

WELCOME TO MY *Quarter-Life Crisis*

A. TYRRELL

Sitting alone in a confined space for many hours a day has given me a lot of time to reflect on why I repeatedly put myself in such a solitary situation. Practice rooms are often compared to the padded rooms of psychiatric institutions. Consequently, my first thought is “no wonder people in mental institutions are crazy.” Day after day, I follow a similar routine of warming up, developing technique, rehearsing, and perfecting repertoire, either as an individual or collectively. And as I play the same exercises over and over, I start to wonder why it is that I do so. Is it because I dream of being the best player out there? Is it because the dedication I put into it makes me feel like I’m accomplishing something? Or is it simply because I’m just doing what is expected of me and following the guidelines of the program I’m in? The answer to this question is likely, and hopefully, floating somewhere amidst in multiple electro-chemical reactions in my brain cavity. But until I find it, how should I get myself through a degree based on something I may or may not enjoy, and avoid slowly but surely losing my sanity in the process?

I guess this brings us to yet another question, the focus of this issue of *The Phonograph*: *Why Music?* When it came time to choose a path to further my education, music was never something I really considered until fairly late in the game. Everyone has multiple interests, and everyone is talented at at least one thing, whether it be an academic, a sport, or in our case, a performing art. I was lucky enough to excel in music, having taken lessons from a young age, and sure enough I found myself taking advantage of my talent by applying to a music program. The problem is this: I’ve been involved in music ever since I was a wee being. Thinking back, my parents forced the music upon me, although I expressed interest, and fairly voluntarily continued to develop my musicianship skills throughout my kid, pre-teen and teen years, but is music really one of my passions, or just something I was lucky enough to be good at? I think we can all acknowledge that listening to and talking about music is something we enjoy. Yes, I admit I’m passionate about

music as a whole. However, I find that this is a trait common throughout the general population, not specific to us musicians.

Although I enjoyed my academics in high school to a certain extent, I did not feel necessarily driven to pursue any of them at a further level. As university application time approached, I didn’t really have an alternative in mind, so I decided to take the opportunity while I had it and take the bold step of entering music school.

So here I am at McGill, well on my way to receiving a Bachelor of Music Performance. I like to think I work hard, learn a lot, get involved, and most importantly, that I practice an acceptable amount of time each day (within the small enclosed spaces mentioned earlier), but I still feel as though something is missing. We all know what it’s like to practice. We work at every technique, every little detail until we become masters of our instruments. However, what happens if we never achieve the status of a “master”? Does this mean that all our work has gone to waste because we’ll surely never get a job doing what it we’ve worked so hard for? For the most part, I have enjoyed my time here. I came in eager to learn, and excited to become a better player at the cost of working hard. However, that attitude wore off, and I find myself still working hard, but not necessarily motivated to do so when the results of what I have done are so seemingly minute. So how do I keep going, not knowing if it will be worth it? “Explore your options!” people tell me when my motivation to perform is running low. And yes, I am in the process of doing so. But, nothing that I have found has sparked sufficient interest. I’m sure I present the typical woes of a performance major, and that nothing outrageously radical has been said on my part. I’m also aware that I’m asking a lot of questions, and that I’m regurgitating the traditional “I-don’t-know-what-I-want-do-with-my-life” student rant. But I guess it’s a rite of passage, and now is my time to do so. So *Why Music?* Because it seemed like the most logical choice. I hope time will tell if logic leads to satisfaction, and in the meantime I’ll continue to voluntarily confine myself away in attempts to figure it all out.

Taking Beethoven to the Bank

The myth of classical music and money

JONATHAN GOVIAS

There’s an old joke that goes something like this:

Q: How do you make a million dollars in music?

A: Start with three million.

With all the possible answers to the question *Why Music?*, one you won’t hear is “for the money.” Most of the students in a school of music understand that theirs is not a lucrative profession, but few have pondered the question *why* that’s the case, and fewer can provide an answer other than “there’s not much money in music” – which really is no answer at all, when you think about it. Music students seem either to accept low pay axiomatically, or to live in a state of denial (i.e.: by completing a Doctorate). It’s surprising that the question *why* remains an afterthought; if we don’t understand the economic conditions of our chosen profession, we’re definitely not going to supersede them.

The first person to take a stab at a scientific explanation for why musicians are underpaid was a Princeton economist named William Baumol, who contended that the issue was one of productivity. As specifically defined within economics, productivity is a relation, the ratio of physical output against man-hours. The economist’s favourite icon of productivity is the autoworker: compare the worker on the Ford Model T assembly line to his modern equivalent at a state-of-the-art plant, and it’s easy to see how the latter can make a lot more car per hour now compared to one hundred years ago. The increased output translates into increased efficiency and profit for the company, meaning that workers’ wages can rise proportionally.

