New Classics: The Analysis of Classical Music Album Covers' Digital Age Characteristics

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the digital age characteristics of the classical music album covers at the turning point of the new millennium based on the six main principles of graphic design, which are unity/harmony, balance, hierarchy, scale/proportion, dominance/emphasis, and similarity/contrast visually. The word *classic*, which based on classes or classifying can define three different aspects of something: the best as quality, the whole as characteristics, and the absolute as and above everything. Music as a mean of artistic expression formed by sound and silence during a time period, according to its components like pitch, rhythm, dynamics, and sonic qualities like timbre and texture. Although European classical art music last its period between 1750 and 1820, the phrase *classical music*, which first used in 19th century today represents the period between composers Bach (1685-1750) and Beethoven (1770-1827). Since the recording technologies occurred in late 1980's, another field of design already born developed as a multi complementary discipline. *Album cover design* is a special department of graphic design, which is the pre-production process of a printed and formatted two-dimensional surface. Album cover design based on six main graphic design principle, which combined to the content, components and the characteristics of the recorded music.

Keywords: Album cover design, classical music, graphic design

Introduction

Graphic design, as a design discipline is the decision process before production of two dimensional surfaces by printing, painting or reflecting on digital screens. Music industry is one of the countless fields, which graphic design serves. Since music recorded on a medium and these mediums became wide, labelling made by graphic design. Recorded mediums placed in packages for protecting purposes. Package design as whole is one of the many working areas of both graphic design and industrial design. The type of the material, the package made of and the production technique and

process of a package belongs to the area of industrial design. Industrial design is the process of design applied to products that are to be manufactured through techniques of mass production. Mass production is the production of large amounts of the standardized products, including and especially on assembly lines. The industrial design's key characteristic is that design is separated from manufacture: the creative act of determining and defining a product's form and features takes place in advance of the physical act of making a product, which consists purely of repeated, often automated, replication. On the other hand, printing industry works for producing packages made by different materials like any kind of paper, fabric, wood and plastics. The visual characteristics of all the two-dimensional surfaces of a package as one by one and as a total belong to the area of graphic design. The better the two design disciplines corporate, the better the final package produces. (Batchelor, 1994; DuPuis & Silva, 2011; Gronow & Saunio, 1999; Groth, 2006; Hauffe, 1998)

An effective graphic design is a design, which formally and contextually consistent. A consistent design can be made by organizing the design elements according to the design principles. Like the general principles of design every design field has its own elements and principles. These elements and principles are formed by the design area, production techniques and materials. In between of many the main six principles of graphic design are unity/harmony, balance, hierarchy, scale/proportion, dominance/emphasis, and similarity/contrast. (Dabner, Calvert & Casey, 2010; Wong, 1993)

It can be observed that there is a remarkable change on album covers of classical western art music. The aim of this paper is to analyze the classical music album covers' digital age characteristics by comparing the usage of the main six graphic design principles before and after 2000s, at the turning point of the new millennium.

Music as a mean of artistic expression formed by sound and silence for a defined duration and has components like pitch, rhythm, dynamics, and sonic qualities timbre and texture (Berry, 1987; Goodall, 2013). Although European classical art music last its period between 1750 and 1820, the phrase *classical music*, which first used in 19th century today represents the period between composers Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). The classical period begins with Baroque / Classical Transition, continues with 1750-1775, 1775-1790, and ends with 1790-1820 periods. (Griffiths, 2006; Taruskin, 2009)

The word *classic*, which based on classes or classifying can define three different aspects of something: the best as quality, the whole as characteristics, and the absolute as and above everything. In the middle of 18th century in Europe a new style born in architecture, literature and in the

arts called Neoclassicism. Classicism phrased and as a conclusion Neoclassicism imitated the classical antiquity, which is the classical era of ancient Greek and Roman imperial period. Natural philosophy, which describes the practice of studying nature lays under this as a strong base. Systematic study of nature and the taste for structural clarity began to affect music like the other art branches. (Bietoletti, 2005; Janson & Janson, 2003)

