

THE STATE OF CLASSICAL MUSIC: A PANEL DISCUSSION

This is an edited and abbreviated transcript of a National Arts Journalism Program panel on the current health of classical music held at Columbia University on February 27, 1998.

Panelists:

Emanuel Ax, piano soloist and one of classical music's best known artists. In addition to a solo career that takes him to the most prominent venues in the world, Mr. Ax plays chamber music at the highest level, collaborating frequently with such artists as Isaac Stern and Yo-Yo Ma. Mr. Ax has been a Sony Classical exclusive recording artist since 1987.

Peter Gelb, president of Sony Classical, since 1995. He is responsible for all aspects of the label's operations. Artists on the Sony Classical roster include Kathleen Battle, Yo-Yo Ma, Bobby McFerrin, Murray Perahia, and Isaac Stern.

Robert Hurwitz, head of Nonesuch Records since 1984. From 1975 until that time, Hurwitz ran the American operations of ECM Records. Nonesuch composers include John Adams, Philip Glass, Henryk Gorecki, and Steve Reich. Performers include Richard Goode, the Kronos Quartet, and Dawn Upshaw.

James Oestreich, classical music editor of *The New York Times*, where he has written about music since 1989. In the early eighties, Oestreich was editor of *High Fidelity* magazine and founder of *OPUS* magazine.

Christopher Roberts, worldwide president of classics and jazz at Polygram, with operating responsibility for its three classical labels, Deutsche Grammophon, Decca, and Phillips Classics. He has been at Polygram since 1989.

Moderator:

Gwendolyn Freed, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow. Former editor of *Chamber Music* magazine, she is a freelance contributor for *The Wall Street Journal*.

Attendees:

Anita Amirrezvani, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

Misha Berson, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

Steve Dollar, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

Alan Hess, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

Michael Janeway, NAJP Director

Ruth Lopez, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

Karen Michel, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

Manuel Mendoza, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

Christopher Reardon, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

Andras Szanto, NAJP Associate Director

Calvin Wilson, 1997-98 NAJP Fellow

FREED: Would you open, please, with some general remarks about your work in the field at the moment? What are you excited about? What are your greatest concerns?

HURWITZ: I'm greatly concerned about the fact that we are living in a moment when things culturally are changing at a kind of reckless pace. Instead of the idea of six degrees of separation being about people, now the notion applies to everything, from politics to music to Broadway to movies, back to politics to media to the Internet. And now it's not six degrees of separation; it's more like one-and-a-half degrees of separation. The lines have become very blurred, and I suppose if I'm disturbed about anything, it's about the way people don't seem to have a huge amount of attention to absorb all the culture that many of us here are interested in providing to the public.

GELB: I perceive my work in the same way that I perceived my role before coming to Sony, when I was producing films, television programs and concerts in more of an entrepreneurial spirit. I think classical record labels have been trying to coast along with the idea of recording and re-recording ceaselessly and endlessly the same compositions. This was possible for commercial reasons up until recent years, when the invention of the CD ended it. What I'm most excited and passionate about is the idea of trying to encourage and to challenge composers and performers to try new things, new directions; to broaden the general sphere of contemporary classical music so that it can actually be relevant in a larger sense and be successful commercially as well as artistically.

THE THING THAT WORRIES ME THE MOST
ABOUT CLASSICAL MUSIC . . . IS THE NOTION
THAT COMMERCE AND ART CANNOT LIVE
HARMONIOUSLY TOGETHER.

ROBERTS: I have a pretty interesting role in trying to reconcile a lot of these things because Polygram represents on a world-wide basis forty to fifty percent of the classical music world. Deutsche Grammophon is one of our labels and it's the largest classical label. Decca's number two and, depending on what polls you look at, Sony EMI and Phillips come into that, and that's a lot of responsibility. Those labels historically have always represented the real traditional part of classical music. It's extremely important to them that you don't just go in there and hack through, in the case of Deutsche Grammophon, a hundred years of history, just because there is this concern about making money in just about

every aspect of the world today.

One of the things we all have to try and balance is the business and the art. The music business has to move beyond these compartments and think about which artists are going to make this music relevant to an audience. All of these things are exciting, but none are easy.

OESTREICH: For me, the most exciting and the most exhausting thing at the moment is the sudden amount of attention that *The New York Times* is giving to culture, with the opening up and expansion of the new section in the fall. At the height of this season, I think we lost possibly ten reviews, not more. The year before that, we were losing almost half the reviews in the height of the season. In general, they're longer. There is more space. There aren't more bodies and it's killing us. But I'm thrilled to be killed this way.

One of the dismaying things has always been that whenever *The New York Times* cuts back on anything like this, the rest of the journalism world leaps ahead and says, "Well, *The New York Times* did it, so we can, too." When *The New York Times* expands on something like this, nobody leaps in to follow.

FREED: What are your perceptions of audiences out there? Who are they? What are the demographics, what are the inclinations, what are the behavior patterns that you are seeing?

GELB: I think about audiences who are interested in new music, who might be interested in jazz or classical music, or who might be interested in musical theater, opera, or a more sophisticated popular music. The goal that we have is to try to make a connection between our music and the audience, and to attract an audience by having our music exposed through television and radio, sometimes by attaching music to films, and by arranging concerts.

