

# *The New* REPUBLIC

ONLINE MUSIC | "Masterclasses for the Masses"

by Adam Baer

Only at [TNR Online](#) | Post date 11.02.00

Say the word "masterclass" to a rising performer and be prepared to watch him cringe. Since the advent of the one-on-one instrumental lesson, the masterclass--a personal coaching session in front of a live audience--has incited fear in beginning and experienced musicians alike. Its purpose is to simulate live-concert conditions for students, and to allow others to benefit vicariously from a teacher's critique. It works very well, generally. But to play in one can trigger terrific anxiety: it's like submitting to a CAT-scan of your soul and then--no matter how serious the findings--broadcasting the diagnosis.

In the past, masterclasses were held behind closed doors, which meant that embarrassments were mercifully limited to a small audience, composed mostly of peers. These days, however, things are different. Celebrated violinist Pinchas Zukerman--a performer-teacher in the spirit of the late virtuosic deity Jascha Heifetz--is spearheading the resurgence of masterclasses by increasing their scope. Zukerman's three most recent masterclasses, held in cooperation with Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra, were webcast free to the public in an interactive distance-learning effort. With Zukerman on one continent, his students on another, and the audience potentially everywhere, the experiment became something more consequential than an open conservatory lesson. Something slightly scarier, as well.

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"Do it. Do it! DO it!" Zukerman sounds stern, but not quite angry. He is seated in a room in Hannover, Germany, his shiny Guarnerius on his lap, his gaze fixed on a monitor in front of him. Courtesy of broadband technology, Zukerman is addressing a student in Canada--who is also glued to a monitor--on his playing of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. "Energy, energy, energy. Ennergeeee..." The student's posture stiffens. He hunches his shoulders nervously and--as fast as he can without dropping his violin--tries to follow Zukerman's instructions: Take more time on this measure, slow the bow speed, build the crescendo gradually, relax.

Is the student considering who might be watching him? I wonder. Until recently, concert violin-playing was one of the few professional pursuits that hadn't been affected by the Internet. For hundreds of years, high-level violin pedagogy remained a well-kept secret, its magical methods under the lock and key of old-school, ivory-tower instructors. The majority of great soloists--from Joseph Joachim, the violinist to whom Brahms' Violin Concerto was dedicated, to Sarah Chang, Juilliard's prodigy-diva of the 1990's-- have been privately escorted through elite channels from early childhood. They've acquired extraordinary skills, inhumanly stretched tendons, and

digits stained black from the ebony of the fingerboard. They've withstood vast amounts of criticism and perpetual tests. And they've done it all, chiefly, in a vacuum.

Aside from pedagogical implications, the specifics of how these interactive lessons occur are intriguing. Called "video-mediated communications" to facilitate "collaborative learning" by its organizers, the operation utilizes broadband "fat pipes" to connect people at different sites through streaming video. Three Zukerman masterclasses have been webcast, each lasting about an hour. In two of them, he divided the time into a series of lessons with different students--some in the same room with him, some, like the student in Canada, half a world away. (The third webcast was more of an intercontinental question-and-answer session than a teaching encounter.) Visitors to the website can see and hear it all, but they cannot contact the participants or take part in the musicmaking. For spreading the news on how to tackle a piece of music, this use of technology is in many ways a first. "We are much more a global village in music presentation," Zukerman says.

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The webcast of Zukerman's masterclass in Cologne, Germany, is the most conventional of the three: both student and teacher interact with one another in person on the same stage. The first student--a college-aged young woman with a sunny disposition--presents Beethoven's "Fourth Sonata for Violin and Piano," a stormy piece from the composer's middle period. Finishing the first movement's exposition, Zukerman stops her. There is plenty to work on. While she plays cleanly, the violinist seems (understandably) self-conscious and therefore not involved deeply enough in the music. Zukerman attacks her skills and sense of Beethovenian spirit. His cure for her tame interpretation relies both on technique and temperament--that is, on a natural method of using the arm as an economical lever and on an intuitive musicality. Zukerman works on her musical problems with mechanical means and with his grasp on Beethoven's inherent anxiety. "Sounding point," Zukerman proclaims into the air as if the two words conjoin to produce a profound sentence. The term refers to the place at which the hair of the bow meets the string and at what angle--and with what amount of pressure--it strikes. "The bow is your bank account," he continues. "If it sounds good, they're going to hire you to play, which means you're going to make more money."

Zukerman follows with a discussion of how to draw the most intense sound possible from the instrument's strings in a "piano" or "forte" dynamic marking: apply and discharge pressure with the right hand's index finger to negotiate the sound quality and articulation. "Power doesn't come from pressure; power comes from release," he says. Zukerman's ideas are based on his late teacher's, the maverick pedagogue Ivan Galamian (1903-1981). They stem from these maxims: soft playing should never neglect a core sound; one should use vibrato (shaking the hand to make the notes oscillate and, in turn, sing) at all times unless instructed otherwise by the score; and one should always let each string on the violin dictate the level of the right arm when crossing them in the music. This efficient system is why Zukerman--and a good number of Galamian disciples--can produce an enormous range of effects. The fact that few can produce half as much excitement, or half as many soul-stirring phrases, as Zukerman, doesn't hurt either. On stage, the student stands humbled by Zukerman's suggestions and practical wizardry. At home, watching through a RealPlayer SureStream--my violin in my hand--I do too.

