

A CONCERT IS A PRESENT

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A good concert can have a purifying effect.

Everybody who ever visited a good concert has had the opportunity to witness the remarkable change the public undergoes.

At the beginning of the concert we notice tense people worrying to find their seats, sometimes even fighting over their places. Many of them show the symptoms of a hurried and stressful life.

How differently do those people behave at the end of the concert! They smile, speak and listen to each other and leave the hall at a calm pace. What an effect the music has had upon them! Good music which is well played changes the way we experience time. We live in the moment and forget about past and future worries. The whole body breathes calmness and contentment. That is the power of a good concert.

Your own attitude influences your experience. Are you eager to listen?

It is clear that listening to a concert is a subjective experience. The attitude you have at the start of the concert will influence the way you experience it. People who come to enjoy are much more likely to experience beauty.

Of course a person who already experienced many moments of musical beauty in his life will undergo a different experience to the person who comes to a concert for the first time. Experienced listeners will have very strong memories of beautiful concerts, moving sound colours, perfect timing and moments of sheer magic. They might measure the actual performance with their best souvenirs.

Your expectations dictate part of what you experience. If you are afraid your child will not play very well, you are probably not going to enjoy the experience. The closest you come to enjoyment will be the *relief* you feel when it is over and it didn't go too badly. If you are just curious to find out what is going to happen you might learn interesting things and even have a wonderful experience. The correctness of the playing is no longer the only norm.

If you enjoy the concert because you allow yourself to do so, you win. If I didn't enjoy the concert because my expectations were not met I am the one who loses, even if I blame the performer. As players we have experienced that the attitude of the listeners can turn a well-prepared concert into a magic moment for everyone involved – just because of the quality of the listening!

Some consequences for the performer

The musician who knows the 'purifying' effect of a good concert will play with other goals in mind than the musician who is only concerned about himself.

The last one will try to impress the public starting from his own values. His ego is prominently present and the concert becomes a matter of winning or losing. An out of tune note in this context is a mistake that leads to losing face. This musician is in constant competition with what he thinks the public thinks about him, and depends very much on others to validate his performance. He will even make his listeners become aware of the technicality or arrogance of his playing.

These players exist in all sizes: Here is the kid that wants to be in the next book faster than the others, the student who thinks that the difference in the exam results is not big enough, or even that his place in the orchestra is not corresponding with his qualities. Of course a lot of tension is involved when we have to perform with this attitude.

This 'contest effect' can only disappear when we stop competing with others. We need better values than our place in the book, our seat in the orchestra or the speed with which our fingers can run up and down the fingerboard. It does not mean that technique is not important; it means that if we use the technique to show off and not for the deeper meaning of the music we lose the whole point. For good reasons we call the pieces by their names and composers and not by their place in the book.

Luckily, music is not meant to select the best, it is meant to give pleasure, to bring balance in your life and make people happy. Students who understand this point will make the greatest efforts to be sensitive to the composer and to make his message felt to the public. This musician will seek to be part of the magic.

Are you nervous when you hand over your Christmas presents?

Now that we understand more about the real nature of a concert we can see it as a present. When our children and students experience a concert as a valuable present they will enjoy going to concerts and even do their utmost to make their concerts pleasurable experiences for both their public and themselves.

A nice present needs a nice package; we take our time to choose it, to make or to buy it. We have others in mind when we prepare it. We adapt our clothing to the festive nature of the

concert. We spend considerable time preparing every part of it. Even during study our approach changes. Practising becomes enjoying in advance, taking care to make the present as beautiful as possible. It is looking forward to happy faces, happy souls and emotionally healthy people. The fear of not performing well will diminish with good preparation and the number of good experiences you have. It will be replaced by a healthy excitement about the upcoming feast. It is not about us, it is about sharing the experience. Every positive experience will add to the confidence.

Let us create concert experiences where you child can bring happiness to other people.

Some people understand the art of letting children feel how much joy their playing brings into our lives. Many grandparents, parents and successful teachers are like that. Every child that keeps getting into contact with love and goodness and learns respect at an early age will develop respect, love and goodness. It is a very special and valuable treat to be allowed to witness the emotion in your parents' or teachers' eyes when you really moved them. Not everybody dares to give such a present to his child.

Some programmes have regular concerts in homes for elderly people. The joy this brings to both public and children is enormous and goes beyond the simple motivation of practising because you have to play your piece in front of people on a set date.

Let us say THANK YOU at the end of a concert.

A couple of years ago I noticed at some very good Suzuki programmes in Denmark and Finland that people say 'thank you' at the end of a concert. It suddenly struck me as being very different from the approach in other places I had been before. It tells us about the attitude and expectations of the listeners. The present the musician has given is accepted with gratitude. The attention drifts from the performance towards the gift. Music becomes a sacred ritual again instead of measurable commercial noise. Let us start giving presents!