

The Value and Values of Classical Music Radio

Excerpts from SRG | PRPD

Qualitative Research

The Value and Values of Classical Music Radio

About the Research

In 2002 the Station Resource Group (SRG) and Public Radio Program Directors (PRPD), in partnership with four public radio stations, examined the value and values of classical music radio. The objectives were:

- Explore how public radio's classical service can strengthen its value to and connection with listeners
- Gain a better understanding of the values and qualities current classical programming brings to those who like it best
- Create a vocabulary that clearly articulates those values and qualities

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting joined SRG, PRPD, and the stations in supporting the project through funding for a larger SRG initiative, *Charting the Territory*, of which this research was a part.

The study included 12 focus groups in 6 cities, with each group comprising listeners who preferred a full-time classical station. In four cities the classical station was a project partner – KBAQ Phoenix, KPAC San Antonio, WNED Buffalo, and WQED Pittsburgh. In two cities the classical station was a commercial station – KDFC San Francisco and KING Seattle, both of which have since become public radio operations.

George Bailey of Walrus Research conducted the focus groups and prepared a report of findings: <http://www.srg.org/chart/classicalreport.pdf>

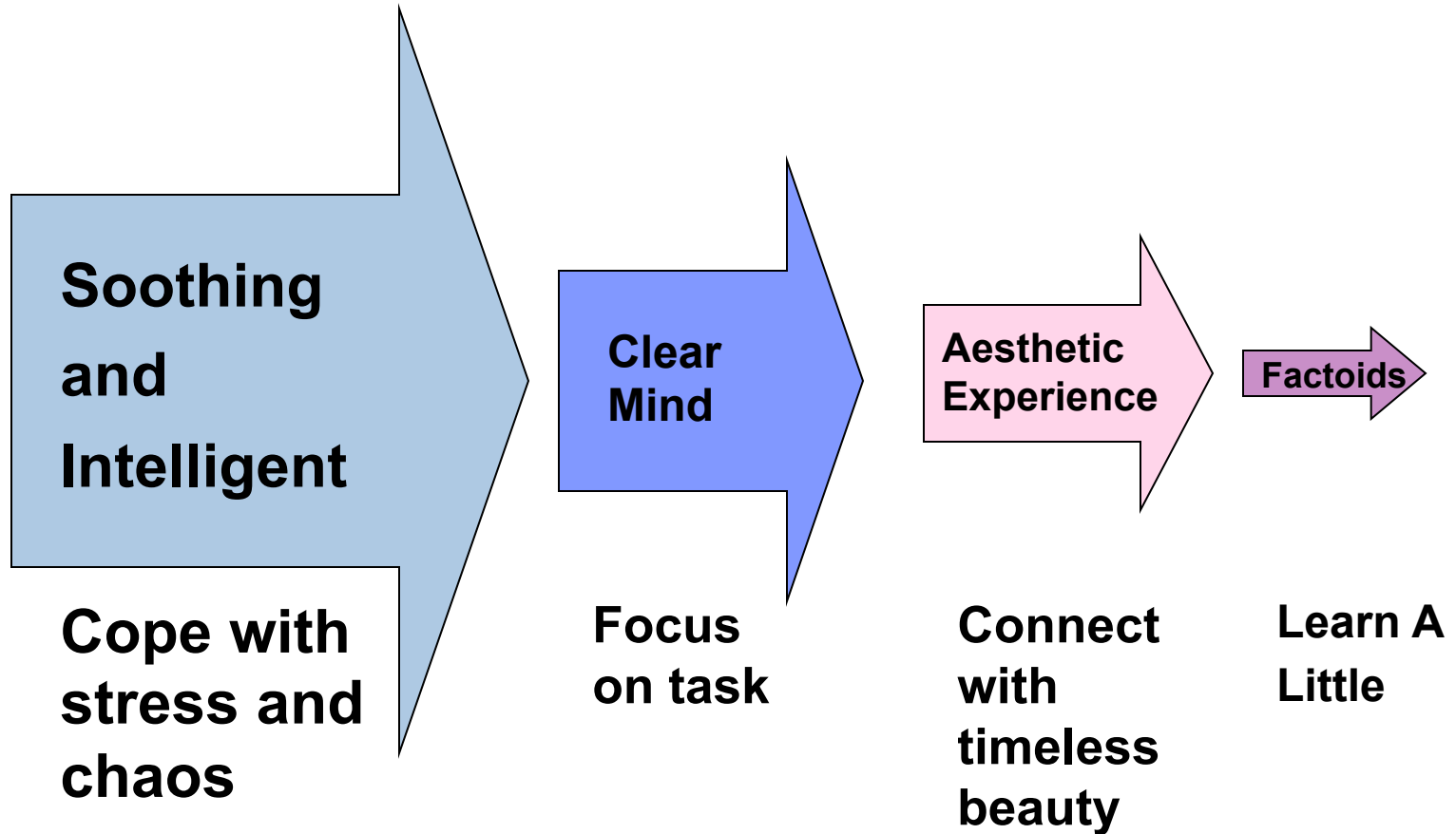
While the media environment and radio audience measurement have changed significantly since this study, our findings about the personal, emotional connections listeners have to classical music radio remain relevant and powerful.

