

The Decline of the Modern Day Classical Orchestra

MUAI 201 Music Business I - Matthew Lannigan, Victor Mainetti, Molly Murphy, Cristo Sanchez, Michael Wong

The Decreasing Popularity of the Classical Music Genre

Classical Music's Lack of Appeal

Overtime, classical music has developed a certain perception in mainstream culture and media. Classical music has become associated with the elite and upper-class. This is due to a multitude of reasons. One reason is the genre's high barriers to entry. Becoming "classically" trained is not affordable for many young Americans. Costs of lessons increase in line with a teachers need to generate revenue. Additionally, instruments themselves are expensive and require a lot of upkeep. According to Hideaway Woodwind Repair, a common instrument repair can cost anywhere from \$65-250. With the costs of becoming a classical musician being so high, it can be difficult for young children to start out. Students who come from schools with a small music program or no program at all are at an immense disadvantage. Weekly lessons can cost many thousands of dollars over the span of a year. This decreasing flow of new classical musicians has in turn created less classical music listeners. In order for classical music to continue to thrive, young people need to be engaged with the genre. The best and most effective way for young people to develop an appreciation for this music is for them to participate in its creation.

Classical Music Stereotypes

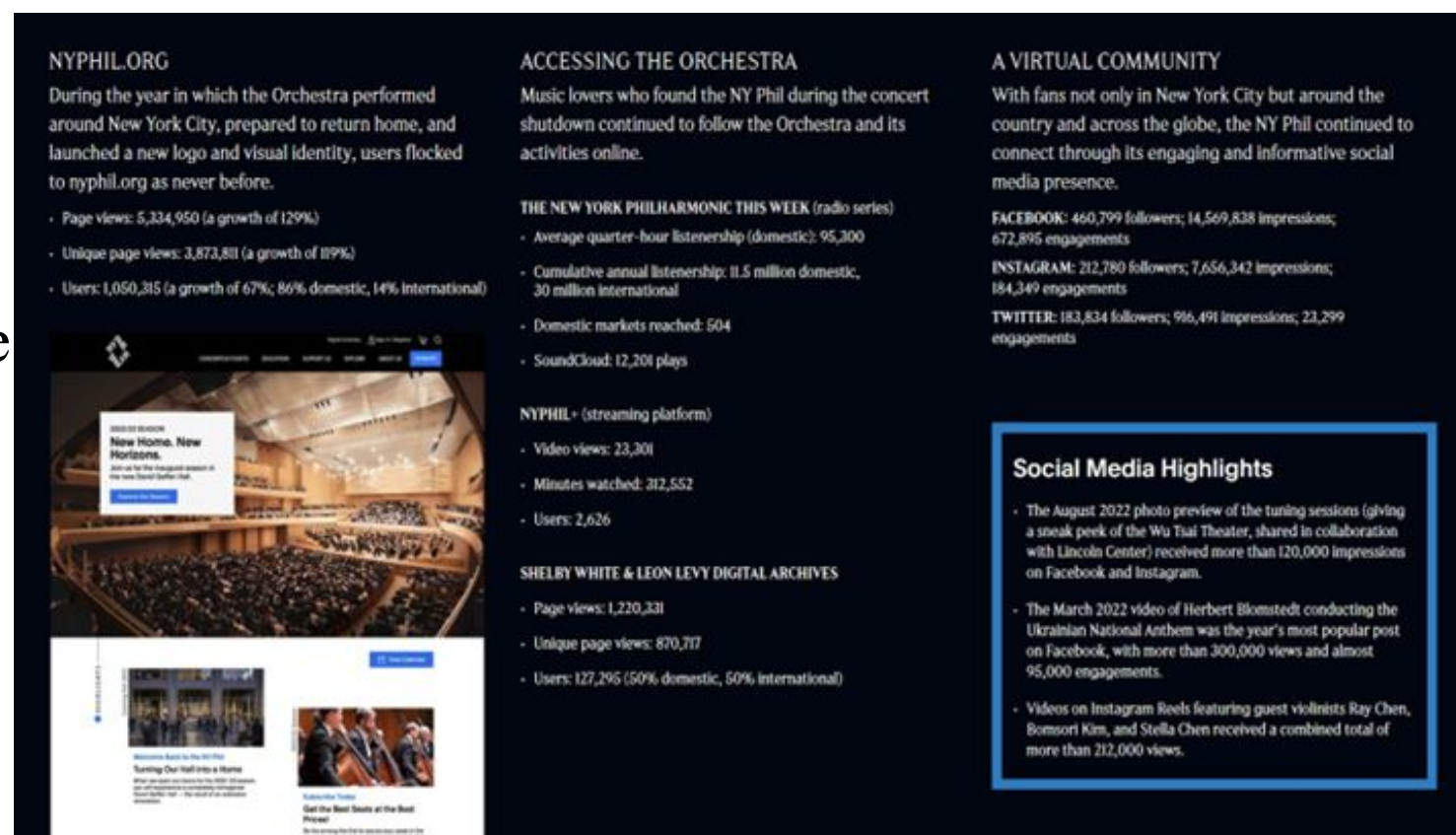
In the world of classical music, there are many prevalent stereotypes. One such stereotype is that of the affluent, arrogant listener. This likely stems from the history associated with classical music. In the 18th century, western classical music was reserved for the rich nobility of the day. Musicians were commonly hired to play in courts for the wealthy. Although the paradigm has shifted over time, there is still a strong association between classical music and the well-to-do. Another common stereotype in classical music is that this type of music is only good for "background" music. This could not be further from the truth. Classical is just as diverse as any other style of music. While some common threads throughout classical music, there is an immensely diverse amount of repertoire and composers to choose from. It is not some monolithic genre that only features composer like Bach or Beethoven. Classical music is still developing to this day. Finally, there is a common assumption that classical musicians are pretentious about their craft. While this may be true for some professionals, it is not the industry standard. No major orchestra wants to hire someone who is unfriendly and makes their orchestra look bad. Overall, these stereotypes are questionable at best.

