

Is Classical Music Dead?

A Quest Club Paper by Bruce R. Haines

Presented March 19, 2010

We are gathered today to perform an autopsy on the body of work that is classical music...

This is what I thought I would say at the outset of this paper. The melodies and masterpieces crafted from the mid-1500s through the dawn of this millennium have become but an echo in our cultural past, a musical reminder to the now fading creative power of composition and performance. I thought I would say that, at its best, classical music's artful exuberance and vast contributions were able to adapt to the audience it served, from solo recitals to chamber ensembles and symphony orchestras.

Sadly, in the latter half of the 20th century, the lifeblood of attendance at classical music concerts began to run cold. The genre drifted in and out of financial health until it lapsed into unconsciousness with the American lifestyle. The results of preliminary examinations have not identified an exact cause for its passing. However, I thought I would be saying to you that the evidence before us regarding classical music's demise does point to three likely causes - death by experience execution, death by chronic economics, or death by terminal stasis. Let's review the findings.

Death by experience execution

It was called The Grandest Musical Festival Ever Known in the History of the World. Above the stage hung banners, huge pictures of Beethoven and Handel, and an angelic arch with wording that read, "Glory to God in the Highest: Peace on Earth Good Will Toward Men." When Patrick Gilmore lifted his baton at the 1869 Peace Jubilee outside Boston, twelve thousand listeners heard one thousand musicians and ten thousand singers present a program popular and patriotic airs, along with Mozart's "Gloria," and Rossini's "William Tell Overture." The highlight of the event was the Anvil Chorus from Verdi's "Il Trovatore," with drum corps, bells, cannons, and one hundred anvils played by helmeted, red-shirted Boston firemen each shouldering a blacksmith's hammer. It was said that the crowd's enthusiasm was frantic – fans, hats, parasols, even babies were waved above the heads of those attending.

There was musical flexibility in concert programs that was popular in the late 1800s. It was quite proper to follow a Haydn overture with the song "And All for My Pretty Brunette," or a Bach overture with the song, "Oh None Can Love like an Irish Man." The French conductor Louis Antoine Jullien could see the educational opportunity in the entertainment, and deliberately included "The Katy-did Polka," and the "Prima Donna Waltz" alongside movements from Beethoven's symphonies. (Jullien displayed a reverence for Beethoven's music, which he conducted with white kid gloves and a jeweled baton that were handed to him on a silver tray by a servant.) In tours of two hundred concerts in ten months from New England to New Orleans, audiences were drawn to the sights and the sounds of classical music.

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Who could deny the impact and importance of such an experience with classical music? Meet critic and publisher John Dwight, who wrote in his *Journal of Music* that the Peace Jubilee only “inflamed the imagination of the ignorant.” Rather than celebrate the concert’s testament to America’s acceptance of musical eclecticism, Dwight struck out against the program’s inclusion of popular songs saying that “classical works of genius were thus pressed into damaging promiscuity with musical mix pickle for the million.” In 1873 Dwight articulated the concept of classical music as “a sacralized art”, one that would make no compromises with the ‘temporal’ world. He wrote:

While all else in our musical life is changing, blown this way and that by the caprices of fashion and the tricks of advertisement, we want one series of concerts devoted to the permanent; one to which we may always look for opportunities of refreshing our knowledge and our feeling of the great masterworks of men and genius, grouped in programmes which shall have symmetry and harmony of tone, and a pervading spirit of pure art; for in this only is there any lasting satisfaction, any charm that will survive the mere excitements of the moment; and in this only is there real culture.

