

## Art-brand in modern production and distribution of music

Elena Khokhlova

Production and promotion of music nowadays functions within the frames and rules of general market. It is globally produced and reproduced to be promoted and sold, consumed. The main processes concerning production, reproduction, distribution and consumption of music therefore can be accepted under the term of creative industries, music industry to be more precise.

According to contemporary researcher of cultural industries David Hesmondhalgh music industry is one of the “core cultural industries because they [cultural industries] deal primarily with the industrial production and circulation of texts” (HESMONDHALGH 2007, 12). He describes basic components of music industry as recording, publishing and live performance. It conforms to its major activities: recording as creating and multiplying (production and packaging), publishing as distribution and promotion (advertising and delivery) and performance as display and show (reproduction). **Publishing** and performance provide the final packaged product directly to its target audience, while recording is rather conveyor stage of producing goods which cannot be yet purchased. As an act of production, **recording** has multiple functions, among which are not only basic creating, forming and packaging, but also selecting material and building basic image of potential product. As soon as the raw material is being formed and packaged, there go publishing activities. They tend to enrich the image of the product and build a strategy of its promotion. The final packaged product with unique appearance and encoded message is placed to the market and can be purchased. Live **performance** can follow publishing (independent show, tribute), be a part of its strategy (promo tour, charity concert) or act as independent activity (most of theater shows: operas, musicals, ballets).

Like in market of ordinary goods musical market suggests enormous diversity of products to consume, among which are recordings, events and connected additional items (t-shirts, books, music sheets and other attributed goods). Each purchase act leads to enrichment of personal experience and activation of aesthetic perception and decoding of the images. However, the New Economy (DOLGIN 2012) which includes music industry as one of its productive fields determines difficulties of purchasing symbolic goods, in other words, all the so called experience goods offered by art-market. This is so because these goods are encoded and suggest experience, which is not only individual and strongly dependent on personal taste, but cannot be predicted before purchase act and can hardly be tested before one. There is possibly no way to test and predict value of new experience before actually purchasing and experiencing an item: “The consumer cannot discriminate between music he considers good or bad without hearing it at least once, and possibly several times. He either buys discs with his fingers crossed...” (DOLGIN 2009, 31).

According to Russian researcher of Economics of Culture Alexander Dolgin, not differentiated prices for experience goods complicate consumer orientation in the art-market, basically making him lost in the vast diversity of identical (by price) experience goods. Therefore, he describes several ways of dragging and pulling attention of a consumer. In his study he mentions that purchase of experience goods can be based on recommendations of

market agents and institutions: critics, ratings or brands, although neither of them can be justified as a real guarantee. References of market agents, generated by the machine of advertisement, cannot be taken for granted first of all because they are based on satisfying business goals, not always harmonized with the needs of the consumer party. Anyway, those recommendation systems lie on the necessity of consumer to filtrate the giant market of arts. It takes considerable amount of time to find a source of enjoyment and demanded emotions or at least to avoid purchasing items and events of poor quality, while appealing to specialized recommendation filters can help to save some personal time.

The machine of musical industry takes advantage of all the possible recommendations. There are music ratings and charts, critical observations of any type of events and recordings, informational references about renowned musical institutions, such as theaters, philharmonics, concert halls, recording companies, radios, music streams, blogs etc. However, the most efficient and powerful recommendation is probably the one based on the reputation of brand. It is formed during the very first steps of musical production, it is considered by the publishing company and pertains to the event experience. Brand does not only provide consumer attention, but helps to save resources and time during selecting and publishing. Its main advantages are, therefore, saving business resources, and effective consumer attracting.

The general definition of brand, based on multitude marketing studies, sees it as a tool, image, promise, reputation, guarantee, and set of real or fictional properties or characteristics, which is strategically placed in the packaged product and which is positively perceived and deciphered by consumer to initiate and intensify his consuming will. Branding may be applied to promote any goods, services, stores, person, city, organization or idea (KOTLER, KELLER 2006). Consumed brands turn to be agents of language of consumption. They carry information which can be exposed and deciphered.

