Prototype, Competition, and Market: the Market for Early Music Concerts

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Abstract

The article analyzes the particular case of early music concerts as a prototype market. It first presents an ideal-typical definition of the prototype, which it then uses to bring to light the prototypical character of early music concerts. It then shows how this concert market and the main mode of marketing concerts (organizing a concert tour) is based on competition mechanisms and exchange logic that vary by whether transactions are with regular or sporadic partners.

During the last two decades, the destandardization of consumption goods has been presented as an undeniable symptom of the break between the "Fordist" model of production assumed to have prevailed until the 1970s and contemporary modes of production (Piore and Sabel, 1989; Boyer and Durand, 1998). Destandardization, which can extend all the way to prototype production, involves project-by-project organization; the characteristics of this type of organization have been studied in great detail in recent years. (1) There are considerably fewer studies, however, on prototype marketing. Whereas, among the many recent studies on real market organization, there are works on subjects as diverse as supermarkets (Cochoy, 2002), farm products (Garcia, 1986), the concrete industry (Dumez and Jeunemaître, 1998), service marketing (Bandt and Gadrey, 1994), financial markets (*Politix,* 2000) and the funeral parlor business (Trompette and Boissin, 2000), studies of prototype markets continue to be "poor cousins". Studying the prototype market of early music concerts brings to light modes of organizing competition and exchange operative on prototype markets and is useful in answering the following question: How do actors interacting on this market handle the uncertainty attached to these "productions"?

In many ways, prototypes are a borderline case, where commodity quality is always being modified, difficult to objectify, and therefore marked by great uncertainty. As L. Karpik (1996) has underlined, in such situations it cannot

(1) See pioneering studies of the construction industry by Stinchcombe (1959) and Eccles (1981) and recent synthetic studies by Boltanski and Chiappello (1999) and Menger (2002).

be taken for granted that the transaction will actually go through; doing so presupposes making use of arrangements for palliating defects in exchange parties' trust and difficulties in judgment-making. Attention to the mechanisms operative in the marketing of prototypes should not, however, lead to concentrating *exclusively* on the (obviously necessary) study of what modes of competition facilitate coping with uncertainty about product quality; study should also work to elucidate how these mechanisms fit together with the process of commodity price determination. While mode of price determination is central for economists, it is still being neglected by sociologists. (2) The central focus of this article, then, is the way these two dimensions, uncertainty about quality and mode of price definition, fit together.

For the last approximately 25 years, early music ensembles have been playing works from the past, applying interpretation conventions in effect at the time the music was composed. As we know, the market for early music concerts developed spectacularly in that time. The mode of diffusing early music products involves commercial relations: ensembles prepare a concert and sell it to several concert organizers in France and/or abroad. It is this market that is under study here, rather than the one that develops between organizers and final consumers, *i.e.*, concert-goers. The two markets are based on profoundly heterogeneous business modes: whereas the market between music ensembles and organizers involves a strongly personalized bilateral relation between exchange actors, the market between organizers and the public brings a seller face to face with an indeterminate crowd of potential buyers and therefore involves much more impersonal business modes. The analytic issues for the two markets are thus necessarily distinct, and the research strategy of separating them seems very likely to gain in coherence what it loses in extension. But can the two markets be considered separately? In other words, if they are heterogeneous, are they therefore necessarily not indexed on each other? Concert success (or failure) with audiences has repercussions on negotiations between music ensembles and concert organizers, repercussions mediated by concert organizers who experience those successes or failures, interpret them, and turn back with those experiences and interpretations to the music ensembles. In other words, the two markets are in fact indexed on each other, by concert organizers, who bring to their negotiations with music ensembles a decidedly incomplete but profoundly functional representation of who their audience is. We can therefore take the principle of this mediation for granted and situate ourselves outside the ultimate market struggle between organizers and audience, concentrating instead on the

(2) This observation is made by Musselin and Paradeise (2002), who point out that with the exception of Karpik's studies of lawyers (1989, 1995), questions on price formation have not been much treated in sociology of markets. We can hypothesize that this issue can reasonably be conceived as a set of questions sociologists ask about markets; that is, empirical questions. Before an alternative theory of price formation can be used against economists' models –and after underlining how economists' hypotheses presuppose an extremely particular type of social organization, without which they cannot be validated– it is necessary to identify the ways prices are actually fixed on real markets; only then can regular forms be identified that correspond more closely to what happens in real economic exchange.

market organized first, beforehand, between concert organizers and music ensembles.

To analyze the early music concert market, I will begin by explaining in what way the concerts can be grasped as prototypes, then show that marketing them involves a concert tour economy characterized by heterogeneous types of competition and exchange which will then be brought to light and analyzed.

Are early music concerts prototypes?

Performing arts productions and cultural industries are often assimilated to prototypes (Menger, 1991; Faulkner and Anderson, 1987). The prototypical character of early music productions is particularly pronounced, as may be seen if we conceive of early music concerts in terms of the ideal-type of a prototype. Following the distinction proposed by Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa (2000), can be defined a prototype using two approaches, one static and focused on the characteristics of the *commodity* in question, the other dynamic and directly concerned with the mechanisms for producing *product* characteristics.

Early music concert characteristics

To specify the traits that will enable us to determine whether a commodity is a prototype, we can borrow Lancaster's idea (1975) that commodities can be grasped as a particular combination of multiple characteristics. We can then define the ideal-type of a prototype by combining three specific traits. *First, prototype characteristics vary across all dimensions constitutive of the commodity*: if we move from one commodity to another, the entire set of characteristics changes. *Second, we do not have scales that will allow us to calibrate the commodity precisely with regard to each of its dimensions* (Eymard-Duvernay, 1989): prototypes cannot be made to correspond to each other by being projected onto standards shared by the full set of market actors –in other words, they resist metrology. *Lastly, it is the combination of these different characteristics –i.e.*, the configuration that fixes the "bundle" Lancaster speaks of– *that is singular each time* and works to produce profoundly original commodities. Using two particular dimensions of the commodity –ensembles' repertoire and ensemble « workforce » composition– we can show how early music concerts can be conceived as prototypes.

The repertoire for early music ensembles is constantly changing. At the outset of the movement, ensembles that were specialized in early music applied the principle of a return to sources and began to perform a repertoire that had not been played for decades. *Les Arts Florissants* made the sixteenth-century French and Italian repertoire for small ensembles their specialty while

G. Lesne, in the "second generation" of *baroqueux*, took on the works of Scarlatti, Galuppi, and Caldera, most of which had for all intents and purposes never been played. In contrast, once groups attained success, they just as systematically began to use diversification strategies: the *Chapelle Royale* became the *Orchestre des Champs-Élysées* by deciding to perform works from the great Romantic repertoire while *Les Arts Florissants*, while continuing to play French music, chose to move into the great classical repertoire, particularly Mozart, recording such pointedly "classical" works as the *Mass in C*, the *Requiem* and operas such as *The Magic Flute* and *The Abduction from the Seraglio*.

Repertoire transformation is also observable at the scale of the movement as a whole, as becomes clear if we analyze distinctions awarded over a twenty-year period by the French press. (3) What repertoire enable baroque musicians to attain recognition? The following table shows that it is not entirely correct to assimilate "early" and "baroque" music: the composers who received the greatest number of distinctions for early instrument playing do indeed qualify as baroque, but baroque musicians are clearly likely to favor investment in the "first canon". (4)

Proportion of early instrument distinctions awarded for each period
(in percentage)

	1978-1987	1988-1997	1978-1997
Medieval and Renaissance	7,0	21,1	17,8
Baroque	35,0	38,4	37,6
First canon	49,5	25,9	31,4
Second canon	8,4	14,6	13,2

To propel their already dynamic movement, baroque musicians adopted two fundamental postures. The first was that of the outsider coming to compete with traditional ensembles on their own repertoire turf. Gradually, the return-to-sources principle was recognized with regard to the traditional ensemble repertoire, *i.e.*, post-1800 music. To this must be added the explorer move; *i.e.*, applying the return-to-sources principle to an as-yet unknown repertoire, namely, Medieval and Renaissance music: the proportion of distinctions awarded for this repertoire as played by baroque ensembles tripled over the period. The specificity of the movement is therefore not so

(3) I took into account all distinctions awarded by *Diapason* and *Le Monde de la Musique* from 1978 to 1997. For a complete presentation of results see François (2000, ch. 2).

