

Music To My Ears:  
Exploring the Potential of Podcasts  
to Make Classical Music More Accessible

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# Abstract

The image of classical music as inaccessible is a widely debated issue among professionals and academics. When it comes to attracting new audiences, making the classical music genre and its cultural context more accessible to a broader audience is often an important goal for performing and presenting organizations. Recently, the medium of the podcast has seen an increase in popularity, and is used by more and more traditional cultural institutions to reach both existing and new audiences. How podcasting can be used as a platform for engagement with classical music has not yet been addressed from an academic perspective. This thesis fills that gap by exploring to what extent the podcast is a suitable medium to make classical music more accessible. It presents a comparative case study of two classical music podcasts, *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* and *The Open Ears Project*, whose communicative approach is examined using Critical Discourse Analysis. I argue that the podcast is a suitable medium to make classical music more accessible because it has the potential to create an immersive and highly connective listening experience which makes it easier for people to feel less intimidated by knowledge-related and socio-cultural obstacles associated with classical music. However, that intimate listening experience is something that can be exploited more and less effectively, depending as much on the internal characteristics of the podcast as an auditory medium, as on a podcast's specific content.

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# Introduction

Podcasts are flourishing like never before. From washing the dishes while listening to the latest true crime mystery to learning about ancient philosophers during the daily commute, more and more people reach for a podcast for entertainment or for gaining extra knowledge. The number of listeners has grown to such an extent that the U.S.A. is said to have arrived in a “golden age of podcasting”.<sup>1</sup> European countries have not (yet) embraced podcasting as firmly as the U.S.A. but listenership numbers are rising quickly.<sup>2</sup> The reason for the increasing popularity of podcasts is not difficult to find: podcasts offer entertaining and informative content that is available at the touch of a button. People can listen whenever and wherever they want, while performing more mind-numbing tasks. Moreover, podcasts are lauded for their intimate content and storytelling formats.

Many businesses and public institutions view the podcast a tool of communication to forge a meaningful and lasting connection with their audience. Cultural institutions, too, are increasingly creating podcasts. Many museums have already ventured into the world of podcasting as a way to make their collections more accessible to visitors and non-visitors, bringing stories behind art and artefacts directly to their ears.

This thesis concerns podcasting in another segment of the cultural field: classical music. In the face of funding cuts and dwindling of its core audience, classical music organizations in the Netherlands and elsewhere are keen to expand and diversify the ways they communicate with existing and potential audiences. In this context, changing the persistent image of classical music as inaccessible is an important goal. As *New York Times* music critic Joshua Barone observed at the end of 2018, the number of classical music podcasts is still low, certainly when you consider that iTunes’ podcast library counts over half a million shows.<sup>3</sup> In light of these circumstances, this thesis

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<sup>1</sup> See Richard Berry, “A Golden Age of Podcasting? Evaluating *Serial* in the Context of Podcast Histories,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22 (2015): 170-187.

In 2019, 70% of Americans is familiar with podcasting (a number that has doubled over the span of a decade), and 32% of the population monthly listens to a podcast, 22% listens weekly. These statistics are derived from *The Podcast Consumer 2019*, Edison Research, April 11, 2019, available via [www.edisonresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Edison-Research-Podcast-Consumer-2019.pdf](http://www.edisonresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Edison-Research-Podcast-Consumer-2019.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Research by the Dutch market research agency Markteffect shows that over the percentage of the Dutch population that sometimes listens to a podcast has climbed from 28% to 39% over the course of six months (based on data from two studies in May and November 2019). One in five Dutch citizens listens to at least one podcast per week. See *Markteffect Podcastmonitor*, Markteffect, November, 2019, available via [www.markteffect.nl/meer/nieuws/Podcastmonitor](http://www.markteffect.nl/meer/nieuws/Podcastmonitor), last accessed March 22, 2020. Markteffect expects to publish a third report in the second quarter of 2020. Also see Steven de Jong, “Radio nog altijd populairste luisteractiviteit maar podcasts groeien,” *NRC* September 17, 2019, [www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/09/17/radio-nog-altijd-populairste-luisteractiviteit-maar-podcasts-groeien-a3973614](http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/09/17/radio-nog-altijd-populairste-luisteractiviteit-maar-podcasts-groeien-a3973614).

<sup>3</sup> Joshua Barone writes: “About a decade into the podcast boom, I’m continuously surprised there aren’t more shows about classical music. It’s an ideal medium: Little can compare with the experience of hearing someone talk about a piece, then listening to it with enlightened ears. Yet few in the field have taken advantage of podcasting.” Joshua Barone, “A Luminous ‘Aria Code’ Joins a Meager Field of Classical Music Podcasts,” *New York Times*, December 30, 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/12/30/arts/music/aria-code-classical-music-podcasts.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/30/arts/music/aria-code-classical-music-podcasts.html).

investigates to what extent the podcast is a suitable medium to make classical music more accessible and to reach out to a broader audience.<sup>4</sup> I pose this question with the development of a particular audience group in mind, namely people who are interested in classical music, yet are hesitant to listen to it or are ‘discouraged’ to attend performances.<sup>5</sup>

The first part of the thesis addresses the particular listening experience that podcasts provide, drawing on literature from media and communication studies. Academic research on podcasting is still developing due to the short existence of the medium and much of the discourse has been found in trade magazines and on blogs. Available studies have been conducted primarily by American scholars and predominantly analyzes American podcasts which can be well explained by the earlier boom of podcasting in U.S.A.<sup>6</sup> A fundament for podcast research has already been laid by scholars from radio studies like Richard Berry, Andrew Bottomley, and Tiziano Bonini, who have addressed the evolution of podcasting from its early days until its latest revival. More recent research also focuses on the relationship between podcasts hosts and their listeners through interviews with creators and case studies of specific podcasts. Other relevant research is done in the field of journalism studies, such as the work of Siobhán McHugh, who studies the storytelling aspects of podcasts, and Mia Lindgren, who researches podcasts from the perspective of narrative journalism.

The discussion of previous literature on podcasting sets the stage for the second, empirical part of the thesis, which consists of a comparative case study of two recent classical music podcasts: *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, created by the Dutch public classical radio broadcaster AVROTROS/Radio 4, and *The Open Ears Project*, created by New York classical radio station WQXR/WNYC Studios. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a methodology (the details of which are discussed in Chapter 2), I investigate in which way these podcasts attempt to make classical music more accessible and to what extent their communication shows a change in the way they establish the relationship between the radio station (as the representative of a traditional classical music institution) and its audience.

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<sup>4</sup> The term ‘accessibility’ requires some further explanation. As this thesis focuses on the content of podcasts rather than other aspects such as production and marketing of podcasts, my use of the word ‘accessible’ should not be interpreted as ‘obtainable’. The question here is not whether podcasts can make classical music related content be retrieved more easily but how their content may affect people’s engagement with classical music.

<sup>5</sup> There is particularly much to be gained regarding the ‘interested non-attenders’, a relevant audience group for the Dutch classical music field, because studies by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research show that compared to other art forms classical music has the lowest percentage of realized audience yet the highest percentage of potential audience. See Nathalie Sonck and Jos de Haan, *De virtuele kunstkar: Cultuurdeelname via oude en nieuwe media* (Het culturele draagvlak, deel 11), Den Haag: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau (2012), 53. This audience group is also featured in several academic studies. For example, see Melissa C. Dobson, “New Audiences for Classical Music: The Experiences of Non-attenders at Live Orchestral Concerts,” *Journal of New Music Research* 39/2 (2010): 111-124; and Bonita M. Kolb, “You Call This Fun? Reactions of Young Firsttime Attendees to a Classical Concert,” *Journal of the Music and Entertainment Industry Educators Association* 1/1 (2000): 13-28.

<sup>6</sup> For a literature review of podcast studies between 2004 and 2014, see Tiziano Bonini, “The ‘Second Age’ of Podcasting: Reframing Podcasting as a New Digital Mass Medium,” *Quaderns del CAC* 41 (2015): 21-30.

This thesis is written during a time in which podcast listenership in the Netherlands is growing quickly and it coincides with an increasing interest in podcasting among professionals in the cultural field.<sup>7</sup> Traditional presenting and producing organizations in the classical music industry, as well as the cultural field at large, are attempting to break down the walls between the institutions and the public. They experiment with concert formats, performances at untraditional locations, and marketing and communication strategies, all with the goal of lowering barriers to engage with the arts and visit its institutions. Podcasting offers an exciting means of communication for those in the field looking to adapt to a changing cultural landscape. The aim of my research is to shed light on podcasting as a tool to present and interpret classical music for the purpose of making the repertoire and its cultural context more accessible. The thesis argues that podcasts can make a meaningful contribution to the goal of making it easier to engage with classical music, but that accessibility is not guaranteed simply by providing content in an informal way.

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<sup>7</sup> See Cultuurmarketing, “De podcast in de kunst- en cultuursector: 12 inspirerende voorbeelden,” *Cultuurmarketing*, January 28, 2019, [www.cultuurmarketing.nl/overzicht-podcasts-door-culturele-instellingen](http://www.cultuurmarketing.nl/overzicht-podcasts-door-culturele-instellingen) (last accessed March 26, 2020).

# Chapter 1      The Podcast as Medium of Intimacy

Compared to other media, such as radio and television, podcasting has a relatively short history. As a result, the academic and professional debate about the specific audio content the term ‘podcast’ denotes, is still developing. It is relevant to identify the characteristics of podcasting as a medium and as a cultural practice, in order to determine to what extent podcasts can make classical music more accessible and engaging to potential audiences. This chapter gives an overview of how these characteristics, in particular the supposed intimate nature of podcasts, have been discussed in the existing literature. Before turning to these aspects, I provide a basic historical context to the discussion by giving a short overview of the history of podcasting from its beginnings in the 2000s.

## 1.1      Podcasting: from its beginnings to a golden age

The term ‘podcast’ is a portmanteau that blends the words ‘broadcast’ and ‘iPod’ and refers to the combination of radio with the at the time new technology of digital audio devices. It was first used in 2004 by British journalist Ben Hammersley, who noticed a trend among bloggers to share their personal stories online in the form of audio files.<sup>8</sup> As such, the medium owes its conception to the motivation of bloggers “to do radio” on their own terms.<sup>9</sup> They were driven to share their stories without having to conform to the rules and frameworks of the professional broadcasters.<sup>10</sup> Like starting a blog, creating a podcast was considered easy and relatively inexpensive: “Anybody can do it. All you need is the internet, a computer and a microphone really!”<sup>11</sup>

In 2020, podcasting has developed into a full-blown industry. Over the years, thousands of podcasts have been released, technologies have evolved, show formats have been professionalized, and audiences have grown, in some countries more quickly than in others. In the 2010’s, professional radio stations, companies, educational institutions and many other organizations have added podcasting to their communications roster at such a rate that the majority of podcasts is now produced by large, commercial organizations and it is becoming more and more difficult for independent podcasters and smaller organizations to compete with them.<sup>12</sup> These developments demonstrate that the podcasting trend is no longer confined to the niche world of independent amateur creators but has become “a professional and commercial medium for mass

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<sup>8</sup> Ben Hammersley, “Why Online Radio Is Booming,” *The Guardian*, February 12, 2004, [www.theguardian.com/media/2004/feb/12/broadcasting.digitalmedia](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2004/feb/12/broadcasting.digitalmedia).

