Encore
The Lark Ascending

As I DROVE west to California, memories of New York quickly faded. I traveled through states I'd never visited, stopping to hike in the Grand Canyon and watch the sunset turn its walls a flaming orange. Listening to conversations of the other tourists admiring the view, I was struck by the irrelevance of classical music to these people's rich and varied lives. How could I have allowed such an insular, incestuous business to rule me for a quarter century? Renewed, I felt like a pioneer driving on across the Mojave, up Highway 5, and finally to Stanford University, which lies thirty miles south of San Francisco.

After a few days on campus, I relaxed and stopped wondering when someone would discover me to be an imposter. Unlike the music business, there was room here in the real world for everyone to learn, work, and enjoy life. Starved for natural beauty after years in the noisy city, I soaked up the Stanford environment. A lemon tree and purple trumpet flowers grew outside my dormitory window. It was so quiet I could hear crickets in the evening, and the air was clean and cool. I ran six miles every morning in the Stanford hills before the sun rose on another day of blue skies. I was in heaven. I was also scared to death.

My brain moved slowly from years of boozy nights in the Broadway pits. I was the oldest journalism student at Stanford by thirteen years. I had no experience arguing points in class or organizing complex ideas. I wasn't used to speaking at all; I had been blowing into an oboe for thirty years. Other students in my Internet journalism class easily published

the Web site that was a required assignment, but I could barely type. I didn't even know how to turn on a computer and spent hundreds on high-tech tutors. With so much to do and learn, my interest in drinking quickly disappeared along with my chronic boredom.

Working a local newspaper internship at the *Palo Alto Weekly* for $15 a week humbled me. I entered police statistics into an ancient computer, attended my first city council meeting, and navigated local politics. I wrote stories about solar energy, dot-com start-ups, philanthropy, cycling activists, and Silicon Valley real estate. My subjects included an eighty-year-old librarian who grew psychotropic cacti, the dedicatee of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* and an old hippie named Perusha who got me stoned at the commune Joan Baez had started in 1969.

The work was compelling, but I felt lonely. Although the age difference between me and my classmates didn't bother me, the cultural divide did. I felt like a nineteenth-century cartoon character with my classical music background; I couldn't follow the impassioned discussions carried on by students who were starting their own dot-coms from dorm rooms.

One day, though, the San Francisco Symphony called me to substitute. When I walked onto the Davies Symphony Hall stage, I knew at least one third of the musicians, and the standard rehearsal protocol was comforting. I began a schizophrenic life, driving between classes, my reporting internship, and the various Bay Area performing groups that paid for my living expenses.

I turned forty in the dorm, three thousand miles from the Allendale. I celebrated the milestone with my 1979 Allendale roommate Kathleen Reynolds, who now played principal flute with the part-time Santa Rosa Symphony and taught elementary school in the daytime. We shared dinner at Chez Panisse in Berkeley.

I had worked hard, and now things were going well. My masters thesis and photographs about a Vietnamese newspaper were accepted for publication in Harvard's *Nieman Reports*. I landed a $2,500 feature assignment for *Sierra* magazine. The *San Francisco Examiner* offered me a staff business reporter job, so I scheduled my classes on one marathon weekday and worked the other four. At age forty, I had my first office job ever.

At school, my magazine-class professor asked us to write about a situation that affected us emotionally. When I read my story of Sam's death aloud in class, there was a long silence. "You have to write a book," the professor urged at last, describing my portrayal of the classical music business as "devastating." I waved off his suggestion, afraid to alienate people in the only business where I was sure I could earn a full-time living. Like many classical musicians, I still didn't believe I could be good enough at anything else to be paid for it. People had always acted as if music was my only real talent.

After graduation I used savings from my Broadway salary to buy my first home, a sunny Oakland condominium whose balcony overlooked a swimming pool. I still clung to music jobs, since newspaper journalism didn't pay very well, and drove between Bay Area orchestras in a routine jokingly called the "Freeway Philharmonic." I left the *Examiner* for an art critic's job at a suburban newspaper, and also taught journalism at Stanford and oboe at the University of California-Berkeley. I thought more seriously about a book but was not yet ready to let go of my old life.

