



# Contemporary Music Taken to Court

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Two Irish ensembles joined forces in ditching the concert hall and making the concert a more sociable experience. The local courthouse was chosen as the venue and extensive research was made to learn more about the audience.

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## **Background**

The organisation, Music for Galway were hosting CRASH Ensemble for their spring season, and therefore the Galway Ensemble in Residence: ConTempo Quartet proposed a 3 way collaboration under the New Music: New Audiences banner.

## **Concept**

Both ensembles wanted to meet their directives – ‘ditching the concert hall’ and ‘making a concert a more sociable experience.’ The ensembles decided to use the local courthouse as a suitable venue to achieve this.

It was believed that having the concert in the courthouse would attract people from both the ensembles' existing audiences and those in the community who would be interested in seeing a cultural event in an unusual space. Also, the partnership of the community's very own ensemble-in-residence with a popular ensemble from Dublin would be a winning combination – again, drawing in newcomers to the audience.

## **Aims and goals**

- To attract new audience members to the concert
- To bring younger people to the concert
- To provide the ensembles' existing audience with a new and fun experience
- To enlighten the audience about the NewAud project and about new music in general in Ireland

## **Concert**

The concert used various parts of the courthouse for performances that gave the audience a different experience, changing from the traditional concert setting to

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traveling throughout the courthouse to experience each piece. As an example, one moment during the evening involved the clarinetist performing her piece from the top of the main stairwell of the courthouse. Having a glass of wine before the concert gave the audience a chance to mingle and relax and this was integral to the social aspect of the evening.

Visuals, created by Romanian artist Mihai Cucu, were used for *Alveoles* to compliment the piece. In addition to this, for *Maito*, Helen Gregg, an actress from Galway, was employed as the reciter for the piece.

Following the concert, a panel discussion was hosted by Evonne Ferguson of Contemporary Music Centre Ireland (CMC), which centred on the writing and performing of contemporary music and the NewAud initiative.

### **Process**

- All three organisations promoted the event on social media
- The host organisation did national and local PR
- The ensembles worked with Contemporary Music Centre Ireland to put together a post concert discussion
- The ensembles invited a composer along to take part in this
- They used posters and flyers as well as online newsletters and reminders to friends, sponsors and existing audience members.

### **Outcome**

- Audience members had a truly unique experience as did the performers
- Everyone felt like they had been a part of something truly different
- It was entertaining but also educational as the post event discussion offered an insight rarely seen
- The post event discussion offered the ensembles the opportunity to be viewed as experts in the areas of contemporary music and fully explore the subject together with the audience
- It was a wonderful collaboration and great for all parties to work together in this way

### **Audience Feedback**

#### **Background to the Research | NewAud**

Contemporary music is characterized by a quest to meet its audience in new ways. The music frequently incorporates other art forms such as performance, dance or lighting design. It is played not only in traditional concert halls, often the musicians goes in direct dialogue with the audience, and sometimes the concert form is as much a work of art as the scores performed.

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NewAud is a project on strengthening such experiments with new concert forms on the international level. The goal of NewAud is to test and demonstrate the future concert forms of contemporary music in a direct cooperation between music ensembles in 17 countries.

31 musical ensembles participate, and will for two years work together cross borders on the many challenges that new concert forms offers. How for example, does one best perform contemporary music for children? How does one involve the audience directly as active participants in the concert? And how do you give the concert a visual expression that matches the content?

NewAud will find answers for these questions through practical experiments. The 31 ensembles, counting some of Europe's most talented musicians will engage in more than 50 concerts, prepared in close artistic collaborate between ensembles. At the same time the 31 ensembles will through workshops, conferences and direct exchange of experience stand shoulder to shoulder in a learning process being for the benefit not only for themselves but for all the whole contemporary music environment of Europe.

NewAud is - in a nutshell - a learning and experience project, offering its knowledge to everyone with an interest in audience development. The experiences, ideas, cases and best practices of the project will continuously be documented and published - on this website.

This case study focuses on Ireland as part of the network of research and learning. The Irish research partner is the Contemporary Music Centre Ireland, and the two ensembles were selected to be Crash Ensemble and Galway Ensemble in Residence, Con Temp Quartet.