IT'S THOUGHT, TO THE ACADEMIC AND
SOMETIMES THE CRITICAL WORLD, TO BE A
SIN TO TRY TO WRITE MUSIC THAT THE
PUBLIC CAN ACTUALLY RESPOND TO.

So it's very gratifying when we do arrange for wide exposure for new music that is written or performed in an accessible style. The most notable example of accessible music composed for an orchestra is the music for the movie *Titanic*, which is perhaps absurdly successful, having now sold more than fourteen

million copies [as of January, 1999, the *Titanic* soundtrack had sold more than 27 million copies worldwide]. The basic compositional element in that music is a symphonic score. And later this summer or in the fall, we're arranging for a series of *Titanic* symphonic concerts that will take place around the world. These concerts will demonstrate to the public that this is symphonic music, composed in a very skillful way by James Horner.

I devote my attention to thinking very much about the audience, but only an audience that has the potential to be interested in what we have to offer. The music that's been written in recent years in the academic and modern form of classical music is not usually audience-friendly. Many composers, if you talk to them, would say that they don't really care what the audience thinks about the music. They're writing for some other purpose.

HESS: In architecture in the twentieth century, the same thing is happening. Well-known architects more and more have felt that they did not have to address the popular audience. And this has led to something of the same state as classical music.

FROM THE TIME I SIGN AN ARTIST, UNTIL THE
TIME THEY FINISH A RECORD, THE AUDIENCE
IS THE ONE THING WE DON'T THINK ABOUT.
ONCE IT'S FINISHED, THE AUDIENCE IS ALL
WE THINK ABOUT.

HURWITZ: I agree with Peter about one thing, and that is art and commerce. The idea of something being successful actually makes me happy. You want to make records as well as you can, and sign artists who are as interesting as you can find. I'm sure that a lot of purists won't like Michael Graves's architecture in Orlando, for example, but I happen to love it. It's very popular and populist architecture, but there is something quite wonderful about it. I know there's a bunch of dance critics here, so they all know that when George Balanchine in the 1950s was able to create both "Stars and Stripes" and "Agon," he was incredibly aware of both doing great work and having an audience. He somehow found a way to do it, but he was a genius. And there are not that many geniuses like that around at any one time.

I would have to say that practically every decision that I have ever made has been in a complete vacuum in terms of what anybody else was interested in,

because I felt that—and again perhaps it came from my own understanding of where the business was twenty, thirty, forty years ago—unless you truly, deep down in your heart, felt something was great, it would be very hard for you to convince somebody else of the same. From the time I sign an artist, until the time they finish a record, the audience is the one thing we don't think about. Once it's finished, the audience is all we think about. That is, how to find a way to get it out to those people.

BERSON: Can an artist in your company have a success by selling fifty or twenty-five thousand records?

GELB: It varies depending on the project. It has to do with the amount of time, energy, effort, and cost that a project takes. If you want to equate it to the film world, very often in the film business, a low budget art film costing \$3 million that grosses \$15 million is considered to be a greater success than a film that cost \$15 million and grosses \$20 million.

At Sony Classical, we have a very broad range of projects. It's extremely eclectic. Like Bob, I don't have people telling me what records to make or how to make them, and I don't do things by committee. It's pretty much my own view, although a lot of our projects are ideas that come in from artists and producers that we may adapt or change. I have to think—I want to think—about all the things a producer should think about when conceiving a record project. How much is the recording going to cost? What is it going to sound like? How is it going to be presented to the public? Will it be successful or not?

Titanic (the record) is the ultimate example of a successful film score, but we also attempt to marry film projects to composers in a less blatantly populist vein. For example, John Corigliano has written the music for *The Red Violin*, a film by Francois Girard, who also made the Glenn Gould film [*Thirty-Two Short Films About Glenn Gould*]. Sony Classical brought Girard and Corigliano together. We thought that Corigliano, who often writes music inspired by music of other periods, would be the ideal composer to write music for this film, which is about a violin over three hundred years. And Corigliano has not compromised his art in writing the music here, or he would never have done it. In this way, the film becomes a vehicle to introduce this very serious composer's music to a very large audience, as has been the case with Philip Glass's film projects.

A lot of times, we'll actually inject a classical music element into a film. For instance, I don't know if any of you have seen the film *Seven Years in Tibet*. It's not an accident that Yo-Yo Ma is featured throughout the score. I suggested to the director, Jean-Jacques Annaud, the idea that the cello could provide a musical link between the Tibetan folk music that he wanted to use and the Hollywood orchestral score that he was required by Hollywood to employ. John Williams was thrilled to write for cello as well as for orchestra. In fact, the result is that John wrote one of his best scores, and, I believe, because he was inspired by Yo-Yo Ma's participation.

What's interesting is that we have sold between 125,000 and 150,000 copies of that score album—a large sum for a classical recording—around the world, even though the film is pretty much considered to have been a commercial flop.

BERSON: But you're not going to match up Elliott Carter with the film *Seven Years in Tibet*.