At one concert with the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players, I performed a solo piece by the Mexican composer Mario Lavista that was accompanied by eight crystal water glasses. Between the glasses' eerie ringing sounds, some dramatic stage lighting, and the unusual oboe multiphonic chords (producing more than one note simultaneously on a wind instrument by using alternate fingerings), I felt an unusual electricity from the audience.

Something strange was happening with my music-making, although I couldn't put my finger on it. I loved my new writing life, which included reviewing art exhibitions and driving up the California coast to cover tidepools and nature walks for *Sierra*. At the same time, I was starting to look forward to playing the oboe as well, since I didn't *have* to be a musician anymore. I was finding journalism positions through want ads and employment interviews; unlike music, there were plenty of jobs where sleeping with the boss was definitely not a prerequisite. On the other hand, landing the scarce and competitive music work still required a humiliating degree of self-abnegation. It would take a reminder from my former life to make me see the difference clearly and to recognize my own evolution and new self-esteem as well.

While I was playing a production of *South Pacific* with Robert Goulet at the Golden Gate Theater, Boston Pops conductor Keith Lockhart called to ask me out for drinks late the same night, as we had done before in New York. Keith was a familiar link to my old ways of thinking. After wine in the Huntington Hotel's dark-paneled bar, we went upstairs to his room and had sex. I felt empty.

Keith then invited me for a weekend in Salt Lake City, where he was music director of the Utah Symphony. Without thinking carefully, I accepted. The night before my departure he called to cancel because his wife was suddenly visiting him there in order to get pregnant. We discussed the situation, including the sex act, in a series of e-mails. Keith did not offer to reimburse me for my nonrefundable plane fare but did so after I asked him to: a check drawn on a North Carolina account he shared with his mother. I was relieved not to be going to Utah, since I'd recognized my mistake. I came to California to leave these self-destructive behavior patterns behind. What was I doing?

I got nothing out of that night with Keith. I no longer wanted to participate in these tawdry scenarios; I now craved a value-driven life, centered around my own accomplishments. My California years enabled me to view the music business with detachment, and the evening provided me with a final turning point.

It was time to write the book. Almost as soon as I decided, I was offered a Broadway show job in New York, where it would be easier to negotiate a literary agent and publisher. I sold my condo and drove back to New York.

I reentered New York's freelance music world in November of 2002, three years after I'd left. I was forty-two. The *Man of La Mancha* production at the Martin Beck Theater included a pleasant group of musicians assembled by its music director, Bob Billig, whom I knew from *Les Mis* and *Miss Saigon*. I also resumed playing City Center's *Encores!* series and subbing in the New York City Ballet.

Sitting in the ballet pit next to Randy, I felt none of the love for him of our summer relationship fifteen years earlier. Now he had three

children and a devoted wife. Yet for some reason Randy wrote out a sixteen-page account of the long-ago love affair between us—that he had never publicly acknowledged—and gave it to me. The torrid story was scribbled on the back of a photocopied *Trio Sonata* by Jan Dismas Zelenka. I tucked it in my oboe bag and listened to the ballet orchestra's performance.

Randy's colleagues were understandably bored after playing *The Nutcracker* forty-five times every December for decades. Fiddlers sawed away vacantly. During one long rest, an ancient bassoonist belched expressively, the sound rippling audibly into the audience. One flutist propped the *Daily Racing Form* on his stand and began playing the perky "Dance of the Mirlitons," possibly for the two-thousandth time in his career. A wind player who disliked him leaned forward and whispered in rhythm, "Take-a-silver-flute-and-then, shoveitupyourass!"

Walking to the subway after the performance, I saw Juilliard students lounging by the conservatory's entrance across Lincoln Center's plaza. Many of them would never find work in music, nor would they be qualified for many other jobs. Unless they had the wherewithal to earn and pay for a second college degree, they would settle for menial retail or office jobs or a dead-end job that required only brief professional training. Except for the occasional star soloist, the luckiest would land a position somewhere like the ballet pit I'd just left. Those who won full-time orchestra positions would worry whether their jobs might disappear. The percentage of orchestras reporting deficits had risen steadily from 37 percent in 1998 to 73 percent in 2003. Only one American orchestra negotiated a salary increase in 2003, with the rest reporting freezes or pay cuts. Some musicians would still be able to earn at least sporadic income on Broadway, since the 2003 theater contract put a moratorium on reducing orchestra size for another ten years.

