

The Student's Preface



*S*INCE WE MUST HEAR MUSIC TO FULLY EXPERIENCE IT, you may enhance your experience in this course by listening frequently to music at home, perhaps in your car, and—especially—at live performances. Of course, recordings allow us to hear great music at a modest cost, and they are invaluable for purposes of study, analysis, and listening pleasure. But even more satisfying is the experience of *live* music, as performers and listeners complete the chain of events a composer has begun.

Both performing and listening to music are highly subjective processes, affected by taste and experience. One performer's technique differs from another's; each fine musical instrument has its own unique sound; music that seems too fast to some listeners may seem slow to others; each listener has favorite composers and pieces. The size of the concert hall and the weather on a given night are among the innumerable variable circumstances affecting a particular live performance. Awareness on the part of performers and audiences alike that they are sharing a once-in-a-lifetime experience heightens the excitement of a great concert.

Of course, live performances pose challenges that may be avoided by listening to recorded music. Repeated exposure to the same recorded performance affords a comfortable familiarity, allowing relaxed, even lazy, listening. It may also dull the listener's objectivity, as a familiar interpretation becomes accepted as "correct." Listening to *different* recordings of the same work encourages active listening and helps us become aware of the quality of the performance as well as that of the piece being played; but still the listener plays a passive role.

The listener at a live concert, on the other hand, can and should be an active participant who shares in the responsibilities and rewards of the performance. Prepared audience members understand concert procedure and etiquette. They listen attentively to the music, expecting a pleasurable experience. They turn off cell phones and pagers, unwrap candies and cough drops before a performance begins, and generally avoid distracting their neighbors' attention. Now the music can work its magic, creating emotional tension and release. Performers often respond to the encouragement of a concentrating, enthusiastic audience by playing their best and perhaps offering a "bonus" piece, or *encore*, at the end. Whether heard in a gymnasium or a concert hall, and whether performed by gifted amateurs or international professionals, the music at the concerts you attend will be *live*, and *you* will have had a part in its performance.

Remember that performers, conductors, concert hall administrators, in fact everyone involved in a music performance wishes the audience members to have an enjoyable experience they will want to repeat often. To that end, orchestras and other performing groups increasingly offer preconcert talks, post-concert discussions, visual aids, imaginative programming, extensive information printed in the program, and other enhancements to increase our listening pleasure. Enjoy all that they offer, and don't forget to express appreciation with your generous applause.

The term **concert** usually refers to the “concerted” effort of a large group, while **recital** is the term often applied to a performance by a soloist or a small ensemble in a relatively small chamber or concert hall: We would probably speak of a band concert, and of a piano recital. However, these terms also may be used interchangeably, without distinction as to the size of the room or the number of performers.

For performances held on a college campus, the audience generally dresses in casual but respectful attire, appropriate in the presence of performers who have exerted great time and effort in preparing the program. For more formal occasions, such as an orchestral performance or an opera performed in a public concert hall, whatever you would wear to a nice restaurant would be suitable. A few audience members may choose to wear formal dress on certain occasions, but it is not required or expected of the general audience.

For any music performance you should plan to arrive early, allowing time to be seated, to read the program and the program notes, if any, and to absorb the atmosphere as the audience and the performer or performers prepare for the event about to take place. The members of a band or an orchestra come onto the stage quite early in an informal manner, arrange their music on their music stands, and warm up by practicing scales, exercises, or passages from the compositions they are about to perform. (Notice that the music stands hold the music in a semivertical position, allowing performers to see the conductor even while reading their music.) The cacophony resulting from many instruments playing different music at the same time is a normal part of the preconcert atmosphere, adding to the pleasant feeling of expectancy.

