
From the Editor

The Birds, the Bees and the Summer Festivals

The coming of summer brings many welcome activities, including a host of arts gatherings: many summer stocks, an ever-increasing number of music festivals, and a smaller number of dance programs all across the country. All of these represent diversion and relaxation that enhance our vacations or otherwise lighten our summer work. But what do these summer festivals mean to performing artists? Are they diversionary? Do they lighten their loads? Or are they simply more of the same work in a slightly different environment? And most important, from the point of view of those of us who are professionally concerned about their physical and psychological well-being, are these events good for the health of the performers? These subjects are a bit afield from the customary editorial material of MPPA, but I cannot resist a few comments. I will justify this foray on the basis of having had, over the years, an intimate relationship in a medical capacity with at least three of the major summer music festivals. And although I will confine my remarks to primarily orchestral music festivals, much of what I say can be applied to other arts activities.

Faced with the economic realities of current orchestral life (including the recently terminated seasons of at least three orchestras—Nashville, New Orleans, and Vancouver), an added season with assured income is clearly welcomed by the artists. An ever-increasing number of orchestras are finding that an extended season of up to 52 weeks has become an economic necessity. Many musicians who are not in orchestras, or who are in ones that do not have summer seasons, have been able to find employment in summer festivals. Therefore, there is no argu-

ment here: summer festivals are economically beneficial.

But do these summer concert programs benefit the artists beyond their bank accounts? Are they a welcome and healthy change of pace? Generalizations are potentially hazardous, but I would suggest that the risks may outweigh the benefits, and unless some current trends are reversed the situation may get worse before it gets better. Many summer festivals originated to provide light musical programs in keeping with the spirit of summer, i.e., less "serious" programs requiring less preparation than standard "in season" fare. As the selling of music festivals and concerts has become more of a business venture than an artistic or educational one, so has the programming. In fact, the only difference between the typical week's programs for the summer and winter of a major orchestra is that there are *more* programs to prepare in a typical summer week. There is certainly more work required to put on two or three different programs than to put on several performances of an identical program. This is hardly a restful pace for a member of such an orchestra. Although some of the summer concerts may swing toward "pops," many more feature the major "blockbuster" musical works that entail concentrated preparation.

And who are the soloists that appear in the summer festivals? Do we hear young, aspiring musicians having an opportunity to expand their horizons? On the contrary. With the benefits of modern transportation, one can track most of the best known (and best selling) soloists of the world from one summer music festival to the next across the country. If you miss your favorite performer playing the Tchaikovsky Pi-

ano Concerto at Festival A, simply go on to Festival B, or C, and so forth.

It is undoubtedly true that the audiences at summer festivals tend to be larger and different from those at winter events, so to some extent these programs have the potential for educating a new public to the glories of the standard works. Lost, however, to the performer is the opportunity to play different programs, to hear different performers, and to help educate the growing body of young musicians as well as the audiences. And instead of the summer offering a respite for the musician for both physical and psychological re-tuning(!), more stress accumulates. We do not yet have proof of whether or not the increasing incidence of performance-related injuries seen in orchestral musicians is a direct consequence of these increased obligations, but it's a pretty good bet that the 52-week season has something to do with it.

The pastoral scene of many festivals may enhance the atmosphere for the listening audience, but the noise of birds, the cries of children, the distraction of insects, and the vagaries of the weather do not make life any easier for the musicians who have to work at performing, despite the irony of the term "playing." Although I admit to anticipating with great pleasure summer events, I have noted increasingly that, with a change into informal clothes, an audience's customary decorum goes out the non-existent window. Eating, talking and strolling imply a lack of respect for what is transpiring on the stage. In the good old summertime our musician/patient/friends are working as hard, if not harder, as they do in the winter and making considerable sacrifices to entertain us.

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