

Classical  
Music  
in a  
Changing  
Culture



*Essays from  
The American  
Record Guide*

DONALD VROON



# Classical Music in a Changing Culture



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Donald Vroon

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# Introduction

When I took over as editor of *American Record Guide* (*ARG*) in 1987, I did so with the conviction that a magazine had to have a position, had to stand for something. There should be a “thought piece” in every issue. I couldn’t imagine that I would have enough ideas to do that, and I was quite happy when other *ARG* writers offered to do a few thought pieces; but most of them have been mine.

After more than 25 years of writing these, it strikes me that there are a few basic themes that turn up again and again:

- The marketing of classical music
- The degeneracy of our culture and its causes
- Misguided ideologies that are affecting our music (political correctness, multiculturalism, period performance practice, etc.)
- The richness of our music and its subculture

Because the themes recur and are intertwined—and because these essays were written every two months over 25 years to be published in a periodical—repetition of ideas is impossible to avoid. But different contexts made the expression of these ideas slightly different each time.

I titled the editorial space “Critical Convictions.” Convictions are beliefs, not just opinions. Usually this is about convictions. Sometimes it is observations on strange and sad elements in our culture. But if I don’t believe in what I am saying, I shouldn’t say it—shouldn’t waste my time and yours. If I do believe in what I am saying, I should say it as if I believe it, not tentatively, as if it’s merely an “opinion.” If I don’t put these ideas forth with conviction—strongly and intelligently—how can they prove their worth and stand up to criticism? Opinions are not equal, and what sorts out mere opinion from

truth is *argument*. It is sad that people no longer argue; they merely assert (or attack). It is true that sometimes I merely assert—largely in areas where people assume no one would dare. That can be very satisfying, especially when I know that thousands of readers will cheer me on.

I am a truth seeker. I have read two or three hours a day—every day—on subjects that interest me, and I interact with the authors. These pieces were all written weeks before the deadline—often months—so they were read and reread in the cold light of day. I have never viewed truth as a cafeteria, where I can choose whatever I happen to like. And I try to read all sides of a question, though often general convictions rule out an approach because it is based on a philosophy I have found invalid. Since I long ago rejected the soft-headed assumption that all opinions or beliefs are equal, I am not about to sound benevolent toward ideas I consider pernicious. And, after all, the laws of logic include noncontradiction. Beliefs that substantially contradict beliefs we have tested and found sound cannot be true or valid.

I am also suspicious of all ideological thinking—that is, thinking that colors everything with dogma. (I call it the “one explanation” phenomenon: these people seem actually to believe that everything boils down to one basic error.) In my lifetime the most irritating ideological thinking has been Marxism and its various offspring: radical feminism, political correctness, egalitarianism, deconstructionism, and so on. Roman Catholic thinking often seems ideological to me, too, as does Protestant fundamentalism (to say nothing of the Muslim variety). I realize we need a worldview that gives us a general scheme for interpreting life and the world—and there is no such scheme that will not color one’s vision. But a living tradition can help here: it has big, strong roots in the past but is always coming to grips with the realities of the present. And history has put it to the test. Of the various forms of humanism that fit that description I subscribe to Christian humanism, largely because I don’t think one can make sense of life without God in the picture, but also because it has been around—and quite helpful intellectually—for 2000 years. This stance may seem a little “off” to some people, but it’s squarely in the mainstream of western philosophy, and I have no hidden agenda that distorts my thought or forces a reader to conclude that I’m “off the wall” (at least I hope not; I genuinely want to be helpful and convey something intelligent in every essay).

When your beliefs are well grounded and defended, you can easily seem arrogant. People with weaker minds resent strong-minded people, and because they can’t imagine such assurance they assume it is arrogance. But it is not to one who was trained to think critically. People who disagree can also resent “convictions.” But if truth exists, it is not arrogant but humble to bow before it. What is arrogant is to refuse to accept what we don’t happen to like. In philosophy and theology the skeptical mind is the arrogant mind. It is very egotistical to refuse to be convinced when arguments and observations are

strong. Yet every idea should be challenged and tested; because if we don't do that, how will we know if it stands up?

I am always fascinated with responses to what I write. I read them all and think about them. I firmly believe that all criticism is constructive. But a great many responses to ideas these days are mere assertions to the contrary, not arguments or criticism at all. I get a lot of those—not uncommonly personal attacks about what a nasty SOB I am. In reading these essays, however, I think you'll see something more than that, strongly argued ideas, in fact, that I believe will actually resonate with many readers.



