

**Gina Emerson (Berlin)**

### **Exploring the Perceived Value of Orchestras**

Despite the steadily growing body of literature on the social dynamics of Western art music cultures (e.g. Bull 2019; Emerson 2023; Ramnarine 2011), this musical form remains underexplored from a cultural sociology perspective. Specifically, the concept of the perceived or public value of cultural institutions and the extent to which these are seen as making a contribution to society, as developed in relation to museums and cultural heritage institutions (Armbrecht 2014; Scott 2009) has rarely been applied to the context of Western classical music. This paper presentation will offer a first summary of results from a new mixed methods study, conducted in collaboration with a chamber orchestra in the city of Potsdam. It explores three central questions: 1) What kinds of value do audience members and other actors attribute to the orchestra and to classical music more generally? (e.g. educational value, ‘historical’ or heritage value; Scott 2009); 2) To what extent are perceptions of value mediated or contested by individual experiences with classical music culture? (e.g. experiences of exclusion or unfamiliarity); and 3) Are classical music institutions seen as having a responsibility to contribute to society and what are they perceived as contributing? Drawing on data collected via audience surveys ( $N = 370$ ) and qualitative interviews with different groups in Potsdam, patterns of inclusion and exclusion and their ties to this musical form will be critically discussed. The implications of the results will be discussed in the context of current literature on concert studies and classical music practices (e.g. Smith, Peters & Molina 2024) and concepts from cultural heritage studies (Loulanski 2006).

**Dr. Gina Emerson** is Lecturer (wiss. Mitarbeiterin) in Systematic Musicology at the Institute for Musicology and Media Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. She studied musicology in Oxford and Berlin, with a focus on music sociology and psychology. Her research explores and connects the topics of audience experience, sustainability, cultural participation and the use of new technologies across art music contexts. From 2021–2023 she was a Postdoctoral Research Associate with the collaborative project “A Sustainable Cultural Mission for Music – a New Aspect of Orchestral Excellence”, a joint initiative of RIFS and the Kammerakademie Potsdam. She is the author of *Audience Experience and Contemporary Classical Music*, published by Routledge in March 2023.