Music had not become the glamorous and elite profession of Cold War–era fantasy but an overpopulated, stagnant, and low-paying business. Many of its practitioners were highly intelligent and motivated, but they had ended up in careers that barely supported them and offered few opportunities for growth or creativity. Ironically, these players would perform little of the public service that classical music is expected to

provide. They would instead demand handouts and contributions for their survival, without asking the big questions: "Why is classical music essential, and do I really enjoy it?"

A field trip to the Allendale should become part of the required conservatory curriculum. The Allendale building, a metaphor for the classical music business, looks worse than ever. The missing water tower roof was never replaced, and the water tank finally failed, gushing into four floors of apartments and unleashing a swarm of cockroaches whose century-old nests had been disturbed. Inside, the elevators creak ominously. On my last visit, my old mailbox was labeled KIM, and its lock was still broken. On the street level, the building's exterior planters were still barren, and a few more cardboard squares patched the basement windows. The ivy had grown long enough to reach the fourth floor, and Jules still stood guard at the door.

However, the building pulsed with sounds of musicians practicing, as it had for decades. I could hear Bobby White's distinctive tenor, probably demonstrating phrasing for one of his students from Manhattan School. The string quartet that rehearsed on the ground floor was practicing Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*, and an unfamiliar flutist was playing long tones. The plaid curtains in Sam's old apartment had been removed and a cello case now stood inside the window. I ran into a former actress and massage therapist who had lived there thirty years. She was turning forty-nine and had finally found a secretarial job with health benefits. Another tenant told me that Brunhilde had "renovated" certain apartments with cheap appliances and now charged over $2,000 for them. She said that when the tenant moved out, the appliances appeared on the street to be replaced with new "renovations" and higher rent for the next occupants.

After waiting thirty years, Betty married her opera-singer boyfriend after his wife died. They live in the Allendale, spending part of the winter in his Florida apartment. Betty quit her ballet job and now pushes his wheelchair up the Allendale's single step into the lobby. I saw Joan on the street with a new matted dog. A few old tenants trudged by, absorbed in their troubles with their eyes downcast, and did not look up to recognize me.

Sydney left the Allendale in 1998 to move in with her CEO boyfriend. She and I met at the Cottage restaurant before the show, where the

waitress recognized us and immediately brought a half-liter of cheap wine, pouring it to the brim in our two glasses. I lifted the wine to my mouth, but it smelled so nasty I set it down again. Sydney took a sip and sighed. She still looked beautiful; she took good care of her hair and skin and worked out at Equinox. I talked enthusiastically of my book and other writing projects. Sydney was supportive, offering to be my editor. The waitress replaced the empty wine carafe with a new one. By the time our usual steamed chicken and broccoli arrived, Sydney's voice began slurring into complaints about the show and the paranoia of competing musicians' motives. "It's so awful," she chorused, reverting to the duet we had performed together for so many years. I was singing an entirely new song, however, and had grown out of our friendship.

Other pieces of my past looked equally absurd in the rearview mirror. I remembered the holidays when I had stayed in New York to "further my career" and play jobs during those busy times. One Christmas, I had sat all alone in my apartment and opened the presents my mother had carefully shipped to me. That evening I had Christmas dinner by myself at the Brew N' Burger across the street from the Broadway Theatre, thought of my parents and brother sitting cozily in our North Carolina living room, and then went inside the theater to spend Christmas night performing *Les Miserables*.

My education now looked like a farce as well. Critics of the North Carolina School of the Arts were becoming more vocal as the school approached its fortieth anniversary in 2005 with only a $17.5 million endowment. Nearly half the government-supported institution's students came from outside North Carolina, and few of its artsy alumni earned enough income to donate to the school. "If they could show me what the benefit is to the state and the average person, I might have a different attitude," said state representative Cary Allred in 2003, declaring the school's existence unjustified.

