A Brief Guide for Going to Classical Concerts

Excerpted and Adapted from Machlis Forney, pages 5 – 10 “Concert Etiquette”

Nothing can equal the excitement of a live concert. The crowded hall, the visual and aural stimulation of a performance, and even the element of unpredictability-of what might happen on a particular night-all contribute to the unique communicative powers of people making music. There are, however, certain traditions surrounding concerts and concert going: these include the way the performers dress, the appropriate moments to applaud, and even the location of the most desirable seats. These aspects of performance differ between art music and popular music concerts. Understanding the differing traditions-and knowing what to expect-will contribute to your enjoyment of the musical event.

Choosing Concerts, Tickets, and Seats

Ticket prices vary, depending on the event. University concerts are usually reasonable-under $20, Keller Hall prices are $10/7/3 or $7/5/3. With a Lobo card or Student ID student prices are either $5 or $3. Some of the Keller Hall Concerts are Free. Faculty recitals and student ensembles often charge an admission fee. Student concerts or recitals are generally free. The seating in Keller is limited to a little less than 300 seats and there is not a bad seat in the hall. For piano recitals you will notice that most people sit on the left side of the hall, it is because they want to see the hands of the pianist. Concerts at Popejoy are quite different in that it seats about 2000 persons.

See listening of Professional and Non-professional Ensembles on the last pages

For the purposes of this class Do Not attend Suzuki School, UNM Prep School, High School, Middle School, and Grade School Concerts for your Concert Reports – none of these meet a sufficient standard of performance level that I require in the concert reports. Submitting a Report for one of these will not be accepted.

What to wear

For college concerts the dress is casual, Popejoy and NHCC are a more formal event, and CMA at Simms is sometimes even more formal in attire. Outdoor concerts are the least formal. Generally put in some effort to look good, clean up so that you are fresh to the nose. Hold off on the perfumes, a lot of persons and performers are allergic to strong perfume aromas. Be aware that you will be seated next to other persons in close proximity – like in a bus or on an airplane. Avoid wearing sport jerseys, shorts, exercising garments, ball caps, cowboy hats, etc. You do not want to “feel” out of place, and if you dress the part then you will “fit in” more comfortably.

Arriving at the concert

Arrive early, about 20 minutes prior to the start time of the concert, if there is a lecture, go to it to gain more insight into the music that will be presented on the concert, these are very informative and you also get to know the conductor and certain aspects of the music (Santa Fe Symphony provides a pre concert Lecture about the music on the program). Arriving late means that the ushers will seat you at an appropriate pause in between pieces or movements and you may probably miss a significant portion of the concert.
The Concert Program

One key aspect of attending a concert is to understand the concert program. The program is printed on a sheet of paper or in a booklet. Below is a sample program of a fantasy concert program of the New Mexico Philharmonic, it is similar to what you might find at Keller Hall, Popejoy Hall, NHCC or CMA. You will need the concert program to submit with your concert report. If they run out of programs, stick around – someone is bound to leave one behind after they have left.

The New Mexico Philharmonic

Jacque B. Nymble, Conductor

PROGRAM

Overture to A Midsummer Night’s Dream  Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551 (Jupiter)  W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)
  I. Allegro vivace
  II. Andante cantabile
  III. Menuetto (Allegretto) & Trio
  IV. Finale: Molto Allegro

Intermission

Concerto No. 1 for Piano and Orchestra in B-flat minor, Op.23  P. I. Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
  I. Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso;
    Allegro con spirito
  II. Andantino simplice; Presstissimo; Tempo I
  III. Allegro con fuoco
    Barbara Allen, piano

At first glance you will notice that the program confirms that three works are to be performed. The concert will open with an overture. The title of this particular work might be familiar because it is based on Shakespeare’s well-known play A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Some works have a literary basis, these are known as “programmatic” or “have a program”, in other words, they are descriptive of something other than music. The dates of the composer, Felix Mendelssohn, establish him as an early Romantic period composer. Not all programs list the life span of the composer (Keller Hall concerts often do not), so you may find the life span of a composer by searching the text or the Internet. The concert continues with a symphony by W.A. Mozart. The title is rather matter of fact stating that it is a certain symphony among a long list of symphonies by the same composer. (It happens to be his last symphony) This is “absolute” music – no story or scene attached. It was named the Jupiter symphony by someone other than Mozart following his untimely death. The symphony is in four sections, or movements, each movement is marked with contrasting tempo indications. (Tempo is an Italian word that means the rate of speed or pace of the music). The tempo pattern is a traditional one: fast (Allegro vivace), slow (Andante cantabile), a moderate dance (Menuetto & Trio), and fast (Molto Allegro). After the symphony concludes there is an Intermission, which lasts 10 to 15 minutes. Depending on the concert, there may be treats served (for a price) in the lobby. When the intermission (typically 10 – 15 minutes) is almost completed the lights of the lobby are dimmed or a tone is heard to let you know when to return to your seat. After Intermission the second half of the concert will be devoted to a single work – in the case of this program example it is a concerto for a piano soloist and orchestra by late-nineteenth-century Russian composer Tchaikovsky. This concerto (like many) is in three movements (fast-slow-fast, again, a standard format) The tempo-markings are more descriptive than the Mozart symphony, using words like maestoso (majestic), con spirito (with spirit) and con fuoco (with fire). This is typical of the Romantic era, as is the work’s somber minor key. In the concerto, your interest will be drawn to the soloist, performing virtuoso passages (with extraordinary technical ability). At other times you will be drawn to the sounds of the orchestra in its back and forth exchange with the soloist.
During the performance
There are certain concert conventions and rules of etiquette of which you should be aware. The house lights are usually dimmed just before the concert begins. Out of consideration for the performers and those around (who have paid to be there too), be sure that your cell phone or pager is turned off and that you do not make noise with candy wrappers or shuffling papers (like if you are taking notes). It is customary to applaud at the entrances of performers, soloists, and conductors. In an orchestra concert the concertmaster (the first violinist) will make an entrance and then direct the oboe to play a pitch for the orchestra to tune in turn. When the orchestra is tuned and falls silent, the conductor enters, and after another round of applause, the performance begins.