(4) I chose the coding principle of classifying composer by year of death. "Baroque" composers died between 1600 and 1750, "first canon" composers between 1750 and 1800 (see below), "second canon" composers (end of classical period and Romantic period), after 1800. Composers who died before 1600 are counted as "Medieval and Renaissance". The "first canon" corresponds, then, to composers of the classical period, including Mozart, but encompasses some "baroque" composers, such as Bach (died 1750) and Handel (died 1758), though they are undeniably "canonical"; *i.e.*, recognized as models of perfection and therefore much played even before contemporary baroque musicians took them up. On the notion of musical canon see M. Weber (1989).

much specialization in a given period as repertoire exploration. Consequently the repertoire of early music ensembles is much less stable than that of traditional ones. Moreover, by adopting explorer strategies, baroque ensembles deprived themselves of the touchstones by which audiences and those who supply them get their bearings in serious music productions. The composers were often unknown and the works had not been heard before, so some of the evaluation standards that work to limit uncertainty for traditional ensemble concerts were missing for the baroquers.

The instability of early music production characteristics is also illustrated by ensemble workforce composition. Early music ensembles work exclusively with *intermittent* musicians (without permanent contract). This type of employment allows them to vary production size considerably. Statistical analysis of ten years of *Les Arts Florissants* archives shows that in the course of a single season, production size can vary by a ratio of 1 to 49, with the smallest possible chamber group at one extreme (two musicians) and a *tragédie lyrique* at the other (98 musicians). (5) Likewise, distribution of musicians among the different sections (strings, wind, etc.) is much more variable for an early music ensemble than a permanent orchestra. According to one indicator of production structure variation, (6) structure fluctuates a great deal more in *Les Arts Florissants* (variation coefficient close to 1) than in the *Orchestre National* (variation coefficient ranging from 0.18 and 0.2). It is therefore much more difficult to define a "typical number of musicians" for an early music ensemble than a traditional group.

While musician numbers in early music ensembles are more stable than what might be expected in ensembles composed exclusively of *intermittent* musicians (François, 2003), turnover is never negligeable, amounting to between a quarter and a third of musicians every year depending on section. (7) Similarly, between 25 and 50% of section musicians in a given year had never played with the ensemble before and would never play with it again –a much higher turnover than in traditional groups. The relative instability of the workforce in musical collectives is also relevant for soloists. Financial constraints for ensembles are such that they usually cannot hire international stars in any permanent way; they are therefore frequently led to discover new talents, which whom they work for a few years until those soloists' careers take off and they become unaffordable. Once again, we see that

(5) For the purposes of comparison, I consulted the archives for three seasons at the *Orchestre National de France*. Orchestra size varied in one season by 1 to 3.5 (for details see François, 2003).

(6) Indicator calculated as follows: variation in number of players in each section between two productions; sum of variation values for each production; average variation from one production to the next at the end of each season; ratio between average variation in player numbers and average production size.

(7) Musician turnover rate calculated as the ratio between 1) average of a) number of musicians playing for the first time + b) number of musicians definitively leaving the orchestra and 2) total number of players for the instrument section during year studied. Since no pre-1988 or post-1998 data was available, there is obviously a risk of overestimating number of new players at the outset of the period and number of musicians leaving at period end.

the indicators that usually work to ensure quality of serious music productions are absent for early music: debuting soloists hired by the ensembles have not yet proven themselves and have no established reputation. Moreover, from one concert to another the need for soloists varies considerably: different numbers of singers are required, and the soloists likely to be cast in this or that role or skilled in this or that style are not necessarily the same from concert to concert. There is also high turnover from one production to the next within the "families" that ensembles develop around themselves, and this too works to singularize productions.

In other words, early music productions come fairly close to the ideal-type of the prototype as defined above in terms of both characteristic variation and uncertainty about evaluation scales. As for the third trait defining a prototype (singular combinations and interaction of characteristics), I would cite here my 2002 article showing how the distinctive sound of each ensemble is to a great extent the result of a chain of complex interactions that occur both long before the production itself (instrument-making, the search for and reconstitution of scores) and during the face-to-face interactions of concert work, which simultaneously involve routines and negotiations. These complex interactions generate a "sound identity" that is both stable and singular (François, 2002). Furthermore, by accentuating variations in musician or repertoire changes and thereby making it impossible to rely on the traditional touchstones for evaluating serious music productions, such interactions accentuate the prototypical character of performing arts products.

The intuition borrowed from Lancaster that commodities can be grasped as a combination of multiple characteristics therefore allows us to give a preliminary characterization of a prototype. The definition is an *ideal-type*: from one ensemble to another, one production to the next, degree of product prototypicalness can also vary considerably. Variation in number of musicians, high for *Les Arts Florissants*, is less pronounced for the *Ensemble Baroque de Limoges*, which concentrates on an orchestra repertoire and usually works with high numbers of musicians. Similarly, the repertoire presented by certain ensembles can stabilize around a few poles which organize the heterogeneity of their productions. This is the case for the *Orchestre des Champs-Élysées*, which since the early 1990s has specialized in the Romantic symphonic repertoire. The traits used in the prototype definition therefore only constitute a *borderline referent*, a standard to which concrete historical situations may be compared and in terms of which they may be analyzed, situations that never entirely validate all characteristics of the pure ideal-type. Moreover, and however useful it may be, this first characterization of the prototype is insufficient and needs be developed further. As F. Cochoy has pointed out (2002), Lancaster's idea has its limitations: by proposing to grasp a commodity as a bundle of characteristics, he suggests that those characteristics are fixed once and for all and can be taken for granted. In fact, in the case at hand, characteristics should be defined and reordered for each production, because the very definition of them cannot be taken for granted. Our characterization of the prototype as *commodity* –*i.e.*, as a particular combination of characteristics– must therefore be supplemented by a definition of the prototype as *product*, *i.e.*, a particular way of defining these characteristics.

Producing concert characteristics

Let us now try to clarify how the intrinsic characteristics of commodities are produced, by looking again at the two dimensions just detailed: nature of the repertoire, composition of the workforce. The choice of works presented in a concert is of course not exclusively up to the musical director. While musical directors obviously play a role in program defining and planning, programs seems much more the result of an aggregation of multiple interactions than the expression of an "artistic project" developed in the sole consciousness of an ensemble director. Concert organizers can play as important a role in choosing works as ensemble conductors. The general manager of *Talents Lyriques* explains how she agrees to play along with what she sees as an obsession with "world premiers", though it isn't at all to her liking:

> The craze for baroque has thrown promoters and festivals into a kind of race to get exclusive engagements, put on new productions –world premiers. There is a strong wish to keep on finding new things, to be able to say, "We put on a world premier." It's the media's game, and the race to attract the public. In my opinion, this shouldn't be the real point, but we have to go along. Concert hall and festival directors are going all out to put on ever more sophisticated programs and handle ever more specific themes.
> (Interview, October 14, 1999).

Alongside organizers who can "commission programs" –and often see this as one of the more noble aspects of the job– other actors also intervene, such as musicologists and artistic advisors, though less centrally and less systematically. Gilles Cantagrel, a Bach specialist, advises the Sagittarius ensemble, while *Les Arts Florissants* have long worked closely with the American musicologist Hitchcock, who is editing a catalogue of Charpentier's works. In the aggregation of multiple interactions that define an ensemble's programs, an orchestra's clients –*i.e.*, the concert organizers– are far and away the most systematic interveners, at least for some ensembles. Launching a production also requires the organizer's agreement, and agreement often develops only as the gradual result of negotiation.