As NCSA chancellor Wade Hobgood explained in a newspaper interview, "There's that automatic assumption that we have strange things happening here." He was right. In 2004, North Carolina auditors determined that a school administrator had diverted nearly $1 million in foundation money for country club memberships, a Cadillac Escalade, and a down payment on a million-dollar condominium. The

scandal was compared to Enron and predicted to represent just the tip of the iceberg.

The two male dance teachers whom my 1970s classmates had dubbed Crotch and Groin had been forced to resign in 1995, after a former student sued the school, alleging the pair had seduced him. My high school lover, the flute instructor twenty-seven years my senior, had retired. He married one of his three daughters' former childhood playmates and sired another child at age seventy. There were sad stories about NCSA's star students. Patrick Bissell had become a star with American Ballet Theater and then died of a drug overdose in 1987. José, my violin-smashing first boyfriend, was struggling in Kansas City to complete his first bachelor's degree at age fifty-two. He was majoring in math.

I started writing about classical music for *The New York Times*, first with an op-ed piece during the Broadway strike. The essay was well received. Before long I spoke to a *Times* editor and gave him a list of story ideas. He chose an article about the exorbitant salaries of "nonprofit" orchestra executives and conductors that ran as the cover story of the Arts & Leisure section.

Some of the pay packages are huge, many of them at orchestras that have run deficits for years. At the New York Philharmonic, conductor Lorin Maazel earned $2.3 million for fourteen weeks of work. Executive director Zarin Mehta got a $600,000 salary plus $150,000 in benefits, despite overseeing the orchestra during a year that included a botched move from Lincoln Center to Carnegie Hall and three canceled tours. Soloists also command huge salaries, with Itzhak Perlman said to charge $65,000 per night and Yo-Yo Ma, $80,000. The large sums not only challenge the budgets of these so-called charitable organizations but also destroy morale within the ranks of musicians who earn a fraction of their bosses' pay.

Communicating with the orchestras sometimes proves difficult. As organizations granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service, orchestras are obliged to release the salaries of their highest-paid employees and contractors. Almost without exception, they refuse to

provide financial information any more recent than the year-old tax documents available online. This was particularly frustrating in the case of the Boston Symphony, which had just hired Metropolitan Opera music director James Levine as its conductor. Levine's salary had not yet showed up on Boston Symphony forms. At his other job, the Metropolitan Opera, the salary was concealed in tax documents that listed two independent contractors—whose payments totaled $2.2 million—"Phramus" and "Dry Fly," one or both of whom could have been Levine.

A disturbing picture emerges. Conductors and executives are regarded as a class of workers whose superior skills entitle them to demand astronomical salaries from nonprofit organizations that are already in debt. As the oxymoronic concept of such classical music "stars" grows, the musicians themselves begin to appear peripheral to the organizations, or even the music interpretation. One midwestern conductor I spoke to said that board members don't respect the musicians because they are willing to work for such meager wages and benefits. (The conductor himself earned a salary exceeding $130,000 for his season of under twenty weeks.)

Sadly, many arts organizations like orchestras, opera and ballet companies, and performing arts centers are failing to fulfill their missions because they are not functioning as charities providing a public service. The people most likely to benefit from these "nonprofit" groups are a handful of star performers and administrators, as well as wealthy donors who receive a tax deduction for their financial contributions to organizations that, themselves, pay no taxes. Many lower- and middle-class citizens interested in attending cannot afford ticket prices, which have risen sharply in an attempt to cover escalating costs.

I discovered huge salary discrepancies among orchestras of similar budget size. In presenting five weekends of concerts, Connecticut's Stamford Symphony spent a total of $847,000 on expenses ranging from musician salaries, advertising, and fund-raising, yet paid executive director Barbara Soroca $105,000, a salary that was 12 percent of the orchestra's total expenses. A few miles away, the Greenwich Symphony also put on a similar season of five weekends of concerts but spent only $465,000. Its president, Mary Radcliffe, took no compensation at all.

The New York Philharmonic was particularly elusive. Its public relations director did not return my calls for two weeks. He spent our two brief phone conversations discussing "the media" instead of providing information that might have tempered an unflattering portrait of the orchestra and its administration.

