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El Sistema as a Bourgeois Social Project: Class, Gender, and Victorian Values

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El Sistema as a Bourgeois Social Project: Class, Gender, and Victorian Values

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This article asks why classical music in the UK, which is consumed and practiced by the middle and upper classes, is being used as a social action program for working-class children in British music education schemes inspired by El Sistema. Through exploring the discourse of the social benefits of classical music in the late nineteenth century, a particular classed and gendered morality in relation to music can be traced that has parallels today. This paper argues, first, that classical music education fits with a middle-class disposition by rewarding investment in a future self; second, that it cultivates an ideal of hard work as a moral project; and third, that classical music allows young women to perform a “respectable” female identity. UK Sistema-inspired programs, in drawing on Victorian ideas of the “civilising influence” of culture, symbolise hope for the continuation of the bourgeois social project into the future.

Keywords: class, gender, Sistema, UK, inequality, classical music education.

One cannot talk seriously about El Sistema-inspired programs in the UK without talking about class. The enormous enthusiasm for Sistema as a concept around the world may be seen as a response to living in an unequal society. If inequality is the problem that is described by the word “class,” as Imogen Tyler (2015) notes, then it becomes clear that it is important to analyse Sistema programs in the UK through the lens of class. The language of “deprived communities” and “anti-social behaviour, drug abuse, and crime” (Arts Council England 2012) that is used to describe those targeted by these programs, while well-meaning, echoes common stigmatizing discourses about class that circulate within policy and the wider public sphere. Therefore, in order to understand the proliferation of Sistema-inspired programs in recent years, it is important to theorize them in relation to inequality, which includes the ways in which class is understood and lived. In order to contribute to this agenda, this article explores the significance of the fact that, in the UK, classical music is consumed and practiced by the middle and upper classes but is being used as a social action program for working-class

children and young people. To make this argument I draw on research into class and classical music in order to critically discuss British Sistema-inspired programs. Through re-reading the historical literature in this area and drawing on insights from research within the sociology of education as well as an ethnographic study into youth orchestras in the UK, I argue that Sistema programs in the UK should be read as a moral project in the form of a middle-class civilizing mission.

I begin by outlining the history and funding of Sistema-inspired programs in the UK, and contextualizing them within the UK's changing landscape of class and culture. However, as the late nineteenth century is a crucial period in setting up these patterns of class and culture, in the second section I briefly lay out a history of classed morality and classical music education in this period, re-interpreting existing literature to argue that classical music education at this time worked as a form of gendered discipline for young women. Returning to the present, I then examine the relationship between class and classical music education in the UK today. I suggest that there is a distinctly classed value system attached to classical music as a social practice, and that this value system can be linked with the middle class. I make this link through three key arguments: first, that classical music fits with a middle-class disposition of accumulating value for the future; second, that it cultivates an ideal of hard work as a moral project; and third, that classical music inculcates a performance of "respectable" femininity for young women (Skeggs 1997). Finally, I return to my discussion of Sistema-inspired programs in the UK, arguing that they perform a powerful symbolic role in the imagination of middle-class musical activists.

I draw on primary and secondary historical material, contemporary documents about Sistema-inspired projects in the UK, and original empirical data from an ethnographic study into young people aged 16–21 playing in youth orchestras in the south-east of England. The ethnography was carried out with four youth classical music groups in a county in the south of England: a youth choir, two youth orchestras, and a youth opera group. I participated as a musician in the two youth orchestras and the youth opera group and observed rehearsals and performances with the youth choir, over a period of 18 months. In addition, I carried out 37 semi-structured interviews and three focus groups with young people, as well as interviews

with nine of the adults involved in running these groups. The young people were mainly white and middle-class, with a handful of lower-middle-class participants and one working-class participant.¹ By contextualizing the material from this ethnographic study within the specific histories of class, gender, and classical music in the UK, the article provides a broad historical and social perspective that demonstrates how class operates in the discursive construction of classical music both among my participants and within Sistema programs today.

Sistema and class

In order to understand what kind of social project El Sistema is, we need to examine it in the context of how class is understood and lived in the UK. I will first introduce Sistema-inspired programs in the UK, before contextualizing them in local patterns of class and cultural taste.

The Venezuelan music education program El Sistema has attracted worldwide attention thanks to its claims to use classical music education to “rescue” or “save” vulnerable children (Tunstall 2012). According to El Sistema USA, there are now one thousand Sistema-inspired programs in 55 countries around the world (El Sistema USA). However, Geoffrey Baker’s recent study of El Sistema in Venezuela has called into question its characterization as a revolutionary movement, describing how it represents a regressive rather than progressive model of music education (Baker 2014).

Sistema-inspired programs in the UK have been set up in “area[s] identified as having a high proportion of [the] most disadvantaged children” (Arts Council England 2012, 11). In 2008, Sistema Scotland started its first project in Raploch, Stirling. In 2009, three projects in England (Liverpool, Lambeth, and Norwich) were set up, funded by the Department for Education under the name In Harmony Sistema England (IHSE). The program was expanded in 2012, with Arts Council England² – jointly with the Department for Education – funding four new projects at up to £575,000 each over three years, as well as continuing the funding for two of the existing projects (Arts Council England 2012). In 2014, a further £1.35 million was announced to cover the period 2015–18 (Arts Council England 2014).

As of November 2015, there are three projects running in Scotland (in Stirling,

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Glasgow, and Aberdeen) and seven projects across eight areas in England (Leeds, Nottingham, Lambeth, Stoke and Telford, Liverpool, Gateshead, and Norwich). All of the programs have explicitly stated links with El Sistema in Venezuela. Sistema Scotland and the Venezuelan project are “official partners,” and the former “seek[s] to benefit from the South Americans’ expertise, while adapting their methods to suit conditions in Scotland” (Sistema Scotland 2014). For the English programs, the funding guidelines for the 2012 funding round state: “Based on the principles of Venezuela’s inspirational El Sistema, In Harmony is a national program that aims to inspire and transform the lives of children in deprived communities, using the power and disciplines of community-based orchestral music-making” (Arts Council England 2012, 2).

