

A Season of Renewal

The Chautauquan Daily

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Sculptor Tom Butter lectures at CCVA.

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Fellowship winner Nakahara leads MSFO students.

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CELEBRATION

Old First Night sets a record.

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WEATHER

Today ... mostly cloudy, morning showers, low 60, high 76; Friday ... isolated t-storms, a mix of sun and clouds; low 60, high 77.

THURSDAY

AUGUST 5, 1999

CHAUTAUQUA, NEW YORK 40c

CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION - CELEBRATING 125 YEARS

Greenberg: musical first

by **Berry Shea**
Staff Writer

Robert Greenberg, professor of music at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, made a witty, lucid, persuasive case for the effect the cultural and political environment has had on composers.

In his Wednesday morning Amphitheater lecture, "Music as a Mirror," he said, "music is beauty, not because it is pretty but because often it is not pretty."

"It is beautiful because of the truths, metaphors, metaphysics, aesthetics, the magnificent historical truths music tells us about the times, places and ultimately, about ourselves."

The focus of the lecture, he said, was to understand the changes in musical style as a function of the larger culture; and to view the composer as a product of his or her time—as part of a holistic culture and not as someone sitting in a garret answering his own creative muse.

Asserting that first impressions, like blind dates, are very important, he played brief beginning excerpts from three pieces. He began with Bach's 1721 Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, which he characterized as exuberant, with a powerful beat, yet "clearly overdressed." As a blind date, this person might be a little nerdy but there is a certain intellectuality to his music.

The next excerpt was from Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik," or "A Little Night Music." Greenberg described Mozart and his music as direct, very accessible, to the point.

"There is no jargon, no complicity or excess," he said. "He is completely friendly."

Next came the opening theme from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, which Greenberg said was "light years beyond Mozart."

If this was a blind date, "close the door," he admonished. There are issues here you don't want to be involved with, he added.

He went on to say that the times

affected composers as much as their personalities; and to show the environmental and cultural influences that shape musical style.

Greenberg talked about the concept of music as a mirror. Music style has changed as the world changes, because there is a constant search for new expression, he said.

"As we move through time there is a constant redefinition of what is considered expressive." Today, he continued, we might say that feelings are most expressive of our time. In other times it might have been a love of God, a love of intellect, a love of order and control.



Photo by Walter Smith

Robert Greenberg talked to Chautauquans on the back porch of the Amphitheater after his lecture on Wednesday. Greenberg is a professor of music at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He talked about the effect of music on culture throughout history.

Not only is music a mirror, Greenberg said, but it is a diary. He described Beethoven as a depressed, sometimes suicidal man who found escape in music. Bach lived in an era of rationality and believed that through logic, humankind could bring order into the world. Bach's music, he said, is emotional and exuberant, yet symmetrical.

The audience roared with laughter when Greenberg made his point about how culture and politics affect music, by playing a song from 1954, the Eisenhower years: The Chordettes singing

"Mr. Sandman, Send Me a Dream."

Then Greenberg brought the audience to the music of 1968 with Jimi Hendrix and his electrifying sound. Greenberg described Hendrix as a revolutionary musician who captured the spirit and tenor of his age.

Greenberg concluded with an aphorism: "The more you know, the more you hear."

Q & A

Q. How do you, as a composer, deal with the 'first impression' factor among audiences

during the compositional process?

A: Ultimately, composers have to do what they want to do and deal with the consequences later. Hopefully, audiences will like your music and will be able to relate to your individual expression. It is also my belief, however, that much of contemporary music is not wholly accessible on first hearing it.

LECTURE

impressions are like blind dates

WEEK SIX

Beauty

August 1 - 7

Q. Should rock music, because it is so popular today, be considered "great" music?

A: It is my belief that every style of music has its time, place and value. Today's music industry is very diverse and offers consumers an enormous range of music. It is not fair to compare rock music to that of Beethoven.

Rock is contemporary and I believe it offers something to today's culture that other music does not. The most important thing to remember, however, is that it is not necessary to degrade one style of music in order to validate another.

Q. Which current composers would you suggest audiences become familiar with, who is composing music today that most accurately reflects our own time?

A: Aside from the fact that one living composer would never promote another living composer, I cannot answer that question because I really don't have the answer.

There is no way to predict which of today's composers will

stand the test of time and be looked back upon by future generations as having truly captured the voice of our generation.

Q. In light of the current state of musical education, how would you go about inspiring elementary school children to develop a love of classical music if you were a teacher in today's schools?

A. In my opinion, the biggest problem with this issue is how "classical" music is perceived by today's culture. First of all, I would cultivate relationships with every local arts organization in my area.

Second, I would create a more holistic classroom, allowing students to actively engage in whatever period they were studying, in order to put a given period of music in the context of cultural issues of that time.

Finally, I would encourage local arts organizations to provide family-oriented concerts, as well as "dress-down" concerts. If parents don't listen to classical music and support their local symphony orchestra, neither will their children. The bottom line is that we need to stop putting music on a pedestal and start treating it in a non-elitist way.

