

Piano Notes: Charles Rosen on the View from the Keyboard
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In today's world, the white tie and tails of the male performer at an evening concert of classical music is an anomaly. It is not strictly a uniform that characterises a profession, like that of the soldier, and it is not worn throughout life, like the cloth of the priest, but only for the frequent evening concert. It is, rather, a sign of gentility. Only on rare occasions is such archaic and uncomfortable dress demanded of others, like the bride and groom and their attendants at a wedding, or the guests at a formal dinner. Musicians are the only ones who regularly have to wear white tie and tails or the slightly less pretentious black tie and dinner jacket (at some restaurants, tails are still required of the waiters, but they must wear black tie with them in order not to be confounded with the gentlemen who are there to dine). We ought not, however, to interpret the costume as a claim by musicians to belong to the class of the wealthy or the powerful. Orchestral musicians are still often obliged to wear tails, and, although some of the most famous orchestras now pay very good salaries, no one would think that the players are part of the highest stratum of society, the equal of stockbrokers, lawyers, oil magnates, or football players. Their almost obsolete garments are only a symbol of the dignity of their art and of the ritual solemnity of the event.

Perhaps the dress is a survival from the private concerts given at court that preceded by centuries the institution of the public concert. Even when the public concert was well established and had become the economic pillar of the music business, a great part of 19th-century music making was still done in fashionable private houses on occasions when formal dress was required. By that time, musicians were marked off from the servant class, but they were still expected to pay for their dinners by performing afterward. Moriz Rosenthal told me that Ferruccio Busoni intensely disliked to be asked to play after dinner. Once, at a banquet, the hostess insisted, and he sat down at the keyboard and performed the last five sonatas of Beethoven without pausing. I asked Rosenthal how Busoni had played, and he replied evasively, "It had been a very heavy dinner." (That was certainly a way for Busoni to affirm the grandeur of his art while subtly admonishing and even punishing the importunate hostess.)

The trend toward less formal wear for piano recitals parallels the movement in present-day churches to hold services in the vernacular in place of an obsolete and unintelligible tongue, or to modernise the language of the prayers, democratically bringing the clergy closer to the laity. Several decades ago some pianists began to abandon white tie and tails, opting either for clothes that looked slightly priestly or for the kind of business suit traditionally worn for job interviews. It was not only that white tie and tails are awkward and slightly constraining (the most reasonable and comfortable costume for a piano recital would obviously be tennis clothes), they were also seen to be pretentious and, above all, to separate too sharply the pianist from the public.

The attempt to diminish the separation is also contemporary with the movement in the theatre of avant-garde directors to override the separation between the actors and the spectators. The remoteness of the stage spectacle, the church service, and the concert was seen as a handicap: there was a growing feeling that the priest, the actor, and the musician should be one of us. The concert has, of course, something of both the theatrical action and the religious ritual. Some musicians try to combine both facets. Once, in the green room after a concert, I heard Leonard Bernstein say earnestly to a nun, "I am not a musician, I am really a rabbi."

The separation of artist and performer imposed by the format of the public concert made manifest an aspect of Western art music that had remained partially hidden until the public concert became the standard medium for presenting a work of music: that aspect is the independence of the work of music

from its social context. This may be something of a fiction but it has been part of the established mythology of art since the 18th century and even before. The public does not actively participate in the performance of a Beethoven sonata; it does not sing along, nor interrupt with praise or disapproval. It should remain silent and shut off the portable phones, must try not to cough, and ought to avoid rustling the programs or the wrappings of cough drops.

Insisting that the audience be unobtrusive is not a modern development. Already before the institution of the public concert had arrived at its full dominance, artists like the young Mozart playing at court were insolently demanding complete silence from the listeners. As in a dramatic spectacle, the audience breathes silently in the darkness while the performer is bathed in light. During the actual playing, the performer does not betray an awareness of the audience: to do so has the slightly scandalous effect of a breach of decorum (this can be forgiven when it is done ironically). Only when the piece is over may the public manifest its existence and express a collective and noisy opinion. The performer has a name and a personality. The public is anonymous.

For whom does one play? To whom is the performance addressed? These questions are odd because they do not seem at first sight to call forth a useful answer. They are worth asking, however, because they raise a more interesting one: to what extent is the performer aware of the public during the actual playing? This latter question is more pertinent to the pianist than to any other musician. Unlike the string player or the singer, the pianist does not face the listeners while playing; the public exists only in the margins of his sight. Nevertheless, even for the violinist or the soprano, the contrast of the spotlight stage and the lowered lights in the hall make the audience largely an anonymous blur.