<sup>9</sup> Kris Markman, “Doing Radio, Making Friends, and Having Fun: Exploring the Motivations of Independent Audio Podcasters,” *New Media and Society* 14/4 (2011): 555.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Berry, “Part of the Establishment: Reflecting on 10 Years of Podcasting as an Audio Medium,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 22/6 (2016): 666.

<sup>11</sup> Berry, “Part of the establishment,” 662.

<sup>12</sup> Berry, “Part of the establishment,” 660.

consumption”.<sup>13</sup> In other words, podcast culture entered a its second or even “golden age,” a contention echoed in most academic as well as professional literature.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.2 Defining Podcasts and Podcasting

During the shift from niche activity to mass medium, the original meaning of the term podcast has not changed: it still refers to the technology of subscribing to or downloading online audio content. Simultaneously, the accumulation of online audio content in the past sixteen years highlights an issue with the definition of the term: ‘podcasting’ is understood differently across the world and among creators and consumers, due to a broad variety of shows, topics, styles, genres, as well as the features podcasting shares with radio. This vagueness has led to journalistic and academic attempts to identify precisely to what sort of content, production, distribution, and consumption practices the word ‘podcasting’ refers, in order to arrive at a clear definition of the medium.

Early articles on podcasting considered it as an extension of radio, with the difference that it deviated from radio’s broadcast model to a narrowcast approach. As such, radio was used as a reference point from where discussions about podcasting departed. Arguments were often based on the assumption that podcasting would be the “beginning of the end” of doing radio.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is reasonable to investigate podcasting from the perspective of radio: early podcast creators saw themselves as independent radio makers and there are clear similarities between podcasts and radio shows. Furthermore, both media are driven by voices, both are able to establish a strong relationship between hosts and listeners, and podcasts often use similar formats as radio shows as well as practices such as the use of jingles.

Media scholar Richard Berry, who was one of the first academics to study podcasts, situates podcasts somewhere in the middle between broadcast radio and internet radio: it is “content with

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<sup>13</sup> Dario Llinares, Neil Fox, and Richard Berry, eds., *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 182-183.

<sup>14</sup> See Tiziano Bonini, “The ‘Second Age’ of Podcasting: Reframing Podcasting as a New Digital Mass Medium,” *Quaderns del CAC* 41 (2015): 21-30; and Richard Berry, “A Golden Age of Podcasting? Evaluating *Serial* in the Context of Podcast Histories,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22 (2015): 170-187.

That the industry also considers this time as the most fruitful time for podcasts is marked for example by the attention it received by the festival and conference South by Southwest (SXSW) in 2019. As one of America’s largest film, media, music, and tech festivals, it featured a keynote titled “The Second Golden Age of Audio,” in which was proposed that the next phase of growth of the audio market will be most likely be achieved through podcasting. Some authors are sceptical about the sustainability of the buzz around podcasts: they argue that the ‘golden age’ has already reached its peak because there are already too many podcasts. But optimists point to the strong user demand and promotion by major platforms such as Spotify and Apple. In my opinion, the slow but consistent growth of podcast audiences since the advent of podcasting in 2004 until now in the U.S.A. points to a lasting development rather than a hype. With the accumulation of content, however, the market becomes more saturated and the findability becomes a more important factor for success. In other words, more podcasts is not necessarily a bad thing, but it will take more effort to ensure that listeners discover a new podcast among all the others. See for example Justin Lake, “The Golden Age of Podcasts Is Coming To an End,” *Better Marketing*, July 20, 2019, [medium.com/better-marketing/the-golden-age-of-podcasts-is-coming-to-an-end-7503fb22f533](https://medium.com/better-marketing/the-golden-age-of-podcasts-is-coming-to-an-end-7503fb22f533) (last accessed March 22, 2020). He suspects that with the accumulation of content, the universal and free distribution of podcasts among the many mobile applications will change to a situation similar to how streaming services operate, i.e. specific content is distributed by a specific service, which subscribers have to pay for.

<sup>15</sup> Berry, “A Golden Age of Podcasting,” 172-173.



the lazy benefits of push media but with all personalization features of pull media.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, the consumption of podcasts revolves around the decision of the listeners to ‘pull’ content by subscribing to podcasts and listening to them whenever they want to, as well as the decision of the creators to ‘push’ content their way. Compared to other media, this model of creation, distribution and consumption of content is beneficial for anyone who wants to reach an audience. Nowadays, most of the content that people consume online arrives on their screen as a result of decisions algorithms have made about its relevance or popularity, which can make reaching an audience, even one’s own followers or subscribers, more difficult. Podcasts subscribers, on the other hand, receive every podcast as it is released – at least for now. The medium may not offer the same amount of audience engagement as social media, but as a slow medium, it can make the engagement more impactful.<sup>17</sup>

More recently, researchers have begun to discuss the podcast as a medium in itself, inherently different from radio, and have started to identify its distinctive aspects. An obvious difference that separates podcasts from broadcast and internet radio is that radio is generally live and podcasts are pre-recorded. Furthermore, broadcast radio limits its listeners to the locations where a signal is available and the room in which the radio is. Additionally, with both broadcast radio and internet radio, listeners are bound to the specific times at which shows are broadcasted. The podcast, on the other hand, transfers the decisions of time and place to the listeners: they can take their favorite shows with them wherever they go. Still, in practice it remains somewhat difficult to draw a line between podcasting and radio because podcasting technology has been used to archive previously broadcasted shows or episodes are broadcasted and released as podcast simultaneously.<sup>18</sup>

Even though the podcast may have followed in radios footsteps by becoming a mass audio medium, podcasting exists by virtue of highly specialized content and hyper-targeted audiences. As with blogs, audiences are attracted to podcasts because they offer entertainment and information

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Berry, “Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star?” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 12/2 (2006): 156.

<sup>17</sup> Hannah Hethmon and Ian Elsner, “Podcasting in 2019: An Introduction for Museums,” MuseWeb Conference 2019, published January 15, 2019, [mw19.mwconf.org/paper/podcasting-in-2019-an-introduction-for-museums](http://mw19.mwconf.org/paper/podcasting-in-2019-an-introduction-for-museums).

<sup>18</sup> In the Netherlands, this idea of ‘postponed radio’ has dominated the public understanding of podcasting for a long time and until 2016, the use of podcasts in the Netherlands has also been investigated as such by media research companies. Sometimes, a pre-recorded show is released as podcast and broadcasted at the same time. A current trend is to release long radio shows in podcast form, edited as a shorter version that includes the best parts of the show. These practices play a role in the somewhat vague definition of the podcast. Among Dutch podcast creators and listeners there appears to be no strong consensus about which type of audio content distributed online may bear the title ‘podcast’. In interviews, they have expressed that their understanding of a podcast is often based on their own experiences, and as a result their definition is highly personal. Among podcast creators, a common opinion is that a ‘real’ podcast should contain audio content that is specifically made as a podcast instead of existing material for which the podcast is merely another channel of distribution. Content such as live registrations of public lectures is considered a “lazy podcast”. See Amanda Brouwers and Bob den Hartog, *Nederlandse podcastluisteraars van audiobehang tot zuurstofbank* (Groningen: University of Groningen, 2019), 98-100, available [www.scienceguide.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-04\\_SvdJ\\_-\\_Eindrapport.pdf](http://www.scienceguide.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-04_SvdJ_-_Eindrapport.pdf).

about specific subject matter – from arts and crafts to self-help and everything in between. Radio, on the other hand, has a broader content strategy and is generally more focused on current events. Berry has pointed out that this narrowcast model affects how listeners approach the medium: podcast listeners generally make an active decision to select a show and listen to it in its entirety, while radio listeners can be characterized as “listeners of convenience” because the radio often acts as background noise.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, podcasts – albeit depending on the format – are characterized in the literature as “talkier”, less formal, and more intimate.<sup>20</sup>

These comparisons with radio and the discussion about the definition of podcasts suggest that ‘podcasting’ has come to mean more than only a way of distributing audio files. In Berry’s words, “‘Podcastness’ also came to signify a number of medium-specific applications related to the production, distribution, and consumption of the audio files, such as the time and place of listening and the process of selecting shows.”<sup>21</sup> There is one concept in the literature that repeatedly turns up in connection to voice-based audio-only content, and by extension, to podcasts in particular: intimacy. It is described as a medium-specific quality of audio, that distinguishes audio from visual and textual media in terms of how it influences the way media consumers experience the content it communicates. In podcasts reviews and how-to guides, intimacy is mentioned time and time again as an innate or at least desired feature of a podcast. Sometimes it is even considered a prerequisite for success. The next section explores this aspect further by discussing how scholarship considers how audio-only media, and podcasts in particular, impact listeners and can construct an intimate listening experience.

### 1.3 The podcast as an intimate medium

Much of the discourse around the revival of podcasting focuses on the intimacy of audio-only content. Talk radio and podcasts share the voice as their fundamental means of communication, and both media revolve around age-old oral traditions: storytelling and conversation.<sup>22</sup> The reason for the success of these media can be found in the affective power of sound, specifically the human voice. A story told through audio is said to have more impact than through written text due to the verbal and non-verbal sounds in which meaning is embedded: the particular sound of someone’s voice and the way they speak, including conscious and non-conscious choices about how a sentence

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<sup>19</sup> Richard Berry, “Considering the Evolution of the Medium and Its Association with the Word ‘Radio.’” *The Radio Journal International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 14 (2016), 7-22.

<sup>20</sup> Siobhán McHugh, “How Podcasting Is Changing the Audio Storytelling Genre,” *The Radio Journal – International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 14/1 (2016), 65. Brouwers and Den Hartog, *Nederlandse podcastluisteraars van audiobehang tot zuurstoftank*, 103.

<sup>21</sup> Berry, “Considering the Evolution of the Medium and its Association with the Word ‘Radio,’” 1; McHugh, “How Podcasting Is Changing the Audio Storytelling Genre,” 27.

