

Kultur der Gegenwart in weiten Teilen zu bestimmen.

14. Die Zitate von Brigitta Muntendorf wurden dem Autor am 27. März 2019 als audio files übermittelt.

15. Vgl. hierzu Moritz Eggerts Blogbeitrag: Überkommene Strategien der Neuen Musik, Teil 5 (letzter Teil): Selbstverständnis. Online: <https://blogs.nmz.de/badblog/2019/04/13/ueberkommene-strategien-der-neuen-musik-teil-5-letzter-teil-selbstverstaendnis/> (abgerufen am 15. April 2019).

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# Would Mozart wear Balenciaga?

The politics of fashion in the concert hall

Rupert Enticknap

**V**isual-aesthetics – how people look and present themselves – are often or mostly entirely ignored in the history of western classical music. Biography however plays an important part in building the figures of the past and creating the image of the great master composer or performer. A prime example is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,

and indeed it's been contested whether his legacy would hold such romanticism, reach and commercial viability (are more Mozart Kugel chocolates consumed than tickets to listen to his music?) without the »story«. But in questioning what someone thought, how they felt, why they made a certain decision or why a modulation took that



Balenciaga Triple S Sneakers / reebonz.com

unexpected turn, it is also interesting and revealing to look at how this was reflected (or not) in the clothes they wore:

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»We left our fine cloth suits in Rome and have had to wear our beautiful, braided summer suits. Wolfg's is made of pink moiré, but the colour is so unusual that in Italy it's called colore di fuoco, or flame-coloured: with silver lace and lined with a sky-blue material. My suit is a kind of cinnamon colour, piquéd Florentine Cloth, with silver lace and lined in apple-green. Both suits are very beautiful.«

This extract from a letter from Leopold Mozart to his wife in 1770, shows the attention to detail in the appearance of the father and son composers, the enjoyment they took from it and a flair for style. Fashion in the c18th was mostly a display of wealth, sending a message to those around you through great artistic skill, fun and theatricality. It is worth pointing out the obvious that the Mozart's choice in outfit was also an effort to »fit in« to their surrounding of Naples at the time; or, to be »in fashion« – to belong.

How would a similar correspondence letter text message from a young composer of today read to an acquaintance? I guess words would not be employed, rather a quick selfie or posed picture holding a classic early 90s girlband stance; acquaintance in singular seems false too, rather the mass plural of a casual sea of 21k Instagram followers; the *colore di fuoco* is replaced by an industrial neon, the lace a chain from baumarkt and the silhouette of a suit by the three striped comfort of Germany's most famous sportswear brand... Or would it be a navy suit, white shirt and red tie?

Fashion today still builds on the meanings of Mozart's time, but has developed beyond this on a global scale, not only due to the availability

of clothing and the diversity it offers, but by the dominating influence of the media image. With the advent of platforms such as tumblr and Instagram it has become instinctive to initially understand each other not through words, but pictures. We have entered the age of what Boris Groys calls »the obligation of Self Design« where we design the images of ourselves according to a visual and aesthetic language and what we want to say and feel through that. I want to ask how could such an environment effect, influence and inform the lives and work of young composers today and the way their work is presented?

It is important to first to clarify the way in which fashion operates in society. For Femke de Vries, when it comes to fashion it is the »value ornament« that drives our desires to buy and wear certain clothes (see her essay *Fashioning Value - undressing ornament*). This value is no longer the display of wealth as signaled by a Versace or Gucci label, or the expensive cloth of Mozart's coat – but rather what this branding or shape on our bodies stands for and can make us feel. We buy the value and meaning of an item to affect our inner feelings, and thus design ourselves from the outside inwards. This stands not just for brands, but aesthetics too – where in society certain looks stand for various values for example x minimalist wears only black because this makes them feel uncluttered and part of an aesthetic-emotional cluster which improves their life. What is interesting is there are so many symbols available to



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, anonymous portrait painted in 1763 on commission from Leopold Mozart.

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Kanye West. Foto: www.splashnews.com ©



us today through clothing, that they can be used like a wordless language, and we can move freely between many different groups, identities and values which are somehow all interconnected.

albeit applied comparison, aligns with the fast and newly expanded language of contemporary music which explores the digital, visual imagery and physical gesture. Surely it also clarifies a realisa-

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Surely then if it's possible to be so inwardly affected by the fashion choices we make, this could have some effect on the artistic process of composition which makes outward – through

tion, that for the first time since the 18th century classical arts and popular arts are closer than ever, not only in the tools being used to create art but also the belief systems being incorporated.

sounds – the inner thoughts, feelings and beliefs of the composer?

This line of thinking also begs the question of what/who we consider worthy of the words »composition«/»composer« but this is a discussion to be taken up elsewhere and by another writer.