This is not merely a fortuitous aspect of the staging but a characteristic of the public concert difficult to eradicate even when the lights in the hall are raised and the performer chats casually with the public. (A number of concert societies ask the artists to talk in a friendly fashion with the public before a group of pieces in the hope of reducing the awesome formality of the occasion.) We can explain the anonymity of the listener most clearly by examining the radical difference between a concert and a lecture. In a lecture, you not only face the listeners, but you are subtly aware of their reactions: are you speaking too rapidly? Is the idea you have just presented too complex or subtle and should one repeat it? If you lecture on the same subject for a group of high school students or for a small audience of experts, you will naturally change not only the speed of delivery but the way you make your points.

In a piano recital, on the contrary, the nature of the audience will not — or at any rate, should not — change the way you play the "Appassionata," a Debussy prelude, or a Stockhausen Klavierstück. During the actual playing, the performer's sense of the listeners is largely suppressed — except, of course, when they misbehave. We may play different programs for an audience of children and for adults, but we will play a Beethoven sonata for the young exactly as we would play it for the more mature. It would certainly be a breach of artistic integrity to interpret the work one way for an audience of musicologists and another for a lay public.

The decision how to play a work is not only theoretically free, but it ought ideally to escape both commercial or intellectual pressures. This is perhaps what is most pernicious about the piano competition: there is almost no way that a competitor can avoid discounting his or her instincts by trying to play a work in the manner most likely to appeal to the jury — that is why so many competition executions are so well-behaved, sedate, and sedative.

It might seem that the answer to the question "for whom does one play?" is: one plays for oneself. This is misleading. If one plays for oneself, it is unnecessary to do so in public. There are, in fact, three kinds of performance: for oneself, for one or more friends, and for a public. The experience of each is different and individual. Performance for oneself is probative, experimental; playing alone, we are less

aware of the passage of time. Playing for friends is framed by conversation; it is part of the occasion, determined by the degree of conviviality, and the music is chosen very often on the spur of the moment to fit the character and the tastes of the listeners. Playing in public not only isolates the pianist: it isolates and objectifies the work of music, and it turns the performance into an object as well. A public performance is irrevocable. In private, one can experiment as one plays, and for friends, one can try the piece again with a different approach. A public performance cannot be withdrawn; it has become an object to be judged.

IT IS FOR this reason that the performance in public seems like the natural goal of the aesthetic philosophy that has dominated Western art and music since the 18th century. A work of art is supposed to have a value independent of its social function and even of its role in the artist's biography, and the public concert is at once a metaphor for this independence and its demonstration in the economy of modern life. This independence may be to some extent a fiction, but it is indispensable to our idea of artistic creation. The work of music may be the expression of an individual sensibility, and we may say the same of a performance: but once published, once played, they have become public property. That is why we can maintain that a composer does not always know how best to interpret his own work. His knowledge of the piece may be more intimate at first, but he cannot control future performances, and his opinion of how to play it may be interesting but is not absolutely privileged. We may say that the performer ought to realise the composer's intentions, but we must also admit that very often the composer, the poet, or the visual artist does not fully understand his own intentions — at least, this is a doctrine of artistic composition that is as old as Plato.

For the modern sensibility, the public performance is the final realisation of the work of music. In spite of the rich tradition of private and semiprivate music making in the centuries before our own, it is with the presentation in public that the performance of a work comes completely into its own, attains its full existence. We must rephrase the question "for whom does one play in public?": the odd aesthetic objectivity, real or mythical, demands the form "for what does one play?" One plays for the music.

This may appear a pretentious answer, rather like the grand response of Doctor Knock to the reproaches of a colleague in the play *Knock* by Jules Romain. Taking over the unprofitable medical practice in a small town, Knock, something of an ambitious charlatan, manages to convince almost the entire population that they are ill and need medical attention, leaving only enough provisionally and temporarily healthy inhabitants to take care of the sick. In the window of each invalid's home is a night light, and the illumination after dark is beautifully impressive. The former holder of the practice asks Knock, "Are you not placing the interest of the doctor above that of the patient?" "There is an interest higher than both," replies Knock. "The interest of medicine."