Classical music was being elevated to a cleansing societal force. The concentration was to be placed on the *music* rather than the *performance*. From his rise as solo violinist, to concertmaster to being the first conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Theodore Thomas wrote, “I have never wished to pose as an educator or philanthropist, except in so far as I might help get the public to get beyond so-called ‘popular music’ – which represents nothing more than sweet sentimentalism and rhythm, on the level of the dime novel.” Rather than being candidates for edification, audiences were obstacles to progress as the highest type of music only appeals to the highest type of individual. When stock broker and founder of the Boston Symphony Orchestra Henry Lee Higginson was criticized for not reaching out more directly to the masses in his programming and ticket prices, he replied, “If a series of concerts were offered at low prices only to the ‘truly poor,’ do you suppose that anyone but the truly rich would frequent them?”

The inclusive experience of classical music was becoming irreparably exclusive. “A symphony orchestra shows the culture of a community,” quoting Theodore Thomas again, “and the man who does not understand Beethoven and has not been under his spell has not half lived his life.” From the perceived high calling of classical music developed the more widely perceived prestige and personal gain that were to be had by associating oneself with the art form. With a level of missionary civic zeal that began in Boston and moved on to New York City, Chicago, and across the country, orchestras were established that lodged control in a board of wealthy sponsors. Musicians found fulltime work, and conductors found a dependable group of performers through whom the great scores could be rehearsed and presented.

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There was a high plateau of public esteem that classical music reached in the first half of the 20th century, much of it tied directly to the support provided by wealthy donors who brought their personal tastes and their personal checkbooks with them to the concert hall to offset any revenue loss from ticket sales. The New York Philharmonic musicians accepted a \$900-thousand dollar note from Joseph Pulitzer at the time of his death in 1911 on the condition that the orchestra's programs include his favorite warhorses. Boston Symphony founder Henry Lee Higginson covered that orchestra's deficits personally; he also chose the conductors, retained the power to hire and fire musicians, and forbade selections of Wagner in concerts as he did not like the composer's music. The Philadelphia Orchestra's founding in 1900 came about even as one board member noted that the city "was not ready to attend symphony concerts or support and orchestra at any general sacrifice to its own purse. The general attitude was that such a project must be supported by a few persons who had time and money to spend. Indifference was widespread."

Musician and author Blair Tindall writes that "as the necessity of pleasing a paying audience diminished, elitist "pure" culture rose above the common entertainment, creating a wide chasm between the two. Writer Alice Goldfarb Marquis noted that the nonprofit model pasted "an altruistic, morally chaste veneer over basically self-serving activities." Prosperous donors began to engineer a city's artistic life that could separate elites from commoners, creating a smokescreen of cultural ritual that also distanced performers from their audience.

Thus, the narrowing classical music experience now had to be *learned* to be *enjoyed*. It became the unspoken culture that has unnerved newcomers to classical performances for years. Peter Linett, a partner at the consulting firm Slover Linett Strategies, writes:

The culture of classical music doesn't tell us why so few musicians smile at the audience, or even make eye contact before or after the music-making. It doesn't tell us why musicians dress in black tie.. It doesn't explain why classical concertgoers who are already sitting in their seats when I come down the row to find my own seat are almost uniformly curt about having to let me pass and far less likely to smile and engage in the little phrases and conversations that grease the social interactions of strangers. In short, the acknowledged culture of classical music doesn't provide a sufficient explanation of the differences between the experience of classical music and the experience of other forms of art and entertainment. There's something else going on—an *unacknowledged* culture, largely unexamined but (or rather, therefore) hugely influential. And it's this unacknowledged culture that's preventing classical music from finding the new and more diverse audiences it so desperately wants and needs.

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Greg Sandow - composer, writer, and a member of the Graduate Studies faculty at Julliard – reminds us that the classical world as we know it is hardly very old. “Only in the 19th century did people start to venerate the great composers, to play (and play, and play) their music, to expect musicians to solemnly respect the composers' intentions (or what can be guessed of them). Only in the 19th century did people start to say that the audience should sit in silence, and as documents from that time -- and even from the 20th century -- clearly show, the battle over silence took a long time to be won. Only in the 1950s did audiences (at least in the United States) stop clapping after every movement of a symphony, saving their applause for the end of the entire piece. Even in the '50s, Italian opera audiences would sometimes shout at singers, or applaud while they were singing. (In one Callas performance of *Norma* that I've heard on records, there's a ripple of applause while she sustains a calm high C).”