The same type of mechanisms operate in hiring musicians for a given production. Once again, concert organizers' intervention is decisive, at least in choosing the leading actors such as soloists and theatrical directors, those who will have a major role in characterizing the production and ensuring its success. A professional in charge of programming for the baroque music *Festival de Beaune* explains:

> The conductor has the right to veto voices, so do we. Now and then there are slight conflicts with conductors because we don't always have the same opinion of the voices, and contrary to what people think, the conductors don't know any more than we do. Voices are a fairly subjective thing, ultimately. We argue, and it can happen that we yell at each other. At the end of the line, we're necessarily the payers, so the balance of power is necessarily equal. We say: "We don't see eye to eye? Then we won't do it." But they do realize

> that we're the interface between conductor, singers, orchestra and the public. When it isn't good, we hear about it. There are problems with buddy-buddy contracts: the conductor takes thus and such voices because the singer's a member of his family, in his network of friends, etc. We don't think that's really right, because you don't do an opera with friends or pals, but with the voices that seem the best for singing those roles. We're there to make sure things go the way they should, and that can lead to bickering sometimes.
> (Interview, March 21, 2000).

Choice of instrumentalists also results from multiple decisions and negotiations, but is less likely to concern concert organizers than other ensemble actors, managers, or section leaders. The head of production at *Les Arts Florissants* explains how the choice of this or that musician results from several instances of delegating responsibility: the musical director entrusts him with hiring the orchestra and he in turn turns to ensemble musicians:

> The musicians' view is more partial, but also much more specific because they see their colleagues at work in a lot of orchestras, they've necessarily got ideas I wouldn't have. To keep myself up on things, to know what's on the market, I keep my ears open. I go to concerts when I can, but in fact I don't go very often. If everyone says good things about someone, they're necessarily good. And there are people you trust and people you don't trust. If my first oboe player says, "That guy's an excellent oboist", then no problem, I follow blindly. If one of the first violins says, "That guy's a good violinist for this or that style", I don't even feel the need to discuss it. The whole point is to know who gives good advice.
> (Interview, July 1, 1999).

From these two examples we can draw a series of empirical conclusions. Non-price characteristics seem the result of an aggregation of successive decisions, often reached through negotiation between the ensemble and actors external to it, mainly, though not exclusively, concert programmers. Among these outside actors, the most important category is indeed concert organizers. First, they are the only ones who can intervene with regard to the entire set of commodity characteristics. Because they're buying the concert, and the concert doesn't exist before the transaction (I'll return to this point), organizers are likely to call into question the full set of dimensions and even the very principle of the proposed production (this is perfectly clear in the remark from the Beaune festival programmer: "We don't see eye to eye? Then we won't do it"). Moreover, they intervene in the most salient product dimensions, the ones that work most to define it. If they are more likely to negotiate choice of soloists than second oboes, that's also because the second oboe's role is less decisive than the soprano's or the stage director's in defining the product.

The important role of concert organizers in defining product characteristics also allows for a return to the ideal-typical definition of the prototype. Using remarks by Gadrey and Bandt (1994), I would underline two criteria that help us distinguish between standardized prototype products by whether we look at what is at stake in the interaction or the nature of relations among participants in that interaction. In the first of these two cases, and consistent with what Gadrey and Bandt call a service relation, we see that interaction is focused not on "price levels and quantities of 'realities-already-there'" but rather on the "realization, monitoring, and evaluation of a reality that is 'not-yet-there'" (*ibid*, p. 19). The non-tangibility of the commodity exchanged during the transaction is a determinant element here: *prototypes do not preexist the transaction but rather depend on and come after it*. For these commodities, we observe a reversal of the production-exchange sequence that applies in ideal-typical manner to the market of standardized commodities; a reversed sequence where the exchange precedes and conditions the product. We therefore have defined one typical characteristic of the relation between buyer and seller on a prototype market, a characteristic pertaining to the chronology of interaction sequences.

If we shift our focus from the point of the interaction to relations among actors involved in it, we also find profound affinities between the "service relation" described by Gadrey and Bandt and the relation which ensemble and concert organizer enter into. For Gadrey and Bandt, the dividing line between commodities should be drawn with reference to the "significance in the commodity of co-production relations between producer and customer" (*ibid.*, p. 14). In our case, "co-production" relations are, as we know, not the only kind of relations obtaining, but they are the favored kind. We now have an element for characterizing the ideal-type of the prototype on the basis of interaction between buyer and seller: *for prototypes, the customer plays an important role in defining the intrinsic characteristics of the commodity.* (8) More precisely, this trait is an ideal-typical one; that is, it constitutes a borderline case from which the reality of exchanges is more or less distanced. One of the questions we must try to answer is, in what cases do we find this co-production relation and in what cases (and under what conditions) are the commodities made available on the market already determined "upstream" of the exchange? Moreover, as Hatchuel points out (1993), it is quite vague to say that the relation is one of "co-production"; to have a clearer idea of what such a relation is, we should ask what founds and what specifies it. To what degree, for example, can a relation of this type be considered a "market" relation? To answer this question, we need to know what the modes are for organizing concert trade.

Modes of marketing early music concerts

Productions of early music ensembles involve the organizing of various projects and a "tour" economy. Musicians come together intermittently to rehearse a production; when the production is ready, they perform it several times in various cities in France and abroad. To prepare and perform a program, early music ensembles have to assume a certain volume of irreducible expenses that are then passed on to concert organizers. The greater the

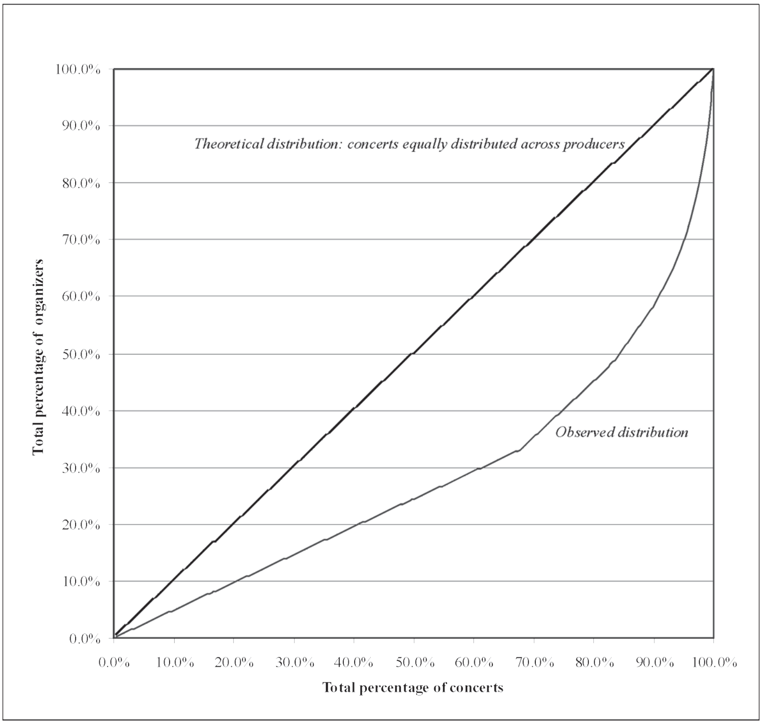
(8) Applying the "service relation" idea to all commodities as Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa propose in their "economics of qualities" (2000) therefore does not seem valid to me. If we do so we have failed to realize that at the moment of commodity exchange, ability to modify intrinsic commodity features varies sharply by commodity exchanged. That ability is often non-existent.

number of partners absorbing these expenses, the lower the concert price. The aim is thus to find several organizers ready to put on concerts during a relatively short period. Early music is still confined to specialized diffusion networks. In the list of possible partners for early music ensembles, the same names keep appearing: Saintes, Beaune, Ambronay are the three major French festivals, supplemented by many smaller ones, such as those of Sablé, Saint-Michel-en-Thiérache, and Périgord Noir. Within these permanent institutions, the place of early music varies by manager personality. The *Théâtre de Caen*, the *Opéra de Montpellier*, the *Arsenal de Metz*, the *Théâtre de Poissy*, the *Cité de la Musique*, and less regularly the *Opéra du Rhin*, the *Opéra de Rennes*, the *Grand Théâtre de Bordeaux*, and the *Opéra-Comique* have been regular early music ensemble clients. Sporadically, the major festival institutions –Aix and Glyndebourne of course, but since the mid-1990s also Salzburg– and permanent performing arts institutions such as *Châtelet*, the *Opéra de Paris*, the *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* and the *Opéra de Lyon*, open their concert halls to baroque ensembles.

