

The Ethics of Music Journalism

This paper was provoked by the problems related to the inadequate coverage of music events and music culture in the printed and electronic media in Macedonia. In a certain way, the problem is global, and there are enough arguments to assume that the situation does not greatly differ in other countries or regions of the world, regardless of whether they possess more and better human, financial and technical resources, or might be more developed in an economic, technical and cultural sense.

We can distinguish two major aspects of music journalism related to this problem:

- the distribution of information
- the evaluation of events.

It is obvious that the first one has more quantitative, while the second qualitative characteristics.

The first one, the distribution of the information, can be further divided into:

- selection of information
- quantity of information and
- form of distribution.

Bearing in mind that the definition of the problem discussed in this paper focuses on the inadequate coverage of music events and music culture, we have further selected four major characteristics of our understanding of the concept *inadequate coverage*:

- selection of presented information (omission of important events)
- quantity of presented information (omission of important aspects)
- form of presentation (such as position and space in printed media, time of broadcasting)
- wrong evaluation (subjective, avoiding the opinions of the experts and audience).

Our assumption is that the four major characteristics of *inadequate coverage* contribute to the long-term negative effect which defined as *leaving wrong evidence about music events and music culture*.

In fact, our perspective of music and cultural history is based only on the selection of the existing artifacts and written evidence from the past. History books are written and based on existing evidence. We could only theoretically assume that one day a new methodology and adequate hardware and software for realistic and unbiased reconstruction of human, cultural or music history will be developed.

The problem of potential misinterpretation is enhanced by the dominant use of digital storage and retrieval of data. Musicological research relies more and more on digitally stored and cataloged materials, as they are much easier to search and retrieve. The search engines, i.e. software, dictate the navigation in the universe of a great deal of

data, digital audio and video. The software algorithms determine the priorities and the hierarchy of the appearance of search results.

The Internet search engines are typical examples of the controlled selection of the search process. The predetermined selection of the browsers, the “first ten results”, could easily confuse even experienced researchers. Poorly or inadequately presented events (not to mention the missing ones) could slip away from the musicologists’ attention.

On the other hand, always, since the appearance of first creative products, the basic marketing strategy has been the control of information. The efficiency of information control has been crucial for the success of the position of the artists in society. As in all other human activity areas, power circles fought over the possession and distribution of artistic and cultural information. *Inadequate coverage* is only one aspect of the same struggle.

We will not present any empirical data about the coverage of music events in the Macedonian printed and electronic media, as they are part of the interest of several other papers at this conference (and also some of the previous IRAM conferences). When we defined the problem as “inadequate coverage”, our main goal was to provoke interest for the theoretical area which is almost unknown among the disciplines dealing with the music phenomenon - ethics of music.

Thus, this paper has two main objectives:

- promotion of ethics of music as a necessity both on a theoretical and practical level
- formation of a code of conduct in music journalism

Musicology underwent a significant methodological transformation in the course of the 20th century. An entire new set of disciplines was developed regarding the complex music phenomenon, among them: psychology of music, sociology of music, music education, music therapy and in a certain way, economics of music. Nevertheless, despite of the numerous articles related to economics, economics of music, management, finance and marketing of music culture, are still not clearly defined both in subject-matter and methodology.

It may sound paradoxical, but the business disciplines inspired our interest for ethics of music and consequently ethics of music journalism. Business ethics became an important part of business education while business (corporal) responsibility is taught during the first classes at the business (management and marketing) courses. Social, historical, cultural, national and global responsibility are considered important parts of business ethics. Organizations are obliged to promote ethical behavior, i.e. the behavior that conforms to generally accepted social norms. Although the basic principle of the economic profit still plays the main role in organizational behavior, organizations have to respect the wider long term social interests which include legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. In other words, corporate social responsibility presents business concern for social welfare. This is reflected in the pyramid of corporate social

responsibility which is a model composed of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities where the organization's economic performance supports the entire structure.

Management and marketing disciplines give further elaboration on the ethical issues through the:

- relations of the organization and the environment
- relations within the organization.

The managerial ethics defined as standards of behavior that guide individual managers in their work are particularly important. Managers need to approach the three sets of relationships:

- firm to the employee
- employee to the firm
- firm to other economic agents -

from a moral perspective. It is accepted that the organization can be successful on a long term basis only if it builds a relationship with the employees and the environment based on understanding and trust. The conflicts of interest, ethnic or religious prejudice, secrecy and confidentiality, are only some of the problems possibly rising in the behavior of workers. The behavior of the organization toward the task and general environment affects the relations with the other economic agents. Building healthy relations with a task and general environment, avoiding ethical ambiguities or unethical practices, become imperative for the organization.

Undoubtedly we can apply or transfer any of these statements in the ethics of music and particularly in the ethics of music journalism. The relations with the music economic agents - composers, musicians, musicologists, audience, associations, copyright societies, music institutions, music industry, are burdened with the same ethical ambiguities such as:

- distribution of information
- interpretation
- evaluation and
- advertising and promotion.

When we began our paper with the problem of inadequate coverage we bore in mind the unethical practices:

- false or misleading information
- false or misleading advertising
- misrepresentation of events and performer capability
- lies told to the audience in order to improve ticket sales
- manipulation of data (falsifying or misusing statistics or information)
- unfair manipulation of audience
- invasion of privacy
- sex-oriented advertising appeals
- event deception
- unsafe events
- price deception
- unfair remarks and inaccurate statements about competitors
- stereotypical portrayals of performers, audience etc.

Once again, we will address the solution developed in the management and marketing disciplines. Both management and marketing approaches developed a code of ethics, which is a formal written statement, guidelines of values and ethical standards to help managers and the other employees cope with the ethical issues.

As an illustration we will quote some of the imperatives developed by different ethical theoretical and practical approaches:

- follow your conscience (The Ethics of Conscience)
- watch out for #1 (Ethical Egoism)
- do the right thing (The Ethics of Duty)
- don't dis' me (The Ethics of Respect)
- all men are created with certain unalienable rights (The Ethics of Rights)
- make the world a better place (Utilitarianism)
- that's not fair (The Ethics of Justice)
- be a good person (Virtue Ethics)

The code of ethics in music journalism could contribute to the establishment of the standards for a better, adequate and fair distribution of the information about music and cultural events. The code of ethics in music journalism should be the appropriate response to the social, cultural and historical responsibilities of music journalists.

A realistic assessment of the urgency, the need or the extent of the practical and theoretical activities must be based on a thorough empirical research. Our assumptions for the “inadequate coverage” were based on personal experiences, but also on some of the results of the surveys undertaken in IRAM during the last several years.

Nevertheless, the need for establishing the discipline of ethics of music (as a theoretical result) and code of ethics (as a practical result in music journalism and generally in music) is inevitable. Whether it will be imposed by the development of the business responsibility, the philosophical issues of multicultural and multi-genre global informational environment, social, religious, ethnic and other conflicts or the sensibility of the artistic world - is only a matter of time and manner. Meanwhile, some unwritten rules and the miraculous Internet galaxy will facilitate the democratization of the distribution and preservation of information.