<sup>22</sup> Jonah Weiner and Matthew Dessem, “The Voices: Toward a Critical Theory of Podcasting,” *Slate*, December 14, 2014, [www.slate.com/articles/arts/ten\\_years\\_in\\_your\\_ears/2014/12/what\\_makes\\_podcasts\\_so\\_addictive\\_and\\_pleasurable.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/ten_years_in_your_ears/2014/12/what_makes_podcasts_so_addictive_and_pleasurable.html).

is uttered, convey meaning.<sup>23</sup> Audio also draws listeners in because it only communicates in real-time which also makes it much more linear: you can flip through a book but you cannot as easily do the same with audio.<sup>24</sup> Journalism scholar and podcast producer Siobhán McHugh argues that “this performative listening-in-real-time creates a pact of intimacy between speaker and listener and an accompanying sense of ‘liveness’ not found in print.”<sup>25</sup> As opposed to visual media, which keep audiences fixed to a screen, audio “envelops” listeners and offers a more private or intimate experience, as if they are part of the conversation or story.<sup>26</sup> As a medium that treasures the voice, this is part of the reason that podcasts are able to attract audiences and keep them engaged for long periods.<sup>27</sup> This experience of intimacy pertains not only to listeners, but also to speakers (host and guests): “Audio’s non-intrusiveness, compared to video, facilitates revelation and the expression of deep emotion: even film-makers concede that ‘people clam up when you put a camera in front of them’.”<sup>28</sup>

The experience of intimacy is heightened if podcasts have a strong focus on storytelling and if the speakers use an informal communicative style to tell the story: “When the lure of narrative and finely-tuned scripting for audio is combined with the affective qualities of sound itself and the highly connective act of listening [...] the resulting audio story engenders a profound response.”<sup>29</sup> It is argued that podcast as a medium owes much of its success to the long-form audio storytelling formats (both fictional and non-fictional) and narrative audio content in general, which has a – perhaps surprisingly large – appeal in a society that is currently predominantly focused on short-form, visual content.<sup>30</sup> An undercut aspect of this in the literature is the distinction between podcast *series* and *serials*. There is a crucial difference between the two because serial storytelling (an

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<sup>23</sup> Siobhán McHugh, “Memoir For Your Ears: The Podcast Life,” in *Mediating Memory: Tracing the Limits of Memoir*, ed. B. Avieson, F. Giles, and S. Joseph (Oxford: Routledge, 2017), 105.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> McHugh, “Audio Storytelling,” 143. A term which comes to mind when talking about the ‘enveloping’ effect of audio is ‘immersion’. In relation to podcasts, however, this term is surprisingly scarcely used. The only article which explicitly focuses on podcasts as an immersive form of audio storytelling is David O. Dowling and Kyle J. Miller, “Immersive Audio Storytelling: Podcasting and Serial Documentary in the Digital Publishing Industry,” *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* 26 (2019): 167-184. Also see Sarah Florini, “The Podcast ‘Chitlin’ Circuit’: Black Podcasters, Alternative Media, and Audio Enclaves,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 22/2 (2015), 209-219. Florini refers to the effect of an ‘aural cocoon’ when podcasts are listened to through headphones: “Mobile technologies not only allow listeners to listen anywhere, but also potentially add an element of immersion. Research (Bull, 2007) on mobile listening has shown how users often rely on headphones to create an aural ‘cocoon’ that sonically insulates them from their surroundings” (p. 210).

<sup>27</sup> David O. Dowling and Kyle J. Miller, “Immersive Audio Storytelling: Podcasting and Serial Documentary in the Digital Publishing Industry,” *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* 26 (2019), 171.

According to Edison Research, audio is ahead of other digital media when it comes to keeping audiences engaged. Data shows that 93% of people in the U.S.A. who start a podcast listen to most or all of the episode. See Steve Pratt, The Metric All Podcasters Should Be Talking About, *Pacific Content Blog*, April 11, 2019, [blog.pacific-content.com/the-metric-all-podcasters-should-be-talking-about-3e103c87155f](http://blog.pacific-content.com/the-metric-all-podcasters-should-be-talking-about-3e103c87155f).

<sup>28</sup> Siobhán McHugh, “Audio Storytelling: Unlocking the Power of Audio to Inform, Empower and Connect,” *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 24 (2014), 143.

<sup>29</sup> McHugh, “Memoir For Your Ears,” 106.

<sup>30</sup> Mia Lindgren “Personal narrative journalism and podcasting,” *The Radio Journal International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 14/1 (2016), 23-41.

ongoing narrative spread over multiple episodes) builds narrative tension or reveals a process of investigation in a way that a single, stand-alone episode would not permit.<sup>31</sup>

These aspects make it possible for podcasts to “[cultivate] an informal, personal, even intimate relationship with their listeners, in a way that ‘generates a deep sense of connection’.”<sup>32</sup> It is obvious that intimacy is not exclusive to podcasting. As Berry argues: “Radio by its nature is an intimate medium – users rarely listen to it as a collective and often listeners are alone in the car or on the bus, all places that portable media devices now also go.”<sup>33</sup> Podcasts simply strengthen that intimate listening experience because above all, the podcast is an ‘earbud-medium’, as is pointed out by many authors and shown by evidence from market research.<sup>34</sup> Podcast hosts are talking directly into the ears of their listeners, which enhances the para-social relationship between the two. It is a relationship that is not reciprocal and yet establishes a feeling of a one-to-one relationship between speakers and listeners, in other words a “false sense of intimacy”.<sup>35</sup> Drawing the effect of the human voice and the use of earbuds or headphones together, Berry describes this stronger effect as ‘hyper-intimacy’: “What has changed since podcasting began is that podcasters have developed aesthetics that are notably different to linear radio. [...] Podcasts are listened to in an intimate setting (headphones), utilizing an intimate form of communication (human speech).”<sup>36</sup>

The intimate mode of listening is mentioned by many authors, in both academic and professional literature, as a medium specific aspect of podcasts. There is, however, a lack of research on how podcast consumers experience listening to podcasts. More data are needed in order to be able to draw representative conclusions as to what extent listeners experience podcast as an intimate medium. I find that the evidence from communication and radio studies discussed in the previous paragraphs is strong enough to be applied to the listening experience of podcasts, and to conclude that, physically speaking, the ‘personalized listening space’ or ‘aural cocoon’ indeed makes for a hyper-intimate mode of listening. However, the literature discusses intimacy in too general terms, giving too much weight to the effect of headphones on the listening experience.

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<sup>31</sup> The only remarks about seriality in relation to podcasts are made in reference to the true-crime podcast *Serial*. (2014-2018). This podcast appears in the literature as a marker the sudden podcast boom in the U.S.A. and raised the bar by acquiring millions of listeners faster than any podcast before it, already in its starting year 2014. The narrative storytelling in combination with the serial episodes during which answers to Amercia’s most famous cold cases evoked comments on narrative tension, as well as discussions about objectivity and the position as journalists as reporters versus storytellers. See Ryan Engley, “The Impossible Ethics of *Serial*: Sarah Koenig, Foucault, Lacan,” in *The Serial Podcast and Storytelling in the Digital Age*, ed. Ellen McCracken (New York: Routledge, 2017), 87-100; Lev Grossman, Sharon Marcus, A. O. Scott, Julie Snyder, “Contemporary Seriality: A Roundtable,” *Narrative* 27/1 (2019), 109-128.

<sup>32</sup> Llinares, Fox, and Berry, *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Berry, “Will the iPod Kill the Radio Star?”, 148.

<sup>34</sup> Llinares, Fox, and Berry, *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*, 228. See also McHugh, “Personal Narrative Journalism,” 5; Lindgren “Personal narrative journalism and podcasting,” 23; McHugh, “Memoir For Your Ears,” 12. For statistics on how and where people listen to podcasts, for the U.S.A. see Edison Research, *The Podcast Consumer 2019*, and for the Netherlands see Markteffect *Markteffect Podcastmonitor* and Brouwers and Den Hartog, *Nederlandse podcastluisteraars*.

<sup>35</sup> Llinares, Fox, and Berry, *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*, 234.

<sup>36</sup> Berry, “Part of the Establishment,” 666.

Consequently, the label of intimacy is too easily applied to another aspect of the listening experience, namely the bond between podcasts hosts and guests on the one hand and listeners on the other. As the next chapter will show, internal features of the speakers' texts also influence what kind of relationship is established between speakers and listeners.

In 2019, the first large-scale Dutch research on the experiences of podcast creators and listeners showed that podcast listeners in the Netherlands are divided about the nature of the host-listener relationship. A survey revealed that almost all listeners agreed that a bond between listener and host existed.<sup>37</sup> However, their descriptions of it varied from “teacher/student,” “at a distance,” “presenter/listener,” and “businesslike” to “personal,” “intimate,” “close,” “cozy,” “friendly,” and “as if I knew them”.<sup>38</sup> Results from the focus groups showed that most listeners found the word ‘intimate’ too strong and they would rather refer to the relationship as ‘close’, as if they were sitting with the host(s) at the kitchen table, having a one-on-one conversation (as opposed to the one-to-many conversation via radio).<sup>39</sup>

From this study emerged another aspect related to the listening experience – whether it be described as intimate or close – and it is related to the technical methods with which an auditory closeness can be established, namely the way in which the sound is recorded and edited. The existing academic literature leaves these practical aspects unmentioned (only the human voice in general and headphone listening is given credit for creating a feeling of closeness), even though recording and editing decisions, such as where to place the microphones and which side of the headphones to play the sound, play a major role in how listeners experience the sound and as such can affect the degree of immersion and closeness listeners may experience.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, there was a substantial amount of listeners who experienced closeness or intimacy without using their headphones.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, the purely physical auditory experience of listening with headphones is not the only important contributing factor for a feeling of intimacy. As the researchers of the Dutch study state, “the tone of the one who speaks, daring to share doubts, and the awareness [of the host] of speaking at just one listener at a time” are all aspects that “can contribute to the construction of a feeling of being close”.<sup>42</sup> When a toolbox of narrative techniques is added, there are many more methods there can be used to establish a feeling of closeness to a host or protagonist of a story, with which comes also a range of intensity of the intimacy.

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<sup>37</sup> Brouwers and Den Hartog, *Nederlandse podcastluisteraars*, 92. The results of this study are based on a survey among 1,099 respondents, interviews with 36 podcast creators, and three focus groups.

<sup>38</sup> *Idem*, 72.

<sup>39</sup> *Idem*, 92. A few respondents mentioned that at one point they could not tolerate the feeling of intimacy anymore and others stated that they could perfectly enjoy a podcast without feeling an intimate bond with the host(s).

<sup>40</sup> *Idem*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*. All translations from the Dutch are mine.