While these institutions constitute the main hiring prospects for ensembles, partner distribution is different each time. More exactly, if we are trying to see how collaborations are distributed for each ensemble, what we find is a highly polarized reality. One set of partners is made up of those with whom ensembles work regularly. *Les Arts Florissants* give a clear illustration of concentrating ensemble activity among a limited number of partners: from 1988 to 1998, 28% of *Les Arts Florissants* concerts were performed with 4.7% of their organizers. The graph below shows how highly concentrated *Les Arts Florissants* concerts are on a small number of favored partners (Aix-en-Provence, Caen, Ambronay, Beaune, the Brooklyn Academy, the *Théâtre du Châtelet*): 30% of organizers accounted for nearly 65% of engagements. Festivals too build up a "family" of artists with whom they regularly collaborate. Often criticized for reserving an inordinate amount of concert time to the Flemish diaspora, the festival of Saintes is in fact not exceptional: most institutions that regularly program early music have a network of musicians that are the armature of their programming. The extremely stable collaboration between the *Arsénal de Metz* and Jordi Savall nearly led to the latter taking up residence in Lorraine, as was the case for William Christie in Caen, and for Rousset, first at the *Festival de Beaune*, later at the *Opéra de Montpellier*. Some of the more modest festivals also regularly assemble a set of artist faithfuls: Moroney, the Turner Quartet, the London Baroque and the William Byrd Ensemble regularly play at the *Périgord Noir* festival, for example. The *Sablé* festival invites baroque ensembles located in the west of France; *e.g.*, the Stradivaria Ensemble, the Matteus Ensemble, and *A Sei Voci*.

But ensembles also perform in connection with organizers whom they collaborate with only very sporadically. In the case of *Les Arts Florissants*, over the 11 years studied, and despite the concentration of their activity, 35% of their concerts were given with organizers who received them only once. This means that in addition to their network of loyal buyer-clients, *Les Arts Florissants* had to go out and find new partners for each production.

Concentration of Les Arts Florissants concerts between 1988 and 1998, Gini curve



The partners of each actor in the world of early music are thus segmented into two groups: regular and sporadic. The composition of each of these groups varies by actor. Ensembles work first and foremost of course with institutions that reserve a significant amount of their programming time for early music, but the partnerships are not the same: while the *Talents Lyriques* have long worked regularly with the *Festival de Beaune*, this festival has seldom received the *Concert Spirituel*, which for its part plays frequently at the *Festival du Haut-Jura*. For actors in the world of early music, then, distribution of partners between regular and sporadic is highly idiosyncratic. To understand how this distribution is established, and grasp more generally how ensembles find outlets for their productions and organizers fill their programming time, we have to have a clear idea of the characteristics of competition among ensembles for placing their concerts and among organizers for hiring this or that ensemble.

I propose to apprehend competition by crossing two perspectives. First, competition can be defined, following Weber (1968, pp. 38-39) and Simmel (1999, pp. 297-319), as a particular form of conflict: an indirect struggle for trading opportunities. Competition is a struggle, but a very specific one in which actors do not interact directly against each other; what allows them to exclude, surpass, or eliminate their competitors are their parallel efforts, as Simmel described. Consequently, to characterize competition the point is not to bring to light how a seller (or buyer) interacts directly with another seller (or buyer) but on the contrary how diverse practices (a radical price decrease that may even amount to dumping; modifying a commodity's intrinsic characteristics; increased attention to packaging; attaching a set of services to the sale; distributing advantages aimed at producing loyal customers, etc.) can be interpreted as so many techniques for surpassing one's competitors and thereby so many strategies for struggling indirectly against them. Victory in this struggle is only the first step; the potential partner must still be convinced that the trade can indeed be realized. "In many sorts of combat, triumphing over the adversary does not immediately mean carrying off a prize, it is itself the prize. In the case of competition […] while chronologically, victory over the competitor is the first compulsory step, it doesn't mean anything in itself. The goal of the action will only have been reached when a value that is itself entirely independent of the combat is acquired. The tradesman who manages to spread the rumor that his competitor is insolvent is still far from having won if, for example, the public's needs suddenly turn away from the merchandise he has to offer. […] What gives its particular coloring to this type of competitive struggle is that the result of the combat does not suffice to realize its purpose." (Simmel, 1999, p. 298).

This *formal* analytic view of competition should be supplemented with a hypothesis on the *function* it serves. We can understand the interactions that give it shape and substance and the arrangements that go with it as so many ways of managing –*i.e.*, acquiring, keeping to oneself, or circulating– information about the commodities exchanged. This second perspective, which runs through much of social science literature on market phenomena, [9] should allow us to clarify the question raised in the introduction: How are commodities exchanged whose identity is singular every time? We can first hypothesize that the nature of information-gathering and the struggle or process of competition will be different depending on whether exchanges occur between regular partners or ones who have either never been in contact before or have no plans of exchanging with each other again. Moreover, the wellspring of the struggle and what is at stake in it can vary greatly: information can be sought on quality of the exchanged commodity or price at which it is to be exchanged; the struggle between competitors can of course take financial shape, but can also involve using other resources, *i.e.*, changing commodity characteristics or mobilizing interpersonal ties. If, as suggested in the introduction, one of the analytic issues is to understand how modes for managing uncertainty about commodity quality fit together with mechanisms

(9) The point is developed in very different ways in economics (Hayek, 1948), anthropology (Geertz, 1979), and sociology. Much sociological literature on "quality" in fact focuses on how exchanges are organized in this second perspective. Main studies include Karpik (1989), Callon, Meadel, and Rabeharisoa (2000), and responses to the "quality" question collected and presented by Musselin and Paradeise (2002) and Stanziani (2003).

for defining price, then we must be particularly attentive to the second dimension. In other words, the competition operative on the early music concert market may be studied by crossing two questions: Are the resources involved in the indirect struggle the same regardless of whether the point is to improve one's chances of exchanging with a stable partner or with a sporadic one? Does competition obey the same principles regardless of whether the information to be acquired and the focus of the struggle pertain to concert price or quality?

Competition around non-price characteristics

How do actors on the early music concert market manage to assure themselves of the quality of commodities as singular as the concerts exchanged on that market? Throughout the early music market we find the same mode of managing information, and it comes down to substituting information about producers for information about commodities. Being inscribed in temporal series enables customers to reasonably anticipate a certain return: the qualities of yesterday's commodity are likely to be found again in today's, or in any case they help to identify the new commodity, even if all commodity characteristics have changed. The problem of course has just been moved over, and the question now is, how can organizers be sure about information on producer? The answer differs of course by whether organizers are dealing with a regular or sporadic partner.

When partners work together regularly, competition is shaped entirely by the resonance and influence of the personal relations obtaining between buyers and sellers. Having regular or recurring relations is indeed a way of ensuring production quality, and therefore of managing information on singular commodities: the renewal of exchange relations with the same partner thus makes it possible, as Lorenz has shown (1996), for confidence relations to get built up where belief in dependability is substituted for formal guarantees on the qualities of a commodity that is yet to be produced. Stabilizing ties in this way is also a means of excluding competitors. One of the major aims of the indirect struggle between ensembles and organizers is to lock out other potential relations: by turning a given concert organizer into a loyal customer, an ensemble improves its chances of being given priority by that organizer when the time comes for it to choose its artists for the following seasons. Likewise, an organizer who regularly invites a given ensemble knows that it will be in an advantageous position when the ensemble has to choose between several organizers ready to put on a production for which there is high audience demand. For this reason, regardless of whether these relations are preexistent to the exchange or produced by it, relations between regular partners are often friendship relations. The programmer for the *Festival de Saintes* describes the musicians he invites as family members and, in somewhat less carefully chosen terms, explains that this relational stability is important for mutual understanding and acceptance of working conditions:

> With the passing of the years at Saintes, we've managed to develop a family. People can call that buddy-buddying, but on that score I don't bring in the same people any more than they do at Aix or Beaune. They're people who've got the same approach to the music, even though they're esthetically different… In a word, they're intelligent. I don't want to have jerks who're going to tell me it's too warm in the hall and they can't rehearse, their hotel room is no good… Saintes is the way it is, population of 5,000 –we've only got two-star hotels. That's why when we invite new people to Saintes, we've got to brief them a little beforehand, tell them that Saintes isn't going to be big luxury, we aren't going to roll out a red carpet for them. On the other hand, we tell them, they're going to be able to do things here they can't do elsewhere. We never have any trouble getting people to come back here: once they've gotten a taste of Saintes, they come back –and for modest fees. They have experiences here, they do concerts, that they don't do elsewhere."
> (Interview, October 3, 1999).

