Classical Music Myths Unraveled

*Classical music fans more tech-savvy than pop music fans*

*Thomas Steffens*

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Summary

The common view that classical music listeners are old fashioned and digitally illiterate is not correct. Classical fans are, in fact, more likely to own a smartwatch, smart speakers or wireless speakers than fans of other music genres. However, classical fans are less likely to stream music than fans of pop or rock. The reason is not that classical fans are less digitally savvy, but that streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music offer a poor experience to fans of classical music, causing them to stick with CDs, downloads and radio.

Introduction

It is often believed that classical music fans are old fashioned. Consider the stereotype of a grumpy, older man listening to his large CD collection on a high-end HiFi system. He supposedly ignores the digital and technical revolution that has turned the music industry on its head, from CDs to streaming, from HiFi to wireless smart speakers. This raises the question of how digitally savvy classical music fans really are.

Key findings

Let’s start with the streaming revolution. Streaming technology has changed the music industry (see graph 1). After more than ten years of strong revenue decline in the fallout from internet piracy, the recorded music industry has been growing again since 2012. This is often called ‘Spotify Effect’. Streaming services like Spotify turned consumers of illegal music downloads into royalty-generating streamers. Spotify alone now has over 100 million paying subscribers.

Streaming already has turned the tide for music at large, except for classical

Classical music seems strongly underrepresented by the big streaming services, and those who listen to it are not catered for in the same way as fans of pop. It is estimated that 5% of worldwide music consumption is classical; consumption includes radio, live concerts, CDs, downloads, streaming royalties, etc. One would assume then that classical music is also about 5% of streamed music.

Graph 1

Source: Goldman Sachs & Primephonic analysis
However, classical music accounts for less than 1% of all streamed music. This figure represents a disparity of around factor 5. See graph 2.

Classical music is heavily underrepresented in streaming consumption and royalties

This raises the question of whether this underrepresentation is due to classical fans not being technologically confident enough to stream, or whether it is driven by another factor. Primephonic has investigated and contrasted the digital savviness of classical music fans with fans of other genres. The findings are astonishing. Primephonic’s research, during which 10,000 music fans were surveyed, shows that classical fans are more likely than fans of other genres such as pop, hip-hop and rock to own smart speakers such as Amazon’s Alexa (22% vs 17%), wireless speakers such as Sonos (38% vs 33%) or a smartwatch (16% vs 12%). Primephonic’s research also confirms the common view that fans of classical music buy CDs (9% vs 8%) or downloads (15% vs 10%) more often. See graph 3.

Classical music fans more often own state of the art of digital technology

Primephonic’s research team found that classical fans are indeed older than fans of other genres (with an average age of 46 vs 38), but also have a higher family income and higher education level. The higher income and education levels appear to compensate for the older age demographic, resulting in higher, rather than lower, adoption of new technologies among classical music fans.

This research has two seemingly contradicitive findings: classical fans are more technically savvy than pop music fans yet stream much less. Therefore, Primephonic also analyzed the reasons why many classical fans do not stream yet.
The reason is pretty simple: they dislike the classical streaming experience they get on Spotify and Apple Music. Primephonic’s research shows that fans of classical music are much more likely to be dissatisfied with their existing streaming services (46%) than fans of other genres (28%). See graph 4.

Classical music fans much less satisfied with existing streaming services

It is not surprising news that classical fans buy more CDs and downloads than pop music fans, but the music industry now finally has a much better understanding of why. It was commonly assumed that classical fans buy more CDs and downloads because they were not particularly tech-savvy, but that is not correct; they are even more tech savvy than fans of other genres. The reason they are not making the switch from CDs and downloads to streaming is not that they are too old-fashioned for streaming, but because these streaming services do not offer what classical fans need.

On the major streaming services classical fans must make do with a limited catalogue, a poor classical search function, uninspiring classical recommendations, missing artist information, and low audio quality. These streaming services are designed for pop music because for them, classical music is a side-business at best. Classical fans love music more than anything else and because they love it so much, they have the highest standards, which current generic streaming services do not meet.

That is why we have developed a streaming service dedicated to classical music, from scratch: to meet the needs of discerning classical music fans.
**About Primephonic**

Primephonic is a Dutch-American start-up based in Amsterdam, London and New York. It has been dubbed ‘the Spotify of classical music’ and is the first and only streaming service to get classical music right. Its rapidly growing team is made up of more than 30 classical music lovers of 20 different nationalities, who share an ambition to delight and indulge currently underserved classical music listeners with the world’s most extensive classical music catalogue, higher sound quality, and industry-leading search functionality based on unique, proprietary classical music metadata. Classical music has been led by disruptors, innovators and pioneers for nearly 1000 years. Today Primephonic brings their legacy into the digital age.

**About the author**

Thomas Steffens is co-founder and CEO of Primephonic. Previously, he spent 12 years as a strategy consultant for the Boston Consulting Group, serving clients globally from their offices in Amsterdam, New York and Madrid. At BCG, Thomas supported the Amsterdam Concertgebouw and the Dutch National Opera and Ballet on a pro-bono basis. Thomas is a board member of the Dutch Arts Council and co-founder of Tapastheater in Amsterdam. He lives in Amsterdam and enjoys playing the piano.