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Key Findings

- The primary benefit provided by classical music radio is stress relief. Respondents told us over and over that they use and value the classical music format because “it is soothing.”
- However, stress relief alone is not a sufficient reason for classical listeners to use a music station. They told us that classical music is not only soothing but also intelligent, unlike music heard on smooth jazz or soft rock stations.
- The second major benefit provided by classical stations is clarity of mind. With a clear mind classical listeners can concentrate on a task and do better work, whether on the computer, in the studio or in the shop.
- Thirdly, classical music radio provides an escape from contemporary culture, which target listeners perceive as decadent and ugly. The classical format serves as a refuge that preserves the beauty and majesty of a better time.
- Most of our respondents use classical music to escape from the problems of the world. Accordingly, they mostly avoid the NPR newsmagazines. While NPR’s in-depth news attracts societally conscious listeners, it drives away most classical music listeners.
- Listeners who use commercial classical stations share the values of public radio classical listeners. They are the same kind of people. Classical listeners do not care whether their station is licensed as commercial or public. They care that it is classical. However, they object to announcements, promos, or pitch break that “sounds like a commercial” and thus disrupts their serenity.
- Classical listeners use the station for gratification of their private, internal needs. Yet through the station they identify with a small community of enlightened others. Having a classical station in the market means that there is still some hope for civilization.

Use and Gratification



Two franchises

- News — connect the dots in a complex world so that listeners can work toward solutions in their lives and their communities
- Classical — provide beauty and peace that raises listeners' spirits and offers a refuge in a stressful and difficult age

Different expectations

- Listeners choosing classical music on the radio come with different needs and expectations than listeners choosing news
- Classical and news listeners may share many values, but they are seeking different experiences from the two formats

Different moods

Even the people who listen to both formats give different reasons for listening to each

- Different moods they are in
- Different settings for their listening
- Different benefits they receive

The sensibilities of our listeners

- The relationship to music programming is emotional, inspirational, even spiritual
- It is experienced on a very personal, individual level
- It takes them out of their stressful lives and connects with something they find timeless and enduring

The sensibilities of our listeners

- The power and impact of classical music radio is shared by a great range of people – from those who know a lot about it to those who said they know little or nothing
- For all of them, we are
 - Above the fray
 - Different from most all their media experience
 - Of enduring quality and value

Value to the community

- Having a classical station makes a community more civilized
- Losing a classical station would mean personal disappointment and public embarrassment
- The leap from significance to institutionality is a long one for a radio station

Value to the community

Classical radio stations are seen by their listeners as:

- Cultural assets in their own right
- Portals to culture in the community
- Gateways to larger music and cultural institutions