



BGM

As I have mentioned any number of times in these little stories, I frequently have music playing while I am at my workbench. In the pre-internet years, this music was either from the radio or the few CDs that we owned. I then for a few years subscribed to a cable music service, which greatly expanded the range of things that I could listen to; they had hundreds of channels available, including overseas radio such as the BBC. I was in heaven!

And then came the internet, which over the years has grown from a curiosity into a practically infinite source of musical (and educational) 'content'. I am now just a mouse click away from pretty much anything I would want to listen to.

But even with such a vast source to select from, I - probably like most people - listen to pretty much the same sort of thing on a day-to-day basis. I have set a number of bookmarks in my internet browser, and choose from one of those when I sit down to work.

The other day though, I learned just how much of a routine this has become. I reached out to select a station and start the music, only to realize that it was already playing! Is that the price we pay for unlimited, unfettered access to something - that we no longer even notice it? What a difference from my teenage days when I owned only a few dozen LPs, each one carefully selected and purchased with precious - and very scarce! - pocket money. Playing one was an event, and the music on those discs burned its way into my brain patterns; I feel like I could make a pretty strong attempt at writing down the complete score for the Bartok Concert for Orchestra, I listened to it so carefully!

The downside of my wonderful current access to music then, is that I have gradually devalued the presence of music in my life to the lowest possible level - where I no longer even notice its presence. What would the men who created that music think of this situation (which of course is not something unique to me)? Bartok would have clearly been very happy to have seen that teen-age David listening so intently to his work, but would he be comfortable to know that even his most serious works have now become nothing more than background music to play while people work or drive?

At this point, I would like to mention that I haven't *completely* lost all sense of what this music means. The other day during the course of one of the BBC programs that I like to listen to, the host announced the next piece - the Brahms Clarinet Quintet. Without hesitation I reached out and changed the station.

Do I dislike Brahms? On the contrary; that piece is one that I absolutely treasure. I can't bear to think of it as 'background music'. I own the musical score for it, and will only listen to it when I can actually 'listen'. I wait for evening (when there will be no telephone interruptions), get out the score, put on the CD, and deeply enjoy the piece.

But look at that, I cast that sentence in the present tense, as though I still actually do such things! I don't even know where my boxes of scores are ... somewhere in the attic, I guess.

Ah well, I shouldn't complain. It's not as though my own time is being wasted. I'm deeply involved in the creation of new work these days, so I shouldn't worry too much about not having time/energy/focus to spend on consumption. I suppose Brahms and Bartok still have real fans out there ... somewhere!

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