GELB: This is where I have my biggest problems with the academic musical community. Because one can't expect Elliott Carter's music to be received by large numbers of people. Even though you, here in this room, may all admire Elliott Carter's music, and I admire it and I can appreciate it as a private member of an audience, as Bob was saying, I can't possibly expect, even in my wildest imagination, any success scenario in terms of large numbers of people buying Elliott Carter's music. It'll never happen.

FREED: The question that pianist and scholar Charles Rosen raises in the current issue of *Harper's* is: Do we really need that? Do we really need to make music that big? Do we need to have halls that are gigantic? Do we need records to sell that many copies? Rosen writes, "Attempts to enlarge the audience for serious music by mixing it with more popular forms usually proves unconvincing and succeeds only in alienating the music's core audience."

ONE OF THE GREAT CRIMES IN CLASSICAL
MUSIC IS THAT ARTISTS ARE AFRAID TO
REMOVE THEMSELVES FROM THE CLASSICAL
VENUE TO PERFORM CLASSICAL MUSIC.

ROBERTS: Well, I don't know what that means, to be honest with you. One thing we talk a lot about is how music is placed in a context. We need a context to be able to appreciate the music. I can imagine Elliot Carter's music being used in a film and people being incredibly moved by it and wanting it, not because it's Elliott Carter and not because it's classical music or because it's difficult or it's serialistic or whatever it might be, but because it works for them on an emotional basis. One of the great crimes in classical music today is that artists are afraid to remove themselves from the classical venue to perform classical music. And the

longer we perpetuate that kind of status quo, the harder it's going to be for younger audiences, those who are under the age of twenty-five or thirty-five, to feel comfortable appreciating classical music.

I'm not saying that we shouldn't present classical music in classical venues. But I know plenty of young musicians who don't want to play their music in Carnegie Hall or to go to the Philharmonic, but who certainly want to play music. They'd rather do it downtown, or they'd rather look a certain way or they don't want to feel infringed upon in terms of how they program their repertoire or the labels that they record it on. That's not a bad thing. We should be encouraging them to break down those barriers. If we don't deal with addressing the audience of young people and the way that younger people want to appreciate their classical music, it's going to be very difficult to continue to grow when there isn't the demand for it.

AX: I just wanted to add a couple of things and maybe be devil's advocate for a minute. First of all, when you talk about breaking down barriers with young audiences, I would love to go out and perform in Land's End shirts. However, I don't think that goes along with the type of music that I play.

I think that we have several problems as an entertainment medium at the end of the twentieth century. One of the problems we have is that, like it or not, a lot of the stuff we have in our tradition takes a while to appreciate. Visiting new art in a museum, it's very easy to walk by a painting and say, "I don't like that; it doesn't do a thing for me." That's it. You've gone past it. It's much more difficult if you happen to be one of the people who don't like the *Symphony for Three Orchestras* by Carter because that's a twenty-five-minute piece. If you decide in the first two minutes that you don't like it, boy, are you stuck.

LIKE IT OR NOT, A LOT OF THE STUFF WE
HAVE IN OUR TRADITION TAKES A WHILE TO
APPRECIATE.

When Rosen talks about alienating the traditional classical music audience, I do know what he means. I think there are people who still, at this point, feel that music does something special for them. It's a kind of entertainment and a kind of spiritual benefit that no other art form affords. I couldn't possibly articulate what that is, but it's different from what painting does; it's different from what television does; it's different from what movies do; it's different from theater. It's something that only music can give us. It's a pang, a special feeling. The best illustration possible is to take any opera story, read the libretto, and see how it

affects you as soon as you put Puccini's music to it. I think it's very important for performers to figure out a way to address this. I feel we cannot compete—least I can't, some people may be able to—but I, as a pianist, cannot possibly compete with an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie in terms of entertainment value. If I'm out for a thrill, I'd rather see Schwarzenegger than Maurizio Pollini.

ROBERTS: I'm certainly not advocating getting rid of serious music, nor would I expect you to be something you're not.

AX: Let's take a very simple case. The idea of applause between movements. You go to a hall. The first movement of Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto ends, and five people go "cough, cough" and that's considered good behavior. That doesn't make any sense to me, you see, because if that had happened at the premiere of Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto, it would have been a fiasco. In fact, that's what happened after the first movement of Brahms's D minor concerto in Leipzig, and that's why it was considered a disaster. Because nobody went "Yeah!" "Clap, clap!" etc. That to me is a silly kind of thing and to judge an audience on the basis of, "Well, they're a stupid audience if they applaud between movements."

I'D LOVE TO FIND A GREAT MARKETING TOOL
TO GET THE SCHOENBERG PIANO CONCERTO
ON EVERYBODY'S SHELF.

I would love to be able to stand up at every concert and say, "If you are moved to applaud between movements, please feel free to do so, just as long as you save some for the end. If somebody wants to applaud, you know, fine! If somebody feels like coming to the concert in Land's End shirts, that probably should be fine. At the same time, I do think it's still nice to play all these difficult pieces that I, for one, love. I'd love to find a great marketing tool to get the Schoenberg piano concerto on everybody's shelf. I actually made a horrible suggestion to the Sony people when it first came out, that they give out a free condom with every recording. I got one sent to my hotel room with the thing packaged that way.

