

## **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125 (1824)**

(1)

“Beethoven, who is often bizarre and baroque, takes at times the majestic flight of an eagle, and then creeps in rocky pathways. He first fills the soul with sweet melancholy, and then shatters it by a mass of barbarous chords. He seems to harbor together doves and crocodiles.”

*Tablettes de Polymnie*, Paris, 1810

(2)

“Beethoven’s compositions more and more assume the character of studied eccentricity. He does not write much now, but most of what he produces is so impenetrably obscure in design and so full of unaccountable and often repulsive harmonies, that he puzzles the critic as much as he perplexes the performer.”

*The Harmonicon*, London, April 1824

(3)

“We find Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony to be precisely one hour and five minutes long; a fearful period indeed, which puts the muscles and lungs of the band, and the patience of the audience to a severe trial... The last movement, a chorus, is heterogeneous. What relation it bears to the symphony we could not make out; and here, as well as in other parts, the want of intelligible design is too apparent.”

*The Harmonicon*, London, April 1825

(4)

“Its length alone will be a never-failing cause of complaint to those who reject monopoly in sounds. While we are enjoying the delight of so much science and melody, and eagerly anticipating its continuance, on a sudden, like the fleeting pleasures of life, or the spirited young adventurer, who would fly from ease and comfort at home to the inhospitable shores of New Zealand or Lake Ontario, we are snatched away from such eloquent music, to crude, wild and extraneous harmonies... The chorus that immediately follows in in many places exceedingly imposing and effective, but then there is so much of it, so many sudden pauses and odd and almost ludicrous passages for the horn and bassoon, so much rambling and vociferous execution given to the violins and stringed instruments, without any decisive effect or definite meaning—and to crown it all, the deafening boisterous jollity of the concluding part, wherein, besides the usual allotment of triangles, drums, trumpets, etc., all the known acoustical missile instruments I should conceive were employed... that they made even the very ground shake under us, and would, with their fearful uproar, have been sufficiently penetrating to call us from their peaceful graves the revered shades of Tallis, Purcell, and Gibbons, and even of Handel and Mozart, to witness and deplore the obstreperous roarings of modern frenzy in their art... Beethoven finds from all the public accounts, that noisy extravagance of execution and outrageous clamor in musical performances more frequently ensures applause than chastened elegance or refined judgment. The inference therefore that we may fairly make, is that he writes accordingly.”

*Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, London, 1825

(5)

“It is not surprising that Beethoven should, occasionally, have entertained blasé notions of his art; that he should have mistaken noise for grandeur, extravagance for originality, and have supposed that the interest of his compositions would be in proportion to their duration. That he gave little time to reflection, is proved most clearly in the extraordinary length of some movements in his later symphonies... His great qualities are frequently alloyed by a morbid desire for novelty; by extravagance, and by a disdain of rule... The effect which the writings of Beethoven have had on the art must, I fear, be considered as injurious. Led away by the force of his genius and dazzled by his creations, a crowd of imitators has arisen, who have displayed as much harshness, as much extravagance, and as much obscurity, with little or none of his beauty and grandeur. Thus music is no longer intended to soothe, to delight, to ‘wrap the sense in Elysium’; it is absorbed in one principle—to astonish.”

Letter to the Editor in the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, London, 1827

(6)

“Beethoven, this extraordinary genius, was completely deaf for nearly the last ten years of his life, during which his compositions have partaken of the most incomprehensible wildness. His imagination seems to have fed upon the ruins of his sensitive organs.”

William Gardiner, *The Music of Nature*, London, 1837

(7)

“I confess freely that I could never get any enjoyment out of Beethoven’s last works. Yes, I must include among them even the much-admired Ninth Symphony, the fourth movement of which seems to me so ugly, in such bad taste, and in the conception of Schiller’s Ode so cheap that I cannot even now understand how such a genius as Beethoven could write it down. I find in it another corroboration of what I had noticed already in Vienna, that Beethoven was deficient in esthetic imagery and lacked sense of beauty.”