Nevertheless, we need to explain why a love of music, which might seem to be realised very satisfactorily in private, will induce pianists to submit to the uncomfortable travels, the depressing hotels, the bemusing receptions, the terror and nausea of stage fright, and the ever-recurring necessity of persuading the piano technicians to put the mechanism of each instrument into a more perfect state. We go through all this because each performance offers a chance to bring a work of music into something approaching its ideal objective existence. With an ambition that only seems more humble than the ambition of the composer, the pianist wishes to create a musical object. It would be wrong, of course, to believe that a work exists only when it is played. A work has two forms of being: as a conception and as a realisation, and the realisation is only apparently more solid than the conception. Between the public realisation and the private, however, it is the public performance that is the more objective, no matter how much of the subjective feeling of the performer goes into it, no matter how spontaneous it seems or is. In one important sense, the public realisation is impersonal — that is, it does not matter who listens to it.

The success of a public performance does not depend on the nature of the public. In private the approval of the connoisseur may have more weight than that of the layman; in public, the ignorant music lover is equal to the expert. A performance that does not please both professionals and laymen is incomplete and has at least partially failed: the best interpretation convinces everyone, even those to whose taste it may be antipathetic. Compelling the unwilling admiration of those musicians and amateurs who have a different perception of the work or style is the greatest triumph. It is true that we may measure the success of a concert by quantity, by the number of people who buy tickets, and that would be an objective economic criterion. For an objective aesthetic criterion, however, one that transcends even individual taste, we need something more cogent. The success may properly be determined by the intensity of the attention of the listeners. In winter months, any performance of a long work in a concert hall unaccompanied by coughs from the audience must be accorded its due share of admiration. All pianists want applause, but quiet attention is the true tribute.

A cough is the basic sign of inattention. (As far as I know, only in the work of John Cage are incidental noises from the audience woven into the texture of the music.) Musicians never, in my experience, cough when playing in public. Nor do they sneeze, but that may have a different explanation. Stage fright sends a good dose of adrenaline coursing through the veins, and adrenaline is a well-known remedy against nasal congestion. A good, but unfortunately very temporary, cure for hay fever is to play a recital. One might say that stage fright both hampers and helps performance: the fear makes one lose some control, but the adrenaline sends a jolt of energy into the system.

Every musician, I should imagine, has friends, well-meaning or otherwise, who have a genius for increasing stage fright just before a concert. "If you miss the opening jump in the first bar of the 'Hammerklavier,'" one such asked me, "are you going to repeat the exposition?" (This friend later became a music critic on an important paper.) Sir William Glock was more forthright about the same place: "If you use two hands for the jump," he said to me, "I shall walk out immediately and I shall be sitting in the first row." Best of all was the concertmaster of the orchestra who picked me up at the hotel to take me to play the second concerto of Beethoven: "What I can never understand about soloists," he said, "is how you can remember so many works." Predictably terrified after that, I was convinced throughout that I would forget and come to a dead halt, but got through the piece relatively safely, leaving out only two bars of the left hand in one passage.

HOW TO CONGRATULATE the pianist after a concert is also a specialised technique. Milton Babbitt had developed a large repertoire of the subtly noncommittal; a good sample was "You did it again!" The compliment offered to me by another pianist that perhaps gave me the greatest pleasure was one given after a concert in Paris; "Congratulations on your great success in New York!" (a recital that had been written up with two columns and a picture in Time magazine). The greatest formula of all had been developed by Nadia Boulanger [the great teacher of composition], who, I am told, would come backstage, hold your right hand in both of hers, look you straight in the eye, and say, "You know what I think!" (Vous savez ce que je pense!)

I must admit an important exception to my claim that an audience does not properly influence an interpretation — but it is simply the presence of an audience, not its character, that comes into play here, and it relates to the essential structure of a piece. We may find in some works a passage that gives a momentary but false impression of coming to an end. This is dangerous, because the listeners prepare themselves for the release of an ending, and become slightly puzzled when the music continues without pause. Such a place, for example, can be found just before the coda of the Adagio of the "Hammerklavier," where three beautifully simple dominant/tonic cadences in the tonic F-sharp major close the recapitulation of the final theme before the harmony moves swiftly and surprisingly through B minor to G major. I have heard fine executions of this movement briefly marred by the restlessness of the audience at this point, with some embarrassed coughs and uneasy shifting about in the seats. As a