HURWITZ: I agree with much of what you're saying. But as we all get older, we're supposed to be informed participants in the process of culture, and we have to be honest about what it is that we do love. I happen to feel that there are other things besides classical music that can give you that kind of power. For example, there's the Brazilian singer Caetano Veloso, whom I've had the privilege of making a few records with. I really can't think of any chamber music that was written in the fifties and sixties that was as important to me as the records that

Miles Davis was making at that same period.

FREED: Don't you feel that new music has always been difficult? In his own time, Beethoven was difficult, Brahms was difficult.

GELB: Sure. I think some music has been more difficult than others. But the argument that I sometimes hear, that Bach wasn't famous in his day, and wait a hundred years and Elliott Carter will be just as famous as Bach, is a rather empty one when you consider the world in which we live. The world in which Bach lived was a rather isolated one. His music was not getting out on the airwaves.

Up until very recently, record companies and radio stations have been allowing composers like Carter and other composers to be heard. And the fact is, composer, critics, and pundits of classical music can sit around and say Elliot Carter is the greatest goddamned genius who ever lived, and it's not going to make the public want to listen to him.

The fact of the matter is that what should have happened, and what, I think, will happen, is that music will find its own level, and there will always be an audience interested in difficult and intellectually challenging new music. And they should be allowed to hear it. On the other hand, music that could have widespread public appeal should also be encouraged. There are composers that are interested in writing that kind of music, and, I think, for many years, they were afraid to write that kind of music.

AX: I want to interrupt you.

GELB: Let me just finish. One of the things that I feel very good about what I'm doing at Sony is that we're getting new music written. Wynton Marsalis just wrote his first orchestral piece. It's for narrator and string orchestra. We commissioned him to write this. We nurtured him to a certain extent. We allowed him to miss many deadlines as he struggled with the idea of how to orchestrate, because he wanted to orchestrate himself. He saw that was a major part of composing and he ultimately did it.

Or take Edgar Meyer, an extraordinarily gifted composer. He's a bass player who lives in Nashville. He is a part of the worlds of bluegrass and country music and is also a member of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. He wrote an absolutely brilliant quintet for the Emerson Quartet, a tonal piece of music that is also brilliantly original, which, when played at Lincoln Center, had the audience on its feet, thrilled. I've never seen an audience get to its feet for Elliott Carter. Maybe you have.

AX: I don't think we disagree on this. Everything you said about Edgar Meyer is true in spades. It's great that he's doing stuff. I'd love to be involved in stuff with him. We just have to make sure that we also leave room for the people who are determinedly unsuccessful. We can do that. It may not be your job to do that. I'm

not saying it is. I know that if I like a composer, if I like difficult music, if I like Hans Werner Henze, for example, I go and learn it. And I go and play it, and I do my very best to make people love it by gesturing, by talking about it beforehand, by getting up in front of the audience before I play and saying, "I hope you enjoy this piece as much as I enjoyed learning it." Whatever we can do. I think we need to leave room for that.

WE JUST HAVE TO MAKE SURE THAT WE ALSO
LEAVE ROOM FOR THE PEOPLE WHO ARE
DETERMINEDLY UNSUCCESSFUL.

GELB: The problem I have, though, is that this is the kind of music that has dominated the world of symphony orchestras, opera companies, and concert presenters. I mean, that's it.

OESTREICH: I think you're talking twenty years ago.

GELB: My experience today is that it's still pretty much the case, Jim.

OESTREICH: Most new music that we hear today is far more accessible. It has grown out of Jake Druckman's New Romanticism. Piece after piece bears this out: the hundredth anniversary commissions at the New York Philharmonic, the music of Aaron Jay Kernis or Danielpour. I think you're tilting at windmills that are twenty years old. I think that battle's kind of been fought and won.

GELB: I don't think I really am. Even though we of course are Danielpour's record company, and we are very happy to have him writing for us, I think quite frankly his music is challenging for us to present to the broader public.

ROBERTS: I think you're talking about giving a forum for a James Horner or somebody like this to have their music placed in a symphonic concert because it is not less relevant than orchestral music.

GELB: I think there has been such a psychological barrier for composers of contemporary classical music. Maybe twenty years ago it started changing. But for the last fifty years, composers were frightened and scared about the possibility that music could actually be genuinely melodic and accessible. Even now, as composers like Danielpour and Kernis are being encouraged to write more accessibly, they do it somewhat timidly because for every melodic line, there are others that are quite dissonant or atonal or somehow apart from really being a genuinely melodic tonal experience. I'm not saying that all music should

be written that way. But based upon my experience, I think there is still a great fear amongst classical composers—except in Hollywood—of writing music that can actually have a kind of large-scale acceptance and impact.