#### 1.4 Podcasts and accessibility

The remaining question is how podcasts can be used to make a certain topic or information more accessible to people so that they can engage with it more easily. Previous research is optimistic about the potential of podcasts to do so. Media and communication scholar Lukasz Swiatek argues that podcasts are useful as a communication tool to bridge two kinds of boundaries. The first kind is related to knowledge: “the medium helps individuals and groups access new insights, from both inside and outside their areas of expertise and interest,” whereby an intimate, casual way of speaking can help crossing educational levels and disciplinary boundaries easily.<sup>43</sup> Swiatek’s argument is illustrated by a discussion of the podcast *Nobel Prize Talks*, in which listeners get to know Nobel prize laureates and their inner motivations. Swiatek demonstrates that the podcast is made in such a way (informal and conversational tone, a phone call, relatable sonic imitations of scientific processes, witty comments) that it enhances the listener’s feeling of closeness to the conversation. He argues that such an approach potentially makes it more likely for listeners to connect, and even relate, to new topics without feeling inadequate or not knowledgeable enough, simply “by engaging them in easily digestible material through the intentional and conscious social act of listening.”<sup>44</sup>

The second type of connection between different worlds that podcast can make according to Swiatek is between people from different socio-cultural backgrounds.<sup>45</sup> In particular, the medium allows individuals from different backgrounds to connect or identify with the participants of the episodes to which they are listening. This is also well illustrated by *Nobel Prize Talks*: it gives listeners from different socio-economic backgrounds the opportunity to listen to a variety of different Nobel laureates from various fields and locations. Naturally, this effect is not specific to podcasting, but the fact that these auditory experiences are a few swipes away and, in the case of headphone listening, they create a more immersive feeling of ‘being there’ for the listener, podcasts offer a more intense experience than other media. The way the podcast is constructed allows listeners to get the feeling that they are a fly on the wall of a conversation with an award-winning scholar. They can connect with them, get to know them, and hear their unique career and life insights in a setting that is less likely to occur on another. Again, using only on sound makes this process of engagement and connection more intense: listeners literally spend hours with a voice in their head. In the case of regular hosts, listeners may begin to associate this voice with a brand, and

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<sup>43</sup> Lukasz Swiatek, “The Podcast as an Intimate Bridging Medium,” in *Podcasting: New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*, ed. Llinares, Fox, and Berry, 177.

<sup>44</sup> *Idem*, 178.

<sup>45</sup> *Idem*, 179.

as podcasts build loyal relationships with audiences, this association can be vital from a commercial – and particularly marketing – standpoint.<sup>46</sup>

A study relevant to my research was conducted by Lena Maculan in 2008, during the early days of podcasting. She investigated the possibilities of podcasting “as a tool to present and interpret material culture in museums for the purpose of making the experience of art more engaging, participatory and accessible.”<sup>47</sup> She found that podcasts that prepared visitors for a museum visit (for example, an introduction to the theme of an exhibition) led to visitors who were more knowledgeable about the works on view, which by extension made them more confident during their museum visit, in the end resulting in a better museum experience and a more engaged visitor.<sup>48</sup> Along the lines of Swiatek’s argument about bridging knowledge divides, Maculan argues that a truly accessible museum is “one which provides users with the intellectual tools which help them to make more sense of what is exhibited.” Additionally, she argues that podcasts provide an opportunity to explore new ways of making content for visitors, experimenting with communication styles, and changing the traditional ways of “presenting, interpreting and talking about art.”<sup>49</sup> In short, a podcast can contribute to breaking down some of the traditional hierarchies between art institutions and their potential audiences.

These studies have a positive outlook on the potential of podcasts to bridge gaps that may exist between certain people and to facilitate an audience to engage with certain information more easily. The knowledge and social-cultural divides mentioned by Swiatek are precisely two issues that the classical music genre and industry are currently dealing with, in particular when it comes to attracting new and younger audiences. These groups may experience obstacles when they consider engaging with classical music or attending a concert. Over the past two decades, studies have found that many people believe that they need to know something about classical music in order to be able to enjoy it, and to understand a live performance in particular.<sup>50</sup> Socio-cultural factors also play a role: beliefs such as ‘I don’t belong in a concert hall’, ‘it is music for old people’, ‘I don’t identify with this music culture’, or ‘I don’t know how to behave,’ make it more difficult for people to relate to other audience members and the musicians on stage. For these experiences, the American violist and radio commentator Miles Hoffman has coined the term ‘Classical

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<sup>46</sup> Swiatek, “The Podcast as an Intimate Bridging Medium,” 179.

<sup>47</sup> Maculan, “Researching Podcasting in Museums,” 14.

<sup>48</sup> *Idem.*, 247.

<sup>49</sup> *Idem.*, 249.

<sup>50</sup> Eva Huisman, “Het klassieke concert herzien: Een nieuwe klassieke concertpraktijk: theorieën, strategieën en concepten van wetenschappers en Nederlandse muziekprogrammeurs” (Master’s thesis, Utrecht University, 2015), 62; Melissa C. Dobson, “New Audiences for Classical Music: The Experiences of Non-attenders at Live Orchestral Concerts,” *Journal of New Music Research*, 39/2 (2010), 111-124.

Music Insecurity Complex'.<sup>51</sup> In other words, people may be attracted to classical music and at the same time feel intimidated by it. They may think that “one needs to be a connoisseur to be able to ‘get’ the music” and they can feel uncomfortable because they cannot relate to classical music’s traditional audience.<sup>52</sup>

This chapter has discussed how previous scholarship investigated the auditory capacities of the podcast as a medium. It is evident that there is a certain closeness or intimacy that listeners can potentially experience, which can be beneficial for the impact of a story as well as the brand experience, when hosts literally function as the voice of an organization. Based on these aspects and the research by Maculan on podcasting about visual art, I find that podcasts have a high potential to positively affect people’s engagement with classical music. Podcasts on music even have one less challenge compared to those on visual art: music has the benefit that its primary communicative property is auditory, which removes the challenge for hosts to transfer something visual into an auditory environment in an understandable and also appealing way. With sound engineering and editing, with which voice and music can be intertwined, I think podcasts can offer listeners a compelling conversation or narrative. However, as the medium encompasses so many approaches to audio content, it depends on the chosen format and all other decisions that come with it whether classical music podcasts can be truly successful in making its classical content more accessible. The next chapter takes a closer look at two recent classical music podcasts, in order to draw more detailed conclusions.

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<sup>51</sup> Miles Hoffman, “A Note to the Classically Insecure,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/04/18/opinion/classical-music-insecurity.html?smid=tw-nytopinion&csmtyp=cur](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/18/opinion/classical-music-insecurity.html?smid=tw-nytopinion&csmtyp=cur).

<sup>52</sup> *Idem*.



## Chapter 2 A Closer Look at Classical Music Podcasts

This chapter focuses on the communicative approach of classical music podcasts and how it might affect the relationship between audiences and classical music organizations. These questions are relevant because classical music institutions exist in an ongoing state of changes in communication strategies, to make their product more accessible and more relevant to a broader spectrum of visitors.

The chapter analyses two podcasts: *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* (2018, five long weekly episodes) by the Dutch broadcaster Radio 4/AVROTROS and *The Open Ears Project* (2019, thirty short, daily episodes; second season announced), a joint production by public classical music station WQXR and WNYC Studios in New York City.<sup>53</sup> These organizations were selected because my goal was to compare one type of organization using a Dutch and an American representative, since podcasting has a stronger tradition in the U.S.A. Radio 4 was chosen because it currently has the most expertise with podcasting, compared to music venues and performing organizations in the Netherlands.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, most of the podcasts by venues and orchestras are either produced in collaboration with Radio 4 or are hosted by one of their presenters. The New York classical music station is comparable to Radio 4 in terms of listenership numbers (both around 800,000). These specific podcasts were selected because their goals align with my research question: they specifically aim to take away some of the barriers connected to the classical music world and to present classical music in a less intellectual way.

### 2.1 Methodology

To ensure a balanced analysis due to the difference in episode lengths between the two podcasts, a comparable amount of analytical material was compiled, namely the first episode of *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, and the first ten episodes of the first season of *The Open Ears Project*. The episodes were transcribed full verbatim – i.e. capturing every word as well as non-verbal communication, including grammatical errors, common fillers such as ‘ehm’, repeated words, false starts, and other noises such as laughter. This was necessary because the nature of my research question demands an examination not only of *what* was said, but also *how* something was said.

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<sup>53</sup> “Beethoven is meer dan een hond,” NPO Radio 4, last accessed March 22, 2020, [www.nporadio4.nl/podcasts/beethoven-is-meer-dan-een-hond](http://www.nporadio4.nl/podcasts/beethoven-is-meer-dan-een-hond). “The Open Ears Project,” WNYC Studios, last accessed March 22, 2020, [www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/open-ears-project](http://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/open-ears-project).

<sup>54</sup> Its website lists 29 podcasts (though this includes several uploads of previously broadcasted shows and there is a wide variation in length and number of episodes). See [www.nporadio4.nl/podcasts](http://www.nporadio4.nl/podcasts).

The questions that guide my analysis of these podcasts are adopted from Lena Maculan's aforementioned dissertation on podcasting in museums and were adjusted to meet the needs of my musical topic.<sup>55</sup> To reveal the relationship between the communication in podcasts and discourses on accessibility, Maculan used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), based on a model that she adapted from sociolinguist Norman Fairclough's textbook *Language and Power* (1989).<sup>56</sup> CDA considers the use of language as a form of social practice. Through the lens of CDA, a podcast text is a social event in which "meaning is not only made through explicit statements in texts but also implicitly through specific uses of language" which impacts the relationship between speakers and listeners.<sup>57</sup>

Fairclough's model consists of three stages of analysis: 1) text analysis (description), 2) processing analysis (interpretation), and 3) social analysis (explanation). The first three questions (stage 1) are concerned with the podcast's text vocabulary and grammatical features by analyzing the over-all communication style, how grammatical features are used to construct a relationship with the listener, and how the speakers use language to construct subject positions for themselves and the audience. In the transcription, I coded for informal vocabulary, false starts, laughter, oddly structured sentences, personal anecdotes, and metaphors (question 1), the use of pronouns (question 2), and modal verbs and phrases that reveal subjectivity (question 3). The second stage of the analysis interprets the findings from the first stage by connecting it to social practice, in this case the existing power relationships and conventions that traditionally govern the output of classical music radio stations. The final stage of analysis, the explanation, analyzes how the discourse is part of a larger social process and how it is determined by it. It will reveal the societal and institutional processes that the podcast in question belongs to. In turn, this will show how the podcast might impact the relationship between the organization, that the speakers in the podcast represent, and the audience.

## **2.2 Case Studies: *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* and *The Open Ears Project***

Both podcasts react against traditional ways of talking about classical music. They aim to take away some of the barriers felt by people to engage with classical music. The hosts of *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, Radio 4 presenter Jet Berkhout and her friend Fieke de Boeck, were seeking an approach that allowed them to give people the confidence to listen to classical music and maybe even attend a concert. In an interview, they explained that their goal is that "mensen niet zo snel afgeschrikt worden door klassieke muziek, het is soms best wel een hoge drempel voor mensen om er aan te

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<sup>55</sup> See Maculan, "Researching Podcasting in Museums," 221-240.