Despite these affiliations with the Venezuelan model, the UK projects have some important differences. While the Venezuelan program runs separately from schools, in dedicated music schools or *núcleos* (Baker 2014), the UK programs are targeted directly at schools in disadvantaged areas. Music tuition often takes place on school premises rather than in dedicated venues, and in some programs several hours a week of curriculum time is devoted to it (In Harmony Liverpool 2015). An entire age group within a particular school tends to take part in the program, and there is an explicit focus on supporting children who are in danger of dropping out (Arts Council England 2012, 2), unlike in the Venezuelan program, which seems to have a high attrition rate (Baker 2014, 93). In addition, while both the Venezuelan and UK programs prioritise social outcomes in rhetoric, it appears that greater importance is given to these in the British programs. In Venezuela, Baker describes how musical outcomes are prioritized over wellbeing, with, for example, children getting up at 5 am and rehearsing till midnight in order to achieve a high musical standard (Baker 2014, 134). In the English programs, the IHSE funding guidelines state desired outcomes such as higher aspirations, better family relationships, and an “improved attitude to learning” (Arts Council England 2012, 6) and similarly, Sistema Scotland describes itself as “first and foremost a social program” (Sistema Scotland 2014). However, unlike the Venezuelan program, evaluations examining social outcomes such as confidence and wellbeing have suggested that the programs are effective for these purposes (Burns and Bewick 2015; Lord et al. 2015; Glasgow Centre for

Population Health 2015; GEN 2011). Finally, another important difference is in the numbers of children involved. The UK programs are much smaller than in Venezuela, with a few hundred children participating in each project to make a total of between 4000 and 5000 children, against a current official figure of 700,000 participants in Venezuela.³

This is clearly a program that seeks to make a class-based intervention. However, it does so without naming class, instead using the language of “deprived” or “disadvantaged” children and areas (Arts Council England, 2012). Current sociological understandings of class follow Pierre Bourdieu's theorization in assuming that class is not simply an economic category, but that people's cultural tastes and practices form part of their class position and identity (Bourdieu 1984). This approach draws on a model of different forms of capital — economic, social, cultural, symbolic — that can be passed across generations in order to safeguard privilege (Bourdieu 1986). This is a relational understanding of class rather than a hierarchical one; people formulate their class identities through distinguishing themselves from others (Skeggs 2010). Furthermore, contemporary sociological theorizations of class are attentive to how social class inflects other social identity categories. This means we need to understand, in particular, gender identities together with class (and race); the expectations and possibilities involved in being female or male are different according to one's class position. Finally, class is always being produced and reproduced; it is not a static descriptor, but an active process. By analysing IHSE with the tools and insights offered by this sociological perspective, this article suggests that Sistema programs are contributing to the ways in which class is being re-inscribed in the UK in the twenty-first century.

There has been a resurgence in public discussions of class in the UK in recent years, as inequality has grown as a result of the global financial crisis of 2008 and subsequent implementation of austerity measures including large-scale cuts to government services since 2010. Class formations are changing; Savage (2015) suggests that the upper-middle class in the UK is drawing away from the rest of the middle class, which has struggled to retain its position since 2008. In addition, he argues there is a new “precariat” class that moves in and out of short-term, low-paid employment within an increasingly precarious economy (Savage 2015). However,

despite these emergent re-groupings, the middle class still retains shared characteristics that can be traced from its formation in the early nineteenth century to today. One example is boundary-drawing around its spaces, through processes such as suburbanization (Butler and Robson 2003; Jackson and Benson 2014). A second example, and one of the consistent characteristics across different middle-class fractions in the past and today, as Reay et al. (2011) argue, is that middle-class groups reproduce their privilege through education. Education — including music education — is, therefore, a key site where class is reproduced or contested.

While the middle class has become increasingly aware of its less-than-secure position in recent years, stigmatization of working-class people in the UK has been growing (Tyler 2013). Demonised as “chavs”⁴ on television and in mainstream media, negative attitudes towards working-class people are now one of the few socially acceptable forms of prejudice in the UK (Jones 2012). Particular types of stigma are reserved for working-class women (Skeggs 1997; Tyler 2008). Reality television abounds with programs showing the correction, and sometimes humiliation, of working-class women who are deemed to lack the correct embodied cultural tastes, such as *What Not to Wear* (Wood and Skeggs 2011), as well as the increasing stigmatization of people on benefits through the new TV genre of “poverty porn” (Jensen 2014). This prejudice has material effects, as negative judgements of working class people affect their access to and experiences of education, the labour market, and public space (Ashley et al. 2015; Friedman et al. 2015; Loveday 2015; Reay 2004).

Cultural tastes map clearly onto class in the UK.⁵ Extensive recent research shows how “culture is clearly hierarchical and exclusionary” (O’Brien and Oakley 2015, 7), in terms of both production (or participation) and consumption (Warwick Commission 2015). Notably for the purposes of this article, Bennett et al. in a major study of cultural consumption in the UK, found that classical music was exclusively consumed by the middle class (2008, 251). They found that it was only middle- or upper-class people who said they listened to classical music, and concluded from analyzing the qualitative data in their mixed-methods study that classical music is the only genre of music that still carries cultural capital (93). They also found that 23% of their sample strongly disliked classical music (79), showing that it carries

some weight of antagonism for a significant minority of the UK population.

Similar trends can be seen in relation to who plays classical music through examining tertiary education. A study of 2007–11 application data for music and music technology degrees in the UK (excluding conservatoires) demonstrates that there are clear class patterns in the composition of those studying music degrees at university (which tend to have a large classical music component) and those studying music technology; the former are predominantly middle-class while the latter tend to be working-class boys (Born and Devine 2015). From the limited data available, it appears this trend extends to conservatoires (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2013; Scharff, Kokot, and Blamey 2014).

Therefore, it can be seen that classical music in the UK is a predominantly middle-class taste and practice. There may be many reasons for this, and certainly economic access is one of them. However, as I will argue, it is not the only one. I am suggesting that there is also, still, congruence between ways of learning classical music and middle-class culture.