Still, it is important not to have too "spontaneist" a vision of how stable relations are instituted. They can also be the object of deliberate investment. In the case of the *Chapelle Royale*, all members of the administrative team are called on to help, as a manager explains:

> We're in contact with 800 institutions throughout Europe, and once a member of our administration has made contact with someone who works in one of those houses, we note the name, role, address and telephone number. We repertory them, to have lasting contacts. If you want to find concerts it's important to have a systematic policy, and it's important, too, that people know each other. That way, if I call on behalf of so-and-so, or if so-and-so calls directly, there's less chance of being told to go blow.
> (Interview, September 14, 1999).

Such deliberate investment shows that, to use Rees' distinction (1996), information the search for follows intensive rather than extensive logic. The point is not so much to look for information by multiplying comparisons between alternative offers as to obtain information by investing massively in one relation. In other words, with regular partners, information management is not merely a means of substituting a guarantee on seller for a guarantee on production. By working together, organizers and ensembles help define the qualities of the products purchased; organizer obtains special information on ensemble's concerts by working *with* the ensemble to modify its characteristics. The relation between regular partners is one of co-production that stabilizes concert characteristics as it defines them.

Stabilizing relations in this way also allows for discriminating between competing actors who are struggling to win an exchange opportunity. Competitor elimination is indirect: the action is not directly focused on competitors but works instead through massive investment in one's relation with an actor one is seeking to win over. What is being played out in this buyer-seller relation therefore exceeds mere exchange; it extends to a particular type of competition where, in order to exclude rivals, sellers and buyers increase their mutual commitment to each other. To struggle against competitors, music ensembles and concert organizers work to stabilize the commitment that links them to some of their respective partners. Competition here follows inter-temporal logic: it is precisely because, by definition, partners who are familiar with each other worked yesterday with an actor they are trying to win over again today that both have a better chance in the struggle against their respective competitors. There are several reasons for this. Actors wager on receiving the same thing they got the first time: renewing relations is a means of reducing uncertainty about performance quality. Also, in the course of the preceding exchanges, ties were established between members of the two institutions, and the sources of commitment deepened: the development of shared work routines has been added to the resonance of interpersonal or friendship relations; this further stabilizes relations, and makes it an increasingly risky proposition to substitute another relation for what has become a solid partnership. In other words, in this form of competition, actors' positions in the struggle change as transactions continue to be made. Exchange partners become committed to each other, changing situations within the space of competition on both sides of the transaction. It is in this way that the competitive struggle tends to fix ensembles' positions relative to each other.

In the arranging of a concert tour, exchanges between regular partners are concluded *before* exchanges with sporadic ones: an ensemble first turns to its usual clients to ensure that its production will be realized; once it has fixed a few dates with them, it tries to give the tour more substance by selling the same concert to sporadic partners. Unlike regular partners, sporadic partners cannot modify commodity characteristics, which were fixed during the first transactions and are immutable precisely because they have already been promised to the other set of partners. With sporadic partners, concert quality management and competition mechanisms in general are considerably different from those just described for regular partners. Because relations are sporadic, the interacquaintanceship that made it possible to reduce uncertainty is missing; likewise partners do not exercise any control over concert characteristics by helping to define them because those characteristics are now fixed. When the point is to win over sporadic partners, the motives that mobilize market actors in the indirect struggle that pits them against their competitors are different from those at work when the point is increase opportunities for exchanging with regular partners.

To increase opportunities for exchange with sporadic partners, concert market actors make use of two main resources. The first involves a figure much studied in sociology of markets, the market intermediary (Cochoy and Dubuisson-Quellier, 2000), "contact man" (Hirsch, 1972), or prescriber (Hatchuel, 1995), who improves information circulation by putting worlds in contact with each other that would otherwise remain separate. This is the role that the artistic advisor to the *Ensemble Sagittarius* says he plays:

> The fact is that Sagittarius' repertoire is dear to me and I have a certain experience in this area, a certain number of relations, so I can give general artistic advice. With the network of friends I've managed to develop in the profession –I really know everybody now– I can give them ideas, approaches, facilitate contacts– I can play an active role.
> (Interview, February 11, 1999).

The role of the intermediary can take another shape, equally classic: putting personal reputation into the scales to guarantee the quality of a given artist or production. The radio producer Jacques Merlet, a tireless advocate of early music at the *France Musique* radio station, has often played that role. As he tells it:

> People call me up saying, "What should I do?" or "What's this or that one worth?" because in fact they don't know. I tell them what I think, and they can do what they like with it. They ask me my opinion of someone, even if he's not well-known, *especially* if he's not well-known… You know, before people get going on something, they… It happened to me again a month ago. A guy grabs me just after a concert and says, "What do I do? I don't know anything. I'm mayor of this tiny town and there's a festival that's asking me for funding." The guy running the festival was behind him trembling and wondering, "What's he going to say?" I gave my opinion and the mayor said, "Well if *you* say so…" I play the switchman –that's our purpose on the radio sometimes."
> (Interview, February 12, 1999).

Delegating judgment to prescribers is a way of coping with lack of information or own judgment deficiencies, but for ensembles and organizers it is also a way of struggling for exchange opportunities with sporadic partners. Access to intermediaries is indeed unequally distributed, and investment in a relation with an intermediary allows one to obtain exchange opportunities that would be inaccessible without him: recourse to a third party is one of the forms the indirect struggle among competitors can take. In the following example the problem is not a lack of information; rather, recourse to an intermediary –and financial investment aimed at making that person loyal– is a required step in any attempt to hire certain artists:

> The problem with big stars is they've got an agent. In France its *IMG*. I've been working with them for several years, and I figured out immediately that they've got big artists, real gifts. They've got a few dates, you pay a lot, and if you don't take, there are fifteen others who will, so it's no problem for them. To get Gardiner with some regularity, you have to have bought a certain number of other programs that are easier to get. I've been working with *IMG* for years. I hired Trevor Pinnock, the King's Consort, people I like and wanted to invite, but I also did it to get a regular collaboration going with *IMG*. Every year we've got one or two projects with them, I'm becoming a loyal customer, I get along really well with the guy from *IMG* (I'd worked with him before, when he was at the *Opéra-Comique*). He knows me, we trust each other, I've bought several productions from him. So I've been telling him for two or three years now that we've absolutely got to have a thing with Gardiner. He says, "Next year I'll count you in. It may cost a bit more, but you should know that you'll be just about the only one in France to have him." That's the result of a two or three-year collaboration with them. And if you want Harnoncourt, it's even worse. At *IMG* they've got two dates –and that's not even every year– and they want the big stages, I don't know what I'm going to have to do to get Harnoncourt. There'll have to be just the right combination of circumstances or they'll have to want to make me a big present at a particular moment. But I've figured out that Harnoncourt will be for later: "Work with us first, become one of the boutique's loyal customers and then we'll see" –that kind of thing. We're not well-known enough for him yet, and then maybe I didn't give the impresarios enough money. That's how it goes. They've got very few dates for the big ensembles and they've got so much demand that in any case they do whatever they want.
> (Interview, December 5, 1999).