matter of principle, I am opposed to expressive gestures made by the pianist for visual effect, but I confess that at such a place it may be advantageous to avoid not only what might seem like a natural *ritardando* but any physical attitude that gives the impression that the performer is relaxing into a final cadence. Even more crucial to a public performance is sustaining the tension rhythmically during a pregnant silence in order to keep the audience from coughing at a dramatic point. One impatient member of the public is enough to spoil a quiet moment. In both these cases, what is necessary is not to fall into any attitude or to make any gesture that suggests that the music comes to a close. I did not always understand this, but I learned it from performing Beethoven's G Major Concerto with Stanislaw Skrowaczewski. In this work, the soloist plays the first phrase quietly, and the orchestra enters after a brief rest of two-and-a-half beats. Skrowaczewski asked me not to remove my hands from the keyboard during the short pause and to let them rest silently on the ivories; he found it disturbing when the soloist appears to have finished with the work for a while (which is, however, indeed the case), and I think he was right. The pianist should still imply, even for those who know the music, that the surprising solo entry might continue. This is certainly a part of staging the work for the public. Similarly, it is not effective if the pianist visually anticipates a surprise entrance by hovering nervously over the keys before the moment to start playing finally arrives. Once again, it is simply a question of what we might call negative stagecraft, the avoidance of anything visual or aural that gives the dramatic game away.

It is not only by coughing and rattling programs that the audience can be a distraction. Following the score during a performance is perfectly legitimate, and I do not at all mind that some amateurs or students think it worthwhile to keep tabs on my interpretation. It is when they do this in the centre of the first row that attracts my attention, so that I am aware of each page turn. This bothers me only because they rarely have the same edition that I have used, and when the page turn occurs in an unaccustomed place, I momentarily lose concentration, wondering if I have made a slip of memory or speculating on which edition they can be looking at. I have on two occasions stopped a performance between the movements to ask a front-row page turner to look for a more distant seat. I give all these details to make the simple point that the less one is aware of the audience, the greater the chance of a deep immersion in the music that results in a more satisfactory performance.

In return, it seems to me that the pianist ought not to distract the audience from the music. There are many pianists who cannot bear the thought that no one is paying any attention to them during the initial orchestral *ritornello* of a classical concerto. (They are like the opera directors unable to countenance the tradition of playing the overture with the curtain down; they want the public to be aware of their importance from the outset. And until I saw the revival of the original Nijinsky choreography of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, I never realised that the extraordinary opening minutes that represent the coming of the Russian spring were meant to be heard as a prelude in the dark, and was astonished at how much more effective this was than either a concert performance or the stagings of all the later choreographers who raise the curtain before the music begins.)

The standard ways the pianist makes the public aware of his or her presence during the introductory orchestral section are raising and lowering the piano seat or fiddling with a handkerchief — the latter method is generally a feminine wile, but Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli had a black handkerchief that he placed in the piano at the opening of a concert and could employ to good purpose. Wiping one's brow after a strenuous passage is inoffensive, but discreetly beating time behind the conductor's back is considered ill-mannered: this is more often a failing of solo violinists than of pianists.

It is true that elaborate gestures while performing not only impress the audience with a sense of drama but also serve to release some of the tension in the pianist, and may act in much the same way as the grunting of tennis players with each stroke (this seems to have been getting louder in recent years). Some pianists and conductors have found it inspiring to sing along with the playing, as if this acted as a

guide to their inspiration. Nevertheless, the wild gestures and gyrations can also interfere with technical efficiency. This was particularly true of Rudolf Serkin, a pianist whom I admired perhaps above all others when I was 16 and for some years afterward. I once heard Serkin play Beethoven's Sonata in A Major, Op. 101, a work for which he had a special affinity. On this occasion, he threw his hands violently high into the air at the fortissimo in bar 52 of the march-like scherzo, marked *lebhaft* and *marchmassig*, with the result that he hit a formidably disturbing wrong note. This section of the scherzo is repeated at once, and Serkin went through the same acrobatic display, hitting a wrong note once again. After a lyrical trio section, the entire march returns: this time Serkin placed his hands carefully and solidly on the right notes, and they stayed momentarily in place on the keyboard. In spite of my great admiration, I inevitably felt a certain *Schadenfreude*.

EVEN IF THE NATURE of the public ideally should not affect the interpretation, which ought to remain personal and individual, every pianist wishes for the approval that is traditionally manifested by applause. Curiously, the amount and enthusiasm of the applause depend less on the actual performance than on the local traditions and customs of the town in which one is playing. In some cities, the audience loves to applaud: Stuttgart is one such place. At a recital there, I had to play six encores, and the only way to put a stop to the applause was to have the chair before the piano removed. I was naturally pleased, but the next day I was disconcerted to hear a truly awful performance greeted with similar enthusiasm. Professional musicians and connoisseurs tend to forget that even music badly played can sound beautiful and give pleasure.