The salary story piece ran in *The New York Times* on July 4, 2004. The responses I received were almost all positive, although many were transparent; musicians who hadn't acknowledged me for years now wanted me to help them with their own publicity. Could I place an article about their chamber group in *The New York Times*? Did I have friends who could write up their summer festivals? Their voices were filled with desperation.

I received two negative messages. The first came from a prominent musician whose salary of over $350,000 was revealed in the story. He complained that I'd let "the world" know he was underpaid, because he suspected one of his competitors earned slightly more. The second message came from a symphony representative who said I'd miscalculated the percentage increase of their president's raise. As it turned out, the executive had calculated the percentage equation backward, basing it on the salary amount that included the raise instead of the pre-raise salary. That phone call ended quickly.

As I continued learning about nonprofit organizations, I began to see a pattern. Major health research centers, museums, performing arts groups, and university endowments pay disproportionate executive compensation compared to other types of public organizations. In many cases the nonprofit structure has become a new scheme for members of the middle class to earn big money by declaring unique knowledge of arts or other specific fields, claims that much of the public is too intimidated to question or challenge.

The musicians, however, were relieved to have the information out in the open after my *Times* article appeared. Through a delegate to the ICSOM convention, I heard that my story opened up the topic of conductors' and administrators' salaries for the first time in contract talks. I felt I had at last done something constructive for classical music. The uproar over the story subsided over the next month, and I began work-

ing on a second *Times* article about drugs used for stage fright, with several more ideas in the works.

There *are* positive signs in the orchestral business. Some organizations are either shifting their priorities or downsizing. The two major West Coast orchestras, for example, are leading something of a revolution. Under the artistic direction of Michael Tilson Thomas, the San Francisco Symphony has been drawing record audiences with its intelligent contemporary music programs. The futuristic Disney Hall in Los Angeles, designed by Frank Gehry, has become an icon of that city's cultural renaissance. At its center is the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which under the guidance of managing director Deborah Borda and music director Esa-Pekka Salonen has achieved both financial stability and musical relevance, with accessible concert formats at both Disney Hall and the Hollywood Bowl.

A trend has also emerged for larger orchestras to experiment with hiring several regular conductors instead of relying on a single absentee music director. The New York Philharmonic will play not only under its music director Lorin Maazel, but also with David Robertson, Alan Gilbert, and Ricardo Muti. The Atlanta Symphony employs two conductors, Robert Spano and Donald Runnicles, and the Pittsburgh Symphony added a trio of conductors who will trade off concerts. This experiment may provide a more consistent musical identity for the orchestras or it may become a colossal expense, as not one but three music directors demand enormous salaries.

It will take years for orchestras to reconcile the needs of musicians with those of their listeners. One major orchestra's executive said that his job revolved around finding ways to meet the musicians' full-time employment demands rather than serving the audience. Another asked plaintively why the musicians were so belligerent during contract negotiations. Although the top ten orchestras are not likely to shorten their seasons, smaller orchestras are already cutting both season length and orchestra size. In doing so, they put the needs of their communities first.

Symphonies that have gone bankrupt and reorganized with smaller expectations and shorter seasons include those in Oakland, California; Denver and Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Birmingham, Alabama, and

they are thriving as part-time orchestras with schedules in proportion to their region's population. Those sticking with the old full-time model are unlikely to succeed. Yet for some musicians, an orchestra is an all-or-nothing proposition, a local expense that their adopted communities are required to bankroll whether they like it or not. "We're not going to be the poster child for making per-service orchestras out of full-time bands," said one unemployed woodwind player in the former Savannah Symphony, which went out of business in 2003 under a crushing debt.

Musicians are finally beginning to understand that the way they have done business is no longer working. When four of the "big five" orchestras came up for contract negotiation simultaneously in the fall of 2004, Philadelphia, Chicago, and Cleveland were rumored to be considering strikes. At first, musicians of the Philadelphia Orchestra would not budge on issues like eliminating the thirteenth viola chair, complaining that such an action would compromise their artistic integrity. However, as contracts expired and talks continued for weeks, all three orchestras finally settled. This time, musicians agreed to reducing orchestra size (and the collective cost of full-time benefits) through attrition, higher healthcare premiums, and more flexible scheduling that will allow performances to break free of formal concert formats.

