

The Implications of Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk for the Planning of Contemporary Classical Concerts

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Abstract. Against the backdrop of an aging audience and the influence of popular culture in classical music, Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk offers innovative insights for contemporary concert programs. This study employs text analysis and comparative case studies to examine the practical application of Wagner's philosophy in modern concerts, such as the "Echoes of the Silk Road: Tang Dynasty Resonance Concert" at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Silk Road Ensemble led by Yo-Yo Ma. The research results show that integrating multiple art forms such as music, visual arts and dramatic performance can enhance the artistic expressiveness of concerts and significantly increase audience participation and satisfaction. Even with a limited budget, strategies such as themes and multi-sensory stimulation have effectively broadened Wagner's artistic vision, expanded the audience base of classical music, and provided practical suggestions for its contemporary dissemination.

Keywords: Wagner, Comprehensive artistic perspective, Classical concert, Multi-sensory stimulation, Audience reception

1. Introduction

In the waves of globalization and digitalization, classical music concerts are confronted with challenges such as an aging audience, declining accessibility, and fierce competition in mass music culture. Music and art managers are constantly seeking new programming methods to attract more audiences and enhance their engagement. Therefore, re-examining Wagner's artistic concepts holds special significance. It has the potential to enhance the accessibility of classical music, while promoting better understanding through artistic fusion without diluting the main art forms, thereby improving the dissemination of classical music. Wagner's philosophy of art emphasizes the comprehensiveness of art, providing a new perspective for the arrangement of concerts. Existing literature indicates that Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk has had a profound theoretical influence and inspired intermediate media movements such as futurism and Cubism in the 20th century. It has been widely discussed and practiced in visual arts, drama, architecture and other fields. However, its application in contemporary concert planning research is still underdeveloped, especially the lack of systematic exploration of its role in enhancing the audience experience and evaluating the effect. Most studies have focused on the historical background and artistic value of Wagner's ideas, while there are relatively few studies on their specific application and impact assessment in contemporary

concert planning. This study aims to explore how Wagner's artistic concepts influence the audience's acceptance of modern classical concerts and provide strategic suggestions for concert planning.

2. The historical and theoretical development of Wagner's concept of Gesamtkunstwerk

2.1. The historical influence of Wagner's concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk

Before examining the influence of Wagner's artistic concepts on contemporary classical concert audiences, it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the theoretical basis and historical development of this concept. Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk represents a methodology of artistic creation and reflects the profound thinking of 19th-century German society on the relationship between art and society. Wagner believed that the dramatic art of ancient Greece was a natural fusion of various art forms, rather than merely juxtaposes. However, as time went by, these art forms gradually separated and became independent, losing their original appeal. Wagner thus advocated restoring the "original natural connection between sister arts" and developing a comprehensive art form. This concept of comprehensive art achieved tremendous artistic success and endowed Wagner's operas with considerable economic and social value [1]. From an artistic perspective, Wagner's operas, with their unique artistic style and profound ideological depth, have become classics in the history of world music, winning the admiration and affection of countless musicians and audiences. From an economic perspective, Wagner's operas attracted a large number of audiences during their performances and generated considerable box office revenues. They have also stimulated the growth of related cultural industries, such as opera recording, music score publishing and operation-themed tourism, thereby bringing huge economic benefits to the music sector. The concept of Gesamtkunstwerk emphasizes the integration of art forms and the direct emotional connection between art and the audience, providing important insights for the planning of modern classical concerts.