By bringing a third party into the struggle among competitors, an actor is investing in a relation that can also increase risk. This becomes clear if we specify the stakes involved in using agents. Though agents are decidedly the least appreciated actors on this market (managers accuse them altogether of being mercantile rogues, ignorant of the specificity of working with early music ensembles and practicing inflationary tactics), they can prove necessary, as just seen, in providing access to certain markets. In some cases, as in

Germany, agents are the only way for organizers to gain access to the market. German concert halls very often do not produce concerts directly; they are mere premises rented to "turners" who organize a series of concerts in them. Turners are also usually agents, so it is extremely difficult to gain access to a market without going through them. The administrator at the *Chapelle Royale* describes the complexity resulting from such a tight grip on the market:

> Where things get really complex is that the Hamburg agent and the Bremen agent are not the same. Agents aren't present in all cities, only some. What's more, they do each other favors: "Take my protégé in your series in such and such a place and I'll take your protegé in mine in another" –you can't have any exclusive relations. The *Chapelle Royale* works with three agents in Germany. But you've got to be really careful: they're all in competition with each other, and you've got to be careful not to get them against you. You have to keep apprised of the networks. In any case you've got to manage to get the information, to know who's doing what in what city, who's got the real power in this place and that place, and set up the right alliances. It's very complicated, and of course they don't do anything to clarify the situation.
> (Interview, September 14, 1999).

Delegating in such cases is obviously not done out of trust, and in the absence of trust, one has to have some "grip" on the partner, *i.e.*, be able to influence his or her reputation. Speaking of the Asian tours of the *Orchestre des Champs-Élysées*, the orchestra's manager explains why he prefers to work with an agent who also works frequently in France:

> I prefer working with an agent who works in both Asia and France. In any case they're all rotten boards. But if a guy who only works in Asia screws up a whole concert tour or gives you a lousy tour, you can't do anything about it, whereas with a guy who also works in France, well, we're well-known enough now to destroy his reputation. You've got to be able to lay on the pressure, otherwise they've got you, especially in geographical areas like that where you're helpless. I don't think this agent is better than the others –what matters to me is that he also works in France. That way it's in his interest not to mess up.
> (Interview, September 14, 1999).

When trying to increase exchange opportunities with sporadic partners, actors can also make use of a mechanism that functions not on the basis of direct or mediated interpersonal relations but rather ability to transform their name into a brand-name. (10) When this is achieved, the name guarantees production quality: in buying a given ensemble's concert, the customer knows he can expect a particular type of performance. Moreover, in giving a bonus to the best-known ensembles and pride of place to their concerts, organizers are also likely to modify their own position in the struggle relative to competitors', as is clear in this statement from a concert programmer at the *Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles*:

> We agree to pay a lot for *Les Arts Florissants* and the *Chapelle Royale* because we're sure to fill the hall. When we program *Les Arts Florissant* we're full; when we program Sagittarius, we're not, even for the same program and the same musicians, even if it's gorgeous.
> (Interview, June 2, 1999).

(10) Karpik defines brand-names as names "associated not only with singular goods and services but also private production commitments aimed at maintaining identity over time" (1996, p. 535).

When an ensemble's name has become a brand-name, both its own position and that of the concert programmer improve considerably. But how to become a brand-name? How does a proper name acquire so much power that potential buyers place complete trust in it? The effectiveness of the brand has first and foremost to do with the reputation attaching to the name, this in turn due to previous successes that market actors have become aware of and consider proof of particular qualities. The former manager of *Les Arts Florissants* explains how a particularly demanding year was decisive for the ensemble's reputation. The investments it agreed to make that year and the successes it achieved enabled it to "change categories"; that is, they made the ensemble significantly less substitutable:

> That same year I put up a million francs [150,000€] for *Médée* and a million francs for *Orlando* because the programmers couldn't pay the total. I reduced their costs by putting up those sums –massive at our scale. The first semester of '93, we had the revival of *Les Indes Galantes* at the *Opéra-Comique* (which got a lot of attention in fact), the new production of *Médée* at Caen, Strasbourg, and the *Opéra-Comique*, and Händel's *Orlando* at Aix –six months of opera for *Les Arts Florissants*– we really changed categories. From that time on, we were in another circuit. It clearly helped renew the sponsorship contract with Péchiney [major aluminum producing company] and with Caen and Lower Normandy. It made the ensemble adult. That type of situation is what's made it possible to work regularly with the *Opéra de Paris*; when people see you've got broad enough shoulders to take on that kind of program and see it through without a hitch, without any surprises and to the general satisfaction of all, then they want to invite you more than the others.
> (Interview, July 6, 1999).

An ensemble's reputation can also benefit from invitations from particularly prestigious organizers. Other buyers trust the organizer's judgment –and benefit from it by inviting an ensemble whose excellent level has been proven by the fact that it has been invited to play in prestigious houses. The manager of the *Ensemble Baroque de Limoges* describes this mirroring game, in which deficits become investments:

> We go to Salzburg in January for the Mozart festival –it's a program we play only once but it's for the Mozart festival, the biggest in Europe that we're invited to, a gift from heaven. The production costs 350,000 francs [53,000€] but we don't sell it for 350 –from a financial point of view it's a disaster, it's going to cost us 100,000 francs. But it's very important for us. Afterwards, I'll be able to sell the Salzburg thing absolutely everywhere. People are dumbstruck, the image radiates. We could almost put it in our promotion and public relations budget. Everybody gets wind of it, we've got much better chances of being asked by other places, it reassures and impresses other distributors. People shouldn't think all distributors are fully informed musicologists. They're like everyone else –they look at the ratings in *Télérama*, they don't know anything.
> (Interview, September 30, 1999).

The resources mobilized by early music market actors in their indirect struggle against competitors vary considerably depending on whether the aim is to improve exchange opportunities with regular or sporadic partners. With regular partners, competition mainly involves recourse to direct interpersonal relations between supplier and demander; these work to exclude competitors from exchange opportunities around comparable productions and ensure the quality of ensembles, the hypothesis being that the quality will also be felt in the new concerts. With sporadic partners, competition involves using intermediaries or the influence that agents attribute to brand-names.

If we now return to the co-production relation, we see it only gets established with certain organizers; *i.e.*, regular partners. Renewal of relations and confidence between such partners can lead to genuine commodity co-production. In contrast, partners mobilized sporadically take the commodity as a fixed package and intervene very little in defining it. If, following F. Weber (2000), Testart (2001), and Chantelat (2002), we accept the idea that what makes market relations specific is that in ideal-typical form they presuppose the impersonality of ties between supplier and demander, then the distance between that ideal-type and the relations obtaining between regular partners on the early music market is very great. In our case, we are much closer to what Gadrey and Bandt (1994) call a service relation, and in any case *far* from a purely market relation. On the other hand, there is a much shorter distance between the ideal-typical market relation and relations between one-time or sporadic partners on the early music market. Given that commodity characteristics have been fixed before negotiations, we can imagine at this stage that those transactions are both sporadic and impersonal.

Before turning to how concert prices are defined, however, another question should be raised: Can sporadic partners become regular ones? The answer appears at first sight obvious: to become regular partners, clearly at one point an ensemble and an organizer had to make a contract agreement. The fact is that relations thought of at the start as sporadic partnerships based on opportunistic engagements ("one-shot deals" or "what's left in the tour", as market actors put it) have given rise to a partnership that is being renewed over time. Regular relations are in fact much more than exchange relations: they are work relations, the work in question being co-production, and even during the first instance of collaboration, relations between ensemble and organizer are of a quite different nature than those established with sporadic partners. Discussions are long, recurrent; visits quickly take a friendly tone, quite different from the rapid interactions of sporadic exchanges, which are much more impersonal, strictly concentrated on the purchase or sale of a precise concert and not at all on shared projects. It can happen, of course, that while at least one of the parties anticipates or hopes upon first collaboration that the relation will be renewed several times, it actually has no future: the first try fails, the will to work together is missing, the head of one of the institutions changes, or something similar. But only very seldom do exchanges thought of at the start as sporadic get transformed into stable partnerships. It happens that an organizer approached during a tour in the hopes of being able to give an extra concert is turned to again four years later, but the nature of relations that develop between such partners does not change. Competition logic is at work instead of co-production or personal relations, and that logic is always marked by the effects of reputation and intermediary's intervention (though it may be reinforced by distant memory of past collaboration), and characterized by impersonal exchanges that do not modify concert characteristics.