The classical music business is experiencing a kind of market correction, as groups reduce the number of formal concerts they produce and provide, instead, more intimate and convenient performances within their communities. Perhaps classical music could learn from the diamond companies, which have transformed a relatively common mineral into something precious by limiting its abundance in the marketplace.

Good music, accessibly presented, is not a hard sell. On a morning television show in early 2004, I saw the beautiful soprano Renee Fleming performing on the air with her pianist, dressed in a simple pants outfit with a casual, contemporary hairstyle and little jewelry. She looked nothing like the stereotypical opera diva. The camera angle showed pedestrians in the background, gathering on the sidewalk outside the broadcast studio's windows as Fleming began singing her aria. Almost immediately, the listeners' faces softened. The crowd grew larger and everyone watched her intently, as if the world around them had disappeared.

I imagine most of these people thought they didn't like classical music, yet they were mesmerized by Fleming's simple performance.

The same listeners might not have enjoyed a typical concert setting so much, forced to sit for two hours or more and absorb sounds that tell no story. For that matter, I have always disliked attending concerts myself. I recently went to a New Jersey Symphony concert in order to hear a friend play a concerto with the group. Even in the wealthy New York area community of Bergen County, the audience was sparse, and almost everyone was over fifty. I watched sour-faced musicians drift onstage, some of them in wrinkled outfits. In between pieces, stagehands took forever to reset the stage, yet the auditorium lights were left dark so that we could not even read our programs in the interim. I left at intermission, wondering why the people around me had paid to attend such a boring event.

As I worked on this book, I played shows at night and wrote during the day in my new condo perched atop the New Jersey Palisades. From its windows, Manhattan looks like a surreal film backdrop rather than the inescapable prison I had considered the city to be only five years before. Across the Hudson River I can just glimpse the tip of the Allendale's water tower, although it is hard to spot among grander rooftops, which in turn are dwarfed by the city's shiny new skyscrapers.

I am forty-four now. My life has paralleled America's so-called culture boom, an unprecedented era of interest in and support for culture that began in the sixties. The boom went bust in many ways as the arts community developed in a vacuum over four decades. Outdated rhetoric charging that the arts are a "necessity" sounds hollow at a time when so many Americans are hungry, homeless, unemployed, and without decent health care. Ironically, some of them are performers and artists. Culture can improve the spirit in many ways, but only for those who can afford the time and money to attend performances or become involved in making art themselves.

Classical music has built a fortress that alienates audiences and has priced itself out of reach of the casual listener. Many of its performers are miserable, as revealed by mediocre performances that further repel the ticket-buying public. No one has ended up a winner, except for a

handful of multimillionaire musical superstars and six-figure arts administrators, many of whom are unqualified to earn nearly this salary in any other business. In music, however, there are few gatekeepers.

Why are so many young people still planning to become professional classical musicians? Why is musicianship regarded so highly that young people are encouraged to train exclusively for a career in an industry that is clearly failing? A little girl wearing pink hair bows and playing a quarter-size violin is adorable. A sixty-year-old fiddler who can't afford health insurance, has no retirement account or savings, and is virtually unemployable is not. Music schools, teachers, parents, and students need to ask themselves hard questions about the true value of their craft and how it might best serve their interests, the future of its students, and the community around them.

A young person who dreamily "wants to go to Juilliard" or "be a concert pianist" should research the reality of these statements. Seek out a variety of professional musicians: soloists, teachers, and orchestral, theatrical, and freelance musicians. Tag along for an afternoon or evening. See where they live. Ask what their days are really like and how they pay their living expenses. Ask if they like what they do and why. Most important, ask yourself if you are willing to sacrifice hours to tedious practice and nights, weekends, and holidays to playing concerts at times friends and relatives are socializing and relaxing with one another. How do you feel about long periods of substandard pay, lack of health insurance, and possible unemployment? Do you love music, or are you just hooked by the attention your performances bring? Somebody else is paying the bills now, but that won't always be the case. If you truly have a passion for classical music, by all means pursue your dreams. You are one of the lucky ones.

