

Ethnic Composer Representation in Western Classical Music Across Live Concerts, Radio, and Streaming Services in America: A Quantitative Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

There has existed for decades within the United States and without to increase the cultural diversity of the Western classical music community, a traditionally white-dominated space. One way music performers and distributors have worked towards this has been through increasing the exposure received by composers of marginalized ethnicities (“ethnic composers”) using deliberate music curation practices. However, varying modes of music distribution may possess differing curational practices. This study utilizes a quantitative comparative analysis with randomized sampling to examine the quantity of ethnic composer representation across three modes of music distribution – live concerts, radio platforms, and streaming services – between the 2023-2024 orchestra performance season and the modern day. First, the study compared the quantity of overall ethnic composer representation across the three modes; then, it explored discrepancies in the representation received by individual ethnic groups across modes. The study finds that live concerts are superior to streaming services, which are marginally superior to radio platforms, at enabling overall ethnic composer representation. Unexpectedly, the exposure received by individual ethnic groups varied widely across modes, with streaming services being conducive to East Asian representation and radio platforms being conducive to Latinx representation.

INTRODUCTION

The genre of Western classical music boasts a startlingly globalized body of composers, performers, and scholars. As such, the tradition possesses the potential to yield music produced by a uniquely culturally diverse composer base. However, modern-day mainstream classical repertoire is still dominated by composers hailing from European or “Western” nations like Germany, Austria, France, and Russia due to a tendency to “canonize” – to venerate and repeatedly perform – these composers’ works.¹ In recognition of the discrepancy between the potential cultural diversity of the classical community and the relatively

¹ Anne C. Shreffler, “Musical Canonization and Decanonization in the Twentieth Century,” *Der Kanon der Musik: Theorie und Geschichte* (2013).

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homogenous reality, there has been effort for decades from authorities within the classical music community to intentionally foster cultural diversity. Consistently, increasing ethnic composers' representation in the classical community is interpreted as a means of improving overall cultural diversity, and is therefore a common focus of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the United States.²

However, music being an interaction between composer and audience, the public audience's access to and perception of classical works is paramount in shaping the genre's identity. In other words, an increasing number of works by ethnic composers has functionally no impact on effectual cultural representation if such works are not performed or otherwise made accessible to an audience. As such, it is imperative that DEI efforts aim to increase exposure received by music from ethnic composers as much as it diversifies the music body itself.

Moreover, multiple evolving modes of classical music distribution exist. Three of the most prominent modes of classical music distribution in modern-day America are live concerts, radio, and music streaming services. Each features distinct music curation processes. Quoting musicologist Miguel Ángel Marín, when deciding which pieces to present to an audience, music curators are influenced by variables like "the repertoire, the performer, the budget, the market, the listener, and the format of the concert."³ These variables can differ significantly between different modes of music distribution. Therefore, to facilitate meaningful discussion about the effectual exposure received by ethnic composers in Western classical music in America, it is necessary to investigate the ethnic inclusivity of multiple distinct modes of music distribution – including any potential discrepancies between them.

The above considered, the following three aspects must be discussed to holistically examine efforts for greater cultural representation in American classical music: first, a preliminary definition of Western classical music; second, the concept of increasing ethnic composer representation as a method for promoting cultural representation, and the implementation thereof in the United States; and third, the implications of different modes of music distribution for fostering ethnic composer representation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Western Classical Music

Musicologists like H. Wiley Hitchcock and Nicholas E. Tawa suggest that the modern concept of Western classical music in America first emerged in the mid-19th century.⁴ This time period, characterized by a burgeoning middle class, increasingly generated a populace with the desire and means to consume

² Rob Deemer et al., *2024 Orchestra Repertoire Report*, 12-13, 2024, accessed November 9, 2025, <https://www.composerdiversity.com/orchestra-repertoire-reports>.

³ Miguel Ángel Marín, "Challenging the Listener: How to Change Trends in Classical Music Programming," *Resonancias: Revista De Investigación Musical* 42 (June 2018): 115-30, accessed April 14, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.7764/res.2018.42.6>.

⁴ Paul Charosh, "'Popular' and 'Classical' in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *American Music* 10, no. 2 (1992): 117, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3051721>.

classical music. As it gained traction, “classical” music adopted connotations of superiority and prestige that contrast “popular” music’s supposed inferiority, a connotation that persists to the modern day.

However, the definition of “Western classical music” remains contentious. A 1990 article examining case-study examples of folk, art, and pop music traditions distinguishes classical music from folk music by its focus on creating music for the sake of artistic exploration, not for social functions; meanwhile, it distinguishes classical from popular music due to its patronage and audience stemming from the socioeconomic elite.⁵ A 2009 article examining the history of musical exchange between Europe and the Americas challenges the choice to define classical music as music composed solely for artistic exploration. In it, musicologist J. Peter Burkholder points out that by excluding works composed for a social function from “classical” music, researchers omit many works indispensable to the tradition today, such as Mozart and Haydn’s string quartets.⁶ Instead, Burkholder argues that all notated music that influences the evolution of Western classical music should be considered as part of this musical tradition. Burkholder goes on to broadly define “Western” music as music of Europe and the Americas – including Latin America; he includes Latin America despite conceding that more traditional definitions limit the bounds of “Western” music to only Europe, the United States, and other regions with direct European roots.

Meanwhile, in spite of the above perspectives defining classical music as music patronized by the socioeconomic elite, musicologist Ralph P. Locke argues classical music is not necessarily elitist. Nonprofit efforts since the 19th century have labored to make classical concerts more financially and intellectually accessible to broader audiences.⁷ Furthermore, in the 21st century, online forms of music consumption further democratize access to classical music. These findings bolster Locke’s argument that the definition of classical music as music patronized by the elite may be becoming less applicable, though perhaps not obsolete.

Composer Ethnicity as Cultural Representation: Debate and Implementation

“Cultural representation” within music can arguably only be achieved most thoroughly by referencing melodies, rhythms, and other musical features from a particular culture’s musical tradition. However, this method of facilitating cultural representation can be compromised by its subjectivity and by its potential for fostering caricatured misrepresentation, as was common with portrayals of African American music during the Jim Crow Era in America.⁸ Musicologist Doris Evans McGinty discusses a less contentious alternative: she argues that all music composed by a composer from a minority ethnic background constitutes cultural representation because it contributes to the musical narrative of the composer’s culture

⁵ Gregory D. Booth and Terry Lee Kuhn, “Economic and Transmission Factors as Essential Elements in the Definition of Folk, Art, and Pop Music,” *The Musical Quarterly* 74, no.3 (1990): 418, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/741939>.

⁶ J. Peter Burkholder, “Music of the Americas and Historical Narratives,” *American Music* 27, no. 4 (2009): 409, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25652227>.

