CultureCase

Measuring the ‘quality’ of symphony orchestra repertoires

This research was conducted by **Mafalda Gómez-Vega** and **Luis César Herrero-Prieto** at **Universidad de Valladolid, Spain**

Summary

This paper analysed the repertoire of 20 Spanish symphony orchestras between 2014 and 2017 using three measures of ‘quality’: contemporaneity, most well-known composers and conventionality. The researchers found that there were two ‘programming strategies, ranging from novelty and risk to more stable and safe repertoires based on well-known composers.’ The highest scoring orchestras in terms of ‘quality’ were younger institutions with longer seasons that were located in Madrid. Those who scored lower had the most conventional programmes and were ‘longer-standing orchestras located in areas with older populations and lower levels of education.’

The research classified repertoires using three ‘quality’ categories: contemporaneity, most well-known composers and conventionality

The ‘contemporaneity’ quality was whether the composers in the repertoire were ‘born in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, in addition to those born in the nineteenth century who composed most of their work in the twentieth century’. The ‘well-known’ quality was the percentage of an orchestra’s repertoire taken up by 'the ten best internationally known composers (Beethoven, Berlioz, Brahms, Dvorak, Bruckner, Haydn, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Mozart and Schubert)’. The ‘conventionality’ quality was how often a composer’s works were performed during a season at any of the orchestras, and the frequency of them in the programme of the individual orchestra in question.

They also took account of external variables (i.e. those that had nothing to do with the repertoire itself)

These were: venue capacity, years in existence, number of guest performers, number of concerts, ticket prices, population density, the age, education and income of the local population, and whether or not it was in Madrid. Some of these were found to influence the programming decisions of the orchestras.

Keywords

spain programming Classical Music

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