Parents of talented children should ask plenty of questions. Is your child receiving a scholarship to music school because he or she is a budding Heifetz or because the school is desperate to recruit new students to fill its empty classrooms? Perhaps the music student could gain a more valuable education by applying to a liberal arts college that needs musicians to fill its orchestra. Is your child receiving an adequate general education? Is he or she genuinely enjoying the music? It is possible to receive

both quality music training and a well-rounded academic education by enrolling at a conservatory that is part of a larger university, like those at Indiana University and Oberlin College.

It is essential to learn what really goes on during the child's private lessons, which take place one-on-one behind closed doors. When else have you handed your child over to a stranger, unsupervised? Many of my friends have been confronted with sexual misconduct, sometimes extreme, in this private setting with a primary teacher who can exercise enormous influence in their lives. The music business is largely populated by generous and ethical teachers. Unfortunately, like any other field it also shelters sexual predators of varying degrees who abuse their positions of power. I was surprised when not one of my Stanford professors would allow a closed door during private conferences with me. Music schools should be no different, perhaps requiring that a window remain uncovered in the door of every teaching studio.

Audiences need to ask their local symphony, during the next "emergency" fund drive, how much the executives, conductors, and soloists are making. Look up the 990 forms yourself at www.guidestar.org. You will find the salaries on page four, page seven, or in the list of directors at the end of the document. How much is the group spending on fund-raising and marketing? What is the orchestra doing to cut costs? How large is the staff and how many weeks does each employee work? If the concerts are not selling out, why aren't they producing fewer performances of higher quality instead? Go to a concert even if you don't "know" music and then speak your mind. It's your money. It's your symphony.

The local orchestra is a community resource, subsidized by taxpayers. Symphonies are classified as public charities, just like food banks, public hospitals, libraries, and museums. They do not pay taxes. They are funded by a system of incentives that give donors tax breaks on their contributions. By the nature of this IRS-granted status, orchestras are expected to provide a public service, and taxpayers have every right to question their expenditures, even if they don't know Mozart from Moby.

Arguments over a perceived decline in interest of classical music have become too noisy to let the beauty of a fine performance speak for itself.

Music is a language anyone in the world can understand, even without a background in the arts. What's more, classical music *isn't* on the decline; audiences have actually increased slightly over the last twenty years. It's just that they're bombarded with an absurdly large increase in the number of performances that enable the glut of full-time musicians, arts administrators, and consultants who resulted from the culture boom's now-stalled momentum to make a living.

The role of classical music in American society has changed since 1960. In the thirties, forties, and fifties, music had been a part of everyday life for Americans, many of whom played instruments or sang together as amateurs. Today, classical music has become peripheral and irrelevant to mainstream life. It is regarded as an incomprehensible art that must be performed perfectly or not at all. Even in recent years, the number of American instrumentalists has dropped markedly. In 1992, some 7.8 million Americans played instruments, but that number shrank to 3.7 million—less than half—by 2002, according to the National Endowment for the Arts.

Today, amateur musicians are conservatory-trained professionals who cannot find work. Typically, their lives are the reverse of those of the 1950s amateurs—highly trained in their hobby but uneducated in whatever becomes their money-making career. Instead of earning a college degree in a field that will support them adequately and playing music in their spare time, they have spent their college years refining the musical talent that will become only a pastime. They are unprepared for professions or day jobs to support them financially and may flounder through life doing nonmusical work that does not use the high levels of ambition and intelligence many gifted musicians possess. True amateur musicians lose out as well, reporting that they have a hard time finding playing opportunities, now that community orchestras and chamber music groups are filled with conservatory graduates.

I'm one of those part-time musicians now. When I do play music, it a joy. The reality of performing full-time wasn't the fantasy I'd imagined as a little girl. What offers me a meaningful life today are the infinite possibilities in our modern world, of which music is only one. Thousands of people have been influenced by the *Sierra* magazine articles I've written about environmental conservation. Many more are

reading my *New York Times* stories about classical music, which I hope will open a window to new listeners.

Sitting in my condo this clear night in November, Manhattan looks more beautiful than ever. The Empire State Building is lit up in autumn colors of orange and burgundy. I had always loved fall because of its promise of new beginnings, until every autumn became hopeless and repetitive. This year, though, I am renewed and confident. Now I have the knowledge and the voice to make every autumn new and better. In the end, I didn't need a magic dress at all.