

Thematic Article

New Possibilities in Cultural Consumption. The Effect of the Global Pandemic on Listening to Music

Judit Váradi¹

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Abstract

In this study, we address the impact of COVID-19 on classical music concerts. New forms of cultural consumption and their convenience have raised the question as to whether concert halls will still be needed in the future, and whether the audience will take on the extra time and effort to be present in person at a musical artistic event. In an analysis of international surveys, we formed an accurate picture of music listening habits in the period before and during the pandemic. We also administered a survey, completed by 134 music teachers. Although the findings cannot be generalised to society as a whole, the respondents in the sample are well acquainted with the artistic setting and possess sufficient prior experience, so their opinion is relevant to the topic. Despite the convenience of the online space and the rich selection of art available, the interviewed music teachers will still prefer live music events, which offer them a more profound experience.

Keywords: cultural consumption, music listening, concert attendance, online concert

Introduction

Concerts have had a social significance ever since their emergence: they have functioned as a meeting point and an organising force of the social space. Musical characteristics, concert venues, performers, and programming have gone through significant evolution; however, a live music event can always be understood as a stage for personal encounters and, therefore, as social space (Váradi, 2018). The concert hall is a traditional and accepted but not exclusive venue for musical events. The aim of involving unusual spaces in the transmission of cultural values is to address new target groups. The musical experience is fundamentally influenced by acoustics and the quality of sound. Consequently, changing the space of performance and perception also affects the development of the musical experience. As a result of technological development, mass media have played a significant role in the restructuring of the cultural map. In a 1963 analysis, the radio was named as the natural medium for listening to music, while the role of television in the transmission of opera was also emphasised (Mason, 1963).

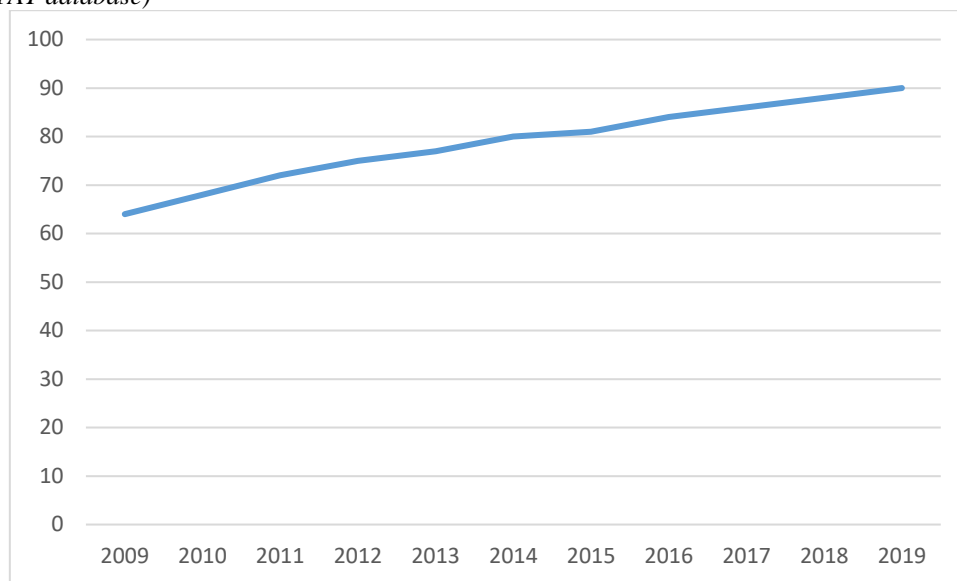
Cultural globalisation, the rise of multiculturalism, and the spread of mass communication have expanded the dimension of cultural consumption, while the education system and support from the state to help preserve artistic values both play a major role in enriching national culture. The deterministic effects of social status with respect to cultural consumption could be made obsolete by the Internet. Sociologists studying patterns of artistic taste and participation argue that contemporary society values cultural “omnivores” or cultural capitalists (Peterson, 1997), who know several cultural forms and are proficient in both high and popular culture. In other words, high status is associated with cultural cosmopolitanism. Taste is not limited to a certain style; listeners may become musical polyglots. The theory is explained by changes in working conditions and lifestyle, whereby high geographical mobility and continuous change in cooperation create complex and heterogeneous social networks. This results in heterogeneous (omnivorous) tastes, giving rise to cultural diversity (Erickson, 1996).

¹ University of Debrecen, Hungary; varadi.judit@music.unideb.hu

Cultural consumption in the digital space

In the consumption of culture and art, the rise of the Internet has been a disruptive innovation (Bower & Christensen, 1995; Christensen et al. 2018), which has significantly unsettled the well-established practice of live art performances with personal participation. As a result of a disruptive technology, previously established market structures may change completely, and the new technology might completely displace the old one. An illustrative example of the creative destruction effect of digitization is that interest in physical records has declined significantly. Since 1999, when Internet use began to spread in the United States, the GDP-adjusted sales of recorded music have declined by 80 percent, and the number of employees in sound recording studios dropped by 50.4 percent between 1998 and 2009 (Waterman & Ji, 2011). According to a survey by EUROSTAT, the statistical office of the European Union, the Internet access of households has increased significantly in the last decade. According to EUROSTAT data, more than half (63%) of EU households had access to the Internet in 2009, whereas in 2019 this share amounted to 90 percent (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Change in the Internet access of households between 2009 and 2019 in the European Union (EUROSTAT database)*



In Hungary, we find a slightly smaller proportion, with 73 percent and 86 percent of households having access to the Internet in 2014 and 2019, respectively.