Classical music was no longer to be *experienced*, but *appreciated*. The arrival of the phonograph, radio, magazines, and television expanded the *exposure* of classical music to Americans across the country. It was a time of mass communication using a more acknowledged niche musical genre. Even so, the media kept the nation's engagement with classical music at greater distance, reducing the need to experience a concert in person. There were noteworthy successes along the way, such as Leonard Bernstein's efforts to bring The New York Philharmonic's Young People's Concerts to television in 1962. The Metropolitan Opera broadcasts continue as the longest running series on radio, dating back to January, 1910, when radio pioneer Lee De Forest transmitted two live performances from the stage of the Met, which were reportedly heard as far away as Newark, New Jersey. And in July 1962, Life magazine commissioned a piano piece, *Down a Country Lane*, from Aaron Copland, and printed it for pianists to play.

Along with classical music, each technological break-through fostered the exposure and the reach of new popular music forms that continued to compete for our time and attention. It became easier for Americans to see, hear, and experience musical styles such as jazz, folk, rock, and country without the cultural and financial participation hurdles found in classical music. It was now an experience on its way to extinction.

In November 2009, The National Endowment for the Arts released new numbers, showing that the percentage of adult Americans who go to classical music performances had declined nearly 30% since 1982. The decrease affected all age groups, except people over 65 – the only people now left in the audience who grew up at a time when younger people still went to classical performances. The League of American Orchestras did its own study, and found that the NEA numbers were correct. The League also came to the conclusion, which it bravely stated in public – namely, that the classical music audience now is both aging and shrinking, and that if things continue as they are, it won't be replaced.

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The data analysis found that each audience generation starts out at a lower participation rate than its previous generation. Each generation's participation declines as it ages except for a bump in the middle years. The size of that bump has also declined over the generations.

Orchestra audiences have aged faster than the US population. In 1982, Americans 45 years and older made up 40% of the classical music audience and 42% of the population. In 2008, Americans 45-plus made up 60% of the classical music audience while being 51% of the population. By 2018, classical music audience is projected to decline by an up to additional 17%. Further, with the learned conditioning to access the genre outside the concert hall, Americans are nearly twice as likely to enjoy classical music through electronic media as attend live concerts or performances. Young adults (18-24) are the least likely to attend classical music performances.

The pronouncement on classical music's death by experience execution comes from a June 1969 issue of Time magazine: "Some critics of American orchestral life contend that the real trouble is that the symphony has been for too long a plaything of the wealthy. Even though symphony-going is not dominated by the rich to the extent that it was 40 years ago, it is still a formal experience that most turned-on youth regard as static, outmoded and irrelevant. As the conservative, 19th century-oriented programming of most orchestras proves, the institutions are trapped into patterns of pleasing the wealthy patrons who support them—and by and large, the patrons like Beethoven, Brahms and Tchaikovsky. No one objects to preserving the masterpieces of the past, as a museum keeps Rembrandts. But some musical experts feel that there may be more orchestral museums than are needed. English Conductor Colin Davis, 41, is one of them. "You devalue your masterpieces if you play them every week," he says. "If it is something you have too much of, like sex and breakfast, then it doesn't mean anything anymore."

Death by chronic economics

Classical music lived, and ultimately succumbed, to an economic deficit it had carried since the beginning of the American orchestral movement in the late 1800s. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra experienced a one million dollar deficit in the first 18 years of its existence. The Boston Symphony's amassed a \$900-thousand dollar debt in its first three decades that was paid through its founder, stock broker Henry Lee Higginson. The Philadelphia Orchestra averaged losses of \$70,000 annually in the early 1900s, and while it was learning new tunes, one board member could only remember one recurring melody, which was called 'Where shall we get the money?' with variations."