⁷ Ralph P. Locke, “Music Lovers, Patrons, and the ‘Sacralization’ of Culture in America,” *19th-Century Music* 45, no. 2 (1993): 171, <https://doi.org/10.2307/746331>.

⁸ Caroline Moseley, “Music in a Nineteenth-Century Parlor,” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* 41, no. 3 (1980): 231-42, <https://doi.org/10.2307/26403312>.

and community.⁹ In this view, music written in the Western classical style by “ethnic” composers inherently constitutes cultural representation.

McGinty’s definition of cultural representation raises questions about which peoples and cultures qualify as “ethnic” in the context of Western classical music. Following the traditional definition of “Western” classical music described by Burkholder, it is logical to conclude that any individual hailing from outside Europe and non-hispanic North America – that is to say, outside regions that directly inherit the Western classical tradition – may be deemed an “ethnic composer” whose works diversify the cultural composition of the music genre.

However, DEI efforts to bolster ethnic composer representation have notably been subject to academic debate, being scrutinized due to doubts regarding their efficacy and nuanced consequences. First, there is debate surrounding the meaningfulness of celebrating ethnic composers’ works as faithful cultural representation. As McGinty points out, some academic perspectives argue that music composed by a ethnic composer – but done completely in the Western style, with no allusion to the composer’s musical cultural heritage – cannot be considered cultural representation.¹⁰ In this view, DEI efforts focusing solely on surface-level features like composer ethnicity may struggle to effectively promote cultural diversity.

Second, there are varying interpretations on what such DEI efforts mean for the composer. A 2010 article compiling statements from seven Latin American composers articulates some of the nuance of this debate. On the one hand, DEI movements offer an otherwise unattainable level of visibility to ethnic composers and their works. This diversifies the classical music landscape and challenges the established “canon” of classical works. On the other hand, composers like Cuban composer Tania León object to this artificially cultivated representation. These efforts, she argues, reduce her to a mere amalgamation of social labels – such as ethnicity and gender – and distract from her chosen identity as a musician and composer.¹¹ León’s experience demonstrates how attempts to artificially increase ethnic diversity in music are not invariably desirable. This perspective cautions against efforts to single-mindedly pursue quantitative benchmarks, such as number of ethnic composers, in cultural representation.

Taken further, these skeptical perspectives reflect fundamental doubts about the desirability of the musical DEI movement itself. In 2013 Nancy Leong coined the term “racial capitalism,” a process by which predominantly white institutions derive social and moral value by incorporating non-white individuals into their spaces and operations.¹² The participation of non-white individuals is deemed valuable, Leong argues, because of a well-entrenched favor towards racial and cultural diversification in society at large. By this logic, any DEI movement by a predominantly white institution inherently serves the institution,

⁹ Doris Evans McGinty, "Black Scholars on Black Music: The Past, the Present, and the Future," *Black Music Research Journal* 13, no. 1 (1993): 1-13, <https://doi.org/10.2307/779403>.

¹⁰ McGinty, "Black Scholars."

¹¹ Marc Gidal, "Contemporary 'Latin American' Composers of Art Music in the United States: Cosmopolitans Navigating Multiculturalism and Universalism," *Latin American Music Review / Revista de Música Latinoamericana* 31, no. 1 (2010): 40-78, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40800952>.

¹² Nancy Leong, "Racial Capitalism," *Harvard Law Review* 126, no. 8 (2013): 2151-226, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23415098>.

not the ethnic composers themselves. This interpretation of DEI movements may explain why composers like Tania León feel not supported but rather suppressed by intentionally cultivated cultural representation.

Despite such academic doubts, DEI movements to increase cultural diversity via promoting ethnic composer representation remain strong within the United States. In fact, the effort can be shown to exist as early as 1903, when America began to systematically, albeit limitedly, expand opportunities for musical education to African American musicians. In this year the Washington Conservatory of Music and School of Expression was founded – a conservatory serving African Americans specifically.¹³ More recently, 21st-century America has witnessed redoubled DEI efforts towards this same end. A 2024 report conducted by the League of American Orchestras catalogued and analyzed the composers of works performed by 212 orchestras in the United States from 2015-2024. It found that the percentage of performed works composed by deceased white men decreased from 86.4% in 2016 to 67.8% in 2024, accompanied by an increase in repertoire composed by artists from underrepresented backgrounds (men of color, women, etc.) from 4.5% in 2016 to 22.4% in 2024.¹⁴ The reports also find that, among composers featured in United States live concerts, the specific minority ethnic groups most commonly represented are Black at 9.4%, Latinx at 3.8%, and East Asian at 2.1%.

Modes of Classical Music Distribution

As noted, three of the most prominent modes of classical music distribution in America are live concerts, radio, and music streaming services. Each possesses unique characteristics, audiences, and implications for ethnic composer representation.

Live concerts are historically integral to the tradition of Western classical music. However, esteemed musicologist Leon Botstein points out that concerns have existed since the 1960s about the viability of live classical concerts in the modern age. Main concerns include the rising cost of organizing and offering concerts, declining audience interest, an aging audience base, an increasingly wide rift between “classical” music and the more mainstream “pop” music, and competition from non-live modes of music distribution.¹⁵ Nonetheless, unique features of the live concert space remain attractive, notably the irreplicability of three-dimensional space and acoustics. Botstein also acknowledges that optimistic literature exists predicting a revival in the prevalence of live concerts. The League of American Orchestras find that ethnic composer representation within live concerts is increasing due to DEI efforts, though it remains disproportionately low. Ethnic composers’ works comprised only 2.9% of concert programming in 2015-2016, though this number increased to 16.6% in 2023-2024.¹⁶ As noted above, Black, Latinx, and East Asian composers are most frequently represented among minority ethnic groups

¹³ Sarah Schmalenberger, “Shaping Uplift through Music,” *Black Music Research Journal* 28, no. 2 (2008), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25433806>.

¹⁴ Deemer et al., *2024 Orchestra*.

¹⁵ Leon Botstein, “The Future of the Orchestra,” *The Musical Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (1996): 189-93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/742361>.

¹⁶ Deemer et al., *2024 Orchestra*, 12-14.

in live concerts, in that order. Indeed, a 2023 quantitative content analysis by Simon Chambers comparing live concert's, radio's, and streaming services' effectiveness at exposing audiences to "unfamiliar" music finds that live concerts consistently offer the most exposure to lesser-known music, though the study defined "unfamiliar" in terms of composer popularity and musical characteristics, not strictly composer ethnicity.¹⁷ Nonetheless, an overwhelming preference for popular white composers remains within live concerts, with just the three major names Beethoven, Mozart, and Tchaikovsky comprising 12.9% of all works performed by orchestras investigated by the Orchestra Repertoire Reports in 2023-2024.¹⁸

Radio is a second popular medium for classical music distribution in America. Despite competition from newer digital modes of music dissemination, Americans' radio consumption remains strong, though it is marginally declining. The Pew Research Center reports that 82% of Americans above the age of 12 listen to radio in any given week, a decrease from 92% in 2009.¹⁹ Granted, this data is generalized to all radio stations and does not specifically investigate classical music radio. Chambers finds that radio is on par with live concert programming in terms of the number of individual ethnic composers featured, though it falls behind when taking into account the relative frequency with which ethnic composers' works are aired.²⁰ This focus on capturing the audience's experience, accounting for the frequency with which a work is presented, has been termed the "output perspective" by Chambers. It is unclear whether the specific weighting of distinct ethnic groups – such as Black, Latinx, and East Asian – aligns or differs from that observed among live concerts.

