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*Producing and consuming inequality: A Cultural Sociology approach to the cultural industries*

*McDonalds music versus 'serious' music: how production and consumption practices help to reproduce class inequality in the classical music profession*

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*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'. Secondly, 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. Thirdly, 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:** Classical music; class inequalities; production; consumption; United Kingdom

**Introduction**

Inequalities in the cultural industries have come 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 (2015) 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 (Allen et al., 2012; 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 has been rarely 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 inequalities in cultural production relating to gender (e.g. Conor et al., 2015), race (e.g. ACE, 2014), class (e.g. O'Brien et al., 2016), and disability (e.g. ACE, 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 (ACE, 2014; 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, b). 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 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; Yoshihara, 2007; Wagner, 2012; 2015). 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 onto 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, our article proceeds in the following way. First, we 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 writings 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 (ACE, 2014; DCMS, 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 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 (ACE, 2014; Scharff, 2015b). Other than O'Brien et al.'s data on the music sector as a whole, we are not aware of any studies that contain statistical data on the socio-economic background of classical musicians. However, more research is available in relation to classical music education and training. In the UK, instrumental and vocal music lessons are provided both privately and by publicly-funded local authority music

education services, established between the 1950s and 1970s. The 1970s also saw the growth of the community arts movement in which local authorities ran 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 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, p. 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 (Rogers and Hallam 2010; Griffiths 2014). 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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. Indeed, Tregear et al. (2016: 280-281) have commented on

the perceived nexus that exists in many countries (especially the United Kingdom and Australia) between classical music in particular and private secondary education – one commonly trumpeted as a point of difference in these schools’ brochures. Such private schools frequently boast concert halls and other facilities that are far better than what is generally available to the broader community. An emphasis on classical music education can, as a result, appear as little more than an ‘act of class differentiation’.

These studies and commentaries 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 class background of conservatoire students is 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 (see also Born and Devine, 2015). Whilst we do not have any statistical data on the class background of 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 into 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 (of varying types) 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 highly divided by social group, particularly class (Warwick Commission, 2015: 33; Miles and Sullivan, 2010).

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, and the professional (rather than the managerial) middle class were associated with liking two out of the three classical music works mentioned. While the question of whether high cultural tastes still carry cultural capital, and in what ways, is now disputed (Prieur and Savage, 2013), according to Bennett et al.'s (2009) mixed-methods study of cultural consumption in the UK, classical music is the only genre of music still to carry cultural capital. However, they were unable to draw

conclusions as to *how* this worked (p. 93).

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 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) using Arts Council England data, demonstrated that omnivores do not consume all forms of culture equally; they are aware of different forms of culture being differently valued, and other authors have similarly rejected the evidence for the omnivore thesis (Prieur and Savage, 2013; Atkinson, 2011). 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. However, 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; Hennion, 2007). While we appreciate the quantitative studies for their ability to trace large-scale patterns of tastes and consumption, the qualitative focus of our article seeks to shed light on the ways in which value is constructed and attributed in contemporary classical music practice.



## **Research methods**

The empirical data presented in this article is based on two distinct studies on contemporary classical music practice in the UK, namely Bull's (2015) research on classical music education and Scharff's (2015a, b; 2017) study of the classical music profession. In this section, we introduce each study in order to highlight similarities and differences. 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 2012-13, is based on an ethnographic study into young people aged 16–21 involved in youth classical music groups in the south-east 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<sup>1</sup>, as well as interviews with nine of the adults involved in running these groups. Participants in these groups were aged between twelve and early twenties, but interviewees were all sixteen or over due to ethics considerations. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim with permission. Thematic analysis was carried out in dialogue with fieldnotes from observations and participant observations.

Scharff's (2015a, b) 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 by 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 twenties/early thirties 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<sup>2</sup>. 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. Reflecting the role that education seems to play in

the reproduction of inequalities in classical music, both studies focused on younger people, who were either currently or recently engaged in classical music education. 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 observation, 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 was 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, 2001; 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, including organising two conferences in this area, have brought to the fore common themes, which are worth exploring in the context of this article. 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 creates a typology of three classical music ‘subworlds’ in New York in the 1980s, characterised by ‘repertory’, ‘academic’ or ‘avant-garde’ practices. Our studies sit firmly within the ‘repertory’ practices he describes, which encompass the major orchestras and venues in Manhattan where musical practices are ‘highly conventionalized’ (p. 214). Across both studies, the majority of repertoire played was 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup>

### **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 came to the fore in the 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 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 but also 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 I (Scharff) asked Kelly about her family background, she told me 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’ 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’ father to “fit in with western culture” meant that she was exposed to classical music at an early age. Similar to her middle-class peers, consumption of classical music formed part of Liz’ 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, 2017). They engaged with classical music practice as a form of ‘serious leisure’, which allowed them to “express their abilities, fulfill their



potential, and identify themselves as unique human beings” (Stebbins, 1982: 251). Some of them even used the contacts they had gained through their engagement with classical music to further their non-musical career goals and ambitions. 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. In Bull’s study, it was only young men from established or upper-middle class backgrounds who decided not to pursue classical music on a professional level; some of their female peers, by contrast, did opt to pursue a career in classical music.

## **2. Beyond the home: practices of classical music production and consumption**

Once musicians move outside 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 into both by their families and through elite schooling (Bourdieu 1984; Forbes and Lingard 2013; Khan 2012). 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 (1957), 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 that occur within these spaces. 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). Less frequently mentioned is the reverent, still and silent listening (Levine, 1990; Weber, 2004). 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 are the requirements of dress for classical music performers. Standard concert dress is dinner jackets for men (which is short-hand for black dress trousers, white shirts, black leather shoes, along with the black dinner jackets), and 'long black' for women, which means wearing black clothing such as ankle-length dresses, skirts or trousers, covering elbows and knees. These dress codes make visible the associations of respectable middle-class femininity with classical music, as described by Bull (2015). 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).

As well as the practices associated with production, the unspoken value of classical music was also apparent in the modes of consumption described by the young people in Bull's study. These modes of consumption varied across different 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, who was from a lower middle-class family who didn't 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". Another 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. She runs out of words when trying to articulate what this depth in music does. Enjoyment or fun do not adequately describe the experience that these young people are trying to access. Instead, the 'depth' of this music connotes a seriousness and an importance which enjoyable music such as pop music do not allow.

Other literatures 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 such as going out dancing or exercise; 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 how listening to classical music was 'work' and said that they didn't listen to it for pleasure; 'classical music is not for downtime' remarked one young woman. 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 are associated with classical music, while embodied activity or pleasure was associated with other genres. These discourses of seriousness and depth that are used to describe people's experience 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.

### **3. 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 young 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, he 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 'McDonalds' 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, canonic orchestral repertoire; we had played Vaughan Williams and Shostakovich 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 to have an awareness of the complex moral politics involved in making judgements of musical taste. While many of my 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 racialized (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 subjective positions. 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 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 a career 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 described this was because they didn't 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 came to the fore 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 identity 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 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 highly disproportionate levels of state funding compared to other genres of music (Laing and York, 2000; Monk, 2014; Hodgkins, 2013). 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 portfolio funding for music in 2015-18 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 grow even greater.

## **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. 44 musicians identified as middle-class, 7 as working-class, and 2 as lower middle-class. 11 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). 56 described their racial background as white, 4 as mixed-raced, 2 as East Asian, 1 as black and 1 as Asian.

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