This approach can be compared to an interpretation of Art Direction by Chris Kraus where »Art direction succeeds to the extent that it locks down our fleeting perceptions of an ambient present into coherent images«. With the dominance of visual and image-based material in contemporary culture, the compositional process of new music could be seen as a »sound-direction« in some way; almost »the presentation of a coherent translation of the

Being aware then of the emotional and image-based communication inherent in what we wear today, this takes us to the next consideration of the relationship in society between music and fashion. In the last century fashion and music have always gone hand in hand holding a shared language; both social practices which deal with communication, they present alternative views of the world and our surroundings.

Since as early as the 1920s, but more significantly from the 1960s onwards, music and fashion became the most powerful catalyst in the development of subcultures in the modern age. The combination has marked strong identities in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality and continues to do so today. In particular, music and fashion have had a huge part to play in putting the identities of queer performers and performance into mainstream circulation. Music and fashion can not only challenge but also influence behaviours and their outcomes. Music and fashion can strongly communicate belonging, or not belong-



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Kanye West. Foto: GQ magazine ©

ing – this indeed being one of the most important discourses in the future of new music.

Let's also remember that music is a performing art, not just a material object to be stared at – it requires bodies to move, breath, sweat and express. Fashion theorists have often talked of the way fashion is performed by an individual or group of individuals. It therefore makes total sense that artists who have trained extensively in the art and composition of performing something, could have the sensibilities and desires to perform their personal identity through clothing, and thus engage in fashion. One would also assume that the people and structures around these events and communities would also encourage and nurture such individuality. However, in the conservatories, orchestras, choirs, theatres and concert halls of the classical music world, there is still a rigid conservatism when it comes to what one wears. The collective policing of older generations of audiences with such attitudes also does the art form no favours in terms of encouraging new engagement with these arts; those of us who have received dirty looks due to our choice *not* to wear a dress or suit and tie know what I'm talking about. However, if music – whether old or new – is to be understood in contemporary terms, then the rituals of experience need also to be of the moment – and this includes how we clothe ourselves.

Considering that the material, tools and environment composers are working with today in the »classical arts« are shared by popular culture, it would make sense that composers and their audiences could be influenced by the clothes they choose to put on their body. Fashion designers constantly reference inspiration from music and musicians, why would it be any different of the (young) composers today? Fashion + music = agency.

There is a noticeable trend in such capitals such as Berlin and London, that the fashioning of new music circles is active, changing the preconception of what new »classical« music can be and what it signifies. By adopting trends and aesthetics from other areas of culture, the fashions employed send a strong message of not belonging to an outdated and dusty conception of contemporary music. But also, who or what belongs, or should belong in the realm of new music.

As summarised by Noel McLoughlin in his essay »Rock, fashion and performativity« just as a musical style is created by social identity (clothing), so to »the meaning of dress will be inflected, altered, amplified and contradicted by the musical and performing conventions and

associations within which they are placed«. We must remember that even in the most conservative classical music situation, music is not pure. It is not just about closing your eyes and listening to sounds – it is much more. We are living in a time where discourses of gender, race and sexuality mean there is much more to add to the equation by considering what the composer is wearing and more fundamentally, why. This is part of it.

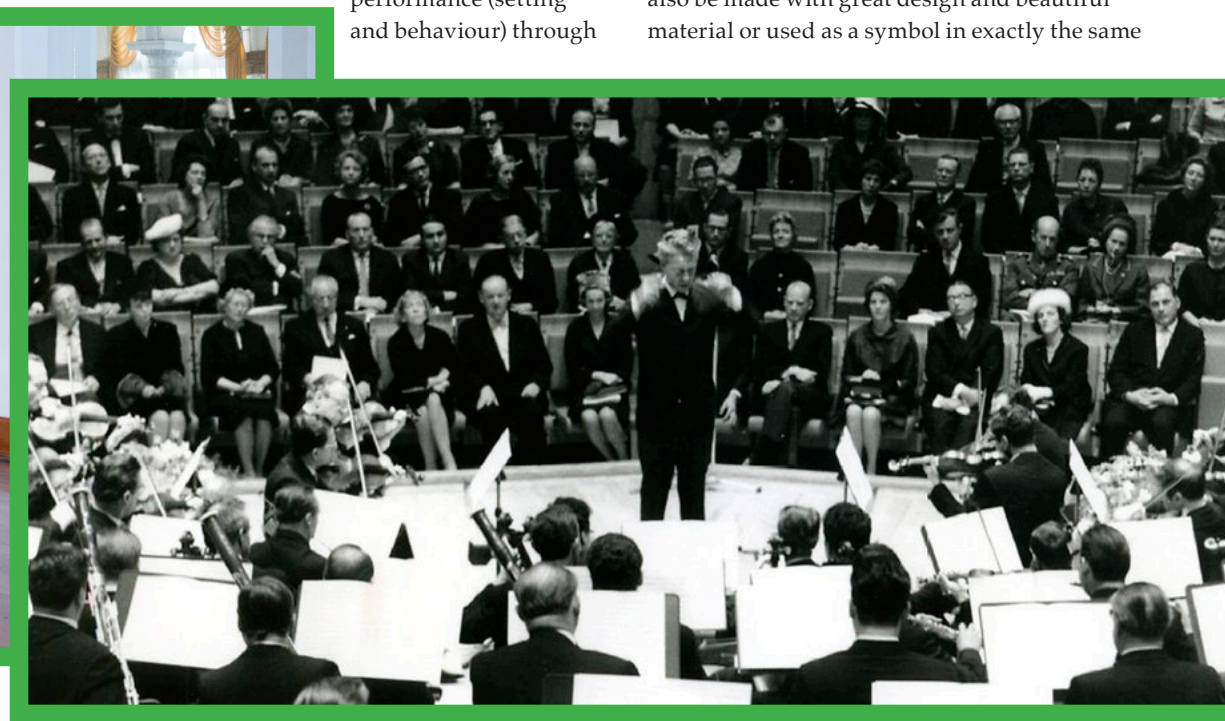
The role of the audience is also an important component of making meaning, in the same way the customer is in the fashion industry. The audience member of a concert of »classical contemporary music« wearing a pair of Yeezys, adidas 3-stripe pants and a Comme des Garçons t-shirt can influence both the music and its modes of performance (setting and behaviour) through