For some reason, afternoon concerts on weekdays stimulate less excitement than evening affairs. That used to be the case with the Friday afternoon concerts of the New York Philharmonic, which were almost always coolly received. Recitals at the Royal Society in Dublin were traditionally played twice on the same day; the evening audience was cordial while the afternoon concert was attended largely by elderly ladies who applauded politely while wearing mittens. Traditions of applause change from culture to culture. Germans never applaud between the movements of a sonata, or before the end of an act at the opera. Italians traditionally manifested their immediate approval even during the singing, although more recent audiences have been infected by the international preference for silence.

I have been told of a performance of *Aida* some years ago at the Baths of Caracalla in Rome before a public of 10,000. After the first aria, "Celeste Aida," 9,997 people broke into applause, and three German tourists indignantly hissed "Shhh." The attempt to make classical music more awesome by demanding a greater amount of dignified silence has resulted in audiences today being unsure where to applaud. Often there is no applause or only a timid acknowledgment between several unrelated pieces, as if they were the movements of a sonata. I have even heard that in one town in Switzerland, the conductor had to turn around at the end of a Beethoven symphony and tell the still politely silent public that the work was over.

Applause may be always welcome (except, of course, when it occurs at a virtuoso gesture in the middle of a work at an unresolved and dissonant climax), but it is not always appropriate. Moriz Rosenthal maintained that the custom of applauding only at the end of Schumann's *Phantasie* in C Major, Op. 17 was misguided. There should be enthusiastic applause after the famous technical display at the end of the second movement, he felt, but the end of the slow movement finale should be received in a meditative silence. The most appreciative audience will indeed leave several moments of reflection after this finale. When this happens, I do not know whether to ascribe the respectful silence to the quality of the playing or to the tact and culture of the local public.

We tend to think of all performance today in terms of the public concert; even on records we attempt to suggest the sonority of the concert hall. Gradually over history the recital program developed into a special genre like an individual work of music. Eighteenth-century concert programs were always

somewhat slapdash: there was no such thing as a piano recital until much later when it was invented by Liszt in the 1830s. The programs almost always mixed several kinds of music: symphony, concerto, aria, and solo pieces. Not even the integrity of the single work was respected; arias or solo pieces could be interpolated between the movements of a concerto or a symphony. In the mid-19th century, the program of a piano recital was usually a potpourri. It was not thought that the public had much taste for sustained listening to a long work.

Even in lieder recitals, a long cycle like Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben* or Schubert's *Dichterliebe* was almost always broken into two or more parts with some solo piano pieces in the middle to ease the strain. Pianists like Hans von Bülow gave a new seriousness to the recital, and either began or enforced the tradition of not pausing between the movements of a Beethoven sonata (Bülow was even reported to have locked the doors to prevent the public from leaving when he conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony). I believe, however, that it was in the 20th century that program-building became an art, so that the whole recital was constructed like a symphony, with air introduction, an earnest and massive central piece before the intermission, a few smaller works that provided a light contrast, and a brilliant finale.

It is true, as I have said, that the nature of the audience will to some extent determine the choice of works — that is, one does not play Bach for an audience that expects to hear Chopin, or Mozart for a society that wants Boulez. Nevertheless, once the nature of the program is set, the public is considered only in an abstract way. The question then becomes only what is the most effective order, and this is answered in much the same way for every type of audience.

We rarely start with the longest work on the program, because there may be some latecomers who will not like to be kept waiting behind the closed doors of the hall for a half hour or more. In my experience, it is not wise to put the work most difficult for an audience to comprehend too early in the evening, because it takes some time for the listeners to settle down to sustained listening. On the other hand, too late in the evening their attention may have been frayed. Some exceptionally monumental works present a problem: the 55 minutes of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* are too long for the first half — listeners will not be ready for so demanding an experience, and it must, I think, be placed at the end; this work should, however, be preceded on the first half of the program by something solidly sustained, as a series of short pieces followed by a theme and 33 short variations make a fragmentary impression that is fatiguing. As for the contemporary repertory, in towns that ask for a difficult modern work it is advisable to place this just before the intermission: those who like difficult music will be properly warmed up and receptive, and those who have little taste for it will be happy to have easier fare on the second half of the concert. In this case, the tradition of playing all the music arranged chronologically, which flourished in my childhood, is not helpful: after all, there is no reason for a recital program to retrace the history of music.