<sup>56</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Maculan, "Researching Podcasting in Museums," 33.

beginnen. [...] het is eigenlijk een instapodcast om een beetje door de brei de bomen te zien [sic].”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* is presented as a crash course in classical music in which Berkhout (the ‘insider’) explains the world of classical music to her friend Fieke de Jong (the ‘outsider’).<sup>59</sup> The podcasts consists of five episodes, varying in length between 30 and 50 minutes, which each focus on one theme: the history, repertoire, instruments, greatest hits, and vocabulary and etiquette of classical music.

*The Open Ears Project* has a similar goal. Its host, the British classical music presenter Clemency Burton-Hill, sought a way to present classical music that was less didactic than established ways of talking about classical music. She writes in *The Guardian*:

“[...] the barriers to entry [the classical music genre] still seem impossibly high; a perception not helped by the policing of those barriers by classical purists to ensure maximum discomfort for anyone unfamiliar with the rules of the game (what to wear, when to clap, how to pronounce). But why should only those of us in the know benefit from classical music’s myriad joys, its soul-nourishing powers, its potential to help get us get through life? [...] It’s time for a radical rethink about who gets to talk about classical music and how.”<sup>60</sup>

Each episode (varying in length between 5 and 15 minutes) features a single guest from a range of different people from New York – some more well-known than others – who share the classical track that means the most to them.

The above cited statements from the hosts show that both organizations aim to use podcasting as a means to make classical music more accessible and the short descriptions of the format has already revealed that they have taken a different approach to reach their goal. The following section discusses the similarities and differences between the two podcasts on the basis of the six CDA questions, using excerpts from the podcasts to illustrate the findings.

### 2.2.1 What kind of style do the podcasts represent?

As quoted above, the hosts of *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* and *The Open Ears Project* want to provide a new take on presenting classical music by moving beyond traditional ways of talking about it. According to Fairclough, one of the most significant aspects that both “restricts access [to a certain discourse] and generates awe” is formality, because not possessing certain knowledge and skills to feel comfortable in formal situations can discourage people from participating in those situations.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Jet Berkhout, interview by Patrick Lodiers, *De Nieuws BV*, BNNVARA/NPO Radio 1, July 13, 2018, [www.nporadio1.nl/de-nieuws-bv/onderwerpen/461990-sprankelend-begrijpelijk-en-leerzaam-podcast-geeft-les-over-klassieke-muziek](http://www.nporadio1.nl/de-nieuws-bv/onderwerpen/461990-sprankelend-begrijpelijk-en-leerzaam-podcast-geeft-les-over-klassieke-muziek), last accessed March 26, 2020.

<sup>59</sup> The title is a joke referring to the 1992-2014 American film franchise revolving around the pet St. Bernard named after the composer.

<sup>60</sup> Clemency Burton-Hill, “Clemency Burton-Hill: We need to get emotional about classical music,” *The Guardian*, October 8, 2019, [www.theguardian.com/music/2019/oct/08/clemency-burton-hill-classical-music-podcast-alec-baldwin-ian-mcewan](http://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/oct/08/clemency-burton-hill-classical-music-podcast-alec-baldwin-ian-mcewan).

<sup>61</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 54 and 57, cited in Maculan, “Researching Podcasting in Museums,” 221.

In other words, formality can make a certain discourse less accessible to those who do not know the rules of the game. Indeed, formality permeates the classical music discourse, from social codes in the concert hall to conventions about which vocabulary to use when talking about music. Similar to museum texts, many texts about classical music, from concert announcements to program booklets, are characterized by their formal and intellectual tone. As several excerpts cited below will illustrate, both podcasts represent a style that is far removed from that formal communication style.

Regarding formality, one of the first noticeable aspects in *Beethoven is meer dan een bond* is the relationship between the two hosts, which is mentioned at the start of the episode:

**Fieke de Boeck:** Dit is de podcast *Beethoven is meer dan een bond*. In vijf afleveringen praat je mee over klassieke muziek. Wij zijn Jet en Fieke, we kennen elkaar al zo'n zes jaar. Hebben het over heel veel dingen maar eigenlijk nooit over klassieke muziek.

**Jet Berkhout:** Ik, Jet, ben een insider...

**FdB:** ...en ik, Fieke, ben een outsider. Nou zit ik met de volgende situatie. Volgende week moet ik op bezoek bij mijn nieuwe schoonfamilie, want zij organiseren een klassiek huisconcert. Ik vind het superspannend want ik weet helemaal niks over klassieke muziek. En ik wil natuurlijk wel goed voor de dag komen.

**JB:** Je wil het er over gaan hebben hè, Fiek.

**FdB:** Jet, ik heb je zó hard nodig.

**JB:** Je wil les.

**FdB:** Een spoedcursus graag.

**JB:** Gaan we doen.

The introduction signals two types of relationships: a formal one, that of teacher and student, and an informal one, that of two close friends. The formal relationship is emphasized by the description of the podcast as a crash course: 'insider' Berkhout represents the classical music world and functions as a 'translator' of its history and mores to 'outsider' De Boeck.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the episode, there are multiple occasions in which this teacher-student relationship is highlighted: there are references to taking notes, compliments back and forth for providing such good explanations

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<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that Berkhout's position as the insider, who acts as a knowledgeable guide into the classical music world, is the result of her status as classical music radio presenter and is less based on the possession of the most knowledge and expertise (she is not a musicologist herself). This, in turn, may be seen as an outcome of recent efforts to rejuvenate its pool of presenters and make further changes towards less scholarly communication styles. See Merlijn Kerkhof, "Radio 4 doet niet moeilijk meer over klassieke muziek, tot woede én plezier van de luisteraar," *De Volkskrant*, January 25, 2019, [www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/radio-4-doet-niet-moeilijk-meer-over-klassieke-muziek-tot-woede-en-plezier-van-de-luisteraar~b1d0413c/](http://www.volkskrant.nl/cultuur-media/radio-4-doet-niet-moeilijk-meer-over-klassieke-muziek-tot-woede-en-plezier-van-de-luisteraar~b1d0413c/); Gudo Tienhoven, "Het geheim achter de opmars van NPO Radio 4," *Het Parool*, April 24, 2019, [www.parool.nl/kunst-media/het-geheim-achter-de-opmars-van-npo-radio-4~b97d0e5b](http://www.parool.nl/kunst-media/het-geheim-achter-de-opmars-van-npo-radio-4~b97d0e5b).

and being a great student, and most significantly, the recurring task for De Boeck to make summaries of Berkhout's explanations.

Although the teacher-student relationship is foregrounded in these explicit statements by both hosts, their more informal relationship is much more prominent because the casual register connected to close friendship is dominant throughout episode (we will later see under question 3 that the teacher-student relationship is underscored by other linguistic aspects). The casual register is created through explicit statements as well as more implicit, informal use of language. The hosts seem to work from notes, rather than a script, because the dialogue happens spontaneously and there is a lot of feedback between them. There is a high amount of false starts, sentences that are grammatically incorrect, word repetitions, hesitations, fillers, and there is a lot of banter and laughter. Furthermore, Berkhout regularly uses the diminutive form of the name Fieke, which becomes 'Fiek', signaling their close relationship and highlighting the relaxed nature of their conversation. All these elements together create a casual and chatty atmosphere and these linguistic features soften down the more formal, didactic relationship between the two. The casual tone is dominant, even in the summaries that De Boeck has to provide. In the following example of such a summary, De Boeck summarizes classical music history from Bach to our time and it is exemplary for several other aspects of informal language:

**JB:** Nu de hamvraag: kunnen we deze hele podcast samenvatten in één minuut?

**FdB:** Ja, wel lekker bezig hè?

**JB:** Ja, ik denk 'hup'.

**FdB:** Oké, mag ik mijn aantekeningen erbij pakken?

**JB:** Ja, ik vind het leuk dat je zo vlijtig hebt meegeschreven.

**FdB:** Dank je, 't was ook bereïnteressant.

**JB:** Hm, go.

**FdB:** Oude muziek: vooral kerk en gezang toen kwam de uitvinding van een extra zanglijn. Barokmuziek. Bach Bach Bach en de klavecimbel. De klassieke periode. Mozart, met een lekkere melodie en lekkere meezingers. Romantiek. Emo drama en het oprekken van de wetten. Twintigste eeuws. Heftig, alles kan en mag, de mogelijkheden zijn eindeloos. Hedendaags. Chill en hip of herrie en superpanna.

This example illustrates the popular register used throughout the entire episode. It includes several aspects of informal language: casual statements ("lekker bezig," "lekkere melodie", and later in the episode "Laten we keihard die theorie in gaan") and slang used to characterize historical periods ("emo drama," "superpanna", "chill"). Furthermore, the hosts regularly use anglicisms: in the

example above, De Boeck uses the term “dramaboys” to describe Romantic composers and later in the episode, Berkhout explains a fugue as “Vader Jacob gone crazy”.

Additionally, the hosts explain classical music by drawing comical comparisons. For instance, a harpsichord “klinkt een beetje als een spijkerkist,” and a Romantic composer is “een beetje de singer songwriter van nu die dan na tien minuten bij je date gewoon z’n gitaar erbij pakt”. Furthermore, they compare classical composers to contemporary figures from popular culture, as in the following example:

**JB:** Nee, nou, Bach is – met alle respect voor Dirk Kuit – Bach is echt nog wel een tandje groter. Dat is... Cruijff.

**FdB:** Dirk Kuit plus.

**JB:** Da’s Messi, da’s Cruijff.

**FdB:** Ronaldo.

By comparing Romantic composers to modern-day singer-songwriters and Bach to world-famous soccer players, the podcast supposedly provides the listener with a more familiar framework to which they can relate the newly learned information, though it should be noted that like classical music, soccer culture equally has its own knowledge framework including famous figures, historical events, and technical terms, and in that sense is not much different from classical music.

The most striking moments of a highly casual style are no doubt the moments that the hosts bring bedroom-related talk into the conversation. This occurs two times in the episode. Note for instance this exchange, which follows directly after a music example of a Renaissance Italian love song:

**JB:** Dit is dus allemaal Italiaanse tekst... Vrij vertaald wordt hier gezongen: ‘ik wil je neuken’.

**FdB:** Ik word er niet heel geil van, Jet, maar goed, ieder z’n ding, hè.

**JB:** Nou, hoe dan ook [*laughs*], wacht maar Fieke, aan het eind van deze podcast...

**FdB:** ...dan glij ik van mijn stoel.

By bringing sex – in itself considered an intimate topic – into the conversation in such a casual way, this exchange once again foregrounds the close relationship between the hosts and the fact that they do not mince words when it comes to expressing their opinion about music.

In terms of over-all style, the first episode of the *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* podcast presents the history of classical music, its composers and its cultural contexts in a light-hearted way, peppered with personal thoughts and reactions, jokes and laughter. The style is highly informal

and can be considered intimate in the sense that the listener is sitting in on a casual conversation between close friends.