Baroque music was a dense, complex polyphonic music. Multiple independent melody lines performed simultaneously in choral and instrumental works. Tonality, writing music in a particular key – a group of pitches, was created in Baroque era. More elaborate musical ornamentation, improvisation the performers made, changed the musical notation and new instrumental playing techniques developed. (Buelow, 2004; Davison & Apel, 1950; Taruskin, 2009)

The layered polyphony of the Baroque left over and music moved towards homophonic style. A fine piece of music, the melody is played over a subordinate harmony, which is the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions, any harmonic set of usually three or more notes. (Rushton, 1986; Samson, 2002)

One of the many aims of this paper is to determine the reflections of digitalization on classical music album covers after 2000s. Digital age, today the world live in is a conclusion of the third revolution in human history. Digital industry creates a knowledge based society with the help of computer miniaturization. This evolution of technology in daily life and social organization has reflections on every aspect of life. Among many, only Bach and Beethoven's compositions performed albums have chosen randomly 8 before 2000s, 50 after 2000s and analyzed. (Charlesworth, 2009; Merritt, 2016)

The Analysis

On randomly chosen classic music album covers of the Bach and Beethoven compositions, before 2000s, at first sight 13 different themes seen. These themes are the composer, maestro, performer, musical instruments, sheet music, typography, painting, sculpture, architecture, landscapes, flowers, curves, and cross, on which the Jesus Christ crucified.

On randomly chosen classic music album covers of the Bach and Beethoven compositions' after 2000s, it is seen that some themes continuing and some new themes occurred. These new themes are the landscape architecture, minimalist art, fine art photography, geometric shape, organic shape, texture, pattern, and digitalization, which are 8.

Figure 1 Composer Themed Covers, 1ˢᵗ Before 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ After *Author's Collection*

Figure 2 Maestro Themed Covers, 1ˢᵗ Before 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ After *Author's Collection*

Figure 3 Performer Themed Covers, 1ˢᵗ Before 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ After *Author's Collection*

Pre-2000s themes are related to the concrete and abstract characteristics of music. Concrete characteristics are the one which can interpret visually as they seen. Bach and Beethoven's real life documentary portraits both as drawing and sculpture are used as they are on the covers before 2000s. After 2000s these portraits re-interpret by the contemporary artists in different art forms like silkscreen printing, digital art, and contemporary sculpture techniques. These contemporary artworks used on the covers for a contemporary look to take attention of the new audience of the digital age. Similar approach can be seen on the covers themed as performer, maestro, and musical instrument. Performer and maestro's colored real life photographs left their place unusual scenes, new photographing techniques, digital photography and digital effect technology.

A digital fine arts artist can add new characteristic to a regular photograph by using special software. Musical instruments also re-photographed with a new point of view, re-sized, cropped and interpreted by new possibilities of the digital technology. The output is more abstract and more symbolic. The audience can see the perfection of the details of a huge organ or can combine the physical characteristic of a piano in his/her daily outdoor life.

Figure 4 Musical Instrument Themed Covers, 1ˢᵗ Before 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ After *Author's Collection*