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This year, The Philadelphia Orchestra has a 62% attendance rate, and a threatening \$7.5 million deficit. The Philadelphia Inquirer reports that even if the orchestra's board can raise \$15 million to fund the a recovery for the 2010 season and into next year, the question is asked if the Philadelphia Orchestra in the awkward position of being better than it has to be? In January 2010, Leonard Slatkin, the music director of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, agreed to donate four weeks of concerts in 2011 to help out with the orchestra's financial difficulties. Battered by the recession, the DSO ran a \$3.8-million deficit in 2009 and projects about a \$5-million shortfall on a \$30-million budget in 2010."The New York Philharmonic reported a record deficit for its 2009 season, \$4.6 million, and said it projects a shortfall of about \$4 million this season. The 2009 budget for the New York Philharmonic was \$64.5 million, which has risen to \$68.9 million this season. As at any orchestra, the largest expense comes from musician salaries and benefits. A January 2010 strike by musicians was narrowly averted in Cleveland over financial matters. The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra had not been able to announce its 2011 season on time as it was still short the funding to have the season. These are just recent examples from the media.

Norman Lebrecht's book, *Who Killed Classical Music?*, examines the internal economics of the classical music industry, highlighting the magnitude of the dollars and deals involved in presenting concerts. "In 1991," Lebrecht writes, "orchestras in America spent close to \$700 million dollars, of which just over half went to soloists and guest conductors. Music directors cost an extra \$40 million. American opera houses in 1992 paid \$52.4 million to soloists and conductors. With US agencies taking a 20% commission, there was around \$90 million dollars to be earned by agents from major institutions – just for the price of picking up the phone." The cure not taken for classical performance to stand on its own two feet, says Lebrecht, would begin by cutting star fees in half. Tickets could be made cheaper, and audiences would increase. It was the medicine that classical music never did swallow.

Orchestral activity is supported by a combination of public and private support—and every piece is critical. Private contributions comprise 39% of an orchestra's budget, its largest funding source. Concert income is the next largest at 33% -a segment that has been chronically decreasing for decades. This has led to what is called "the performance income gap," which is the gap between the money ticket sales bring in, and the amount needed to keep an orchestra on budget. The percentage of income that orchestras get from their ticket sales has steadily fallen from 70% to 90% in 1937 to no more than 40% today. Michael Kaiser, President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, said that it "is not unusual to see tickets for major opera companies cost \$250 or more and the best theater tickets are now well over the \$100 mark in many cities. For two tickets to an opera you can now buy a computer and watch Leontyne Price and Joan Sutherland on YouTube for free!"

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Challenging economics and declining audiences regarding classical music have been the source of a number of studies. There was the Knight Foundation's Classical Music Consumer Segmentation Study of 2002, which included The Fort Wayne Philharmonic, to advance knowledge of audiences and markets for potential for increased attendance. There was The Elephant Task Force, a cross-constituent group of musicians, managers, and trustees, which met for five years beginning in 2003 to determine whether fiscal problems were structural or cyclical. Then there was the RAND Corporation's three-part, six year study of the changing roles and missions of state arts agencies and of supply and demand in the arts. Finally, in 2008 there was The Audience Growth Initiative, which focused on audience churn and how to surmount barriers that keep first-time classical-music ticket buyers from becoming concert regulars.

All of the studies offered long term aspirations and ideas for consideration, but nothing the main providers of classical music could use to face the mounting, more immediate monetary challenges. Many people in the classical world came to think that the time may have come for those orchestras who are unable to keep up with their funding needs take steps to shrink their operations, play fewer concerts, and stop employing musicians for a full 52-week season. One fund raising professional put it, "You cannot raise endowments by trying to finance the status quo."