Comparison of two Orchestras

New York Philharmonic

The New York Philharmonic has been thriving for many years, having the reputation as one of the world's leading orchestras. As the pandemic began and spelled trouble for all ensembles, the NY Phil stayed very active on social media. On facebook, recordings and video clips of old performances and memories were often posted. The captions of the posts are often quite profound, sharing backstory and fun facts about the performance they're reminiscing. During the holiday season, they even created and shared a playlist of the ensemble performing holiday tunes. Almost every facebook post contained a video of a performance.

On Instagram, the NY Phil similarly posted Countless reels of past Performances during the Pandemic and months Of restricted live Performances. Looking at the NY Phil Annual 2021-2022 Report one can see that They were able to flourish digitally.



San Antonio Symphony

The San Antonio Symphony has been in a financial struggle for many years, filing for bankruptcy in 2003, but reviving in 2004. Regular financial deficits almost resulted in the cancellation of their 2018 season.

The 2021-2022 season was in danger of being canceled, which led to negotiations between the musicians and orchestra management. Negotiation ultimately ended when the musicians refused to accept the two-tier wage schedule imposed by the management.

In the months leading up to its collapse, the SA symphony posted inconsistently on facebook with most of their posts being an announcement of the symphony's return, or the promotion of "TheBigGive," a fundraiser. All of this led to a post on June 16th, 2022, stating its dissolution.

During the peak of the pandemic, the SA symphony would occasionally post reminders to tune into a certain radio station, as some of their previous concerts would be rebroadcasted.

On the SA symphony instagram, the last 33 posts, which spanned 65 weeks, 11 of the posts were nearly identical, all promoting the return of the symphony. 6 Of them were posts promoting "TheBigGive." The rest of the posts are a mix between radio rebroadcast announcements, informational posts, staff highlights, and posts announcing the dissolution of the symphony and emergence of the San Antonio Philharmonic.

Comparative Analysis

Keeping the audience's attention in a situation such as the pandemic was paramount. The NY Phil consistently posted memories, video clips, and interesting facts throughout to maintain engagement visually and auditorily. It helped remind their audience of the sound of the ensemble they love. Some of their posts also included questions, rhetorical or otherwise, that prompted more people to comment and engage with the post.

The biggest difference between the two ensembles' social media posts is the inclusion of audio. NY Phil's was constant, whereas SA symphony's was almost nonexistent. Additionally, you must make the posts interesting enough to draw somebody in and actually get them to read it. A video clip also helps with this, giving auditory stimulation while a person reads the post.

While both the NY Phil and SA Symphony had many posts with "link in bio," the NY Phil usually had a detailed and profound explanation or description of the link they were trying to get you to click on, while the SA Symphony often had that accompanied by very little text. In general, people will not want to follow link after link from social media. On social media, the tendency is to just "keep scrolling," so if a post is just an announcement of a performance or memory with a "learn more from the link in bio," people will be less likely to follow through. The general trend is to stay on the app you're currently using, so it's important to divulge information on the app itself, include lots of eye and ear-catching visuals/sounds. The goal should be to generate interest for the link you want people to click on, rather than just posting the link.