Music streaming services, although much newer than radio or live concerts, nonetheless contribute significantly to America's classical music consumption. First, streaming services have increased the quantity of audiences' exposure to music in general by sheer accessibility. However, this effect is somewhat compromised for classical music specifically. An examination into the most popular music streaming services, such as Spotify, reveals the platforms' fundamental incompatibility with the classical genre. For example, the organization of songs by artist conflicts with the fact that the classical repertoire consists of many performers repeatedly interpreting the same composition.²¹ Also, features like automatically generated, mood-based playlists fragment multi-movement works and remove them from their original context. Nonetheless, the sheer ease of access offered by streaming services, coupled with the emergence of platforms specializing in classical music, have the potential to increase public exposure to classical music.²² For one, the genre is rapidly growing. Revenue generated by the music streaming

¹⁷ Simon Chambers, "The Curation of Music Discovery: The Presentation of Unfamiliar Classical Music on Radio, Digital Playlists and Concert Programmes," *Empirical Studies of the Arts* 41, no. 1 (2022): 304-26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02762374221128729>.

¹⁸ Deemer et al., *2024 Orchestra*, 10.

¹⁹ Naomi Forman-Katz, "For National Radio Day, Key Facts about Radio Listeners and the Radio Industry in the U.S.," Pew Research Center, last modified August 17, 2023, accessed April 28, 2026, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/08/17/for-national-radio-day-key-facts-about-radio-listeners-and-the-radio-industry-in-the-us/>.

²⁰ Chambers, "The Curation."

²¹ Ryan Blakeley, "Mozart and Metadata," *The Journal of Musicology* 42, no. 3 (2025): 253-85, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2025.42.3.253>.

²² Ryan Blakeley, "Mozart and Metadata."

industry grew by 19.9% between 2019 and 2020, even while more conventional forms of music consumption – such as digital downloads – declined.²³ Similarly, prior research examining characteristics of radio and streaming services finds that streaming services generally attract younger users, contrasting the older audiences attracted by radio,²⁴ signaling longer term growth potential. Streaming services' implications for ethnic composer representation are unclear. In non-classical specific streaming services like Spotify, the increased exposure is once again counteracted by a tendency to gravitate towards the most famous, “canonized” composers and works, leading to less exposure to lesser-known works.²⁵ Due to ethnic composers being generally lesser known than their non-ethnic counterparts, these findings imply but do not definitively show that streaming is uncondusive to ethnic composer representation. As with radio programming, the specific weighting of ethnic groups among composers featured by streaming services is unclear.

Lastly, the differences between the above modes of music distribution appear to extend beyond straightforward deviations in content, in fact potentially affecting audiences' perception of and attitude towards the music. A 2024 neurological and physiological study conducted with 60 Australian participants finds that radio platforms are superior over streaming services and podcasts at increasing audience engagement, defined as audience immersion in the music and in the audio platform. Meanwhile, streaming services elicit the greatest degree of positivity in response to the music.²⁶ Such psychological differences generated by different modes may further accentuate concrete discrepancies in content or form, leading to increasingly diverse listening experiences.

GAP IN RESEARCH AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The identified research gap for this study is twofold. First, there is ample preexisting work examining the representation of multiple minority ethnic groups in the American Western classical music landscape. However, this existing research does not examine potential discrepancies in ethnic composer representation across multiple distinct modes of music distribution. For example, the Orchestra Repertoire Reports investigates only live concerts.²⁷ Alternatively, there also exists research examining the discrepancies between the works represented via different modes of music distribution – live concert, radio, and streaming services – and how each contributes or detracts from the dissemination of “unfamiliar” music.²⁸ However, this research defines “familiarity” in terms of composer popularity and musical characteristics, not composer ethnicity specifically. By bridging this divide and specifically

²³ IFPI, *Global Music Report 2020* (IFPI, 2021), 12-13, accessed June 24, 2026,

https://www.ifpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/GMR2021_STATE_OF_THE_INDUSTRY.pdf.

²⁴ Simon Chambers, "Distances in the Field: Mapping Similarity and Familiarity in the Production, Curation and Consumption of Australian Art Music" (doctoral thesis, Western Sydney University, 2020), accessed April 28, 2026, https://researchers-admin.westernsydney.edu.au/ws/portalfiles/portal/94861669/uws_57520.pdf.

²⁵ Chambers, "The Curation."

²⁶ Shannon Bosshard et al., "Radio, Podcasts, and Music Streaming—An Electroencephalography and Physiological Analysis of Listeners' Attitude, Attention, Memory, and Engagement," *Brain Sciences* 14, no. 4 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci14040330>.

²⁷ Deemer et al., 2024 *Orchestra*.

²⁸ Chambers, "The Curation."

investigating ethnic composer representation across these three modes of music distribution, the following insight can be gained: first, better understanding of the holistic representation received by various minority ethnic groups in the American classical music landscape; second, more extensive knowledge regarding the distinct characteristics of each mode of music distribution.

The second facet of the identified gap is as follows: the existing research regarding multiple modes of music distribution was conducted regionally in Australia. Similar research has yet to be conducted within the United States.

Taking into account the above gaps as well as practical considerations for data availability, my research question is as follows: To what extent does the representation of Western classical music composers of marginalized ethnic groups differ in frequency between live concerts, radio programs, and streaming services engaged with by Americans from September 1, 2023 to April 1, 2026?

This research question is especially relevant given the possibility for varying patterns of audience receptiveness to music across the different modes of music distribution. Any discrepancies in each mode's conduciveness to ethnic composer representation – if present – may influence audiences' perception towards ethnic composers' music depending on the characteristics of each mode. Such discrepancies would also hold direct implications for music programmers and organizations intending to increase ethnic composer representation. The existence of more culturally homogenous modes would warrant increased attention to the DEI effort in that mode specifically; meanwhile, more culturally diverse modes may prove insightful regarding the specific factors that contribute to a more ethnically inclusive curated music body.