Throughout the European Union, there is an average difference of 6 percentage points between urban and rural regions. In Hungary, however, the difference is 10 percentage points. In the 21st century, when the Internet is an integral part of our everyday work and private sphere as a natural medium, the 91-percent Internet penetration in urban regions of Hungary is only 1 percentage point short of the EU average. In contrast, only 81 percent of households in Hungarian small settlements and villages had access to the Internet in 2019. The latter figure seems small, even if one considers that it reflects the situation in the year before the pandemic. In 2020, remote learning was introduced and most employees also worked from home (Table 1).

Table 1. *Internet access in households by degree of urbanisation in 2019 (EUROSTAT database)*

	Cities	Towns and suburbs	Rural areas
EU	92%	89%	86%
Hungary	91%	86%	81%

Information and communications technologies and ICT tools have become increasingly important for the entire society and in all areas of life, whereby culture and cultural consumption are no exception. Modern technology makes it possible for all genres of cultural consumption to become independent of time and space.

In addition to subscription-based sites, several free platforms provide a variety of cultural and artistic content. The interaction, however, is not unilateral: in addition to downloading, it is also possible to upload and share cultural content. These digital platforms present significant competition to cultural institutions and other cultural services, and force them to constantly innovate.

The potential of the Internet has also been recognised by radio stations: several radio broadcasts are available on the Internet, in a similar way to films and TV shows. According to a 2018 database of EUROSTAT, 56 percent of the EU population used the Internet to listen to music in the three months preceding the survey, while 69 percent of the Hungarian population aged 16 to 74 did so. The data show that, compared to the EU average, the Hungarian population listens to music more often in both of the examined age groups (Table 2).

Table 2. *Listening to music (web radio, music streaming). (EUROSTAT database)*

	16-74 years	16-24 years	55-74 years
EU	56%	86%	30%
HU	69%	94%	42%

When analysing the frequency of listening to music on the Internet, we find different patterns by age group, gender, educational attainment, and residence. The table shows the average of European Union member states. The results reveal that tertiary graduates and young city dwellers use the Internet the most for this purpose (Table 3).

Table 3. *Use of the internet for listening to music in 2018 (EUROSTAT database)*

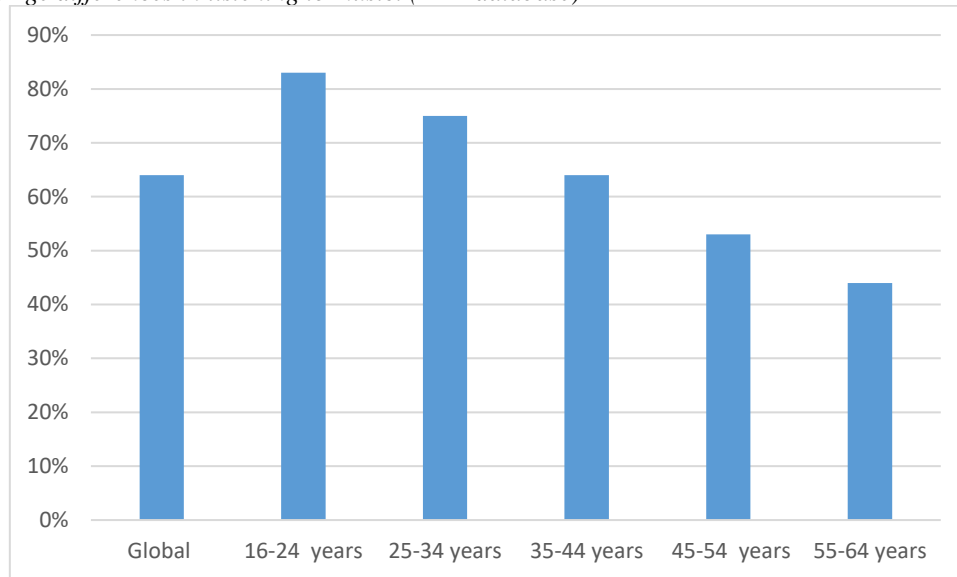
Age	16-24 years	86%
	25-54 years	59%
	55-74 years	30%
Sex	Men	59%
	Women	53%
Level of educational attainment	Lower secondary education or less (ISCED 0-2)	52%
	Upper secondary and postsecondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 3-4)	53%
	Tertiary education (ISCED 5-8)	63%
Degree of urbanisation	Rural areas	53%
	Towns and suburbs	55%
	Cities	59%

In April and May 2019, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) conducted a comprehensive survey of music listening habits, which was published in their *Global Music Report 2020*. The representative survey was carried out in 21 countries around the world (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States, China, and India) among the population aged 16–64 (N=34,000). The results clearly show an upward trend in the amount of time people spend listening to music, which is carried out in increasingly diverse forms.

The time spent listening to music has increased in the last two years. While in 2018 people spent 17.8 hours per week or 2.5 hours per day listening to music, the average increased in 2019 to 18 hours per week or 2.6 hours per day. In 2018 and 2019, as much as 86 and 89 percent of music listeners streamed music content, respectively. The three main reasons for using streaming are the access to a wealth of musical content, the ability to choose the desired piece of music, and finally, its convenience. The examined age groups used both

free and paid content, but there was a significant difference in the music listening habits across age groups. In particular, there was a 39-percentage-point difference between the youngest and oldest generations (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Age differences in listening to music. (IFPI database)



The three most common listening activities were the same in both years of the study: consumers listen to music most frequently while traveling in the car (EU66%/HU70%), while relaxing at home (EU63%/HU64%), and while cooking or cleaning (EU54%/HU54%).

