



Classical cred: Apple turns to composers to give its brand a sophisticated boost

Shrugging off the usual tired clichés associated with classical composers, Apple is using them to promote cutting-edge technology in its new TV adverts

by Jessica Duchen

TUESDAY 27 MAY 2014

Esa-Pekka Salonen is not a household name. At least, he wasn't until the other day. Apple has released some new TV advertisements for the iPad Air, each demonstrating the way a high-level creative person uses the device for their work; Salonen, the principal conductor of the Philharmonia Orchestra and a distinguished classical composer, is prime among them.

He is shown constantly on the move – in London, in a taxi, in a snowy field in his native Finland – mulling over ideas for his new violin concerto with the help of his iPad until the piece is ready for performance.

For the first time, a TV ad is using a contemporary classical composer and his music to symbolise something cutting-edge, desirable and sophisticated. In an area where practitioners and fans often feel marginalised, misunderstood and alienated by mainstream pop culture, this may just demonstrate the start of a sea-change in public opinion.

The ad had 100,000 YouTube hits on its first day and in his blog for The New Yorker, Alex Ross, author of the book *The Rest is Noise*, which is about 20th-century music, described it as “a cool, elegant piece of work”. If anyone thinks that Salonen is selling out by

associating himself with Apple, there is little sign of it. The classical community seems to be greeting the development with open arms – perhaps because the advert is serious about the music and its creator, without “dumbing down”. Or perhaps anything that points out classical music is not just about dead composers and elderly audiences is a welcome relief from the usual tired, inaccurate clichés.

The composer Roxanna Panufnik, whose *Three Paths to Peace* is being performed at this year’s BBC Proms, says: “For composers to be seen as mainstream people involved in mainstream activities is a great advance for our public image. Previously, we’d maybe looked a bit precious and ivory towerish. I think this will give us great street cred.” The advert highlights the way that technology can revolutionise the experience of classical music: with the iPad comes the stunning new potential of iPad apps. Salonen himself is the driving force behind an impressive, multimedia app made by Touchpress called *The Orchestra*. Just weeks ago, two of the same company’s apps, devoted respectively to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and Liszt’s B minor Sonata, won a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for creative communication. Combining music, film, documentary, commentary and more, these apps are like coffee-table books come to life, controlled by the viewer at the swipe of a screen.

A similar “interactive book”, *The Mozart Project*, has reached No 1 on the iBook Store’s non-fiction sales. The project features essays, interviews, music, a specially filmed play and even a facility for readers to ask its experts questions. Its co-creator, James Fairclough, adds his approval to the Apple advert. “People are starting to understand the power of what you can do with an iPad and the whole relationship between the watcher and the device,” he says. “Creatively, it can make you a lot freer, whether you’re reading or producing. I think the ad is a brilliant thing, not only for classical music, but for the iPad, too. You needn’t only play games like *Angry Birds* on it; you can use it to enrich yourself in a completely new way.”

The pianist Stephen Hough, who features in Touchpress’s Liszt app, is a composer himself. He says he has not yet used an iPad for composing, but may now give it a shot. “I do a lot of composing on tour and often I scribble a note on a piece of paper, stick it in my pocket, then put things together when I’m home,” he says.

As for the advert, he is in favour of anything that brings classical music to more people: “Let’s have more ads for classical music than there are for Nescafé,” he says. The sole note of caution, though, comes from Panufnik, who likes the advert, but says she cannot use an iPad for composing. “The screen is just too small,” she says. “I prefer to use my Macbook Air.”