*The Open Ears Project* establishes an informal and intimate style in a different way. Due to the different guest each episode, there are differences in the use of languages because each guest has their individual way of speaking. There are, however, several constants and similarities that are revealed upon closer examination. Before I describe the linguistic aspects, it is necessary to understand the basic structure of each episode. Each episode begins with one or two advertisements, after which Clemency Burton-Hill gives a short introductory statement.<sup>63</sup> This is immediately followed by the musical piece chosen by the guest. A few seconds after the music has started, the guest begins to tell their story while the music underscores their story. The guest's monologue is followed by an excerpt of *Etude No. 2* for piano solo by Philip Glass and a few closing remarks by Burton-Hill after which the rest of the guest's music fills up the rest of the episode. As a result, the duration of each episode is majorly influenced by the music: since some pieces or movements are longer than others, some episodes are shorter (around five minutes) and some are longer (up to fifteen minutes).

Burton-Hill introduces the first episode as follows:

**Clemency Burton-Hill:** Welcome to *The Open Ears Project*. I'm Clemmie Burton-Hill and every day for 30 days we're going to hear from people, all sorts of people, who share an intimate story about the classical music that gets them through their lives. Part mixtape, part a sonic love-letter, you can consider this as a sort of musical journey into the lives of others. Hopefully by the end of it we'll not only hear classical music differently, but each other too. So, here we go. This is day one.

Like 'Fieke' became 'Fiek' in *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, Burton-Hill uses the informal Clemmie instead of her full name. This is not unique to this particular podcast because she does this on her radio shows as well. Nevertheless, it contributes to the relaxed atmosphere of the podcast, which Burton-Hill herself explicitly characterizes as intimate and also compares it to products – a mixtape and a love-letter – which are commonly shared between two people who know each other intimately. The introduction quoted above occurs only once. From the second episode onwards, Burton-Hill only says “This is *The Open Ears Project*, welcome to day [number]” at the beginning of an episode, which implies that the aim is that people will follow the podcast from start to finish, rather than listen to single episode (although that is entirely possible because there is no ongoing narrative).

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<sup>63</sup> The advertisements also point to another difference between the two broadcasters, namely the way in which they are funded. Both are non-profit. As part of the Dutch public broadcasting system, AVROTROS/Radio 4 is funded by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. WQXR/WNYC Studios, on the other hand, is funded through philanthropy, crowdfunding, and sponsorship.

It is striking that Burton-Hill never mentions the name of her guest. There is also no dialogue at all between her and the guest, in contrast with the abundance of dialogue in *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*. Moreover, in nearly all episodes, the first sentences uttered by the guest, are not an introduction of themselves either. Note for instance the following example from the beginning of episode 8, in which opera singer Jamie Barton speaks while *Nocturne No. 21* by Frederic Chopin is playing:

**Jamie Barton:** If you're having a day when you need to feel just, the most intense aural catharsis, this piece is like emo teenager meets your heart on your sleeve. My name is Jamie Barton.

In this example, Jamie Barton introduces herself only in the second sentence. The first sentence the listener hears is actually a statement related to Barton's process of attaching meaning to Chopin's nocturne. So, with the exception of the advertisements and the opening remarks by Burton-Hill, the first thing the listener hears is music, followed directly by a personal interpretation of this music. In other words, there is no slow build-up in terms of a formal introduction of the guest by the host or a guest moving from more general remarks to personal comments. Instead, the listener is pulled in immediately and motivated to listen to the music from the highly personal and sometimes emotional perspective of the guest.

The guests' comments always refer to profound topics such as peace, conquering fear, the meaning of home, finding joy, vulnerability, and catharsis. They share intimate and personal details from their life, related to these themes. For example, author and digital strategist Aminatou Sow talks about how "Juba Dance" from *Symphony No. 1* by the American composer Florence Price gave her strength in her fight against cancer:

Episode 5 – **Aminatou Sow:** And I just remember looking at my really truly wonderful gynecologist and thinking like wow, this is very hard for her. And I had my phone and my headphones with me, I've been listening to a classical playlist and ended and then this was the next thing that it served me. And I remember it was very joyful. And it was very defiant and it felt really romantic to me in this, like, very big way. And it really just imprinted on my brain that day and I was like, this is the mood... this is the mood we are going for. Everybody else is borderline tears. They're whispering to you. They don't know what to tell you. I was very excited, I was like, oh my God, let me tell you. I finally have a... I have a thing that I know what it is. It's cancer, it's great! And people don't like to hear that. I was like: Juba Dance... It just became the background to illness for me.

Similarly, firefighter Jon Vogt (episode 2) talks about Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* and how it gave him the power to conquer fear during his work searching for bodies after the 9/11 attacks. Conductor Eric Jacobson talks about the loss of his mother when he was a teenager and shares his mother's favorite piece with the listener. The intimacy lies in the fact that the guests share music



that has accompanied them at key moments in their life, music that helped them through both difficult and happy times. The music is not just an illustration of their story, but it has become part of their story and part of their identity. By sharing it with the listener, the guests offer the listener not only a peek inside their life, but also reveal some of their most private feelings and thoughts.

Compared to *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, there are much less examples of slang in *The Open Ears Project*. This occurs only occasionally, for example in the fifth episode: “I never thought that this Hispanic chick from Brooklyn would be digging it”, “This piece you’re listening to right now is my jam” (underlinings mine). In general, the guests’ register can be characterized as using the language of everyday speech. Their monologues flow with much less interruptions than the speech in *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, probably due to the lower tempo of speaking and the higher number of pauses in which there is time to think and construct sentences. Still, the way the monologues are structured is far removed from the rules of written text: there are enough word repetitions, oddly structured sentences, pauses, and filler words that give the impression that the guest’s story is an ongoing thought process. This is also made clear by the extensive use of conjunctions. See for example the excerpt by Aminatou Sow quoted above: she begins five consecutive sentences with “And I” or “And it”. This narrative structure, in which events and thoughts are strung together using the conjunction ‘and’, is common in colloquial speech and it gives her story an informal tone.

### **2.2.2 How do the speakers use grammatical structures to build a relationship with the audience?**

In *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, the listener is addressed directly only once, namely in the introduction (see the example on page 4 above). It features the second-person singular (“In vijf afleveringen praat je mee over klassieke muziek” [underlining mine]), which underscores the informal nature of the format as well. It refers to the implied para-social relationship between hosts and listener: naturally, the listener cannot literally talk to the hosts but the phrase “praat je mee” does suggest that the listener can actively participate in the conversation. In the rest of the dialogue, the hosts frequently address each other with their names, which emphasizes their relationship rather than the connection between them and the listener.

In *The Open Ears Project*, both the host and the guests construct a relationship with the audience more often and more strongly. A recurring moment when this happens is at the end of the guest’s monologue. Burton-Hill ends each guest’s story with a comment on their chosen piece and directly addresses the listeners:

Episode 1 - **Clemency Burton-Hill**: Alec chose the “Adagio” from Khachaturian’s *Spartacus Suite* and if you can give yourself the next ten minutes or so just to reset and

indulge in the whole soaring thing, then it's coming right up. If not, we're going to be providing the full tracks of all the music that we hear on Open Ears: just head to [openearsproject.org](http://openearsproject.org) to find out more. I'll see you tomorrow.

After this example, the listener hears the rest of Khachaturian's "Adagio" from the *Spartacus* ballet. This is a significant difference with *Beethoven is meer dan een bond*, in which there are only short music excerpts that function as illustration for Berkhout's explanations. In the example above, on the other hand, Burton-Hill invites the listener to listen to the rest of the piece, specifically in the way actor Alec Baldwin has connected with it ("reset and indulge"). In this way, the listener always hears a complete piece or movement (in some episodes occasionally interrupted by sound fragments such as historical news footage that illustrates the story), and they are urged by the host to take action, which makes for a different connection to the music than in *Beethoven is meer dan een bond*.

In the same example, Burton-Hill greets the listener with "see you tomorrow". On other occasions, she also adds phrases like "take care of yourselves". The phrase "see you tomorrow" implies that the connection between Burton-Hill and the listener is there not just for a single episode but for a longer period of time. By ending the podcast this way, Burton-Hill underscores the relational nature of the format. She also regularly asks listeners to give the podcast a review, to subscribe to the newsletter, and to contact her on Instagram or otherwise "join the conversation", which again urges listeners to take action, implies that they can become part of the conversation and that they can turn the para-social bond into a more reciprocal relationship.

This feeling of inclusion is also established by the use of the pronoun 'we' by both Burton-Hill and guests, such as in the following examples.

**Ian McEwan:** This is Ian McEwan, a British novelist, and we're going to talk about music, which is one of the great passions of my life.

**Aminatou Sow:** We're listening to the 'Juba Dance' by Florence Price from her first Symphony.

The use of the pronoun 'we' implies that the guest and audience are together, although they are not in the same room, perhaps not even in the same time zone. It again points to the para-social relationship, which in this case is also felt by the speakers, because their choice of words reflects a feeling of connection to the audience.

The pronoun 'you' is often used by the guests. The extensive use of the phrase 'you know' particularly stands out. The following excerpts feature the phrase in context:

Episode 2 – **Firefighter Rob Vogt**: And knowing him there’s no doubt about it, he ran into the buildings try to go as high as he could to help rescue people, and you know, the towers came down and he was never found.

Episode 4 – **Guitarist Miloš Karadaglić**: So often in life, we, you know, we have our shields and things we build around us to, to survive. But in music there are no shields, there is... There is nothing, it’s just... You and the music.

Episode 6 – **Author Ian McEwan**: I think, you know, when a close friend dies the first thing you confront is... is the love.

The interjection ‘you know’ is used by almost all guests in the first ten episodes in more or lesser degree. By saying ‘you know’ in connection to their feelings or memories, the speaker builds a relationship with audience because it signifies some sort of mutuality. It suggests that they share a certain memory (in the example of firefighter Rob Vogt) or that a feeling is recognizable for the listener (in the case of guitar player Miloš Karadaglić and author Ian McEwan). On a more superficial level, ‘you know’ can be understood as just a filler phrase expressing a pause or hesitation, but the fact that it includes the pronoun ‘you’ shows that it is oriented towards a listener and “it stresses the role of the addressee” in a real conversation as it invites interaction (cf. ‘I guess’ or ‘I mean’ are more speaker-oriented).<sup>64</sup>

Guests also often simulate conversation more directly, as in the following examples:

Episode 5 – **Aminatou Sow**: I mean tell me if this doesn’t make you want to jump out of your seat and dance.

Episode 1 – **Alec Baldwin**: And I just find that in the way that there’s a moment in the day where I need to just reset myself, what better way to reset yourself than the Khachaturian?

Episode 10 – **Rachel Strauss-Muñiz**: Great music transcends time everything, right?