The resilience of radio stations is also evident from the survey, with 86 percent of music listeners spending 4.4 hours per week listening to a radio channel. Nowadays, people listen to the radio through two main media: traditional broadcast and the Internet. Radio channels use simulcasting to transmit the signal simultaneously on the air and on the Internet using streaming technology. Among young people, customisable radio stations and on-demand programs are the most popular, which are able to correspond to listeners' individual needs.

The average popularity of genres reveals the strong presence of younger generations, but a comparison of the examined years also shows that genre preferences change constantly. Classical music appears in both lists, although it fell two places between the two years (Table 4).

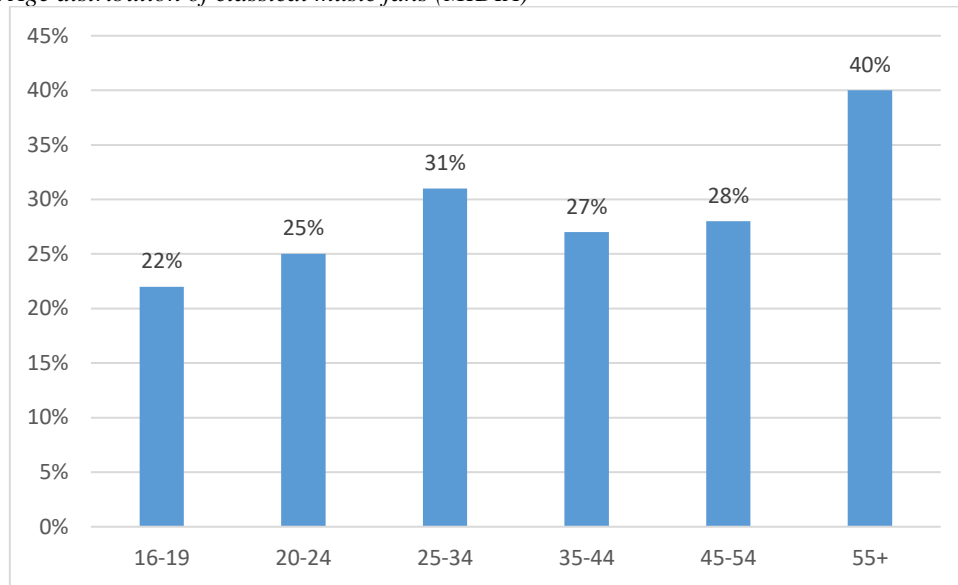
Table 4. The most popular genres (IFPI database)

	2018	2019
1	Pop	Pop
2	Rock	Rock
3	Dance/Electronic/House	Oldies
4	Soundtracks (film or TV)	Hip-hop/Rap
5	Hip-hop/Rap	Dance/Electronic
6	Singer/Songwriter	Indie/Alternative
7	Classical (including opera)	K-Pop
8	R&B	Metal
9	Soul/Blues	R&B
10	Metal	Classical

MIDIA Research conducted a survey of the adult population (N=8,000) in eight countries (US, UK, Mexico, Sweden, Austria, Denmark, Germany, South Korea) to investigate music listening habits. The figure

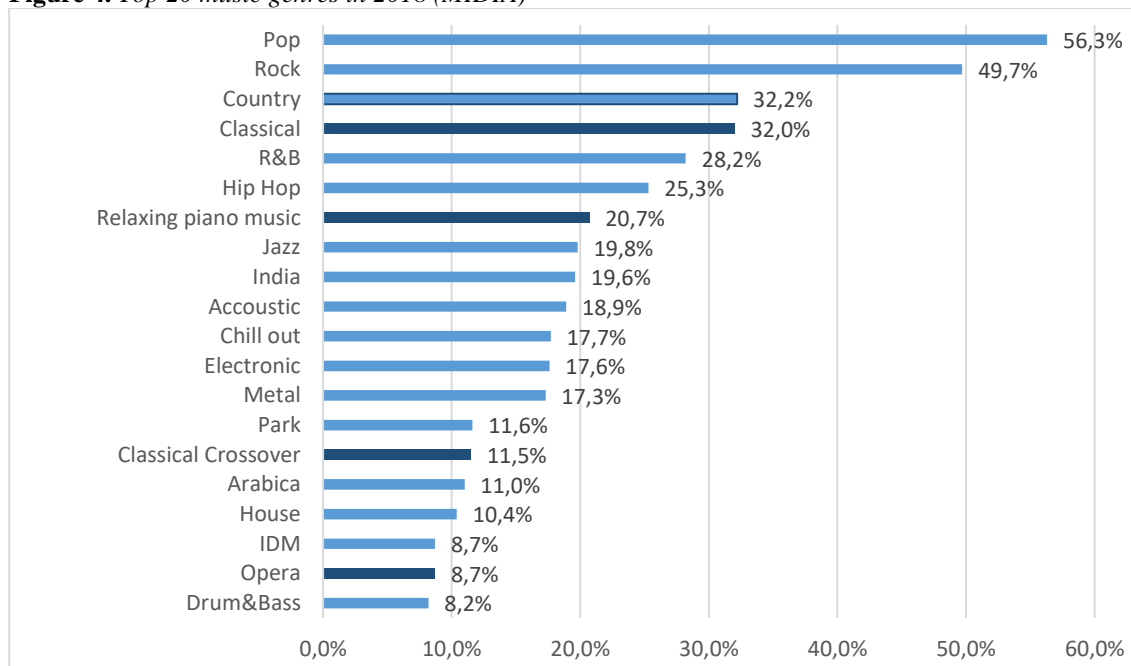
below clearly shows that classical music is the most popular in the oldest age group, which is immediately followed by a younger cohort: some 31% of 25–34 year olds prefer the genre. The results also reveal that almost one-third of the classical music audience is younger than 35 years, with a mean age of 45.6 years (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Age distribution of classical music fans (MIDIA)