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Zukerman's masterclass from Paris differs from the Cologne and Hannover sessions in that students linking from France's Lycée Jules Verne and from Ottawa's Lycée Paul Claudel could work not only with Zukerman but also with each other. This class is less traditional: no one plays. Students from Canada and France only ask the maestro and National Arts Centre Orchestra members questions. A student in Ottawa asks, "Do you ever suffer any nervousness, and assuming you don't, is this the result of playing so many concerts you aren't nervous any longer?" Zukerman laughs. "Adrenaline flows, you feel in control but are always apprehensive because, whenever you go on stage, you are always vulnerable," he replies. "And the minute vulnerability leaves, I close the [violin] case. That's it."

Though interactive masterclasses are helpful, entertaining, and certainly out of the ordinary, their mere occurrence is not the vital issue; the fact that they're being archived for on-demand access is. For violinists who aren't in conservatories, the only readily available masterclasses are taped recordings of Jascha Heifetz's classes at the University of California in the 1950s (there's also an obscure set of Galamian lessons from the 1970s). Filmed in black and white, and brimming with budding virtuosos--one of whom, Erick Freidman, would become Heifetz's most famous protégé--these classes open a window to a world that very few could ever see: an authoritative, order-driven realm where Heifetz runs the show and no one dissents, where Brahms's harmonic rhythm is expertly parsed, and the tension is thicker than a Wagnerian chord. Yet these classes serve more as a socio-historical document of virtuosity and its harsh training grounds than as an instructive tool. The students radiate with fear whether they're performing or watching; it's an exercise in adhering to a strict regime, in mimicking a very affected interpretive style, and in not having your own say.

Fortunately for us, while Heifetz is at least as authoritative and masterful as Zukerman, Zukerman's classes are superior because he is more concerned with teaching students how they can harness an instrument's power. I, for one, hope Zukerman plans more of these events, and that the audience for them (currently 1,600 visits a day) grows. At around two hundred dollars an hour for a top-tier lesson, I imagine other violinists will keep their tired fingers crossed too.

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ONLINE MUSIC | "Open All Night"

by Adam Baer

Only at [TNR Online](#) | Post date 04.09.01

A few weeks ago, in a wood-paneled chamber of the New York Public Library, the city's largest public collection of tangible information, the forward-thinking French composer-conductor Pierre Boulez spoke to a select group of wine-sipping socialites and arts administrators about a new classical music website, [andante.com](#).

"Everybody is aware that if you want to keep an audience coming, and [interest] a younger audience, and renew your audience, you have to really give some thought to the environment of a concert," said Boulez, who sits on [andante.com](#)'s advisory board. "Orchestras are like restaurants: they open at eight and they close at eleven--before you cannot, and after, you cannot. And that is not very attractive, let's say, because you are dependent on the cook all the time."

Boulez was getting at the idea that classical music needs to do more to engage with the world, instead of watching from an elitist sideline. "You know, during the war, Schoenberg was in the army," Boulez added. "And, once, he saw a captain or something like that. And the captain asked: 'Oh, you are Schoenberg?' And Schoenberg answered: 'Somebody has to be Schoenberg.' And so, I say, why does andante exist? Because it has to exist. Simply that."

Boulez, having served as the cook himself most of his life, had a point, no matter how grandly put. Why not offer music and music-related information for the public to access whenever they want. Hence, andante.com: a website that presents classical music and hosts of ways to learn more about it on demand.

But, from the looks of it, andante.com won't exactly be a palatable (or entirely free) resource like the building in which it premiered and the description Boulez offered. It is a content-rich, virtual ivory tower, designed by and geared toward aficionados who desire in-depth, genre-specific information and who agree that it will be worth something in addition to what they already pay their ISP to access everything the website has to offer. The site includes exclusive webcasts; curriculum-development tools; insider criticism from Fanfare, International Record Review, and andante staffers; academic-minded essays from the Grove Dictionary, archived music pieces from The New York Review of Books, excerpts from the tomes of Michael Steinberg, music's liveliest annotator; all to buttress the world's classical-music knowledge and, surprise!, to sell CDs. Beginning in September, the site will institute a subscription model not unlike that of cable television: andante users will have to pay to access parts of the site, including the webcasts themselves, it seems.

Andante is one of a new breed of Internet animals. Like Global Music Network (which is a free Web resource), it is a record label as well as a website, and, as such, an experiment in e-commerce. Andante aims to become what the marketers call a "brand": a company explicitly named for quick identification that functions on a multitude of platforms which fuel one another. But charging people admission doesn't quite jibe with Boulez's populist mission statement--it will limit the size of his Web audience, and may even represent an impediment to generating interest in a subject matter that is, at present, doing no more than grazing the interests of most global citizens.