The Victorians in the present: institutionalising bourgeois values

The idea of bringing “culture” – in this case, classical music – to working-class people in order to bring about positive social outcomes is far from new. In this section I will briefly examine the nineteenth-century antecedents of this belief in order to explore possible parallels with Sistema-inspired programs today. In nineteenth-century Britain and its colonies, using culture as a tool of government for its supposed “civilizing effects” was a widespread, if contested, idea (Bennett 1998, 110). As Bennett describes, in this period museums, galleries, libraries, and other forms of cultural provision were seen as a “civilizing influence” that was “expected to give rise to social benefits in view of the changed forms of behaviour that it was expected would result from exposure to it” (122). The Romantic ideal of “the influence of the fine arts in humanising and refining, in purifying the thoughts and raising the sources of gratification in man” (125) would, it was assumed, teach the poor to learn voluntary self-regulation and moral discipline. Culture would work on the poor from within, changing their very character.

The classed morality of this period holds important clues for understanding how

class plays out in classical music education today. A powerful bourgeois value system had emerged in the UK by the mid- to late nineteenth century which included sexual and moral restraint; rational labour or “the gospel of work”; domesticity; accumulation; thrift and “time-thrift”; punctuality; and all of these values performed with seriousness or earnestness (Moretti 2014; Davidoff 2002; Thompson 1967; McClintock 1995). Time-thrift (Thompson 1967, 78) is the process of treating time as currency which can be “wasted” or “spent,” which is intrinsic to the Puritan work ethic (Weber 2001 [1904]). Pre-industrial practices such as “Saint Monday” (taking Monday off, probably to get drunk) declined as timepieces became more widely available during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Thompson 1967; Davidoff 2002; Gay 1998, 13). Thrift, while taking on a moral dimension, also served an ideal of accumulating and storing wealth for the future.

Music, among other cultural forms, was perceived to help in cultivating these values. However, its role was a contested one, given its sensuous, embodied nature and therefore its potential to lead people into “degeneracy” (McClintock 1995, 46). Certain types of music formed part of the “rational recreation” movement (Bailey 1986), which promoted a more productive use of the working class's leisure time — or, put more bluntly, tried to keep them out of the pub. Rational recreation was linked to a particular morality around a gendered understanding of sexuality that centred on female respectability, performed through embodied restraint or control. It drew on the “cult of domesticity” that followed the emergence of the bourgeois family in the first half of the nineteenth century, and involved the separation of the household and workplace (Davidoff 2002, 181). The role of housewife was invented; it first appeared in the census in 1851 (Gay 1998). Women's successful performance of the role of refined, virtuous mother, daughter, and wife became the linchpin of this new bourgeois identity.

This middle-class value system was read onto music, but within these discourses music had a contested moral status. Some of these contestations were put forward in an enormously popular book by Reverend Haweis, entitled “Music and Morals.” First published in 1871 and reprinted many times, this book argued for “the music of the great composers (i.e. the Austro-German canon) as truly exemplary, morally as well as musically,” and representing “an uplifting and worthwhile pursuit” (Wright

2013, 32).⁶ Haweis was writing against a gendered and classed discourse of music-as-entertainment. For example, single women who attended London's music hall venues were assumed to be prostitutes (Hoher 1986).

Music was also harnessed to serve the “cult of domesticity,” as described by John Hullah, a friend of Charles Dickens and, for a time, inspector of music in teacher training colleges:

The more general diffusion of musical skills [would mean that] order, cleanliness, mutual forbearance would take — must take — the place of slovenliness, filth and mutual recrimination; and for some hours in the week the working man might exchange for the hell of the gin-shop for that image and foretaste, if such be possible, of heaven — a well-ordered, cheerful home (in Cox 1993, 33).

In this quote, alcohol, “filth,” and disharmony are positioned against ordered domesticity, where music would take the place of less salubrious practices. The “working man's” wife is conspicuous by her absence, but she was, of course, responsible for maintaining this “well-ordered, cheerful home.” The implication is that if this man's wife can entertain him with music at home, then the couple will stop arguing and he will no longer need to go out to the gin-shop. The stigmatizing narrative is glaringly obvious; for Hullah, the working class home is synonymous with “slovenliness, filth and mutual recrimination.” The corrective powers of music to improve family life are, I will argue, still an important idea in Sistema programs in the UK today.

Social reformers thus saw music as having powers of redemption for the working class. Consequently, music education was a deeply contested site, rehearsing debates around who should, could, or needed to learn music. Music education was frequently used by middle-class moral entrepreneurs as a tool to rescue the working class from their moral torpor. Inscribed with the virtues of hard work and their associated moral connotations of respectability, classical music managed to escape charges of sensuality and emotional excess and so was salvaged by the middle class as an acceptable cultural form, even for young women.

Disciplining the female body into respectability

In the late nineteenth century, the rapid expansion of the lower-middle class meant that boundary-drawing between classes intensified (Gay 1998, 7). This was also the period when music education was institutionalized. The Royal Academy of Music had been set up in 1822, but the rest of the Royal Colleges of Music as well as the Guildhall School of Music and Drama were established between 1872 and 1893, as well as the grade exam boards, which established a system of music exams that was influential in the lives of the participants in my research today.⁷ The value-system described above became institutionalized into music education. This can be most clearly seen in the gendered composition of those seeking to access these institutions: 90% of candidates for grade exams in the early years were girls and young women (Ehrlich 1985, 118–9). For the conservatoires, a pattern of two or three times as many women as men prevailed.⁸

One argument put forward to explain this preponderance of women attending conservatoires and taking grade exams is to suggest that these institutions were “little more than finishing schools” for young women (Herbert 2014). However, rather than seeing them as a failed version of the systematic training for professional performers that the Royal College of Music was set up to provide, I would suggest that there was a pattern of gendered training occurring within music education in this period. As Wright (2013, 276) suggests, the high number of women entering these institutions was because music teaching was one of the few respectable professions open to women. However, music education was important not only for employment but also as a way to perform middle-class respectability.