Louis Spohr, *Selbstbiographie* [Autobiography], Cassel, 1861

(8)

“The whole orchestral part of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony I found very wearying indeed. Several times I had great difficulty in keeping awake... It was a great relief when the choral part was arrived at, of which I had great expectations. It opened with eight bars of a commonplace theme, very much like Yankee Doodle... As for this part of the famous Symphony, I regret to say that it appeared to be made up of the strange, the ludicrous, the abrupt, the ferocious, and the screechy, with the slightest possible admixture, here and there, of an intelligible melody. As for following the words printed in the program, it was quite out of the question, and what all the noise was about, it was hard to form any idea. The general impression it left on me is that of a concert made up of Indian war-whoops and angry wildcats.”

Quoted from a Providence, RI, newspaper in *The Orchestra*, London, June 20, 1868

(9)

“Beethoven always sounds to me like the upsetting of bags and nails, with here and there an also dropped hammer.”

John Ruskin, letter to John Brown, February 6, 1881

(10)

“We heard lately in Boston the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven. The performance was technically most admirable... But is not worship paid this Symphony mere fetishism? Is not the famous Scherzo insufferably long-winded? The Finale... is to me for the most part dull and ugly... I admit the grandeur of the passage ‘und der Cherub steht vor Gott’ and the effect of ‘Seid umschlungen Millionen!’ But oh, the passages of stupid and hopelessly vulgar music! The unspeakable cheapness of the chief tune, ‘Freude, Freude!’ Do you believe way down in the bottom of your heart that if this music had been written by Mr. John L. Tarbox, now living in Sandown, NH, any conductor here or in Europe could be persuaded to put it in rehearsal?”

Philip Hale, *Musical Record*, Boston, June 1, 1899

Stop music: SQUARE button.  
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## "Does Jazz Put the Sin in Syncopation?"

by Anne Shaw Faulkner, head of the Music  
Department of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.  
Published in *Ladies Home Journal*, August 1921, pp. 16-34.

We have all been taught to believe that "music soothes the savage breast," but we have never stopped to consider that an entirely different type of music might invoke savage instincts. We have been content to accept all kinds of music, and to admit music in all its phases into our homes, simply because it was music. It is true that frequently father and mother have preferred some old favorite song or dance, or some aria from opera, to the last "best seller" which has found its way into the home circle; but, after all, young people must be entertained and amused, and even if the old-fashioned parents did not enjoy the dance music of the day, they felt it could really do no harm, because it was music.

Therefore, it is somewhat of a rude awakening for many of these parents to find that America is facing a most serious situation regarding its popular music. Welfare workers tell us that never in the history of our land have there been such immoral conditions among our young people, and in the surveys made by many organizations regarding these conditions, the blame is laid on jazz music and its evil influence on the young people of to-day. Never before have such outrageous dances been permitted in private as well as public ballrooms, and never has there been used for the accompaniment of the dance such a strange combination of tone and rhythm as that produced by the dance orchestras of to-day.

Certainly, if this music is in any way responsible for the condition and for the immoral acts which can be traced to the influence of these dances, then it is high time that the question should be raised: "Can music ever be an influence for evil?"



John Held, Jr., "Dancin in the Jazz Age" (1920)

### The Rebellion

In history there have been several great periods when music was declared to be an evil influence, and certain restrictions were placed upon the dance and the music which accompanied it. But all of these restrictions were made by the clergy, who have never been particularly enthusiastic about dancing anyway. To-day, however, the first great rebellion against jazz music and such dances as the "toddle" and the "shimmy" comes from the dancing masters themselves. Realizing the evil influence of this type of music and dancing, the National Dancing Masters' Association, at their last session, adopted this rule: "Don't permit vulgar cheap jazz music to be played. Such music almost forces dancers to use jerky half-steps, and invites immoral variations. It is useless to expect to find refined dancing when the music lacks all refinement, for, after all, what is dancing but an interpretation of music?"

Several of the large dance halls in the big cities are following the lead of the proprietor of one of them in Chicago, who, when he opened his establishment a few years ago, bravely advertised that no jazz music and no immoral dances would be allowed on his floor. His announcement was met with ridicule, but his dance hall has become the most popular one in Chicago. The place is crowded every evening, and yet nothing except waltzes and two-steps are allowed on the floor and absolutely no jazz music is tolerated.