2.2. From manifesto to program

The historical origin of Wagner's concept of "holistic art" can be traced back to the cultural and artistic background of Germany in the 19th century. This concept was first proposed by Richard Wagner in his 1849 work "Art of the Future", and he drew inspiration from the Greeks. As shown in Figure 1, he advocated integrating art forms such as music, dance, poetry and architecture to achieve the equal unity of music, writing and drama. This aims to create a new form of art that serves the people and awakens the collective spirit. This philosophy reflects Wagner's evolution from a composer to an art reformer and provides a theoretical basis for his later works, including "The Ring of the Nibelon" [2]. In his works, Wagner sharply criticized the contemporary art world for its detachment from its essence and alienation from the masses, condemning its degeneration into isolated "absolute art". Based on the holistic principles of logic and metaphysics, he put forward his core concept - the totality of art (Gesamtkunstwerk) - advocating that art return to its fundamental purpose. This vision advocates the social function and moral mission of art, regarding it as a collective art form (Volk) that meets people's natural needs. The Art of the Future profoundly embodies the influence of Hegel and Feuerbach's philosophical thoughts. It serves as a key to understanding Wagner's early ideas and also provides an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the subsequent development of art and thought. Wagner's theoretical evolution from "The Art of the Future" (1849) to "Opera and Drama" (1851) reflects the shift from revolutionary proclamations to theatrical programs. In "The Art of Music of the Future", Wagner put forward a utopian vision: the

concept of holistic art, emphasizing the integration of music, poetry, dance, pantomime, painting and sculpture, based on the collective spirit of Greek tragedy. He advocated drawing on the model of Greek tragedy and opposed the fragmentation and vulgarization that are widespread in contemporary operas (seen in fig.1).

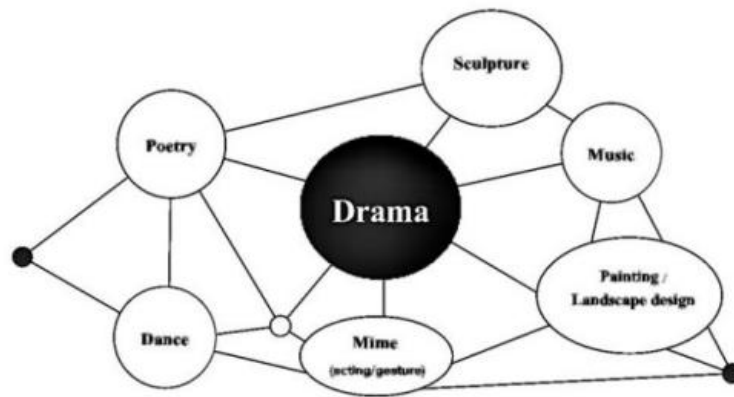


Figure 1. The constituent elements of the Gesamtkunstwerk

(illustrated according to Wagner's exposition in *The Art of the Future*)

Once these arts are integrated into a single entity, they are no longer isolated but serve a higher purpose - popular art. Wagner emphasized that this kind of "mass art" is not merely "entertainment" in the sense of opera, but a collective artistic creation that stems from the common will of people, aiming to create a comprehensive sensory and spiritual experience.

In "Opera and Drama", he established a more systematic theory: drama is the core and the task of music is to reveal the essence of poetry. He criticized opera for overly relying on exquisite singing and empty stage effects rather than emphasizing the organic integration of "words and sounds" (Wort-Ton-Drama). As Jack Stein observed, Wagner's ideas evolved from the revolutionary aesthetic manifesto of 1849 to the program of dramatic practice of 1851, laying the theoretical foundation for his later musicals [3]. For example, a loop. Wagner further elaborated on his vision for opera reform, starting from Monteverdi, through Lully's innovation, Gluck's series of reforms, Weber's German opera revolution, and ultimately ending with Wagner's musicals. The evolution of the relationship between music and drama has finally come to an end. Wagner's attitude towards opera was uncompromising. He compared the music in the opera to several different types of women: cantatas, artificial, detached from dramatic performance, and regarded as inferior. The originator of this art form, Italian opera, was ridiculed for its lyrical arias in the recitation structure, which he regarded as unrestrained and disrupted the dramatic structure. French opera has been condemned as "the music of frivolous girls". Furthermore, he also criticized "hypocritical and pedantic German opera music". Wagner's thoughts had a profound influence on the subsequent development of art and musicals. His works have changed the development trajectory of opera and provided new perspectives and creative methods for modern art. Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk embodies the social utopian ideal of achieving collective unity through art. However, with the rise of German totalitarian politics in the 20th century, this concept became politicized, complicating its legacy. The concept of political aestheticization held a significant position in 19th-century German conservatism, reflecting a tendency to view national and world history as an integrated art. This aestheticizing impulse blurs

the line between art and politics, influencing the relationship between individuals and the state by creating an illusory resonance mechanism [4].

