

Revival of the romantics

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Silence spreads swiftly through the darkened concert hall. Anxiously, the audience waits to be taken on a journey filled with passion. The conductor suddenly raises his arms, and the listeners, awaiting the music, jump to the edge of their cushioned red seats.

The conductor begins moving his arms to the tempo and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra begins playing Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 5 Movement 4, Adagietto. The audience is lured by the melody almost as if the Orchestra was a Siren from Greek mythology. Chills run down the backs of all the audience members seated in the concert hall. When the conductor concludes the piece, thunderous claps fill the hall for minutes. All the listeners are ecstatic that they were moved so emotionally, and tears almost run down their cheeks.

Each shares an intense passion for classical music. However, the number of people with fervor for classical music has significantly decreased within the last fifty years. Today, several people argue that classical music is a dying passion, and thus they conclude that modern music is better. To a certain extent, this is true because in the 1960s the youth rebelled against parental beliefs and influences. They revolted against several things like the Vietnam War and "Part of their act of rebellion was to put a minus sign on anything their parents found important and classical music was seen as part of the conformity and stuffiness of the middle class life they rejected" (Rudenstein). The youth of the 1960s did not like 'the status quo' set up by their parents because they found it immoral, so they revolted against it by fighting for civil rights, peace, women's rights, etc.

Classical music was considered as one of these ‘wrong’ things to do and the youth opposed and shunned it. From that time on, classical music began to wither away and modern music was born. Today, youths without experience in the fine arts view classical music as boring and old; it has become a genre of music that no longer interests people as it once did. However, just because the masses feel a certain way, it does not make that the correct way to think. For example, numerous teenagers today view school as annoying and unnecessary in life, but any clever person would know that an education is essential to their lives so that they can learn basic skills to survive in this harsh world. Just because most of society shuns classical music and thinks modern music is better, does not make modern music better.

Classical music is more meaningful and helpful to society than modern music through various aspects such as inspiration and music therapy. Artists and composers need some sort of inspiration in order to create music. This can range from emotions to prostitution to greed. One can see this in music from the lyrics in modern music and the tone and melodies in classical music. For example, in Birdman’s song “Got Money to Blow” featuring Drake and Lil’ Wayne, he raps about spending money on drinking and wasting it away. He was inspired to create this song from how he lived his own life.

In the song, Drake raps “I am on a 24 hour Champagne diet, spillin’ while I’m sippin’ I encourage you to try it [...] leavin’ girls that love me and constantly seducing hoes I’m losing my thoughts I said damn where my roof just go?” (Mousdell). He encourages the listener to constantly drink and engage in one-night stands. These are the types of songs youths today listen

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to and believe this lifestyle to be ‘cool.’ By listening to this, they will want to engage in similar behavior and live a life according to the song. This will not help them in anyway; it will actually hurt them. In the current economic crisis we are faced with, splurging money would not be a wise decision.

But more importantly, engaging in one-nightstands is unethical, and this behavior, advocated by modern music, corrupts youths’ minds and distracts them from what their focus should be: their education and becoming successful adults in the real world. The inspiration behind modern music causes these harmful effects to arise and hurt society. However, classical music does not send the same message. For example, Dmitri Shostakovich was a Soviet Russian classical composer who lived from 1906-1975, and the inspiration behind several of his 15 symphonies and 15 string quartets is the pain and suffering that he endured or witnessed. In 1960, he composed String Quartet No. 8 in C minor.

His inspiration behind this piece was unlike several modern artists. He wrote this piece specifically for two reasons: his own stress and suffering and post-World War II destruction. Shostakovich hated the Communist Party, but in 1960, he applied for a membership out of necessity due to his poor health and being in the middle of two marriages, which inundated him with misery and dejection. He would have rather committed suicide than join the Communist Party. Even though his friends dissuaded him, he still wished to portray his feelings in this piece.

As Fig. 1 shows, he is distressed and disturbed by these troubled times. The Soviet government under Stalin was ruthless and brutal, and at this time

Shostakovich lived in Communist Russia. This regime kidnapped and killed thousands and thousands of its own citizens; imagine living under the constant fear and uncertainty, wondering whether waking up tomorrow morning will actually happen. In comparison, Soviet Russia under Stalin was worse than the atrocities of Saddam Hussein and his regime in Iraq.