It was soon a case of chronic economics versus musical aesthetics, mission versus the marketplace. Writing in *The New Republic*, Richard Taruskin cited the cutbacks in print media at *The Chicago Sun Times* and the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* that led to the elimination or downgrading of classical music reviewing in the nation's newspapers and general interest magazines. Data presented at The League of American Orchestras Mid-Winter Managers Meeting in January 2010 highlighted a downward trend in overall sales of music – mainly CDs –since 1999. Though the music industry has recovered somewhat through Internet downloads, classical music has not enjoyed a similar level of growth and the online footprint of classical music is small. This is troubling because younger generation cohorts get most of their musical exposure online. Most orchestras are now without major label contracts.

Classical music on radio, increasingly, is a nonprofit franchise. Our study of 50 top markets surfaced 30 classical music radio stations. Of these, 22 are public stations and 8 are commercial. Of the 8 commercial classical stations, however, only 3 are operated by for-profit entities; the other 5 are owned by nonprofit organizations. Philadelphia's commercial station, WFLN, donated its record library to Temple University's public radio station, which now plays classical music during the day and alternating with jazz overnight. New York's WNYC now owns Classical WQXR. Classical music's cultural value is dependent upon the economics of making such a broadcast service viable. As Maestro Leonard Slatkin expressed it, "The problem has remained one of balancing artistic integrity with fiscal responsibility."

Death by terminal stasis

We have an inbred suspicion for anything we are told will be “good for us,” whether it is eggplant or Shakespeare, classical music or church attendance. We seem to even resist encounters with such things when they are on someone else’s terms and timetable. We want to be the ones who direct our experiences. Yet, even as we guard our power to choose, life intervenes and we are drawn in to moments of discovery that stay with us for years to come.

Who knew you could make eggplant parmesan, a movie based on Romeo and Juliet or a whole off-Broadway show on the Complete Unabridged Works of William Shakespeare! I didn’t know that live animals could march onstage to music of Verdi’s *Aida* until that grade school class trip to Philadelphia’s Academy of Music. I also realized I could draw just as close to God at a summer camp as I could back at home sitting in a sanctuary. Personal experiences become our connections to a larger world we would not have known otherwise, and to a greater understanding of who we are as individuals and as a society.

Classical music’s challenge to remain relevant and relational in the lives of changing generations has not met with success. John Thomas Dodson, Music Director of the Adrian Symphony Orchestra in Michigan, hosts a blog about how the arts can be used in building communities. His March 5, 2010 post leads with these lines: “Much has changed around us. We, in classical music, haven’t changed much... We still tend to think of management and artists as being adversaries. Our contracts have almost no flexibility in them to adapt to the ever-changing market place. We’re stuck in a bad business model, and we perpetuate it without thinking. It is killing us. We still think of audience members as customers and of donors as friends. It is killing us to categorize like this. We don’t grasp the implications of technology, or we won’t put it to good use because somebody might lose money in the deal. It’s killing us to think like that.”

Then he moves to the personal connection to classical music that seems to honor that 1869 Peace Jubilee: “We don’t seem to understand that one of the most important aspects of a public concert is the community it creates at that moment. Our art happens within the communal experience. If not, we can download a personalized version of the sound-product for less than a dollar. It isn’t that the art isn’t important, but that the context of the art has become equally important. They are now one thing.”

Not surprisingly, there is resistance to any change in classical music. People love classical music. They enter a classical concert hall, and feel like they’re coming home. So of course they don’t want classical concerts to change. There is deep concern that any change will dumb classical music down, or that any problems that classical music might have can be blamed on our culture. There’s nothing wrong with classical music, but our culture is now too dumb to support serious art.