# Elitism

The world in which we live, the abominable, sentimental, mob-ruled world of cheap newspapers and cheaper minds, where every imbecile is articulate and every folly tolerated, where the arts are dying out and the intellect is scorned, where every little cheap-jack knows what he likes and what he thinks. Our moralities, our democracy, have taught us to suffer fools gladly, and now we suffer from a surplus of fools.

—a character in an Edmund Crispin mystery

## PART I

Some readers seem to think I am too much of an elitist. They tell me classical music has to be marketed aggressively because there aren't enough deeply interested souls to keep it going. Besides, they often say, "classical music is for everyone."

I don't think it's true that classical music is for everyone. It's a noble-sounding sentiment but not realistic. There are, after all, tone-deaf people. And most people are too passive and unwilling to make an effort—and it takes a little effort. Some people can't develop enough of an attention span for a Mozart symphony—or can respond only to multisensory stimulation. (Music is only sound.) Our music is not for those people.

In fact, it is very important that we realize that this music has no real mass appeal. If we insist that it is for everyone and then "everyone" doesn't respond, we are tempted to try to "mass market" it—think of all the advertising techniques we could apply! But nothing would destroy it faster.

There should be no requirement, no barrier to cross, for people who are interested in great music. No special knowledge is necessary to get to know it and love it—but people who invest a little reading and thought will know it faster and better and love it more. There should be no dress code for con-

certs—but people have always shown respect for the finest things in life by “dressing up,” and it would be wrong to discourage that.

We must require one thing: the music must be enjoyed for itself, on its own terms. It is wrong to market it with hype, sell it with celebrities and stars, or lure people with free food and dancing (many of our orchestras are doing all that). That cheapens the whole experience and insults the music—as if it must hitch a ride on the coattails of a more attractive experience or more famous person.

Houston Grand Opera has become the first opera company in the world to install permanent movie theater–style screens to enhance the view of the stage. Now—just like TV!—the audience can have close-up views of the singers and conductor! Wow!

But that is not opera. Part of the essence of opera is a distant view—unlike TV—and it involves voices (and acting) that project out from a bright stage into a huge, dark theater. Houston has added another nail to opera’s coffin. Surtitles are credited with the tremendous boom in opera attendance in the past few years—now beginning to fade. But that is not opera, either. We were not meant to understand every word; we were not meant to concentrate on the words. Opera is not reading comprehension, and watching an opera shouldn’t require reading. Next we will have amplification, and that will be the final nail in the coffin. Lovely singers with very nice voices are winning a big public on television, but those voices could never fill an opera house. What a shame! Let’s give them a chance! Hand them a microphone!

It ought to be perfectly clear to absolutely anyone that mass marketing will destroy our art. Just look at all the other things it has destroyed. Look at the stuff Americans call “beer”—or yogurt—or “gourmet food.” Mass marketing anything changes it almost beyond recognition and reduces its value to almost nothing.

Sorry. It may seem lovely to say “opera belongs to everyone,” but when you try to sell it to everyone you end up destroying it. Popularity is the kiss of death. If we let the pragmatic marketers keep doing what they have started doing to our opera companies and symphony orchestras, we are going to end up with something very disappointing. Close-ups of the conductor’s face are not part of the symphony experience; add it in and you have changed the experience. Symphonic music is not a visual matter. That is part of its attraction! The eyes rest, letting the imagination supply the images. All orchestras dress alike and look alike, and so do the conductors. They are supposed to; anything else would be distracting. But orchestra marketers these days were themselves raised on television and think *everything* must be visually stimulating. We who have been going to concerts for 30 or 40 years know that the people who respond to the visual side are the shallow people—the people whose opinion doesn’t matter, because they are more concerned with the conductor’s hands or his hairdo or tailoring than with his musicianship.

Change the visuals—up to now deliberately understated, even ignored—and you will also change the audience. And the new people will know far less than the old and have far lower standards. It is already happening in opera, where marketers have been capitalizing on opera's visual dimension (and "action") to woo the TV-viewing audience. Most of the audience at most operas nowadays knows nothing of good singing—and that is how standards get lost. In the rush to fill the seats we are killing the art, changing it into something else. Then we brag that we are selling opera or symphony, but we might as well be selling lipstick, because we are pushing aside the actual experience in favor of something with mass appeal.

