Art Brand in Production and Reproduction of Classical Music and Music Theatre

Elena Khokhlova

The versatile discourse of classical music was under scrutiny for decades. Some theorists (ADORNO, 1988; TARUSKIN, 2010) question the very definition of classical music and its distinction from the others spheres, some investigate its role in the everyday life (BOURDIEU, 1984), and some, more recent studies, ask who and why continues to establish interest towards this phenomenon (KRAMER 2009; LEBRECHT, 1997). No matter how many debates there are around classical music as a tradition, culture, style or ideology, it stays on the surface of modern cultural production and consumption.

The study aims to review some aspects of classical music and music theatre in post-modern discourse of production, reproduction and consumption, by explaining its relation to art brand. In doing so the study will follow a general definition of classical music as Western artistic tradition that provided rigorous musical forms; classical music nowadays is taken as representation and reproduction of historic tradition, and is performed by professional musicians and vocalists and consumed as a serious experience; and music theatre as stage productions that represent or follow the same musical tradition. Phenomenon of art brand is extension of brand as a marketing tool into the sphere of cultural goods, such as music recordings, videos, theatre plays, books and so on. It means that the following text will be covering the aspects of art brands applied to modern forms of classical music and music theatre.

Contemporary discourse of everyday life suggests that people are surrounded by industrial and cultural goods being produced, reproduced and consumed (BAUDRILLARD, 1980). In the earlier decades of industrial revolution, the exuberance of industrial goods overflowed markets, thanks to the new ways of production that became excessive. Now, that we are suffering from information overload (TOFFLER, 1984), we witness emergence of cultural goods, or, products of creative industries (HESMONDHALGH, 2007). Those are not only agents of mass media and the Internet, but also visual and audible data, performance experience and other forms of professional and amateur creative activities.

Cultural goods are widely spread in everyday life because of the new ways of their production and reproduction as well as the mentioned information overload, or, excess of diverse information accessible to almost everyone, or, at least, much bigger amount of people via Internet and various digital gadgets. The accessibility eventually allowed much more people to learn artisan skills and develop their own production of amateur cultural goods. Then the same accessibility provides opportunities to place those goods to the access of other people.

As a result, there is an enormous offer of cultural goods, paid or free of charge. The unlimited market for cultural goods then raises a problem of navigation (DOLGIN 2009: 31). History repeats itself: overproduction of cultural goods confuses consumers with the problem of distinction. As any experience goods, cultural goods are unpredictable – one may never know about the actual qualities of a book or a play before reading or attending it.

This is why cultural goods need brand technologies. A brand or a trademark is an expressive sign (or signature) of certain quality or style. Modern brands are capable to represent rich images and lifestyles with a small shortcut (image, slogan, word, name, combination of colours or sounds). Art brands are capable of doing the same amount of work.
The same way as a prancing horse on a yellow shield emblem successfully represents Ferrarri’s wealthy lifestyle, legendary speed, world success and love to sport, the picture of a dog curiously staring at gramophone becomes a symbol of outstanding musical performances, recorded and accessible in privacy at home. It is just like a stamp that proves exceptional quality and professional principles.

Cultural goods that use brand technologies have advantages in the market. They offer a well distinct product alike others, a wishful image, extra value and unique experience of a certain quality. Products represented by brands signal to consumers with their names, design or extra connections. Screen adaptations of comic books suggest connections to the same dimensions and realities, and represent the same ideas of heroism, supremacy of the good and so on. A new book by Orhan Pamuk most probably suggests similar quality and type of experience as the older ones. Most of the book series even have the same design. A new work by Steven Reineke is composed according to the same professional and personal skills and style of the composer, so it is expected to be on the same quality level as the older ones. We also expect to see the famous joyful, colourful and sarcastic musicals in Broadway, simply because it is the Broadway. In a word, branding sorts numerous products into different sections by style, idea, message, image, mood, experience, quality and genre.

Branding is a matter of marketing. In creative industries, especially classical music and music theatre, we face some powerful and famous brands that were created outside of the modern discourse of production and consumption. Some of them (Niccolò Paganini, Erik Satie) were initiated as something outrageous or exceptional to actually gain popularity, some of them (Modest Mussorgsky, „Carmen“) were gathering dust for some time before they were revealed.

Given examples assure that, at some point, branding is not something very new to classical music and music theatre, even if it wasn’t used as intensively as nowadays. There are names and titles („La Scala“, Pyotr Tchaikovsky) familiar to most of the people, even those who have no particular interest in the subject. There are other names and titles that provide sufficient information regarding quality and image but only for those who are involved (Vladimir Yurowski, London Philharmonic Orchestra).