Concert price formation

The answer as to whether competition around price takes the same forms as competition around non-price product characteristics is clearly no. As we have seen, competition with regard to non-price characteristics takes different forms by whether the point is to increase exchange opportunities with sporadic or regular partners. When price is the incentive and issue of competition, competition takes the same forms for *all* types of partners and involves massive investment in relations between seller and buyer contemplating an exchange. The price of early music concerts is determined first and foremost in bilateral relations. This is shown by the very strong price variation from one organizer to another for the same programs, as suggested in the following statement by the manager of the *Ensemble Baroque de Limoges*:

> Say we put on a production with eight chamber music concerts, we're going to sell it for around 40,000 francs (6,000€). Then I've got a festival in some tiny town that calls to tell me they've only got 30,000 francs and won't be able to put up any more. "We'll do it", Christophe says to me, "they're nice." So we sell it for 30 and we reinject –we pay the musicians the same price. These are structural and artistic choices. I can sell a chamber music program to the big Whatsit festival for 50,000 francs, and at the end of the tour, between two dates, I sell it for 25,000 to a nice little festival that doesn't have the means to pay but where we want to play.
> (Interview, September 30, 1999).

The incentive in competitors' struggle for exchange opportunities with regard to commodity price is clear: the resources used here are primarily financial, and for some concerts, organizers and ensembles choose not to recover their expenses. The deficit they accept is for them a means of realizing an exchange that would not take place without that effort. Price variation from one transaction to the next also points to the fact that price is fixed exclusively through negotiation between buyer and seller, a negotiation that involves partners' relative desire to work with each other while depending, of course, on power relations within the exchange, themselves closely linked to parties' relative reputations. The concert programmer for the *Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles* explains:

> When you want to ask for Gustav Leonhardt –"Monsieur Leonhardt, would you do us the honor of coming to direct *Saint John* with the choir?"– you're not going to discuss his fee much, it's a delicate point. In general they don't have an agent, so you call the secretary's office and even if you start to cry you're not going to get much. "Listen, the answer's no. Good-bye", they say.
> (Interview, June 2, 1999).

Negotiation outcome depends on more than a desire to trade and the relative reputations of suppliers and demanders; it is also determined by what actors call "the market price", This price actors must submit to, as one manager explains in no uncertain terms:

> We have to go along with the market. It's not because Bach's cantatas cost me 450,000 francs (70,000€) every time he lifts his baton that I'm going to be able to sell them for 450. There's a market price and we're all aligned on it.
> (Interview, September 30, 1999).

The notion of "market price" is nonetheless problematic. If we accept that prices are fixed on the market in purely bilateral fashion, how can there be a market price? And if the commodities exchanged are singular, how can one know from one production to the next if the price is right or not? Let us begin by defining very clearly what is meant by "market price". If it were absolutely imperative that actors follow it, then the wide variations found and mentioned above would not exist. Because those variations are observable, "market price" should be thought of as a sort of focal point that actors can choose to move away from according to their financial leeway and the intensity of their desire to exchange with the other party. How then are we to understand the fact that exchange partners have a "referent" when there is no formal mechanism intervening to standardize prices and productions vary qualitatively to a significant degree? "Market price" is assessed by the different parties' knowledge of their partners' expense structures, as explained clearly in the following comment from a festival director:

> At the beginning, it's true, I didn't really know. They'd put out a figure –how was I supposed to I know if it was high? Now I know how things break down. And when you ask the question, people are in a spot: "Yes, well, you know, that's the maximum figure, we can negotiate", etc. For example, René Jacobs tells me, "We can do *The Creation*, I'm doing it at Montreux, we can maybe pick it up for Ambronay." Actually, it's his wife who gives me a figure –she's the one who manages his affairs. I say I don't agree with that figure: "Who do you have for soloists? You better have big international soloists at that price." He tells me the soloists. Most of them were in the academy last year, the others are also young but I don't know them. I know the RIAS choir of Berlin, I know how much you can handle them for. If I call the RIAS manager and ask him the price of a concert he's going to tell me it costs 40,000, maybe 45. I've got an idea of what the orchestra's worth, I've got a bit of an idea what you give those soloists because I had them working for me the year before. Even if you add a generous fee for the conductor, I get a different total from what they're citing me.
> (Interview, December 15, 1999).

Finding the "right price" thus involves a learning process ("At the beginning… I didn't really know"), cost analysis ("Now I know how things break down") and keeping an eye on the market ("I've got a bit of an idea"). What does surveillance consist of? It may involve observing what programs partners plan, which allows for assessing at least roughly the financial balances involved, as explained by the manager of the *Orchestre des Champs-Élysées*:

> If you do your job right, you keep an eye on who buys what. After a bit, you know everybody's prices. You discuss them on the phone with producers, things like that. You conclude that this or that concert hall can pay so much, this guy's expensive, that one isn't. I watch *Arts Flo*'s tours, for example, and I can tell where there's money. It's easy. Someone who programs a regional orchestra doesn't have any. On the other hand, everyone knows that English orchestras are unaffordable, so a guy who invites an English orchestra's got the cash for it.
> (Interview, September 14, 1999).

Information diffusion can also be extremely informal. Information is constantly circulating among distributors, among ensembles, and between distributors and ensembles. Programmers and managers are continually taking market pulse by talking with colleagues and the musicians they employ:

> You've got means of comparison, really. You know you're not going to get Christie with 18 singers for 100,000 francs (15,000€). I know how much he gets elsewhere –by

> contacts, the network. Sunday with Niquet we've got Michel Chapuis at the organ. He's going to be giving the same program at Toulouse in September. O. calls to ask me, "What're you giving Chapuis? I'll give him the same." There's a market, concert organizers are in contact with each other, not exhaustively of course, not constantly, but we can exchange info with the people from Saintes or Beaune, for example. The artists themselves are also information relays. Three weeks ago we did a thing around Racine with M. at La Ferté-Milon, M. conducting. P. knew about the budget and he tells me, "M. is really expensive on this thing. I used to do it with 10 singers for 30,000 francs." That way, evaluations get back to you.
> (Interview, June 16, 1999).

Information circulation thus involves informal, systematic interactions where actors are constantly on the lookout for information or signals that will enable them to assess their position and that of their partner. In other words, network interactions are what ensure circulation of price-related information. This relative transparence is the very principle of a mirroring dynamic: seller knows buyer's economic situation, knows that buyer knows his, and both know the other knows. Under these conditions, "market price" can be established without any formal standardizing arrangement, and though it doesn't present itself to actors as a kind of heaven-sent datum, it can nonetheless at least implicitly function as a discussion-framing referent.

Competition does not follow the same rules here as when non-price characteristics are at stake: the first resource –financial leeway– is decisive, whether the exchange is between regular or sporadic partners. To get partner's attention by playing on price alone, parties play with the financial leeway they have from subsidies or surpluses from other productions; this allows them to lower their price and thereby push out competitors. When exchange is between regular partners engaged in a co-production relation, however, this type of struggle combines with a second: through negotiations on commodity components, organizers are also likely modify the price of the production they're buying. Nonetheless, this difference does not change the fact that competition around price and competition around other-than-price obey different mechanisms.

Two questions come to the fore in response to the heterogeneity observed in price/not-price competition: What explains the difference? How do the two types of competition characteristics combine? To understand the difference between these two competition types, it is necessary to see what is specific about price within the set of dimensions that define the commodity. If we agree that since the market is the foundation for voluntary exchange relations, agreement between partners is necessary, we see that price is the only dimension on which actors *must* reach consensus for the exchange to be able to take place. If we then try to specify the ideal-typical market relation, we note a third criterion –in addition to the two noted by Chantelat (2000); namely, impersonality plus instantaneity and discontinuity: in an ideal-typical market relation, the only dimension that *has to* be agreed on is price. That criterion, it should be underlined, is once again an ideal-typical one, and defines a borderline situation: in many exchanges, other dimensions also require partner agreement; *e.g.* in exchanges between regular partners, where, as we know, the whole set of commodity dimensions are open to negotiation and presuppose partner agreement. Once again, reality is often far removed from the ideal-type. When the exchange is between sporadic partners, however, concert organizers get a fixed package. Both buyer and seller assess commodity quality, obviously, but their assessments may be dissonant: one may think a given singer is mediocre while the other things that he is satisfactory; the exchange can still occur if the party making the harsher judgment decides not to make a decisive issue of it. In other words, parties do not have to reach identical assessments of commodity quality for the exchange to take place. Such agreement can of course be reached when seller and buyer look into the identity of a soloist or how a work that is unknown to them is going to be performed, when they discuss the merits of a piece of music, etc., in order to formulate their judgments. But exchange parties can also decide to commit without all product characteristics being put up for discussion, without there being points of explicit agreement between them. At the extreme, the transaction can be disconnected from all evaluation of concert's singular characteristics: a distributor either buys or doesn't, maybe to fill a hole in a tour, and the only specific dimension requiring agreement is price.