Thoughtful people—people who think long and hard about what they say and write—are not going to be people whose "opinion" you will find easy to "change." If my opinion were easy to change, it wouldn't be worth anything.

And that applies to "marketing," too. I have been told that television is aimed at about one-third of the population—the part that is easily manipulated, buys on impulse, and can't control its appetites. Television commercials have very little effect, if any, on the thinking person, the mature person. People who think about what they buy are not easily talked into trying something new. The programs (including "the news") are thus designed to appeal to the infantile bottom third of the population, because television has only one purpose: to sell products. Since they can't sell anything to you and me, nothing on commercial television is designed to appeal to you and me. It's that simple.

Opera and symphony marketing should begin by writing off that market. Why do our orchestras advertise on television? It costs a lot! Serious TV watchers are hardly likely to respond to our music. And since the television establishment has deliberately aimed its product at the bottom third of the population, it is obvious that marketing opera and symphony on television is a waste of money. Television reaches massive numbers of people, but they are not our people. Television coverage of a symphony concert is of no importance at all.

## PART II

We live in a time of rampant relativism—the problem is philosophical. But people take refuge in relativism out of defensiveness and laziness. One's taste in music is viewed by almost everyone as mere taste—as preference and nothing more. "You prefer classical; I like rock." As if there were no standards, no way to judge between them.

This is, of course, a self-justifying position. Any lazy bastard can justify anything on that basis. He doesn't have to bother learning anything; he doesn't have to develop any real taste or ability to discriminate—no effort is

required. He just likes whatever happens to strike his fancy, and he justifies it with the old ruse: relativism. (Some of these people eat nothing but ice cream for dinner—that's only an extreme case of this kind of stubborn relativism.) It's all a matter of mere preference, says he, because he doesn't want to admit that he knows next to nothing about classical music and is too lazy to learn. He doesn't want to admit that there is music that challenges the intellect and rewards thought and sensitivity—and that most music does neither and therefore appeals to lazy minds and ears.

Sometimes this relativism has an ideological basis: somehow it seems democratic to think that one person's preferences are as good as another's and "elitist" to think otherwise. But democracy has nothing to do with aesthetics. Ignorant opinions are simply ignorant opinions, and we are not required to respect them. Nor should we have any respect for lazy minds. Unwillingness to take the trouble to form a judgment should not be confused with a real judgment.

So we have ended up with a society in which thousands of people can consider themselves "educated" and know nothing about music—and justify that ignorance by insisting that it's all a matter of mere preference, as if one's taste in music has nothing to do with intelligence or education. Such nonsense! If an education doesn't change what you turn to for pleasure and entertainment, it has failed! That is the connection between education and civilization—a connection we are fast losing! If your education has not made you bored and disgusted with the music of your fellow Americans, you have not been educated! Education changes the sensibilities, heightens the sensitivities. It's not a matter of learning a task or a pile of facts. It's a matter of an enlightened mind. Enlightened minds don't read comic books and don't find fulfillment in popular music!

### PART III

Our culture is technology-mad. Almost nobody needs a mobile phone—think about it—but everybody has to have one. Why? It was always a blessed relief to drive somewhere or ride a train because you were out of touch—no one could disturb you. But people now seem to like being constantly on call, don't mind being disturbed—even put up with bad drivers who are too busy yakking on cell phones to watch their driving and loudmouthed louts on trains who rudely disturb everyone's peace while they make a private conversation a public nuisance.

The same is true of computers. Almost nobody needs one. As an editor I am very grateful to computers, because they save weeks and weeks of time and effort. They have vastly reduced the cost of publishing a magazine. It's all done on computer. It's wonderful. But not 5% of the population needs a

computer—certainly not at home. It has become another entertainment piece, like the television set—and just as wasteful of time, money, and attention. The people who make and sell them (and the software) are trying hard to make them NECESSARY (and to make last year's models obsolete so everyone has to buy the newest models), but we should all resist them. I live very happily without television, and apart from my work I can live quite well without a computer, too. In fact, since I spend up to 12 hours a day staring at the cursed screen when I'm editing, I am determined not to have anything to do with it when I'm not working.

