Critic versus the performer

(Continued from page 4)

Performers to critics is strongly influenced by the type(s) of critics they have encountered. Student critics (e.g. myself) defy classification: they are either doing it as a hobby, or are in the process of developing a mature style. However, among established, non-evolving styles of critics I can see three types:

1. The critic as God. This person is critical and arbitrary. Criticism is an ego trip for this person. (S)he is often plain wrong, and loses no sleep over that reality. A testament to Lord Acton's "absolute power corrupts absolutely," (Smith et al).

2. The critic as a publicist. His/her reviews are always lavish and effusive; the worst one can ever fare at his hands is being "damned with faint praise." Others debate the question of subjectivity vs. objectivity. Suffice to say that a totally subjective review is worthless to all but the author, while a totally objective one is impossible. The critic must attempt to divorce himself from his personal prejudices, and admit to them when he cannot. He must approach each performance or work on its own merits, without adherence to some preconceived absolute ideal, two entirely different interpretations or styles may be equally valid.

3. The critic as an enlightened individual. This person is "right" almost all the time, and when (s)he is wrong, readily admits that possibility. Although his reviews may be subjective, they are based on factual material that is indisputable (e.g. "Smith numbed" or "the violins were flat." Even where the reader's taste is totally in opposition, one finds his reviews always valuable. He is an enlightened individual, no more and no less -- and not a capricious power-broker or a one-man advertising agency. Before he became the BSO's director of publications, Michael Steinberg was such a music critic for the Globe; the Globe's David St. George appears to have such a philosophy, though the newspaper uses him only part-time.

Both critics and performers should keep in perspective the fact that reviews are merely opinion, and not the Gospel Truth.

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