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Margulis revisited: Once more on program notes and audience enjoyment

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Margulis revisited: Once more on program notes and audience enjoyment

An Honors College Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Visual and Performing Arts
James Madison University

by Jocelyn A. Abrahamzon

May 2019

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Music, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at VCHC Conference on April 5, 2019.

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Abstract

In a 2010 study, Elizabeth Margulis finds that audience members enjoy classical music less when they read information about the piece before they hear it. Her result is surprising because conventional wisdom suggests that such pre-concert information would add to an audience members' enjoyment of a concert. To gain further perspective, I decided to conduct a similar study on JMU's campus that differed from Margulis' in many ways. For example, participants attended a live concert rather than listening to excerpts of music through headphones. I created a survey that asked participants questions about their experience at a concert they attended at the Forbes Center. These questions included what kind of interpretive assistance (i.e. program notes or a speaker) participants received, what type of information they received from the program notes or speaker, and how their enjoyment was affected. The results of this study contradict Margulis' in two major ways: participants that received program notes were likely to experience an increase of enjoyment, and participants had a strong desire for descriptive information in their interpretive assistance. Other results from this study include the confirmation that information provided by a speaker leads to large increases of enjoyment, and participants who were at least neutral toward attending a concert beforehand had a greater chance of enjoying most or all of the concert.

Introduction

As a rapidly growing number of entertainment alternatives become available, fewer people are attending classical music concerts, and scholars have increasingly been interested in studying how audiences react to such concerts to find ways to engage more people. Some reasons for the decline in classical music concert attendance include a lack of knowledge about classical music & concert etiquette, a perceived high cost, and the availability of substitutes.¹ Perhaps in response to the growing concern over the decrease in concert attendance, Elizabeth Margulis completed two experiments whose goals were to determine the effect that program notes have on audience enjoyment.

In her 2010 study, “When program notes don’t help: Music descriptions and enjoyment,” Margulis attempts to determine what type of program note, if any, benefits the listener. Rather than being beneficial, Margulis’s results instead suggest that program notes negatively impact listener enjoyment.² These results are astonishing—indeed, Margulis herself expressed surprise at the results of the study—and they prompted me to pursue further investigation.

In this study, I build upon Margulis’s work by further exploring the relationship between audience enjoyment and program notes or other types of interpretive assistance. Similar to Margulis, my target audience was people who do not regularly attend classical music concerts. I hypothesized that most participants would not read any program notes a performer chose to provide; if an audience member did read their notes, I believed that it would increase their enjoyment of the concert, contrary to Margulis’s conclusions. I will begin by reviewing relevant

¹ Njordur Sigurjonsson, “Orchestra Audience Development and the Aesthetics of ‘Customer Comfort,’” *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 40, no. [4] (December, 2010): 266-278.

² Margulis, Elizabeth H., “When program notes don’t help: Music descriptions and enjoyment,” *Psychology of Music* (2010): 285-302.

literature. Then, I will outline my research methodology, present the results of a survey I conducted, and interpret its results.

Literature Review

There are two main categories of interpretive assistance typically provided at classical music concerts: program notes and spoken introductions. Program notes are written descriptions of the music, usually by the composer, a member of the performing ensemble, or a scholar not performing in the ensemble. Program notes typically include information about the composer if they are less widely known, and they may include information about a story that is connected to the piece or structural information about the pieces' construction. At professional orchestra concerts, program notes are often provided in a program book that must be purchased at an additional cost to the concert ticket. By contrast, performing groups occasionally have one of the performers speak about the music in lieu of, or in addition to, program notes. The speaker is usually the conductor, but musicians or the composer also often speak.

Recent research regarding audience enjoyment at concerts indicates that while program notes are meant to be inclusive and help audience members better understand the music, sometimes they do the opposite. Stephanie Pitts studied six concert attendees at two chamber music concerts in Sheffield, England. She concluded that "listeners show themselves to be receptive of their new experience of concert attendance, yet [are] alienated by some of the resources that should be a source of welcome and guidance."³ Participants in this study thought the program notes included too much jargon that made them feel as though they did not belong at

³ Melissa C. Dobson and Stephanie E. Pitts, "Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members' Social and Musical Responses to First-time Concert Attendance," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, no. [3] (February, 2012): 353-383.

the event: "...for these new attenders the unfamiliar technical language contributed to the impression of classical concert audiences as a knowledgeable, distinct group."⁴

Melissa Dobson conducted a similar study in which nine new concertgoers attended three different orchestra concerts in London. The attendees talked about their experiences in a post-concert focus group. Program notes were the primary source of interpretive assistance at the first and third concerts, and the participants "responded negatively to these, finding that they assumed a substantial degree of prior knowledge."⁵

While some concertgoers find program notes to be too technical, others find that the information provided is lacking or somehow unsatisfactory. In Bonita M. Kolb's study, three groups of five to seven university students attended three different concerts. One group attended a concert that performed new music by Michael Nyman that was written for a science-fiction movie. Overall, this group did not enjoy the concert because they found the music to be too repetitive, boring, and aimless without the movie. This group believed that their experience could have been improved if there was more information about the movie, the composer, or both the movie and the composer.⁶ Participants in another study by Radbourne et al. echoed these desires, stating that they "expressed a desire to know more about what they were viewing and to be given information relevant to the performance as part of the viewing experience."⁷ Similarly, Alan Brown finds that "program notes provide background information on each piece, but seldom explain the connections or counterpoints between pieces on the same program."⁸

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Melissa C. Dobson, "New Audiences for Classical Music: The Experiences of Non-attenders at Live Orchestral Concerts." *Journal of New Music Research* 39, no. [2] (July, 2010): 111-124.

⁶ Bonita M. Kolb, "You Call This Fun? Reactions of Young First-time Attendees to a Classical Concert," *MEIEA Journal* 1, no. [1] (2000): 13-28.

⁷ Radbourne, Jennifer et al., "The Audience Experience: Measuring Quality in the Performing Arts," *International Journal of Arts Management* 11, no. [3] (2009): 16-29.

⁸ Alan S. Brown, "Smart Concerts: Orchestras in the Age of Edutainment," *John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Issues Brief* no. 5 (December, 2004): 1-20.

In addition to program notes, speakers may also provide information about the performance. In general, concert attendees enjoy when a performer speaks to the audience because it leads to a greater sense of inclusion, which in turn leads to a more enjoyable concert experience. Dobson and Pitts characterize spoken introductions as “less off-putting” than program notes. They find that the format allows performers to provide “some background information, some anecdotes, some jokes, and... some personal comments.”⁹ Spoken introductions may also give the audience specific musical moments to listen for in the piece. For example, in the third concert of Pitts’s study, one participant commented on the conductor’s introduction to the Brahms Symphony, saying that he “really liked when he [the conductor] sort of mentioned, he name-checked like a horn solo in the fourth movement, and when you actually hear it, and you kind of give yourself a little brownie point for actually recognising it.”¹⁰ Giving the audience members something to listen for increased their confidence, which lead to greater enjoyment of the music.