Young people encounter classical music on streaming services through mood-based playlists and algorithmic recommendations. The survey explores listening habits in different countries and reveals that people sometimes like to listen to something other than their usual musical style, and are more likely to choose classical music to relax, fall asleep, or concentrate. A special aspect of the survey was that the examined sample listened to music not during another activity but in itself. The following figure reflects the preferred genre of music, irrespective of listening time. Of the 20 genres included in the survey, we find classical music itself in fourth place, while three other genres, namely relaxing piano music, classical crossover, and opera, also fall within classical music (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Top 20 music genres in 2018 (MIDIA)



The survey by MIDIA is in line with the IFPI report as both agree that the radio remains the most popular way for classical music enthusiasts to access their favourite genre (www.midia.com).

In the 21st century, young people are the most likely to use a mobile phone to listen to music (IFPI, 2019). While only 27 percent of the total sample prefer the smartphone for listening to music, this figure is 44 percent in the 16–24 age cohort. The smartphone surrounds the listener with a virtual aural space through an acoustic bubble, which makes the activity of listening to music private by removing it from the social context and its usual environment. A typical example of privatised music consumption is a young person listening to music through headphones, who can be undisturbed even in the middle of a crowd.

Opportunities for cultural consumption during the pandemic

Musical performances and concerts are the result of a joint interaction between performers and listeners. The special trait of musical communication, which distinguishes it from other types of communication, is that it is realised in a triadic relationship. The communication between composer and audience presupposes the presence of a third, intermediate party, namely the performer, whose role in the process can be interpreted as both receiver and transmitter. In cultural transmission, the listener is widely considered to be actively involved in the decoding of the musical process. Successful communication is only possible if its language is known to both the transmitter and the receiver, so the success of a concert is also largely dependent on the audience's understanding of that particular form of communication (Váradi, 2018). Gordon (1999) emphasises the importance of audiation and the transmitted message in musical communication. A concert is not a unilateral form of communication, because feedback from the listeners and the audience is also a crucial component. Thus, participation in music is not limited to the composer and performer but also involves the listener. Music, or in Small's terminology, musicking includes all forms of participation which can be related to music (Small, 1998). The maintenance of a dynamic musical culture requires the active presence of all participants (Cuskelly, 2019).

The live music experience is never only musical in nature; there is a performance space between the musical material and the audience, which plays a significant role in successful communication. The performance space is influenced by acoustic characteristics as well as the performer, whose personality, expressiveness, and virtuosity create an artistic force field, which contributes to the completion of the musical communication process (Váradi, 2020). As for recordings or online concerts without an audience, the feedback, which determines successful communication, cannot take place. Personal participation, through the richer context and ambience of the real environment, provides more information, in addition to the experience of belonging to a community (Váradi, 2018).

The period of pandemic-related restrictions fundamentally shook cultural life. Performers of classical music, soloists, ensembles, orchestras, choirs, and similar groups were forced to cancel their performances as concerts and performances within the traditional framework could not take place. The demand for culture, however, remained steady even during the period of restrictions. According to the managerial approach, an operational model is viable if it is adapted to current needs as well as to market and social conditions (Szedmák & Szabó, 2020). Taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the Internet and digitisation, several orchestras chose to organise online concerts, while others opened their existing databases to anyone worldwide. As a result, various concerts and performances became available online for free, which had previously seemed inconceivable. The phenomenon raises questions as to the impact of the pandemic on the organisation of live music events in the future, as now art may be “delivered” anywhere and be enjoyed in the comfort of one's own home through technical devices with excellent sound quality. In 2020, closures due to the pandemic accelerated digital consumption trends, reshaping consumer behaviour. The shift of everyday life into the digital world was the escalation of a long-term, slower-paced trend. Remote work and continuous restrictions meant that the role of streaming in music listening and cultural consumption became even more important. Among the possibilities of classical concerts, new genres have emerged, such as real-time broadcasts of live music concerts without an audience, webcasts, or podcasts, which are not real-time equivalents of live broadcasting but rather the publication of recordings of previously broadcasted concerts. In a similar way, archived recordings of previously held events and pre-recorded shows have also been released frequently at pre-announced times. The content was free initially but, later on, often required payment, which was enabled by the online technology that allowed only those to enter who possessed the code displayed on the purchased ticket. In recent years, many

media and entertainment companies have seen an increase in the number of subscribers and users, with an even more significant growth since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Entertainment has become more important than ever as a way to spend time and as comfort in difficult times (Westcott et al., 2011).

The Global Consumer Insights Survey (PwC) examined worldwide the changes in consumer behaviour and habits compared to the pre-pandemic period. According to the survey carried out in 27 countries around the world, 74 percent of the adult population has worked from home at least occasionally since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Transformed consumer habits are evidenced by the fact that 36 percent of respondents reported to spend more on online entertainment and media than before. The role of social media has increased due to widespread isolation, with many people taking advantage of the calming effects of media, entertainment, and music as stress relief in difficult times. More than half of consumers have increased their use of video or messaging applications and social media (www.pwc.com).

The most popular concert substitutes have been live events, which are watched on a platform with many other people. Such occasions do not fully replace the experience of belonging to a community, yet they are considered a social event. Audience members at online events have been able to communicate through comments. The pandemic has had a substantial impact on the organisation of live events. While some enjoy the new form of cultural consumption and its convenience, others wait for the end of the unpredictable period to return safely to physical community spaces. At the same time, the role of creators and services that can take advantage of the increased popularity of online entertainment is projected to increase in 2021 (Kahlert, 2011).