METHODOLOGY

Data Extraction

In order to address the identified gap investigating ethnic composer representation across modes of music distribution, I utilized a comparative quantitative analysis. Similar to existing research examining multiple modes of music distribution like live concert, radio, and streaming services, I leveraged webpages and archives that record a history of pieces performed, aired, or otherwise distributed via each mode. I subsequently extracted a randomized sample of works presented via each mode, recording the composer name for each work. If a single composition featured multiple composers, each composer was listed once separately, so that the final number of composer entries may exceed the total number of works. Because the investigation aims to capture the classical music experience as experienced by the American public, duplicates of the same work (for example, the same work performed independently by two different orchestras) were not removed. This choice aligns with previous studies in highlighting the “output perspective” of music.²⁹ The data extraction process differs slightly for each mode of music distribution, the specifics of which are detailed below.

1. Live Concert

²⁹ Chambers, "The Curation."

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To obtain data on live concert repertoire performed in the United States from 2023-2024 to the present day, I referenced the League of American Orchestras' Orchestra Repertoire Search Resource. This archive tracks pieces performed by over 200 American orchestras across the 2021-2022, 2022-2023, and 2023-2024 performance seasons. Data was extracted for the 2023-2024 performance season for the "Big Five" orchestras – The New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, and Cleveland Orchestra – known for their prestige and national prominence.

INSTITUTE for COMPOSER DIVERSITY		ABOUT	SEARCH	SUBMIT	ANALYSIS	RESOURCES	CONTACT	SUPPORT US!
Sort by YEAR (A to Z)								
Records 151-200 of 255								
Show per page 50								
Page 4 of 6								
	YEAR	COMPOSER	TITLE	ORCHESTRA	CONCERTO	INSTRUMENTS	DURATION	
151	22-23	Wang Lu	New Work	New York Philharmonic			TBD	
152	22-23	Wolfe, Julia	unEarth	New York Philharmonic			TBD	
153	23-24	Azmeh, Kinan / Chaker, Layale	Dawning	New York Philharmonic			TBD	
154	23-24	Balch, Katherine	musica pyralis	New York Philharmonic			10	
155	23-24	Barber, Samuel	Concerto, violin	New York Philharmonic	Concerto	Violin	25	
156	23-24	Bartók, Béla	Concerto for Orchestra	New York Philharmonic			36	
157	23-24	Bartók, Béla	Romanian Folk Dances	New York Philharmonic			6	
158	23-24	Bartók, Béla	The Miraculous Mandarin Suite	New York Philharmonic			20	
159	23-24	Beethoven, Ludwig van	Ah, perfido!	New York Philharmonic			14	

Figure 1: A page from the Orchestra Repertoire Search Resource listing works performed by the New York Philharmonic.

Due to the relatively small number of works programmed by only five American orchestras during one performance season, I extracted all programmed works for the above five orchestras in 2023-2024, omitting any data randomization process, for a total of 435 works. Data extraction for radio and streaming services was conducted to approximate this sample size.

Admittedly, the temporal bounds from which data is available differs across each of modes of music distribution. For example, the radio station KUSC only retains history for the past 90 days. Prior research by Chambers finds that the "popularity" and "distinctiveness" of music distributed by Australian orchestras, radio stations, and Spotify playlists do not vary between the years 2009 and 2018 with any statistical significance.³⁰ These conclusions appear to suggest that sampling of data from varying date

³⁰ Chambers, "The Curation," 12.

ranges that vary at most by three years (from 2023-2026) would not adversely impact results. Nonetheless, the focus of Chambers’s study – “popularity” and “distinctiveness” – differs from the focus of the present study, namely composer ethnicity, a variance that may introduce further complications. As such, in an effort to reduce the temporal discrepancy while still incorporating sites that only offer very recent data, the temporal ranges for data extraction across modes of music distribution were selected to be as close to the date of research implementation as possible, hence the omission of data from before the 2023-2024 performance season. Figure 2 below illustrates the date ranges from which data was extracted for each radio station or streaming service, as well as for all live orchestras. Note that the date range for live concerts is an approximation of the 2023-2024 orchestral performance season, as precise performance dates are unknown; meanwhile, due to the constantly updating nature of streaming platforms, only the single date of data collection is noted.

Mode of Music Distribution	Data Source	Data Extraction Temporal Range
Live concert	New York Philharmonic	Approx. Sept. 2023 - Jun. 2024
	Boston Symphony Orchestra	
	Chicago Symphony Orchestra	
	Philadelphia Orchestra	
	Cleveland Orchestra	
Radio	KUSC	Dec. 2 2025 - Mar. 2 2026
	WFMT	Mar. 5 2025 - Mar. 6 2026
	WQXR	Sept. 1 2023 - Mar. 8 2026
	WRTI	Sept. 1 2023 - Mar. 8 2026
Streaming	Idagio	Mar. 30 2026
	Apple Music Classical	Mar. 29 2026
	Spotify	Mar. 29 2026

Figure 2: Table depicting temporal range for data collection across live concerts, radio, and streaming services.

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2. Radio

To obtain data on radio programming in the United States, I referenced past online airtime schedules for the following radio stations: KUSC (Los Angeles), WFMT (Chicago), WQXR (New York), and WRTI (Philadelphia). These radio stations were selected for their geographic diversity and their prominence in the classical music radio landscape.

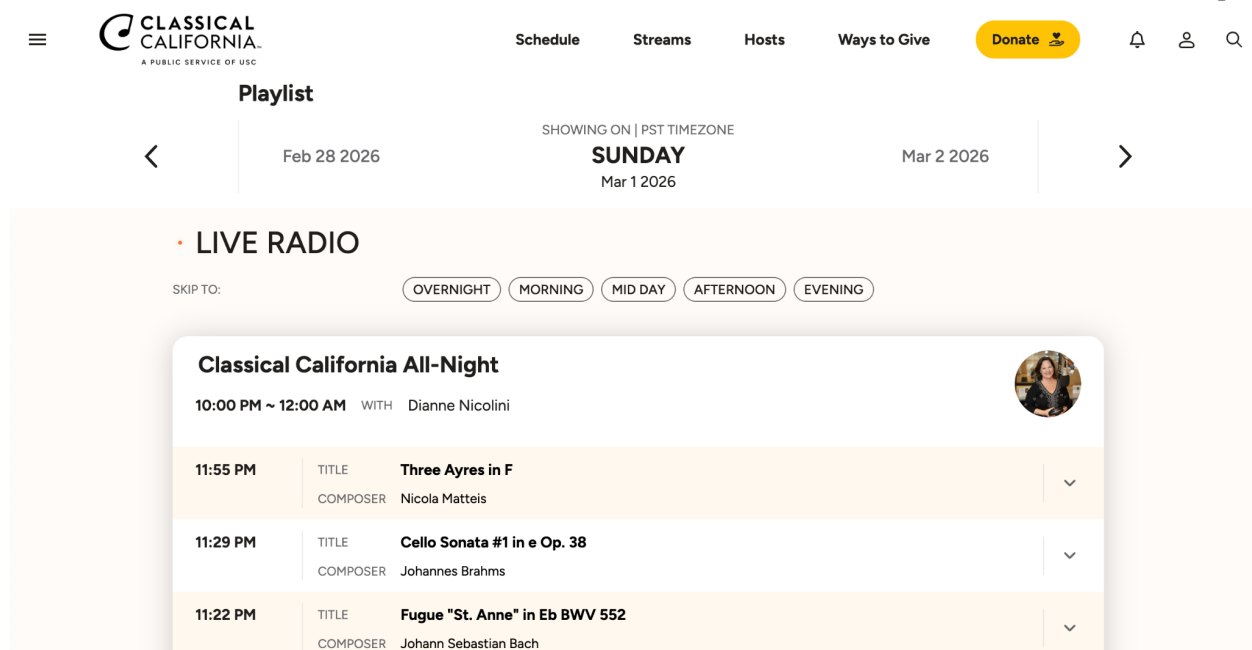


Figure 3: A page featuring the airing schedule of KUSC for Mar. 1, 2026.