Participants in Dobson’s study enjoyed the concert titled *The Night Shift*. Audience members liked its informal setting, which allowed them to walk around and eat food during the performance. The audience was also deeply engaged with the concert because the performer took the time to demonstrate three different interpretations of a single passage in a work by Mozart. Participants were enthusiastic about this demonstration because the performer related Mozart to jazz, music with which they were more familiar. The demonstration had a profound effect on the participants who gained insight into the performer’s preparation in deciding how to play a

⁹ Melissa C. Dobson and Stephanie E. Pitts, “Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members’ Social and Musical Responses to First-time Concert Attendance,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, no. [3] (February, 2012): 353-383.

¹⁰ Ibid.

particular passage, and in recognizing that not every performance is perfect. The listeners felt that the pianist was “making us part of that, and I did love it, absolutely, it was great.”¹¹

In 2003, a chamber music festival in England (*Music in the Round*) underwent a personnel change. The resident quartet at the time had announced their retirement, and the festival found a new resident quartet. Audience enjoyment increased with the arrival of the new quartet, in part due to the format of the spoken introductions that the new group offered. Before each piece, a different member of the quartet introduced the piece, whereas only the principal violin of the former resident quartet gave introductions to the music. These results suggest that while spoken introductions increase audience enjoyment by giving audiences insight into the music, audiences also valued the opportunity to connect with each member of the quartet.¹² Participants of various studies not only agreed that spoken introductions increase their enjoyment, but also that not speaking to or acknowledging the audience was rude because “it seems to be that they’re almost willfully ignoring the audience.”¹³

In addition to providing their opinions about interpretive assistance at concerts, participants of these various studies also offered suggestions on how to improve the information they were provided. Participants in Kolb’s study suggested that program notes should be included in the cost of the concert ticket. They also believed that the conductor should always “greet the audience and announce the music. They thought such communication would not only be helpful but would also make the concert more personal.”¹⁴

¹¹ Melissa C. Dobson, “New Audiences for Classical Music: The Experiences of Non-attenders at Live Orchestral Concerts.” *Journal of New Music Research* 39, no. [2] (July, 2010): 111-124.

¹² Stephanie E. Pitts and Christopher P. Spencer, “Loyalty and Longevity in Audience Listening: Investigating Experiences of Attendance at a Chamber Music Festival,” *Music and Letters* 89, no. [2] (May, 2008): 227-238.

¹³ Melissa C. Dobson and Stephanie E. Pitts, “Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members’ Social and Musical Responses to First-time Concert Attendance,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, no. [3] (February, 2012): 353-383.

¹⁴ Bonita M. Kolb, “You Call This Fun? Reactions of Young First-time Attendees to a Classical Concert,” *MEIEA Journal* 1, no. [1] (2000): 13-28.

Participants in Pitts's study suggested that there should be less background information about the performers, and more information authored by the performers about the pieces. Perhaps program notes written by the performers would mimic spoken introductions, making them more accessible to audience members. Participants also suggested that the program include the approximate length of a piece to help them concentrate on the music. People that do not regularly attend classical music concerts often feel that their inability to focus on the music for its full duration makes it more obvious that they are outsiders. Finally, they wanted the program notes to "reflect the quality of the music more generously;" in other words, they wanted the notes to make it sound like the music would be enjoyable.¹⁵

Margulis's study offers the most detailed discussion of program notes and their effect on audience enjoyment to date. She conducted two nearly identical experiments in which participants were asked to listen to recordings of Beethoven String Quartets. While the sample size of each experiment was small, they were demographically representative of a typical concert audience, which is typically comprised of people who have some kind of musical background. The first experiment had sixteen participants who, on average, attended nine concerts a year (with a standard deviation of 9.5). Nine of the participants had taken private lessons for an average of 2.8 years, seven participated in ensembles for 2.1 years on average, and four had been taught some music theory for less than a year on average. Of the sixteen participants, half stated that they regularly listened to classical music. The second experiment had eleven participants who, on average, attended seven concerts a year (with a standard deviation 6.9). Seven of the participants had taken private lessons for an average of 2.4 years. Six participants had

¹⁵ Melissa C. Dobson and Stephanie E. Pitts, "Classical Cult or Learning Community? Exploring New Audience Members' Social and Musical Responses to First-time Concert Attendance," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20, no. [3] (February, 2012): 353-383.

participated in ensembles for an average of 2.1 years, and three had been taught some music theory for almost a year (0.9 years) on average.

Margulis wrote program notes for each excerpt from Beethoven's String Quartets that she used in her study. Participants read a dramatic, structural, or no description before they listened to the excerpt. After listening, they were asked to rate their enjoyment of the music and later were asked to recall the music and the descriptions that accompanied each. Margulis found that excerpts not accompanied by a description were more enjoyable to the participants, with dramatic descriptions decreasing enjoyment the most.¹⁶

Margulis offered a few possible explanations for these findings. For instance, she believes that "listeners may seek to be swept away by the music" without any outside information spoiling the music they are about to hear.¹⁷ Another possibility is that the participants did not enjoy reading the descriptions themselves, which affected their opinions of the music. To counteract this kind of transfer of enjoyment, Margulis repeated the experiment with the intent of disassociating the descriptions from the music. The participants were presented the music and descriptions in the same manner as the first experiment, however in the second experiment they were not asked to rank their enjoyment until they listened to the music again without any descriptions. The results of the second study were the same as the first: participants enjoyed having no description the most and dramatic descriptions the least.

The results of Margulis's study might suggest that concerts would be more enjoyable without program notes. However, before this conclusion can be drawn one might consider the limitations of her study. The study's small sample size makes it difficult to draw general

¹⁶ Margulis, Elizabeth H., "When program notes don't help: Music descriptions and enjoyment," *Psychology of Music* (2010): 285-302.

¹⁷ Ibid.

conclusions that apply to many scenarios. Another limitation is that the written descriptions are not representative of typical program notes. Each description (Example 1) was fifty words on average, while typical program notes are much longer, ranging anywhere from half a page to multiple pages. The written descriptions were also more mundane than the typical program note.

Dramatic	Structural
The opening evokes a deeply-felt hymn; it is as if we are hearing not the hymn itself, but rather the sounds of the hymn filtered through the ears of someone passionately connected to it. The melody that breaks away on top of the hymn seems to be expressive of this person's emotional reactions to the music.	This piece begins with a series of slow, sustained chords that grow louder and achieve resolution. Across the course of these chords, the melody first slowly rises, and then slowly falls. After the point of resolution, the slow chords begin again, but with a new, faster-note melody sounding high above them.

Example 1. Sample program notes from Margulis's study.

By contrast, a typical program note might read as follows:

One of Fillmore's more idiosyncratic works, *The Klaxon* was composed for the January 1930 Cincinnati Automobile Show. The work, often subtitled 'March of the Automobiles,' introduced an instrument of Fillmore's own invention as a member of the ensemble. The klaxophone was a collection of twelve automobile horns, mounted to a table, and powered by an automobile battery. The effect is rendered, somewhat less noisily, by the brass and woodwinds in the setting that has survived.¹⁸

Another limitation of Margulis's study is that it was not conducted in a concert setting; instead, participants listened to recordings through a set of headphones. Additionally, Margulis's study only presented recordings of one genre of music (classical string quartets) by the same composer (Beethoven). When people attend classical music concerts they often hear music by

¹⁸ "Program note for Concert Band," James Madison University Concert Band, Forbes Center for the Performing Arts, November 30, 2018.

more than one composer. It is possible that participants grew tired of listening to the same type of music.