Research design and Methods

In September 2020, the Music Pedagogy Research Group of the Doctoral Program on Educational Sciences of the Doctoral School of Humanities at the University of Debrecen with support from Research Institute of Art Theory and Methodology of the Hungarian Academy of Arts launched a survey to examine the lessons from and impact of remote art education and novel forms of cultural consumption. The survey targeted teachers and instructors involved in musical art education at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. In addition to teachers of the subject singing and music, the sample consists of instrumental music teachers, private singing instructors, teachers of solfeggio and music theory, accompanists, as well as orchestra and choir conductors.

The research attempted to uncover whether music teachers took advantage of the expansion of online musical content and whether they watched more concerts online than they had previously. It was also addressed whether they planned to return to live music events once concert halls opened given the convenient availability of diverse and professional artistic events online.

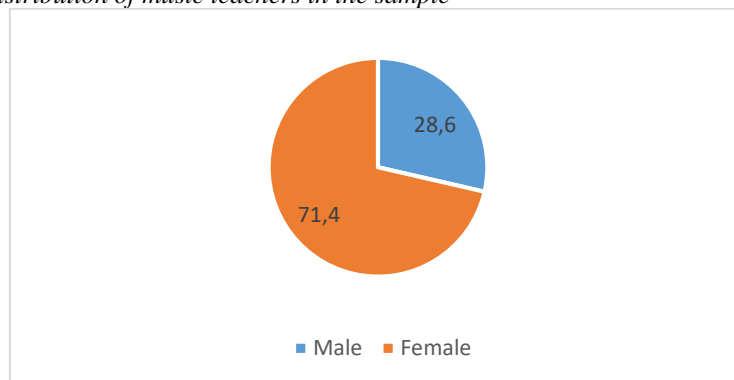
The compilation of the online questionnaire was preceded by two focus group interviews with 3 music teachers each from two small towns. Once the interviews were completed, the questionnaire received 134 responses from music teachers. Data collection is not yet complete, however, so our partial results can be interpreted as a pilot study of a larger volume of research. In this study, we present an analysis of those open-ended questions in our self-developed 48-question measurement tool which concern cultural consumption.

Results

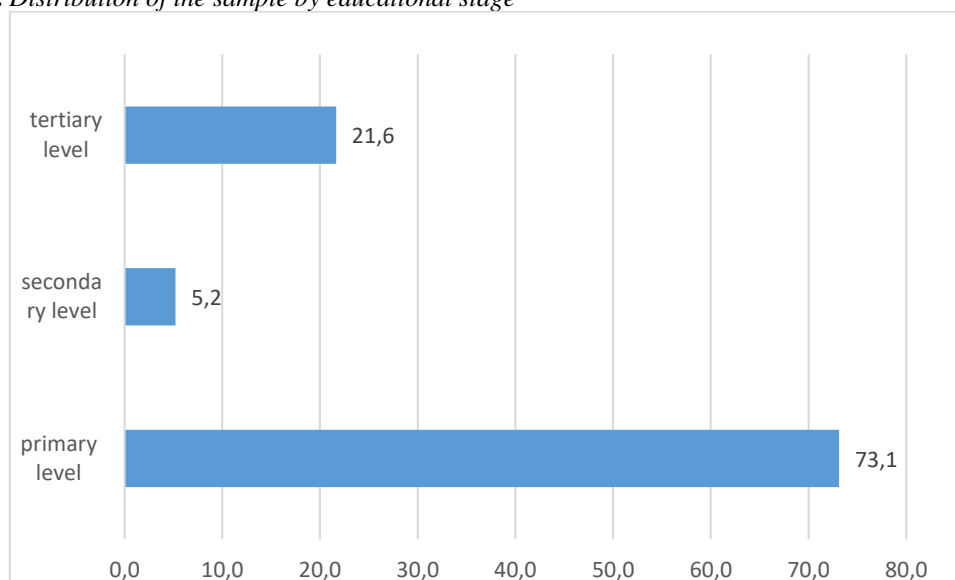
The situation of live music concerts after the pandemic

The sample of our survey consists of music teachers, a group in society which is highly interested in art, so their opinion cannot be generalised to society as a whole. Still, we believe that there is considerable value in and relevance to the opinion of a group of people who are well acquainted with this environment and have sufficient prior experience.

Female dominance, which is characteristic of the teaching profession (Polónyi, 2004; Veroszta, 2015; Sz. Fodor & Kerekes, 2020), is also present in this sample: more than two-thirds of the surveyed music teachers are female (Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Gender distribution of music teachers in the sample*

Music teachers in the sample typically teach in county seats (38.8%) and towns (38.8%), but the capital (12.7%) and villages (6.7%) are also represented. As for educational stages, more than two-thirds (73.1%) of the instructors in the sample teach at the primary level, 5.2 percent at the secondary level, and 21.6 percent at the tertiary level (Figure 6).

Figure 6. *Distribution of the sample by educational stage*

The analysis revealed a significant link between gender and educational stage ($p=.000$): about 50 percent of men teach in higher education (18 people), while not even 8 percent of women are represented at this level (10 people). Typically, female music teachers are employed in primary education (74 people) (Table 5).