That jazz is an influence for evil is also felt by a number of the biggest country clubs, which have forbidden the corset check room, the leaving of the hall between dances and the jazz orchestras--three evils which have also been eliminated from many municipal dance halls, particularly when these have been taken under the chaperonage of the Women's Clubs.

Still another proof that jazz is recognized as producing an evil effect is the fact that in almost every big industry where music has been instituted it has been found necessary to discontinue jazz because of its demoralizing effect upon the workers. This was noticed in an unsteadiness and lack of evenness in the workmanship of the product after a period when the workmen had indulged in jazz music.

Many people classify under the title of "jazz" all music in syncopated rhythm, whether it be the ragtime of the American Negro or the csardas of the Slavic people. Yet there is a vast difference between syncopation and jazz. To understand the seriousness of the jazz craze, which, emanating from America, has swept over the world, it is time that the American public should realize what the terms ragtime and jazz mean; for the words are not synonymous, as so many people suppose.

## The Elements of Music Out of Tune

Jazz is not defined in the dictionary or encyclopedia. But Groves' Dictionary of Music says that "ragtime is a modern term of American origin, signifying in the first instance broken rhythm and melody, especially a sort of continuous syncopation." The Encyclopedia Britannica sums up syncopation as "the rhythmic method of tying two beats of the same note into one tone in such a way as to displace the accent." Syncopation, this curious rhythmic accent on the short beat, is found in its most highly developed forms in the music of the folk who have been held for years in political subjection. It is, therefore, an expression in music of the desire for that freedom which has been denied to its interpreter. It is found in its most intense forms among the folk of all the Slavic countries, especially in certain districts of Poland and Russia, and also among the Hungarian gypsies.

For the same reason it was the natural expression of the American Negroes and was used by them as the accompaniment for their bizarre dances and cakewalks. Negro ragtime, it must be frankly acknowledged, is one of the most important and distinctively characteristic American expressions to be found in our native music. Whether ragtime will be the cornerstone of the American School of Music may be a subject for discussion; but the fact remains that many of the greatest compositions by past and present American composers have been influenced by ragtime. Like all other phases of syncopation, ragtime quickens the pulse, it excites, it stimulates; but it does not destroy.



What of jazz? It is hard to define jazz, because it is neither a definite form nor a type of rhythm; it is rather a method employed by the interpreter in playing the dance or song. Familiar hymn tunes can be jazzed until their original melodies are hardly recognizable. Jazz does for harmony what the accented syncopation of ragtime does for rhythm. In ragtime the rhythm is thrown out of joint, as it were, thus distorting the melody; in jazz exactly the same thing is done to the harmony. The melodic line is disjointed and disconnected by the accenting of the partial instead of the simple tone, and the same effect is produced on the melody and harmony which is noticed in syncopated rhythm. The combination of syncopation and the use of these inharmonic partial tones produces a strange, weird effect, which has been designated "jazz."

The jazz orchestra uses only those instruments which can produce partial, inharmonic tones more readily than simple tones--such as the saxophone, the clarinet and the trombone, which share honors with the percussion instruments that accent syncopated rhythm. The combination of the syncopated rhythm, accentuated by the

constant use of the partial tones sounding off-pitch, has put syncopation too off-key. Thus the three simple elements of music--rhythm, melody and harmony--have been put out of tune with each other.

## Its Effect

Jazz originally was the accompaniment of the voodoo dancer, stimulating the half-crazed barbarian to the vilest deeds. The weird chant, accompanied by the syncopated rhythm of the voodoo invokers, has also been employed by other barbaric people to stimulate brutality and sensuality. That it has a demoralizing effect upon the human brain has been demonstrated by many scientists.

There is always a revolutionary period of the breaking down of old conventions and customs which follows after every great war; and this rebellion against existing conditions is to be noticed in all life to-day. Unrest, the desire to break the shackles of old ideas and forms are abroad. So it is no wonder that young people should have become so imbued with this spirit that they should express it in every phase of their daily lives. The question is whether this tendency should be demonstrated in jazz--that expression of protest against law and order, that bolshevik element of license striving for expression in music.



