

Changing the image of orchestras György Lendvai (Hungary)

CHANGING THE IMAGE OF ORCHESTRAS

I'm sure everyone has an image of what "image" means if we are talking about orchestras. Yet let me try to give a definition. Image is the sum of total beliefs, ideas and impressions people have of the organization, programs, services and products it offers. In our nonprofit section, a strong, positive image is a crucial element in keeping and gaining audience. It is also critical to get sponsors and supporters.

One task of a good orchestra management is to monitor all circumstances related to the orchestra, and when needed, react and respond to them as quickly as possible. Those reactions make a change in the orchestra's life and a sequence of such changes sooner or later may alter the image of the orchestra. Sometimes the image changes much faster. A bad review or a scandal in the life of the orchestra could generate a very quick change.

WHAT ARE THE MAJOR COMPONENTS OF THE IMAGE OF AN ORCHESTRA?

CHIEF CONDUCTOR

TRADITIONS, HISTORY (former history and leaders)

REPERTOIRE (has been changed since authentic groups play all baroque repertory; should be changed for new audience)

SIZE

GUEST ARTISTS (Pavarotti, involving pop music)

COMMUNICATION (image-based on beliefs, so sometimes does not need any change in the organization but needs good communication; printed materials, webpage, advertisements)

PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES, TOURS, RECORDINGS (besides having concerts, outreach programs; representing the country's culture abroad)

VENUES, APPEARANCES (where it performs, festivals)

REVIEWS (long story)

TICKET SALES (hard to get a ticket, plays with full house, sold out concerts)

Which element is the most important today in changing the image of orchestras? To see that let's examine first what the biggest problem is orchestras have to face and today? Undoubtedly that is the loss of audience. We have to adapt to this situation (imagewise too). All of us working in this field have realized that we need more and more work to get the same amount of people as audience from year to year. Why is it so? I think, mostly because of the lack of music education. That's why audience in general becomes older and older all over the world.

(When I was a young student in the early 70-s, everyone had 2-3 music lessons a week, and practically all pupils graduated from elementary schools could read simple tunes from music. That was the legacy of Kodály in Hungary. At that time many more students studied instrumental music. They knew how hard it is to play an instrument, and they appreciated both music and musicians much more.

Today there are a lot of schools with no music education at all.)

What to do? The answer is for that problem:

BE A MUSIC EDUCATOR!

Find new ways to reach out to young people, play them and bring them to concert halls. To accomplish this, you need a different way of communication, new venues, new programs and activities.

From that point the image of a traditional orchestra - that goes to stage, the unapproachable maestro comes and conducts, people see and listen to them, but there is no any other contact between public and musicians - is broken. During outreach programs in schools, community houses you have to be



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casual, because personal contact is needed; you have to speak to listeners, to answer questions and engage them in different activities. Here in Berlin you can see a big difference between Herbert von Karajan, - the unapproachable maestro - and Sir Simon Rattle, who involved dozens of youngsters to his Rite of Spring project and brought thousands to see it.

You also need different kinds of programs specialized on various segments of the public.

In our orchestra there are three different series for young people. One is – following the idea of Kodály that music education begins nine month before the birth - for pregnant women. Generally they come with their husbands, sometimes with kids, and they really enjoy the reactions of the baby inside. The second one is for children in kindergartens. Instead of going to kindergartens, we insist on that they should come to our rehearsal place. So they have to make certain preparations in advance, adapt to the new surrounding of the concert. They can also touch different instruments; see posters of composers and performers on the walls. It becomes a real event for them. In this new milieu we can teach them, how to be silent and how to behave during concerts. The third one is titled "Grandchildren and grandparents" for the age of 8-14. We find it very important to have adults and children of the family come together to concerts. In that case they prepare for the concert, dress up, and talk after. In this way our place becomes a community music house, a kind of cultural or music center. That is very new in our orchestra's life.

We try to bring people over 14 to concert halls. Groups from high schools are coming to our concerts not only from Budapest but also from cities within 100 kms around Budapest. We attract music students from the university (Liszt Academy) by offering master classes in our place with our guest artists.

We also try to bring music to people not able to come to concert venues. We go to elderly homes, institutes of blind people, and disabled persons. I think all of us have to have that kind of charity works. BE BENEFICIAL. That is a good way to be part of the community and take part of social responsibility.

To bring culture to rural areas, small cities and villages, where people do not have the chance to listen to live music is also one of our MISSIONS. For our orchestra this means: going back to our roots. In 1945 when the Hungarian Railway Company founded our orchestra right after the WW II, the idea was to transport culture all over Hungary by train. So every Monday three coaches: one for men, one for women and one for the instruments left Budapest heading to one corner of the country. The orchestra gave concerts in villages, slept there in their coaches, and played additional 2-3 concerts the next day, before returning on Wednesdays and having concerts in Budapest on the weekend. That was the heroic epoch of our ensemble.

Another major influence that makes a significant change in the orchestras' image is the change in the media. Orchestras appear differently in different magazines and periodicals. Appearance should fit to the users of the medium. New media, especially internet have made a big change. Photos, personal information can be accessed about musicians, and messages, opinions can be sent to the orchestra. In that way orchestra musicians can be more visible to the public. (That will be discussed at the next panel.)

We have discussed the image and changing image of orchestras in the context of "Orchestras in society". It means from the point of view of the audience and community. Nevertheless there are other factors related to image. We have to build up our image for critics, and other professionals; for our musicians in our orchestra and for sponsors. We have to create a positive self-image in our sponsors. They have to be proud of being our sponsor. (In Salzburg there is a big competition among sponsors.) After fifteen years of being reorganized into a foundation, the orchestra has been pushed by the Hungarian Railway Company in the forefront of its PR and marketing. As its president said: "the orchestra gives the best quality in all services of the company, which can be sold all over the world". I'm proud to say that it is true.