Unfortunately, productivity in this particular sense is almost entirely absent from the performing arts: it takes as long to perform a Beethoven string quartet today as it did in Beethoven’s time. The higher standards of musician training today mean that the quartet can rehearse and prepare the work more quickly, but the only

profitable part of the endeavour is the actual performance. This lack of productivity wouldn’t normally be a problem in itself, but the performing arts as an industry sector still have to compete to hire people in a nationally, if not internationally integrated labour market. According to Baumol, the combination of increasing salaries along with near-static productivity means that the costs to performing arts organizations will always increase faster than the revenues, creating an “income gap.” One basic solution? Don’t increase wages as much.

“Demand is a very flexible entity, something that can be both created and negated... [musicians need to] foster demand for what they produce.”

Certainly, the performing arts are not unique victims of what has alternately been called “cost disease” – this economic issue is also seen in other industries such as health care and education. Of course, those other sectors have the benefit of being removed from the normal market conditions of supply and demand: regardless of supply, demand will always be high, so workers can command increasingly higher salaries. The auto industry is not immune, however: those recent massive layoffs, contract renegotiations and plant closures in Canada and the US are a result of auto manufacturers having the capacity to build many more cars than they can sell. This means that increasing productivity is only of value if the market is able to absorb the increased supply. Detroit has finally reached that point that classical music attained years ago, maximizing productivity past the point of market demand, and is now hemorrhaging money as a result.

Supply and demand also apply directly to the overall labour market. Not surprisingly, classical music habitually suffers from a glut of labour. An American Federation of Musicians study from the 1980s noted that over one thousand musicians applied for 43 orchestral vacancies within the space of a year. With

large numbers of music students graduating annually, entering a very limited, very depressed (and depressing) job market, the only mathematical certainty is that the vast majority will not find sustaining work.

Those are the causes then, but what about solutions? When talking of excess labour supply, it would be easy to focus on the relatively low admissions threshold at many music schools. This isn’t a fair or realistic conclusion for economic reasons either: most schools, public or private, operate on a business model in

which intake and recruitment take priority by necessity. If admission levels aren’t maintained, funding is typically reduced, resulting in lower quality student experiences. Offering admission only to those with genuine career prospects isn’t therefore an option, especially considering how few performing jobs there are. There’s also an artistic or pedagogical argument to be made: for example, the quality of the experience within the McGill Symphony is in part dependent on all parts being covered, all chairs being filled. A substandard player in a chair is sometimes better for everyone than no player at all.

If the supply side of labour can’t effectively be addressed, the next logical step is to look at the demand side for the product. Demand is a very flexible entity, something that can be both created and negated. (Did society know it needed Swiffers or Febreze before companies launched those products?) In the case of American auto manufacturers, their losses don’t mean that people aren’t buying cars – people just aren’t buying American cars. Since most individuals can only afford to own one vehicle, the auto market is essentially a zero-sum game in which one manufacturer’s sale means another manufacturer’s

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been exceedingly warm and friendly – Joanne and Michael both took time out of their Saturday a few weeks ago to help me move boxes and boxes of piano vocal scores from my home to my studio here. That's just one example. Julian and I are getting to know each other better with each rehearsal and meeting. Sanford Sylvan and I know each other from a *Così fan tutte* production he sang in at Glimmerglass Opera, where I was running the Young Artists Program. All I all, I am so pleased to be among so many friendly folk!

MM: A lot of undergraduate singers were shocked to see Opera McGill basically become a graduate program. Some think it's unfair that only a handful of undergraduates were given the opportunity to be in Opera McGill after so many tried out. Do you have a response to their reaction?

PH: I was unaware of any "shock." Aside from one undergraduate who came to speak with me about their audition, no one else has stopped by, written, or tried to contact me to discuss their audition or Opera McGill. I have always found it better to openly discuss matters, and would welcome any and all discussion about undergraduate issues here.

MM: In response to the lack of accepted undergraduates (and some graduates), an extra-curricular opera troupe, Opera da Camera, has been formed by some Schulich School voice students. They will be performing *Cendrillon* by Massenet in February. Do you have an opinion about this?

PH: I believe that any extra-curricular operatic activity is good for the art form – either on or off campus.

MM: So far, do you have any regrets about your decision to become a part of the Schulich School of Music and Opera McGill?

PH: Mallory, why such a negative question? There are no regrets in life, just choices that – in hindsight – one could have made in some alternative way. My current present is the result of very past choices. I turn around and see only wonderful experiences that have led me and my family to Montreal. I do regret driving to Toronto this past weekend, though...

IT'S OPERA. GET EXCITED!

MICHAEL IMBIMBO
PRESIDENT & FOUNDER
OF OPERA DA CAMERA

With the popularity of classical music declining, it is imperative that musicians be proactive in creating new and exciting performance outlets. This is the goal of Opera da Camera, a new student-run opera company. Created by a group of McGill students last month, Opera da Camera (literally "chamber opera" in Italian) provides much-needed performance experience to vocalists at McGill – an answer to a problem that resonates strongly within the McGill student community.