Due to inconsistencies in data availability, the specific temporal range of investigation differs between stations. For a given radio station, one date is selected via random number generator from the available date range and from no earlier than Jan. 1, 2023. For any given day radio programs provide multiple available “sessions” of programming; further randomization proceeds by these sessions for convenience. One “session” from that day is selected at random. The works and composers listed under that specific session are documented. For each of the four radio stations, this process was repeated until sample size reaches 110, roughly one-fourth of the sample size of the live concert programming, for an eventual total of 454 works. Repeated dates were not allowed. The purpose of this randomization process is to obtain data evenly spaced out across the available temporal range.

3. Streaming Services

To obtain data on classical music streams, I referenced the user interface for the following platforms: Idagio, Apple Music Classical, and Spotify. The first two platforms were selected for their prominence and specialization in classical music, which has been attested to by previous work examining the role of

streaming services in classical music dissemination.³¹ The last, Spotify, was included because of its domination of the general music streaming market.

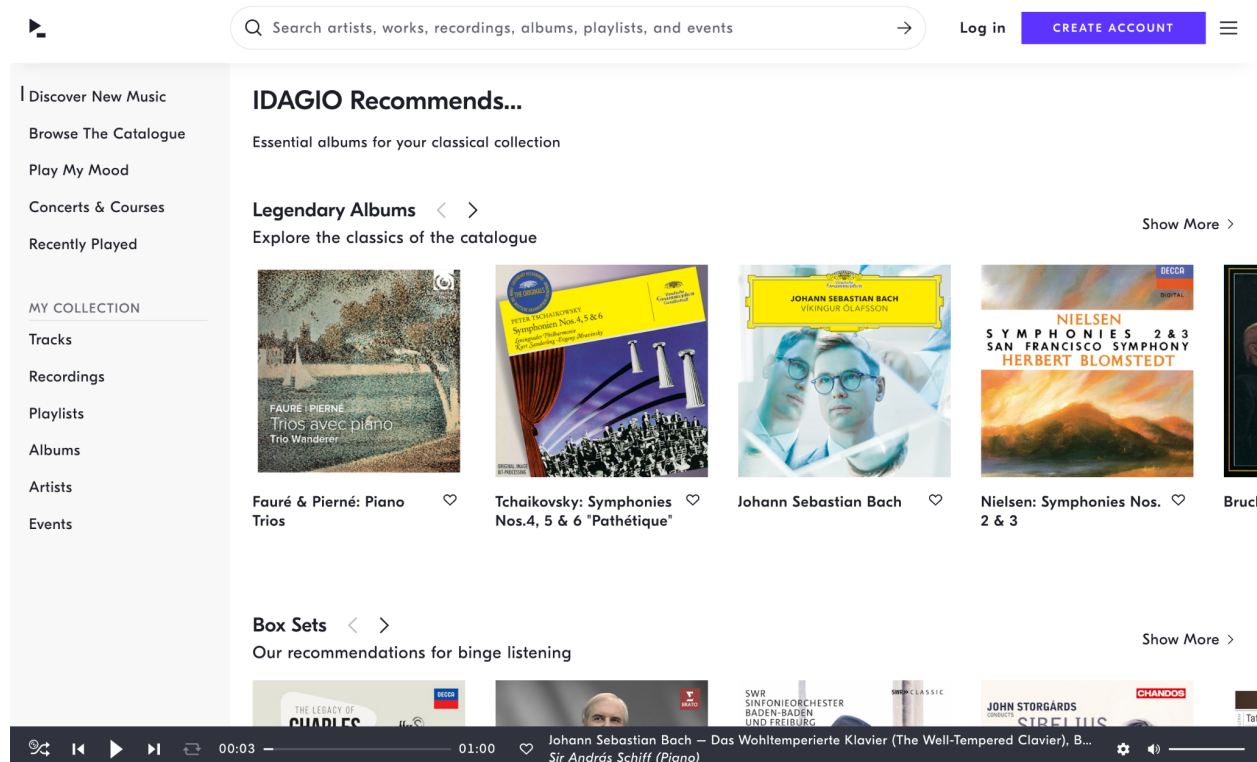


Figure 4: The "Idagio recommends" page layout of Idagio, as seen on Apr. 28, 2026.

The goal is to assess how conducive the platform itself – and operators behind the platform – are to ethnic composer representation. As such, the sampling focuses on the homepage layout of the streaming service in question. To ensure consistency with live concerts and radio programs, a multi-movement composition whose movements are divided across multiple tracks is counted as one composition, and the corresponding composer is counted once.

Because there exist playlists highlighting specific composers, some of which specialize in ethnic composers, the extraction of entire playlists may cause significant variation in results. As such, the random selection process for a single work has two phases: first, an album from the homepage is randomly selected; then, within that album, an individual track is randomly selected. 150 works were extracted from each of the three streaming services for a total of 450 works.

Ethnicity Corroboration

After extracting a list of works and their composers, the ethnicity of each composer was verified online via the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, a well-respected and comprehensive music

³¹ Blakeley, "Mozart and Metadata."

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encyclopedia utilized by the Orchestra Repertoire Reports. For contemporary or obscure composers who do not possess entries in the Dictionary, alternative sites were pursued to obtain this information. In these cases, I prioritized composers' self-description of their ethnicity – for example, through the composer's own official website. If such a website does not exist, I deferred to websites with specialization or authority in the classical music field, such as an orchestra's official website.

