

My niece in Germany, having attained stature in a youth symphony that toured even some cities in the eastern U.S., desired a career as concert violinist. Eventually, however, she relinquished the ambition, for it would have meant years, if not decades, of subsistence earnings.

All the more remarkable that modest-sized Cheyenne boasts a symphony orchestra of excellence. I suspect this is possible only because many of its members hold full-time jobs or careers, and they rely on the tolerance of families who must do without the musician's support during long hours of practice. Heartwarming, too, are the diverse guest artists the symphony sponsors. During Maestro Intriligator's brown-bag lunches at the library, at noon on the Friday before an evening performance, we might hear the guest artist talk of subsisting a step away from poverty. An appearance in Cheyenne means a boost both to wallet and morale.

These no-charge library lunches (attendees bring their own sandwiches) are a delight for those of us who cannot afford a symphony ticket: we may hear the guest artist's snippets from an upcoming performance, plus we are treated to the maestro's erudite yet informal conversation on featured works, their composers and their times. To illustrate a point to the public, Mr. Intriligator might hum or sing a phrase from an orchestral work. A few evenings later we may listen to that week's performance on the local public-radio station.

The library offerings, as the educational talks that precede the evening performances, are an American invention as yet unattempted by any European conductor I know of. As to the observed diversity of the Symphony's guest artists it's important to recall, until very recently the world of classical music was the exclusive preserve of white males. Even then, a musician's rank depended on the caprice of his maestro. "Auditions for major orchestras were sometimes held in the conductor's dressing room or hotel room," writes Malcolm Gladwell in *Blink*. Sergiu Celibidache of the Munich Philharmonic was such an individual, "an imperious and strong-willed man with very definite ideas about how music ought to be played—and who ought to play music."

Musicians, of course, resented conductors' abuses of power and, on unionizing, strove to formalize the auditioning process. In summer 1980, having listened to fifteen try-outs and then hearing Auditioner 16 perform, Celibidache cried out, "That's who we want!" The remaining 17 musicians waiting their turn were sent home—but when Auditioner 16 stepped out from behind the screen, Abbie Conant was revealed to be a woman. Since she passed two further auditions with flying colors, Celibidache had no choice but to hire her. A year later, however, he demoted her to second trombone. "You know the problem," he told her. "We need a man to play solo trombone." In a process that took eight years Conant sued and was reinstated, but at a salary lower than her male colleagues. She instigated a suit for equal pay that took another five years, and again she prevailed. Under conditions of perfect objectivity, Celibidache decisively said, "That's who we want." Ironically, because one of the auditioners was the son of a musician he knew, the Munich maestro opted for screened auditions when they were yet rare.

In the thirty years during which screened auditions and audition committees have replaced the idiosyncrasies of the maestro, "an extraordinary thing happened: orchestras began to hire women," writes Gladwell; since then, "the number of women in the top U.S. orchestras has

increased fivefold.” The benefits have been all around: by hiring the best musicians, the orchestras produce better music.

Abbie Conant was saved by the screen, yet Gladwell acknowledges that others were not so lucky. At postwar Vienna Philharmonic, “A screened applicant qualified himself as the best and, as the screen was raised, there stood a Japanese before the stunned jury,” he quotes from an Otto Strasser memoir. Strasser described it as “a grotesque situation.” In his belief system, “someone who was Japanese simply could not play with any soul or fidelity music that was composed by a European”—never mind that his own ears told him otherwise. Not surprisingly, the Philharmonic’s sole woman played for twenty-eight years as “alternate” harpist before she was accepted as full employee.

“All musics are created equal” was the signature line of *Schickele Mix*, the radio broadcasts of a musicologist cum satirist who as “P.D.Q. Bach” has composed *Oedipus Tex* renditions and is fond of citing Duke Ellington’s “If it sounds good, it is good.” In California my husband and I listened to the program during lunch hour, driving from the office to Shell Beach where we ate fish sandwiches and watched the waves roll in. (Like *Schickele Mix*, that long-ago husband has ceased to be with us.)

Music may be “created equal” but that does not mean it creates equality. Still, hierarchies are socially constructed and can be modified—provided, we examine cold-eyed the privileges of power and rank. Perhaps, by offering guest artists an opportunity that’s equal in terms of gender and ethnicity, our symphony and its maestro endeavor to repair, in some small way, injustices carried over from a painful past.