HURWITZ: I have lived with composers for a long time. I have worked with Steve Reich for eighteen years. I know a lot of people who have actually had very successful careers. And I think there's another word we're leaving out in this whole discussion, and that's talent. There are artists—and there have probably been twenty or twenty-five in this century—who've had enormous talent, who've been able, no matter what the form of music, to write music that people actually have an emotional connection to. One thing I can tell you, having worked with these people for as long as I have, is that there is a genuineness to Henryk Gorecki or Louis Andriessen or Steve Reich or John Adams or Philip Glass. A great artist comes out of a real person; a great artist doesn't necessarily have to come out of the classical tradition. There are a lot of great artists who have come out of pop music. There are a lot of great artists who have come out from musical cultures that are completely unlike ours. There's obviously in our own culture a huge number of great jazz artists.

A GREAT ARTIST COMES OUT OF A REAL
PERSON. A GREAT ARTIST DOESN'T
NECESSARILY HAVE TO COME OUT OF THE
CLASSICAL TRADITION.

Astor Piazzolla, who died a few years ago, spent fifty years not being recognized by anyone in the world. But he wrote 450 or 500 compositions during that time, and just kept working. There are people who work. That's what they do. In this business, we just kind of grasp them and try to hold onto them. But if they're great artists we can't affect them at all. All we can do is give them a contract, give them some money, let them make their record, and we put it out.

REARDON: I'm not really satisfied by the argument that the problem is that classical music has gotten more difficult. Pop music, theater, and literary fiction have gotten much more difficult in the late twentieth century, and yet in many ways those forms are thriving. So I'm not sure what's different about classical music. Why can't classical labels do more commissioning of new music, take more risks, and let more fail? Wynton Marsalis didn't seem like a risk to me.

OESTREICH: But in fairness, Peter is taking those risks.

ROBERTS: In the pop industry, bands are signed to create music and it's recorded and produced. It seems like more classical composers get their commissions elsewhere and get their music performed. If it achieves a certain level of success, then it's recorded for posterity.

I think we take more risks than you think. We have a label in the United Kingdom called Arco which was set up as a home for Anglo-American composers, like Michael Torke, Michael Doherty, Aaron Kernis, and Michael Nyman. Whether or not those pieces were commissioned, it costs an awful lot to record operas or orchestral music, so unfortunately none of those recordings have been particularly successful in commercial terms. But we didn't do it for those reasons, let alone the Entartete Musik series, a documentation of early twentieth century music which was never allowed to be heard during the Nazi era, from the early thirties up through World War II.

More labels are embracing these kinds of things than you might think, but the problem is that they have their moment and then are not performed enough in a live environment, except on an extremely sporadic basis. So there is not a momentum that's being generated. Now, what makes a lot more sense is to be more selective and focus on commissions that are tied to particular events. Probably the Marsalis is a very, very good example when you think about risk.

GELB: I totally endorse what Bob was saying. You take a great talent, you give them the money and you let 'em do it. But I would never be afraid to say to a composer, no matter how great a talent, "You can be the greatest genius in the world. Here are some opportunities. Tell me what you want to write and I'll tell you how I think we can get the largest audience for it. Maybe we can insert it into a film, maybe we can get a famous soloist."

To respond to the question posed, I don't think it's fair to say, really, that classical music is any different from any other art form. In every art form, the more difficult the work, the smaller the audience for it is. I'm not saying difficult work shouldn't be encouraged, but there's plenty of it. On the contrary, I think serious composers should be encouraged to write pieces from their inspiration with a larger, broader-based populist approach. For me the fear is that if the only music performed and recorded is either difficult new music or repertoire that has already been performed and recorded a hundred times, classical music will need smaller and smaller halls because there won't be anyone left.

MICHEL: How about changing the classification system? Perhaps it's defeating to call a symphony by Paul McCartney "classical music"? As you know better than I do, if you look at the top ten selling classical albums, very few of those would be recognizable as traditional classical music. I did a piece on the marketing of classical music for NPR. The people at the record stores are going nuts because they don't know where to put this stuff. The people going to the second floor of

Tower for classical are not the people who are going to go to another section.

HURWITZ: There has been no section for a lot of the stuff I've done. Laurie Anderson, for example, I don't know where she belongs. She's not a classical composer, she's not a pop musician. There are boundaries being flattened at all times. But let me just put it on the record, I like the idea of classical music. When someone says classical music, I know what they mean, just as when somebody says impressionist painting, I know what they mean. When someone says baroque music or romantic music I don't want to shy away from it.

THE CONCERT HALL PROVIDES SOMETHING
THAT'S QUITE WONDERFUL. WE SHOULDN'T
THROW THAT AWAY.

As a concert-goer I am more informed than someone fifty years ago might have been. That's because of records. When I go to hear a performance of a Beethoven symphony or a Stravinsky piece, I have heard it thirty or forty times on records, so when I go to hear it there is so much more that I'm going to get out of that performance than I would have twenty or thirty years ago. At that time I might have been able once to hear the *Firebird*, if I lived in Los Angeles. Or if I lived in Omaha, once I could have heard a Brahms symphony. So, recordings have been part of a great education. But the concert hall provides something that's quite wonderful. We shouldn't throw that away.

AX: Whatever piece you loved, because you could hear it forty times on record, you didn't have to learn the piano in order to get to know that piece. The only way to get to know that music, or any music, for that matter, in 1895, or 1898, was to learn an instrument and play it. One of the reasons we had a tremendous amount of interest in classical music—or in music, period—in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s was because the same people who are now hitting a tennis ball were practicing the piano.