In short, these institutions served a commercial demand for training respectable femininity. For the lower-middle class, in particular, respectability was a major concern because of their closer proximity to the working class. The discourses around classical music as morally “exemplary” and “uplifting” (32) were very convenient for the enormous emerging market in grade exams and conservatoire music education. Indeed, this musical practice lent itself extraordinarily well to the role of moral uplift through its requirement of sustained, detailed, daily disciplining of the body. The instruments and the repertoire require a high skill level that draws on thousands of hours of repetitive, disciplined work in order to render them even

passably well. The aesthetic of classical music is thus dependent on years, even decades, of lessons and daily practice.

Notwithstanding how important it was for women to have the possibility of economic independence through this route at a time when most professions were closed to them, I want to suggest that music education in this period reflected and reproduced boundaries between classes. It did so through the requirements for embodied control and restraint in both classical music and female respectability. Classical music required not only the strict disciplining of the body, but also effacing the body's sexuality in order to construct music as a respectable occupation for women. This disciplining needed to be particularly strict given the still-contested status of music in relation to bourgeois morality, and the sensuous possibilities of the practice, as revealed by Leppert (1995) in his reading of the many nineteenth-century paintings of music lessons. As Lucy Green (1997) describes, while women singing or playing instruments for domestic use affirms their femininity, their bodies still intrude uncomfortably into the frame: “history has dictated [the male instrumentalists'] normality, and they are relatively transparent: we do not have to listen to a man playing the drums; we can listen to the music played on the drums.” For women performers, however, their body competes with the autonomy of the music (79–80). Green is describing, of course, a respectable, bourgeois woman. Working-class women would struggle to achieve even this status, being instead associated with the “slovenliness and filth” (connoting sexual dirtiness as well) which John Hullah imagines above.

For women, therefore, respectability and propriety were at play in ideals of musical standards of ability. Mastery of one's instrument denoted the capacity for embodied restraint, rational labor, and time-thrift; these bourgeois values became audible in the successful performance of classical music, and could then be examined and certified, and — if necessary — commodified in the form of piano lessons. In this way, proficiency in classical music was institutionalized as a boundary marker between respectable, middle-class women, and their “degenerate” working-class others who lacked this refinement. As popular Victorian author John Claudius Loudon explained, “women's virtuosity lay in her containment, like the plant in the pot” (quoted in Davidoff 2002, 191). The juxtaposition of “virtuosity,” a word

associated with musical practice, and “containment” suggests that this bodily disposition was a performance that could be learned by young women who desired to demonstrate their respectability.

In short, classical music was a way of performing the female respectability that formed a crucial marker of bourgeois identity. Class, gender, and music education were therefore intertwined in Victorian music education, and are still today.

Classical music and class in the UK today

The idea of the arts as having a civilizing effect still has considerable currency, at least within the discursive construction of the role and significance of the arts and culture within policy and public debate. Sir Peter Bazalgette, while head of Arts Council England, recently referred to the “civilising influence of the arts” (Bazalgette 2014). Similarly, the former culture secretary Tessa Jowell argued that “[e]ngagement with culture can help alleviate this poverty of aspiration” (Jowell 2004). In this section I draw on data from my ethnography of youth classical music groups to explore the legacy that nineteenth-century institutions and values have left on music education today. I argue that these classed and gendered values are still present in classical music education in three key ways. First, there is a fit between classical music culture and middle-class dispositions, specifically the orientation to strategies of long-term investment in cultural capital as a way to accumulate value for the future; second, the disposition required to learn classical music fits in with a value-system where hard work has a *moral* significance; and third, classical music still works as a signifier of respectable femininity for young women today. Using classical music, which is closely entwined with the values and history of the middle class, as a social project for working-class communities can therefore be seen as a project to reform working-class children and their families. Classical music is used to make them resemble middle-class young people who play this music. This teaches them to value middle-class culture, and suggests that in their difference from middle-class young people, they themselves are deficient and need to change through the development of “character” (Hunt 2014). In line with the individualizing nature of educational and social strategies aimed at working-class children and families, such interventions involve a displacement and negation of broader social structural

problems such as high levels of inequality, a stratified education system, and low pay and insecure labour conditions for working-class people. Despite enormously touching individual stories of transformation, the overall effect of Sistema programs risks being a perpetuation of the “powerlessness and educational worthlessness” (Reay 2009, 25) that repeated studies of working-class experiences of education have revealed.

Researchers such as Archer, Hollingworth, and Halsall (2007) and Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009, 2010), among others, have drawn attention to the “fit” between education and middle-class culture that occurs on various levels, such as the content of the curriculum⁹ and the modes of language, dress, and bodily comportment required, which concord with what is normal for the middle class at home. This large body of literature is highly relevant to understanding Sistema-inspired programs in the UK. This fit between mainstream education and middle-class culture extends to classical music, where, for example, the necessity of recognizing institutional authority (such as teachers and conductors) and the lack of recognition afforded to vernacular forms of culture may have the effect of making some working-class pupils feel devalued and alienated. The sources of value they draw on to construct their identities are not ones that are recognized by this system (Archer et al., 2007).

The middle-class culture that classical music represents and cultivates includes both cultural tastes and a particular value system. This value system varies across class fractions (Barlow et al. 1992) but shares some characteristics. Reay et al. (2011, 6) argue that a “bourgeois self” that encompasses a “particular set of values, commitments and moral stances” has remained relatively constant over time (Reay et al. 2011, 6). This set of middle-class values differs from the values that have been found to be important to working-class people, such as communalism, egalitarianism, anti-pretentious humor, dignity, honor, loyalty, and caring, as well as pride in and commitment to employment (see for example Skeggs 2005; Winlow 2001; Stahl 2014).