We will never make a computer necessary to read or enjoy *ARG*. Words on a screen can never compare with the printed text. The “democratic” nature of computer input—any idiot can write anything he wants—also violates the whole idea of a carefully written magazine by people selected for their knowledge and judgment and carefully edited to the highest standards. (Yes, we are elitists.) Music discussion groups on the Internet are dominated by fools and resentful nincompoops. No one would publish what they have to say in a respectable magazine.

But why should anyone who cares about classical music need a computer? Why does 95% of the population need a computer? They don't—that's obvious. For most of them it's just a fancier and more expensive typewriter. For their kids it's a fancier and more expensive toy or television. It's another consumer scam. It's another case of the tail wagging the dog—like mobile phones. No one needs these things, but everyone is made to feel that resisting these things makes them old-fashioned and stubborn and “out of it.”

Who cares? It is never wrong to refuse to buy things you don't actually need—in fact, it is always right. No system of values or ethics can support self-indulgence the way Americans in general practice it. Some would call my lifestyle Spartan, but my life is certainly not cluttered with useless crap, the way most people's houses and lives are. I have everything I need and nothing I don't need—how else should life be lived? Yet Americans routinely clutter their lives with junk that they have been talked into buying but certainly do not need. That is one of the evils of capitalism. The wise man isolates himself from consumer pressures of all kinds—pays no attention to the latest thing or to advertising (and thus ignores television and “the news,” both designed to sell you things).

Every now and then I read *Consumer Reports* about good and bad products. That magazine naturally endorses the consumer society we have created in this country, and most issues are full of reviews of things that should simply be labeled “Nobody needs this” and forgotten. I recently got a call from a marketing person asking whether I would like to subscribe to it. I told her, “I'm not a consumer.” Long pause. That is especially hard for a woman to grasp—90% of young women say that their favorite activity is shopping. I think men prefer sex, which is at least a natural activity. I don't know any

man who likes shopping. I don't shop for much of anything, except food. I told her there was almost nothing in any issue that interested me at all, that I never found myself buying the items they lavish such attention on. She was amazed.

Why are Americans so easy to manipulate? Why is it that they can apparently be talked into buying almost anything, no matter how useless it is? Why are they such massive conformists? I don't know, really. It never ceases to amaze me. The other day the signal lights all went out on US 50 on my way home. Drivers sat and waited! They need to be told that they can go; they couldn't bring themselves to go thru the intersection without that green light! Sheep! Whatever causes such idiotic behavior—and it's everywhere in our society—it is certainly depressing to see. Can such obedient consumers maintain a free society? I'm sure they cannot. We are going to lose it. The vast majority of my fellow Americans are a total loss and might as well be written off. Their daily choices cumulatively reduce their humanity and intelligence and further impoverish our civilization. They don't know what freedom is, because they have undeveloped minds. They are about to crash. The manipulators control them almost completely. If I am an "elitist," it's because only an elite offers any hope.

First published in the May/June 2003 issue of the *American Record Guide*.

American life is so bathed in clichés that it is nearly impossible to think a fresh or original thought. . . . Your head swarms with ready-made phrases, stock expressions, and instant, pre-packaged ideas.

—a Nigerian after 20 years here

# Education and Culture

Everyone says that the root problem that threatens the future of classical music is “education.” I suppose they mean “schooling,” though that is not really the same thing. Education is a lifelong thing for some of us, but we were glad to complete our schooling years ago. It is too bad that in this culture adulthood is not considered a time of learning. And thousands of people who go through the schooling never seem to get educated.

How much can schooling achieve in the age of television and computers? It is discouraging, but I like to think that children who are sent to good schools (probably not public ones) and kept away from television still have a pretty good chance to get a real education.

Education has become something we do to get a good job. It seems to have less and less to do with the way we live. In his book *Jefferson's Children*, conductor and educator Leon Botstein says

a college ought to be measured by the extent to which the curriculum influences dining hall conversation and the kinds of entertainment students choose. . . . Not only should learning be enjoyable, but what we, as adults, consider enjoyment should be transformed by what we discover thru study. . . . If what goes on in the classroom does not leave its mark in the way young adults voluntarily act in private and in public while they are in college, much less in the years after, then the college is not doing what it is supposed to do. . . . It is the transformation of peer-group values and behavior that mark a first-rate college education.

