

NEWSLETTER

Financial Crisis

The effects on Music

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(John Thrower)

I'm sure many would consider it somewhat presumptuous to contend that the Financial Crisis has had its effect on music. Surely the Universities, and general establishment which has been the main-stay for classical music for decades can't bow to this economic pressure.

The problem is so complex that many economists and financial experts are not in agreement. Here in Europe, the politicians have made the Hedge-Funds the scapegoat. In other words, it is the financial speculation that is a problem for countries like Greece.

I personally think this is not true. Money will go where there is money to be made. The Greek problem is internal politics and corruption. Obviously there are not going to be many investors who would keep their capital in a country with that financial record.

But just a minute. What does all this have to do with the music business? If you read the above paragraph, you will see what the problem is — especially in the field of classical music. Money will only go where there is money to be made.

MONEY IS GLOBALISATION — of which the major principal is profit. Those countries or industries who cannot cut the grade will eventually be sourced out and left behind. Could this happen to classical music?

Recently I had a conversation with a trusted colleague and musician. He is one of the finest musicians I know, and teaches at the Hochschule für Musik in Stuttgart. More I will not say because I do not want to endanger his position in any way by revealing too much.

The problem is, he said, that there are fewer and fewer music students coming into the music system. Many music teachers are worried if they will have a job in years or even months to come.

I know many talented music students who feel that it is hardly worth it now to study music and probably it would be better to study economics or get an MBA at a top university.

Recently on a trip to Canada, I was shocked to find out that the classical music department of the local university where I originally studied, had been simply deleted — it doesn't exist any more. All that was left was a small jazz and band department.

For years, well, now it is decades, I have been banging my fist on this table and have been saying or shouting out, that if we in the modern classical music business (for me, contemporary music) cannot find ways of communicating and engaging our public, it is simply going to die or go somewhere else.

The whole reason behind the introduction of the term Classic Fusion, is nothing other than an attempt at survival — the survival of modern classical composition. Now if the living composers cannot catch the imagination of the public, then classical music is doomed, it is finished and there will be no state government, no culture agency or even good-will that will be available to prop it up.

It will die with not a bang, but a whimper — a whimper which will be drowned out by the financial cries and protests of a lower and middle class who will not allow their own tax money to be wasted on cultural events that hardly can be deemed responsible.

Believe me, there is a lot at stake. It is not just the survival of modern classical music, but the necessity to create music which can be a safe haven for a battered world.

Now for any of you who may think that this is not unsettling for me personally, let me add that if indeed the above scenario does happen it will no doubt be one of the darkest and saddest days in the history of this planet.

For in essence it will mean that we have, for nothing other than the idea of intellectual elitism — paved the way for the end of the classical music industry. Yes, we are doing this today — step by step.

Let me get one thing straight. I am not against the idea of technological progress, nor do I hate atonality, nor am I against the idea of artistic experimentation.

What I am against is this: State cultural agencies giving tax payers money to projects which will NEVER fill the requirements of that known as globalisation, will never bring even one percent point back for the money spent — will further alienate more people, and eventually reduce the circle of influence of classical music in the society to the point where all interest will eventual fade. I'm against what has been going on for more than 70 years in contemporary music.

You think I am crazy? I believe the last classical piece that has made any publishing company a great deal of money is Orff's CARMINA BURANA — composed in the mid 1930's. It is no secret that so many top publishing countries have gone broke in the last 20 years.

The largest existing publisher in classical music today, SCHOTT, Mainz — has only really managed to keep up by turning the main thrust of their music publishing to the education and music school segment. If any publisher, whether in print or in disc labels makes any serious money from modern classical music, please let me know.

You see, the making of money is nothing bad or even detrimental. It is the confirmation that an industry is thriving. Well the only music industry today that is thriving is popular music and this is doing quite well, despite technological advancements (the Art of Copying) which are nothing but detrimental to the business.

Sometimes I think the best think that could happen to modern contemporary music would be to take it completely off of state support — no more money for goof-ball projects, no support for music which is nothing other than ugly to put it bluntly. Turn off the support for some rude idea that was nothing other than a

political reaction to two world wars. I mean — it's finished, so let's finish it once and for all.

Perhaps something interesting would happen. Maybe there would be a new generation of composers who would be more interested in composing music that would have a much different effect on it's listening audience.

Yes, taking all the technology of electronic music, combining it with solid compositional techniques, not favoring in any way atonality, but having only on goal, altruistic and firm: Music which spiritually uplifts and even heals the spirit of man, perhaps even inspire (my God, how dare I use such words) the listener to acts of humanity, development and solutions for a small planet. Is this impossible?

Well — look at Bach, Mozart and the rest of them. **There once was a time on this earth where music of inspiration, incredible beauty and an ethically high state of consciousness was composed.** But in the explanation of a famous conductor "...the music of today is destructive because that's the way the world is today."

Well obviously we have problems, but do we have to give in to them, enlargen them, be decadent giving way to the ego of man?

I think it is high time that we start taking action. Just like the financial crisis. We have to take action to save those countries. And in the crisis of modern music, we have to take action as well. Believe me, there is a lot at stake. It is not just the survival of modern classical music, but the necessity to create music which can be a safe haven for a battered world. To support music which will have an inspirational effect on the listener and at the end of the day — give hope to a world community which is faced with jarring images of destruction every day.

But it's going to have to be financially solid and feasible more than experimental. It's must be aesthetically pleasing more than new or provoking. It's going to have to satisfy a niche which has been lacking since the middle of the 20th century in classical music — for more than 70 years.

This is the greatest challenge facing classical music today.

(John Thrower)