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Logistical and commercial issues aside, andante.com's first webcast is a diamond in the virtual rough: a concert from Linz's Brucknerhaus of Pierre Boulez leading the Vienna Philharmonic through Wagner's "Prelude and Liebestod" from Tristan and Isolde, and Bruckner's bear of a Ninth Symphony. It is far from rare to hear such music on today's concert stages, but it is almost unheard of on the Internet. Can such difficult music work online? And does Pierre Boulez pull it off?

Wagner is difficult music for obvious reasons. It is thick. It is longwinded. And it is harmonically complex in its form of chromaticism (its chords ascend in half-steps, blurring any sense of tonic), an approach that turns the ideas of traditional tonality on their heads. When people conjure images of "The Opera," envisaging homely, pigtailed Teutonic women wearing Viking caps, they are thinking of an archetype cemented by Wagner's Ring cycle. Taken in small doses, however, as it is offered on andante, Wagner's orchestration and moments of arrival are actually quite effective and beautiful.

Boulez's reading of these strictly instrumental Tristan excerpts is as lyrical and approachable as a late Wagnerian "music drama" can get. He unearths Wagner's humble sensitivity and exuberance in a work famous in the Western tradition for one conflicted chord that never quite returns home. Nevertheless, although the audio stream of this concert held together fairly well, the video stream was indecipherable on my narrowband 56k connection. Can such expansive, expressive music really work in this medium, at this point in its development? One hates to adopt the dot-com mentality that short, quick "bites" of content work best on the Internet. But Wagner's incredibly rich writing deserves an arena that will do it justice, one in which audiences can truly allow the music to envelop them. Unfortunately, it seems as if that the virtual pipes through which Net-music currently streams are simply too narrow to make even abridged Wagner pieces work.

The dilemma multiplies exponentially for Bruckner, who is about as close as the most famous nineteenth-century composers got (albeit superficially) to the principles of Gustav Mahler, the best expressionist composer in the canon. Bruckner, more difficult and less interesting than Mahler, was also prey to manic mood swings, and his is a disjointed music that demands the even keel and emotional patience of a pricey shrink. In this webcast, Boulez artfully articulates each of the piece's extremes--the bizarre games and egregious aches--but the music still misses coming from a PC's speakers.

Bruckner's Ninth Symphony is far more problematic than Wagner. Think more confused ideas, more elaboration, more philosophical rambling, more sound. It therefore becomes more of a challenge to ingest this music without having it wash over your eyes, ears, and neck, from a live orchestra. (I'd even question how well it works on CD.) Bruckner is music that demands to be seen as it is performed. But not even the clearest streaming video (like *andante's* on a broadband connection) can do justice to the richness of this sound-world. To truly get it--and I'm not sure that most would want to--you have to be in the same room as the performance.

Wagner and Bruckner are, of course, too vital to classical music to call this webcast an exercise in elitism. But without a T1 connection, this art just doesn't approach the realm of the digestible. The sad truth is that heavy, longwinded, Expressionist music just might not be Internet material right now; this is a limitation (or virtue, depending on your view) of the medium that classical webcasters like *andante* need to consider. If Boulez and the *andante* staff are serious about their populist mission, they might settle for clips, good commentary, lighter repertoire and hope to hook people that way. In the distribution of music, the medium is the message. And no matter how much this makes musicians cringe, the Internet's ability to broadcast, right now, stands for "less"--less weight, less size, less time, less confusion.

Clearly all concerts aren't fit to be encoded for online listening in what some say is still the Internet's infancy. In streaming this high-fat dish of a concert, Boulez doesn't seem to be offering classical music the help on the Web that it needs or accomplishing his stated goals. Certainly there are ways to maintain high standards of artistry while not pandering to a lay audience. (*Andante* does a decent job in this respect with its commentary, which sews together interesting, if heady, comparative writing that has appeared in print separately.) The *andante* team is right to argue that the classical music world needs to take seriously the challenge of finding new listeners and that it must do a better job of opening wide its doors to let them in. The trouble is, you could say the same thing about *andante*.

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## ONLINE MUSIC | "Make It New"

by Adam Baer

Only at [TNR Online](#) | Post date 05.25.01

Calling new work written for the concert hall "classical" is about as helpful to the plight of living composers as calling a car a Nova was twenty years ago to Chevrolet in Latin America. (Bisect "Nova" and the result, in Spanish, is "No va"--"No go"-- not a great tagline for a car.) "Classical music" is a term, its composers and promoters and performers are beginning to fear, that may drive away as many potential listeners as it draws. The term presumes two unfortunately popular misconceptions: that music called "classical" must depend entirely on its connection to the great (and thus, to some, hopelessly ancient) works of the Western tradition, and that listeners who want to enjoy new music should have extensive background knowledge of the canon.

