

Spicing Up Your Concerts!

I read an interesting blog post the other day by Richard Dare for The Huffington Post: (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/richard-dare/classical-music-concerts_b_1525896.html) . He spoke about the experience of going to a classical music concert in a well respected venue. He compared obtaining your tickets to "visiting a sort of bland theatrical version of the Department of Motor Vehicles" and the actual concert itself as having "a great many 'clap here, not there' cloak and dagger protocols to abide by." In the end, he wasn't able to enjoy the event to the fullest.

He brought up Beethoven and how outraged he would be if he knew his music was heard in such forced silence. The whole point was for people to participate in the joy and sorrow being conveyed in the music he composed. Beethoven was all about going against the grain and here we are 150 years later treating the concert experience like dinner at the Queen's palace being careful not to upset the delicate balance of enjoyment and protocol.

This got me thinking about what we do in our classrooms everyday. Are we perpetuating this culture or is it one that is imposed upon us with no hope of change?

I would like to think that because we have our students when they are very young we have the power to change almost anything. What if we allowed our parents to shout out praises to their kids throughout the concert as Dare suggests? What would that look like? Could we maintain control? Would it be total mayhem? Most likely.

It would have been very interesting to hear a Beethoven concert where audience members were expected to shout out and applaud throughout the performance. Dare tells the story of Beethoven's Third Symphony premier where his pupil shouted out "Can't the damned horn player count?!" after measure 394 when the horn seems to have come in too early. The truth was, Beethoven purposely wrote it this way, but it was acceptable behavior to question it....out loud.....DURING the concert.....

The real question is: how do we balance participation and respect for those who want to hear *all* of the music, not just what is heard over the loud screams?

I don't know how I would feel if an audience member shouted specific jabs or praises during a piece, but it would certainly be more exciting! It would also be more intimidating to perform knowing that you would be called out on something publicly. Yet, having been to several concerts, I have often seen eyes droop from time to time. Perhaps I might have closed mine once or twice. The concerts where I enjoyed the music the most were when one of two things happened. One, I knew the music so well, I knew I liked it and loved hearing it live. Two, the artist or artists playing the music were so animated and/ or brilliant that I couldn't help but fall in love. In the first instance, I engaged myself in the experience and in the second, the artists engaged me.

So what can we as educators do? Parents will already be excited because their kids are performing. This creates an opportunity where we can hand a bit of the teaching over to our students. Let them educate their parents and concert goers about the music they will be singing and playing. This will give them a sense of pride in what they know and then be able to know enough to teach others. So when a particularly difficult passage arises or a certain emotive part "moves" listeners, audience

members will feel comfortable applauding vigorously on a job well done. In this case it will be more about the musicianship of the group and less likely about parents shouting praises to their kids that border on obnoxious!