

Case study

# The Night Shift

## Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment



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## Background

The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment (OAE) is a pioneering ensemble that plays classical music on period instruments – i.e. instruments appropriate to the era of the music, and that plays in styles suitable for the age of the music. The Orchestra is self-governing, run and owned by the musicians, and this translates to a real collective energy and intensity of performance.

In the autumn of 2005, the OAE mounted a series called Listening in Paris. The series examined the radical change in concert going that occurred in 18th and 19th century Paris – a period which saw audiences transformed from being rowdy and irreverent into the quiet well behaved ones we know today. It occurred to us that while we were examining the music of the time, we weren't experimenting with enabling the audience to experience the music differently. At the same time our student scheme, Attitude, was taking off, with 2,000 students signed up to the mailing list in the first year. These two things, together with a general desire to try an informal concert experience led us to create a radical new concert series to attract a new audience to our work – The Night Shift, which was started in May 2006 with the aim of encouraging new and younger audiences to OAE events.

The whole of the OAE is involved with this project, which is led by the Communications Team. Events usually take place 3-4 times a year at Southbank Centre, but the concept has been taken to other venues including the Roundhouse, Wilton's Music Hall, Village Underground as well as a London pub tour (and associated crowdfunding campaign) and appearance at two Summer Festivals in 2012. The aim of doing this is both to keep the series fresh to regular attenders, but also to attract audiences that might not come to a traditional concert hall.



## Objectives

- To attract a younger, 18-35 audience
- To attract an audience that only infrequently or never attends classical music
- To take classical music out of the concert hall
- To present our concerts in an informal, interactive, friendly way, breaking down barriers between performers and audience
- To present concerts of the same high artistic standards as our existing concerts

## Target audience

From the outset the two groups targeted were: a) Students in London b) Those aged under 35, going to other cultural events but not classical music. When devising the series, we took time to think about why these groups were under-represented at these concerts, what the barriers to attendance were, and therefore developed The Night Shift with the aim of removing as many of these barriers as possible.

## Process

The Night Shift was designed so that it built upon our existing concerts, which had been conceived through the OAE's player-led structure and delivered by OAE management. The Night Shift involves many of the artists with whom the Orchestra works regularly.

The event is an hour-long late night concert, introduced from the stage by presenter Alistair Appleton and featuring repertoire drawn from 'standard' OAE concerts. Before the concert, the bar always plays host to live (non-classical) music and afterwards a DJ concludes the evening. As well as being intended to reach new audiences the programme was also designed to alter and change the relationship between performer and audience, breaking down the wall between seat and stage – we were interested to see the impact of this on audience and performers alike.



The audience for The Night Shift has been built up through: innovative print, (taking The Night Shift as the lead brand and not the Orchestra's), distribution through Don't Panic packs at bars, clubs, & events and hand-to-hand flyering at selected events where we are likely to find our target audience. Online activity includes blogging, Twitter, Facebook Pages, Spotify Adverts, Facebook adverts, It is also promoted through our Attitude Student scheme and student representatives. We undertake mailings and emailings to targeted mosaic groups, together with limited outdoor and tube advertising, plus PR campaigns centring on media likely to be consumed by target groups. We also produce preview videos, post-concert vox pops, podcasts and concert merchandise.

## Outcomes

Regular surveys show that 85% of the audience is aged under 35, with 1/3 being students and 15-20% being new to classical music. For Southbank Centre concerts 48% are first time attenders at the Centre. Top performing Mosaic Classifications that attend are Bright Young Things (23%), Urban Cool (17.9%), Multicultural Towers (8.2%) and Re-housed Migrants (6.1%) confirming a very different demographic to our standard



classical concerts. During 2012, over 3000 people attended Night Shift events. And the event has sold out venues including the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Roundhouse.

Research carried out by Anne Millman stated “The Night Shift succeeds in reversing all negative preconceptions of live classical music concerts: in the course of an hour or so attenders moved from expectations that the experience will be expensive, formal, long, middle aged, proper, strict and stuffy to an understanding that it can be accessible, comfortable, inclusive, informal, laid back, relaxing, spontaneous and ‘studenty.’ The range of generic negative preconceptions about attending a live classical music concert are completely overturned by The Night Shift experience. The OAE is doing a service to the entire sector.”

## Key points for effective practice

- Creating a product and brand for a specific target group and not trying to be all things to all people.
- Understanding the needs and lifestyles of that target group.
- Assume nothing. Those working in the classical music industry are of course steeped in the art form. It is important we step outside of this to understand the perspective of a consumer coming to us ‘cold’.
- Effective communication of plans to artists (orchestra and guest artists) and existing audiences is crucial, even with the intent of communicating that this event isn’t for them – but showing them why we are doing it. In terms of the orchestral musicians, we have tried to communicate the results of research etc. to them whenever we can.
- Constant evaluation, important in securing funding for the event and also in monitoring audience satisfaction.
- Crucially this is a sustained programme. We only got the produce ‘right’ at the third event. In order for a programme like this to be successful, we believe that a

sustained approach to programming is necessary, rather than mounting a one-off event.

- This kind of programme is an investment. Return on marketing is lower than for a traditional concert as this audience is harder to reach.
- Be aware of events and periods that may impact on the target audiences ability to attend i.e. we try not to schedule events outside of university term time.
- Make it fun.

## **Conclusion**

The series is succeeding in attracting a different demographic to the work of the OAE, as evidenced by research and regular evaluation. We believe the basic formula of the event is right we will keep it fresh by continuing to use 'surprise' venues, by programming 'mini' events in bars and pubs, and tweaking the format of the event occasionally. We also aim to take the event outside of London during 2013 as part of a second pub tour.

We believe that The Night Shift is a valid musical experience in itself, so there are no plans to encourage attenders to cross over to 'regular' OAE events. The musical values are the same whatever the format.

[oae.co.uk/thenightshift](http://oae.co.uk/thenightshift)