This creates quite a dilemma for those inclined to write new concert music and attempt to make a living from it. But apart from breaking down the linguistic walls that isolate the music from so-called outsiders (who may in fact enjoy it as much or more than the typical "classical-music" listener) where can living American composers turn to get their music out? A website called [NewMusicBox.org](#) posits the Internet as its solution. From a concert by the Eastman School of Music's Musica Nova ensemble (here, it means "new") held on February 15, 2001, NewMusicBox has produced a customizable webcast (streamable through Quicktime players) that features a program made only of living American composers and that includes a few world premieres, one of which is courtesy of a student, to boot.

Jennifer Graham, a bubbly, brown-haired undergraduate, whose world-premiere "Eight Minutes" is featured on the webcast along with a warm, meet-the-composer interview, cites two pieces as her impetus to move from a childhood of rock-music influence to Eastman, a conservatory whose reputation is almost synonymous with the academic study of Western music theory and composition. The two pieces are Stravinsky's primeval romp, "The Rite of Spring," and Steve Reich's minimalist paean "Music for 18 Musicians." Is this surprising? Somewhat. That Reich's work can serve as an inspiration for someone to compose concert music these days is significant: Today, when most people hear this piece, an acoustic braid of repetitive electronic-sounding cells, they think they are listening to cutting-edge work. They're not. Reich recorded his work in 1978 and could be considered an elder statesman of living composers: That's how far new music is removed from people's minds. Music that sounds new to the concert-music newcomer (like Reich's) is now actually old enough to serve as a student's inspiration. We are no longer Modern in our musicmaking, no longer Postmodern, even.

Graham's "Eight Minutes," her first work written for large ensemble, shows promise, with strong ties to the pop and minimalist idioms. "Technically speaking, 'Eight Minutes' reflects my fascination with rhythm and pulse," she says, in her online interview. To Graham's credit, her piece weaves disparate layers of texture that work with one another via a give-and-take sort of action. There is particular merit in her use of the piano's tonality--her juxtaposition of glassy and urban sounds and some of her vibrant ostinati, lower-pitched patterns that loop underneath higher-pitched, expansive lines. The weakness of "Eight Minutes" is its melodies, which, though purposely sparing, are tedious: They don't seem to go anywhere and often land on a pitch that is, perhaps, a step or two away from the most satisfactory one.

Steven Stucky's "Nell'ombra, nella luce (1999-2000)," crisply performed by the Susie Kelly Quartet, a group whose attire is colorful enough to match that of a troupe of big-top clowns, is indicative of Stucky's fascination with what can be done with

stringed-instrument tricks and a controlled palette of tonal hues. "Nell'ombra, nella luce (1999-2000)" is unevenly segmented, making for an exciting intellectual experience, and pins brilliant colors against darker, personal ones. Stucky, Graham's professor at Eastman, head of the music department at Cornell, and New-music Advisor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, says that his interest lies in the sonic possibilities that exist between instruments, not in a traditional use of melody. He'd prefer, perhaps, to mix musical colors on his palette and splash them about the manuscript in a way that leaves the linear, narrative function of the melody by the side of the road. Stucky's work is raw art, not art motivated by narrative. What's more, it is convincing. Hearing Stucky's quartet, I don't miss melody. I am drawn to the colors, to the buzzing, insect-like ponticellos (achieved by bowing very close to the instrument's bridge). I wonder what this piece is about when I am done listening to it. It works.

Part of Stucky's appeal is the challenging nature of the work. Two pieces on the program make listeners work a little too hard, though: "x=x (in memoriam, Iannis Xenakis)," a world premiere by Musica Nova's conductor Brad Lubman, and the third movement of Peter Alexander's "Thranobulax," also a world premiere, commissioned by the Manhattan-based New Millennium Ensemble. Lubman's composition adopts Stravinsky-ian woodwind timbres and Xenakis' penchant for percussion, but it lacks a clear individual voice. The result is a stale piece that doesn't communicate the composer's sense of mourning. "Thranobulax," an atonal virtuosic rambling for small chamber ensemble, calls for as much work from its performers as it does from its listeners. It seems difficult for the sake of being difficult.

With Robert Morris's premiere work, "In Concert," it is possible to focus on the multitude of involved techniques that Morris utilizes to construct his music. But it isn't easy. His musical effects work so well together, I hear the piece as an organic whole, as a statement. Morris, who chairs Eastman's composition department and has served in a similar capacity at Yale, has run the gamut of musical expression in his career, from toying with non-Western musical elements to those produced by computers. According to Morris, "In Concert" throws four instrumental groups together, sort of an atonal experiment in how they can coexist. Alto flute and bass work in tandem against a somewhat disturbed-sounding piano, which stands alone. Strings converse dissonantly with woodwinds by means of musical phrases that stab experimentally at each other as if to see how the other will counter. The strength of "In Concert" is that it doesn't seem static in the way that similar experiments occurring on today's concert stages do. There is connectivity, a motion, between these abrupt clips of discourse as they come to a close with a high, flute whistle.

