

## THE VICE PRESIDENT'S VIEW

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I have always had a passion for live musical performances and have bemoaned the fact that these days live music is often replaced by recordings. When was the last time you attended a wedding reception or a ballet performance where a live band or orchestra was featured? These occasions are rare indeed, and their scarcity is presumably driven by financial considerations. Yet, the value of live performances cannot be measured in monetary terms because, in fact, they add a dimension to the entire artistic experience which is invaluable.

I was reminded of the impact of live music at a recent performance of the Miami City Ballet, which my wife and I attended at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts in Fort Lauderdale. Not only did this event include a thirty-two piece pit orchestra, but it was preceded by a presentation by Edward Villela, Founding Director of the Miami Ballet, who presented an overview of the ballets that were going to be performed. But the most impressive aspect of the afternoon occurred during the last ballet, which was choreographed by Twylla Tharp and accompanied with music composed by Elvis Costello. This work, entitled "Nightspot," also included an on-stage dance band that was situated in the background behind what appeared to be a red haze or veil. With the dancers out in front, the result was the creation of a complete audiovisual experience that conveyed the sensual and dynamic environment surrounding the Miami nightclub scene.

A second recent and memorable experience was a concert by the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Maestro Lorin Maazel. It was broadcast from North Korea on public television and therefore was not, strictly speaking, a "live" event. However, the camera work was of such high quality, that it felt as if the viewer had been transported to North Korea and was sitting there in the concert hall. Depending upon the particular point in the piece being performed, the camera would focus on specific sections or individuals within the orchestra. Of course, this approach is often used in televised concerts, but in this particular case, the extraordinarily high quality of the results suggested that the person behind the camera was perhaps also a musician intimately familiar with the music. Again, it was the last piece that elevated this concert to the level of a remarkable audiovisual happening. As its final work, the orchestra performed the Overture to the opera, "Candide," by the late Leonard Bernstein, on the occasion of what would have been his ninetieth birthday. The amazing thing was that Maestro Maazel, paying homage to Bernstein, left the stage and let the orchestra perform the piece without a conductor. This was an amazing technical achievement, as the overture is rather complex and moves along at a rapid clip. But it was the emotional impact resulting from the image in our mind's eye of Leonard Bernstein on the podium conducting his own work that created an unforgettable moment. This was an event that had to be seen and heard to fully appreciate it.



These two recent experiences reminded me of other live musical performances that I have enjoyed over the years. My exposure to live music began during my childhood in Schenectady, NY, where my mother regularly took me to a series of concerts sponsored by an organization called the Civic Music Association. Although Schenectady was not exactly a cultural mecca, it benefited from its proximity (165 miles) to New York City and other cultural centers. One performance that sticks in my mind was that of Maestro George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra. The moment Maestro Szell came onto the podium, the orchestra

immediately began a rousing rendition of the Star Spangled Banner (which was not on the program), and the audience hopped out of their seats and stood up at attention. The image of the stern European Maestro, the lively orchestra, the responsive audience, and the stimulating music persists in my mind to this day.

After I entered high school and switched from the clarinet to the saxophone section in the school band, I became enamored with jazz, particularly big band jazz. Somehow I managed to see the Count Basie Band at the Armory in Albany, NY, and this event remains one of my most memorable ones. Of course, the music was terrific, but seeing individual virtuosos within each section stand up and play dazzling solos was what really impressed me. This was also the first time I saw the pyrotechnics of a big band drummer (Sonny Payne) and, as a result, became hooked on big bands forever. During this period, I also snuck into a small jazz club on Upper Union St. in Schenectady and heard Ben Webster, a legendary tenor saxophonist. This was another unforgettable moment in which the smoky club, the imposing Webster, and his large, robust sound all melded into one artistic impression.

Over the years, I have continued to enjoy live performances including those by Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Milt Jackson, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Oscar Peterson, Duke Ellington, and many others. My only regret is that I never saw John Coltrane or Charles Mingus live, which, I am told, were amazing events. I can still see the look on my mother's face, though, when I first hooked up our record player to the speaker in our television and played Coltrane's interpretation of "My Favorite Things." She appeared to be wondering where she had gone wrong in raising her son.

My goal in this article has been to convey the significance and impact that live musical performances have on our cultural lives. Historically, the Acoustical Society of America has played a key role in promoting this idea through its tutorials, special sessions, and a variety of artistic events at plenary sessions and banquets. It is critical to continue this tradition in the future and to remember that our intellectual and emotional wellbeing is significantly enhanced by the experience of both hearing *and* seeing artistic performances.