Lastly, how do the two types of competition combine? The answer is, differently by whether the exchange is between regular or sporadic partners. In the first case, actors reserve the right to modify price by modifying intrinsic commodity characteristics: because all commodity dimensions are open to negotiation, finding the right price involves playing on non-price characteristics. When the exchange is between sporadic partners, price-quality fit follows a considerably different type of logic. There the two dimensions are not at all independent: when an organizer agrees to pay a high price for an ensemble because it has a name, he is paying for a component of ensemble "quality". But in this case, parties do not reserve the right to negotiate on intrinsic commodity characteristics in the aim of lowering commodity price. These characteristics have been fixed by early negotiations between regular partners, and it is in the framework instituted by those negotiations that price can then be negotiated between sporadic ones.

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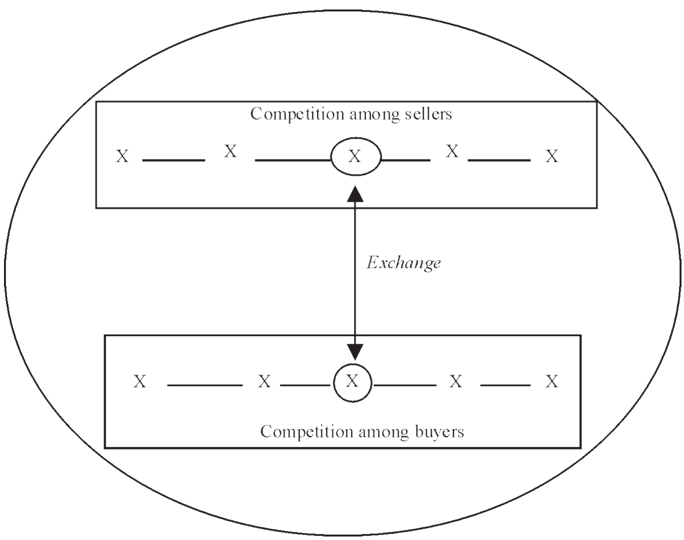
In accounting for the way the early music concert market functions, I have gradually been led to formulate hypotheses that I will now recapitulate. I first suggested that to understand the way exchange is organized on a real market we need to begin with exchange commodity specificities. I proposed to characterize early music concerts as prototypes, forging an ideal-type that combines criteria pertaining to commodity characteristics (variation over the entire set of commodity dimensions; instability of evaluation criteria for each dimension; singularity of combinations of characteristics) and criteria pertaining to characteristics definition (specific order of the production-exchange sequence, since exchange precedes production; customer's involvement in commodity feature definition; co-production). Using these different criteria, it became clear that the early music concert market can be apprehended *to varying degrees,* as a prototype market. Early music concerts are thus commodities of uncertain quality, the marketing of which is not at all "given": How do actors interacting on this market manage to exchange prototypes whose characteristics vary so widely from one production to the next?

To answer this question I applied views of competition and exchange to this particular market. These are covered by Max Weber's definition: "A market may be said to exist wherever there is competition, even if only unilateral, for opportunities of exchange." (Weber 1968, p. 635). Applying Swedberg's elaboration of this definition (1998) leads to the hypothesis that a market can be broken down into two interaction games. The first puts the set of buyers into competition with the set of sellers; this allows for selecting one from each category who can then proceed to exchange. The second pertains to the exchange that develops between a particular seller and a particular buyer. To illustrate this analytic definition, Swedberg proposes the following diagram:

Social structure of the market according to Weber (see Swedberg)



I then studied competition by combining two perspectives, one functionalist, in which competition is viewed as a particular way of managing information; the other formal, inspired by Simmel and Weber, where market competition is analyzed as a particular form of the conflict in which two actors are indirectly struggling to obtain exchange opportunities. These two dimensions interact without its being possible to make them overlap perfectly: while the struggle cannot be reduced to the single dimension of information management (as we saw in our case of early music concerts, it has quite different sources), strategic use of information –about one's own commodity and about the others'– is one way of fueling it. Moreover, the information function in competition clearly has implications for the shape the struggle may take: in the case of prototype markets, for example, intervention by intermediaries distorts it if, as happens with agents, trust is lacking and the intermediary, assumed to be an ally, becomes an adversary. The study of types of competition operative on this prototype market suggests two conclusions: first, price competition and non-price competition do not follow the same type of logic; second, competition form varies by product's more or less prototypical character, namely by degree that commodity is fixed before the transaction. When commodity is fixed during transaction –*i.e.*, when the prototypicalness of commodity exchanged is very strong– actors' main resource in the struggle against competitors is to stabilize partnerships. Here we find a classic form of competition as identified by Simmel; it involves intensifying the tie with the actor one is seeking to win over, and consequently diminishing competitors' exchange opportunities: "Given that the target of competition for parties within society is generally to have at one's disposal one or many third persons, competition requires the parties to get very close to that third person… [competition] requires the competitor, who sees he has a rival –and who would often otherwise not be a competitor– to move forward and get closer to the person he is trying to win over, to establish ties with him, study his strengths and weaknesses and adapt to them, look for whatever bridges could link his own person and work to the others, or create such bridges." (Simmel, 1999, p. 301). Price competition in this case is partially mixed in with competition around non-price features. More exactly, the two areas of competition are directly linked: through modifying commodity features, exchange partners can change commodity price. But when the prototypical character of the commodity is less pronounced and features have been fixed upstream of the transaction, the sources of competition are considerably different, based now on logic that brings into play market intermediaries, or ensembles or organizers as brand-names. In this case, price competition involves actors' making use of whatever they have in the way of financial leeway.

Still, competition is only one type of interaction operative on a market. Suppliers and demanders compete to have exchange opportunities because the *real* exchange that emerges from competition between them cannot be taken for granted. The second interaction structure, then, *i.e.*, the exchange relation between supplier and demander, must be analyzed in turn. It is helpful in studying the forms this relation can take to relate the concrete or historical forms realized to the ideal-typical market relation, which I have sought to characterize following F. Weber (2000), Testart (2001) and Chantelat (2002). To the typical criteria proposed by these authors, namely, the relation's impersonality and its instantaneity and discontinuity, I suggested adding another typical trait, deriving from the idea that the *market* relation presupposes reaching agreement: in an *ideal-typical* market relation, the only commodity dimension on which agreement must be reached is price. These criteria, which define *borderline* situations, make it possible to bring to light and explain a particular feature of this prototype market. When exchange is between regular partners, it is quite far from ideal-typical market exchange as just defined; in this case agreement must be reached on all commodity dimensions, which are in fact co-defined in the course of the exchange. Between sporadic partners, however, while concert features may be discussed, tested, assessed, they cannot be modified because they have already been fixed beforehand during negotiations between regular partners. In some instances, no commodity dimension is called into question or explicitly made the focus of agreement, but there is one that partners must agree on: price. In other words, even for commodities as singular as early music concerts, exchange of which is strongly marked by uncertainty, some exchanges can rest on minimal negotiation that bears on price alone. For price to be the only issue, however, two conditions must obtain. The first concerns constraint: since commodity characteristics are fixed upstream of the exchange by co-producing, recurrent partners, discussions between sporadic partners have necessarily weaker implications. In some cases, discussion of features to be determined beforehand can be extremely limited, and this is where the second condition comes into play: in order for actors to be able to exchange commodities as singular as early music concerts without discussing non-price features, there have to be arrangements that allow them to acquire guarantees on commodity quality. There are two such arrangements on the early music concert market: market intermediaries, whose action is viewed with ambivalence though they may be mobilized by exchange partners to facilitate transactions by functioning as guarantors of givens, and brand-names, which, when stabilized, work to limit discussion of commodity quality. The sequential order of transactions then combines with the competition process to allow for simplified negotiations between exchange partners.

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