Orchestral Performances

Shortly before an orchestral performance is to begin, the first violinist, who serves as the conductor's assistant and is known as the **concertmaster** or **concertmistress**, enters the stage, and the audience usually claps. The concertmaster calls the orchestra to attention and then gestures to the first oboist to play an A, the clear-sounding pitch to which the orchestra tunes. (If a keyboard instrument is included in the ensemble, however, the other instruments must tune to it, since the tuning of a piano or an organ cannot be quickly adjusted.) At the concertmaster's signal that the orchestra is in tune, the orchestra settles down and the conductor enters the stage, greeted by applause from the audience. The conductor bows, turns to face the orchestra, raises the baton, and begins the performance—often by playing the national anthem, for which the audience stands and may sing along.



ATTENDING PERFORMANCES



A symphony orchestra.

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Since the late eighteenth century, the instruments of the orchestra have been arranged on the stage much as they are today. The strings, providing the dominant “color,” or timbre, of the symphony orchestra, are seated across the front of the stage. Violins are usually to the conductor’s left, violas toward the center, and cellos to the conductor’s right, with the double basses lined up against the wall to the conductor’s right. Members of the other three families of instruments are suitably placed where they will best enhance the overall sound of the ensemble. The woodwinds usually are behind the strings toward center stage, the brasses are behind them, and percussion instruments are placed widely across the rear stage area. Research into early music performance practice and advanced studies in the science of sound, or acoustics, occasionally has led conductors to vary this basic seating pattern for practical and aesthetic reasons.

The size of the orchestra also varies according to the style of the music being performed. Eighteenth-century orchestras were quite small, but during the nineteenth century several new instruments were added to the ensemble, necessitating the addition of more violins and other “traditional” instruments for a balanced sound. In the twentieth century a trend toward restraint and control of resources led many composers to write for a smaller ensemble once more. Therefore, instrumentalists may enter or leave the stage between compositions, depending on the style of the next work to be performed.

Other Performances

The atmosphere at a *concert band* or *symphonic band* performance is often less formal than at an orchestral concert, with less standardization of concert procedure. A band sounds quite different from an orchestra, since it has few if any string instruments. A typical concert band performance includes some light or popular pieces, such as marches or popular or patriotic songs, as well as serious band music and other literature arranged for band. Pieces that have been so arranged are called *transcriptions*, and the name of the individual who altered the original instrumentation (for keyboard, voice, or orchestra, for example) appears on the printed program after the name of the composer. For example, “J. S. Bach/William Smith” indicates that Bach composed the music and Smith rendered it suitable for performance by a band.

You should try to attend many other kinds of performances as well. *Chamber music* is performed by a relatively small number of people. *Choirs* and *choruses* vary from small to large and may include only women, men, boys, or girls or a combination of voices. Musical theater, dance, jazz, and solo recitals all offer aural, visual, intellectual, and emotional delights, and we will discuss them all in the text. Many performing organizations have Web sites, and you may enjoy referring to them as well.

Form in Music

Formal design, based upon principles of repetition and contrast, is essential to every art. Repetition of material lends unity, symmetry, and balance to a work, while contrast provides variety to keep a piece interesting. But unlike literature or the visual arts, whose forms may be analyzed in any order and at leisure, music continues once its performance has begun. Thus the listener must learn to memorize passages as they occur, so as to recognize repetition and contrast throughout the piece.

The text will cover the important forms of orchestral music in detail. Meanwhile, you should know that many music forms have several sections, called *movements*, related to each other much like the acts of a play, chapters of a novel, or stanzas of a poem. Movements generally are separated by a pause, but since they comprise parts of a whole, the audience seldom applauds until the end of the complete work. When you are unsure of when to applaud, of course you may simply wait for others to begin clapping.

The Printed Program

The printed concert program gives the name of each piece to be performed and its composer. Further information about the piece, often indicating its form, usually is indented under the title of the piece. A program of several pages sometimes includes information about the history and style of the music to be played, and about the performers' backgrounds and experience. There may also be detailed descriptions of the music to be performed.

As you leaf through a program of several pages, you may find further information, such as a glossary of terms or an explanation of musical form. Musicians and their promoters increasingly try to make their audiences comfortable by providing such information, so be sure to take advantage of all they offer you.