Aminatou Sow voices her opinion in such a way that she asks for agreement from the audience. And Alec Baldwin and comedian Rachel Strauss-Muñiz deliver their thoughts in the shape of a question. In these examples and the examples featuring the phrase ‘you know’, the guests’ speech simulates a dialogue between the guest and the listener. Every ‘you know’ and every question invites feedback from the listener, as if it were a regular conversation where they could nod in agreement or give an answer. With these suggestions of dialogue in their speech, the speakers construct a bond with the audience, even if they cannot immediately engage with each other.

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<sup>64</sup> See Jan-Ola Östman, *You Know: A Discourse Functional Approach* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1981), 15-43.

### 2.2.3 What values do textual features have in terms of subject position of the producer and the audience?

This question is concerned with the social structure of the discourse. According to Fairclough, discourses have a set of recognized ‘social roles’, which he calls subject positions, in which people participate in the discourse. In Fairclough’s words, “occupying a subject position is essentially a matter of doing (or not doing) certain things, in line with the discursual rights and obligations [of that subject position] – what each is allowed and required to say, and not allowed or required to say, within that particular discourse type”.<sup>65</sup> The social structure determines the discourse and at the same time the discourse “determines and reproduces” the social structure, because only because people take up a subject position, they continue to be part of the social structure.<sup>66</sup>

In *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, there is a clear distinction between the role of Jet Berkhout on the one hand and Fieke de Boeck, and the podcast listener by extension, on the other. This separation is immediately made clear because it is explicitly stated at the introduction cited on page 20. Berkhout, the insider, assumes the role of a teacher – i.e. a position of authority – who explains classical music to her students. Her subordinates, in the person of Fieke de Boeck and the podcast listener, are outsiders and are assigned the role of listening and asking questions. These roles also reflected in the modality of sentences. Consider the following example in which Berkhout explains baroque music:

**JB:** Volgende periode is de barokmuziek en tijdsbeeld ongeveer 1600 tot 1750. D'r is eigenlijk één woord, één naam, één sleutelfiguur die deze periode markeert. Bach. Bach is Barok. Barok is Bach. En de barok eindigt ook als Bach dood gaat. Da's handig om te onthouden. Barok, Bach. Sowieso moet je Bach onthouden want Bach is een soort God.

Berkhout uses declarative sentences in her explanation, with which she positions herself as the a giver of information. The position of De Boeck and the listener is that of receivers of the information. In the last sentence, Berkhout uses the modal verb ‘moeten’: “Sowieso moet je Bach onthouden.” Modal verbs are used to convey the user’s attitudes and judgements. With ‘moet’, Berkhout conveys an obligation, with which she asserts authority over De Boeck, and by extension, the podcast listener.

Other occasions in which these roles are emphasized are moments when De Boeck questions if she is allowed to say certain things about classical music. In the following example, De Boeck voices her opinion on Gregorian chant:

**JB:** Pas vanaf de middeleeuwen krijg je een beetje zicht op die klassieke muziek en die begint heel basic. Met éénstemmige kerkgezangen.

[*Music example of unidentified, melodic Gregorian chant on the words 'timentibus eum'*]

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<sup>65</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 31-32.

<sup>66</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 31-32.

**FdB:** Niet alleen éénstemmig, maar ook beetje ééntonig. Kan 'k dat zeggen?

**JB:** Ja dat mag je zeggen. 't Is, 't is ehm, 't is heel basic inderdaad.

In this case, Berkhout's position as the person 'in the know', and therefore the person with authority, is brought to the forefront even more because by giving her permission, it is she who determines whether or not De Boeck is allowed to say that Gregorian chant is dull.<sup>67</sup>

Still, there are number of occasions where Berkhout softens her authority. The example that best illustrates this is the following exchange about the definition of the term 'classical music':

**FdB:** Dus oosterse muziek uit die tijd is geen klassieke muziek?

**JB:** Dat niet nee.

**FdB:** Best wel vreemd toch eigenlijk? Waarom?

**JB:** Dat is eigenlijk heel raar.

**FdB:** Waarom is er zo'n zo'n strikte grens getrokken?

**JB:** Ja... dat weet ik niet. Het gekke... ik weet niet waarom dat is. Ik heb 't zelf niet bedacht, maar het hele oosten is in de term klassieke muziek niet inbegrepen.

By admitting she is unable to answer De Boeck's question, Berkhout steps back from her role as insider and authority on classical music, as she assumes a more equal position in comparison to De Boeck, with which she is able to question the world she represents. Significant is her use of the adverb 'eigenlijk' when she says that she finds it strange that the term 'classical music' doesn't encompass (Middle-)Eastern music. 'Eigenlijk' is a modal particle, a word with which the user adds a mood to a statement or reveals how they relate to that statement. 'Eigenlijk' in this context signals Berkhout's apologetic mood or feeling of uncertainty which undermines her initial position of authority. By saying "ik heb 't zelf niet bedacht" she continues that process because with that phrase, she emphasizes that she herself has played no part in creating the definition and canon of classical music, with which sets herself apart from other insiders.

In *The Open Ears Project*, these diminishments of one's authority and emphases on one's subjectivity occur more often. The strongest examples occurs in the fourth episode with classical guitarist Miloš Karadaglić, in which he talks about music by Francisco Tárrega:

**Miloš Karadaglić:** There is a deep emotional connection because it's... maybe it's just for me, I don't know. Maybe I'm idealizing it, I have no idea but it's... It's just because I

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<sup>67</sup> The chant excerpt features a free melody, which supports my understanding of De Boeck's use of the word 'eentonig' as a characterization of the music as 'dull', rather than as a reference to the monotonous quality that a recitative on a single pitch would have.

can so relate to every note of that piece, and it's much harder to as an artist find musical meaning in a piece that has very few notes.

Although Karadaglić begins his sentence as a categorical statement, he questions his own interpretation and emphasizes again and again that his interpretation is only his own and does not necessarily apply to other people. All episodes are dominated by phrasings such as “It seems to me that ...”, “I think that ...”, “I feel ...”. These phrases signal the the subjective nature of the statement and the speaker’s highly personal interpretation of the meaning. In this way, the guests emphasize that this is just one possible way of interpreting the music, rather than presenting their meaning as fact.

However, there are some instances where this subjectivity of interpretation is disguised by using the pronoun ‘you’. We find such a use in the following example, in which Alec Baldwin talks about Khachaturian’s *Spartacus Suite*:

Episode 1 - **Alec Baldwin:** And I think that the Khachaturian is simple in some ways. But that simplicity allows it to get inside you, and I can only think of a very clichéd word, which is soaring. You listen to this music and this music is soaring. By the time this piece is over you are revived.

At first, his statement “I think” makes clear that it is a personal opinion that Khachaturian’s music is simple. But then, with the use of ‘you’ in the last two sentences, he constructs a relationship with the audience, in which it is less apparent that it is his personal opinion is. ‘You’ suggests a relationship of partnership between the speaker and the audience, which implicitly forces the listener to think along the lines of his statement. So even though the speaker might not explicitly position himself as a person of authority, he can still impose his interpretation upon the listener. In many of *The Open Ears Project* episodes, we find combinations of clearly recognizable subjective statements, such as in the example of Karadaglić, and these opinions disguised as categorical statements, sometimes even within the same sentence.

#### **2.2.4 To which degree do the podcasts break with the organization’s voice of authority?**

The first stage of the analysis shows that *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* uses a personal and extremely informal communicative approach. The informal way of speaking can be considered part of a larger strategy for Radio 4 as a whole, namely to ‘demystify’ classical music radio. In the last few years, Radio 4 has noticeably made an effort to rejuvenate its pool of presenters, using more informal language such as addressing their listener with ‘jij’ instead of ‘u’, and changing the program

formats.<sup>68</sup> The content and communication style of the podcast has taken that goal much further. The casual style of conversation with the high amount of slang and anglicisms breaks with the current, though updated, Radio 4 voice. Furthermore, although it is not unusual for radio hosts to tell their listeners personal anecdotes, Berkhout and De Boeck again bring this to the extremes with their boyfriend- and bedroom-related remarks. Their casual comments on sex as in the example on the Italian Renaissance song would be unheard of in a regular Radio 4 broadcasted show and would surely be provoking to their traditional listener base.

Also, the hosts regularly express their opinion after they listened to a musical example, such as after listening to music by Stockhausen:

**FdB:** Misschien moet je er ook een beetje naar leren luisteren maar voor mij is het ook muziek [*inaudible*] als ik een huisfeestje zou geven en ik denk nou nu is het wel genoeg geweest, zet ik dit op, iedereen naar huis. De oprotmuziek.

Giving such a strong opinion of Stockhausen's music by characterizing it as "oprotmuziek" sets the podcast apart from regular Radio 4 shows because hosts generally function as a neutral guide for the listener's journey through the repertoire. In the case that personal thoughts on music are voiced in broadcasted shows, hosts generally make remarks about the quality or musical choices of the performers (performance critique), not about the composer (composition critique).

Furthermore, Berkhout and De Boeck do not shy away from discussing questions that are usually left undiscussed, even in the more laid-back classical radio shows. Voiced by Fieke de Boeck, questions such as "Hoe nodig is die dirigent?" and "Waarom is iedereen in de klassieke muziek eindelijk aan het coveren?" help the listener to understand the traditions around the classical music repertoire. This breaks with the Radio 4 tradition because it brings to the surface the implied knowledge that only insiders possess.

All in all, the informal style reflects a strong contrast with regular Radio 4 programming. However, as the analysis under question 3 has revealed, Jet Berkhout speaks on behalf of the classical music world and all the traditions that come with it. Because the hosts present themselves as either an insider and an outsider and their intention is to bring these closer together, at the same time, they emphasize that there is a clear line between people who are 'in the know' and those who are not. That last group can be 'initiated' by learning about the history, accepted behavior, and linguistic conventions such as the difference between 'musicus' and 'muzikant'. The way Berkhout positions herself as an authority in relation to De Boeck and the listeners continues the traditional

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<sup>68</sup> Kerkhof, "Radio 4 doet niet moeilijk meer over klassieke muziek"; Tienhoven, "Het geheim achter de opmars van NPO Radio 4."

model of communication between classical music radio as the holder of authority and the producer of truths and audience on the receiving end.