"Jazzola" by J. Russel Robinson & Theodore Morse (sheet music 1919);

"Parisiola" by Alex Gerber & Abner Silver (sheet music 1920).



The human organism responds to musical vibrations. This fact is universally recognized. What instincts then are aroused by jazz? Certainly not deeds of valor or martial courage, for all marches and patriotic hymns are of regular rhythm and simple harmony; decidedly not contentment or serenity, for the songs of home and the love of native land are all of the simplest melody and harmony with noticeably regular rhythm. Jazz disorganizes all regular laws and order; it stimulates to extreme deeds, to a breaking away from all rules and conventions; it is harmful and dangerous, and its influence is wholly bad.

A number of scientific men who have been working on experiments in musico-therapy with the insane, declare that while regular rhythms and simple tones produce a quieting effect on the brain of even a violent patient, the effect of jazz on the normal brain produces an atrophied condition on the brain cells of conception, until very frequently those under the demoralizing influence of the persistent use of syncopation, combined with inharmonic partial tones, are actually incapable of distinguishing between good and evil, right and wrong.

Such music has become an influence for evil.

Last winter, at one of the biggest high schools in one of our largest cities, a survey was made of the popular songs of the day by the music supervisor, who suggested that a community sing be held for one assembly each week. He requested the students to bring all the popular songs to school that a choice might be made of what to sing. At the end of two weeks he had in his office over two thousand "best sellers." He asked the student body to appoint from among themselves a committee of six to choose the songs to be sung at the assembly. This committee, after going through the two thousand songs, chose forty as being "fit for boys and girls to sing



together." With this evil influence surrounding our coming generation, it is not to be wondered at that degeneracy should be developing so rapidly in America.

In a recent letter to the author, Dr. Henry van Dyke says of jazz: "As I understand it, it is not music at all. It is merely an irritation of the nerves of hearing, a sensual teasing of the strings of physical passion. Its fault lies not in syncopation, for that is a legitimate device when sparingly used. But 'jazz' is an unmitigated cacophony, a combination of disagreeable sounds in complicated discords, a willful ugliness and a deliberate vulgarity."

Never in the history of America have we more needed the help and inspiration which good music can and does give. The music department of the General Federation of Women's Clubs has taken for its motto: "To Make Good Music Popular, and Popular Music Good." Let us carry out this motto in every home in America firmly, steadfastly, determinedly, until all the music in our land becomes an influence for good.



Click the **REFRESH/RELOAD** button (above) to re-play the music.

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Background MIDI: George and Ira Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm"

Source: [Jack's "MIDI Music", Jazz Page 3](#)



# There's a good reason why there are no great female composers

Damian Thompson



*Robert Alexander Schumann and wife Clara Schumann*

Last week a 17-year-old girl forced the Edexcel exam board to change its A-level music syllabus to include the work of women composers. Jessy McCabe, a sixth former at Twyford Church of England High School in London, started a petition after studying gender inequality. Good for her, you might think. But is it good for A-level students?

A delicate question lies at the heart of the subject of female composers, and it's not 'Why are they so criminally underrepresented in the classical canon?' It's 'How good is their music compared with that of male composers?'

Ms McCabe told the press that 'I'd quite like to learn about the music of Clara Schumann.' OK, let's start there. As I write this, I'm listening to a recording that couples the piano concertos of Mr and Mrs Schumann. In track three, I marvel yet again at Robert's genius.



Then comes track four, the first movement of Clara's concerto, and within ten seconds we know it's a dud. The first phrase is a platitude: nothing good can come of it and nothing does. Throughout, the virtuoso passagework is straight out of the catalogue. In her defence, it's an early piece; her mature Piano Trio is more accomplished, though its lyrical passages could have been cut and pasted from one of her husband's works. Her G minor Piano Sonata, on the other hand, isn't a success. I wouldn't go so far as to call it 'repugnant' (Clara's verdict on *Tristan*) or 'horrible' (her description of Bruckner's Seventh), but it's embarrassingly banal.