### **Research aims**

The main aim behind this research was to work in conjunction with the two Irish NewAud ensembles to learn more about Irish contemporary music audiences. The purpose of this is to develop new audiences for contemporary music in order to provide a vibrant and sustainable future for the ensembles and contemporary music, not only in Ireland, but also across Europe.

Both ensembles also wished to explore two thematic elements of the NewAud with their concert; *Ditching the Concert Hall* and *How Music and Audience Meet*. *Ditching the Concert Hall* is one strand of the programme that explores the genre of contemporary music breaking away from the traditional concert hall setting for more exciting and informal settings in which to perform. The second theme *How Music and Audiences Meet*, which can be inherently linked to liberation of contemporary music from the concert hall setting, focuses on making contemporary music concerts a more sociable event where audiences and artists can engage in a more relaxed and informal setting.

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Working with the ensembles, the researcher explored the individual information requirements of the ensembles and helped them primarily focus on building a profile of current contemporary music audiences to discover potential opportunities for audience development. Secondly, the research focuses on the thematic elements of the NewAud programme for gauging audience feedback to the concert setting for comparison with other research partners.

Therefore, the main research aims can be summarized as follows:

1. To build a localized profile of contemporary music audiences.
2. To gauge the effectiveness of the concert setting to the audience experience.

### **Research methodology**

An audience survey was chosen as the research method for fulfilling the research aims for the following reasons:

1. The data gathered could be used to provide definitive answers for the ensembles to their research questions.
2. The unique setting provided an excellent opportunity to engage with the audience on a 1-to-1 level.
3. Data and statistics derived from the quantitative data can be compared to data gained from the other research partners.

The survey questions generated using a set of guidelines and standardized questions pool from NewAud, specific information requirements of the ensembles and questions relating to feedback on the concert setting.

Survey Monkey was used to generate the audience survey and contained the following structure:

1. Building a Demographic Profile of the Audience
2. The Audience's Participation in the Arts
3. The Audience's Contemporary Music Consumption
4. Feedback to Venue and Concert Format

The survey was forwarded to the ensembles for feedback and pilot testing. After the survey was thoroughly tested, a number of amends were made and a final survey was produced.

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On the night of the concert, two members of the research team distributed the survey in print format before, during and after the concert. A total of 40 people were surveyed of a total estimated audience of 90 people (44%). While this is a small sample size, the researcher feels that this sample is representative of the total audience.

See separate document for the full survey questionnaire.

## **Findings and analysis**

### **1. Building a Demographic Profile of the Audience**

- 60% of the audience were female and 40% male.
- The majority of respondents were aged between 22 and 34 (35%).
- There were no respondents below the age of 21.
- The second largest age profile was between 45 and 54 (20%)
- 61% of the audience lived in Galway City and 39% lived outside the city in the surrounding areas.
- 55% did not play an instrument.
- 72% of respondents work full-time.
- On average, most time spent by respondents was with family, socialising and attending concerts.
- Most preferred genres of music to listen to by respondents were Classical Music (70%), Folk and Traditional Music (58%), Jazz (53%) and Rock Music (53%).
- Most popular genres of concerts attended were Classical Concerts (85%), Folk and Traditional (59%) and Rock (36%).

### **Average Audience Member Profile:**

A female from Galway City aged between 22 and 34 who works full-time and spends a majority of her leisure time socialising and attending classical and folk & traditional concerts.

## **2. The Audience's Participation in the Arts**

- Most preferred art forms by audience members were Arts Festivals (80%), Drama (73%), Exhibitions (68%) and Classical Music Concerts (68%).
- The audience were primarily cultural omnivores, attending 10 or more arts related events per year (63%).

## **3. The Audience's Contemporary Music Consumption**

- The majority of the audience stated that they knew very little about Contemporary Music (48%).
- However, 63% of respondents stated that you do not need to know about Contemporary Music to enjoy a Contemporary Music concert.
- The majority of respondents do not listen to Contemporary Music in their daily lives. 40% do not listen to contemporary music during the their average week.
- 40% of respondents stated that they only attend Contemporary Music concerts once a year.
- 53% stated that they would attend more Contemporary Music concerts if there were more concerts available.
- 70% of the audience had previously been to a Galway Music Residency concert.
- 40% of the audience had seen both ensembles previously, with 28% having only seen ConTempo Quartet previously and 5% having only seen Crash Ensemble previously. 28% had never previously seen the ensembles.