Education should enable a person to reach higher when looking for pleasure and entertainment. Mr. Botstein complains in that book that the precollege culture is superficial and subjective. Students arrive in college with strong preferences but without any arguments that would support their preferences.

They are unable to contrast the merits of one view versus another. They assume all opinions are equal and the result of salesmanship and advertising rather than of clear thinking. They don't believe in the power of reason, and they are unable to defend their values. Ethics and aesthetics are especially viewed as realms of sheer taste, and they have never learned that one's convictions must be subjected to reason, logic, and argument. Somehow that seems unsporting and undemocratic to them. Try getting students to defend their choices in music and entertainment! They are insulted! That means their "education" has failed them.

Hilton Cramer, editor of *The New Criterion*, has often pointed out that the fate of high culture depends on a principled resistance to the influence of popular culture. But he is very pessimistic about the contribution of our colleges and universities: "They can no longer be counted upon to contribute anything significant to that resistance. Our academic culture has become part of the problem."

A college education was for me life changing. It gave me a lifelong passion for reading and learning. It challenged my narrowness and parochialism—really forced open my mind. It deepened my commitment to culture in general and to the higher forms of pleasure. Thus it enriched my life—permanently—by confirming me in habits of mind that would benefit me all my life long. Anyone observing could have seen that happening to me (and my fellow students) at the time. A real education is life changing. You don't go to classes during the week and get drunk in dance bars on the weekend. You discover a higher level of life and pleasure, and you start living it. If the education takes, you keep living it the rest of your life. Music is not a course you had to take; it is an exciting discovery, a never-ending source of joy. Education releases you for real joy in the midst of a culture that is abysmally cheap and shabby. The people around you pursue TV, sports, and shopping—obey the commands of their masters to indulge themselves in every way and not to question the value of what they are fed by the media. But the educated man is critical and even self-critical: he THINKS about things—even things like pleasure. Mindless self-indulgence is no longer enough when you have learned to think.

John Kenneth Galbraith once said that America has produced a society of private riches and public squalor. Our shared culture is so cheap. Our cities and towns are so ugly, our public spaces so neglected. Our public lives are on such a low level. Albert Borgmann of the University of Montana recently estimated that about half of the population in this country lives in a culturally impoverished condition. Gertrude Himmelfarb said a few years ago that never in the history of western democratic countries have we had so large an illiterate class. More people are going to school for longer parts of their lives, but the level keeps slipping. Obviously something is wrong with our schooling. It isn't doing what education would do. It is leaving people where they

were in terms of what they take delight in and what they do with their spare time. And the universities have very little influence on the culture at large, which becomes more infantile every year.

I might mention here that illiteracy often shows up in letters I get and online discussions of my editorials (sometimes passed along to me by our writers). Reading comprehension is abysmal these days. People respond irrationally, because they haven't understood what I said and did not say. They were apparently never taught to argue, only to assert their opinion, which they were apparently taught was as good as anyone else's, even though no real thought had gone into it and no real arguments defend it. It happens, too, in our business dealings. Just last week an exchange with an agency had me tearing my hair out and asking, "Why don't they understand plain English?" and "How many times do I have to repeat what I said before it sinks in?" People don't listen well or read well. They jump to conclusions. They grab a category they can put you in so they can dismiss you. They create a straw man based on their own weird misunderstanding of what you said and then shout it down. No one ever taught most of these people how to argue a point or defend an idea. Yet they are "college educated." It is also foolish to assume that because they are educated they can write. Very few college graduates can write.

I have always argued for the union of sense and intellect; it is especially rich in our music. I don't know who said it, but I like the idea that the mind doesn't really dwell in the brain but travels the whole body on caravans of hormone and enzyme. The sensual and the intellectual are that close. You cannot claim to be educated if it hasn't changed your sex life, the pleasures you seek and enjoy, the things your senses delight in. A good education will make "sensuists" out of us: people who rejoice in sensory experience. But of course it educates the senses, too, so that we are able to find ever more joy in ever higher realms of beauty.

David M. Greene wrote for *ARG* for a number of years but also wrote some fine private letters to me. In one of them he proposed the idea that "the wretched state of education in this country is a deliberate creation. Ours is a consumer society, and the less informed people are the easier it is to persuade them to consume your product. And the manufacturers and merchants control the purse strings. Surely it is in their interest to keep the public as ignorant as possible." I thought that a bit paranoid when I read it in 1995, but since then I have come to agree completely. Our popular culture is every year controlled by fewer and fewer corporations, who also control publishing (yes, even textbooks). Take a look at Robert McChesney's book, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*. By the time you read 30 or 40 pages of it, you will know that it's not paranoia.