Art-brand is the same brand technology; however, it is applied in art-market realm. Art-brand exists and functions in the frame of creative industries which offer experience goods. It means that art-brand pretends to be reliable source of recommendation and aims to indicate unpredictable quality as positive and relevant. This is a borrowed technology to label and unify diversity of goods by a mark, which cipher contains extra information to covertly influence and direct one's emotions. Brand has value only if its mark can be deciphered by its trade target. Otherwise, it does not bring either extra emotions or meaning, and does not help to convert potential consumers. Thus, brand information should be well exposed, understandable and reliable. In this case, it adds both information and extra value to its goods, which also adds value to every single purchase.

Art-brand is founded within artistic act, shaped within artistic image, and grounded within art-market. Its life circle is framed within the processes of production (when art-brand is being created and formed), distribution (it is being enriched and placed) and consumption (it is being exposed, evaluated and deciphered) of goods provided by creative industries. As soon as an item or event is attributed by art-brand it receives a new layer of meaning to be perceived. Its basic properties, the aesthetic characteristics are strongly connected with the emotional set of art-brand. Branded goods provided by extra set of meanings are connected between each other and with the very idea of the brand. The connections of the brand are perceived by consumers as a net of goods united and attributed with a certain image and guarantee.

The nature of art-brand as a tool of commodification of artistic products is explained

better on the basis of Marxian concept of commodity. The references to the core researches of Marx (*The Capital, The German Ideology*) may be sufficient to lighten the problem of artistic goods and our perception of them. Marx suggests modified form as a model of a commodified item. Modified form (*verwandelte Form*) describes an ontological characteristic of an item as “a product of conversion and modification of complicated relations inside a system, which leads to substitution of its core connections and meanings by indirect ones” (MAMARDASHVILI 1999, 315-316). In the case of brands, it may be interpreted as a substitution or meaning of an item by its form, or relative meanings based on current ideological necessities. Modified form can be constructed and perceived by modified consciousness, the latest status of which is inscribed within the New Economy and ideology of consumption. In the Marxian tradition the most basic example of modified form is commodity, and the core of modified consciousness as consciousness, that actually creates or allows to be created the modified form, is explained as an ideology. Art-brand can be, therefore, understood as an independent agent of art-market based on real or fictional images and characteristics, aiming to support the New Economy, influence buyer's perception, and lead the ideology of consumption (consumerism) to a very unused field – to the field of commodified art.

Like fetish of archaic culture, brand contains metaphysical characteristics of a product, taken for granted *a priori*. There is a bunch of examples of fetishes (modified form) created by archaic mentality (modified consciousness). Archaic mentality is capable to transform a basic item into a sacred and celebrated being by pouring extra meanings into its sensual form (LEVY-BRUHL 1922). The celebrated item created by inquisitive mind turns to be fetish. There is an undisguised similarity in the way brands and fetishes function. Masks, for example, carry not only aesthetic characteristics in the archaic society: they also indicate social status of their owners and bring connections with the ideas of spirits (LEVY-STRAUSS 1982). A lance which once helped a hunter to succeed is believed to carry mana or a spirit touch. To celebrate the mana or spirit which blessed the lance, it is not used as a lance anymore. It is carefully kept with all the respect to it and its spirit or mana; as a result, the lance loses its meaning of a hunting tool (EREMEYEV 1996, 125– 126). These transformations are made by modified consciousness, which is willing to subordinate and transform items, and so it transforms the way we percept them.

After all, we return to Marx and his theory of the fetishism of commodity. Just like a lance endowed by new connections, meanings and relations come to be fetishized as well: a table “not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head” after being commodified (MARX 1952, 31). Brands are perceived in a similar way. For modified consciousness brands carry “mana” or extra meaning, which is ciphered and deciphered by only modified consciousness. The unique attitude towards brands (or archaic fetishes) is based on forming peculiar (sacred) relations with them. These relations consider communication with the labeled items and include them in the communication system as language agents.

