

# Music Appreciation for Execs

By TESSA DeCARLO  
AND SUSAN SUTLE DINTENFASS

San Francisco

Are business types hungry for something besides power, prestige and profits? Prof. Robert Greenberg believes they are, and the enthusiasm of the business community here for his classes on music appreciation suggests he's right.

"The way folks are educated now—and the business community is the worst offender—you crunch numbers for four years as an undergraduate, then you go to business school or law school," says Mr. Greenberg, a dapper 37-year-old who holds degrees in music from Princeton and the University of California at Berkeley. "That leaves a tremendous desire to deal with things unspoken, to talk about things that are non-concrete, abstract, intuitive. Music is one of the best vehicles for doing that."

Mr. Greenberg, a pianist and composer, spends most of his time teaching music history and literature at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. But for the past seven years he also has conducted classes in private homes on Italian opera, the symphonies of Beethoven, art songs of the 1920s and a dozen other musical subjects. He began noticing that more and more of his amateur students were attorneys, chief executive officers and others from the business world.

Since the financial district was coming to Mr. Greenberg, it made sense to bring Mr. Greenberg to the financial district. So for the past two years Bank of America has made a meeting room in its headquarters here available to the conservatory for Mr. Greenberg's talks on "How to Listen to Music." The eight-week early evening class drew 40 people the first year, 65 the second and will be repeated this fall.

"Bob Greenberg's course isn't going to make me any better at doing the financial analysis for a retail building," says Adele Hayutin, a real estate economist who attended the class, "but I think it does make me more open to new ideas, more able to be creative with new solutions. Taking his classes and learning about music have been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life."

You don't need to read music or have a "musical ear" to appreciate even the most demanding compositions, Mr. Greenberg contends. In his classes he uses what he calls "word scores," which translate sound into a series of descriptive phrases arranged in jagged triangles, fluffy balloons and other rough visual analogues of the music's form. "They're Bob's greatest invention," Ms. Hayutin says, "a visual play-by-play of what you hear."

Now an executive speakers' bureau, a high-tech computer company and a multinational real estate investment firm are among those interested in having Mr. Greenberg teach homophony and sonata form to high-level executives around the country.

"Bob's a charming guy and an excellent instructor," says Earl Cheit, dean emeritus of Berkeley's business school, who, like many of Mr. Greenberg's students, has taken one class after another. "His classes are much more involving and interactive than the typical music-appreciation course."

Mr. Cheit is now a business-education

consultant, and has arranged for Mr. Greenberg to teach two seminars this summer to top partners from an international consulting firm. "Alert executives need to be able to converse about something other than sports and business," he says. "Music provides an additional language, an additional basis of communication. That's important in dealing with top people."

Although Mr. Greenberg agrees, he doesn't believe the finishing-school patina is the main reason people come to his classes. "It isn't just an extra bit of polish," he says. "I've been told hundreds of times by my students that learning about music makes them feel more complete, more alive, more in touch."

Mr. Greenberg has become such a draw that this spring the San Francisco Symphony launched a "Discovery Series" that is attracting new audiences by offering short lectures by the popular professor before symphony concerts. "Bob is fantastic," says Patricia Geffner, the symphony's marketing director. "Not only are his talks stimulating, but they are very entertaining. So far we have received nothing but rave reviews."

In a class on 20th-century music held recently in the home of a surgeon here, Mr. Greenberg cracked jokes, waved his arms and worked his audience of 60 or so as skillfully as a virtuoso plays his instrument. Along the way he managed to shine light into several dark corners of modern atonality, from the "atomized and micro-ized" vision of Webern ("an infinity of nuance, like a haiku") to the "super-serialism" that dominated postwar music ("an attempt to purge music of romanticism, expressionism, all the evils that they saw creating the havoc of 1933-45").

Music's historical context is a favorite subject with Mr. Greenberg, who describes music as a "time machine" that can link the educated listener with other people and other times. He expanded on this theme in a talk he gave last fall to the San Francisco Commonwealth Club.

"Concert halls are not museums or mausoleums, but reanimation facilities," he says, "where the life essence of a composer and his or her time comes back to life—in a good performance—in all its original intensity. The best concert music is as profound, as insightful and as representative of the intellectual cutting edge of its day as the works of Newton, Adam Smith, Pasteur and Freud."

Mr. Greenberg hopes that classes like his will be to the '90s what gyms were to the '80s—places where the managerial class goes to recharge its batteries. "I think more and more people will turn from the physical to the intellectual," he says. "They're saying, 'Is this all there is—making money, spending money? Where do we extend ourselves; where do we replenish ourselves? Where do we find our joy?' Well, music is as good a path to self-enlightenment as any other."

Ms. DeCarlo and Ms. Subtle Dintenfass are free-lance writers in Northern California.

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