Another concrete theme before 2000s is sheet music. The pages of staves with the notes on them photographed with a new point of view, blurred, re-scaled and combined with other abstract elements like regular geometric shapes. For a new look their color can change and new characteristics can add like texture.
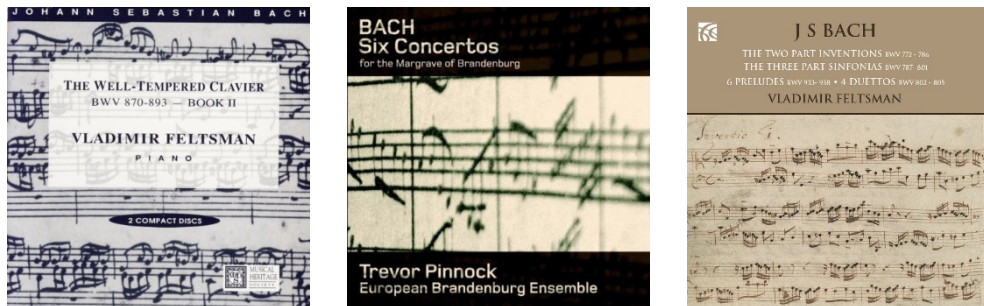
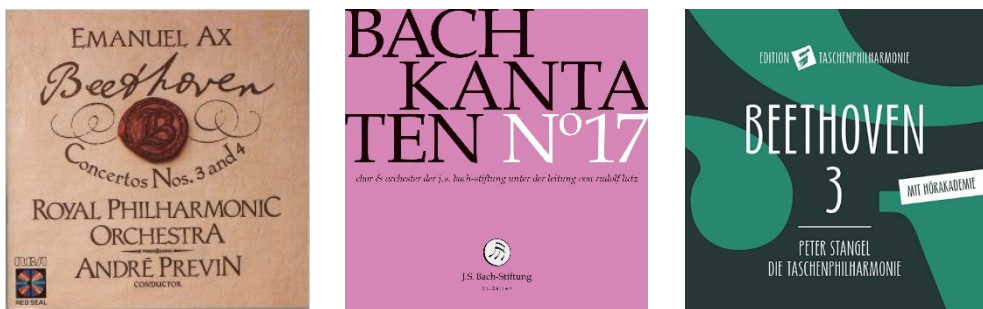Figure 5 Sheet Music Themed Covers, 1ˢᵗ Before, 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ After *Author's Collection*

Figure 6 Typography Themed Covers, 1ˢᵗ Before, 2ⁿᵈ and 3ʳᵈ After *Author's Collection*

Typographic elements are letters, numbers, punctuation marks and other sign and symbols used for writing and calculation or formulating. Another solution for covering can made by using only typographic elements without any visual. Before 2000s, two or three type character placed in front of a pale ground. In a closed composition the words centrally aligned. Only features which take the attention is the brush script used and curved form of the line combined with a seal under. This typographic setting left its place after 2000s to a new approach. Instead of a plain ground, a divided dynamic figure-ground, which interacts with used. Unexpected colors like lilac and bright greens are the ones never used on classical music stages, instruments and costumes. Organizing the surface in an unequal asymmetrical way is another digital age characteristic. Leaving an empty half is a new approach, which calms the eye while the other half tired. Size contrasts between the element groups are help to emphasizing and building a hierarchy among them. Using artworks for the classic music covers makes a resemblance between the beauty of fine arts and classical music. An abstract characteristic became concrete with the help of these fine artworks. Before 2000s placing a beautifully harmonious painting, sculpture or a classical piece of architecture in the middle of a cover was enough to visualize the art music. The typographic elements squeezed around as a must have and do. But after 2000s to a better visualization the scope of this artworks changed as theme, context and style. Even the subject figures are the same, the mood they are in or the color scheme used give them a different role. The creation techniques of these artworks have changed decades ago.
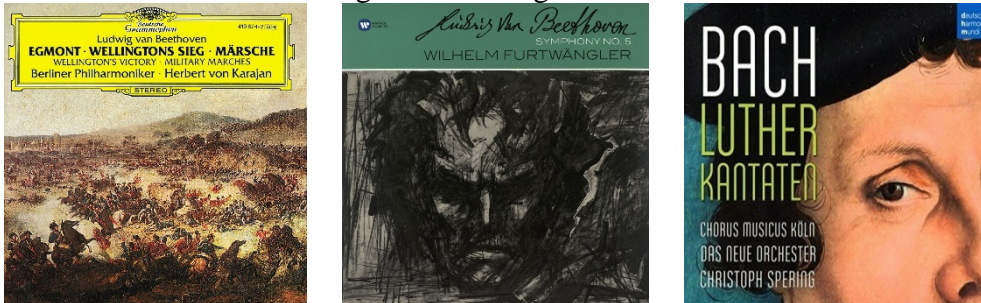