Participation is a large element which is missing today, and which is why the complexities of some music are falling by the wayside. I don't think it's a matter of good or bad, but the music lover who goes to a concert and hears a Beethoven sonata recital is a totally different listener from the guy who went to learn the Beethoven sonatas and then went to hear Arthur Schnabel play them.

We're all doing performances in schools. What I really should be doing is playing a benefit and buying thirty violins to bring to that school. It really is a

problem, and I think if we saw that with baseball, pretty soon the stadiums would be too big, too. I think that's more of a problem, perhaps, than the type of music that's going on in concert halls. The people who could play could go and hear Elliott Carter and say, "I hate that," but say that from a position of some kind of expertise. A lot of people hearing the Carter now say, "I don't like it because I can't figure out what the hell is going on."

WILSON: I own exactly one classical CD and that's *The Desert Music* by Steve Reich. So I know nothing about all this, which is maybe beneficial to what I'm getting ready to ask. I get mixed signals from the classical music world. On the one hand you hear people complaining that the audience is dying, blah, blah. And at the same time, it seems to me, there is a certain snobbism from the classical music world.

TO ME, IT LOOKED LIKE ANOTHER MARKETING GIMMICK: CHARLIE'S ANGELS DOING BEETHOVEN.

When I went to an Eroica Trio concert, I asked my companion about the group because I had only seen their ad, and to me it looked like another marketing gimmick: Charlie's Angels doing Beethoven. She told me that the three of them were actually very good musicians. Then, when I asked someone who is a classical music writer about them, that person seemed to be so preoccupied with the way they presented that they didn't want to know anything about the music at all.

AX: I think that snobbism and elitism are difficult words because they seem to somehow imply that there is inherent superiority, that people who have more money, who are born a certain way, can belong to certain groups. I don't think that kind of snobbism has anything to do with classical music.

But there is an elitism because I think classical music is a kind of music that benefits from getting to know more about it, just as when you get to know a difficult book like a book by Thomas Pynchon—which is a kind of book I've never been able to finish. The snobbism in classical music is in the effort, not in the prerequisites, if you will. So when you get to hear a Brahms symphony, the more effort you make to get to know it, that's where the snobbism comes in. Does that make sense?

I HEARD THINGS THAT KIND OF GRABBED ME
BY THE ANKLES, PICKED ME UP, BOUNCED ME
OFF MY HEAD, TURNED MY GUTS INSIDE OUT:
THAT'S WHAT THIS MUSIC DOES TO ME.

OESTREICH: The notion of elitism in classical music has always struck me as funny, and I hear it a lot recently. I grew up with no classical music at all. I was around at the beginning of rock'n'roll, you know, Bill Haley and all that stuff, and loved it. I went to college to play football and I knew nothing about music. I ended up in a seminar on art and music I had no business being in, and I knew nothing. But I heard things that kind of grabbed me by the ankles, picked me up, bounced me off my head, turned my guts inside out: that's what this music does to me. That's what *The Rite of Spring* does to me. That's what Mendelssohn's *Italian Symphony* does to me to this day. The notion that any of this has anything to do with elitism is very odd. And I want to say that evidently I'm supposed to be one of those people who think that anything that attracts audiences is not good.

I'll take that part for the moment. Basically, I want to be moved by music. That's what got me into this business; it's what I want every day out. I've heard some Danielpour recently that didn't grab me and seemed derivative in a distracting sort of way. The same thing has happened with Aaron Jay Kernis. I like to think that I go to these things with a fresh slate, and I like to think that what I want is that thing in my gut that happens when I'm moved by music. I don't think it has a lot to do with what I think audiences should be hearing, or how people are dressed on stage, or any other goddamned thing.

AX: I just want to address the Eroica Trio. Because if I looked like those people, I would want my record cover to look that way. I will probably now be called sexist. But look, there's a pianist called Tzimon Barto, who has record covers which are exactly like the Eroica Trio records; the guy has a great physique. If I had his physique, I would want that kind of record cover. Especially if I was recording the complete music of Schoenberg. Because that's when you can say, "Well, now I have a chance to sell this music."

GELB: Jim, you speak with so much passion about music, it's wonderful. But I think you have to realize there is a great deal of snobbism and elitism and, significantly, negativism about classical music amongst some of your colleagues. It does exist, and people who run orchestras and put on concerts really don't share the kind of optimism and openness that you have. In my opinion, the majority of criticism does get unfairly influenced by external criteria. There's a

lot of baggage that comes with the criticism of classical music that doesn't apply to the other arts.

BERSON: You just mentioned orchestras; I'd really like you to talk about the programming at concert halls right now. For example, at the Seattle Symphony, they are inviting in rock composers and they're doing some pop stuff.

GELB: That's great.

BERSON: They're getting some flack for it, and some people feel they're dumbing down.

GELB: I said "it's great" as a knee-jerk reaction to what you're saying. I haven't seen it, maybe it's terrible. One of the things that's happened in the classical music world is that orchestras and conductors are no longer the valuable commodities they once were in terms of new recordings. What we think about now is repertoire and individual solo artists, and then we try to find the right orchestra and the right conductors that can serve that goal.

THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF SNOBBISM AND
ELITISM AND, SIGNIFICANTLY, NEGATIVISM
ABOUT CLASSICAL MUSIC.

HURWITZ: Hired hands. . .

GELB: To digress for one second, part of the changing attitudes in classical music business come from the whole way in which classical music careers are dealt with, particularly amongst conductors. I grew up in the classical music management world. I was with Columbia Artists for a number of years. It used to be that if a conductor did not make three or four or five recordings a year, there was something wrong with him, and it was a sign of lack of maestro virility if you didn't make a lot of records.

Now, conductors and managers suddenly have had a rude awakening in the last couple of years. They have had to come to grips and get used to the idea that their careers can no longer be measured in terms of recordings; it has to be something else, it has to be selling out concerts. I used to have to explain to conductors that in the same way that they wouldn't want to put on a concert with ten people in the hall, we don't want to put out a record of theirs that only ten people will buy.

ROBERTS: We try to marry what gets played in concert venues with the records that we make so there is some sort of continuity.

WHERE IS THE TRICKLE DOWN FROM "THE THREE TENORS"?

Take the Seattle Symphony for example. If that means they're going to play the music from *Mr. Holland's Opus* alongside a Beethoven symphony, and that works for them, I think that's a really good thing. And if we happen to have a relationship with them, and that's a record in and of itself, and they were touring that all over the world, that would be a very good thing too. I don't see that as being at odds with anything in terms of the performance of either the Beethoven on that particular program or of a suite from *Mr. Holland's Opus* or *Dances With Wolves* or *Titanic* or whatever it might happen to be. That's certainly one of the things that never existed before, particularly in the more traditional areas of classical music, that making records and touring could be tied together. This is definitely something that we're all working very hard to try to change. Which doesn't lower the standards of everything, but actually raises the opportunity to bring more people in on a consistent basis.

HURWITZ: Okay, let's fight this one out. I'm going to take the point of view, from Nonesuch Records, of the complete purist for at least thirty seconds. I remember when there was a jazz station called WRVR in New York City. It was a great station, and in its last two or three years, it began to be a bit like the Seattle Symphony. It got more and more watered down. I remember a guy who was a concert promoter who really wanted me to get involved with a big campaign to save WRVR at a time when they were playing this guy Chuck Mangione, who, as you may remember, had a two-million-selling record. He said that people who were turned on to Chuck Mangione were going to be turned on to jazz. And I said, "I don't think so."

I said, "I think people who are going to love jazz are always going to be a small, spirited minority, but they're going to be turned on, ultimately, by Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, or Wynton Marsalis. But if they're going to be happy, it has to be hooked onto their bones." I feel the same way about classical music. People who are going to like classical music are not going to be drawn to pops concerts. They just aren't. They were not drawn to Andre Kostelanetz; they were not drawn to Arthur Fiedler. What's going to turn their heads upside down are Brahms symphonies and Beethoven symphonies and those kinds of incredibly ecstatic experiences. Because that's what it's about!

WE'RE ENTERING INTO AN ERA WHEN YOU
HAVE THE ABILITY TO DICTATE YOUR OWN
PERSONAL TASTE AND COMPILE YOUR OWN
MUSIC HOWEVER YOU WANT TO DO IT.

OESTREICH: Where is the trickle down from "The Three Tenors"?

HURWITZ: There is no trickle down!

GELB: I actually agree with you. But I also think there is something else. There are composers who can actually write music that both has high artistic promise and can actually appeal to a symphony orchestra audience.

HURWITZ: But you know what? Steve Reich, for example, has never listened to a Mahler symphony in his life. And yet his audience has complete integrity in terms of what they are listening to. And you know what? It's a different audience: it's an artistic audience and a culturally sophisticated audience.

ROBERTS: We're entering into an era when you have the ability to dictate your own personal taste and compile your own music however you want to do it. It's going to be the private responsibility of every individual. That's one of the interesting dynamics of the Internet, for example. There, we won't be able to legislate what is pure and what is not pure and what is classical and what is not classical.

OESTREICH: The problem is that you have to have access. And you guys are still providing a lot. I mentioned radio before; radio is providing almost none to serious listeners of classical music.

GELB: National Public Radio is.

OESTREICH: Yes, some. But for example, does National Public Radio have time to do a Mahler symphony? I don't think so. The problem is that most of what happens on the radio these days—these three-minute snippets of Boccherini guitar quintets—you couldn't tie me down to listen to that stuff. Those pieces aren't going to turn anybody on to classical music. When I came to classical music, it was largely through radio: it was free and it was serendipitous. You never knew what the hell you were getting. I fell in love with Mahler at 3:30 on

an insomniac night when I heard the finale of the Fourth Symphony. You can't get that experience any more from radio, and I think that's a tragedy. I think we've already lost radio. You have to have access, and I don't care how big the audience is as long as there's access. That's what we need.