Table 5. *The relationship between educational stage and gender*

	Primary level	Secondary level	Tertiary level	Altogether
Female	58,7%	4,8%	7,9%	71,4%
Male	13,5%	,8%	14,3%	28,6%
Altogether	72,2%	5,6%	22,2%	100%

The age of music teachers in the sample ranges from 21 to 68 years, although 10 people did not provide this data. Age groups were created according to the system employed by IFPI, as presented above. Since the survey was directed towards teachers, the lowest age group could have been eliminated, but we nonetheless considered it reasonable for young people to be represented in the analysis as many students already teach in primary art education (Table 11). In accordance with data from the previous OECD survey and the collection of studies titled *Művészeti körkép* (Art Panorama), we can observe an unfavourable population pyramid among music teachers (OECD, 2018; Sz. Fodor & Kerekes, 2020; Váradi & Kiss, 2020): more than half of the sample is older than 45 years (Table 6).

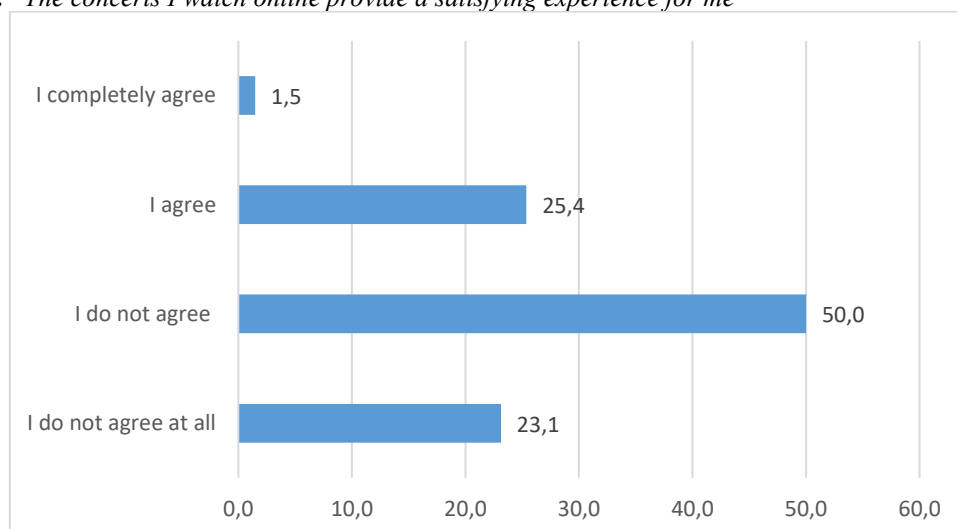
Table 6. Age distribution in the sample

Year	Person	%
16-24	3	2,4
25-34	22	17,7
35-44	29	23,4
45-54	44	35,5
55-64	24	19,4
65-	2	1,6
Altogether	124	100,0

Within the field of cultural consumption, the questions focused on live music concerts, which had completely changed during the pandemic. The special effect of the physical and temporal coexistence of the performer and the audience is questioned by many. Reason (2006) considers participants' subjective accounts to be a utopian performative. Dolan (2005) suggests that live performances provide an opportunity to share emotional impressions and the experience of imagination in a physical space, as a fleeting imitation of a better world. Auslander (2008) argues that, in the case of cinema and television, performers, actors, and the audience are not in the same space and may be far apart in time, yet the artistic experience is still created. According to Auslander (2008), the integration of live performances into media does not make such events less lively or effective. The experience of live performances, due to their subjectivity, is rather filled with mystification, the effect of which is indecipherable for deductive logic.

Our study investigates whether the experience of live music provides additional significance for music teachers, who are familiar with different forms of art consumption, or instead the experience of online concerts is completely satisfying for them. Some 73.1 percent of respondents feel that listening to music online does not provide the expected experience for them, while slightly more than a third (36.9%) of the sample believe that online concerts do provide an adequate musical experience (Figure 7).

Figure 7. “The concerts I watch online provide a satisfying experience for me”

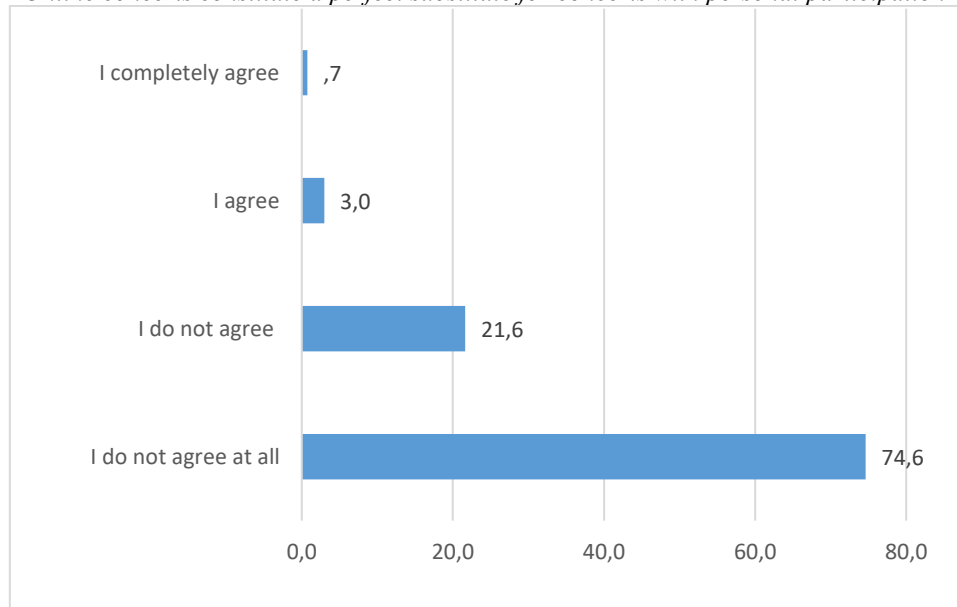


Few scholars have explored the special experience of live music concerts, although the motivations for and barriers to attending concerts have been examined (Baker, 2007; Earl, 2001; Kolb, 2000). There is growing interest in the specific area of research which aims at understanding how audiences experience and appreciate live classical music concerts (Kolb, 2000) and explores the cumulative impact of repeated visits (Pitts et al., 2013; Toelle & Sloboda, 2019).