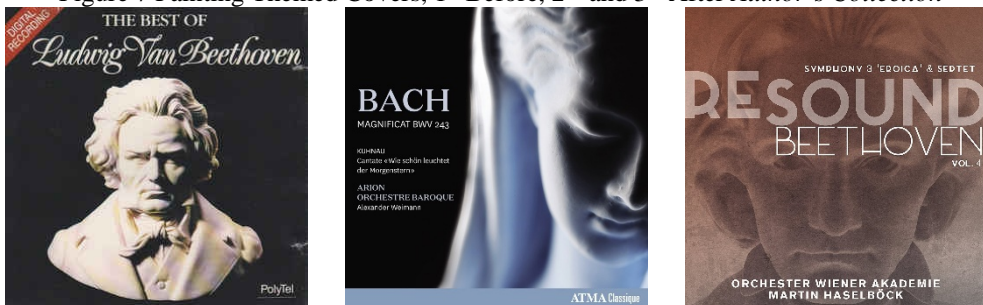Figure 7 Painting Themed Covers, 1st Before, 2nd and 3rd After *Author's Collection*

Figure 8 Sculpture Themed Covers, 1st Before, 2nd and 3rd After *Author's Collection*

Figure 9 Architecture Themed Covers, 1st Before, 2nd and 3rd After *Author's Collection*

Bach and Beethoven have religious themed compositions like St. John Passion. These works have covers with special scenes, signs and figures. Before 2000s paintings with special themes like crucifixion of the Jesus Christ used. But in time the scene simplified and turned into the major sign on Christianity, the Holy Cross. Besides the happy message of the red colored heart – cross combination, there are also fragmented colorless sad messages. After 2000s finally the typographic elements playing leading or supporting roles in these plain atmospheres.
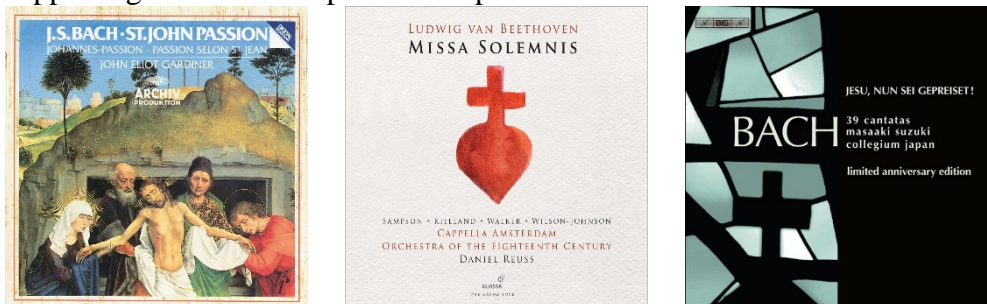
Figure 10 Cross Themed Covers, 1st Before, 2nd and 3rd After *Author's Collection*

Nature with its beauty is another visual source for the classical music covers. Emulating nature by painting, drawing and photographing always was the goal of fine arts. In digital age art works with new techniques gained endless visual creation possibilities. Before 2000s manual photographs used to cover music albums. Digital photography in a combination with digital effects made by computers are astonishing. Now a photograph can have different levels of reality with its physical features. While pure yellow sun set creates an extra sadness, blueish rocks with ultra-white clouds changed the world we live in like another world.

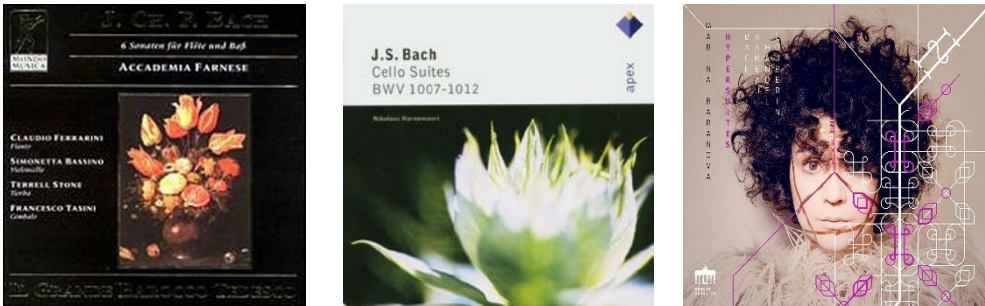Figure 11 Landscape Themed Covers, 1st Before, 2nd and 3rd After *Author's Collection*