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A champion for the status quo is Julian Johnson, author of the book *Who Needs Classical Music?*, who asserts that a commitment to classical music is an ethical choice. Contemporary popular culture, Johnson contends, is obsessed by packaging, image, and design. Even in music, the surface sheen is everything: the music is literally one-dimensional – it has one sound, one timbre, one kind of material. “The ideal of humanity on which we have based our greatest religious, ethical, philosophical, and political thinking is not defined by our outward, material surface, but by our capacity to exceed the limits of our material existence.” He condemns those who do not seem to need classical music as being caught up in “pre-rational immediacy,” lost in “libidinal energy,” and athirst for “the luxury of blind, adolescent emotions.”

Lest one think the tension between standing firm and moving forward is only found in classical music, consider this: why are there more than 20 English translations and paraphrases of The Bible? One story is told of a pastor who tried to introduce a revised version of the Bible to his rigidly conservative congregation. “So what’s wrong with the King James Version?” said one woman in defense. “In my opinion, if it was good enough for Jesus, it’s good enough for us!” For nearly 400 years the King James Version, published in 1611, was the prominent translation used in most Protestant churches. However, the English language continued to *change*, and it became increasingly more difficult for people to understand the Old English vernacular. Dr. Lewis Foster, one of those who helped translate the New International Version and the New King James Version said, “It is necessary to continue making new translations and revising old ones if people are to read the Word of God in their contemporary languages.” Research has shown that there is an increase in the number of 18- to 34-year-olds on the verge of disengaging from the church. We need to find ways to reach them with the timeless truth of God’s word in today’s language.

Two points must be made here. First, the intention of the translations is to help readers better understand, experience, and connect with Scripture. Secondly, the intention of the transitions always honors its source. The essential nature of the truths in the texts does not change even as each translation uses its own linguistic approach to the passages. In classical music terms, the concert hall could be the genre’s King James Version, with other venues that could allow for new translations of classical music that reach new audiences. In all cases, it is the message of the music being preached in performance.

What would classical music look like, asks classical strategist Peter Linett, if we could somehow preserve that inner, acknowledged culture while replacing the outer, unacknowledged culture with something less precious and dour, something more confident and connected to the rest of life? Or better yet, replace it not with a culture but with many different cultures, aesthetics, personalities, and possibilities. How would the institutional and funding ecology of classical music change? Most importantly, what would happen to the audience—or rather, audiences—for classical music?

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Music critic Alex Ross might have had these points in mind when considering what he called “the prescriptive quality of the classical ritual.” Why does concert etiquette appear as printed rules in the programs as if rendered in the style of God on Mount Sinai, he asked. Should we be surprised, he writes, “that people aren't as excited about classical music as they used to be? This question of etiquette is only part of the complicated social dilemma in which classical music finds itself. Indeed, in my view, it supposes that all great works of music are essentially the same, that they can be placed upon a pedestal of a certain shape. What I would like to see is a more flexible approach, so that the nature of the work dictates the nature of the presentation – and, by extension, the nature of the response.”

Composer, instructor, and writer Greg Sandow offers one other illustration:

Find a photo of the crowd at a baseball game in the 1940s. You'll see men in suits and ties, wearing hats. Now go to a game today. You'll see men and women, people of all ages, dressed informally. I'm not going to say that classical concerts haven't gotten more informal -- certainly you see more people dressed casually in the audience -- but orchestra musicians still wear formal dress, and the formal atmosphere of performances (the entrance of the concertmaster, followed a little later by the conductor) has barely changed. The rest of the world has evolved; classical music has only just started to. Younger people, for this reason, as time goes on, will find classical concerts less and less plausible. They just don't look or feel like the rest of the world.

Fort Wayne Philharmonic music director Andrew Constantine was quoted saying, “No two people have the same experience of classical music. Our interpretation draws on personal insights, memories and feelings. The challenge is to persuade more people to go to concerts and discover this for themselves.”

Sadly, it would appear this antidote has arrived too late to keep classical music's heart beating. The death blow to the genre's hope of conquering terminal stasis came in a 2008 Wall Street Journal essay by Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, and a conductor. “Classical music has never been the passion of the young,” wrote Botstein. “It is an acquired taste that requires both encouragement and education.” Could it be that some people who want to keep classical music in its protected place are, in the end, just uncomfortable in our current world?

