

Facts & Arguments

Roll over, Beethoven

By appearing live on stage, musicians allow themselves to walk a tightrope. **BY GODFREY JORDAN**

Twice a year or so, on a Thursday late in the month, a pair of coinciding events occur in Toronto that highlight widely divergent forms of music: classical and "classic rock." A prize-winning violinist accompanied by piano recently performed selections from Beethoven and Brahms, among others, over the noon hour at the Toronto CBC's Glenn Gould Studio for a respectfully quiet, can-hear-a-pin-drop capacity audience of 380 persons.

Later that evening, a dozen thoroughly skilled rock musicians, appearing at the Phoenix Concert Theatre delivered an impeccable recital of the album *Led Zeppelin IV* in front of a joyfully spirited capacity crowd of 1,000 persons.

These programs — classical and classic rock — present a unique opportunity to enjoy musical compositions performed live in the manner which the original composer (Mozart/Schubert/Handel or Page/Jagger/Lennon) intended.

From my own observation, I was quite probably the only person to attend both of those performances. Pity, since many listeners are missing out on a marvellous affair as both events, *Music Around Us* and *Classic Albums Live*, have more in common than would first appear.

As a regular dual attendee, I have pondered these similarities and considered certain questions: What exactly attracts a particular audience? Is it just the music? Does the communal gathering itself play a role, extending outside the shared acoustical environment? Is there more to the concertgoers' experience beyond hearing such familiar pieces as the *Violin Sonata in G, Opus 78* or *Stairway to Heaven*?

For those keeping a box score on history, the era of what we call classical music flourished between the 1740s and the 1830s. It was preceded by the Baroque and followed by the Romantic period. Classic Rock arguably occupied a frenzied decade from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. It arrived along with the Beatles and ended at the emergence of Punk.

Classic/classical carries a broader definition, of course, referring to particular

works that achieve critical approval and long-lasting appeal. The sustainability of Bach and Beethoven over nearly two centuries is undisputed; after 40 years in an evolving world, the Lennon-McCartney oeuvre also holds up remarkably well.

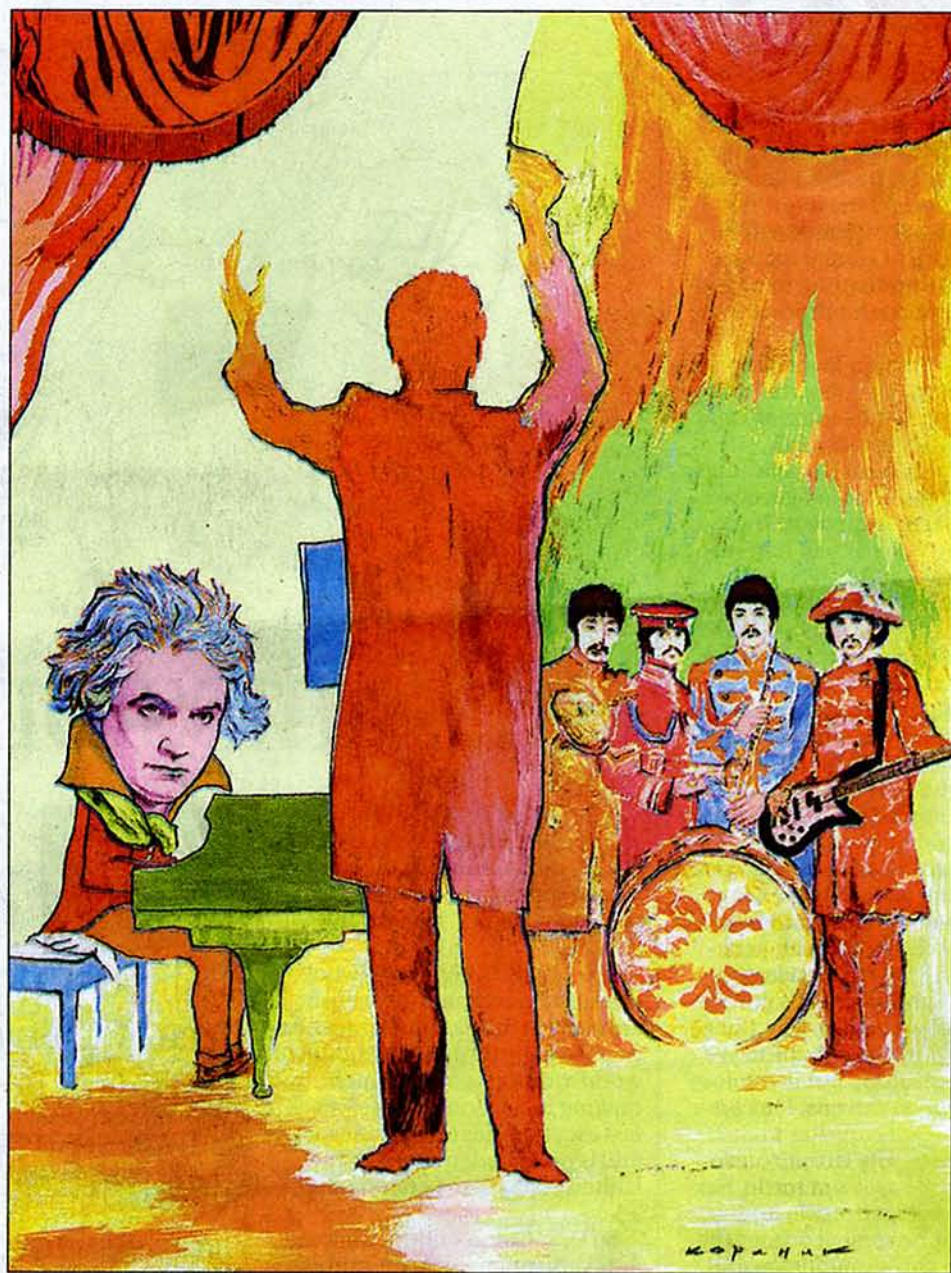
If seeing is believing, the live performance of music elevates the hearing into a total experience of the aural product, allowing us to observe the technical reproduction of the composition itself. The hands over the keyboard, bow upon the strings, fingers at the frets, sticks striking the percussion: here is true craftsmanship at work, bringing to life a familiar soundtrack known previously only through one's turntable, now transformed into a physical, 100-plus decibel reality.