MICHEL: On the other hand, the National Public Radio classical music show "Performance Today" is growing and adding more stations all the time, which means there is an audience. The thing is, program directors make more money with a movement than with an entire piece. And there's this modal thing with classical music. You just punch into a computer that you want an "up" piece that lasts 20 minutes, and now you want a "serious" piece for eighteen.

AMIRREZVANI: I'm curious about world music. There, you are often dealing with people who are really famous in their home countries and who are pop musicians but who are not necessarily well-known here at all. How do you treat that and what are you finding in terms of what the audience is willing to listen to and buy?

WORLD MUSIC HAS BEEN OUR COMPLETE SALVATION.

HURWITZ: If it wasn't for world music I would be calling these guys [pointing to Peter Gelb and Chris Roberts] for a job right now. World music has been our complete salvation. There is a huge audience that is interested in hearing things that are more true to the original cultures than to a homogenized sort of bad American pop music. The big world music records have all come as huge surprises to us whether it be the Bulgarian Singers or Cesaria Evora. People who wanted sophisticated music just put their arms out and embraced these people in an incredible way.

GELB: World music also continues to be a very valuable source of inspiration and material for classical composers. I agree it shouldn't be homogenized. As it has for centuries in terms of ethnic tunes and melodies and folk music, world music has inspired classical composers for centuries. I still think it can provide, and does provide, inspiration for contemporary composers and classical artists.

ROBERTS: Bob's done a wonderful job with the history of the Nonesuch Explore series. It's very healthy to see it alive, and it's alive not just in the United States, but on an international basis. In France, there is music coming over from Africa, South America; and in America, there is music coming in from Europe and Asia, particularly in Korea.

HESS: How did the world music market develop?

HURWITZ: By complete surprise. It was, I think, in the early days of Nonesuch, people like Tracy Sterne and David Lewiston, and there were also some small companies in France. People went around and passionately recorded it. Lou Harrison went over to Asia. There was something in the air as travel became more accessible to more people. It was in the 1960s, and it was part of the same impulse that led many people to love folk music. You can make the argument that folk music is still at the base of both classical music and pop music today. That same basic human instinct has always affected people. I don't think that there is anybody at this table who hasn't been affected by something that's come out of a culture other than theirs, something that has spoken to them even though they don't understand a word of what was being said. They know that it is real and true.

SZANTO: It's an interesting question, the surprise and the success of world music. I'm struck by the fatalism in a lot of what you have to say. It seems to be the case that artists come up with things and they're either good or they're not good, but there's not a lot of space for you as promoters to operate. I spend a lot of time talking to art dealers, and they are always very fatalistic. They say, "No matter what I do, the work is either going to sell or not. I can raise the price, lower the price, and it has no impact." Artists, on the other hand, expect the promoters to do their magic. So I'm curious what magic there is that you can do. Given this very competitive, short attention-span economy, apart from undressing the artist, what can you do? What are the techniques?

GELB: What you can do is believe in something, and then do everything you can to ensure that it will have the greatest success by making sure the music is exposed and heard. And that happens through all the things I mentioned earlier: television, films, concerts, radio, getting a music video if the music lends itself to that, anything. You put all of your efforts into things that you believe in. This is where our skills as promoters are based, why we still have jobs: we take the records that we really believe have the chance and we take the risk in spending the marketing dollars to set them up in such a way that their potential can be realized.

ROBERTS: It's more Darwinistic than fatalistic.

GELB: And sometimes it works and sometimes it fails. More often than not it works. The Darwinian process begins with selecting what we think, based upon our experience, is going to have potential.

SZANTO: Given the changing institutional climate, are there any new sort of nuts-and-bolts tricks in the books or is it still just done pretty much as before?

IT'S MORE DARWINISTIC THAN FATALISTIC.

GELB: It's the same way, just taking advantage of whatever new means are at one's disposal. Now there's the Internet, there's CD ROM, and so forth.

HURWITZ: I never thought that we were fatalists. But I think you're right. Except in the movie business; that may be the one huge exception because there is so much money involved. You're talking \$20 million, which is an average marketing cost for one picture. How many years would it take you to spend \$20 million dollars in classical music? It would take a long time in marketing for three hundred records to spend \$20 million.

GELB: It's a question of scale. I've never been in a position where we had a record that we could actually spend millions of dollars—until *Titanic*.

HURWITZ: But that doesn't even come close to the movie. They're going to spend \$60 million and you're going to spend \$6 million.

GELB: \$6 million is probably more than you're normally going to spend in a year.

HURWITZ: You're right about us being fatalists.

GELB: It's healthy to be fatalist.

HURWITZ: It's not a science.

AX: I also think that what you're saying is true of just about every activity under the sun except that of dictator. The President is a fatalist, too.

HURWITZ: You work at it as hard you can, and ultimately, the public is going to make that decision. If it didn't work that way, Chris or Peter or I could put a million dollars behind a composer like Louis Andreisson. He is a great composer, and I love Louis, but we've never sold more than seven thousand copies of his records. I could spend a million dollars on the next record, and we'll sell seven thousand copies.

GELB: I was an office boy for Hurok, whose famous line was, "If the public doesn't want to come, you can't make them." And the point is you can do everything you can, but there are some things that just don't click.