Similar to any brand, art-brand may carry real or fictional (simulative) characteristics. It includes real or fictional promise concerning actual meaning of an item. However, since brand is a modified form, its dominant component, form, is presented by illusive characteristics on which its image is based. For example, parquet circle of Russian theaters turns to be VIP zone

for elite spectators during big tours of famous branded ballet dancers, such as Anastasia Volochkova or Nikolaj Tsiskaridze. The purchased item – an expensive ticket for the best seats – is, of course, used to pass through the ticket check and enjoy the performance. Anyway this general function of the ticket may transform to indirect self exposure. The chance to appear among the VIPs and to be connected with the elite while watching famous branded performers is also provided by the same ticket. In the end, the main purpose of going to a musical show is not only to watch the performance and enjoy it (which is not excluded), but to appear at the event, and constitute one's social status, or to consume some “mana touch” through connection with “sacred” brands. Marketing an item or event attributed with art-brand does not only drag additional attention to it, but legitimates its overpricing.

“Mana” of art-brand (just like any other “abstract” brand) attracts attention of those who need to consume cultural goods or to enrich personal image, experience, communication. Art-brands, therefore, do bring additional value to the cultural product: most of them are widely known or recognized at least in some special areas of their appearance. They serve as a recommendation tools for audience's navigation. By indicating certain groups of items or events, art-brands point where consumer should look for similar quality and impressions. If an art-lover attends Don Giovanni in Royal Opera House and definitely loves it, then he will seek for something of similar quality and impression level: he may navigate himself by such brands as “Mozart”, “Don Giovanni”, ROH and the names of performers he heard (most probably it would be well celebrated Joyce DiDonato and Simon Keenlyside).

Art-brands exist in various forms that connect and interact with each other, creating fusions and collaborations. However, it is possible to set them up in an organized structure with flexible frames. Dolgin suggests to divide all the art-brands into these categories:

- Public person: Madonna, Charles Saatchi;
- Production: La Scala, Universal;
- Title: *Gone with the wind*, *Tosca*;
- Fictional character: Harry Potter, Figaro.

This classification suits the multiform world of art-brands pretty well and offers space to include all the possible products of cultural industries named by Hesmondhalgh: broadcasting, film industries, the content aspects of the Internet industries, music industries, print and electronic publishing, video and computer games, advertising and marketing (HESMONDHALGH 2007, 12– 13).

In case of musical industries in particular, I would like to be more precise and suggest a bit different classification of art-brands. The idea is to divide them into 3 classes according to their dominating role in producing, publishing or performing. Therefore, the classification of music brands may look like the following:

- Creating and Recording (Producing stage): Composers, Conductors, Recording labels;
- Performing: Instrumental Musicians, Groups of Musicians (Bands), Orchestras, Singers;
- Reproducing and Delivering (Publishing stage): Theaters, Philharmonics, Radios, TV streams, Festivals.

The problem with art-brands (as probably with any art subject in general) is that they are not prone to strict classification. For example, a theater can perform both functions: creating and reproducing art-brand, as it pertains both: creating, as well as delivering resources, neither of them being dominant. That is why it is necessary to consider and qualify several deviations.

The phenomenon of sharing different types of brand usage by the same brand actor may be called **fusion**. It means that a certain brand has more than one role, developed within more than one stage of music industries, and exists in few functional fields at the same time, thus being recognized by public as multifunctional. For example, Sting is a well-known composer, singer and member of musical groups (instrumental musician). It indicates the art-brand "Sting" as fusion brand, which has more than one side of application and impression to the public: it may be recognized as a sign for a composer, musician and singer at the same time or separately.

Another typical phenomenon for brands, which has migrated to the field of art-market, is **co-branding** or collaboration of brands aiming to reach higher level of popularity and attention, increasing sales and creating larger variety of products. A good example of co-branding in classical music is The Three Tenors. Being already well-recognized by followers of classical music, Carreras, Domingo and Pavarotti expanded the territory of influence and conquered considerable area of the field of popular music. Another successful and interesting example of co-branding is the alliance of Freddie Mercury and Monserrat Caballe, which resulted in recording the album "Barcelona". It has not only united classical and popular music fans, but presented an example of classical singing to the fans of Queen's art and vice versa. In a word, co-branding is a powerful tool which can increase popularity and gain attention from non-target groups. That is why it is used more and more often nowadays (Britney Spears and Madonna, Beyonce and Lady Gaga, Valery Gergiev and MET, etc.).