Subscribers to the symphony take for granted a lifelong attendance to various re-enactments of the classics. Pensive audience members have been known to bring along their own musical scores to monitor the recital's accuracy.

For Phoenix concertgoers, hearing famous studio-born creations of the 1960s and 1970s now performed live presents something hitherto unknown: witnessing the fruits of what could have been a six-month recording process rendered precisely in a 48-minute recital. It may be the first and only occasion for an album's real-time performance played note-for-note, cut-for-cut in the same order as on the released LP. This is followed by a lengthy encore set with other hits by the evening's featured artist.

The Phoenix experience is as close as one will ever get to sitting inside the recording studio, being able to scrutinize the actual musicianship behind the layer-upon-layer of tracks that comprise each song. That explains why three lead guitarists are required for a Led Zeppelin program, each to trace Jimmy Page's triple-track journey over the fret board.

Back at the Glenn Gould Studio, the lunchtime audience has its one-hour program to savour. Should the clock above the master control room on stage left tick past 1 p.m., a few individuals are certain to slide from their seats toward the exits,



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beckoned by office cubicles in nearby buildings. What they forgo is often a rousing encore, where the spirited young performers dash off a special number that surprises as much as it perfectly complements their appearance.

By appearing live on stage, without the safety net of a recording engineer to stop, rewind, count down, roll and "punch in," musicians allow themselves to walk a tightrope where any number of mechanical glitches could subvert their moment. Yet they continue, for there is a strange magic in the air as music fills the void.

This relationship between performer and audience is a shared adventure guided by numerous rituals and expectations. They take the stage, we look upon it; they act, we react; they present and fulfill their program, we cheer and applaud

them. Concert performances have maintained the same narrative across the ages.

Both programs showcase Ontario musicians who bring to life favoured compositions of their choosing. With all of the energies at play between these two concert series, will they ever manage to merge their programs?

Perhaps the closest that could come will be tonight, when the orchestral sounds of cello, violin, woodwinds and brass are scheduled to be featured. Not at the Glenn Gould Studio, though.

Those instruments, and more, along with 19 local musicians, should take the stage at the Phoenix for a live performance in its entirety of the Beatles' classic *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

Godfrey Jordan lives in Toronto.