communicating emotional, symbolic and aesthetic meaning through their *choice* of clothing; true both of the composer, and hopefully one day the conductor and the entire orchestra, this then signifies the absolute redundancy of policing dress codes and conservative formats in our cities' concert lives. What meaning can a t-shirt bring to a space and the music performed within it?

It is interesting here to highlight a strong current trend in fashion, which is the dominance of streetwear. »Fashion« in many people's minds stands for chic, fancy, expensive, and formal. However, we are in a moment when most relaxed is most fashionable. A pair of jogging pants is no longer something to only be seen in the gym or lazing around at home – it is a garment that can also be made with great design and beautiful material or used as a symbol in exactly the same



Gosha Rubchinskiy 2017 fall/winter runway show. Foto: Tima Baladin/Hypebeast ©



Berliner Philharmonie Opening concert October 1963 with Herbert von Karajan. Foto: Reinhard Friedrich/Stiftung Stiftung Berliner Philharmoniker ©

way as a branded jumper, to make us feel the desired effect of belonging to something exclusive and or meaningful. In the same way, classi-

photo-book. This direct move from fashion into audio-visual work is bold but also seems natural. Although his music is not for a concert hall in

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The work and collections of young Russian designer Gosha Rubchinskiy offer a very interesting example of the universality and flexibility of garments with pre-conceived meanings and associations and how the fashion world can be manipulated through them. Using post-soviet street wear aesthetics and sports brands, Rubchinskiy placed his garments and symbols on the catwalks of high fashion, making normal fashionable. By employing certain bodies – young, often ordinary looking young men – he also attracted new types of people to his clothes, young men (often teenagers and boys) suddenly engaging with »high fashion«; his clothes are affordable for high fashion standards too as he believes in the importance of accessibility to his brand. According to *The Guardian* he has become »fashion's emblem for disenfranchised youth, a group that defines itself by its rejection of consumerism«.

There is a powerful message here in the potential to reject and change institutionalised norms through creative means. As Rubchinskiy subverts the space between streetwear and the catwalk, perhaps there is a similar possibility to subvert the space between the »free scene« concert space and concert hall, and that the social power of clothing holds a useful tool to do this. Since closing his self-named brand in april 2018, Rubchinskiy's first new project is musical: a 10-track album with the band GRUPPA, including music videos and a

the classical sense, perhaps this move could be reversed, offering strong evidence as to why there should be no boundaries in our contemporary society between disciplines in the classical arts.

To go back to Groys' thought that »In our time self-design has come to be the mass cultural practice par excellence«, how do we then design ourselves with new music, and how could new music/the concert hall be (re-)designed through clothing? I'm not suggesting that you need to be fashionable to attend or enjoy new music (or any music for that matter!). Moreover, to wear what you want and feel free to use this consciously and simply express yourself outwardly in what you wear. Consider what effect a piece of clothing creates and how this relates to its sonic and social surroundings, how can you use this to intervene, challenge and politicise the concert hall? What you wear is of equal value to what is being performed and by whom.

Perhaps the future of contemporary classical music will be shaped by its interaction with fashion in the same way it has been processed by rock, punk, rap, techno etc. For in a time where, according to trend influencers K-HOLE, »youth mode« is no longer to do with age but an attitude and a freedom – »an emancipation from boredom, from prescription, from boredom. It's the fullness of potential, the ability to be the person you want to be«. Perhaps in all its devices and tricks, fashion is a useful tool to expand the future of new music and its arenas.

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## 1. Berliner Jazzwoche

24.–30. Juni 2019

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