2.3. The application and evolution of wagnerian concepts in modern art

Wagner's concept of Gesamtkunstwerk was widely applied in the art movement of the 20th century and had a profound influence. Art movements such as futurism and Cubism put Wagner's principles into practice through cross-media integration [5]. At the beginning of the 20th century, art movements such as Futurism, Cubism, Expressionism and Dadaism proposed that rather than merely updating individual art forms, it is better to pursue a brand-new art model - an art model that transcends the boundaries between disciplines and realizes the integration of art, ultimately eliminating the gap between art and life and thus "reunifying" the two. From the perspective of cross-media theory, these artists have never ceased their exploration and practice of cross-media art integration. For instance, attempts to combine text and images on a two-dimensional plane have given rise to various collages and illustration arts. Meanwhile, the theatre offers Gesamtkunstwerk's earliest spatial realization on a three-dimensional level, condensing media such as plastic arts, stage design, music, dance, architecture and literature into one space. Therefore, due to its compact nature, the cabaret performance has become one of the excellent carriers and basic forms of popular art.

Wagner's concept of Gesamtkunstwerk originated from the cultural foundation of Germany in the 19th century and was applied and developed in the artistic practice of the 20th century. Through cross-media integration, artists constantly explore and practice Wagner's artistic concepts, promoting innovation in art forms and enhancing their expressive abilities. These historical and theoretical studies provide a solid foundation for understanding the application of Wagner's ideas in contemporary classical concert programs and offer a theoretical framework for case studies and the practical perspectives that arise from them.

3. The potential manifestation of Wagner's concept of Gesamtkunstwerk in contemporary concert planning

3.1. Case study on the overall artistic concept of contemporary concerts

In Wagner's overall artistic concept, the main melody is a core compositional technique that uses the repetition and variation of musical themes to convey specific emotions, characters or concepts. This theme goes beyond mere musical repetition and has symbolic and narrative functions in drama. Wagner believed that language originated from the human need to express emotional responses through sound. He uses alliteration, language condensation and free rhythm to enhance the sensory impact of the poetry, while orchestral music supplements the emotional expression of the movements. The ambiguity was resolved by unifying vision and hearing. The repetition of melodic lines or orchestral sections establishes emotional continuity and evokes memories [6]. By using this method, concert programs can adopt coordinated music, lighting and stage movements, as well as innovative sound design, rhythm changes and visual elements. By using multimedia technology to combine music with dynamic visual elements, a thematic melody can be designed to permeate the entire performance. This directly mobilized the audience's emotions, enhanced their sensory experience, strengthened the impact of the performance, and deepened their emotional investment.

In the "Echoes of the Silk Road: Resonance of the Tang Dynasty" concert at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk concept was put into practical use, significantly enhancing the artistic expressiveness by leveraging potential themes. Holographic projection