Fanny Mendelssohn, sister of Felix, has also been suggested for the new syllabus. She, too, wrote a G minor Piano Sonata and it's bloody awful. Whether it's worse than Clara's sonata I can't say, because that would mean listening to them again. But we can be pretty sure that neither of them would have been recorded if they had been composed by a man. (Note to A-level candidates: you make this point at your peril.)

Clara and Fanny were not, of course, typical female composers of their day. They traded on their surnames, and Clara was also a world-famous virtuoso pianist. What about women who lacked these advantages? Amy Beach (1867–1944) is regarded as the first significant woman composer from the United States, though she sounds more French than American. She's significant mainly because she was a woman. Critics dutifully praise her but can't resist the adjective 'well-crafted', meaning boring.

In contrast, Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944) wrote some very badly crafted music. But her opera *The Wreckers* and her Mass in D — which she once sang solo, orchestral parts included, to Queen Victoria — are titanic in scale and ambition. *The Wreckers* has been described as a fusion of Wagner and Gilbert and Sullivan. She's an interesting composer but not a great one.

Although Beach and Smyth lived until the second world war, it's hard to think of them as 20th-century women composers, of whom there were many. They wrote in an enormous range of styles, though none of them can be said to have invented a musical language. The 13 string quartets of Elizabeth Maconchy (1907–1994), for example, are distinctively knotty — but when they turn spiky you think of Bartok and her bleaker moments sound like Shostakovich. Again, the phrase 'well-crafted' comes to mind, as it does in the case of Thea Musgrave (born 1928), a master orchestrator who spins out the development of small-scale motifs to the point where listeners are looking at their watches.

But then that's a bad habit of male composers, too. Indeed, there's nothing distinctively female about the uneven output of women composers. Clara Schumann's piano concerto is

that's because creative geniuses are rare and, in the past, so few women wrote music. There may be some in the future, though I'm not sure whether 'greatness' is achievable amid the messy eclecticism of 21st-century music.

Meanwhile, we're stuck in a situation where the barriers to women becoming composers have been removed but they're still honoured for being women. Judith Weir (born 1954) is a minor figure whose 'stark' scores sound as if crucial instrumental parts have gone missing. Her opera *Miss Fortune* received such a savaging at Covent Garden in 2012 that the Santa Fe Opera dropped its plans to stage it. Last year she was appointed Master of the Queen's Music. You may not be surprised to learn that she's all in favour of the new A-level syllabus.

*This is an extract from this week's magazine. Subscribe [here](#).*

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## Prom 25: Gabetta/BBCSO/Stasevska review - stirring and spirited

**Royal Albert Hall, London** Dalia Stasevska established a strong rapport with orchestra and audience in fresh and fluid readings of Tchaikovsky and Sibelius, while Sol Gabetta gave shape and intimacy to Mieczysław's cello concerto

**Erica Jeal**

Wed 7 Aug 2019 07.42 EDT

**T**his was Dalia Stasevska's debut as the BBC Symphony Orchestra's new principal guest conductor - an appointment that makes her, at 34, the first woman to hold a titled conducting post at a major London orchestra. The players' responsiveness to her suggests a strong rapport already developing; the silence in a packed Royal Albert Hall at the end of Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 6 suggests that she can hold an audience in her hand just as surely. It had been the bleakest of endings to a stirring performance of the symphony, spirited and with a few edges left raw, its dark moments made more vivid by the BBCSO players' grittiness.

Opening the concert, Sibelius's Karelia Suite had likewise sounded familiar yet fresh, the middle movement fluid and pensive, the outer ones skipping along, feet barely touching the ground, the orchestra always ready to move when Stasevska whipped things up.



Richly lyrical ... Sol Gabetta performs the Cello Concerto by Mieczysław Weinberg. Photograph: Chris Christodoulou/BBC

Between these two there was something new, at least for London audiences: the Cello Concerto by Mieczysław Weinberg, a more richly lyrical work than you might expect from the musically proscriptive USSR of the 1950s. Sol Gabetta, who has recently been its champion, shaped the first movement into one long, slowly blossoming melody, and whirled through the livelier passages, even if the orchestra didn't always share her urgency. The return to the opening music at the end was movingly done. Her encore - Casals's haunting arrangement of a Catalan folksong, for which she was joined by three of the BBCSO cellists - was further proof that even the Albert Hall can feel like an intimate venue if the performer gets it right.

