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MANAGEMENT OF MUSIC FESTIVALS IN RUSSIA AND IN EUROPE

Fifteen years ago there was no such thing as an art-market in Russia (USSR). Those few music festivals that were running were entirely funded by the government and were made to its measure. Now times have changed. New festivals appear every year sometimes in spite of the little knowledge their directors have in art-management. Hence it is no wonder that many such festivals fail to survive for financial reasons or inability to establish adequate image. In the following article the author tries to define the differences between organising music festivals in Russia and in Europe by taking into consideration each one of four components of any festival – management, sponsors, artists, audience – and researching how they function.

We say in Russia that “theatre starts with a coat hanger”. In fact it is not true – any performance starts because there was a person who put the coat hanger on its place – and that must be a member of the management team. All over the world, and Russia is no exception in this case, it is the management team that creates “the face of the festival”. It is them who represent the festival in all its dealings with the outside world, for example the audience, the press, the radio etc. It is them who determine what the festival will be like and make sure that everything runs as smoothly as possible.

Who are the directors of successful festivals? Quite often we see that the directors are people prominent in certain fields. As an example we may take “Stars of White Nights” festival organised by Valery Gergiev, or even “Earlymusic” festival in St. Petersburg whose co-director is Andrey Reshetin, probably the best known of our baroque violinists. Such cases definitely have some advantages as famous names can easier attract money for the event, but it also creates a problem of festival identity; audience may be misled. “Stars of White Nights” is not the festival of V. Gergiev but of classical music.

Whoever the directors are the main characteristics they should possess are entrepreneurial skills and deep knowledge of the subject. Sometimes both are combined in one person, sometimes the goal may be achieved by successful collaboration of two people or more people. There does not seem to be any striking differences between art managers in Russia and in Europe, but Russian managers should be ready for more work. As the director of “Earlymusic” festival in St. Petersburg Marc de Mauny says: “Working in Europe would be much easier. In the West there exists a certain social structure with established links between its members – audience, show and sponsors. Take London for example – there is a mediator company with a huge database. An art-manager comes and asks: ‘I am involved in the latest rap-music project. Do you have any contacts, sponsors for me?’ The agency then finds a number of companies whose PR-politics suggests they might be interested. Surely Russian art-market is not yet up to this level of development” [3].

Russia definitely has much to learn from the western countries in terms of art-management. Probably the main point of difference is building the financing plan. Take “Earlymusic” festival in St. Petersburg, 30% of all the expenses are covered by the consulates, 5% by the commercial profit (ticket sales) and 65% by the sponsors. In Europe 35% of all the expenses would be covered by commercial profit, up to 50% by the governmental funding and only 10 to 15% would be covered by the sponsors [3]. Lack of governmental support lays the burden of financing on the insecure support of sponsors. Taking into account the economic situation in Russia and the novelty of the art-market, creating a realistic budget turns into an arduously difficult task for the management. One problem is fluctuations in the financial markets make it incredibly hard to secure the

sponsorship help in time for the festival to go on as the budget must be defined at least 6 to 8 months before the festival starts. Another problem lies in the mentality of modern Russian businessmen. Many of them simply do not fully realise the difference between charity and sponsorship. Sponsorship is a mutually profitable agreement and that is exactly what art-managers have to offer. Sponsors get advertisement and, most importantly, “public image” [1]. Names of the companies get associated with certain music groups, certain life-styles. As mentioned above, there is more awareness among potential sponsors in the West and that eases the interactions between them and management teams working on some art-project.

Now come the artists. Any festival wherever it takes place will aim at two categories of performers: on one hand, it is always appealing to invite the most famous artists that can provide maximum of enjoyment for the audience. After all, as Keith Mayler, director of M.A.M management, says: “Artists simply have to be good because they are the medium communicating with the audience. If the artists were not top quality then people would not return for more concerts.” Equally important it is to work with young and relatively inexperienced musicians giving them exposure. This contains more risk though. Without due preparation and selection there will be no rising stars but unknown mediocrities only. Nevertheless justified risk will only contribute to the positive image of the festival and to the musical scene in general.

Surely nothing happens without spectators. The audience is the one and only decisive factor of whether the festival will live. Sponsors want to see audience satisfied otherwise they will stop sponsorship. Artists want to see audience responsive and interested otherwise they will not be back. As a result, reaching as wide an audience as possible is of utmost importance. Unfortunately, in Russia it does not always happen that way. Due to financial reasons, price of the tickets for the festival concerts can triple or quadruple compared to normal prices at the same venue. Automatically that limits the access to the festival for the largest part of the potential audience [2]. Nevertheless, it is the audience in Russia that creates a special spirit of unity during the performance. Friendly and just, supportive and demanding Russian audience welcomes the artists and rewards them by their merits.

To sum up, success depends on the interactions between four constituents of any festival – management, sponsors, artists and the audience, with management being the core organisational unit whose role is to establish links to the other three. There are still certain peculiarities of organising festivals in Russia – i. e. lack of governmental support, low awareness of the sponsors etc., but the cultural potential of the country undoubtedly helps to overcome them. The most important thing for the festivals already running is continuity, so those yet to appear would exist in the environment of an established and successfully developed art-market.

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