The screenshot displays the Grove Music Online interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'About', 'Tools and Resources', 'Subscribe', and 'Customer Services'. Below this is the 'Grove Music Online' header. A search bar is present with filters for 'Topic', 'Instrument', 'Era', 'Region', 'Place Type', and 'Occupation'. The search results for 'Johann Sebastian Bach' are shown, indicating 1-20 of 378 results. The search term is 'johann sebastian bach'. The results are sorted by 'Relevance'. The first result is 'Bach, Johann Sebastian', with a red lock icon. It lists authors 'Christoph Wolff and Walter Emery', a print publication date of '20 January 2001', and an online publication date of '2001'. A snippet of the article text is visible, mentioning 'Scheide : "Johann Sebastian Bachs Sammlung von Kantaten seines Veters Johann Ludwig Bach"'. The second result is 'Hodges, Johann Sebastian Bach', also with a red lock icon, listed by 'John Ogasapian' and revised by 'Barbara Owen'. On the left side, there's a 'Modify your search' section with filters for 'Term' (set to 'All'), 'Format' (Article (376), Image (2)), and 'Type' (Biographical Article (262), Family Article (6), Place Article (12), Subject Reference (96)).

Figure 5: Grove Music Online, the online website for the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians.

Data Adjustment and Analysis

For all of the extracted data, works were removed from the dataset if either the composer of the work or the composer's ethnicity cannot reliably be corroborated. Final sample sizes for live concert, radio, and streaming services were 446, 446, and 423 respectively. The dataset adjustment process for each mode of music distribution, including the aforementioned process of individually listing each composer in a multi-composer work, is detailed in figure 6 below. Following data collection, simple percentage-based analysis similar to that used in the Orchestra Repertoire Reports was utilized to compare the following across the three modes of music distribution: first, the proportion of all ethnic minority groups to the entire body of works presented; second, the representation of individual ethnic groups relative to each other. Following traditional definitions of Western classical music, a composer is considered an "ethnic" composer if he or she possesses cultural roots from a region outside of Europe and non-hispanic North America for the purposes of this study.

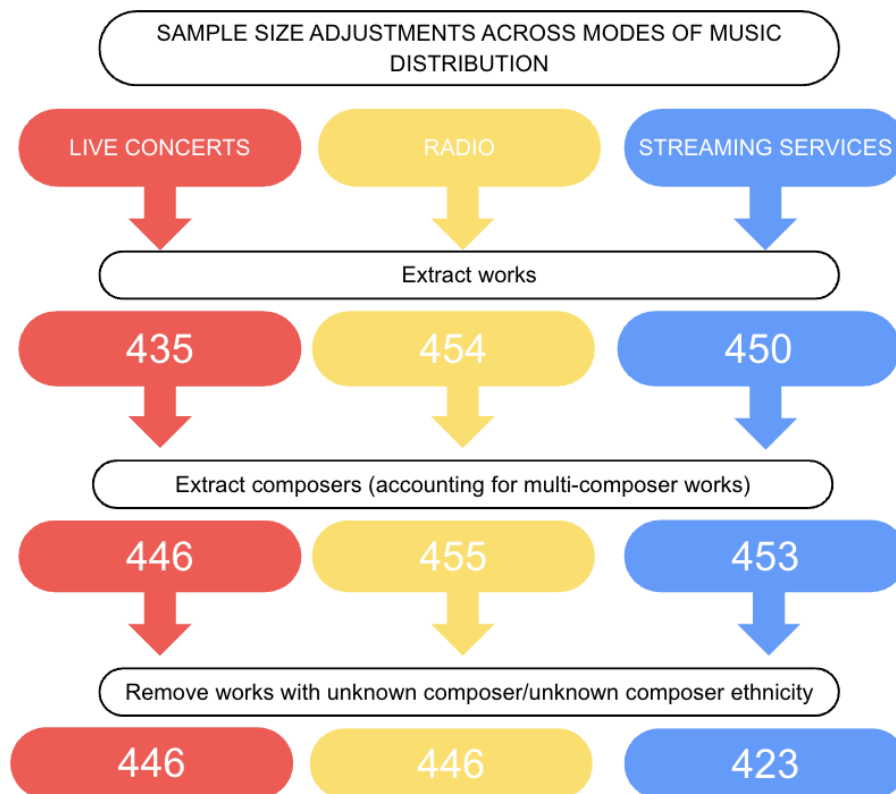


Figure 6: flow chart depicting sample size adjustment process.

HYPOTHESIS

Prior research finds that live concerts are more conducive to exposing audiences to “unfamiliar” classical music, i.e. obscure works or works not usually presented within the given musical context; streaming services are least conducive to this end. Meanwhile, works by ethnic composers are consistently less mainstream than those by well-established and “canonized” Western composers, and are therefore more likely to be “unfamiliar” to audiences. As such, I hypothesize that live concerts will reflect the highest rate of ethnic composer representation, and that streaming services will reflect the lowest representation. Under the assumption that the relative representation of individual ethnic groups will not differ greatly among different modes of music distribution, I hypothesize that Black, Latinx, and East Asian composers will receive the most representation relative to other minority groups across all three modes, in that order.

RESULTS

Results for this study focused on overall ethnic composer representation relative to the entire body of works featured, as well as representation received by individual ethnic groups relative to each other.

Overall Ethnic Composer Representation

Out of the 446 composer entries identified from live concerts, 48 were found to be ethnic composers. This constitutes 10.76% of the total amount of programming. By contrast, out of 446 composer entries identified from radio, 28 ethnic composers were identified, constituting 6.28% of the total. For streaming services, out of 420 composer entries, 33 ethnic composers were identified, amounting to 7.80% of the total.

Ethnic Composer Representation as Percentage of Total Composer Entries Across Live Concerts, Radio, and Streaming Services

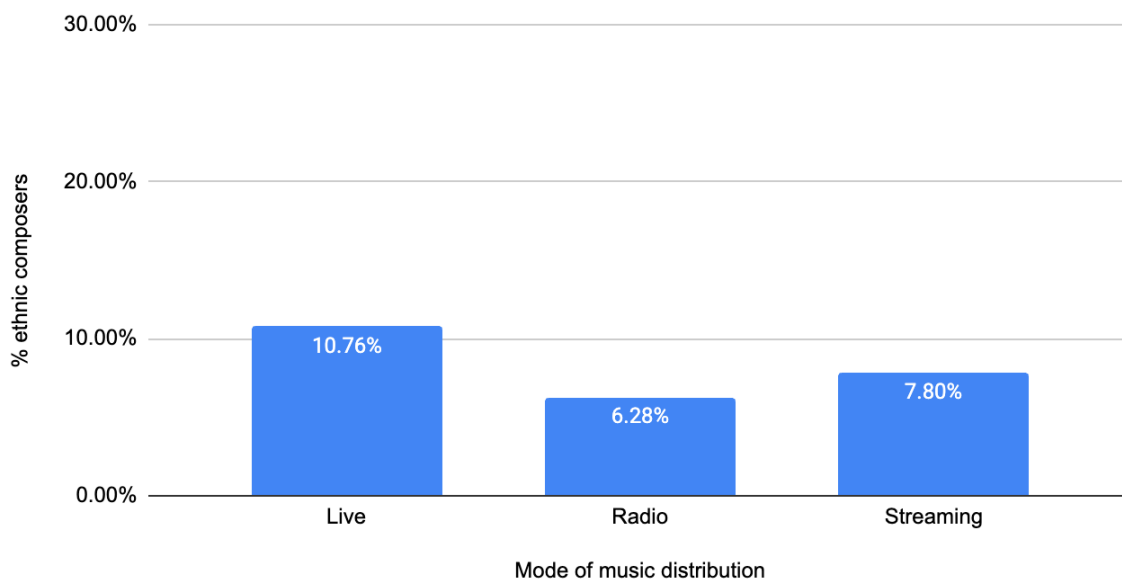


Figure 7: Ethnic Composer Representation as Percentage of Total Composer Entries

These findings establish live concerts as being notably more conducive to the dissemination of unfamiliar music. However, ethnic composer representation was found to be 1.52% higher within streaming services than within radio programming, contrary to previous research; granted, the discrepancy is marginal.

