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Gabriel Prokofiev's Nonclassical club night breaks with tradition

Club nights are taking the starch out of live classical music



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The girl taking tickets on the door is wearing odd stockings. It's the middle of June, but one of the bar staff is sporting a woolly hat, complete with a strategically draped bobble. It's 9.30pm on a Wednesday night at the Macbeth on Hoxton Street, and this is exactly the kind of crowd you'd expect to find in this terrifyingly trendy corner of East London. It's not what you'd expect at a classical music concert, though.

But this is no ordinary classical music concert. Nonclassical, run by Gabriel Prokofiev, DJ, producer, composer and grandson of the great Sergei, is a monthly classical club night that mixes live performances from instrumentalists and singers with sets from electronica DJs. Talking during the performances is not frowned upon in fact, it's positively encouraged and drinks are served at the bar throughout the night.

The event is just one of a host of classical club nights springing up in cities across the country, aimed at younger punters who are open to classical music but deterred by the formality of the traditional concert hall. According to Prokofiev, young people are put off going to formal concerts because they don't know what to wear or when to clap, and hate being forced to sit in silence throughout a performance.

But the classical club night is not limited to contemporary music. The Yorkshire Grey, a postwork waterhole in Holborn, has been hosting monthly chamber music performances since January. Here,

the repertoire is much more traditional (a violinist and pianist play Bach and Schubert) and the crowd much better behaved, but this is still not your average chamber music performance. Two halves of 20 minutes each are separated by a 30-minute interval, and again, drinks are served throughout.

Harmonic at the Arts Club on Dover Street in Mayfair also sticks to a more traditional, core classical format. Begun this year by Steve Abbott, of the artist management agency Bedlam Management, it has attracted performers such as the violinist Nicola Benedetti, the soprano Danielle De Niese and Julian Lloyd Webber, and draws crowds of around 300 each month. It combines chamber music in one room with a classical music DJ in the bar next door.

The fact that a lot of people are doing this is a reflection of the fact that a lot of young people are feeling very alienated by the traditional way in which classical music is presented, Abbott says.