

Madeleine Pillwatsch

BROAD ACCESS – BROAD OPPORTUNITIES: HOW REDUCING BARRIERS TO CULTURAL HERITAGE BENEFITS ALL INVOLVED STAKEHOLDERS

The Vienna-based International Music + Media Centre (IMZ) is the international network for music and dance films and was founded under the aegis of UNESCO in 1961 in order to preserve the performing arts as a cultural asset. With this goal in mind, the IMZ's mission is to promote performing arts in and through audiovisual media in order to inspire and engage new and future audiences in music and dance.

It is obvious that filming a musical performance allows present and future generations to access cultural heritage from past times; we can all enjoy a performance of the legendary Maria Callas, still experience the *Three Tenors* singing together or re-watch Leonard Bernstein conduct at the occasion of his 100th birthday in 2018. Furthermore, thanks to the fact that these and countless other performances are captured on video, we will still be able to appreciate them for hundreds of years to come.

However, preserving cultural heritage for future generations is not the only effect of an audiovisual recording of a musical performance. Through the dissemination of cultural content on TV, DVD, in cinemas and now increasingly on streaming platforms, a much broader audience can gain access, and many barriers involved in attending cultural performances can be reduced.

However, what are the main barriers and how can audiovisual media help overcome them? In a recent study on Cultural Heritage requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 56% of people in the EU-28 reported that they have not attended any traditional or classical performing arts event (such as music, including opera, dance or theatre, folk music, and so on) in the past year. The factors contributing to non-attendance are fairly standard across all countries:

- Higher age (55+)
- Lower educational status
- Lower socio-economic background (profession and household income)
- Geographical distance to cultural offers

When asked for the barriers to accessing cultural heritage, the main difficulties were:

- Lack of time (37%)
- Cost (34%)
- Lack of interest (31%)
- Lack of information (25%)
- Geographical remoteness or difficulty of access (12%)
- Lack or limited choice of cultural offers in the area (12%)
- Poor quality of cultural offers in the area (6%)

Furthermore, what can be subsumed under ‘lack of interest’ or ‘lack of information’ is the concept of familiarity, which many studies have shown is the single-most influencing variable on cultural participation. This means that people who have not been introduced to cultural activities by their family, school or peer groups find it more difficult to develop a taste on their own and gain access and appreciation for cultural offers. When it comes to classical music, which is regarded as a ‘highbrow’ artistic discipline, this is especially relevant as non-attenders feel hindered by their lack of understanding of the subject and the appropriate ‘etiquette’ when attending a performance, which might result in experiencing alienation, a sense of inferiority and disinterest.

It is clear from the above that those most affected by these discouraging actual and psychological barriers tend to be people from lower socio-economic backgrounds with lower educational status who live in rural areas.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of scientific research on how disseminating performing arts content through audiovisual media changes consumption patterns and reduces barriers in accessing cultural heritage. However, it is intuitively understandable that watching an opera or a classical concert on television, a DVD or via a streaming platform as opposed to attending a live performance mitigates many of the above-cited obstacles:

- It requires less time (and effort) since it can be accessed from the comfort of one’s home, which is a particularly important factor for people with

reduced mobility due to age or health-related issues as well as for people living in remote areas.

- It is significantly less expensive and often even freely available or accessible via one's local public broadcaster or an online streaming service.
- It can, and often does, go hand in hand with educational information on the respective work and performance (artists, historical context, musical genre and classification, and so on) or other compelling content, such as the behind-the-scenes or interviews with the artistic team, all of which is suited to foster understanding and familiarity and to increase the personal connection to performing arts.
- It is easy to access from almost any place in the world and offers an incredible variety and quality of performances, even performances that are half a world away, have been sold out or would blow one's budget.

The IMZ is proudly convinced that audiovisual media does not only preserve cultural heritage but also provides broader access to the performing arts. Furthermore, with the example of two IMZ initiatives that have also received the label of European Year of Cultural Heritage, this article will demonstrate how cultural heritage can be made more accessible for the benefit of all involved stakeholders. In the following, the audience development initiative IMZ Music Film Festivals – with the specific example of the annual Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz – sheds light on the tangible and intangible effects on the local community. The second example, the professionalisation initiative of the IMZ Academy will further explore the perspective of performing arts institutions.



IMZ Music Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz

IMZ Music Film Festivals

In order to reach and engage new audiences with high-quality cultural experiences, the IMZ has spearheaded the rising popularity of music film festivals and can look back on more than 25 years of experience in programming awe-inspiring festivals in almost 30 cities around

the globe. One of the oldest and largest IMZ Music Film Festivals is the Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz, which has been taking place annually since 1991. Organised by the City of Vienna, the Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz is set in front of the spectacular scenery of the Viennese City Hall and accompanied by an extensive food festival with creative and exotic delicacies.

Providing Access to Cultural Heritage and Engagement

The IMZ contributes the programming to the film festival and showcases operas, operettas and musicals, classical, pop, jazz and rock concerts, ballet as well as contemporary dance performances during the entire summer (approximately 65 days). With this broad and multi-faceted programme, the IMZ aims at satisfying a great variety of tastes and preferences. Moreover, popular programmes are also suited to provide an initial attraction for newcomers to cultural performances. In order to provide an additional and timely draw, current events or cultural anniversaries are also considered in the programming. Furthermore, a designated children's programme was successfully incorporated and introduces kids to opera and classical music in an engaging and playful manner.

Apart from the programming strategy, additional crucial factors in attracting audiences are the central location (with high foot traffic and easy access via public transport), the spectacular atmosphere and architecture of the public venue set in front of the Vienna City Hall, the free admission to the festival and the appealing culinary offers.