*The Open Ears Project* breaks with traditional classical music radio practices in a different way: by transferring the authority of interpreting music to a guest instead of the host. Most classical music radio is made by experts (in the position of host or guest), where often experts talk with other experts. For a host, Clemency Burton-Hill's physical voice plays an extremely small role in the podcast. The majority of the episodes are made up of the guest's story and music and Burton-Hill only speaks a handful of sentences. As executive producer, she is, however, the driving force behind the podcast and her personal voice resounds in the entire concept, the curation of the guests and undoubtedly also editing choices. She does not, however, have any influence on what guests will talk about.<sup>69</sup> *The Open Ears Project* reflects the idea that accessibility is not about initiating people into the classical music culture by teaching them knowledge and conventions that are supposedly necessary to participate in the classical music discourse. Instead, by centering the podcast on the interpretation of a single guest, who is often not an expert on classical music, or even music in general, the podcast advances the idea that there is no correct way to listen to classical music because anyone can have a personal interpretation of a piece, and more importantly, that one does not need to be an expert to share it with others. In other words, *The Open Ears Project* proposes that everybody has a place in the making of meaning when it comes to classical music, even if they know nothing about it.

The approach of inviting guests to share their personal favorites is not new in radio practice: for example, in the Netherlands, *Een goedemorgen met...* has been a long-running Radio 4 show which is based precisely on the concept of guests sharing personal stories and memories related to classical music, and this show format exists in other countries as well. Therefore, the argument may be made that the approach of moving the spotlight away from the host is not radically innovative. However, the distinguishing feature of *The Open Ears Project* is that it puts the spotlight on that one special piece rather than a more general gathering of favorites. Moreover, it sets itself apart from existing guest-led shows with its highly intimate and emotional storytelling format.

### **2.2.5 How do the podcasts interpret musical works and to what extent does this deviate from traditional ways of interpreting classical music?**

The format of *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* exists by virtue of a transfer of knowledge between the two hosts. The informal register of *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* can be refreshing for listeners who

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<sup>69</sup> Sara Ivry, "Open Ears, Full Hearts, Can't Lost: WQXR's New Classical Music Podcast," *HotPod News*, September 17, 2019, [hotpodnews.com/open-ears-full-hearts-cant-lost-wqxr-new-classical-music-podcast](https://hotpodnews.com/open-ears-full-hearts-cant-lost-wqxr-new-classical-music-podcast).



might feel alienated by the more formal tone used in other situations in which they receive information about classical music. However, the framework within which the two hosts operate is still very much similar to traditional structure of the classical music discourse: the information provided concerns historical periods, stylistic features, definitions, and categories. Even though the conversation is regularly injected with their personal feeling of a piece, the dominant didactic approach perpetuates the idea that in order to understand and interpret the classical music repertoire, you need to know at least the basics of its theory, history, its composers, and the cultural context in which it was produced.

*The Open Ears Project*, on the other hand, moves away from topics that are traditionally at the center of discussion, such as a composer, performer, or historical events related to a musical work. A common way to talk about music is to start with the formal aspects of a piece, followed by an explanation of the meaning of the work based on empirical research such as the theoretical analysis of the piece or the writings of the composer. In contrast to this, *The Open Ears Project* places the center of attention on one individual perception of a piece, and moreover, how a guest reacts to it emotionally, rather than rationally. In the way the speakers construct a partnership with the listeners, the process of interpretation takes place on a much more personal level and is more active, rather than in the case of when the listener is the receiver of a fixed interpretation.

### **2.2.6 What societal processes does this discourse belong to?**

The analyses of the podcasts have made evident that the podcasts both sit firmly within the context of ongoing changes in the style of communication with which classical music organizations reach out to their existing and new audiences. These changes are driven by several factors which are driven. *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* is a strong example of using informal language in order to attract a younger audience who is not so familiar with classical music and who would feel intimidated by the more formal and intellectual tone of voice that is still firmly connected to the classical music discourse. Both podcasts also reflect current debates on the relationship between organizations that traditionally hold a position of authority in the cultural field and their audiences. They both try to renegotiate that relationship through their own particular format and attempt to create a more accessible and democratic way of talking about classical music. The analysis has demonstrated that *The Open Ears Project* is more consequent in this regard than *Beethoven is meer dan een hond*, because the latter is ambiguous when it comes to the friendly yet hierarchical relationship it constructs between Berkhout, De Boeck and the listener.

The format of *The Open Ears Project* also fits in with the personal storytelling trend which media scholar Mia Lindgren has traced back to the New Journalism of the 1960's. She states that

the growing fascination with personal storytelling is driven by “radio’s capacity to privilege the unique and emotional qualities of the human voice sharing personal experiences.”<sup>70</sup> She observes that this trend has now manifested itself even more clearly in podcasts, in which creators are eager to exploit the intimate nature of the podcast. *The Open Ears Project* is exemplary for this trend and it defies existing conventions on *nho* is allowed to talk about classical music, in a product produced by a traditional public radio station. This trend on foregrounding an individual story is not only visible in journalism but also in the marketing of classical music. A recent example is the large campaign ‘Waar luister jij naar?’ launched by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.<sup>71</sup> It features posters and videos of Dutch people from different walks of life who listen to their favorite piece of classical music and share their reactions to it, which are often highly emotional, much like the stories of *The Open Ears Project*.

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<sup>70</sup> Lindgren, “Personal Narrative Journalism and Podcasting,” 24.

<sup>71</sup> View the campaign via [waarluisterjijnaar.concertgebouworkest.nl](http://waarluisterjijnaar.concertgebouworkest.nl).

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I have investigated to what extent the medium of the podcast has the potential to provide a platform for making classical music more accessible. After reviewing the relevant literature, I support yet also wish to bring nuance to the arguments on the intimate nature of podcasts as discussed in Chapter 1. Additionally, the analysis of *The Open Ears Project* and *Beethoven is meer dan een bond* has produced results that partially confirm previous research results on how podcasts can bridge knowledge and socio-cultural boundaries. The results of the case study also draw attention to the broader discussion about the accessibility of classical music.

The podcast has proven to be a suitable medium to make classical music more accessible because it has the potential to create an immersive and highly connective listening experience which can be beneficial for this goal because it creates a setting in which it is easier for people to feel less intimidated by knowledge-related and socio-cultural obstacles associated with classical music by untapped audiences. However, it should be noted that podcasting is no holy grail: there are some nuances that I will address below.

The podcast's quality of intimacy is attributed partly to the fact that podcasts are an audio-only medium that privileges the human voice (a feature it shares with talk radio formats) and partly to the immersive effect of headphone listening – the setting in which most people listen to podcasts. The connective act of listening and the surround sound are said to foster a listening experience which allows people to feel as if they are transported into the conversation, feeling as if they are part of it.

I have argued that the existing literature does not make a clear distinction between the interpretation of intimacy in physical terms (the sense of 'being there') and intimacy in terms of the para-social relationship between speakers and listener (the sense of connection). One can feel as if they are eavesdropping on a conversation, but not feel an intimate or close bond to the speakers (as the evidence from the Dutch survey has shown), and vice versa. This makes the interpretation of 'an intimate medium' somewhat vague as to which aspect the term intimate refers. Moreover, there are other aspects such as narrative techniques – whether or not used consciously – that contribute to both a feeling of being there and a feeling of connection, as was illustrated most clearly by the guests' use of conversation simulating linguistic elements in *The Open Ears Project*. In short, intimacy is the result of content as much as it is the result of the characteristics of the medium itself. I agree with existing literature that fundamentally listening to a voice through headphones can be considered as an intimate experience but I want to emphasize that this can only be the result

of the characteristics of the medium itself up to a certain point because at the same time it is something that can be exploited more and less effectively.

In Chapter 2, I have analyzed two podcasts that have employed the medium creatively to create alternative types of content of classical music, specifically with the purpose to minimize boundaries for audiences to engage with classical music. Based on this comparative case study, I argue that the podcast medium is indeed suitable to make classical music more accessible. They have used the podcast medium's potential to create an intimate listening experience: *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* by informing the listener on classical music as if they were sitting amidst of a casual conversation between close friends, and *The Open Ears Project* by appealing to people's emotions through individual interpretations of personal favorites.

Through Critical Discourse Analysis, Chapter 2 has illuminated three types of changes the two podcasts have made compared to a more or lesser degree compared to the traditional classical music radio voice. These alterations pertain to *who* is given the authority to talk about classical music, *what* they say about it, and *how* they say it. Starting with the last aspect (*how*), both podcasts deviate from the intellectual tone of voice that is so closely associated with classical music broadcasts and which can deter people from engaging with it. *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* with its highly casual, chit-chatty, and at times coarse talk larded with slang and anglicisms, and *The Open Ears Project* with its relaxed, colloquial tone with personal storytelling while avoiding jargon.

In terms of *what* is said about classical music, one podcast has made more changes than the other. Besides the informal style, *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* is considerably conventional in terms of the conversation topics: it discusses the traditional must-knows relating to stylistic periods, composers, instrument types, and seminal works. The hosts take some steps out of the box by not mincing their words when it comes to their personal opinion, explicitly discussing and questioning the traditions and social codes associated with classical music – something that is usually only learned through upbringing and observation. *The Open Ears Project* throws the conventional topics of discussion overboard and puts in the spotlight not composers or stylistic features but people's individual relationships with a piece of music.

The greatest difference is related to who is given the authority to speak about classical music. The two hosts in *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* are presented as friends, which is also underscored by their style of communication. However, the analysis has shown that the podcast also foregrounds their hierarchical relationship of teacher and student. In that sense, the traditional dominance of the classical music expert (as the provider of information and producer of meaning) versus the audience (as receiver) is continued. *The Open Ears Project* confronts that hierarchy by transferring the authority almost exclusively to a non-expert guest.

In sum, *The Open Ears Project* has gone further than *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* in terms of establishing change in the way classical music is presented and interpreted. One can question to what extent the ‘crash course approach’ makes the classical music repertoire and culture is truly more accessible in the long run. It offers information in a light-hearted and easy consumable way but at the same time perpetuates the idea that you need to some basic knowledge to understand classical music and participate in its culture. While this may sound negative, I do not mean to imply that *Beethoven is meer dan een hond* cannot be successful or that it cannot have a positive effect on people’s engagement with music. What I suggest, though, is that it draws attention to the accessibility debate of classical music at large. Within that debate, and in future communication endeavors, the question of who is given the authority on meaning-making deserves more attention.

Whether podcasts indeed positively affect the accessibility of classical music can only be revealed through audience research. In that context, the most interesting audience group consists of people aged between 18 and 40 because these are the generations that currently use podcasts the most. It is also a relevant group in light of policy goals to reach younger audiences. Furthermore, the concept of intimacy demands more detailed attention from both academics and podcast creators, since it plays such a central role in the creation of podcasts and analysis of podcasting practice. How the para-social relationship might be cultivated with listeners in this relatively new medium needs further investigation. From a marketing standpoint, establishing a connection with people is a powerful mechanism to draw audiences in, so more research on this topic would be relevant for professionals in the field.

Whether the podcasting trend will linger and which place podcasts will take in the Dutch media landscape is something that only time can tell. For now, the podcast has proven to be an exciting medium for experimentation, while it has the potential to be an effective communicative tool to make classical music more accessible to those who are interested in it but do not feel comfortable with its traditional context.

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