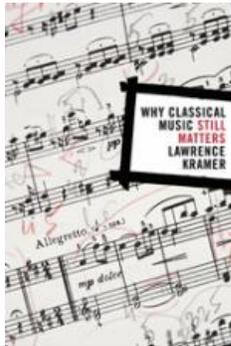


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Why Classical Music Still Matters

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These are the best of times and the worst of times for classical music. More music is available to more people than ever before. The digital revolution has made more music available than at any previous time in human history, and available 24/7 at very low cost. Musical performances silent for decades are now available in new digital editions.

Yet, enrollment in many musical education programs is dropping fast as children and teenagers play video games, spend time on the internet, join soccer leagues, and think of music as something they buy — not something they do. Music programs in public schools are often cut for budgetary reasons or reduced in size and scope.

Lawrence Kramer, Professor of English and Music at Fordham University in New York City has written a wonderful and informative book intended to make the argument that classical music has a distinctive and much-needed place in our culture and in our individual lives.

In *Why Classical Music Still Matters* [University of California Press] Kramer acknowledges the problem. “Classical music has people worried,” he concedes. “To many it seems on shaky ground in America. For more than a decade the drumbeat of its funeral march has been steady.”

Kramer provides his readers with ample argument for the importance of classical music. In so doing, he provides a concise musical education as well. As a professor of both English and music, he is in a good position to make his case with engaging prose and style.

In the end, most readers of *Why Classical Music Still Matters* will be those who *already* believe that classical music still matters. Still, the book will interest anyone who wants to know more about music and our cultural heritage.

An excerpt:

As I said earlier, classical music developed with a single aim: to be listened to. Listened to, that is, rather than heard as part of some other activity, usually a social or religious ritual. As noted earlier, too, this sort of listening involves both focused attention and active involvement. Its attention is a form of attending; it is not just a hearing but a hearkening. To practice it is to presuppose that listening is a discrete form of activity, of interest in itself independent of what is heard. Listening so conceived is capable of sustaining personal, social, and spiritual values depending on how it goes, and when, and for whom. Such listening quickly develops the ambition to get beyond the quicksilver transitory character of hearing in the moment. It seeks to embody itself in forms that can endure and so become the “classics” upon which a culture of heightened listening depends.