Conflicting with Margulis's study is the body of literature that cites a perceived lack of knowledge about music as one factor that deters people from attending concerts. Program notes are one of the gateways to gaining an understanding of classical music that could make non-concertgoers feel more comfortable attending a concert. "No one disagrees that offering concertgoers more information about the program is a good thing. But how and when is hotly debated."¹⁹ The goal of my study was to gain some insight into how and when to offer information to concertgoers without some of the limitations that Margulis's study presents.

Methodology

Participants volunteered to complete a survey after they had attended a live concert at the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts at James Madison University in Fall 2019. The survey was accessible through a QR code on the back of concert programs, as well as a link on the front page of the School of Music website. Participants were also directly recruited from a general education class on campus as those students were the target audience for the study and they are required to attend at least one concert over the semester.

The survey included questions that asked participants to rate their anticipated level of interest before attending the concert and their actual level of enjoyment after the concert. Additionally, concertgoers indicated what kind of interpretive assistance they received and what content was given within that interpretive assistance. If the participant had attended another

¹⁹ Alan S. Brown, "Smart Concerts: Orchestras in the Age of Edutainment," John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Issues Brief no. 5 (December, 2004): 1-20.

concert at the Forbes Center within the past calendar year, they were also asked what kind of interpretive assistance they would prefer to receive.

The majority of the concerts that participants might have attended were those in which students performed, and these generally included some interpretive assistance in the form of program notes, speakers, or both. Few concerts provide no interpretive assistance. The most common scenario is that audience members will be given program notes and also listen to a speaker talk between pieces.

Participants that were provided some type of interpretive assistance were asked to categorize the information as historical, structural, or descriptive. Each category was accompanied by a description to help participants understand the distinction between each. Historical was described as “information about the composer, when the piece was written, its premiere, etc.” Interpretive assistance would be considered structural if it “described technical aspects of how the piece was constructed.” Finally, the information may be categorized as descriptive if it “painted a picture, told a story, or used other kinds of metaphor.” Example 2 provides sample notes for each category.

Results and Discussion

Participants

A total of seventy-five concertgoers responded to the survey. Of the seventy-five participants, fifty-eight were not music majors at JMU, though many were students at JMU in other majors. The results discussed in the remainder of this study will only include the data collected from these fifty-eight participants since the goal of this study is to determine how

Historical: When Holst was commissioned to write *Hammersmith* for the BBC Wireless Military Band in 1928 he felt rather out of practice in orchestrating for the medium. For some years he had the idea of arranging some Bach fugues for brass and military band, so he set himself the task of scoring the *Organ Fugue in G Major BWV 577* (from Preludes, Fugues and Fantasias). He, rather than Bach, called it *Fugue à La Gigue*. The piece made an ideal exercise, and Holst’s brilliant dovetailing of the counterpoint between different instruments shows his mastery. The piece is technically demanding and the characteristic unison clarinet writing suggests the orchestral conception of a large wind ensemble rather than a band. It was this conception which the composer carried forward into *Hammersmith*. *Fugue à La Gigue* was published for military band in 1928 by Boosey & Hawkes and shortly afterwards for orchestra, but with only short scores, as was customary at the time.

Structural: *An Introduction to the Moon* offers eight improvisational sections for concert band, tuned water glasses, and amplified voice. This concert piece combines two distinctly different and wholly essential musical practices -- music of the page and music of the ear. The work alternates between music that is written and music that is improvised. The improvisational sections include different poems, one per section with the instruments improvising along with the reader. This work provides students a wonderful opportunity to develop and demonstrate their improvisational skills.

Descriptive: The African American spiritual **My Lord, What a Mornin’** is an iconic song of support and release. In the words of Jonathan Miller, “Spirituals affirm our common humanity. They were composed by people whose names are lost to history, and yet they are immortal treasures—treasures of dignity and honor, treasures of hope and longing for a better life here and hereafter.”

Example 2. Sample notes for each category of interpretive assistance.²⁰

interpretive assistance can enhance the enjoyment of people who do not regularly attend concerts.

Information about participants’ musical experience and current year at JMU is summarized in tables 1 and 2. Most participants were underclassmen, which is expected since many of the non-music students that completed the survey were enrolled in a general education music course, and most general education courses at JMU are completed during students’ sophomore year. The majority of participants received no music education while in school, which could include a band or choir class.

²⁰ Historical sample taken from “Program note for Symphonic Band,” James Madison University Symphonic Band, Forbes Center for the Performing Arts, November 3, 2018. Structural sample taken from Ibid. Descriptive sample taken from “Program Note for Mid-Semester Choral Concert: Spirit,” James Madison University Treble Chamber Choir, Forbes Center for the Performing Arts, October 8, 2018.

Year at JMU	Number of Responses
Freshman	26
Sophomore	16
Junior	2
Senior	2
Non-student	7

Table 1. Year at James Madison University.

Music education received in school	Number of Responses
0 years	26
1 year	2
2-3 years	7
4-5 years	4
6+ years	17

Table 2. Years of music education received in school.

Shift in Enjoyment – Results

To determine if participants experienced a change in anticipated enjoyment versus actual enjoyment, participants were asked to rate what their interest was toward attending the concert and to rate how they enjoyed the concert (Tables 3 and 4).²¹

Table 3 shows that before the concert seventy-five percent of the participants were neutral, interested, or excited to attend, while twenty-five percent were not interested or were only attending because it was required for their class. After the concert (Table 4), eighty-seven percent of participants were at least neutral toward the concert. Additionally, seventy-four percent enjoyed

²¹ The interest participants had before the concert was interpreted as an anticipation of their enjoyment. For example, if the participant was moderately disinterested in attending the concert, it was assumed that they anticipated to enjoy some of the concert, but overall not to enjoy the concert. If the participant was excited to attend the concert, it was assumed that they anticipated to enjoy the entire concert and so forth.

most or all of the music. Only one participant did not enjoy the concert they attended, while five participants enjoyed some pieces, but still did not enjoy the concert overall.