All art brands that function in classical music and music theatre may be sorted by the phases of production (creating, conceptualizing, supporting, promoting and performing) according to the following classification (Table 1), where the last two lines are general (A) examples and examples taken from famous Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes (B).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Creators and creations</th>
<th>Performers</th>
<th>Mediators</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Retranslators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanatio</td>
<td>Composers and Masterpieces</td>
<td>Single musician and singers; Collective of musicians; Conductors</td>
<td>Directors; Managers; Editors</td>
<td>Stages and venues; Recording labels</td>
<td>Media sources; Festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Example A</td>
<td>Giuseppe Verdi; „Bohema“</td>
<td>Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; Fazil Say</td>
<td>Lev Dodin; Valery Gergiev</td>
<td>„Bolshoi“; Glyndebourne</td>
<td>Mezzo; „Opera vsem“</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. Classifications of art brands in classical music

The table suggests that there are five main types of art brands in classical music. First of all there are creators and creations, or, actual authors and their masterpieces. Being a historic tradition, classical music may only offer the authors and masterpieces that gained their popularity decades ago and it is very unlikely to see any new names and titles in this category. Creations and creators brands are initial in every performance, they provide the idea, message and background for a cultural product.

The second important type of art brands is performers, or those, who bring the tradition in life. There are single musicians and singers, collectives of musicians, such as, choruses, orchestras, ensembles and so on, and conductors. Music theatre adds dancers, ballet companies, designers and artists to this category. Performers brands are responsible for representation of a masterpiece.

The next vital type of art brands is mediators, or those, who stay behind the stage but help to bring performances to life. Mediator brands include stage directors, editors arrangers, managers and others. They conceptualize and support production of the cultural good.

Institutions are a very important art brands too, for no music reproduction or performance may happen without a stage or a recording process. Institutions are represented by theatres, stages, venues and recording labels. They support the production or recording by providing space and tools.

The last type of art brands is retranslators. Media networks, blogs, streams, newspapers and festivals fulfill the role of promotion, they spread the word about cultural goods, they also criticize and rate them to enable the cultural navigation and targeting.

While each performance or its reproduction (each cultural good) may stay away from using any brands, majority of them choose to use at least one or as many as possible. A DVD recording of „Eugene Onegin“ collected enormous number of brands (Table 2). As more art brands are collected in one performance, as more attention the performance is going to get. Because each brand targets its own audience, collection of brands attracts a sum of various audiences. In case of the production of „Eugene Onegin“ the total audience consists of those who admire Tchaikovsky and romanticism in music; those who read or heard of the Pushkin’s novel in verse; those who appreciate the style and work of world famous Fleming, Vargas, Hvorostovsky, Gergiev and Carsen or those who heard the names and has a notion of the quality they represent; those who like MET’s productions and expect its traditional style; and, of course, those who follow the news of the opera world or attend the performance (buy the DVD) regardless of being attached to one of these groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Creators and creations</th>
<th>Performers</th>
<th>Mediators</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Retranslators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eugene Onegin, 2007</td>
<td>Pyotr Tchaikovsky; „Eugene”</td>
<td>Renee Fleming; Ramón Vargas; Dmitry</td>
<td>Robert Carsen; Brian Large</td>
<td>The Metropolitan Opera;</td>
<td>The Metropolitan Opera HD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Anna Della Valle, such cultural products as opera, ballet and classical music are classified as pure experience goods (DELLA VALLE, 2004). It means that each single experience of these goods will vary. It is rather impossible to attend two identical performances of classical music or music theatre, even if it is supposed to be the same author and title. The problem is that performing arts are so unpredictable, that the only thing left is to navigate by the announced art brands. The same production of „Boris Godunov“ may dramatically vary in two different theatres. Information of the institutions, performers and mediators, however, help. Scandalous opera director Calixto Bieito would probably put something extreme and violent on stage (LOOMIS, 2013), while experimentalist Graham Vick would try to offer a new look and concept (IOFFE, 2012). Even one name (which is brand) may help to identify the sort of experience to expect from the performance.

As a result, classical music and music theatre production survive in the everyday discourse of market by applying technologies of art branding. It helps to identify the products in the professional and amateur sphere of cultural goods, target consumers by ensuring them of a certain style, image and quality before the purchase and provide navigation in the world of art by operating with such types of art brands as creators, creations, performers, institutions, mediators and retranslators.

Bibliography


TARUSKIN, Richard, *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays*, University of California Press.