There is, I suggest, a fit between classical music education and the values and morals of the “bourgeois self.” One of these morals is accumulating and storing value over time (Barlow et al., 1995). Those in the middle-class who fail to learn this lesson risk losing their class position. The middle class are characterized by a “fear of

falling” (Ehrenreich 1990), and so working hard, thinking ahead, and planning for inheritance are important lessons for middle-class young people to learn. This is not to say that working-class people do not plan for the future; but it is not an essential lesson for them, as it is for the middle class, as they have less to lose.

Classical music education is a way of learning the habit of long-term accumulation of value. Some of the young people in my study said that a belief in long-term investment was something they learnt explicitly from playing classical music. Alice told me that her mother (a dentist) started her on the violin in order to teach her the discipline of practicing every day and learning that long-term investment will pay off.¹⁰ As Alice narrated it, learning this value-system was of primary importance to her mother; learning to play music was secondary. Eighteen-year-old viola player Bethan provided a similar narrative. She told me:

Well I guess everyone here [in this youth orchestra] is very disciplined, you know, they're all clearly working very hard and going to have bright futures [laughs]. And I think — I've been practicing the violin every day since I was six — not that I practice every day [laughs] but it's a good way to get into that kind of mindset where you just keep going and what you do pays off.

I was struck by her earnest confidence in the “bright futures” that were in store for her and her fellow musicians. Indeed, she was about to start a degree at Oxford University, so this confidence was by no means unfounded. She went on to describe that this mindset of “what you do pays off” helped with schoolwork as well. Indeed, all of the participants in my research expected to go to university — usually high status universities or music conservatoires. This disposition of working hard and keeping going in their musical learning fitted well with a habit of working hard at school and expecting to do well there. Similarly, Mark Rimmer's research into the IHSE programs in Norwich, Newcastle, and Stoke on Trent demonstrates that the children who did well in these music education programs tended to be those who also enjoyed school and achieved high grades. For example, children who performed well in IHSE programs were those who also said they enjoyed doing their homework in their free time (Rimmer 2014).

Bethan's description of the mindset required for success in classical music is more relevant to middle-class young people whose efforts are indeed more likely to be rewarded within the fields of education and employment, as indicated by the

middle-class dominance in high status universities and professional occupations in the form of the “class ceiling” (Friedman, Laurison, and Miles 2015). As Skeggs describes, “investment ... must be about a projection into the future of a self/space/body with value. We only make investments in order to accrue value when we can conceive of a future in which that value can have a use” (Skeggs 2003, 146). In order to invest in the daily labor which classical music requires, you (or your parents) have to be able to imagine a future self who will benefit from the labour you are putting in (Wagner 2015). This is a classed resource. The middle class are buffered by material and other resources in the present, so they are able to project themselves into the future; there is a sense of entitlement and “assured optimism” (Forbes and Lingard 2015) about their future. Yet for those in less privileged positions where material hardship is an everyday reality, it is harder to project oneself into the future with such assurance. Therefore, for working-class young people it may make less sense to invest in a future self who will be able to play the violin in ten or fifteen years' time. This is not just about being able to imagine a future self, but also having faith in that future self so that it makes sense to invest in him or her. It requires believing in a world that rewards your hard work and will recognise your achievements. It requires faith in the current social order as being fair and meritocratic. And it requires a belief in the tradition and history from which this music has emerged. For these reasons, as well as the reasons of taste described above, an investment in learning classical music may not make sense to some young working-class people.

Classical music and the “gospel of work”

This disposition of accumulation over time requires disciplined labor or the “gospel of work” (Gay 1998), a value beloved of the late Victorians. “Rational labor” versus idleness was a crucial axis around which the emerging middle class asserted its identity in the mid- to late nineteenth century (McClintock 1995, 119). This is not an argument about whether it is a good idea to work hard or not, but rather about work taking on a *moral* significance. Work becomes a means through which an individual can assert their value as a person. This has become a particularly powerful discourse in the UK in recent years, with David Cameron's repeated assertions about “hard-

working families” contributing towards a “hard work zeitgeist” (Mendick et al. 2015) and an increasing stigmatization of those claiming welfare (Baumberg, Bell, and Gaffney 2012).

Class is about distinction, or distinguishing oneself from others. For middle-class people who are close to the boundary between the middle and working classes, and are therefore at risk of being misidentified and stigmatized, middle-class values need to be performed more actively. By contrast, for those who are securely middle-class, hard work and disciplined labor have until recent years been less important, since their value as a person and the reproduction of their privilege have been relatively assured. (This is changing; as Savage (2015) describes, insecurity is now reaching most middle-class groups. Concomitantly, as Mendick et al. (2015) describe, the discourse of hard work is becoming universal.)

These differences were evident in the ways in which young people in my study talked about practicing their instruments. Privately-educated violinist Sam told me that he had never liked practicing the violin: “to be honest, if I practice an hour a day, I feel like that's been a good day for me.” Sam and other privately educated young men did not feel the need to demonstrate their hard-working ethos. By contrast, trombone player Jonathan, from a lower-middle-class background, described himself as lazy, even though he spent eight hours a day in a practice room with his trombone. “Every performance I do I'm not happy with. I think every solo performance I've done is not good at all.” As a result, he felt he constantly had to push himself to work harder. Similarly, Andy, from a working-class background, told me that when he plays with other musicians who are better players than him, “I really get down on myself ... I really beat myself up about it. But I think that's how you get better.” While this drive may be common to many classical musicians, it is exacerbated for those whose sense of self and ability to fit in — or not — in the *social* world of classical music is linked to their musical proficiency. This “laziness,” demonstrated in level of musical ability, carries a heavy weight because it is their hard work (or lack of it) that will give them access to the middle-class space of classical music, and will confirm their difference from the supposedly “chavvy,” feckless working class.