Interest before attending the concert	Number of responses
I was not interested in attending. I only came to fulfill a class requirement.	7
I was moderately disinterested in attending	5
I was neutral toward the concert	12
I was moderately interested in attending	12
I was excited to attend	12

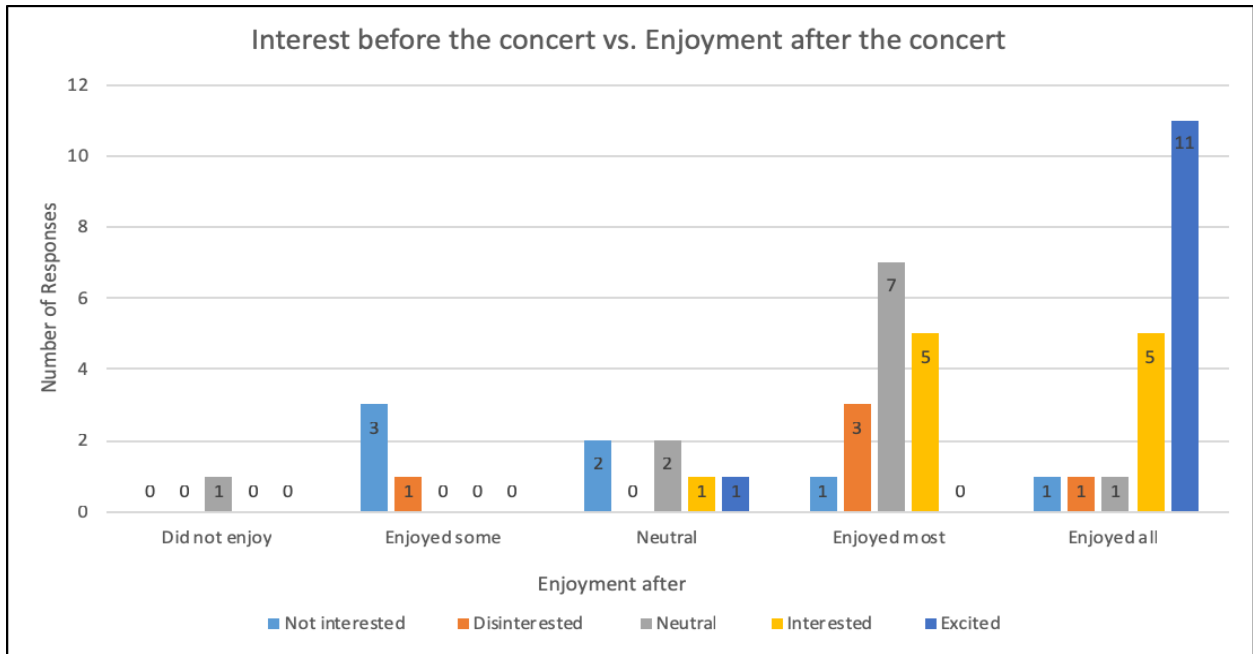
Table 3. Anticipated concert interest.

Enjoyment after the concert	Number of responses
I did not enjoy the concert	1
I enjoyed some pieces, but overall I did not enjoy the concert	5
Neutral	6
I enjoyed nearly all of the performed pieces	16
I enjoyed the entire concert	19

Table 4. Actual concert interest.

Example 3 correlates participants' interest before and after the concert, where colored bars representing levels of anticipated enjoyment are distributed among the five categories of actual enjoyment. Most people who actually enjoyed the entire concert were also excited to attend (eleven of nineteen, or fifty-eight percent). Seven of the eleven participants who were neutral about attending the concert enjoyed most of the concert. All of the participants that only attended a concert because it was required for their class enjoyed at least some of it. The difference between a participant's anticipated enjoyment and their actual enjoyment will be referred to as the participants' shift in enjoyment. For example, a participant that was

disinterested in the concert before attending but enjoyed most of the concert would have experienced an increase of two enjoyment levels.²² Meanwhile, a participant that was neutral toward the concert but overall did not enjoy the concert would have experienced a decrease of enjoyment by one level.

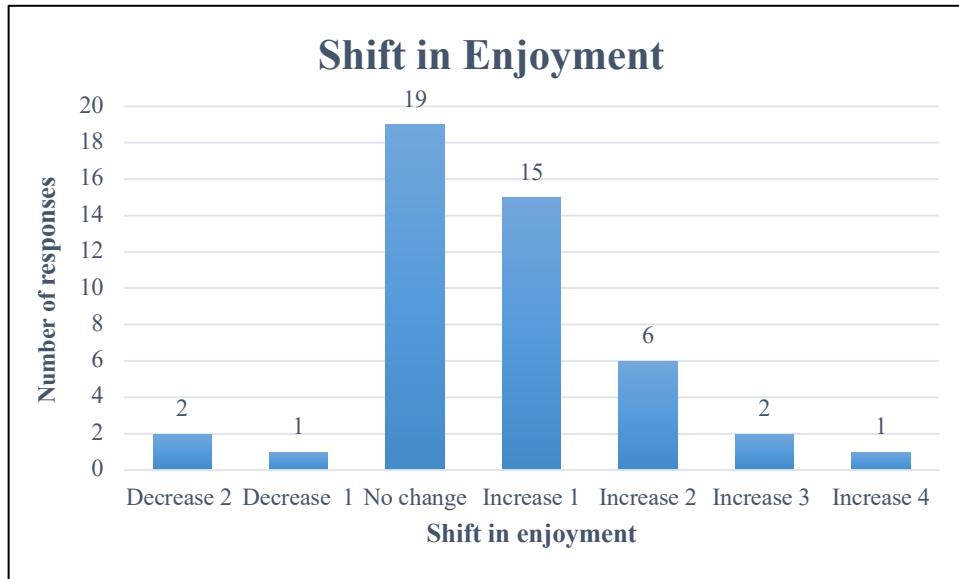


Example 3. Anticipated versus actual enjoyment.

Example 4 displays the same information as Example 3 in a different way. In Example 4 we cannot see the exact degree of either anticipated enjoyment or actual enjoyment. We can only see the overall shift in enjoyment that participants experienced. Most participants experienced some increase in enjoyment. Fifteen participants increased by one enjoyment level, six increased by two, two increased by three, and one increased by four. No participant experienced a decrease of enjoyment by more than two levels. An increase or decrease of four enjoyment levels is the maximum shift that someone could experience. Such an increase would mean that the participant

²² By “level,” I refer to the descriptions of enjoyment listed in the left columns of Tables 1 and 2.

was only attending the concert because it was required for their class and enjoyed the entire concert, while a decrease of 4 levels would mean that the participant was excited to attend the concert but did not enjoy the experience at all.



Example 4. Shift in enjoyment (i.e. anticipated vs. actual enjoyment)

Shift in Enjoyment – Discussion

As shown in Table 3, participants had varied levels of interest in attending the concert, however, as shown in Table 4, a large majority of participants enjoyed most or all of the concert, an encouraging result. There were people in the audience who were not at all interested in attending a concert that enjoyed a large portion of the music. While many participants experienced some increase in enjoyment, nineteen participants did not experience any shift in enjoyment. Example 3 shows that eleven of these nineteen participants were both excited to attend and enjoyed the entire concert. Furthermore, five participants in this same group were interested in attending and enjoyed most of the concert. Therefore, sixteen of the nineteen participants who experienced no change in enjoyment anticipated enjoying most or all of the concert and had their anticipations met. Initially, the number of participants that did not

experience a shift in enjoyment may seem like a negative result, however since eighty-four percent of this group enjoyed most or all of the concert, the result might instead be interpreted positively.

Of the fifty-eight non-music major participants, only one did not enjoy the concert they attended at all. Considering that seven participants anticipated not enjoying their concerts, this result is quite positive. The participant that did not enjoy the concert they attended was a sophomore interdisciplinary studies major at JMU with no musical training that was taking a general education music class. They attended a percussion recital that included a lot of contemporary music, which may be difficult for audience members without any musical background to understand and enjoy. Three other participants who attended the same recital enjoyed the concert to varying degrees, from not enjoying it at all to enjoying the entire performance.