Figure 12 Flower Themed Covers, 1st Before, 2nd and 3rd After *Author's Collection*
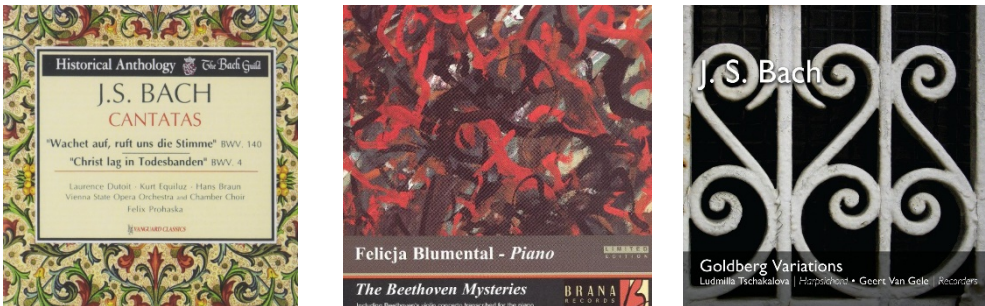
Figure 13 Curves Themed Covers, 1st Before, 2nd and 3rd After *Author's Collection*

The first new theme occurred after 2000s is landscape architecture. Beautiful gardens made by masters belong to the classical buildings. These beautiful gardens shaped by the artistic principles on the base of their own beauty. If it is painted the beauty of it will be triplex like the classical music, which can be accepted a first class. If the garden is a multi-pieced unity the typographic elements contribute it with their plainness. White sans serif typography is the basic form the letters can be. If the garden has a minimalistic view, then the typographic elements curving a little to add some grace. It is obvious that in nature there is a harmony, harmony of the contrasts. Like another kind of beauty in minimalistic gardens, minimalistic artworks have also a calm beauty, which give peace to hearts. Minimal

number of dots, lines, shapes and colors supported by types in small sizes in order not to increase the number of the elements.
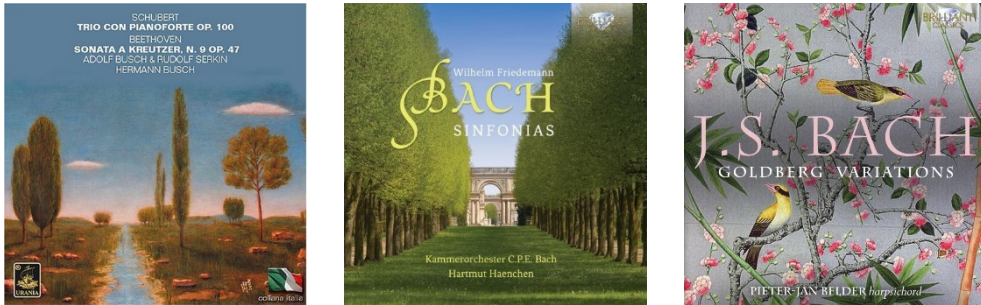