Experience execution. Chronic economics. Terminal stasis. By one, or some combination, of these forces, classical music is dead.

This is what I thought I would say...but I won't!

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What I *will* say is that while rumors of its death are premature, classical music's condition has been called into question numerous times. The prognosis is this: classical music will have more near-death experiences in human relevance and revenue unless it receives the life-saving transplants of a new heart and mind. Fortunately for us all, and for future generations, there are many knowledgeable physicians already in operation!

Here are a few of the classical music innovations:

- The Berlin Philharmonic has begun a digital concert hall whereby for a fee you can “attend” its concerts on your computer, if virtual music is to your taste.
- The Fort Wayne Philharmonic announced a new “Random Acts of Music” initiative, aimed at increasing community awareness of classical music as people go about their daily routines. The program features various Fort Wayne Philharmonic ensembles performing in random places around Allen County, such as local businesses, at sporting events, or outdoor venues throughout the season. The general public or business owners can make suggestions of future Random Acts of Music locations by emailing the orchestra: info@fwphil.org.
- The Metropolitan Opera's Peabody and Emmy Award-winning series *The Met: Live in HD* continues for its fourth season, featuring nine live transmissions at a theater near you – in Fort Wayne that would be Regal Cinema (the next show is Hamlet, March 27).
- The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra announced its first BSO Academy, aimed at a 120 or so amateur adult musicians who would like to step not just onto the Meyerhoff Symphony Hall stage, but into the thick of orchestral music-making itself. For a week, beginning this June 13, participants in the academy – tuition starts at \$1,650 – will work intensely with BSO players and music director Marin Alsop.
- In downtown New York City, the club Le Poisson Rouge often programs dynamic acts, presenting classical music in a bar setting and sometimes combining both pop and classical music on the same bill.
- The Rotterdam Opera Days Festival programs events in nontraditional venues, like a river. They also promote private concerts in the homes of audience members and other intimate locations so that small groups can interact personally with artists.
- The Waterloo-Cedar Falls Orchestra incorporated visual elements and music by Ellington and Gershwin in a program entitled Kelley's Blues.

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- In New York City, the Special Music School is a classical music magnet intermediate school that features a new music ensemble called *Face the Music*. Students at the school arranged some of their favorite pop songs for classical instruments.
- Composer Melissa Dunphy wrote a work called *The Gonzales Cantata* which placed the transcripts from Attorney General Alberto Gonzales' Senate Judiciary Hearings in a baroque cantata format. The work had a wide appeal from different parts of the audience, including people who were interested in the political story, classical music fans, and music fans outside the classical world.
- Courtesy of Deutsche Welle, the German broadcasting service, you can fill your iPod at no cost with some exceptional classical music. First, Beethovenfest lets users download “Beethoven’s most famous symphonies performed by excellent young orchestras.” Next, Classical Masterpieces gives you free access to symphonies by Mozart, Strauss, Schumann, Brahms, and Bruckner, each presented by conductor Kent Nagano and the internationally known DSO Berlin.
- The British Broadcasting Corporation is launching a “reality radio” show in a nationwide hunt to find the next opera sensation. Dame Kiri Te Kanawa heads a judges panel from which a winner will be chosen to perform at the BBC’s Proms in the Park in September. The Radio 2 Kiri Prize is part of *A Passion for Opera*, a year-long programme of expanded opera coverage on the BBC.
- In 2008, the BBC presented a program called *Maestro*, classical music reality show where celebrities try to conduct an orchestra. The judges included two top conductors, Sir Roger Norrington and Simone Young. Viewers got to see – and hear – exactly what conductors do, and what happens when they fail. The series can still be viewed online.
- In May 2010, PBS39 will rebroadcast the second season of *Keeping Score*, featuring the San Francisco Symphony and hosted by Michael Tilson Thomas. The series, shot in a variety of locations, features the music and stories of Hector Berlioz, Charles Ives and Dmitri Shostakovich and includes a program website plus materials for classroom arts integration for K-12 teachers.
- Watch for a six-part TV series called *Lone Star Opera*. The show’s producers met a group of opera singers at a local winery, and, quoting producer Russ Johnson, “that’s when I immediately realized the bias I had in my head that all opera singers must be tuxedo-wearing, you know, highbrow types. And here I had this great collection of young, old, fun, very boisterous, passionate people.” It doesn't simply record the behind-the-scenes rehearsals and evolution of a stage show. As the work progresses, the episodes follow different characters and storylines, they find little cliffhangers and dramas. Plus, for TV purposes, it doesn’t hurt that members of the opera's Young Artist Program live together in a house. It’s a classic reality-show situation!