In that same letter to me David Greene gave me the perfect conclusion to these space-limited musings: "I admit to being an unashamed elitist. That

does not mean I believe in a God-appointed ruling class, but that I believe for a society to cohere and move forward there must be those who take the trouble to set the standards and point the way—in other words, an educated group who profits by its education.”

In its own way, in one small area, music criticism plays that role; but the future of all of it depends on a revitalized, truly educated elite in our society.

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## Don't Educate Us; Entertain Us

In 1992 the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra was having budget problems, and attendance was falling off. (That is still the case, and it is a national pattern.) One of the local newspapers asked readers to offer suggestions. Recurring themes in the published responses were predictable: “no serious contemporary music” and “don't educate us, entertain us.”

It does sometimes seem to be a recurring American refrain: “Don't educate us; entertain us.” Certainly the “media,” including the newspapers themselves, have gone that way. Never has there been less hard news, less serious thought, more “fluff” and features. And certainly “classical radio” has been going that way—even stations with “educational” licenses. “Talk radio” has also been growing—pooled public ignorance. Television is, of course, the entertainment medium par excellence; whatever it touches turns to entertainment—even “news,” which television does particularly badly. Public television isn't much better; NET became PBS to avoid the word “educational” in their name. Educational? Heaven forbid!

The churches have become largely entertainment with a religious theme, and we have the lowest religious literacy level in centuries. If the churches are losing their grip, surely it is partly because they have yielded to the whine of the average American: “Don't educate us; entertain us.”

It is obvious to any intelligent person that politics has followed the same path. Personality and image mean far more than substance or ideas or goals. It is usually hard to know whether any of the candidates can even think. It is a perfect symbol of our times that for eight years we had a movie actor as our president. What a nice vacation it was from real issues—what a help in our flight from serious thought. Our political “debates” have long been a joke all over the world—a collection of sound bites and surfaces.

It's certainly true of our educational system: if the parents have largely lost the ability to reason, why should our children be forced to? Self-expression is much easier; we encourage them to assert their groundless opinions, and we seldom challenge them to reason through the issues, to deal with the implications of what they say. Children will take the easy way out when it is offered to them; and they have the examples of countless "successful" adults who got where they are without having an original thought in their heads. Naturally, if we let our children take the easy way, the entire level of our culture goes down—and it has; there's no question about it. Music teachers are making their courses more entertaining by playing rock and rap. Never mind that we have a glorious heritage of great music: to teach that is too much like "education."

The best part of our system is still college and especially graduate level. We manage to take almost uneducated pupils and put something into their heads in four to six years. It's not what it should be, because the products of our school systems are not what they should be; but we still attract plenty of foreign students who are willing to use their brains even if our own children are not. I've known dozens of foreign students, and they are universally amazed at how unwilling to work and learn the American ones are. College is fun. Life is fun. "Don't educate us; entertain us."

Is it any wonder that the rest of the world views us as lazy? We are an extremely lazy people these days—intellectually at least. We seem unwilling to do the work that real education involves. We want everything to be easy—as easy as television. How passive we are becoming! Is it any wonder that classical music is doing so badly? Its appeal is to people who are willing to use their brains, who want to grow, to develop, to enrich their lives—to be educated. How few minds seem uncontaminated by our entertainment ethos!

From the time of the ancient Greeks, music was seen as a powerful educating force. Music can play a major role in the formation of *character* (forgotten word). The Greeks were also aware that it could have a negative influence. There comes a point when generations bred on junk music (or food or TV) can no longer assimilate the best music (or food or literature). Sub-art systematically unfits a person for art, and vice versa. Heavy consumption of one destroys our capacity for the other. The law of culture is that the bad drives out the better. (And for the few who are hooked on the better, it inoculates them against the bad.)

Have you thought about the aesthetics of our mass culture? The chief standard is *popularity*. Apart from, perhaps, opera in Italy, classical music has never been popular. Our culture also assumes that obsolescence overtakes aesthetic and moral values just as it does scientific and technical ones. So classical music is widely viewed as obsolete and of little worth because it is not popular, does not make news or dominate conversation—or simply because it is old.