The Proms continue until 14 September.

This review was amended on 7 August to correct the statement that Stasevska is the youngest to be appointed to a titled position at a major London orchestra.

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# PATHETIQUE FOR A WOMAN CONDUCTOR

By Norman Lebrecht

On August 7, 2019

Dalia Stasevska, the BBC Symphony's **new** principal guest conductor, made a nervous debut last night at the BBC Proms.

She was not helped by wearing a kimono-type garment with a peacock design and flapping sleeves. It deflected attention from what should have been the musician's main focus – her hands. Stasevska, 34, uses a long baton with textbook motions. Her left hand, so far as I could see past the sleeve, was curiously unexpressive, the fingers static and together.

A Finn of Ukrainian origin, she gave a fidgety account of the Sibelius *Karelia* suite, not much light and shade and very little to draw the ear off the beaten path. The London premiere of Mieczyslaw Weinberg's 1956 cello concerto (and Weinberg's first hearing at the Proms) went much better, thanks to the soloist Sol Gabetta, who has toured the work across Germany to great acclaim. Rippled with Jewish themes and klezmer evocations, embedded with ideas that the composer's friend Shostakovich borrowed for his own concerto four years later, the half-hour work has so much going on between the lines that I kept wanting to press the pause button for instant replay.

Gabetta, in a show-stealing backless dress, kept the eye off Stasevska, who seemed less laboured by now, more comfortable with the idiom and evidently more connected to the players, though the concertmaster Igor Yuzefovich looked lost in a world all his own.

Which left, after the interval, Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony, a challenge for any young conductor bearing in mind the interpretative legacy that listeners bring to any new performance – Mravinsky, Furtwängler, Karajan, Kubelik, Solti, Abbado, Muti, Tennstedt, Masur, to mention just my own milestones.

The symphony started well, the tempi taut and credible, and it got to be so confident that Stasevska was able to stand back in the second movement and lower the baton, letting the orchestra play on auto-pilot, always a good sign in a new conductor. The *allegro* third movement was almost joyous – if such a word is not out of place in the *Pathétique* – and, if the finale lacked ultimate pathos, the narrative direction was never less than lucid. It was a good performance, redeeming in many ways. This conductor will have better nights.

UPDATE: **Should we just ignore what an artist wears?**

*photo: Chris Christodoulou/BBC*

Player of the night: The BBC's principal bassoon Amy Harman.

And here's an earlier performance of the Weinberg, conducted by Stasevska's teacher, Mikko Franck:



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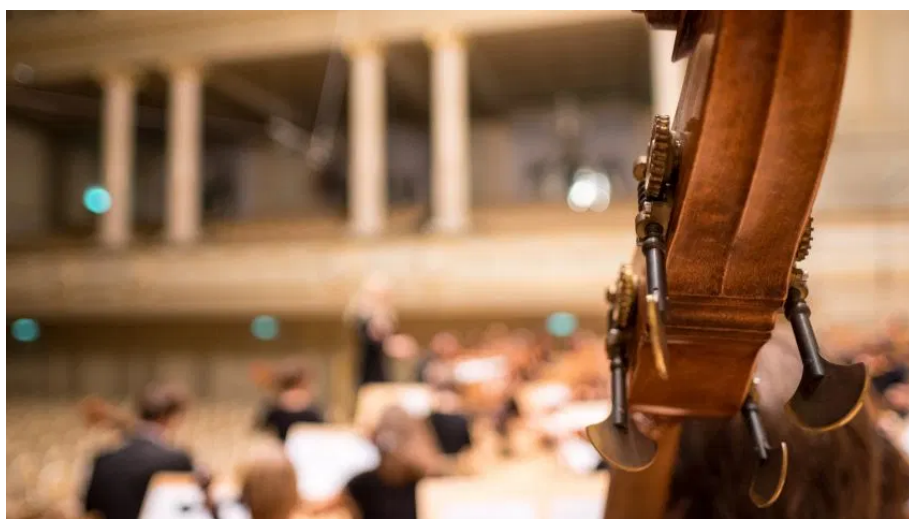
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## Pathetic for a male critic

REVIEWING A GENDER-DRIVEN REVIEW

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BY STEPHANIE ESLAKE

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**Music education matters, s...**

BY STEPHANIE ESLAKE

Music education matters.