Shostakovich incorporated his fear in his music through the chords in movement four which are “ the secret police’s knocks on the door in the dead of night” to kidnap and murder him (Richards). He dedicated the piece to the victims, including himself, of the Stalin regime and its vicious actions. Shostakovich also wrote this for the countless innocent victims of World War II. The Allied forces had bombed Dresden on February 13th, 1945 and Dresden was massacred, as can be seen in Fig. 2.

Due to the intense fires, it was almost impossible to count the number of deaths, but the estimate for casualties added up to over 100, 000. As Fig. 3 shows, bodies were stacked up on each other to be carted off. In 1960, Shostakovich went to Dresden to write a score for a movie celebrating the achievements of the Red Army during World War II to save the treasures of Dresden before its bombing and desolation. When he arrived, he saw the destruction of the city and remembered Dresden in that shape in 1950, becoming instantly depressed at the sight. His sympathy for the numerous innocent victims that lost their lives due to the war in Dresden, rage, and dejection compelled him to compose.

An example of how he incorporated the bombing into the piece was through the slowed twisting of the cello in movement four that symbolized “ the

drone of aircraft and the explosion of bombs” (Richards). He did this to show how the civilians were fearful and scared during the attack. On the quartet composition itself, Shostakovich wrote “ To the Memory of the Victims of Fascism and War” and later he claimed, “ When I die, it’s hardly likely that anyone will write a quartet dedicated to my memory; so I’ve decided to write it myself. [...

] The pseudo- tragedy of this quartet is so great that while composing it my tears flowed as abundantly as urine after downing half a dozen beers” (Richards). He was inspired by the hard times of his own life as well the destruction of mankind. If youths learn and understand the inspiration of several classical composers, it can lead to them becoming more aware of the atrocities that occur during war and convince them to morally and peacefully handle situations. This is unlike modern music today, where most inspiration comes from immoral ideas and actions. Another pro of classical music is its use in music therapy. The American Cancer Society defines music therapy as “ the use of music by health care professionals to promote healing and enhance quality of life for their patients” (“ Music Therapy”).

Classical music, through its melodies and musical structure, can cause the mind and body to heal and develop. It can soothe patients during chemotherapy and can cure numerous things such as high blood pressure, stress, and pain. As one can see, there are various uses of music therapy. For example, music therapy can be used on stroke victims and other people with neurological problems through a procedure called ‘ Entrainment.’ This is when “ when patients listen to rhythmic music, their muscle movements

become synchronized with the beat. As their motions become more regular and efficient, their motor skills improve in turn.

Entrainment can also induce a sedative, relaxing response if the music has a slow, steady rhythm” (Bekman). This procedure allows music therapy to work its magic and cure people. The rhythms of classical music vary and can be used to fit the specific needs of the therapist. Also, music therapy can be used to calm the mind and ease pain or other negative feelings because of the “ visceral reaction” that mankind has (Bekman). A soft and melodious classical piece will produce a soothing and calming effect through its gentle melodies.

On the other hand, modern music is not used in music therapy because it does not have this same effect on the mind and body; it actually produces negative effects. In a 1994 study, researchers investigated the correlation between of heavy metal and rap music psychosocial turmoil on adolescents; teenagers who liked this type of music were compared to those who liked other types, such as classical. They concluded that “ adolescents who preferred heavy metal and rap music had a higher incidence of below-average school grades, school behavioral problems, sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, and arrests” (“ Music for Babies”). The study shows that the teens who that liked these types of music ended up having problems in their lives. These problems not only harmfully affect the teens themselves, but also the society in which they live in.

Another study was done in 1995 at Kent State University in Ohio, and it concluded that rap music tends “ to lead to a higher degree of acceptance of

the use of violence, including violence against women” (“ Music for Babies”). Rap music harms the brain, making listeners more violent. This is probably because numerous rap songs advocate hating or mistreating women. As one can see modern music, such as metal, rap, etc, harms people mentally. Classical music should not be shunned and forgotten in society. It helps in the medical field and is more ethical than modern music.

It gives an outlet of expression without harming society at the same time. If the youth enjoyed classical music as much as it enjoys modern music, then our society would be a better and safer because of less violence and a more mentally stable mindset. Classical music should rise from the deep grave that modern society has buried it in. Works Cited Ann. “ On Classical Music and Elitism”.

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