

IN APPRECIATION OF ...

CLASSICAL MUSIC

STORY BY BARB CHURCHILL

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT HANEY

Classical music. The words often conjure up fear, loathing, repression and misunderstanding, rather than hopeful contemplation.

Tyler White, assistant professor of music and director of orchestral activities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, understands this as well as anyone.

"Classical music is a journey through the mind and heart," White said. "This is what great music is."

But many non-musicians completely fail to understand the purpose or significance of classical music.

To begin with, "classical music" is a misnomer. Western art music, serious music, or symphonic music would be a closer description, as "classical music" to a musician means only one style period — that of music written between 1750 and 1800.

However, most non-musicians aren't that picky. So "classical music" it will be.

But it's not for the timid. White said many novice listeners misunderstand and even fear listening to classical music, because they "don't get it."

However, there's no need to become a musician to enjoy and appreciate classical music, he said.

White's advice to the novice listener? "All you need to do is to concentrate on the ideas and the emotions, because specific sounds are intended to evoke emotions," he said. "Then, all you have to do is look at your progression of emotional responses."

But this act can be difficult if the piece is well-known.

For example, White pointed to the famous opening of Ludwig van Beethoven's "Symphony No. 5." The dah-dah-dah-DUM, dah-dah-dah-DUM has what White calls "cultural baggage," because it has been so widely heard it is now almost "too familiar."

It is almost impossible to separate the actual music from the cultural baggage, he said, which makes it much more difficult for Beethoven's "Symphony No. 5" to be taken as a

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piece of music rather than a cultural icon.

Another thing that separates classical music from popular and jazz music is the sense of "closure."

Popular music differs from classical because no closure is possible, White said.

"If you think about it," he said, "another verse can almost always be added to a popular song."

But classical music has both emotional and musical closure to it, because every piece has a

powerful end. Each separate event along the way relates to the end, White said.

Another big concept for the uninitiated is concert etiquette, how a listener is expected to act while listening to a classical music concert.

Unlike many jazz or popular music concerts, audiences are expected to sit politely and wait for the end of a piece to respond positively or negatively. People unfamiliar with classical music think the atmosphere is "stuffy" inside the concert hall, and may actually feel repressed from expressing their response to the music. And, if one judges serious (classical) music by the same standards as jazz or pop, it's understandable why one might feel this way.

Understandable, but wrong, White said.

People need to realize serious music is an experience akin to listening to a great orator or a great comedian, rather than listening to jazz or pop music, he said.

"You don't want to miss a minute of what these people are saying, because it is so important," White said. "You can't wait to see what happens. Classical music is the same way."

There is a different way of listening to classical music, he said, and a wholly different mindset.

"Just because people aren't standing up stomping and whooping in the middle of the concert doesn't mean that there isn't powerful communication going on — and that doesn't

mean it's stuffy or repressive.

"At the end of the piece, go ahead and stand and cheer," White said, smiling. "I've never known a classical performer who was offended at people who liked his or her performance."

People are exposed to more classical music than they think, if they count commercial snippets. For instance, United Airways uses George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" for its slogan.

"This is a good example of taking a piece that's structured in a particular way, ripping the melodies out of their context," White said, "and making the background popular music."

He contrasted appreciating classical music with jazz, and found some differences.

"When you listen to a jazz piece, you're listening to a familiar theme with variations by the soloist. You're paying attention to what the player is doing differently, and that is where the joy comes from. The same structure is repeated over and over," White said.

"In many forms of classical music, the musical structure of the entire piece moves and changes as you go through the piece. Listening and responding to these changes is where the joy comes from in classical music."

And, for those who have friends in the School of Music, White also recommended going to classical concerts in which their friends are performing.

"The sense of a personal connection between yourself and the music is much greater when you're friends with someone on stage."

MEMORABLE WORKS

There are many, many representative classical recordings to choose from when looking for music to understand and appreciate.

However, to give the uninitiated a head start, I have listed a few of my favorites and why I like them, in no particular order:

1) **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, "Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra or Symphony No. 40"**

The "Clarinet Concerto" is an excellent later work by Mozart that prominently features the clarinet. This piece promotes festivity, yet has high energy in spots and is an excellent representative sample of Mozart's genius. "Symphony No. 40" was prominently featured on the "Hooked on Classics" recordings. Despite this, "Symphony No. 40" is full of grace and wit and wears well with repeated listening.