[cutcommonmag.com](#)

Didn't like the headline you just read?

Oct 26,

Now you know how I feel — most likely in the company of many women who find themselves stumbling upon the headline on Norman Lebrecht's new review, 'Pathetique for a woman conductor'.

Writing for *Slipped Disc* on August 7 (also responsible for **publishing a report that tore into an under-age Australian musician** and his budding career), Norman let rip about new BBC Symphony principal guest conductor Dalia Stasevska and her "nervous debut" at the BBC Proms.

I can't tell you what Norman was wearing while writing his review, but there may be a chance his garments were stiff and outdated, as they enabled him to produce music criticism in the following fashion:

*She was not helped by wearing a kimono-type garment with a peacock design and flapping sleeves. It deflected attention from what should have been the musician's main focus – her hands. Stasevska, 34, uses a long baton with textbook motions. Her left hand, so far as I could see past the sleeve, was curiously unexpressive, the fingers static and together.*

While typing, it may intrigue you to know I am a woman wearing a plain black shirt, matching the shade of my feminine soul while reading about Dalia.

Nevertheless, had Dalia chosen to wear a different style of women's clothing, she *may* have been in the running to compete for this male critic's attention (a bulk of his short review focusing on the outfits). As Norman highlights, soloist Sol Gabetta took to the stage "in a show-stealing backless dress, kept the eye off Stasevska" – and was "evidently more connected to the players".

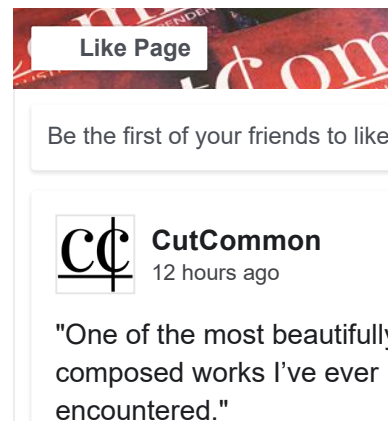
(While I wasn't in attendance, I would take an educated guess that this cellist's primary intention was to *perform music* that would steal the show. But, hey.)

While Norman acknowledges Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* symphony is "a challenge for any young conductor", he still doesn't hesitate to make a point of the *particular* challenge it presents to a conductor *sans penis*.

It may even have been "a good performance, redeeming in many ways", Norman admits.

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## HANSEL AND GRETEL

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But will the success of a woman conductor (or any conductor, for that matter) receive as many clicks as a headline using sexism as bait?

Probably not.



*photo: Chris Christodoulou/BBC*

Above: The photo published alongside Norman's review. I can see her hands pretty clearly...can you?

For another perspective on 'Pathetique for a woman conductor', you might like to check out '**No, no, Norman**' in which writer Amy Nagoski links this objectification of women to the #metoo movement.

If you'd like to read a credible and musical review of Dalia and this event, we'd recommend **this one in The Guardian**.

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*Featured image via Unsplash.*

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# Pianist Yuja Wang issues emotional reply after critics shame her for wearing glasses on stage

24 February 2020, 16:05 | Updated: 27 February 2020, 13:24



Pianist Yuja Wang shamed for wearing sunglasses on stage. *Picture: Getty*

By Maddy Shaw Roberts

**“Humiliated” after being detained at the airport, Yuja Wang says she delivered the recital in sunglasses to hide her tears.**

Chinese pianist Yuja Wang has issued an emotional response, after being criticised for wearing sunglasses during a recital in Canada.

After Friday’s concert, Wang was shamed by critics for her appearance, with one classical music blogger – Norman Lebrecht, who runs *Slipped Disc* – labelling her “attention-seeking”.

The piano virtuoso has defended herself in an emotional response, explaining that she had been detained and subjected to “intense questioning” for over an hour at Vancouver International Airport, causing her to almost miss her recital at the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts.