Classical music education is an ideal way in which to demonstrate disciplined labor because the repertoire and the instruments used to play this repertoire —

particularly the most prestigious instruments such as violin — take years of investment in order to be able to play well. The powerful tradition of classical music, in particular fidelity to composer's intentions and the written score (Goehr 1992), fixes these practices in place. Given the stigmatizing labels of fecklessness and laziness to which working class people are subject (Jensen 2014), the requirement for hard work over a long period of time appears to be part of the motivation for using classical music as a social action program for working class children.¹¹

Learning embodied restraint and gendered respectability

A further link between classical music and middle-class values today can be seen in the gendered respectability that classical music still signifies for young women. Historically, female sexuality was a marker of class in the Victorian period. Proximity to working-class-ness still risks attracting a signifier of sexual degeneracy, which was, and still is, a stigmatizing status that denotes lack of value (Mckenzie 2015). Middle-class young women distance themselves from these signifiers in order to retain their distinction (Maxwell and Aggleton 2010; Griffin et al. 2012).

The problem with trying to identify respectability is that it only becomes visible when it is transgressed. There were very few transgressions in my ethnography because all of the young women had taken on a respectable feminine identity, such as through avoiding dress that might be seen as sexualized or excessive. Where transgressions did occur they were subtle. For example, during a concert in which I was playing with one of the youth orchestras in my study, the girls were required to wear all black, with long skirts or trousers; but, the organisers told us “since it's so hot you don't need to wear stockings”; the assumption was that stockings would be part of our usual concert attire, covering our legs. We all wore modest, elegant clothing except one young woman who stood out for having very high wedge heels and bright peroxide blonde hair. These differences operated as transgressions within this social environment because they are signifiers that are attached to working-class femininity (Tyler 2008; Skeggs 1997). It was only through the difference of her appearance that the similarity of the rest of us became visible. In this way, symbols of taste appear neutral to those who inhabit them as their 'norm' but as Skeggs (2003, 101) describes, they operate as 'condensed class signifiers'. Within

educational institutions, Archer et al. (2007) demonstrate the subtle ways in which pupils are regulated and policed according to the ideal of ‘respectable’ middle-class femininity.

The only time that this association of respectability with classical music was made explicit was in an interview with the only working-class participant in my research. Andy's position as a classical musician from an objectively working-class background was an unusual one. As a result of this, he often saw the classical music world differently to his peers. He would notice and comment on aspects of this world that were taken for granted by his white middle-class friends. His perspective therefore often revealed alternative ways of reading the cultural world of classical music. When I asked him to tell me about ways in which he thought his classical music friends were similar to him, he answered:

Andy: I think music is ... often linked to, like, not even intelligence level, but kind of a moral level of what is right and what is wrong, do you know what I mean?

Anna: I'm not sure...

Andy: Like I mean chav culture has a different set of morals as, like, white middle class, and I think — you know I very much consider myself — even though my parents are very working class, all my university friends would say, oh you're completely middle class...

Anna: And so in the way it's a middle class morality, what would be the substance of that, like is this about kind of...?

Andy: I think it's about common ground, common interests. So music obviously but then the people who do music often have the same kind of outlook on things, the same kind of moral outlook.

Andy's emphasis on this common ground he shares with his classical music friends can be read as a move towards dis-identifying with the stigmatized working-class identity of the “chav.” He does this through emphasizing his musical taste and proximity to “authorized” culture, while distancing himself from “chav culture.” He went on to describe this outlook as a “moral understanding of what is correct behaviour and what is OK.” This perspective was also racialized: the sense of right and wrong that he felt was linked to classical music was part of what he called his “white middle-class morality,” which drew on Christian values. When I asked him to explain what he meant by “chav culture,” he eventually stated that “moral is the only

way I can explain it, in that I see ... [a] sort of sexual promiscuity.” Hence for him, at least, classical music carries an implicit moral code that sets it apart from “chav culture.” These markers of class have material effects in confirming the value of some and the lack of value of others, for example with professionals making judgements about working-class girls' sexuality which works to legitimize the value of those who possess it, and delegitimize those who don't (McKenzie 2015, 51; End Violence Against Women coalition 2015). Classical music is a way for girls and young women to perform these appropriate and sanctioned modes of femininity.

Behavioural change or structural change?

I have given three examples of ways in which Sistema-inspired programs in the UK fit with middle-class culture: through middle-class dispositions of accumulating value, a morality of hard work, and a “respectable” femininity. As such, I have argued that these programs contribute to broader processes in which working-class people are stigmatized and marked as lacking through conveying an implicit message that working-class children need to change their behavior to become more middle-class. While public investment in working-class areas is to be warmly welcomed, it is vital to look underneath the surface and ask critical questions about these interventions. In tracing the historical antecedents of music education and locating their classed and gendered dimensions, we can see how the Sistema programs come with a moral weight and continue an historic trend of using culture to “civilize” the working class.

For example, the guidance notes for applicants to the 2012 funding round for new IHSE projects detail the outcomes that will be assessed for these projects, which include “avoidance of anti-social behaviour, drug abuse, and crime” and an “improved attitude to learning.” For parents, one projected outcome is “improved relationships with their children,” and for children, “improved relationships with their parents” (Arts Council England 2012, 6).¹² Clearly, then, family life is one of the areas that Sistema projects are intended to intervene in. This urge reflects an assumption that working-class families are “troubled” and need to be fixed through publicly funded programs; this has been a tenet of government policy over the last twenty years, culminating in the recent creation of a “Troubled Families Unit”

(Gillies 2014). Working-class family relationships are seen to require intervention in a way that middle-class ones are not. The similarity with Victorian ideals can be seen through comparison with John Hullah's vision, discussed above. From these guidelines, then, a stigmatizing picture emerges of the kinds of families children in the program are imagined to come from. By contrast, in the Suzuki method, a music education method associated with middle-class “intensive parenting” (Hays 1998), while parental involvement is required, it is in order for the child's learning to be supported (Yoshihara 2008; British Suzuki Institute 2015). For middle-class children, the goals are musical, while for working-class children and their families, the goals are moral or behavioural.¹³

A further outcome listed for IHSE projects for parents are “higher expectations of and aspirations for their children” (Arts Council England 2012, 6). The inclusion of “aspiration” is important, as it asserts a belief in meritocracy and the assumption that social mobility depends on individual effort (Littler 2013). However, this ideal, which is widespread within contemporary public discourse in the UK, ignores the evidence that many working-class young people in fact *do* have high aspirations (St Clair and Benjamin 2011). This emphasis on aspiration ignores the barriers that working-class people face in access to higher education and professional occupations.