What's good about NewMusicBox is that it fuses concert music with jazz and seems even to be suggesting that new music is indeed its own genre, one that transcends the "classical" or "jazz" pigeonholes. Yes, the argument that new music is suffering isn't new. What is something new to consider, however, is the notion that perhaps new music is so "new" that, although it might alienate members of the classical-music audience, it could possibly speak to concert- or art-music newcomers. Sitting next to the Nutcracker on the CD store shelf certainly doesn't seem to be helping it. So perhaps it should sit elsewhere. Given the chance, good, new concert music speaks so powerfully it shatters the myth that you need to understand everything about Bach's Well Tempered Clavier to enjoy it. Perhaps new concert music is the place for listeners disgruntled with cotton-candy pop and a dying community of quality songwriters. Perhaps, one day, they may even stumble upon some in the front of a record store.

## ONLINE MUSIC | "He's Bach"

by Adam Baer

Only at [TNR Online](#) | Post date 08.28.00

Though you'd be hard-pressed to hear it above the melée of Napster, Internet radio, and MP3.com, it's possible for newbies and connoisseurs alike to find worthy (and legal) classical music online. A British website called Online Classics provides classical sound-hounds free, live, streaming webcasts, which remain online and available for future viewing. Like those at the comprehensive Global Music Network, these multimedia classical-concert experiences -- sponsored by artists and underwritten by corporations -- sidestep the copyright issues that plague other forms of performance on the Web.

Watching Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* live from the Vienna Staatsoper without leaving your bedroom takes some getting used to, but it's worth it. A trip to Austria via a broadband (or even a prehistoric 28.8) connection is an easy way to see concerts inaccessible to aficionados unable to hop on Lufthansa at the drop of a hat. Can it take the place of a first-tier box at Carnegie Hall? Well, no. But, quite honestly, what can?



My venture into this virtual concert space commenced with a series of performances - recorded and live -- that displayed a powerful ability to bring a global community together: an 18-hour webcast of concerts to mark the two hundred fiftieth anniversary of J.S. Bach's death, July 28. The performances took place mostly in Germany, where the yearlong celebration of this milestone culminated in a multitude of full-day church concerts, centered mainly in Leipzig, the city in which Bach died.

Bach, as almost anyone drawn to the arts knows, is the true cornerstone of modern music history; his exhaustive (and pedagogical) inventions in polyphony -- never mind his melodic genius -- have made it possible for everyone from Mozart to the Beatles to interpret sound as a language and to speak with it. Bach's music is the first substantive repertoire that child pianists of any nationality are usually assigned. Other musicians and composers, from Britney Spears to Leonard Bernstein, may be more accessible, but Bach's brilliance and the universality of his work make him much better suited for a global medium like the Internet.

Online Classic's Bach-day virtual menu began with the Chaconne from the Partita no. 2 in D Minor for solo violin, BWV 1004. The performer, a black-clad Viktoria Mullova - the virtuoso forever trailing the success and charm of the classically glam Anne-Sophie Mutter -- stood alone on stage with a fixed sense of purpose. The venue, Bach's own St. Nicholas Church, proved apropos as well: as Mullova pulled well-articulated chords from her instrument, the camera filmed her from what must have been the rafters, and the historically imposing architecture of the Baroque room melded with that of the piece. The Chaconne is the fifth and final of the partita's dance movements; based on a three-beat motif, it's underscored by a repeating bass line, which identifies it as a type of passacaglia, or variations on a bass theme. It's also a renegade in the violin repertoire, composed of knotty technical hurdles that make it difficult for many performers to pull off. But they didn't faze Mullova. With a delicately precise left-hand facility and a bow arm as artful as they come, she expressed lucid musical constructions of form and function: hidden lines sang, and harmonies rang clear. Yet despite her flawless technique, Mullova seemed disconnected from the emotional currents of the score. Her utilitarian approach

lacked a certain fire and gave one the sense that she was celebrating Bach more out of obligation than of love.

This passion was clearly not lacking in the devoted Keller Quartet's prerecorded performance of György Kurtág's contemporary sound essays interspersed with movements from Bach's Art of the Fugue. I found the unisonic chemistry the quartet's members displayed in the tender sections of Kurtág's essays even more gripping than the way they handled moments of stirring agitation. Bach's last -- and unfinished -- work, this collection of counterpoint studies was written without a definite instrumentation: the manuscript specifies the clef that each part should be played in, but not which instrument should be used to play it. That musical legroom is what convinces many that further manipulation -- breaking up the piece and lacing it with Kurtág's music, say -- is not a blasphemous act. As staid as he appears to us at times, it's worth remembering that Bach was essentially a flexible man.