In a 2003 study carried out among primary and secondary school students, Zoltán Pad examined audience approval ratings of the same songs when played from a sound recording or performed in a live music performance. The analysis concluded that live music productions received a much higher score from participants. Bernhofer investigated the impact of live music performance among 15–18-year-old secondary students, who were surprised to see how much more they liked the live music interpretation of a piece than the recording they had listened to.

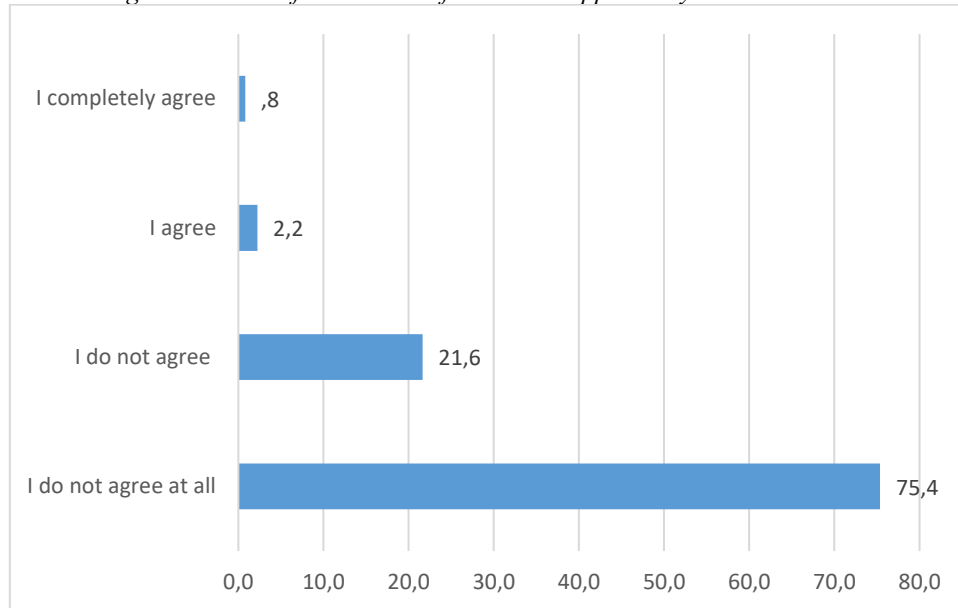
We asked music teachers if they thought online concerts were a satisfactory substitute for live music events. Only 3.7 percent of respondents, or 5 people, agreed that the experience of an online concert was as satisfactory as that of similar events with personal participation (Figure 8).

Figure 8. “Online concerts constitute a perfect substitute for concerts with personal participation”

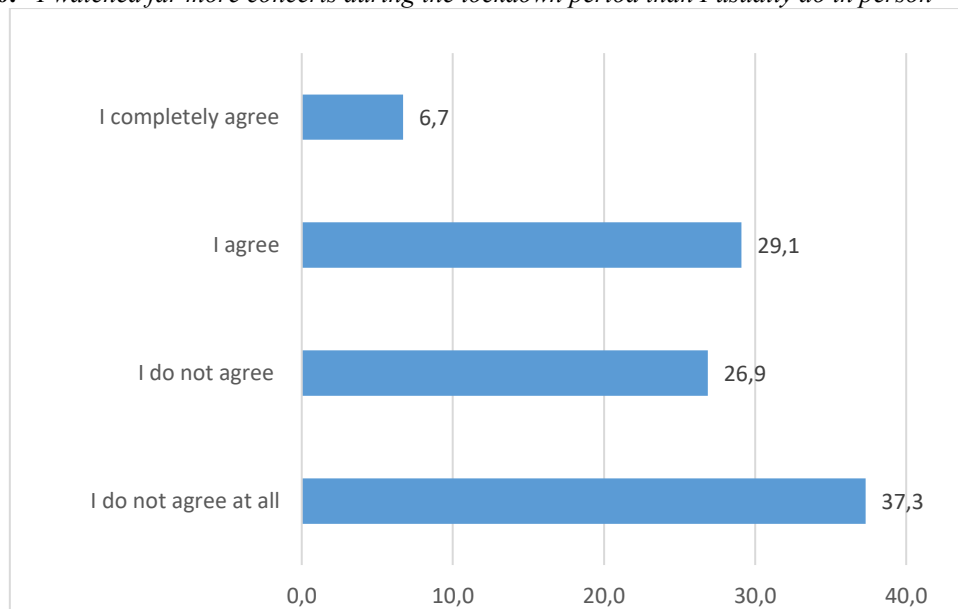


Some argue that the appeal of a live music concert comes from the experience of aesthetic pleasure (Small, 1998), while others interpret concerts in a social context (Pitts 2005). Listening to music allows for escapism and detachment from reality even if it is still part of the world around it (Bull, 2005). The consumption of music may have an impact on everyday life and identity (DeNora, 2000). The audience of classical music is, of course, not homogeneous. The participants' role is in constant transformation even within a concert, with a dominant diversity of micro- and macro-social experiences (Dearn & Price, 2016).