technology recreates the Dunhuang murals, using this visual art to evoke historical scenes that closely interact with musical performances. The concert uses holographic projection technology to reproduce the Dunhuang murals. This visual art recreates the historical background and establishes a profound dialogue with the musical performance [7]. This cross-art form integration embodies Wagner's idea that diverse art forms should serve a higher unity. The organizers of the concert successfully combined visual art with musical performance, creating a brand-new artistic experience, which is precisely at the core of Wagner's artistic philosophy. The unique drumbeat rhythm imitates the footsteps of camels crossing the Silk Road. This rhythm recurs throughout the music and is visually reinforced by the holographic projection of the camel. The synchronous repetition of musical and visual elements enhances the coherence of the concert's theme, enabling the audience to experience the history and culture of the Silk Road more profoundly. Furthermore, the connection between the silent plucking of the curved-necked pipa and the rotational dance of the terracotta figurines is a prominent main theme, achieving an artistic fusion through the integration of music and dance. The successful application of cross-media themes has attracted audiences, enhancing their engagement and satisfaction. This transcends the boundaries of traditional concerts, enabling people to engage in the artworks through multiple senses and deepen their understanding of their essence. This performance demonstrated the contemporary relevance and value of Wagner's philosophy, providing valuable insights and inspiration for the planning of future concerts.

The core logic of Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk lies in integrating multiple art forms to offer audiences an immersive experience that transcending the ordinary. Based on this fundamental principle, the fusion of musical elements from different countries and cultures around the world can also produce a rich and comprehensive effect, transcending the limitations of any single ethnic music style. Since Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty sent Zhang Qian on a diplomatic mission to the Western Regions, the Silk Road has become a passage for China to reach the West and the world, embodying friendship and cultural exchange. The Silk Road Orchestra was founded by the world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma and brings together musicians from different cultural traditions along the Silk Road [8]. His performance employed the core concept of Wagner's artistic philosophy: the integration of multiple art forms to enhance the audience's experience of a single artistic entity. During concerts, he often combines music with physical performance and drama, and at the same time uses multimedia technology and stage installations to enhance the expressiveness of the music. Yo-yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble mainly focuses on music creation and integrates musical elements from different ethnic groups. The name chosen by Ma symbolizes the integration and fusion of global music cultures, encouraging artists to take the ancient Silk Road as an example and strive to become a bridge connecting Eastern and Western cultures. The orchestra aims to promote a peaceful world based on mutual assistance, connection and sharing of various cultural heritages through music. Figure 2 shows the modal analysis of the excerpt from "Vincent's Song (Emerald Green)", which is taken from one of the orchestra's most famous albums and transcribed by Sibelius. The introduction of the work establishes a desolate and solemn tone through the flute and xiao, while the repetitive rhythm pattern of the pipa that follows evokes the soundscapes of camels crossing the Silk Road. This adopts the e-commerce model in the Chinese five-tone gong system. The American experimental a cappella group Roomful of Teeth, which appeared in "Vincent's Song (Emerald Green)", adopted various modern vocal techniques such as throat singing and throat singing, demonstrating a strong experimental approach to sound. The addition of the choir enables the work to transcend traditional musical elements and incorporate the essence of contemporary American music exploration. The middle and back parts blend musical elements from West Africa and Latin

America. The collision and integration of diverse cultures present artistic effects that transcend single cultures and styles (seen in fig.2).

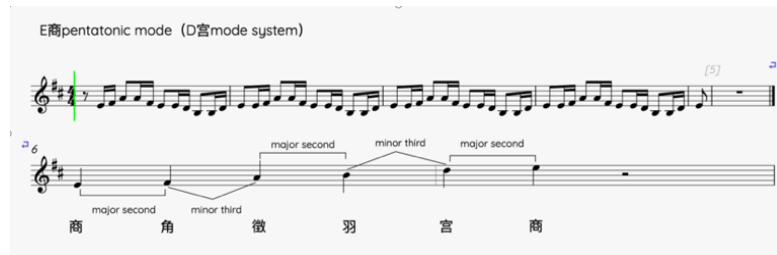


Figure 2. Vincent's Song (Emerald Green) modal analysis of the pipa part

The interweaving of musical elements from different cultures and traditions can create richer and more profound artistic effects, promoting mutual understanding and communication among different civilizations. The integration of global music cultures has enabled artistic creation to transcend a single style and develop into a diverse, inclusive and cross-cultural artistic process. This artistic practice transcends the boundaries of traditional creation, broadens the perspective of expression, and embodies artistic exploration and collaborative innovation in a cross-cultural context.