The verve of the Keller Quartet notwithstanding, it is this flexibility that made the Kurtág-Bach marriage the most captivating part of the celebration. Kurtág is a living Hungarian composer known for fusing the mathematical trials of Webernian serialism (otherwise known as twelve-tone composition) and the folk-driven, exotic flavors of Bartók's modernist oeuvre. His profoundly fragmented works -- *Ligatura/Hommage à Bach*, *Twelve Microludes*, *Perpetuum Mobile*, and *Officium Breve in Memoriam Andreae Szervánszky* -- radiated in their juxtaposition with the Baroque master's harmonic treatise; the two composers actually appear more intriguing next to each other than alone. This is the purpose of Kurtág's postmodern departures. They toy with art of the past: high-register whispers stab low, guttural utterances; pitches bend with angular trajectories; vertical notes assault hushed tone clusters; atonal chords shift direction from line to texture. The result is an engaging image-in-sound of how Bach translates in one of music's busiest minds; when one hears Kurtág next to Bach, it's difficult to sense which of them is the rebellious Other.

Many performers opted for a more "respectful" approach. Some played in the Baroque style, using techniques and instruments from Bach's time. The Freiburg Baroque Orchestra -- a gifted band of standing, swaying period players -- donated all six Brandenburg concerti. Purist Anner Bylisma played the G major and D minor cello suites with fluid drama; and Ton Koopman, the academician known for drafting *Yo-Yo Ma* into his early-instrument brigade in a Sony Classical release, exercised the great Silbermann Organ in Cöthen's St. Marien Cathedral for the G Minor Fugue. The program even included a black-and-white video of lauded Fantasia conductor Leopold Stokowski dictating one of his overly Romantic arrangements of the Toccata in D Minor, the tune most often used to suggest the supernatural in Saturday-morning cartoons.



In all, the concerts were a mixed bag, well-deserving of the ticket price and therefore certainly worth the monthly rate of one's ISP. The problems, for now, are technical. The tiny screen of the Windows Media Player makes it difficult to concentrate sufficiently without a good pair of headphones and a deserted, dark room. Even if those hurdles are overcome, Net congestion makes pauses and delays an unfortunately frequent problem. Classical elitism aside, these minor problems loom even larger when they involve Bach. His art relies on interweaving musical lines -- an intricate braid of voices that require unfettered freedom to sing. Certain pop stars, such as the aforementioned Spears, do not rely so heavily on the continuity of their phrasing. Their acts use other hooks. Bach, thankfully, does not.

Despite Internet music's current shortcomings, it's a pleasure to see classical music burgeoning in this most accessible arena. One wonders what Bach, a man who supposedly traveled hundreds of miles on foot to hear his compositional heroes, might make of it all.

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ONLINE MUSIC | "Virtual Yo-Yo"

by Adam Baer

Only at [TNR Online](#) | Post date 09.25.00

For people who dream of a career in classical music, the path is pretty clear. You begin studying your instrument at an unspeakably early age with a pricey conservatory pedagogue. You try to master the solo repertoire, which you'll toil at for more than five hours every day. Then you enter a cutthroat international competition and, win or lose, hope that a jury of celebrated musicians will think you've got talent. If you're lucky, you'll be offered a grand metropolitan debut. If you're really lucky, that debut will go so well that the critics will like you and make presenters in other cities think you're enough of a draw to give you a chance to play there. If you're really, really lucky, this will happen a few times. And then you'll have the start of a career.

Though the Internet has changed the road to success in commerce (thanks to the phenomenon of the dot-com IPO), it's unlikely to have as far-reaching an impact on the path to a career in music. But the rise of Internet concert venues, such as Web Concert Hall and Global Music Network, may one day create some shortcuts. Concerts broadcast via streaming webcasts have exposure that is both broader and more lasting. If music-industry executives begin to pay more attention to online performance, we may see talented newcomers make names for themselves more quickly. The downside is that the number of critics in the audience is bound to grow as well. Combine the two, and an Internet concert becomes a very big deal for a young artist on the way up--like a Nasdaq IPO every night.

If there's one up-and-comer who's likely to benefit from the Net anytime soon, it's Edward Arron. The 23-year-old cellist is both prodigiously talented--having studied with renowned Juilliard teacher Harvey Shapiro and a slew of other classical masters--and fortunate enough to share the stage with no less than Yo-Yo Ma. Arron's June performance with Ma at the Caramoor International Music Festival (online September 25-October 5) is the latest offering at Global Music Network's smorgasbord of classical- and jazz-concert webcasts. I was not fortunate enough to attend it in June and therefore welcomed the news of its electronic availability. Yo-Yo Ma's appearance on the Internet was no surprise: he's built a reputation in part on his forays into crossover realms such as bluegrass, Baroque period practice, and interdisciplinary humanities. What did raise an eyebrow, however, was that he arrived on the Internet holding the hand, so to speak, of the lesser-known Arron.

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Its career-building aspects notwithstanding, the concert is one of the finest gems available on the Net. The program, conducted by ex-Tokyo Quartet leader Peter Oundjian and the Orchestra of St. Luke's, combined Vivaldi's Concerto for Two Cellos in G Minor, RV531, and Elgar's E Minor Concerto for Cello and Orchestra, Op. 85.