Through the lowered barriers for attendance in terms of cost and proximity, the additional attraction of the food festival, the rousing atmosphere of a spectacle, the beautiful scenery and the multi-faceted programme, many non-traditional visitors become exposed to classical music and are hopefully inspired to seek out further cultural engagement in the future. In fact, 73% of visitors indicated that they would like to attend next year's festival again and 96% reported that they are likely to recommend the festival to others.

Tangible and Intangible Effects on Local Community

Since 2016, attendance to the festival has risen by 75% and reached a record number of 980 000 visitors in 2018. Given this impressive number, its duration of two months and the richness of additional offers and spectacles, such as the food festival, it is no wonder that the Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz

also has a substantial impact on the local economy. Illustrating the additional economic effect, nearly 30% of visitors from other parts of Austria named the festival as the main reason for their visit to Vienna, thereby generating economic activity in the area that would not have occurred without the festival. Moreover, only 53% of visitors reported that their attendance at the Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz substituted another leisure activity (cultural or culinary activity), which means that there is not merely a shift but actually considerable growth in cultural engagement as well as in economic impetus.

In total, the Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz induces an economic boost to the local area that is 40 times more than the initial investment made by the City of Vienna. Furthermore, the municipality can immediately re-finance its expenses through the increased tax income due to growth in economic activity.

Despite the fact that 35% of all visitors are tourists from foreign countries, merely 1% of tourists cite the Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz as their main reason to visit Vienna. Hence, the additionally induced economic activity from abroad is limited. However, the intangible economic benefit on Vienna's image can still not be neglected: Since its establishment in 1991, 14 million visitors from all over the world have attended the Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz, contributing to a positive perception of Vienna with connotations such as cultural heritage, arts and gregariousness. In fact, these attributes have already been defined as crucial aspects of the brand 'Vienna' by the Vienna Tourist Board and, therefore, the festival further strengthens the city's capability to attract new visitors.

Last, the Film Festival at Vienna Rathausplatz is a popular meeting point, brings together people from diverse backgrounds and adds spectacle and vitality to a public space. While the intangible impact is difficult to measure, it can be assumed that the overall effect is positive and contributes to Vienna's status as an exceptionally liveable city.

Like many other case studies and academic papers, this example of an IMZ Music Film Festival demonstrated how a cultural festival cannot only reach and engage new audiences with music and cultural heritage but also provide impetus for sustainable economic development and foster a lively, connected local community.

www.musicfilmfestivals.com

IMZ Academy

The IMZ Academy is the IMZ's professionalisation initiative to support representatives in the performing arts and media as well as the music and dance film industry as a whole. A variety of current topics are covered in hands-on training sessions in order to help practitioners tackle crucial issues that affect their work. However, due to the increasing demand in recent years, one major theme has been to help performing arts institutions position and promote themselves in the digital realm.

Understandably, concert and opera houses, orchestras and performing arts festivals that are more active and present in the digital sphere and offer (live) streams and videos of their performances provide audiences with broader access to musical heritage and reduce the aforementioned barriers. Moreover, the possibility of online transmission further increases the variety and depth of cultural offerings since the number of music films is no longer limited by the scarce programme slots in traditional broadcasting, and audiences can access programmes from all over the world and are no longer restricted to their local broadcasting stations.

The question is, why – and how – should performing arts institutions engage with their (potential) audiences online? The IMZ Academy is designed to help performing arts institutions understand the opportunities and advantages of streaming and digital audience development and to equip them with the tools required to succeed in their endeavours:

- Whether over a streaming platform, such as YouTube and Facebook Live, or a personal streaming site or app, digital dissemination reaches (potential) audiences wherever they are. Our increasingly digital world calls for new ways of thinking, changed consumption patterns for music and significantly altered the manner of communicating and connecting with performing arts audiences.
- As previously mentioned, audiovisual transmission includes educational or entertaining content to accompany a performance, which provides viewers with a more meaningful experience and increases familiarity with the subject and the respective performing arts institution. As a matter of fact, 87% of viewers are prepared to switch to channels that offer more behind-the-scenes coverage, and it is a wonderful opportunity for performing arts institutions to create a more personal bond with their audience.
- Contrary to the widespread belief, streaming does not reduce attendance in the concert hall or opera house. In fact, 67% of online viewers are

more likely to attend a live performance after watching a video. Moreover, regular audiences do not substitute but expand their cultural consumption with digital offers since the frequency of live attendance and streaming are proportionally correlated.

- Online streaming allows to connect with audiences regardless of geographical location. Hence, performing arts institutions can reach audiences in remote areas or those who are far away from their own location, even on a global scale. Thus, it also helps performing arts institutions to develop an international brand and reputation, which is especially beneficial for touring companies.
- Costs can be more than offset by additional income through royalties, subscription revenues or even licensing the solutions that were developed in-house to other performing arts institutions.
- Last, filming a live performance allows performing arts institutions to thoroughly archive their performances and preserve their musical heritage for future generations.

While even small events and performing arts institutions can quite easily and cost-effectively stream a performance on YouTube or Facebook Live, setting up a professional and extensive online video presence is a complex operation. Obviously, it is crucial to invest in high-quality video and sound recording, but there are many other technological, practical, artistic and promotional aspects to consider – ranging from website optimisation to creating a buzz on social media.

The challenge might seem daunting, but the IMZ Academy has already seen plenty of cases where performing arts institutions can reap the benefits of embracing the digital world while making their art more accessible for a global audience. In order to continue this positive development, the IMZ Academy does not only offer valuable insights from experts and successful case studies but also fosters the development of international networks that allow for peer learning and collaborations between performing arts institutions and media professionals.

www.imzacademy.com