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- The New York Philharmonic developed a series of “Rush Hour Concerts” that begin at 6:45 pm. The promotional language says, “When work ends, come experience a different kind of rush. Head over to the Philharmonic for an evening of music that’s guaranteed to revitalize you.”
- The Pittsburgh Symphony, before a concert where a new piece would be played, put musicians in various rooms and lobbies in the concert hall an hour before the performance, so that audience members could talk to them, and hear them play excerpts from the new piece.
- Orchestras around the country have been collecting food for local food banks.
- When Michael Christie began his first season as music director of the Phoenix Symphony, he and all the musicians stood outside the hall before the first concert, to welcome the audience.
- The San Francisco Symphony invited bloggers to come to a concert, and blog from it.
- YouTube launched a Symphony Orchestra Channel on its website with a new approach to traditional auditions. The world’s first online orchestra invited aspiring musicians to submit video entries. China’s Oscar-winning composer Tan Dun (“Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon”), wrote a piece specially for the event called “The Internet Symphony.” Applicants downloaded the appropriate sheet music for their instrument and practiced with a video of Dun conducting for their part. Next, they filmed themselves and uploaded their videos to YouTube. Semifinalists were selected by a judging panel composed of musicians from the world’s leading orchestras and YouTube viewers were invited to vote for their favorites. The winners traveled to New York City for a three-day YouTube Symphony Orchestra summit, and a performance at Carnegie Hall. Reflecting on the coming together of the YouTube Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony music director Michael Tilson Thomas said this changes the answer to the question, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” Upload, upload, upload!

As the Knight Foundation’s Search for Shining Eyes study makes clear, the problems of orchestras stem not from the music they play but from the delivery systems they employ. Orchestras must demonstrate their relevance and service to their communities if they hope to find the resources to survive. And despite those who suggest a single magic bullet is adequate to address the serious problems that orchestras face, only a combination of many strategies will be effective.

Classical music is not dying; it is changing. Reviewer Richard Gehr notes his favorite example right now is Gabriel Prokofiev, the British-born grandson of the Russian composer, who studied electronic music in school, has headed a successful disco-punk band, and is now writing string quartets. Gehr concludes by saying that “change is not always loss, and realizing this should not threaten but console.”

Classical music is not dead. Neither is chivalry. Nor is God...but that’s a topic for *another* Quest paper!

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Is Classical Music Dead?

Quest Club Paper by Bruce R. Haines; March 19, 2010

Resource List (Continued)

In Person

Interviews were conducted by the author with the following individuals:

Anita Cast - Community Volunteer; Senior leadership positions with Fort Wayne Philharmonic, American Symphony Orchestra League, Indianapolis Violin Competition; Quest Club member.

Andrew Constantine – Music Director of Fort Wayne Philharmonic

Christopher Guerin – Former Executive Director of Fort Wayne Philharmonic; Quest Club member

J.L. Nave – Current Executive Director of Fort Wayne Philharmonic