

Is There a Beethoven in Your Home?

WHAT comes to your mind when you think of classical music?

Probably a lush sitar, a mellow tabla, a high-pitched voice moving gracefully through note passages. Well, what comes to mind when you think of Western classical music? Maybe an energetic symphony orchestra navigating through elaborate music, or a piano virtuoso passionately expressing gorgeous melodies through his/her lightning-fast fingers.

Or, do you think of an opera – larger-than-life voices singing in foreign languages on a grandiose stage? Or, do you think of the classical composers – Beethoven, Mozart, Bach, Handel? Does the thought of, or listening to, classical music make you want to yawn in boredom or revel in rejuvenation?

Some may call it intelligent music, but I call it the root of all

music. All the music that we hear today in this country has its roots in Western classical – be it pop, rock, jazz, country or Broadway.

It is well known that Western classical music was born in Europe. Many of the composers we think of today are from Europe, particularly Germany and Austria. In fact, we recently celebrated Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's 250th birthday.

Musicologists say the earliest forms of music began in the 4th century with chant. Actual notation of music began somewhere around the 10th century.

By the 15th century, Renaissance music was born, and by the 16th century, early opera was being composed. We then move through Baroque into the true Classical Era, although much of the music through these centuries is generalized as classical music. The Classical Era ranged from about 1725 to 1900. The Europeans

brought classical music to our young country as it was being built. It then became an American staple. From there, our own music – which many say is inspired by classical music – came into being. Jazz is an example. Miraculously, classical music has remained in its true form for centuries.

The question is where and how does love, or even appreciation, of this art form begin? As we mature, we often have changes of taste, especially in our love of music. As we learn to appreciate the different stages of our lives, so also we learn to appreciate these changes of taste.

But what about classical music? First of all, classical music is rarely as present or in-your-face as pop music. Listening to classical music has become a choice. I am sure everyone has heard some facet of Western classical music. You probably have heard more clas-

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VISUAL FEAST: Geeta Bhatnagar performing in "Figaro's American Adventure" at the Los Angeles Opera.





Geeta Bhatnagar-Novotny

sical music than you think, and would recognize it if you heard it again, but you may not know the title of the work or the composer.

We will occasionally hear a sample of Antonio Vivaldi's "Spring" from "The Four Seasons" during a TV or radio commercial. Many movies have used classical music and have in turn popularized some works, such as Johann Strauss's "The Beautiful Blue Danube," notably in the Stanley Kubrick movie "2001: A Space Odyssey."

In fact, the good ol' cartoon character, Bugs Bunny, per-

formed many of his high jinks to classical music. But I bet you weren't humming along to Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." The bottom line is that on an average day, you may not hear as much classical music as you will hear pop songs. Hence the word popular music.

Where can the appreciation of Western classical music begin? At the very beginning of life – in the open, unadulterated mind of a child. It has been scientifically proven time and time again that listening to and studying classical music enhances one's health and well-

ness, as well as creativity and emotional expression. It can increase intellectual and creative development, instill discipline, improve concentration, strengthen intuition, induce relaxation, relieve stress and is motivational.

It has also been proven that having children listen to classical music can boost much of their cognitive development. Equally important is having a child play a musical instrument because not only does that help maturity, but it also builds priceless confidence. It has been proven that students' SAT

scores were higher the more they were stimulated with classical music.

A person develops a life-long passion for classical music if it is introduced in the formative years. Just as children learn languages fluently, so can they learn classical music. Have you seen the actual notated music of some classical works? No wonder our brains come alive when listening to this stuff.

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How to Interest Your Child in Western Classical Music

ONE of the more crucial considerations is to never force a child. Let the child find the love of music on their own through introduction.

• Incorporate freestyle dancing with classical music. Have children perform their own interpretive dance to the music. The fast or slow moving rhythms and melodies of the music will inspire their movement. Remember, you must do this with them. Also, show your exhilaration!

• Have the child listen to a piece of classical music and do a visualization exercise. Ask them: What does this music make you think of or how does this music make you feel?

• Think of a story that you could tell to go along with the music. Both you and the child can create a story. Or read an actual story with the music playing in the background, although to make sure the spirit of the music matches the content of the story, you may have to plan this out beforehand.

• Mix in positive facts about the composer to entice the child to learn more about a work of music. Many classical composers have very interesting life stories. Even talk about the composers' names and what nationality they are. For instance:

– Ludwig van Beethoven, born in Germany, had been losing his hearing throughout his life. At the age of 30, it started to deteriorate to the point where he eventually went deaf. Through this hardship, he still managed to compose the best works of his life.

– Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, born in Austria, first composed at the age of 5 and wrote his first opera by the time he was 15.

– Johann Sebastian Bach, born in Germany, fathered 20 children!

• Here's another tip: Put to music a child's chore, such as picking up toys, getting dressed, getting ready for bed. Hint: There are some wonderful classical lullabies such as Johannes Brahms's "Lullaby."

Some great pieces to start your child on the journey to appreciate

and love classical music:

• Sergei Prokofiev's "Peter and the Wolf." This is a symphonic work.

• Piotr Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker Suite." At the age of 7, I was spellbound when I first saw "The Nutcracker." It is performed every year around the December holidays.

• Walt Disney's "Fantasia" is a priceless movie to show to your children. "Fantasia" is an animated feature film that combines thrilling stories with many of the Disney characters, set to the classical works of Bach, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Mussorgsky and more. However, a witch is portrayed in a scene that may be a little scary for small children.

• Camille Saint-Saëns's "Carnival of the Animals." This is a symphonic work.

• Antonio Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons." When listening, one can just picture all aspects of the seasons, especially in the movement called "Spring."

• Beethoven's "Symphony No. 9" is mostly orchestral with vocal solos

in some sections. Listen to the final movement of the work. You will be sure to recognize "An die Freude" or "Ode to Joy."

• "The Hallelujah Chorus" from G. F. Handel's "Messiah" is very uplifting, to say the least.

• A wonderful children's opera to watch is by Maurice Ravel. It is called "L'enfant et les Sortilèges" ("The Child and the Enchantments"). This opera is in French, but it is visually stunning and includes a naughty little boy who learns his lesson at the end through the help of dancing furniture and animals.

My last tip – and one of the most significant – is to have the child learn a musical instrument. (I started piano when I was just 5 years old and violin at 7.)

I promise you this can work, but you must invest some time and patience, as with any new endeavor. I know that teaching your child to appreciate classical music will bring you great joy and it may also kindle, or expand, your own appreciation.