Though the two pieces lacked a genuine connective thread, they did complement each other nicely and seemed appropriate to the opening of an idyllic summer festival like Caramoor.

A Venetian, Vivaldi wrote his double-cello concerto early in the eighteenth century. Like *The Four Seasons*--four thematically related concerti written to evoke the changing seasons--this piece traverses a liberal spectrum of effects. The musical chiaroscuro--that is, the contradictions in dark dramatics and light moods--is characteristic of the Baroque style; Oundjian gave these shades a painterly brush through use of an element that was still new when this work was born: the orchestra. Ma, armed with his earthy Montagnana cello (yet another product of the early 1700s), paid homage to historical practice despite using the present-day technique of expressive vibrato and rich phrasing: his bow crossed the cello's strings with just enough speed to infuse the resulting sound with wisps of Baroque-style air. Arron mimicked Ma with a tone and stylistic sense only slightly less centered: Compared to such a natural (and experienced) partner, he couldn't have sounded better.

With commitment to Vivaldi's linear motion, both utilized the structure of the piece to fuel its inherent drive. Fast movements of Baroque concerti are often composed in what is known as "ritornello form," in which a catchy, momentum-charged tune returns after moments of episodic elaboration. The duo, ensconced in the forward progress of the final Allegro, rode it through moments of dueling technical feats and intuitive cadential climaxes: In parts, it sounded--and this is meant as a compliment--like the very best rock and roll.

The Elgar, while performed with as much pomp, read from a different design. Defying stereotypes of stifled British music, Elgar's concerti for violin and cello travel the brooding routes of the inner self. But, like all grand concerti written in the Romantic tradition (utilizing the orchestra as a symphonic partner and not merely an accompanist), Elgar's Cello Concerto is built on tempestuous instrumental effects. Pieces like these are Ma's specialty, and this live performance did not disappoint. Ma is one of the few artists who can give their all to a work of this magnitude, drawing full-bodied lines of lyric poetry from a wooden box while avoiding dramatic self-indulgence. Even over the speakers attached to a desktop PC, Ma's performance of the Elgar could compete with any of his famous recordings. He played it the way it was meant to be played.



In addition to the virtues of the webcast's content, its form is worth noting as well. GMN.com took the unusual step of presenting the live concert without a video feed: It is available only in streaming audio. Because pure audio demands much less bandwidth than audio and video, the sound quality is much higher--still not as high as a CD, certainly, but greater than a live radio broadcast. It also represents a compromise in terms of availability: It enjoys an advantage over the radio because you can listen to it 24 hours a day; but, unlike a CD, it has a limited shelf life--the concert will be available online for only ten days. The concert suggests that the massive bandwidth of broadband technology might not be necessary in order for the Internet to join CDs and the radio as ways to enjoy high-quality sound. Over the next few years it will be a development worth watching.

It's unclear whether Yo-Yo Ma's performances will appear on the Internet with any regularity, but I hope that they do. Despite media skepticism about the "authenticity" of Ma's more rebellious projects, one thing is clear: Music is in his blood. He often

connects to the written note with more honesty and openness than a listener imagines possible. His stature as one of the premiere musicians playing today would seem to make him a credible judge of who deserves a shot at building a career like his. Edward Arron hasn't just found friends in the right places--he's found the best friend you could hope for. The question now is whether his music will one day share the same humanity, devotion, and insight as that of the talented elders with whom he keeps company.

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### ONLINE MUSIC | "Dances Russes"

by Adam Baer

Only at [TNR Online](#) | Post date 03.05.01

Those who doubt that hard times produce great artists might do well to take a quick look at the Russian 20th century in music, which yielded an extraordinary number of the century's most important classical musicians--especially violinists, pianists, and conductors. In Russia, musicians train like athletes: they're fed essential nutrients (e.g., Bach, Glinka), drilled endlessly on exercises (scales, arpeggios), and disciplined to approach clutch situations (symphonies, solo concerts) with the utmost confidence in their technical preparation. Years after their deaths, names like Horowitz and Oistrakh do more than ring bells for the classical-music audience: they sprinkle virtuosic pixie-dust. Hearing their music, we are reminded of images of their performances captured on black-and-white reels--respectful, determined, humble--and, in turn, how much of themselves they gave to their music.

Enter two of today's best embodiments of the Russian musical tradition: conductor Valery Gergiev, the artistic director of St. Petersburg's Kirov Opera; and violist Yuri Bashmet, perhaps the only man since William Primrose (the Jascha Heifetz of the viola) to coax a celebrity lifestyle from an instrument that's served as the butt of almost every classical-music joke. (For example: What do you call someone who hangs around musicians a lot? A violist. Etc.) Presently, Online Classics offers a video webcast which presents both artists working together in renditions of music from their homeland: a concert with the Vienna Philharmonic at the 2000 Salzburg festival that features Prokofiev's Classical Symphony, Schnittke's Viola Concerto, and Stravinsky's Firebird.