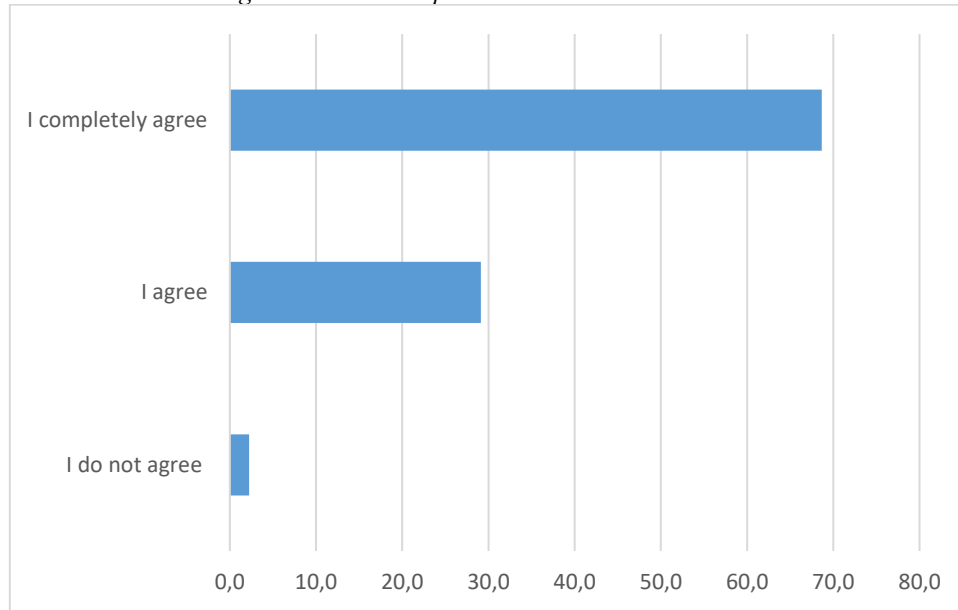
According to our data, only 3 percent of the surveyed teachers answered that they would no longer go to a concert if they had the opportunity to watch it online. In contrast, the vast majority (75.4%) chose the other extreme, namely that they would for certain return to the concert hall (Figure 9).

Figure 9. *“I will not go to a concert from now on if I have the opportunity to also watch it online”*

A survey by MIDIA has shown that, despite the significant increase in the number of virtual concerts streamed during the pandemic, online concerts were still watched by fewer people than the regular audience of live music concerts. However, the average age of livestream concert spectators was younger than in the traditional concert audience (www.midiaresearch.com). A surprising result of our research is that cultural consumption did not surge: the majority of respondents did not listen to more concerts despite the widespread availability of online live concerts as well as pre-recorded professional performances (Figure 10).

Figure 10. *“I watched far more concerts during the lockdown period than I usually do in person”*

The answers to the following question support the assumption that the experience of a live music concert is unique; in other words, the listener's experience is singular and unrepeatable (Wilheim, 2010). All but 3 people (2.2%) look forward to finally take part in musical events in person (Figure 11).

Figure 11. “I could not wait to go to a concert in person”

We also analysed the relationship between the attitude towards online concerts and demographic background variables. The data did not reveal a significant correlation with respect to age cohorts, the settlement of the educational institution, and the educational stage. However, we saw a significant correlation in connection with gender: most women did not consider the online space to be a suitable venue for musical experience. Our data are consistent with the EUROSTAT database, which suggests that the proportion of men who used the Internet to listen to music in previous years is larger by 6 percentage points (EUROSTAT, 2019) (Table 7).

Table 7. “The concerts I watch online provide a satisfying experience for me”

For underlined values, the absolute value of adjusted residuals is greater than two.

	Sex	
	Female	Male
I do not agree at all	15,9%	6,3%
I do not agree	41,3%	9,5%
I agree	13,5%	11,9%
I completely agree	,8%	,8%

In our analysis, we found a significant link between the preference for online concerts and gender. Typically, women would prefer to go to a live music concert, even if they could watch it online, while men would choose comfort over the subtlety of the artistic experience (Table 8).

Table 8. *“I will not go to a concert from now on if I have the opportunity to also watch it online”*

	Sex	
	Female	Male
I do not agree at all	54,8%	20,6%
I do not agree	15,9%	5,6%
I agree	0,0%	2,4%
I completely agree	,8%	0,0%

The result is consistent with Kane’s findings (2003) of women’s higher participation in high cultural events across samples, as well as with EUROSTAT data presented earlier, according to which women participate in live artistic events at a rate higher by 10 percentage points (EUROSTAT, 2019).

Conclusion

The impact of ever-evolving technologies has spread into our everyday lives, but our established habits have not been transformed immediately (DiMaggio, 2014). Due to the availability of diverse cultural content and the expansion of consumption pathways, “choice”, which fundamentally affects our lives, is now one of the most important discursive mechanisms (Ang, 1996). How different influences change our relationship to art is entirely our responsibility.

The pandemic completely precluded live artistic events, and the novel form of cultural consumption became exclusive. In our survey, we asked teachers and instructors involved in music education at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels about their relationship to online musical content, their use of the convenient online space, and their intention to participate again in a concert held in a physical space.

Although our sample is not representative and cannot be generalised to society as a whole, our findings are consistent with international research. According to the answers, online concerts do not provide a satisfactory experience for an overwhelming proportion of music teachers in the sample, who also believe that the digital experience cannot be compared to personal participation. Once they have the opportunity, respondents will continue to visit concert halls. As for gender differences, we found a disproportionately strong preference for live music concerts among women. In this study, we have shown that the experience of artistic events and live music concerts is perceived to be more impactful during personal participation. Despite the technical and technological development of the last century, live performances have been able to retain their audiences even in the 21st century. In spite of the rich selection of content provided by the digital space and the comfort of the home, many people look forward to the end of this unpredictable period to return safely to physical community spaces.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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