I do not much appreciate didactically ordered programs that attempt to demonstrate a thesis (although I have yielded several times to the temptation of placing Elliott Carter's *Night Fantasies* at the end of the first half of a recital and then beginning the second part with Schumann's *Davidstanz*, Op. 6, which Carter used as a model, but the contrast of these two works is as remarkable as the affinity, and the combination is musically effective). Some pianists are careful about juxtaposing certain tonalities on the program in the belief that some relationships are less welcome than others. I have qualms about following a work in E-flat major by one in D major, for example, as the second one will sound at first not only less brilliant but also a little flat. I have been told that Wilhelm Backhaus used to play a program all in C-sharp minor. I think I would have found that irritatingly monotonous. Since there are few works for the piano in C-sharp minor, it is easy to reconstruct that program even by guesswork: two preludes and fugues from *The Well-Tempered Klavier*, the "Moonlight" Sonata, Schumann's *Etudes Symphoniques*, a Chopin waltz and a nocturne along with a few mazurkas and the third scherzo,

and finally a famous Rachmaninoff prelude for an encore (beyond a Haydn sonata and a Brahms intermezzo, there is not much choice left).

Playing in public is not the most nerve-wracking form of performance: playing for one or two friends who are musicians can be even more frightening. I have always marveled at Leopold Godowsky, who was reputed to perform magnificently in private and was greatly admired by other pianists, but was unable to play his best in the concert hall. Nevertheless, playing in public is a special experience, different in kind from any other sort of performance, and it requires getting used to. Acoustics are different, and the ritual of starting a work resembles nothing else. An opening phrase that is not really technically difficult but only a little awkward (like the first five notes of Chopin's Sonata No. 3 in B Minor) can induce an irrational sensation of terror. The first recital of a season after an absence from the stage of a month or two is always particularly uncomfortable. Most difficult is the first performance in public of a piece new to one's repertoire.

These difficulties have been magnified by the decline of concerts in small towns. Before one played a new piece in London, Berlin, or New York, it used to be possible to try out the program for a small audience. (Composers, of course, prefer that a premiere of their work be held in an important city with proper press coverage.) It is not, as one might think, easier to play in a small town than in a large capital, and the stage-fright that is magnified by playing a new work is more or less the same wherever the recital takes place. But confidence increases naturally with successive performances. The concert series that used to be held in hundreds of small communities is dying out. It is not that the public for them is diminishing, but it has not grown as rapidly as the public for rock concerts, and does not attract investment. Above all, the expenses of travel and publicity have mounted almost catastrophically. Only in large cities is the public concert still a normal constituent of social life.

What makes a concert successful? On the whole, the more famous the pianist the greater the pleasure of the public. This is only fair. In general, the reputation of the finest pianists is well merited. The paradox that needs at least brief explanation is why a mediocre or poor performance by a fine pianist on an off day will receive as much applause as, will be a triumph equal to, the most perfect executions.

WE HEAR for the most part what we expect to hear. This is not as cynical as it may sound. A good deal of the sense and power of a work comes through in an inadequate performance, and even seasoned critics will imagine they have heard what they believed they were going to hear. Several critics of Toscanini, for example, still think that most of his tempi were very fast, although his Wagner was abnormally slow (his Parsifal at Bayreuth was the slowest in the history of that house, astonishingly one hour slower than the fastest performance, which was directed by Richard Strauss); his Verdi was generally slower than that of many other conductors, and so was his Brahms, except for the first symphony. When his recording of the four Brahms symphonies was issued at the same time as a set of Bruno Walter's, most critics claimed that Toscanini's tempi were faster than Walter's, although this was quite clearly not the case: his initial tempi were often slower, but they were very steady and, as many musicians know, this can give an illusion of forward movement.

It may seem unjust that a mediocre interpretation by a famous pianist can give as much pleasure as a fine performance by an unknown one, but, as I have said, what makes for success is the intensity of listening, the heightened attention awakened in the public. This attention is accorded in advance to a great reputation; the listeners know that they will be dazzled and moved even before the artist walks out of the wings. They come disposed to admire. It should be admitted that some of the quality of a fine player is detectable in the performance on a bad day, but, more important, the greatness of the music, if it is in a familiar style, will pierce even the fog of an incompetent performance. This is as it should be. We must grant pianists the same tolerance as politicians. The authority of office will confer a touch of sense to the language of the most incompetent president or governor, an air of wisdom to the

commonplaces of the most intellectually inadequate.

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