

"Get Classical"

by Paul Campbell

If you read this column last week, perhaps you remember that I wrote about the concept of quality of life, and what culture and Culture have to do with that quality. Remember, the two are different: to grossly oversimplify, culture is our societal memory of how to do or feel about things, and of attitudes, whereas Culture is a repository of the great creative and artistic works which have grown out of our culture. When we speak of a person being cultured, we mean that that person has knowledge of some aspects of Culture. Of course, we don't have to know first hand that the person has such knowledge, we know it because he or she acts differently from those who are not 'cultured'. Is it this association that makes the difference which we can see so readily? That's what this column is about. At the end of last week's column I promised to talk about "what Culture can do for you".

For many the term 'Culture' is a slightly frightening one. Not only is it perhaps representative of many unknowns, but it is easily perverted and therefore often associated with snobbery.

When a composer writes a great piece, or a painter finishes a great canvas, he, to some extent at least, has laid open his soul. People talk about the work, analyse it, perhaps disparage it, and it is in this reaction to the Cultural object itself that snobbery and one-upmanship raise their ugly heads. But that reaction has nothing to do with the work itself. The work, unchanged by all the jargon being slung about it, is still there for us to see or hear for ourselves, for us to respond to or be affected by on a personal level. In fact, this process of surrounding new works with verbiage tends to delay their true valuation. The lasting value of most non-verbal works of art is not known until a long time (perhaps a century) after they were created, because it takes that long generally for people's reactions not to be influenced by the surrounding verbiage and politics. Mozart, for instance, was known as a good composer in his day, but many composers with more prestigious positions, of whom we hear little today, were thought to be better at the time.

I like to use an image in talking about Culture: things of Culture

grow out of small c culture, and they acquire the capital C just because they are good, and because they are sufficiently universal to have meaning for many people, and they withstand the test of time. For me they are like the mountain peaks of culture. When we see these peaks at a distance, it is a pleasant experience (unless we happen to be afraid of peaks!), and, when we are among them we are always looking up; we are thrilled and uplifted by them. It is this aspect of Culture which perhaps does the most for us. We look up because great works embody the best of ourselves and our combined experience. They uplift us because they focus our attention on possibilities, on things which are perhaps on a higher plane than the daily situations and petty problems which may plague us. In short, they are spiritual in the best sense: they deal with the human spirit and they freshen and strengthen your spirit. They help make us bigger than ourselves.

There has been a lot of interest lately in life after life experiences, that is, the experiences of people who have been pronounced medically dead, yet have come back to life, often under the guidance of an expert medical team. People who have gone through this all report one thing in common: they have had out of body experiences as part of the death process. They left their

body, maybe on the operating table, and found that even though the body was no longer part of them, they were the same spirit, the same person. (There are several other types of experience shared by the clinically dead, and it is enlightening to read about them. I urge you to do so whenever you have the chance. The book entitled "Life After Life" is a good place to start.) People who have had the life after life experience generally find they have a different view of life as a result. They realize in a much more profound way the true importance of spirit, and how the continuous emphasis on physical in our lives crowds out the awareness or knowledge of the spiritual center of our beings.

I want to talk specifically about music now, because music of all the art forms is most direct in expressing the state of people. Because of this immediacy, it is perhaps the most accessible. In films and on TV music is used as a background because it can direct the emotions of the observer, and most climactic scenes are really dependent on the music; they fall flat without it. Almost certainly you have heard a piece or melody which has 'caught' you -- somehow that piece felt just right for you, and you responded to it, and perhaps listened to it to death. Beethoven and Mozart are so popular because they spoke, and continue to speak to so many people. Their music, like the

music of most good composers, is almost universal in its 'fit'. Listening to it is a satisfying experience, perhaps in the same way that reading a John LeCarre novel is more satisfying than reading an Agatha Christie. Further, by listening to many types of music, from many different composers, you will actually broaden your emotional experience and understanding, and increase your sensitivity. By doing this you will also bring a little beauty into your life. But the language of music becomes more intelligible as you listen to it, so if at first it does not appeal, keep at it for a while: give it a chance.

There are two chances to immerse yourself in Culture this week: the Desrosiers Dance Theatre will be at the Playhouse Sun. Feb. 24 at 8PM, sponsored by the Creative Arts Committee. Adults must pay \$20., but students have to pay only \$6. to see this highly acclaimed group. And on Wednesday I welcome the Quatuor Arthur Leblanc, a young and dynamic String Quartet from the University of Moncton to my own Noon Hour Series. That's Wed. the 27, at 12:30 at Mem Hall. Come and hear a Mozart quintet and a quartet played by this increasingly recognized quartet.

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