She adds, in an Instagram post, that although she found the experience “humiliating and deeply upsetting”, she was determined not to let her audience down so decided to wear sunglasses to cover her “visibly red and swollen” eyes.

[View More on Instagram](#)



14,852 likes

yujawang.official

It is difficult for me to share this with all of you, but given the circumstances, and harmful speculation and criticism being shared online and elsewhere, I feel it important that the following is made public. •

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On arrival at Vancouver International Airport on Friday, I was detained for over an hour and subjected to intense questioning which I found humiliating and deeply upsetting. I was then released, giving me very little time to travel to the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts. I was left extremely shaken by this experience. •

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When I was dropped off at the venue for my recital that evening, my eyes were still visibly red and swollen from crying. I was in shock. Although I was traumatized by what happened, I was determined not to cancel the recital, but to go ahead with the performance and not to let the audience down, which included my dear teacher Gary Graffman. I decided that wearing sunglasses was the only way to prevent my distress from being seen, since I wasn't yet prepared to make a statement about what happened. •

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My main concern in that moment was to give the best performance I possibly could, and not to allow the audience to be distracted by my swollen eyes or visibly shaken demeanor. It would never be my intention to snub or disengage with an audience. Everything I do on stage is about connecting with people. My audiences and fans sustain and nourish me as an artist. •

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I am deeply grateful to Leila Getz and her team in Vancouver, and to the audience there with me in the hall for their support throughout the day and evening. •

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My recital tour will continue, and I look forward to bringing my program to the audience in San Francisco tonight, and on to New York. •

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Thank you to everyone who has sent or shared words of support during this difficult time. I know that I am unfortunately not the only person to have had this kind of traumatic experience, which has shaken me to my core. My heart goes out to anyone else who has, and my hope is that by sharing what happened to me, there can be a much needed conversation and change in protocol to ensure this doesn't happen to anyone else. •

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Photo: Julia Wesely

[view all 707 comments](#)

On 23 February, Lebrecht published a blog post quoting audience member and conductor Tania Miller, who wrote on her own Facebook page:

“Your innocent audience, some donning masks to protect themselves from the potential Coronavirus, came to be in your presence for this sold-out concert, and to hear the music and extraordinary talent that you had to share. Instead they experienced the rejection of an artist withholding the permission to share in the feeling, transcendence and the shared emotion of the beauty, joy, and humanity of music.”

Miller has since apologised for her comments.

In her post, Wang calls out the media for spreading “harmful speculation and criticism”.



“It would never be my intention to snub or disengage with an audience,” she said. “Everything I do on stage is about connecting with people. My audiences and fans sustain and nourish me as an artist.”

Indeed they do... as seen in the hundreds of messages of support she has since received on Twitter and Instagram, including the below image of Wang smiling with hand on heart, smiling at the audience (“I believe this image should call into doubt the veracity of the claim that she did not appreciate her audience,” Mark Ainley writes).



Yuja Wang, in sunglasses, pictured smiling at audience. *Picture: Mark Ainley/The Piano Files*

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**Stephen Lupton #FBPE**

@stephenlup



Replying to @YujaWang

You bring joy to so many, Yuja. It is a shame that you have been subjected to this. You, the lady who has awoken Mozart from his slumber and had him dancing to his rather less sedate rondo, just keep breaking down the barriers and opening people's eyes to the joy of Music.

♡ 18 7:07 PM - Feb 23, 2020



[See Stephen Lupton's other Tweets](#)



**Barry Rueger**

@appalbarry



Replying to @YujaWang

Despite this awful treatment at the hands of Canadian customs authorities Yuja still did a wonderful concert., and the audience was enthuſisatic and overwhelming in their applause and praise.

I applaud Yuja for her professionalism, and her determination to still play.

♡ 21 1:50 AM - Feb 24, 2020



[See Barry Rueger's other Tweets](#)



**Paul Maranto**

@paulmaranto



Replying to @YujaWang

Thank you! Yuja Wang! For sharing you Talent, Passion and Art with the world! It is Beautiful! 🙌❤️

♡ 10 7:12 PM - Feb 23, 2020



[See Paul Maranto's other Tweets](#)