Your instructor may expect you to attend live music performances and describe your experiences in written reports, including an objective analysis of what you heard as well as your personal reactions. Your paper should be as detailed as possible, always including the name of the concert, the date and place of the performance, and the titles and composers of the music you heard. While you may find this a good opportunity to practice using some of the terminology you have learned in class and read in your concert program, you can write a fine report using familiar everyday terms.

During a performance, while the lights are low and the audience and performers absorbed in the music, you will not be able to take notes: simply con-



HOW TO WRITE ABOUT MUSIC

The printed program. Like many orchestral performances, this concert began with a brief opening work, continued with a concerto with a featured soloist, and concluded with a symphony.

The Phoenix Symphony Orchestra

Theo Alcantara, Music Director and Principal Conductor

THE CLASSICS

April 20 & 21 — Phoenix Symphony Hall — 8:00 p.m.

Theo Alcantara, Conductor
Max Wexler, Violin
The Phoenix Symphony Orchestra

Rimsky-Korsakov **Russian Easter Overture, Opus 36**

Prokofiev **Violin Concerto No. 1, Opus 19 in D Major**
Andantino
Scherzo: Vivacissimo
Moderato
Mr. Wexler

INTERMISSION

Schumann **Symphony No. 1, Opus 38, in B-Flat Major, "Spring"**
Andante—Allegro molto vivace
Larghetto
Scherzo
Allegro animato e grazioso



concentrate on what you are hearing and seeing, making mental notes of things you wish to remember. Try to memorize melodies, feel rhythms, and notice changes in timbre, for example. Then, during pauses between pieces or during an intermission, quickly note down several things you want to include in your written report.

After the performance, you will want to write your paper as soon as possible, while memories and images of the experience are fresh in your mind. Assume that whoever reads your report has not attended the same performance, and try to make it come alive in the reader's mind. What instruments were involved? Were they arranged on the stage in a traditional or an unusual manner? How were the performers dressed? Describe the music in as much detail as you can, exercising your increasing ability to discuss music.

Different Kinds of Performance

For an orchestral performance, which normally includes only a few pieces, you should briefly discuss each composition. Perhaps one was a programmatic

work, in which the composer used musical means—which you may try to identify—to describe an extramusical concept. To describe each movement of a multimovement work, consider how changes in tempo, dynamics, rhythm, melody, harmony, and timbre affected the music. How did one movement differ from another, and, together, how did they form a unified composition? What role did the conductor appear to play, and were you able to follow the conductor's beats? Did the music evoke an emotional reaction, and if so, how?

A choral or a popular music program, on the other hand, may include a large number of shorter works, from which you may choose several to discuss. Perhaps you will select songs or pieces varying in mood, style, tempo, instrumentation, level of complexity, language, or other characteristics that come to mind. If you attended a jazz concert, were you aware of improvisational interaction among the players? The visual aspects of any performance are significant and have particular relevance to dance and music theater. Costumes, stage designs, lighting, and other visual effects all have received concentrated attention from people involved in the performance and should be duly noted by the audience as well.

Further, in your report, you may consider the members of the audience. Were they attentive? Appreciative? Seemingly prepared? Were their reactions (attentive silence, applause) appropriate? Did you sense rapport between the musicians and their listeners? How did this affect the performance and your own reactions to it?

Subjective Reactions

Having thoughtfully considered the facts, you are in a position to share your personal reactions, bearing in mind that “like” and “dislike” are highly subjective concepts and need not imply judgment. Even a professional music critic, armed with years of training and experience, often forms individual opinions not necessarily shared by other equally qualified experts. This is fine, so long as opinion (“It was great!”) and fact (“The piece had three movements”) remain distinct. And you will strengthen your paper by supporting your opinions with facts: “The symphony lasted almost an hour; I found this too long to sustain my interest.”

As the semester progresses, you will find it easier to describe your concert experiences, because your increasing knowledge of style, form, and musical genres will enhance your ability to hear music and to articulate what you have heard. Most important, the exercises—such as writing concert reports—that you dutifully perform for this class will open your ears and mind ever wider to receive and fully enjoy the wonderfully varied musics of the world.

Jean Ferris