Drawing these threads together, a broader picture emerges of a complex, contested, but powerful history of classical music practice working towards the reproduction of bourgeois values. This brings me back to the question posed in the introduction: what is the significance of the fact that this is a genre of music which is consumed and practiced primarily by the middle and upper classes but is being used as a social action program for the working class?

Performing a fantasy future

In order to answer this question, it is important to understand why Sistema, as an idea, has caught the imagination of middle-class musical activists. The historical continuity between the late nineteenth century and today of ideas of culture as a civilizing influence sheds light on the symbolic meaning of classical music education, and the reasons why Sistema has become such a powerful idea. Young people playing classical music are a powerful symbol of the middle-class values described

above, and this has helped IHSE to attract funding at a time of wider cuts to music education.

The late Victorian era, which I have described as a crucial phase in setting up the music education institutions that continue to shape the classical music world today, was characterized by looking towards the bodies of young people as symbolizing the health of the nation and hope for the continuation of Empire into the future (Pryke 1998). Youth movements around bodily discipline and health were springing up at this time. While the lower-middle-class girls were doing their piano exams, their brothers were joining the Boys' Brigade (established in 1883) and then the Scouts (established in 1908), organizations which combined military practices such as drill with reinvigorating the national body politic through the bodies of boys (Proctor 1998).

The ethos of the Scouts included “be prepared,” as well as “be cheerful” (Baden-Powell 2005 [1908]). These instructions resonated with many moments in my research with youth orchestras and choirs. We too had to “be prepared” with our pencils at the ready, and “be cheerful” to demonstrate that music really is fun and good for young people. Especially with the younger age groups, exhortations from adults to “look like you're having fun” were common. In a rehearsal with one youth orchestra, our conductor jovially mocked us for looking glum; around me I could see slumped bodies and zoned-out expressions, amidst a palpable mood of low energy, frustration, and boredom.

Why, then, was it important for us to look like we were having fun? These frequent appeals to young people to show enjoyment they clearly were not feeling suggests a parallel with the Scouts: young people playing classical music symbolize the hope that their elders have for the future of our society. In short, they represent the continuation of the bourgeois social project into the future. The fantasy projected onto these young people is of a world where young people are still playing classical music, and therefore carrying forward the values and practices as distilled into these treasures of our civilization (the musical works) into the future. This belief helps to bring into effect the world that is being imagined. The investment that has been made into In Harmony El Sistema England, at a time when music education funding generally was being cut by nearly a third in England (Department for

Education 2011), may be understood in light of the powerful symbolic role that classical music still carries in the bourgeois imagination.

We also need to understand who is doing this advocacy and reproductive work. In my research, I found that my participants' imagined futures could be clearly mapped onto their class and gender positions. While the young men from established middle-class backgrounds would only pursue a career in classical music if they were promised a position of status (for example, a conductor or composer), by contrast, it was young women from all class positions, as well as lower-middle-class young men, who most fervently wanted to pursue a career in classical music. This gendered pattern echoes the Victorian practice of young women using classical music to perform gendered respectability, and for the young men, using classical music as a tool for social mobility. By contrast, for the established middle-class young men, participating in classical music would endow them with valuable social and cultural capital (including networks of privately-educated friends and contacts), but they would eventually decide not to become a musician but rather study history, business, or law at a prestigious university. They seemed to realize, on some level, that classical music as a profession would not allow them to retain their social and economic position, unlike their sisters or lower-middle-class friends.

One of the roles that these young women and lower-middle-class young men take on, if or when their performing career is blocked, is to educate the next generation of classical musicians. The proliferation of programs such as IHSE and London Music Masters can be seen therefore as providing employment for lower-middle-class musicians in disciplining the working class. This model brings to mind the UK government-run Youth Training Scheme in the 1980s, which provided white-collar jobs for the lower-middle class, running employment schemes for the working class (Finn 1987). Similarly, Sistema programs not only ensure moral discipline for the working class but also provide employment for the oversupply of classical music graduates.

Conclusion: Reproducing the bourgeois ideal

On one level, the purpose of Sistema-inspired programs in the UK is to reproduce the ideals for which classical music stands: a morality of hard work, respectability, and

accumulation for the future. However, in doing so, they also legitimize common-sense understandings of who is valued and who is not. Stigmatization of working-class people is compounded by the discourses around these programs, and by the assumption that their own culture is inadequate and they need middle-class culture brought to them. In this way, Sistema-inspired programs, though they may be a response to living in an unequal society, may end up reinforcing the very inequality that motivates their creation by bolstering ideas about the reasons why people are poor, in particular the idea that the reason they are poor is because of their behavior and their culture.

While evaluations of Sistema-inspired programs in the UK have found a wide range of positive outcomes, analysis of these programs needs to look at their wider social implications as well as the effects on the very small numbers of children that are able to participate in them. It is also important to pay attention to the lack of evidence that orchestral programs offer any particular benefit. As Jacqui Cameron, Education Director for In Harmony Opera North points out, one of their programs that offered *only* singing tuition had comparable results to the orchestral programs (Cameron 2015). This raises the question as to whether it is in fact simply intensive investment, rather than the experience of being in an orchestra, that offers benefits for children. Classical orchestral music, as I have argued, also has the disadvantage of being strongly associated with middle class tastes and values. Classical music instruction trains young people for a society that values accumulation or investment as a mode of morality. It will therefore reward those who are already enculturated into this value-system, and may penalize those who have different values. It also reduces the capacity of music and education to become a sphere of the possible – to bring into being worlds which are, as yet, only imagined (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000).