3.2. The significance of Wagner's comprehensive artistic vision in the transformation of audiences

When planning a classical concert, it is crucial to clearly define the audience group. Understanding the characteristics and needs of the audience enables organizers to better meet the expectations of different groups, thereby enhancing the overall influence and impact of the concert. Planners must determine the public's inclination towards the project and reach a consensus between the project's goals and the audience's preferences to ensure that the music arts initiative achieves the expected goals it has designed for the public [9]. This accurate understanding of the audience's needs enables planners to strike a balance between artistic expression and public acceptance, promoting a shift from self-orientation to a broader market orientation.

According to the theory of Western scholar Hersman, the audience of art projects presents hierarchical characteristics, as shown in Figure 3. The first layer includes self-oriented individuals, namely the artists themselves, who participate in artistic products mainly to meet their own creative needs. The second layer is composed of expert-oriented individuals such as art critics and scholars, who are not only collaborators of artists but also guides for the public's appreciation of art. The third layer consists of market-oriented audiences, whose acceptance of artistic products is determined by "market orientation" [10]. Self-oriented projects mainly focus on the creator's expression and the intrinsic artistic value. The audience of these projects are usually the artists themselves, and their evaluations of the concerts are often based on their personal artistic experiences and emotional resonances. On the contrary, expert-guided projects emphasize academic standards and artistic innovation. The audience includes art critics, scholars and other professionals in the art field. Their assessment is based on professional artistic standards and theoretical frameworks, and they have higher expectations for the artistic value and innovative quality of the concert. Audience feedback has a significant impact on the artistic positioning and academic value of a concert. The acceptance of art products by market-oriented audiences, including the broader public, is influenced by market guidance. Their evaluations are more based on personal preferences and entertainment value, which plays a crucial role in the dissemination and promotion of the concert (seen in Fig.3).



Figure 3. Three types of audience for art projects

Wagner's concept of Gesamtkunstwerk did not attempt to replace the central role of music, but rather enhanced its expressiveness and emotional influence through the support of other art forms. This principle has significant guiding value for the integration practice of classical concerts. It must be clear that in this process of integration, music constitutes the main art form of classical concerts. The combination of other art forms is merely for better promoting musical expression. For instance, when designing stage sets and lighting effects, emphasis should be placed on the atmosphere and emotional resonance of the music, and overly elaborate visual effects should be avoided to prevent the audience from being distracted by the music performance. Similarly, when choreographing a dance sequence, the movements and rhythms must be closely coordinated with the music to enhance its expressiveness rather than mask it. Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk concept, through multi-sensory integration and overall emotional participation, transcends the solitary self-expression of music and gradually broadens the audience range. This approach not only promotes art projects from niche to mainstream, but also enhances the dissemination capacity and cultural influence of classical music in contemporary society. For music managers, this requires balancing the needs of different audiences in program arrangement, building connection points through comprehensive artistic means, and achieving the dual unity of artistic value and social value.

Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk concept put forward an important principle: to enhance the expressiveness and emotional impact of artworks through the integration of various art forms. This approach has achieved considerable artistic success and also provided theoretical support for art projects to gradually shift from single, self-directed efforts to broader market-oriented initiatives. Traditionally, artistic efforts have mainly focused on self-directed audiences, emphasizing the artist's personal expression and creative freedom. However, Wagner's comprehensive view of art introduced multi-sensory stimulation and emotional investment, enabling artworks to attract a broader audience. This transformation not only expanded the scope of artworks, but also enhanced their social impact and economic feasibility. By shifting art projects from a single self-oriented approach to a broader market-oriented model, Wagner's philosophy helps art managers better understand the diverse needs of different audiences. Through innovative curatorial methods, this transformation has attracted a broader audience, expanded the range of artworks, and simultaneously magnified their social impact and economic feasibility. Therefore, it has opened up new possibilities for the dissemination and innovation of classical music in contemporary society.

