

What is Classical Music?

(some thoughts and definitions, assembled for

Classical Music in an Age of Pop)

Some dictionary definitions, from leading British and American dictionaries:

The American Heritage Dictionary:

Of or relating to music in the educated European tradition, such as symphony or opera, as opposed to popular or folk music.

The Chambers Dictionary:

Orchestral and chamber music, etc, as opposed to jazz, folk music, etc.

Random House Dictionary:

Music of the European tradition marked by sophistication of structural elements and embracing opera, art song, symphonic and chamber music, and works for solo instrument.

Oxford English Dictionary, first edition:

Of music: having permanent interest and value

For comparison, a definition of jazz, from the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary:

A type of music of US black origin, characterized by its use of improvisation, syncopated phrasing, and a regular or forceful rhythm

Some thoughts from various people:

Laura Seay, a violist who took this course at Juilliard:

There are many things in my life that are fulfilling, but while the viola is under my chin and my arms are flapping about, somewhat like a chicken, I am most excited and fulfilled playing steak-and-potatoes music. I also enjoy and sometimes even love playing appetizers, desserts, palate cleansers, but to cut to the chase, I enjoy playing steak-and-potatoes music the most. What does this mean? Brahms sonatas, Beethoven quartets, Bartok quartets, these are pieces that, when I play them, I feel like a tiny part of me has grown, has learned something new and has changed. And this happens every time I play.

Alex Mansoori, a singer who took this class at Juilliard:

The joy of being involved with something larger than you are.

Kim Laskowski, NY Philharmonic bassoonist:

The best thing about being a musician is carrying around works of art in your head all the time.

from Scanning the Dial, a blog about public radio by Mike Janssen and Marty Ronish

It's often been observed that lovers of classical music speak of it as a refuge from the stress of everyday life, a sanctuary of timeless treasures.

from Robert Paterson's Weblog, a blog that often talks about public radio:

[Classical radio stations] offer a Refuge. They offer a Refuge in a world that is overwhelming. A world that is usually loud and crass. A world that often isolates us from others and more importantly from our very selves.

From a statement by Gary Ginstling, who began this year as President and CEO of the New York Philharmonic:

This orchestra's past is illustrious, our recent history groundbreaking, and our dreams for the future boundless. And while the world around us is changing, one thing holds truer than ever: our belief in the power of the arts to uplift. Our potential to forge close connections among our musicians, audiences, and neighbors is limitless. It is an honor to become President & CEO of the NY Phil at this pivotal moment.'