One unspoken aspect of the concert is that the audience typically does not applaud between movements of a multi-movement work. The frustrating thing is that the energy of the first movement often inspires uninformed persons in the audience to applaud, if that happens – do not give in – the applause is actually an interruption of the performance and the musicians/conductor will not acknowledge the applause until the end piece. After the four movements of the symphony are played, the conductor will acknowledge the audience and the musicians will stand.

Knowing when to applaud during a concert is part of the necessary etiquette. Generally, the audience claps after complete works such as a symphony, a concerto, a sonata, or a song cycle, rather than between movements of a multi-movement work. Sometimes, short works are grouped together on the program, suggesting that they are a set. In this case, applause is generally suitable at the close of the group. If you are unsure, follow the lead of the others (or majority of) in the audience. Opera has a few different conventions.

Once the concert begins remain seated until intermission, getting up in the middle of the concert is quite distracting for those around you. If you have a small child who makes a commotion, then it is suitable to take the child out of the concert hall. When bringing children be certain that they can sit quietly for long periods of time – some works are as long as 55 – 75 minutes. Most very young children do not have to ability to sit quietly for that length of time. Many movements in a symphony can last as long as 20 minutes, so be advised as to the time limits and know your child’s ability to focus and not disruptive to others.

**KELLER HALL** staff members stamp the concert program before and after the concert. This is a requirement for UNM Music Appreciation Students, and a guarantee to the Instructor that the student stayed for the entire concert event and did not leave after the first piece was performed and BS the report. That is the way it is, just so you know, I will know by the presence or absence of two different KELLER HALL Stampings on the concert program, no other venue administers this practice. [This is only in the Fall and Spring Terms - Other concert Venues DO NOT stamp your programs]

The Performers
You might be surprised at the formality of the performers’ dress. It is traditional for ensemble players to wear black-long dresses or black pants and tops for women, tuxedos or tails for the men to minimize visual distraction. Soloists, however, often dress more colorfully. Summer concerts are sometimes less formal in performer’s attire.

Final words
Even if you are familiar with some of the conventions mentioned above, you will generally get a sense of excitement by the other audience members. For my students who are assigned to attend these extraordinary events, I would prefer that you attend with an open mind and be an observer of all that is happening around you. If you need to take notes, do it in the program or make a mental note of it. After having your concert experience, before going to bed, write a brief summary of your experience, or complete the form as best you can. The concert reports may be handed in to me at any time during the term.

Most professional level programs have historical notes about the composers and compositions, glance through the program before the concert starts and read about the pieces.

Concert Reports are due when they are due (see report form) but may be handed in early.

Most important of all…

HAVE FUN!!!
Guide to filling out Concert Report “Classical” Concert Forms

Start by reading “Concert Etiquette” then read the instructions at the top of the concert report form, then become familiar with the form, the questions etc. before attending the concert.

NOTE: DO NOT take this form to the concert – have the experience then fill it out at home.

Attach concert program (required) Name: ______________________

Most Classical concerts provide a program. Keller Hall is the only concert venue that stamps the program – do not expect other organizations to do that. Sometimes they run out of programs, Keller will provide a stamped page with the concert date on it. Or hang around after the concert – you might find a program on the floor.

CONCERT SETTING:
1. Date of Concert: the date the concert event happened Place of concert: the location of the concert
2. Name of ensemble(s) performing: name of the performing ensemble or musician (i.e. NM Philharmonic)
3. Describe the concert environment (performance hall, performer’s attire, audience size and attire): Look around – describe the concert hall, its self-explanatory – use other side if needed
4a. Were program notes provided? Yes No 4b. Were there any spoken remarks about the concert? Yes No Change in program? Yes No 4a, 4b, & 4c are self-explanatory
4c. Any comments regarding the composer, the performers or the compositions performed? Again, self-explanatory

CONCERT MUSIC:
5. Which genres of music were performed?
   - Solo recitals
   - Sonata solo instruments play sonatas or sonata-like pieces
   - Orchestra Symphony most orchestra concerts include a symphony
   - Orchestra Concerto some concerts include a concerto with a solo instrument
6. Were any of the works programmatic (music with literary or pictorial associations)? Yes No
   - If yes, which compositions were programmatic?
     Usually program music includes the “story” or description of the music
7. Choose two complete works from the program and fill in the blanks:
   Composition #1 Name of Composer: F. J. Haydn Composition Title: Symphony #94 in G
   List movements: 1. Adagio Cantabile-Vivace assai (Tempo markings: 2. Andante
   Allegro-Moderato) 3. Menuetto Allegro molto
   4. Finale: Allegro molto
   Historical Style ___ pre-1600
   ___ Baroque 1600-1750
   ___ Classical 1750-1820
   ___ Romantic 1820-1900
   ___ 20th Century 1901-2000
   ___ 21st Century 2001-
   List any solo or featured Instruments: What solo instrument stands out or any soloist etc.
   Describe the overall Mood of the music? __________
   What is the mood of the music - music is an emotional art form

8. Briefly compare this concert to the other concert you attended. Self-explanatory.

9. On the backside or on a separate single page, write a brief narrative about your concert experience and include it with this form. Self-explanatory.