There is yet another technology to increase the sales of a brand, which is called **brand stretching**. It is used to share popularity and influence of a known brand when selling irrelevant items (Gwen Stefany and her clothing brand L.A.M.B.) or promoting unknown or new products to the public (Hugh Laurie performing with the Band from TV). In these cases the fame and all the recognizable symbolic characteristics of a brand are transferred to another item or group of items or people to grab attention and support sales. Image of the brand is shared as well. Brand stretching helps to place a new product and promote it faster. This product, however, most often stays attached to the original brand presenting it.

Brand in music is actually not something new or unique. Together with the modern and well-known music brands, such as MET, Lady Gaga, EMI, Hans Zimmer, Sting or Jonas Kaufmann there are (still grand and powerful) Giuseppe Verdi, Johann Strauss, Niccolo Paganini, Feodor Chaliapin, Jasha Heifetz and others. It means that brand techniques had been involved with the production of music before music industries developed in the frames of the New Economy.

Art-brand based on a person (performer, conductor, composer, etc.) most often requires fame, stardom. It is clear, that all the brands are based on a certain level of public recognition. Some brands can be niche brands, which means they are recognizable and valuable only for some part of public with special interest and knowledge of certain musical niche and are not possible to be deciphered by others (in nor out of context). But the most powerful brands in music nowadays are those who carry the "mana" of fame. Every item or event

touched by them may turn to be a fetish (e.g. autographs, guest appearance, star reference or advice). Art-brand can be considered a serious and powerful marketing instrument in the modern production of any type of music, popular or classical.

There are few main characteristics of art-brand, which help to direct its application in producing, publishing and promoting music nowadays. First of all, brand brings additional **value** to attributed item or event and guarantees wider attention and higher prices, higher income for the business party (and sometimes, higher self-esteem for the consumer party, for those who manage to get the ticket to an exclusive event). By purchasing a labeled item or event, consumer builds specific **connections** with the brand and may use them to enrich his **experience**, impressions, self image, or consumer communication. Mark of a brand indicates a group of identical or diverse items or events as of similar quality or emotions, which helps consumers to get themselves oriented. Deciphered mark or already known image of a brand serves also as a recommendation to purchase a particular item or any item of the labeled set. All in all, art-brands implement the role of **reputation** of an item or event, or the whole set of labeled items and events. It does not only refer to promised images and relevant quality, but declares the importance of purchasing, for it is still an agent of consumer ideology.

## **Bibliography**

DOLGIN, Aleksandr. 2012. *Manifesto of the New Economy: institutions and business models of the digital society*. Heidelberg/New York: Springer Verlag, 2012. 151 p.

DOLGIN, Aleksandr. 2009. *The Economics of Symbolic Exchange*. Heidelberg/New York: Springer Verlag, 2009. 526 p.

EREMEJEV, Arkadij. 1996. *Pervobytnaya kultura: proishozhdenie, osobennosti, struktura : kurs lekcij*. Vol.2, Saransk: Izdatelstvo Mordovskogo universiteta, 1996. 159 p.

HESMONDHALGH, David. 2007. *The Cultural Industries*, London: SAGE Publications, 2007. 360 p.

KOTLER, Philip – KELLER, Kevin Lane. 2006. *Framework for marketing and management*, Boston: Prentice Hall, 2006. 384 p.

LÉVY – BRUHL, Lucien. 1922. *Le Mentalité Primitive*, Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1922. 538 p.

LÉVY – STRAUSS, Claude. 1982. *La voie des Masques* [The Way of Masks], Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982. 249 p.

MAMARDASHVILI, Merab. 1999. *Kak ya ponimaju filosofiju*, Moskva: Progress; 3rd edition, 1999. 368 p.

MARX, Karl – ENGELS, Friedrich. 1952. *Das Kapital* [Capital. Manifesto of the Communist Party], Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952. 434 p.