Examination of Individual Ethnic Groups

The three most commonly represented minority ethnic categories across all three modes of music dissemination were Black, Latinx, and East Asian. Black representation was relatively consistent across all three modes, varying between 33.3% of all ethnic composer representation in streaming to 43.8% in live concerts. Other ethnic groups experienced greater fluctuation in representation across modes. Radio programming especially featured a notably high degree of Latinx representation relative to other minority groups, with works by Latinx composers consisting 53.6% of the 28 aired works by ethnic composers, a dramatic increase over the 21.2% observed for streaming services. By contrast, streaming services

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relatively favored East Asian composers, with works by East Asians constituting 36.4% of ethnic composers' works, as opposed to merely 7.1% in radio programming. The specific distribution of minority ethnic groups as a proportion of total ethnic composer representation is presented in figures 8a, 8b, and 8c for live concert, radio, and streaming services, respectively.

Detailed distribution of ethnic composer representation: Live concerts

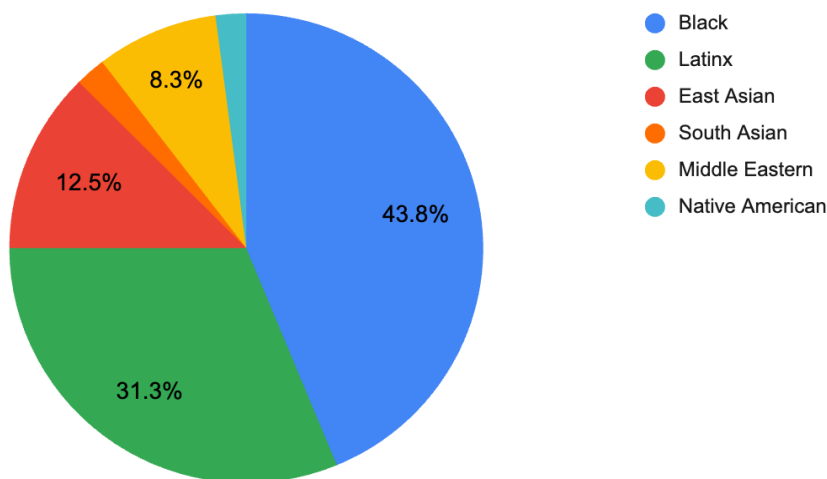


Figure 8a.

Detailed distribution of ethnic composer representation: Radio

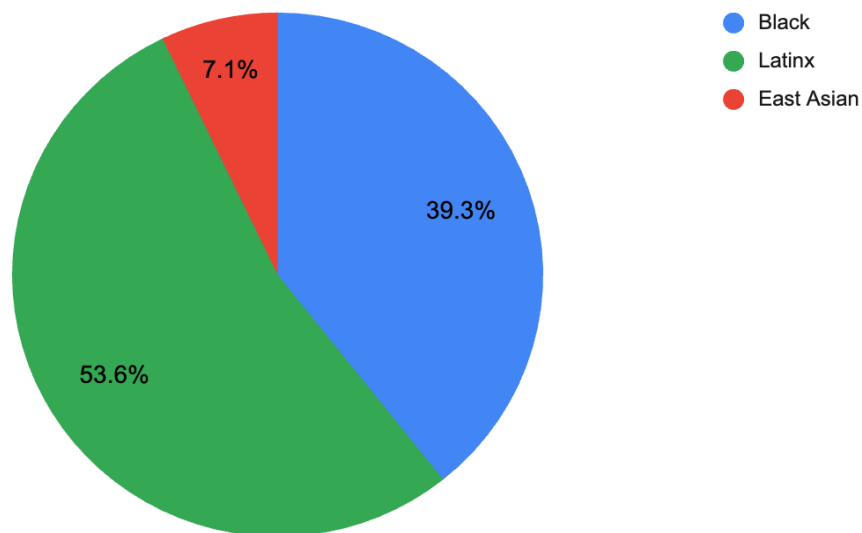


Figure 8b.

Detailed distribution of ethnic composer representation:
Streaming services

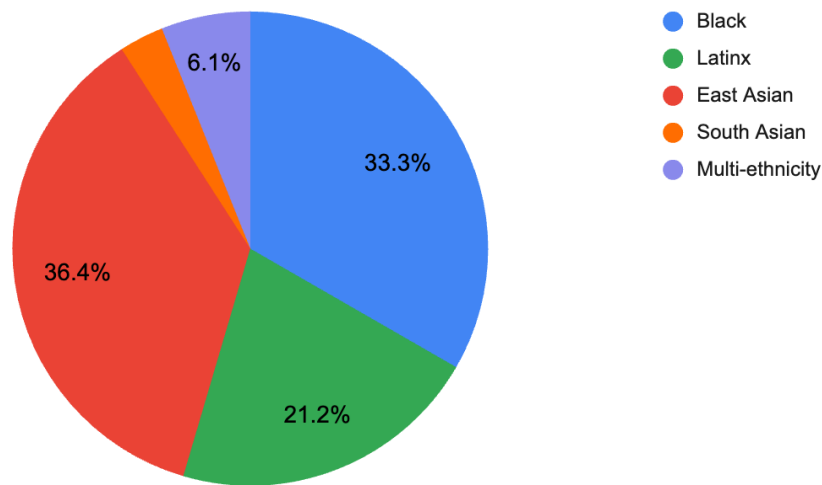


Figure 8c.

As a qualitative addendum, it is noteworthy that live concert programming yielded the greatest number of distinct cultural groups: The medium featured works by Middle Eastern and Native American composers, both of which were not represented in either radio or streaming. This finding reflects the curational focus on diversity present in many orchestras' programming.