## **4. Feedback to Venue and Concert.**

- The most popular method of building audience awareness of the concert was found to be the Music for Galway mailing list (32%) and Word of Mouth (32%), followed by Event Poster (21%), Galway Music Residency Brochure (13%) and Newspaper Editorial (11%).
- The audience is divided when it comes to the importance of the concert venue. 52% are in agreement that the concert venue makes no difference to their decision to attend and 40% state that it is a factor in their decision making process. 8% neither agree nor disagree.

- Numerous members of the audience stated that their preferred venue was the Town Hall Theatre, which is in close proximity to the courthouse and used its Box Office to sell tickets for the concert.
- 42% stated that they preferred ‘ditching the concert hall’ while only 20% stated that they preferred the traditional concert hall setting. Interestingly, 38% stated they had no preference over both.
- Similarly, 45% stated they preferred an informal setting, 20% a formal setting and 35% having no preference over both.
- In terms of the concert format, 68% prefer to be seated at the concert, with 10% preferring to move about the concert venue and 22% having no preference.
- The courthouse as a concert venue was highly received with 50% of the audience rating the venue 4 stars out of 5. 30% rated the venue as 3 stars and 15% rated the venue as 5 stars. Only 2 people rated the venue negatively (1 and 2 stars).
- The most important elements of the venue for the audience were Atmosphere, Geographical Location and Level of Comfort. The physical building, venue facilities and accessibility were not a concern. Atmosphere being of a primary concern here shows the importance of the New Music: New Audience aspect of making Contemporary Music events a sociable experience in its venue choice and concert format.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings from this research, the researcher makes the following recommendations based on the audience survey data. The aims of these recommendations are to inform best marketing practice for future concerts and events for both ensembles and also to add recommendations to future concert formats.

### **Good News!**

There is an appetite for those surveyed to attend more Contemporary Music! This is a positive indicator of customers willing to attend more if the opportunity arises. These opportunities can be created by not only hosting more concerts, but to build awareness of these concerts through strategic marketing informed by the audience research.

### **Best Marketing Practice – Online**

#### **Websites and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

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The website is the most important digital tool available for ensembles and very often the first port of call for audiences and potential audiences. It should be central to all promotional activity and should be prioritized.

Making sure your website is found through a simple Google search can be easily achieved through some simple **search engine optimisation**. Talk to your website developer about this or you can find an abundance of resources online.

Develop content for your website to represent the ensemble and programmed events in an exciting and engaging way to visitors and ensure the website remains informative and engaging all year-round, not just when there is an approaching event:

- Engage visitors with excellent imagery and video. Use this type of content to highlight the concert setting and format and also show the social aspect of the concerts.
- Place performance and preview videos and also interviews with composers and musicians. This can be a great way to educate people further about your ensemble and about contemporary music.
- Develop informative landing pages for those who are unfamiliar with your ensemble or venue location.
- Direct website visitors to where you wish them to go through strong call to actions on the homepage and throughout the site.
- Report on activity through monitoring Google Analytics and social engagement and interaction. This will help you see what is working, and what's not on your website.

### **Facebook**

With the Irish arts industry very active on Facebook, and arts attenders in Ireland known to be heavy users, this is probably the most important platform through which to engage with key publics about you ensemble and concerts, throughout the year.

Follow Facebook pages of other ensembles to learn from their practices and see what sort of content and posts their audiences respond to best.

Post regular updates and use high quality imagery and video content.

### **Twitter**

The Media are particularly active on Twitter – indeed the media and political set are over-represented on this platform. Ensembles should make a concerted effort to seek out and follow media and journalists, particularly those journalists that write/talk/broadcast about culture/arts.

Again, follow other ensembles to learn from how they engage with audiences.