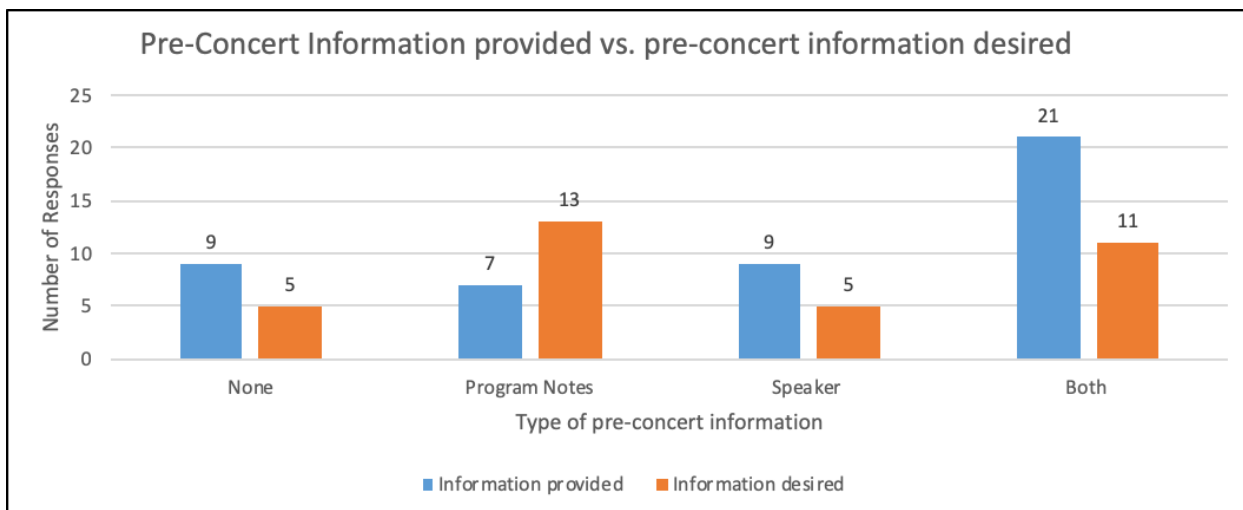
Of the seven participants who were only attending the concert because it was required for their general education music class, three enjoyed some of the music, two enjoyed about half, one enjoyed most, and one enjoyed the entire concert. Importantly, every participant who anticipated not enjoying the concert at all had their expectations exceeded. This group's low anticipated enjoyment also meant they had the biggest opportunity to experience a positive shift in enjoyment. The participant that experienced an increase of enjoyment by four levels anticipated not enjoying the concert at all. This participant, who attended a brass band concert, was a junior physics major at JMU with no musical training enrolled in a general education music class. Four other participants attended a brass band concert, and of those four, three experienced an increase in enjoyment, including one increase of three. Of the five participants that attended a brass band concert, one was neutral toward the concert, two enjoyed most of the

concert, and two enjoyed the entire concert. It appears that JMU Brass Band concerts have the potential to be enjoyed by all audience members.

Interpretive Assistance Results

At the Forbes Center, there are two common forms of interpretive assistance: program notes and speakers. At some concerts, both forms of interpretive assistance may be provided, while at others no information might be provided other than basic information such as piece titles, composers, and program order.

The blue bars in Example 5 show the interpretive assistance that participants received, while the orange bars show the interpretive assistance that participants would prefer to receive. The majority of participants (twenty-one of forty-six) received both program notes and information from a speaker. By contrast, program notes alone were the least common form of interpretive assistance provided with only seven of the forty-six participants receiving only program notes.²³ Between these extremes, nine people each received either no interpretive assistance or pre-concert information from a speaker only.

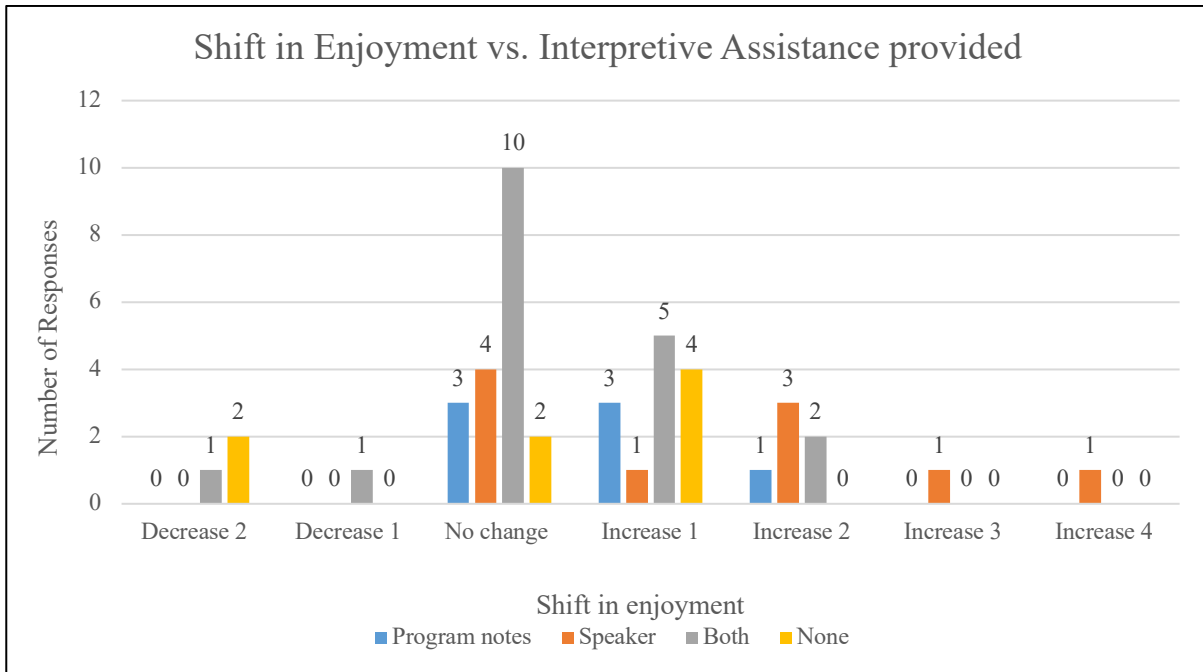


Example 5. Received vs. desired pre-concert information.

²³ This number is lower than the original fifty-eight because twelve did not complete this section of the survey.