DISCUSSION

Previous literature demonstrated that live concert programming exposes the audience to the greatest proportion of “unfamiliar” works, followed by radio and then streaming services. The findings from this study align with this previous literature in confirming that live concerts are most effective at facilitating ethnic composer representation from an audience-based “output perspective.” However, contrary to previous literature, streaming services were found to be marginally more effective than radio at achieving this representation. This discrepancy may be due to a variety of causes. First, unlike the previous study conducted by Chambers, the current study incorporated data from multiple sources even within the same mode of music distribution. For instance, to obtain data on streaming services, the platforms Spotify, Idagio, and Apple Music Classical were jointly consulted. This difference in methodology may be significant because Idagio and Apple Music Classical, both platforms not consulted by Chambers's study, cater towards a classical music audience specifically. In this regard they more closely resemble live concerts than generic streaming platforms like Spotify: curators will likely seek to expose audiences to a more nuanced and diversified selection of classical music as opposed to a general introduction to the genre's canon. A second potential cause for the discrepancy is a difference in focus: it is possible that the categorization of “ethnic” composers' works does not definitively fall under Chambers's categorization of “unfamiliar” music. However, this possibility may be unlikely considering the established tendency to

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“canonize” and popularize white European composers. Lastly, it is imperative to note that the observed discrepancy between radio and streaming is minimal and may also be explained by the current study’s comparatively low sample size and by fluctuations in the randomization process.

The current findings also align from results from the Orchestra Repertoire Reports in finding that Black, Latinx, and East Asian composers are the minority groups most consistently represented, indicating that a trend existent in live concert settings extends to both radio and streaming services. However, this current study’s findings also point to a previously unattested to variance in the specific ethnic groups most significantly represented across modes of music distribution. This phenomenon may be deliberately curated – either intentionally or unintentionally – as it must be in the context of radio programming; it may also arise naturally, as in the context of playlist curation for streaming services, which can be influenced by audience preference. It is unclear why the distinct curatorial processes for each mode would result in differing distributions of representation across different ethnic groups.

The identified discrepancies between programming across live concert, radio, and streaming are made more significant by the evolving prominence of each mode. As noted in the literature review, for decades there have been consistent concerns about declining audience interest in live concerts;³² radio audience remains strong yet slightly declining;³³ and the relative novelty and youthful audience body of streaming services³⁴ makes the medium appear promising in terms of future expansion and development. The findings of the current study suggest that this shift away from live concerts and towards streaming services may reduce the perceived presence of ethnic composers in classical music, limits effectual representation for less frequently represented ethnic groups like Middle Eastern or Native American composers, and shifts ethnic composer representation towards a new weighting that appears to favor East Asian composers. Once again, the desirability of these findings remains a complex issue. Proponents of active representation and affirmative action possibly view this trend as a threat to the robustness and inclusivity of the classical music landscape. On the other hand, critics of deliberate representation from both within and without ethnic communities may laud a return to a more “natural” form of curation based on audience interest, as with streaming services, as opposed to curator interest.

For proponents of active DEI efforts among music managers, curators, and performers, the aforementioned findings from Bosshard et al. – which conclude listeners tend to react more positively to music distributed via streaming services³⁵ – imply that listeners may be more receptive to this newer, increasingly homogenized body of classical music. This increased may warrant further investment into the DEI effort within this mode of music distribution. Conversely, should ethnic composer representation remain a priority for live concert music programmers, organizers, and sponsors, the potential decline of this music medium most conducive to ethnic representation may warrant increased attention towards preserving and advertising the medium.

³² Botstein, Leon, “The Future.”

³³ Forman-Katz, “For National,” Pew Research Center.

³⁴ Chambers, “Distances in the Field.”

³⁵ Bosshard et al., “Radio, Podcasts.”

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of this study corroborate the hypothesis – and previous studies – by establishing live concert as a superior medium for ethnic composer representation over radio and streaming services. The findings slightly contradict previous results by demonstrating that streaming services exceed radio in ethnic composer representation, though only marginally. Lastly, this study examined the specific ethnic groups represented across each mode of music distribution, suggesting the superiority of live concert for representing a wider array of distinct ethnic groups as well as differing preference for certain ethnic groups across modes, the latter of which is unattested to in previous literature. The significance of these findings is framed by a current trend of expansion for streaming services and a concern for live concert decline.

LIMITATIONS

This research method possesses limitations that may undermine or restrict the above conclusions. First, due to the premise of the research, the conclusions are restricted geographically to the United States and temporally to the range between the 2023-2024 performance season and the present day. Second, for radio stations and streaming services, the music offered by the platform or curator may not accurately reflect the body of music consumed by the audience due to the audience's ability to switch stations, skip tracks, or otherwise dictate their own listening experience. Without obtaining data on the detailed listenership specific to each track, playlist, or section of programming, it remains difficult to illustrate a highly accurate image of the ethnic composition of music actually consumed by the audience across radio and streaming.

Third, acclaimed biographical resources on classical composers – such as the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, utilized in the current study's methodology – inevitably contain more extensive information on historical composers than modern ones. Information on lesser-known contemporary composers is at times incomplete, hence the necessity to reference other webpages to corroborate composer ethnicity. In some cases, external webpages were unable to provide ethnicity information for these lesser-known contemporary composers. However, because DEI initiatives have only increased into the modern day, contemporary composers are more likely to belong to a minority ethnic group than historical composers are. Therefore, the relative lack of information on lesser-known ethnic contemporary composers may cause their exclusion from the data pool and skew results towards well-established – largely deceased white male – composers.

Lastly, the sample size of this study is incomparable to previous studies conducting similar research due to dramatic differences in resource and time availability, reducing the overall impact of this study and increasing volatility of results due to randomization.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Multiple steps could be taken to further the results of this study. First, the noticeable difference in ethnic composer representation across modes of music distribution raises the following question: what steps could be taken to mitigate such discrepancies and achieve a more uniform identity of Western classical music in America? Granted, given the aforementioned ambivalence of some ethnic composers towards a more actively managed, DEI-oriented curatorial technique, this discrepancy also encourages further investigation into the debate of whether to mitigate the discrepancy at all. Similarly, periodic repetition of a similar methodology may prove valuable as a means to monitor the representation gap across different modes, helping establish whether the phenomenon is increasing or decreasing in scope.

Second, the noticeable variation in the representation of specific ethnic groups – such as Black, Latinx, and East Asian – across modes of music distribution prompts the question: what curatorial factors causes certain ethnic groups to be better represented than others depending on the mode of music distribution? Especially of interest is streaming platforms: Streaming platforms hold the most potential out of all three modes for audiences to self-curate their music selection, implying that some of these curatorial biases may be inherent to the audience. A more thorough understanding of these factors provides music curators and DEI initiatives valuable insight into why music consumption may homogenize in terms of composer ethnicity, insight which may aid in the prevention of such homogenization in the future.

Third, it is noteworthy that the focus of this study centered on classical music curation and presentation within the United States. This geographical boundary likely strongly influences the results of the study, especially when it is noted that Black, Latinx, and Asian groups are the three most common ethnic minority groups in the United States. Further research can generalize and extend the findings of this study by repeating similar procedures in different geographical contexts, with results informed by the demographic composition of the region.

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