What are the implications of this argument for Sistema-inspired programs? Over the last fifteen years or so in the UK, in line with New Labour's emphasis on the social impact of the arts (Belfiore and Bennett 2008), there has been a shift in legitimizing discourses for classical music. From discourses of “edification through exposure to Art” (Mantie 2012, 99), justified as universally great across all cultures and times, a rhetoric of “social benefits” is now prevalent. The current legitimizing

discourse for classical music education is that it teaches valuable social skills such as discipline and aspiration; this snug tying-up of great art with opportunities for young people to learn appealing qualities makes these programs come across as self-evidently desirable. These social benefits bear a strong resemblance to the qualities propounded by John Hullah in the 1870s, which musical participation would instil in the working class: “patience, temperance, power of attention, presence of mind, self-denial, obedience and punctuality” (Cox 1993, 16). The rhetoric of the social benefits of classical music, institutionalized into music education as classed values in the late nineteenth century, has returned today.

In prescribing classical music as a cultural intervention for disadvantaged communities, Sistema-inspired programs reinforce the idea that being poor is about the behavior and the culture of poor people. The programs may be new, but their thinking is old, and it is far from emancipatory. They work on the assumption that by changing their behavior, family relationships, and aspirations, poor people will no longer be poor. This vision blames individuals for their situation, rather than looking for structural solutions. Against these discourses, I have argued that classical music is not a neutral good which can be rolled out to disadvantaged children in the hope of rescuing them from a life of drugs and crime (Arts Council England 2012, 6). Instead, its history is encompassed in its practices and its aesthetic; its powerful performance norms, which are strictly followed today, constitute a palimpsest of this history. This does not mean that this music cannot be reclaimed or resignified, but both the practices and the aesthetic of classical music have to change if classed, raced, and gendered hierarchies are not to be reproduced alongside musical ones. A loosening of musical boundaries is required in order to break down social boundaries. As an increasing number of organizations are now recognising, the musical practices themselves need to change.

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Notes

¹ I am adapting Reay et al.'s (2011) theorisation of middle class fractions. By lower-middle class, I am referring to young people whose parents did not go to university but are in skilled jobs. By established middle-class I am referring to those whose parents went to university, and who expect to go to high ranking universities and enter professional careers themselves. Throughout this article I will refer to “middle class”, “lower-middle class” and “working class” in the singular. This is an artificial 'ideal type' that I am using for heuristic purposes which belies the fact that classes are made up of different fractions that are constantly shifting and re-grouping. This also blurs the important difference in the middle class between public- and private-sector employees (Barlow et al. 1995).

² Arts Council England is the organisation that distributes public money from the government and the National Lottery for the arts in England.

³ Sistema Scotland's flagship scheme in Raploch, Stirling works with 470 children (Sistema Scotland, 2014). Liverpool IHSE currently works with 211 children aged 0-16 (In Harmony Liverpool 2015), and In Harmony Lambeth currently works with 482 children (In Harmony Lambeth). If we take an estimate that there are 400 children per program across the eleven projects in the UK, that means that approximately 4,400 children are currently involved in Sistema programs.

⁴ “Chav” is a perjorative word for white working-class people in the UK which emerged in the early 2000s (Tyler 2008). As Hayward and Yar (2006, 17) point out, there is a conceptual overlap with nineteenth century categories: when “terms such as “moral wretch,” “degenerate poor,” “depraved nomad,” and “savage outcast” all ultimately came to be incorporated under the umbrella term “dangerous class.” Similarly, today, the word “chav” is increasingly acting as a ubiquitous structural category.” Similar terms include “bogan” in Australia and New Zealand, or “white

trash” in North America (Haslam 2014).

⁵ An excellent introduction to, and exploration of, this idea can be seen in artist Grayson Perry's three-part series for Channel 4, “All in the best possible taste” (2012).

⁶ Somewhat ironically the morality he so vehemently endorsed was not practiced by Haweis himself who had an illegitimate daughter by one of his parishioners (Wright 2013, 32).

⁷ Grade exam boards offer extra-curricular musical qualifications. I am referring here to the classical music grade exams offered by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (established 1890) and Trinity College London (established 1877). Other key institutions were the Guildhall School of Music and Drama (1880), the Royal College of Music (1882), the Birmingham Conservatoire (1886), the London College of Music (1887), and the Glasgow Athaeneum School of Music (now the Royal Scottish Conservatoire, 1890) (Wright 2013).

⁸ The National Training School for Music, during its short-lived existence, had roughly three times more female than male students (Wright 2005, 247). The Royal Academy of Music in 1884 had more than three times as many women as men (with thanks to Kathy Adamson from the RAM for assisting me with this archive enquiry). The Manchester College of Music, the Royal College of Music, and the Guildhall School of Music, which grew rapidly in this period, similarly had a majority of women students (Ehrlich 1985, 110, 114, 116).

⁹ The 2011 National Plan for Music Education, as Gary Spruce (2013) notes, privileges classical music. The last time similar debates were occurring in the UK was around the introduction of the music education curriculum in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this earlier iteration, Conservative politicians were advocating that the curriculum should prioritise the Western art music canon, and music educators generally were arguing for a more diverse, practice-oriented mode of music education (Wright 2010; Shepherd and Vulliamy 2012). What is surprising about Sistema programs today is that, in contrast with these earlier debates, they have co-opted many of the left's voices as well as the right.

¹⁰ All names have been changed.

¹¹ See, for example, the statement by Richard Holloway, chair of Sistema Scotland, quoted in Logan's article in this issue.

¹² Similarly, in relation to the Venezuelan Sistema program, Baker (2014, 198) gives a convincing Foucauldian reading of how children become a tool for disciplining their whole families, as the interventions made in the child's life are expected to also bring about changes for their families.

¹³ This is a broader point, whereby music education programs for middle-class children and young people are primarily about musical “excellence” and “talent”, with social goals as secondary to musical ones, while programs for working-class or ethnic minority young people tend to be labelled as “youth work” or “social action programs.” (See, for example the National Youth Orchestra <https://www.nyo.org.uk/why-join> and the National Youth Choir <https://www.nycgb.org.uk/about-nycgb/what-is-nycgb>, in contrast with XLP youth club <http://www.xlp.org.uk/what-we-do/arts>).

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