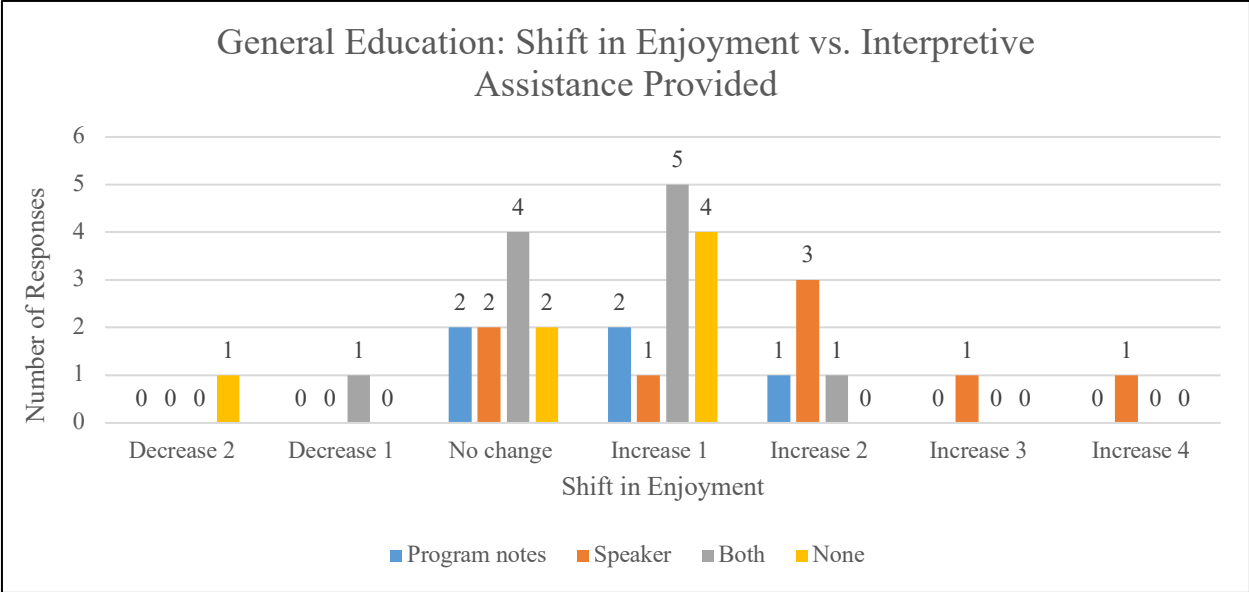
While program notes alone were least often provided, most participants (thirteen of thirty-four) indicated that this is their preferred type of interpretive assistance to receive.²⁴ Having both types of interpretive assistance available was the second-most desired option, with eleven of thirty-four participants preferring to have both. Listening to a speaker and having no interpretive assistance available are equally desirable, with five participants desiring each. Example 6 correlates participants' shift in enjoyment with the interpretive assistance that they were provided. The participants who experienced the largest shift in enjoyment, (increase three and increase four) only received information from a speaker. Those who received program notes alone either experienced a relatively small increase in enjoyment (one or two levels) or no change in enjoyment. Those who received both program notes and a speaker had a wide range of enjoyment shift possibilities, anywhere from a decrease of two to an increase of two, with the majority experiencing no change. Participants that were not provided any interpretive assistance often experienced an increase in enjoyment by one level, but some experienced a decrease of two levels.

²⁴ The number of responses for the preferred type of interpretive assistance is lower than the number of responses for the interpretive assistance that participants received because only the participants that had attended another concert at the Forbes Center in the past year were asked what type of interpretive assistance they prefer. Only those who attended another concert were asked this question because it is possible that they had not experienced both types of pre-concert information in one concert and would not accurately be able to answer the question.



Example 6. Shift in enjoyment vs. provided interpretive assistance.

One result that stands out from the rest in Example 6 is the number of people who received interpretive assistance from both program notes and a speaker, but for whom the concert experience resulted in no change in enjoyment (see the grey bar within the “no change” column in Example 6). Many of those ten respondents were people who chose to attend a concert (rather than attending for class credit) and who rated their anticipated enjoyment of the concert highly, an expectation that was fulfilled. If we focus instead on only those participants who were enrolled in a general education music course (Example 7), we can see that general education students who received both types of interpretive assistance were more likely to experience an increase in enjoyment than no change.



Example 7. Shift in enjoyment vs. interpretive assistance for general education music students only

Interpretive Assistance Discussion

Participants who either received only program notes or only a speaker were likely to experience an increase in enjoyment. Fifty-seven percent of participants that received program notes alone experienced an increase in enjoyment, and sixty percent of participants that only had a speaker experienced an increase in enjoyment. The participants that experienced the largest increase in enjoyment (increase three and increase four) were provided information from a speaker alone. Additionally, the majority of participants that increased in enjoyment by two levels also were given information by a speaker. Based on my research, this result is expected because speaking from the stage creates a connection between the performers and audience members. It makes the audience feel included in the performance and it gives them insight into the performer’s personality and character.

The results of those who experienced an increase of enjoyment by one level is surprising because the second-largest group of people that experienced this increase received no

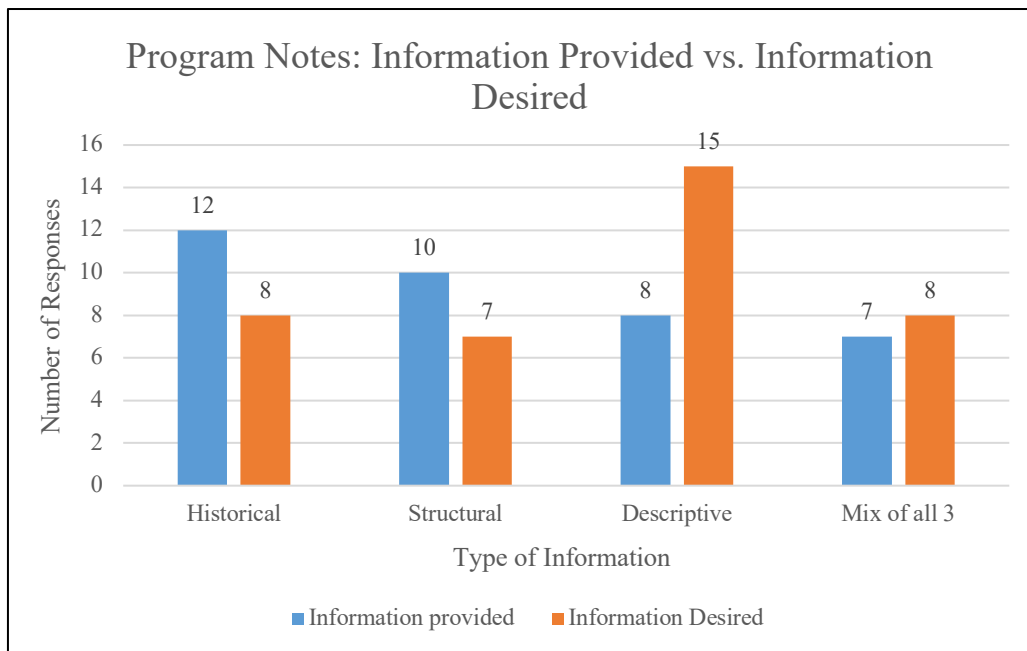
interpretive assistance. It is possible that some participants prefer to have no interpretive assistance because this survey was conducted on a college campus where some audience members may prefer to simply listen to the music and leave. It is especially likely that this is the case for general education music students on a college campus because they were required to attend for a class. Three of the participants that experienced an increase in enjoyment reported that they both preferred and received no interpretive assistance, but in each case interpretive assistance was provided.²⁵

The potential to misinterpret what “pre-concert information” or “interpretive assistance” meant is one limitation of this study. Participants may have misunderstood the difference between the two types of pre-concert information, or they may not have understood what pre-concert information was at all. In the survey, participants reported: “notes were written in my program,” “someone spoke during the concert,” “notes AND someone spoke during the concert,” or “no pre-concert information was provided.” While these options seem clear, it is possible that participants thought that the basic information provided in programs (the order of the music being performed, title of the pieces, and composer) were program notes; alternatively, participants may not have looked through their entire program to see if there were program notes. It is also possible that some participants did not pay enough attention to the concert to know if there was a speaker. For example, the participant referenced earlier who did not enjoy the percussion recital claimed that they did not receive any pre-concert information, however the performer reported that he spoke between pieces during the concert.