Gergiev's reading of the Prokofiev floats like a ballet, as it should. The piece is an example of neoclassicism--a school of thought that reinvents the modern composition with structured elements of antiquity: four-movement symphonic form (expository first movement, slow second, sprightly third, and rousing fourth); stately dances from the Baroque era (like the Gavotte); and crystallized themes that would have worked better, architecturally, in Mozart's era than in that of serialist Arnold Schoenberg. Prokofiev's trademark orchestral sheen and modern wrong-note technique are everywhere in this piece: he takes seemingly harmless musical idioms from the era of powdered wigs and inserts into them dissonant chords or unexpected cadences. We also find Prokofiev's use of strings as percussive elements, and his woodwind solos that sound for all the world like a carnival merry-go-round. To understand the

creativity of Prokofiev's work, think of how Picasso's cubes look convex when viewed one moment, and concave when viewed another. The nature of Prokofiev's game is punning on, and simultaneously paying respect to, the past.

It was once a given that conductors--guest conductors in particular--are strong figures who come to orchestras with clear-cut ideas of what they want and the ability to articulate it forcefully. But since the rise of musicians' unions and tyrannical taskmasters like Toscanini, who almost single-handedly spurred these organizations along, conductors are expected to be less autocratic than they were in the past. Today, a good conductor has to treat his musicians with more respect--he can no longer simply dictate an interpretational blueprint and expect them to follow. The strength of Gergiev is that he seems to get what he wants without demanding it. His gift is an ability to make a full orchestra perform with the same cohesion as a small group playing chamber music, while contributing to the finished product as a player himself. He dances on the podium like a marionette--his darting arms give musicians cues that are at once sharp and sensitive. The strings respond with uncanny ensemble; the winds whistle and laugh as if each instrument was not a piece of metal or wood held by a person, but some sort of animated jovial spirit.

Playing these games makes sense, especially considering the next piece on the program: Alfred Schnittke's Viola Concerto, a torment-riddled piece which Bashmet premiered in 1986, and is led here by Gergiev with dark severity. A prolific composer of music for films, the German-Russian Schnittke (1934-1998) wrote serious music best known for a kind of philosophical inconsistency: it's music that, due to its melange of conflicted ideas, seems to be thinking about itself. Schnittke's deconstructionist body of work also heavily relies on a tendency to meld different cultural idioms and musical motifs from throughout history, much in the way Borges used history and myth. The viola concerto is at times a musically hollow experience with only a few similar timbres at play over an imposing silence. In some moments, however, it is thick and Romantically tonal. Its peace often presents itself in wide-interval leaps, and yet it returns to traditional scalar steps to speak with fury. This is music with an identity crisis--but one that we want to come to terms with.

Bashmet, who is arguably the most talented violist playing today (with Kim Kashkashian taking a close second), looks like a postmodern vampire. Blessed with Paganini-esque locks and talent, his probing eyes and disturbed grins match his stark, black apparel. He is a cross between a showman and an undertaker: one minute, his attacks can sound like that of a mechanical brainwashed soldier and then, snap!, he is his own victim, a whimpering 10-year old balled up in the corner. Bashmet is a masterful technician: he can wring from his viola truly gut-wrenching sounds. But unlike other artists, he doesn't want merely to send them out into the auditorium--he seems intent on inflicting them upon himself. Take, for instance, the moment in the first movement of Schnittke's concerto when he traverses all four of the instrument's strings in repetitive arpeggiated double-stops (two notes played at once, like on a piano), or when he drives the lower quarter of his bow into the meaty part of the viola's deep C-string, extracting a syrupy, almost dirty, sound. Bashmet, a renowned interpreter of the classics, fares even better with music like Schnittke than he does with Mozart. He plays a compositional role, as a performer, in music that is written for him. Audiences at his concerts get their money's worth, as I'm sure the people of Salzburg would attest. Bashmet is not so much a vehicle of the music as an embodiment of it.

The final piece on the program, *The Firebird*, one of Stravinsky's early works written for the Ballet Russes, is a work that musicians like Gergiev and orchestras like Vienna's can play on autopilot. But here these veterans offer it with a rarely heard freshness. Stravinsky's musical lacerations and exotic colors--a combination of his Romantic mentor, Rimsky-Korsakov, and his own latent modernism, soon to erupt in *Le Sacre du Printemps*--pixellate and morph into one another. Quality playing from the entire orchestra and the precisely executed polyrhythms of Gergiev's stick convinced me from the beginning to listen to a work I'd heard hundreds of times.

In fifty years, Gergiev and Bashmet will be legends, and their outdated CDs will be revered by music students everywhere. At present, they provide classical music with something it desperately needs: excitement. Both take musical expressions, marinate them in their own emotions and faculties, and return them, better, with a personal stamp, to the world from which they were borrowed. That these performances can be heard so readily at Online Classics strikes me as the best news to reach classical-music audiences in a long while. We're finally sending our best troops to the front lines.