3.3. Strategies for realising Wagner's concept of Gesamtkunstwerk at low cost

In practice, budget constraints often limit the comprehensive artistic expression of large-scale concerts. However, Wagner's core concept does not rely on luxurious sets, but rather on the

integration of multiple senses and the continuous development of themes to bring the audience an immersive experience. This theme is at the core of Wagner's philosophy. In a concert program, select a central musical theme and repeat it through different instruments or forms at the beginning, intermission and end to enhance the continuity of emotions and the audience's memory. At the same time, incorporate visual elements of this theme into promotional materials to enhance theme recognition. Neuroscience research from Stanford University has further demonstrated that multi-sensory stimulation is more effective than single-sensory stimulation in enhancing memory depth and experiential engagement [11]. Concerts can enhance immersion through innovative soundscapes, rhythm changes and visual elements, such as synchronizing lights with the music rhythm and integrating natural soundscapes.

From a planning perspective, a clear and relevant core theme should be selected (possibly through cooperation with films or animations to enhance the mutual value of Copyrights, thereby reducing production costs and attracting IP audiences) to provide cohesion for the concert. The "wordless" or "semi-stage" form can reduce reliance on traditional sets and performers, and enhance expressiveness through visual and action elements. In addition, skillfully utilize visual effects and spatial design: use lighting (smart bulbs, projectors, etc.) combined with the smallest props to evoke an atmosphere and imply emotions; Use minimalist and symbolic sets (such as curtains or geometric forms) to inspire imagination - the "Female Valkyrie" performance by the Singapore OMM Creators Orchestra is a prime example. It employs a "semi-stage" approach to capture the singer's expressions in real time through projection. Try non-traditional venues, such as art galleries or repurposing industrial Spaces, where the architectural atmosphere itself can become part of the "overall art piece" while potentially reducing costs. Use projectors and computers to generate dynamic backgrounds (abstract patterns, natural landscapes, etc.) to ensure that visual content is synchronized with music and drama, forming a "visual theme" to enhance immersion.

4. Conclusion

Wagner's concept of "holistic art" holds profound significance in the history of art and provides realistic insights for the arrangement and dissemination of contemporary classical concerts. For the organizers of classical concerts, it is very important to study Wagner's concept of "holistic art". Drawing on this concept, we can apply various art forms without affecting the main ones, making classical music more acceptable, thereby enhancing the audience's acceptance and better disseminating classical music. The research results show that when music, visual arts, stage design and drama are integrated within a comprehensive framework, the audience will experience full sensory engagement. They transcend passive audiences and immerse themselves in an integrated realm of art. This transformation has enabled classical music to transcend traditional boundaries and evolve into a comprehensive experience that evokes emotional resonance and spiritual connection. Meanwhile, case studies have confirmed that contemporary concerts can innovate and optimize the audience experience within the given resource constraints by integrating comprehensive artistic concepts. In terms of research significance, this study combines comprehensive art theory with audience acceptance research, broadening the perspective of concert planning. It transcends the traditional limitations of merely focusing on performance content or marketing promotion, providing a new research approach for the discipline of music management. Through the analysis of cross-media, multi-sensory stimulation and the psychological mechanisms of the audience, the internal logic behind the increased acceptance of concert audiences is revealed, providing a theoretical basis for further academic exploration. By integrating multi-disciplinary artistic concepts, concerts can counteract the challenges brought about by an aging audience and the influence of

popular culture, while also rebuilding the spiritual connections between individuals and art as well as among people. This provides practical planning insights for music art managers. Managers of contemporary music art should also fully recognize the value of music history research, draw methodological insights from it, and promote the continuous development and innovation of classical art. Only in this way can classical music regain new vitality in modern society and gain wider appreciation and enjoyment. As a result, art has transcended mere external expression and become the universal pursuit of human beings for meaning, emotion and freedom.

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