2) **Joseph Haydn, "Symphony No. 45 (Farewell)"**

This piece is interesting mainly because the musicians get up and leave during the last movement until only a pair of violinists are left to finish the piece. It is full of humor, extremely fun to listen to and an excellent representative sample of Haydn's symphonic writing.

3) **Ludwig van Beethoven, "Symphony No. 7"**

This is perhaps Beethoven's finest symphony, which isn't faint praise considering Beethoven's better-known "Symphony No. 3 (Eroica)" and the ubiquitous "Symphony No. 5." The reason this is more interesting than Beethoven's 3rd or 5th symphonies is because of the changes in energy from movement to movement. Beethoven is a master of orchestration and he uses dynamic changes with great flair and skill.

4) **Maurice Ravel, "Bolero"**

This is quite simply the most romantic, sensuous classical music ever written. "Bolero" was picked as the theme music for the Dudley Moore/Bo Derek film, "10," which proves Hollywood producers do indeed have brains and hearts.

5) **Sergei Prokofiev, "Lieutenant Kije Suite"**

Who says you need to be a popular composer to be revolutionary? Prokofiev's "Lieutenant Kije Suite" set the world afire with its tale of Russian Army brutality and the futility of war. The music is both stirring and disturbing and uses the comparatively new instrument of the tenor saxophone to good advantage.

6) **Aaron Copland, "Appalachian Spring or Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra"**

"Appalachian Spring" uses American folk music to good advantage, while showcasing Copland's orchestral abilities to their best advantage. The "Clarinet Concerto" is famous because Copland uses American jazz rhythms and idioms and because it was written for clarinet virtuoso Benny Goodman.

7) **Antonin Dvorak, "Symphony #5 (New World Symphony)"**

Dvorak was taken with American folk music while visiting the United States. This symphony commemorates the pioneering spirit of 19th century America better than a postcard.

8) **Gioachino Rossini, "William Tell Overture"**

This is one of the few pieces most of you have heard, as it is the opening theme for the television show "The Lone Ranger." This is programmatic music at its best.

9) **Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, "Marche Slave" or "1812 Overture"**

"1812 Overture" is one of the most popular works of classical music ever composed, as it uses multiple percussion, extremely loud dynamics and passionate, lyrical themes to proclaim the United States' victory over Great Britain in the War of 1812. "Marche Slave" is another revolutionary piece (similar to Prokofiev's "Lieutenant Kije Suite"), which depicts a slave marching to the gallows for some minor infraction.

PRINTED MATTER

The best way to appreciate classical music is to listen to it. But some books and Web sites can help clarify any confusion.

There are some books essential to the appreciation of classical music, for the musician and the non-musician alike.

Donald Jay Grout and Claude V. Palisca's "A History of Western Music" is a good start. Somewhat like Stephen Hawking's "A Brief History of Time" in concept, this book examines the various musical style periods and explains how music grew from using one instrument/one voice to using several instruments, and from one type of melodic concept to many. It can be slow-going and frustrating at times (much like "A Brief History of Time"), but it will help you understand compositional differences, orchestral challenges and other various concerns and problems.

"The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians," edited by Stanley Sadie, explains various stylistic periods as well as many musicians of note. There are brief biographies of many important classical music figures, such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Joseph Haydn, Johann Sebastian Bach, Peter Tchaikovsky and Aaron Copland, just to name a few.

Ted Libbey's "The NPR Guide to Building a Classical CD Collection," as well as Ivan March, Edward Greenfield and Robert Layton's "The Penguin Guide to Compact Discs and Cassettes" and "The Penguin Guide to Bargain Compact Discs and Cassettes" can help nonmusicians understand what they need to listen for in order to pick understandable, enjoyable classical music. Another guide along this same line is Jim Svejda's "The Record Shelf Guide to the Classical Repertoire."

Josiah Fisk's "Composers on Music" discusses eight centuries of music from the perspective of the composers. This is a fascinating journey into the minds of many famous composers.

Several good Web sites are available to whet your curiosity regarding classical music.

The Juilliard Bookstore Web site, <http://www.bookstore.juilliard.edu>, is a good place to start. This site contains all sorts of fascinating classical music books, articles and paraphernalia.

Online biographies are also available. Some of the best ones are for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, <http://home.hkstar.com/~tslw/mozart.html>; Ludwig van Beethoven, <http://classicalmus.com/composers/beethoven.html>; and Joseph Haydn, <http://classicalmus.com/composers/haydn.html>.

