possible the transition from the written music, conceived by the composer, to the animation and realization of the score. The final result however is reached through another fundamental component, the mediation and the involvement of he/she who participates in the performance as a member of the audience, a union which sometime brings to the unique event, and for this reason unrepeatable, intended as a fortunate synthesis of all of these elements: composition, interpretation, spectators.