Figure 14 Landscape Architecture Themed Covers, All After *Author's Collection*

Besides many fields of photography, fine art photography differentiate with its artistic purpose, elements and principles. After 2000s as a mean of artistic expression photographs began to use on the covers of classical music albums. Because of small sizes of the album covers these photographs covers the surface for maximum effect on the audience. To be united, typographic elements works with the figures of the photographs; colored, sized, grouped and placed to increase the emotion, which will be created by.
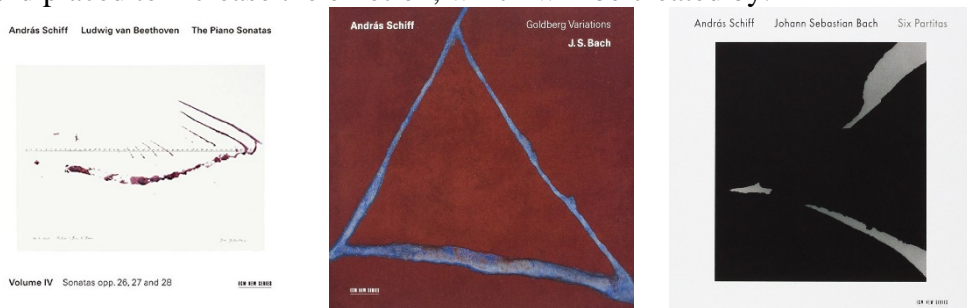

Figure 15 Minimalist Art Themed Covers, All After *Author's Collection*

Figure 16 Fine Art Photography Themed Covers, All After *Author's Collection*

And finally, in this last group of classical music album covers some basic design elements occurred as main themes as a part of post-modern graphic design. When graphic design and design elements formed, both the designer and first samples of graphic design were all post-modern. There

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wasn't any one unified graphic style, the movement was an expressive and playful time for search for more and more. Geometric shapes, organic shapes, texture, pattern are some of the basic graphic design elements. The covers with the geometric and organic shapes, textures, and patterns on them are neutral as color schemes, and asymmetrically balanced with the positioning, size and colors of the typographic elements. Sizes are small as they can, colors contrasting with the ground and types are modern sans serif characters.

Figure 17 Geometric Shape Themed Covers, All After *Author's Collection*

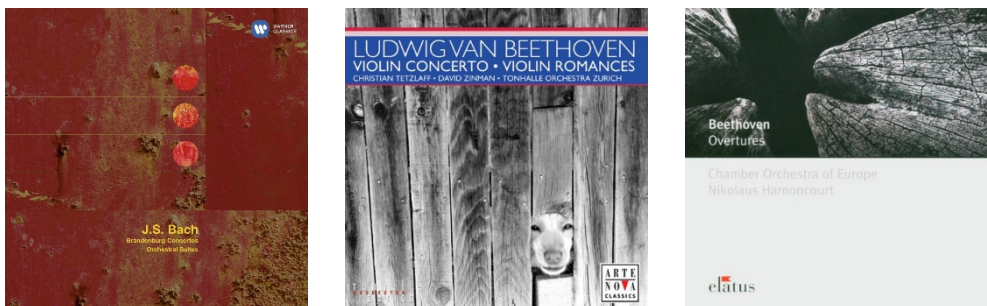Figure 18 Organic Shape Themed Covers, All After *Author's Collection*

Figure 19 Texture Themed Covers, All After *Author's Collection*

Figure 20 Pattern Themed Covers, All After *Author's Collection*

Digitalization is the final theme group of the classical music covers after 2000s. Digital age's technological improvements and devices have their own special and newly developed display unit and screen indicators, signs, and symbols. After a while with the increasing number of user these indicator, signs and symbols gained direct resemblance with the digitalization. Besides these, another strong relation among musical instruments' metallic parts and digitalization formed. Highly fragmented bright or metallic colored parts seen on the covers of last three albums.

Figure 21 Digitalization Themed Covers, All After *Author's Collection*

Conclusion

Before 2000s there were '13' themes, and these themes continuing. After 2000s '8' new themes occurred. Pre-2000s themes are related to the concrete and abstract characteristics of music. Pre-2000s compositions are generally symmetrically balanced. Pre-2000s all visuals are realistic. Post-2000s themes are related to only the abstract characteristics of music. Both these concrete and abstract characteristics belongs to the same musical style. After 2000s even concrete characteristics interpreted as abstracts. After 2000s only modern serifed and sans serif typography used. Both before and after 2000s neutral colors used sometimes with a bright color in small amounts.

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