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## Summary

- Make sure your audience can find you online.
- Use excellent imagery to show a great concert experience and the social aspects of the concerts to entice new audiences.
- As we know, many people state that they do not know a lot about contemporary music. Use your online platforms to educate them. Doing so will involve them more with your ensemble and contemporary music.
- Give them more contemporary music to listen to by hosting your audio files on your website or sharing them on Social Media.
- Make sure you update your events listings on your online platforms regularly – we know contemporary music audiences are looking for more opportunities to attend.

## Best Marketing Practice – Offline

### Print Advertising

Now that we have a clearer picture of an audience profile and what their interests are, print advertising should be changed to reflect this. The research suggests:

- Make the marketing message and imagery gender neutral.
- People don't know a lot about contemporary music, explain to them clearly what the concert will be about, how they will feel etc.
- We know that atmosphere is important to concert goers. Make sure this is conveyed in the messaging and imagery.
- Include clear call to actions like, **Phone Now** and **Visit our Website**.
- We can see from the audience survey that the Galway Music Residency Brochure and the Music for Galway Brochures and Mailings were important. Direct mail campaigns should therefore be considered for future marketing efforts.

### Cross Promotion

We can see from the research that there is an apparent crossover audiences for Classical Music, Folk & Traditional Music, Jazz and Rock Music. Use these type of

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groups to help promote yourself online by using sharing each other's content online via website or social media. Posters and brochures should also be placed in venues that host such types of music events to promote upcoming Contemporary Music concerts.

We can also see that audiences enjoy attending Arts Festivals and Exhibitions. Performing at these events can help broaden your audience base for future concerts. Also, placing listings or adverts for an upcoming concert within a festival programme or exhibition brochure would be well placed.

Team up with other Contemporary Music ensembles on the NewAud programme to share, promote, like and collaborate online to increase your international reach also.

### **Concert Venue & Format**

Having reviewed the audience research and feedback on the concert venue and format, the following may be recommended:

People are busy. Choosing a suitable time for hosting a concert is important. For example, most of the audience surveyed was working full-time. Therefore, host concerts during lunch-hour or after work. Perhaps host a concert at 6:30pm and market the concert as being an alternative to sitting in traffic during rush hour.

Geographical location is important to concert goers. When choosing a suitable venue, make sure to educate audiences about the location and a little about the venue.

While most of the audience surveyed stated that the concert hall did not influence their decision to attend a concert, the audience responded well to 'ditching the concert hall' for the unique settings of the courthouse and rated the venue, on average, 4 stars out of 5.

The social aspect of the concert format is important to concert goers. The pre-concert drinks, the promenade format of the concert, the informality, the intimacy of the settings, the engagement with artists. This all culminated in an enjoyable experience for the audience and is reflected in the audience feedback.

The audience survey however, seem to enjoy to a seated concert experience rather than a promenade piece. In future, perhaps the concert format should include the same social experience as before and after the concert within a unique venue, however, including a seated arrangement.

### **Further research**

For both ensembles, more audience research is needed for cross referencing the data from this audience survey with other Irish audiences at contemporary music concerts.

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This will help build a definitive picture of who the audiences for contemporary music are, and potentially could be. Findings should also be compared with other audience survey data from the New Music: New Audiences programme for comparison and validation of results.

In addition to this, both ensembles should develop an **Audience Development Plan** which will help them broaden their audiences' demographics, diversify audiences who attend their concerts and deepen the relationship with existing concert attendees. This can then be achieved through strategic marketing.

### **Facts**

Ensembles: Galway Ensemble in Residence, Con Tempo Quartet  
Crash Ensemble

Venue: Galway Courthouse, Galway, Co. Galway, Ireland

Time and date: April 4th 2014, 8 pm

Programme:

Simon Holt: *Brief Candles* (2003)

Santa Ratniece: *Alveoles* (2006)

Sam Perkin: *Prelude and Fugue for Violin and Marimba* (2011)

Øyvind Torvund: *Neon Forest Space* (2009)

Max Savikangas: *Maito* (1999)

Attendees: 93

Working communities:

Ditching the concert hall

How music and audience meet

Further information:

[www.contempoquartet.com](http://www.contempoquartet.com)

[www.crashensemble.com](http://www.crashensemble.com)