

## Representing classical music listening practices in modern literature and cinema

**Field of Study :** Arts and culture, Literature, Sociology

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### KEYWORDS

Western classical music – Literature – Cinema – Performing arts

### ABSTRACT

Classical music (or what may more widely defined as “western learned music”) is a major part of Europe’s cultural heritage. And it includes the traditional concert or opera performance, which mainly is a 19th century legacy. But ways of listening to music have changed over the last decades (from the triumphant CD’s advent to the era of streaming platforms and You tube) and so has sometimes the rite of classical concerts itself. Contemporary literature and cinema reflect that evolution, associating values and meanings with those different modes of enjoying or discovering European masterworks. By doing so, one can assume that they also (re)shape our image of classical music and concerts. These interactions between literary/cinematic representations of our modern listening practices and our conception of such a musical heritage can be apprehended in a large spectrum of works varying both in *genres* and languages.



## Research aims and methodology

Research aims can be set as follows :

- to see how literary/cinematic representations of our music listening practices contribute either to reinforce the values traditionally associated with classical concert either to reshape its image in people's mind.
- to know better about functions these various representations perform in modern cinematic or literary narratives.
- to determine how and to what extent each practice (with its circumstances, its process) influences our conception of Western art music tradition, which would help to understand how this "intangible" heritage survives (and will survive) in Europe, in people's life and imagination, especially among those who are not musicians.

Researchers may choose to concentrate on one European film, novel, poetry work or even theatre play. But they will be encouraged to use an international and/or intermedial corpus that would allow them to compare ways and meanings of representing listening practices in different works. Unita partnership and comparative literature scholars involved in this project should enable research to encompass various European languages and cultures. Researchers will be able to use a large range of tools taken from different disciplinary fields (literary studies, film studies, musicology, sociology etc.). Research on narrative works will always include a reflexion on the functions of representing listening practices in such works (as, for instance, to contribute to define a character or his/her social environment, to build the plot etc.).

## Relevance and added-value of the proposed research in relation to the current state of knowledge

Sociology may choose music listening practices as an object of research but hardly considers the way values associated with these practices derive from art's representations and discourses. Several art studies explain how writers (and not only critics) and filmmakers have influenced the reception of musical masterpieces but without focusing on the way their characters listen to music. In the intermediality field, some papers or books are concerned with literary or cinematic depictions of orchestral, instrumental and vocal performances, some comment on "scènes d'écoutes", but the modern ways of listening to classical music remain the poor cousin of art and literary studies.

## Interdisciplinary nature of the research together with the alignment with the CHORAL programme and complementarity expertise of the teams

Such a programme will encourage interdisciplinarity as it invites to cross the borders between literature, film studies, musicology and even sociology. Indeed, PhD students may come from one disciplinary field or the other and, as previously mentioned, each of them will be encouraged to make use of tools taken from the range they offer.

The Choral programme addresses an aspect of cultural heritage and, among other objectives, aims at its preservation. One can easily see that Western art music tradition (or "learned music"), both as a collection of valuable works and as a panel of original performing practices, belongs to that field and is to be preserved among a wider range of citizens than the "learned" one and the musicians themselves. Studying modern literary and cinematic representations is a good way of understanding how this tradition is deeply perceived, valued and promoted or, on the contrary, disparaged nowadays. Unita partnership offers the financial and academic resources necessary to reach the interdisciplinary and international scope of the project, allowing researchers of different fields to explore their own culture and object in its perspective.



## Output plan including publication and dissemination activities

The output plan is to publish papers and PhD thesis on the topic here proposed. At some stage, an international conference, which would notably bring together Unita Professors and PHD students involved in the project, is to be organized in order to boost this research and publication activity but also to assess and synthesize its first results.

### Estimated schedule

#### First year:

- Establishing the corpus and specifying the questions (among those mentioned above) it allows to deal with.
- Creation of a selected bibliography and reading the most important essays and articles.
- Development of the interdisciplinary methodology and choice of the theoretical tools to be used.

#### Second year:

- Thorough analysis of the corpus (film(s), novel(s) etc.) and, if necessary, processing the data collected through surveys and interviews on works's reception: analysis and synthesis of the results.
- Structuring of the thesis.
- Reading the bibliography (continued) and providing an annotated evaluation of the same.

#### Third year:

- Writing the thesis
- Preparation of appendices, indexes and insertion of iconographic documents.

