

An Interview with David Finckel

Question: David told the story of an MIT music professor confronting students about why they don't listen to classical music as they walk around the campus... "It's the information," David explained.... What exactly does he mean by 'the information'? Could he recap/elaborate for me?

DF: All one needs to do is to crack to practically any page of Charles Rosen's *The Classical Style* and the intensely packed details of Haydn's music are revealed in all their astounding glory (the MIT story was specifically in relation to Haydn). An enormous amount of creativity, energy and ingenuity went into the creation of Haydn's music. If one hasn't got the time of day to appreciate it, then one should simply listen to music of lesser quality, i.e. containing less information.

Question: When David and Wu Han disagree, what is that most likely to be over? And, how do they resolve personal differences on the fly? This is an amazing story of a couple as well as musical partners, and so I am interested in how do they keep from sparring /"killing each other", which often happens with other couples...

DF: This is a great question that is asked of us all the time. While I'm not sure that an even more revealing question might be "what DO they agree on?" I'm happy to address the disagreement part. First, let's separate art and business. About our art, how we do it, how we present it, what standards we hold for ourselves and others, we are idealistic. And about all of everything that falls in those categories, we agree. We agree when we are in the presence of either greatness or mediocrity. We know when our own playing is not what it should be. There is no disagreement between us in these areas because that part of our work is not about us, it's about the music, the composers, and whether we are serving them the best we can. We acknowledge that, try as hard as we may, it will not be perfect, we can always do better, and as long as we're aiming at the same target, we are in sync.

When it comes to business – the business of arts administration, our other life besides performing – there is a two-pronged approach. It's always a mixture of being idealistic and realistic. If you are not idealistic enough, you can't serve your art, but if you are not realistic enough, you can sink the ship trying. When we disagree about our arts presenting projects, or extra-musical aspect of them, it is usually a strategic choice. The beauty of a team is being able to test your convictions on an equal, respected partner, to see if they hold up. Often, when Wu Han is really up for something, I might take the opposite approach just to test the strength of the idea. We can argue, for sure, but in the end, a more sure way forward emerges, having withstood the brutal dissection that both us, wielding time-sharpened scalpels, have performed.

Question: Could David share his thoughts about the art of making music when on tour, stressed, being always on the run?

DF: Hotel wake-up calls. Shuttle buses. Check in lines, Trouble with the cello's seat on the airplane. Lousy food. No sleep. Can't find the concert hall. Lighting no good. Acoustics not great. Only decaf coffee backstage. But then, I have my cello, and I'm playing Mozart. Wherever I am, no matter how tired, how frustrated, all of that dissolves as I finally take the day into my own hands, commune with a great composer, and share it with eager listeners. And if a musician can't cope with the travails of touring that way, then they should probably stay home.

Question: And how has David's creativity changed over time? I am interesting in hearing him talk about the creative process...

DF: This is a great question. It's made me sit here for five minutes just thinking about it. I would hate to give an answer that's not thought-through at least to some degree.

I'm a person who believes that all of us are born artists. My proof of that is the art of virtually all very young children, who create the most amazing work at nursery school age, the world over. As we grow, society dictates conformity. So for those wishing to pursue lives as artists, it's all about how much you can resist, how much you can retain the freedom of thinking, the imagination we are born with, and bring to life, day in, day out, to serve your chosen artistic genre.

I don't think I'm any different than anyone else who's made a life in music. When I was young, I let my creative urges flow freely, without much thought, and I made a mark and that mark was the stepping stone to a career. Now that I have been through so much, now that I know so much more about what I am really doing, I am ever mindful to retain that youthful reliance on instinct rather than empirical knowledge as I approach the stage. It's increasingly difficult to do so, but if one neglects that allegiance to instinct, all the education and experience in the world is not necessarily going to help you reach peoples' hearts in the heat of the moment.

© ArtistLed 2019