²⁵ These three participants attended a concert band concert, which had both program notes and a speaker, and a jazz concert and a brass band concert, which both had speakers.

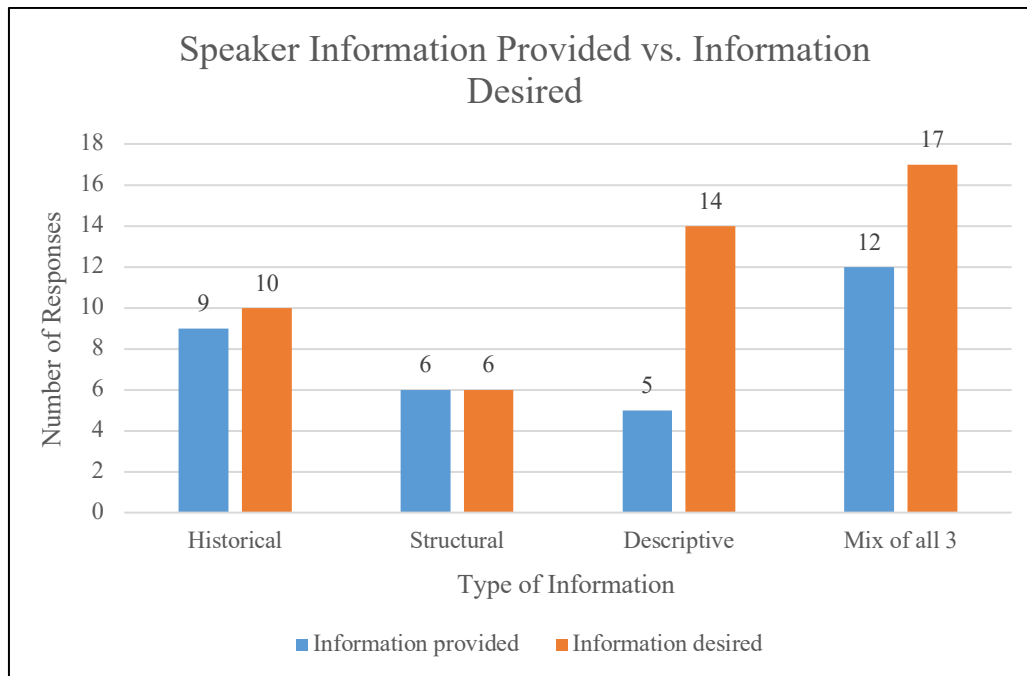
Category of Information - Results

If participants indicated they received some interpretive assistance, they were asked to categorize its type from among three options: historical, structural, and descriptive. Participants were also given the option to choose from any mix of the three types of information provided (i.e. historical and structural, descriptive and historical, etc.) or a mix of all three. The high degree of variation in the responses made it challenging to draw strong conclusions. To simplify the data, I counted any mention of a given category, regardless of whether it was mixed with another category. For example, if the participant answered "a mix of historical and structural" their answer was counted toward both the "historical" and "structural" tallies (Examples 8 and 9).²⁶



Example 8. Type of information provided vs. desired in program notes.

²⁶ It is possible that due to this method of distributing answers, the results may be skewed slightly. The "mix of all three" option appears to have a smaller number of responses in comparison to the other options because participants were given a plethora of other options, that included the categories alone as well as a combination of the different categories, however in the initial results "mix of all three" was the most preferred. The individual categories dramatically grew in size when the different combinations of answers were added to them.



Example 9. Type of information provided vs. desired from speakers.

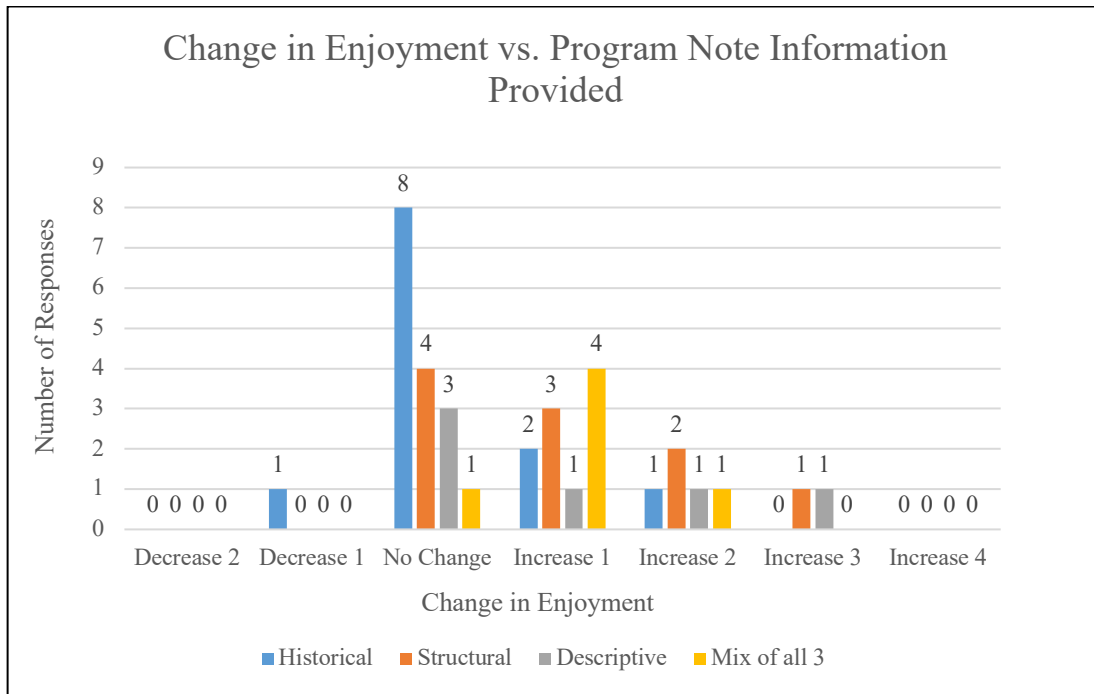
Example 8 shows that most participants (twelve of thirty-seven) were provided historical information in their program notes, however most of them (fifteen of thirty-eight) desired descriptive notes which were the least common category provided in program notes.²⁷ The information provided by speakers was more varied than what is typically included in a program note (compare Examples 8 and 9). Twelve participants reported that they received a mix of all three categories by a speaker while only seven participants were given a mix of all three in program notes. Similar to program notes, historical information was the most common type of information provided by speakers, followed by structural information, and finally descriptive information. Also similar between Examples 8 and 9 is the disparity between participants who

²⁷ The reason these totals are different is because one participant answered what they prefer to receive but did not answer what information they did receive.