The mandate of Opera da Camera is to:

1. Produce at least one fully staged opera per year;
2. Spread opera awareness throughout the Montreal and McGill communities;
3. Educate younger audiences about opera and classical music;
4. Raise funds for future projects and music scholarships.

In its early form, Opera da Camera conceptualized a series of small one-act operas. The resounding enthusiasm of the student community, however, has facili-

tated the expansion of this idea to the production of a full opera with orchestra, Massenet's *Cendrillon*.

Why *Cendrillon*? Massenet has fallen into obscurity in recent years and many people are only familiar with his more famous operas, including *Manon*, *Werther*, and *Thaïs*. *Cendrillon*, however, is one of Massenet's most charming works, successfully bringing the story of Cinderella to life with a rich and lively score. Because many people are familiar with the fairy-tale story, the opera will delight audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

Producing an opera is no small task. Winston Purdy, a member of the voice faculty at McGill, has graciously donated his time and skills to help coach and conduct the opera. The cast has also devoted their time to the development and launch of the company.

Opera da Camera's refreshing approach will give our musical community a reason to get excited about opera and classical music and showcase the talent and dedication of Montreal's young artists.

Cendrillon is scheduled to open in early February at Redpath Hall. More information can be found at www.imbimbo.org.

It's opera. Get excited!

Letter to the Editor: SAMOSAS for Massenet

B. OPINIONATED

Why is it that every time I walk through the lobby of the Strathcona Music Building, I'm accosted by at least five people telling me to buy a samosa? Why is it that student clubs and other organizations think this is the only way to fundraise? Over the past month I've noticed one group in particular that keeps on waylaying me to the point of harassment, and they have actually made me feel annoyed at the smell of deep-fried potatoes and veg.

Opera da Camera is an opera 'company' founded just over a month ago by McGill music students – suspiciously just after the list going up for the McGill Opera department. This group of students has risen from the ashes to grow roses of success by attempting to stage *Cendrillon* by Massenet. Oddly enough, there has been no advertising whatsoever for this budding organization other than the weekly samosa assault. When questioned about when auditions would be held for *Cendrillon*, one group member

answered that "...there would have been way too many people showing up for the auditions for the main roles, so we've already cast those. It was kind of a 'word-of-mouth' thing. But there are still other, smaller roles that haven't been cast yet." How interesting that Opera da Camera's company simply "cast" their friends in all the main roles without advertising any auditions at all for any other interested music students. Rather hypocritical, don't you think? Aren't they supposed to be making a stand against the political way in which operas at McGill are cast? This 'company' has set a great example for other music students. I'm really looking forward to the next time some first-year violinist doesn't make it into the orchestra and starts her own.

With real costumes and sets, an acting teacher, a conductor from the Voice Department and an attempt to use a McGill performance venue, I hope they switch soon from selling samosas to diamond earrings and gold chains. At least there won't be bits of potato all over the lobby.

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loss. Makers like GM and Ford are now desperately trying to redesign their product lines to meet market preferences, or foster demand for existing vehicles.

The latter is exactly what musicians need to do more actively: foster demand for what they produce. Happily, the music market is not the same as the auto market. Since almost everyone who can afford a car owns one (some 70-80% of the population), there's little room for growth. Conversely, a typical symphony orchestra boasts around 3-5% market penetration, meaning for every person who attends, there are at least another 19 who

don't. Unlike autoworkers, most musicians are also nowhere near their maximum personal productivity, so there's plenty of capacity for adding more hours of performing. There's clearly good market potential, just an underdeveloped understanding on the part of classical musicians – and the larger industry – how to tap it. Classical music has only made serious efforts to expand its audience in the last thirty years, and only in reaction to, not anticipation of, increasing "income gap". The first genuinely scholarly text on classical music marketing (*Standing Room Only*, by Kotler & Scheff) is only ten years old now, which goes to show how far behind the

curve the industry really is.

Fortunately, this situation is changing. In recent years, music institutions like Eastman and the University of North Texas have developed programs in leadership or entrepreneurialism which complement artistic studies, under the eminently reasonable position that talent and work ethic simply aren't enough to guarantee success anymore. The real innovation here is that the programs are oriented towards emerging artists, not just recording engineers or commercial musicians, and are designed to help musicians present successful events, build audiences – in short, foster market demand for themselves. The courses are career *means*, not ends. That being said,

excellence is still a prerequisite. If what happens on that stage isn't artistically compelling, no one will pay for it a second time.

If you are a Performance student at McGill, you should believe this institution can give you the tools and knowledge to achieve excellence as a musician. Achieving it is your responsibility, as is achieving financial success. If you're reading this, chances are you've already answered the question *Why?*, so perhaps it's now time to consider *How?*

Next Issue: *Part II, Hired like Haydn or Liberated like Liszt?*