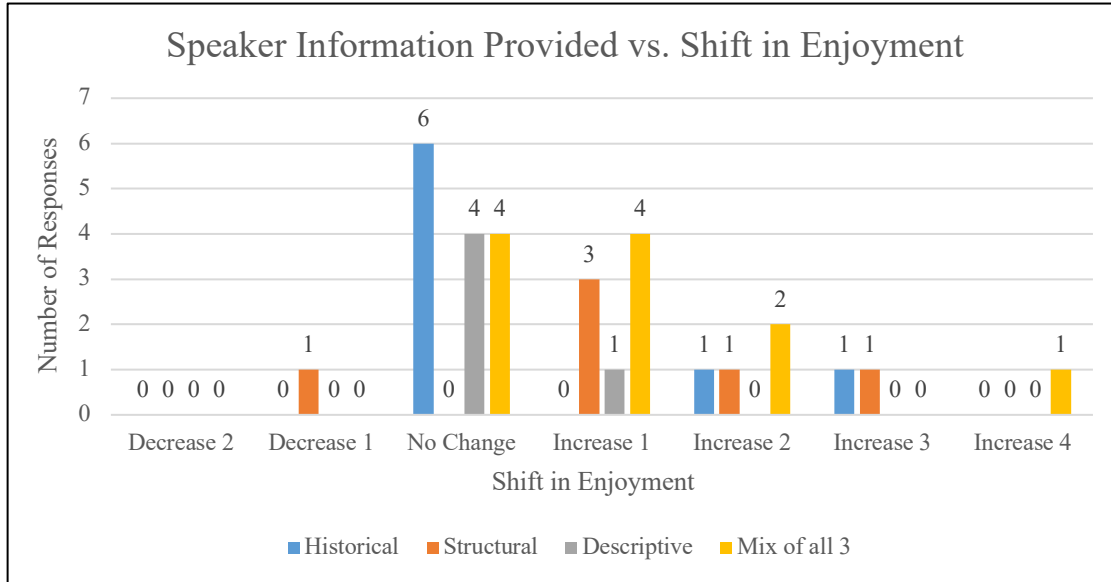
were provided descriptive information versus those who desired it; in fact, the difference is even larger in Example 9 than in Example 8.

Example 10 correlates participants' shifts in enjoyment based on the category of information provided within their program notes. Historical information, the most common, often did not lead to a shift in enjoyment. Structural and descriptive information either led to no shift in enjoyment or an increase by varying degrees. A mix of all three categories most often lead to an increase in enjoyment by one level.

Similar to Example 10, Example 11 shows that historical information provided by a speaker most often did not lead to an increase in enjoyment, although for a select number of participants it did increase the level of enjoyment by up to three. Structural information provided by a speaker, with one exception, led to an increase of enjoyment.



Example 10. Change in enjoyment vs. program note information.



Example 11. Change in enjoyment vs. information provided by a speaker.

Descriptive information, despite being the most desired type of information provided by speakers, most often lead to no change in enjoyment. A mix of all three categories, similar to when such a mix was provided in program notes, often lead to an increase in enjoyment. However, while a mix of all three categories often led to an increase of enjoyment by one level, it equally led to no shift in enjoyment.

Category of Information – Discussion

Based on the results, it appears that there is not a strong correlation between the type of information provided within the interpretive assistance and participants’ enjoyment. However, some small generalizations may be taken lightly and perhaps considered for further research. Historical information, when provided in program notes or by a speaker, often leads to no change in enjoyment, and rarely to an increase in enjoyment. This kind of information is commonly provided, perhaps because it provides context. However, historical information alone is not always the most enjoyable for audience members, but it is almost expected when interpretive

assistance is provided. If historical information were paired with either structural or descriptive information, it is more likely that audience members will experience an increase in enjoyment. If possible, creating a speech or writing program notes with all three types of information would also likely lead to an increase in enjoyment.

There are many possible reasons that the correlation between the category of information and enjoyment is weak. It is possible that the descriptions provided for each category of information may have resulted in a bias among participants. It may be difficult for participants to prefer information that “described technical aspects of how the piece was constructed” (structural) over information that “painted a picture, told a story, or used other kinds of metaphor” (descriptive). While many participants wanted to receive descriptive information, those who did most often did not experience a change in enjoyment. It is also possible that participants did not pay enough attention to the speaker or read the program notes thoroughly enough to understand what type of information was provided.

General Discussion

The results of this study do not align with the results of Margulis’ study. Most participants in Margulis’ study preferred to have no program notes, while some preferred the structural notes, and few preferred the dramatic descriptions. This is almost the opposite of the results of this study. Examples 8 and 9 show that participants in this study generally desired descriptive information or a mix of all three categories, while they desired structural information the least, with historical somewhere in between. Pairing historical information with either some structural or descriptive information will likely lead to a greater chance of increased enjoyment because historical information is expected, but including structural and descriptive information offer more than historical context. As I mentioned earlier, the setting of Margulis’ study was

different from that of a typical concert, and her program notes were starkly different than the notes usually provided at a concert, which likely affected the results of her study.

This study, similar to Margulis', has its limitations. Many participants did not correctly answer what kind of interpretive information they were provided, either due to confusion or possibly a desire to complete the survey faster. Indeed, participants may have misunderstood what constitutes program notes or a speaker. Even the term "pre-concert information" may have restricted participants to think only about information that was provided before the concert began. Similarly, the descriptions provided for each category of information may have skewed the results of what information participants prefer to receive.

It should also be noted that there may be a natural age bias in this study since it was conducted on a college campus and it consisted largely of underclassmen. However, knowing what the next generation of concert attendees prefer to experience at a concert is critical to the future of classical music organizations.

Despite these potential problems, significant results may still be drawn from the study. As seen in the literature review this study confirms that having a speaker almost always has a positive effect on audience enjoyment. Having a speaker helps the audience to feel included and welcomed, and not as though the performers are objects on a stage. Speaking from the stage allows performers to connect with their audience by telling anecdotes and expressing personal feelings. That is not to say that program notes have no value—after all, some concertgoers indicated they desire program notes alone, and the results of this study were restricted to non-musicians whose views may differ from the musicians in the audience—but the results of this study indicate that speaking to some extent during a concert, whether it is in addition to program notes or not, will likely lead to greater enjoyment.

There is no one factor that can guarantee an audience member will experience greater enjoyment than they anticipated at a classical music concert. However, this study shows that providing interpretive assistance, whether it be program notes, a speaker, or both, will likely either not effect audience members' enjoyment or increase their enjoyment. Furthermore, if audience members are at least neutral toward the concert before attending, they will have a greater chance of experiencing an increase in enjoyment. Determining how to get audiences to be neutral or interested before a concert is an area of research that should be explored more moving forward. Further research should also be conducted into what kind of information should be provided within interpretive assistance in order to understand how to increase audience enjoyment through that medium. Interpretive assistance, likely with a mix of different types of information, should always be provided at classical music concerts as one factor that can increase an audience member's understanding and enjoyment of the music.

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