Of course, the funding/donors and reputation for these two ensembles are not the same, so the success of each is not an exact science and goes far deeper than their engagement on social media. However, the NY Phil did a better overall job with advertising, engagement, consistency, and generating/holding interest during a difficult period of time.

Decline of Classical Orchestras Over Time

In the last several decades, the popularity of classical orchestras specifically has declined. Evidence of this can be seen in the financial struggles of and in the failure of orchestras like the San Antonio Symphony, both of which are described in detail later. Several reasons have been hypothesized to explain this decline.

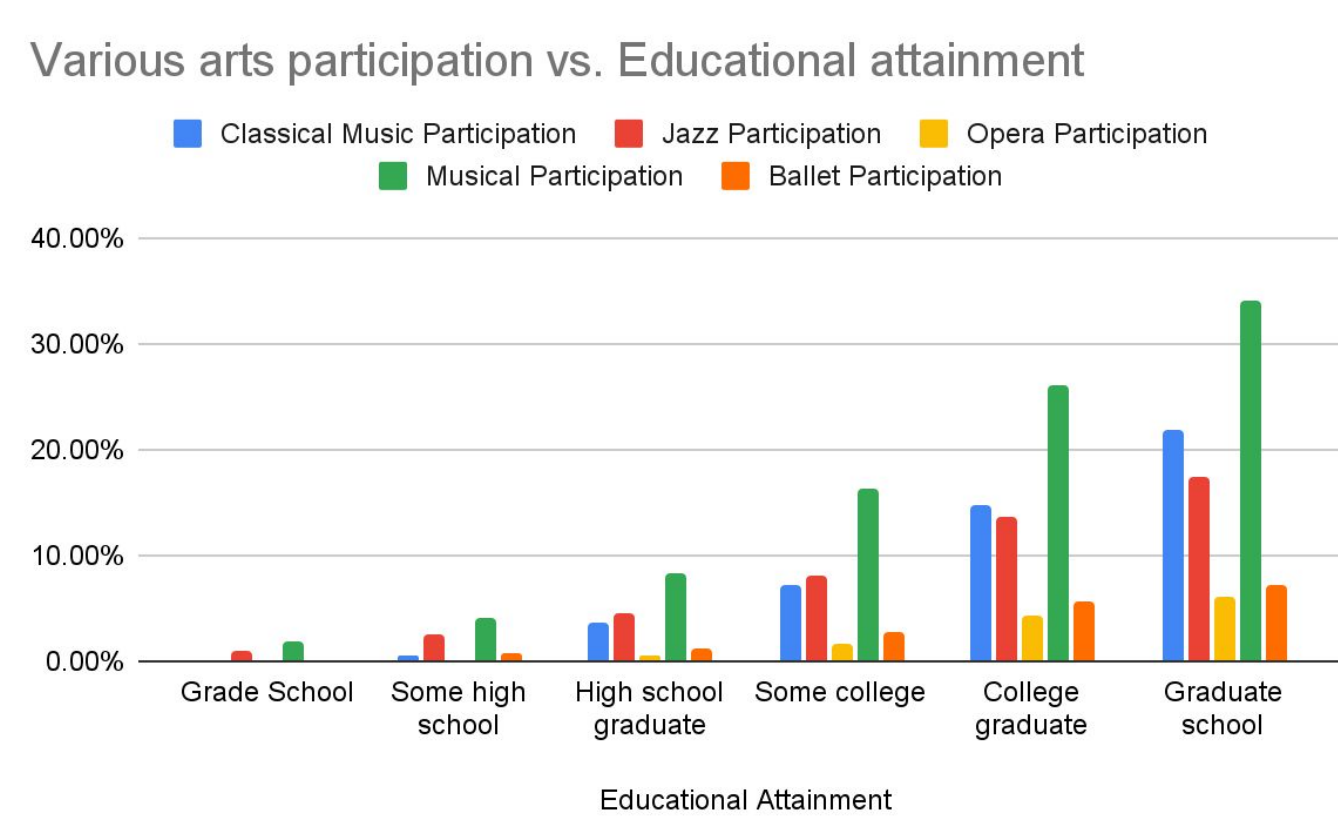
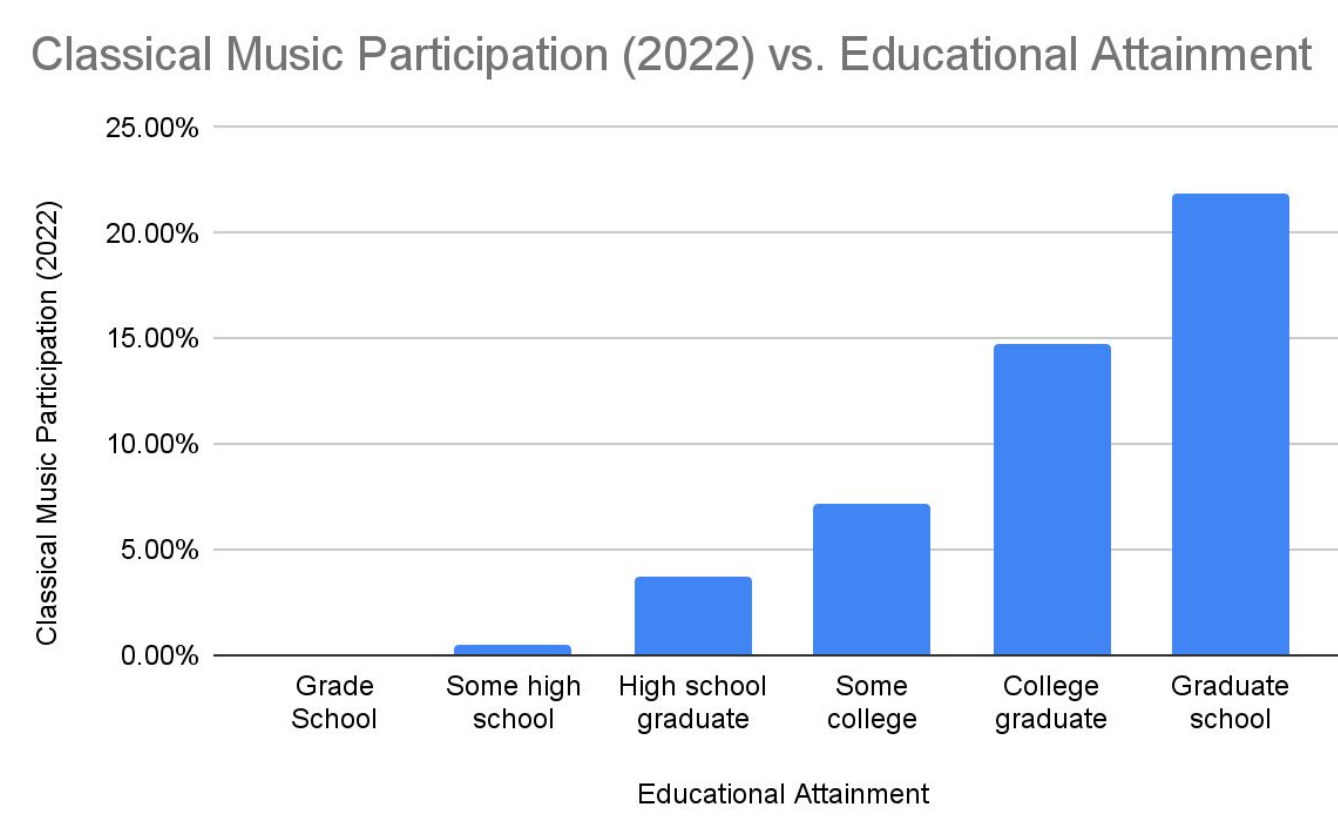
Repertoire

Classical orchestras are commonly known to perform classical music, or more specifically music from the Western classical tradition. Some have argued this reliance on this canon in orchestral programming has caused decreased interest in orchestral performances. Herman and Lolb both argue that classical music is becoming characterized as old-fashioned, which does not appeal to newer generations. Kolb argues further that classical music's historical association with self-improvement (a byproduct of the Victorian era) makes it seem non-entertaining to the general public. Due to this decreased interest, the popularity of classical concerts decreased. Additionally, attempts to break out of this mold are often derived from this same tradition. Herman gives the hypothetical "Mozart as a DJ" and *Titanic* concert to explain that many of the attempts to appeal to the public are often based closely on the tradition or are done at the expense of attempting to break out of this mold. Finally, de Lancia notes that financial pressures often motivate orchestras to program music from this same canon (which many orchestral members have learned already) discourage the introduction of non-canonic and contemporary music that could be used to diversify.

Management

Changes in management structure and in the role of music directors have increased costs for orchestras and lowered their differentiation, which especially harms smaller orchestras. De Lancia states that in the past, orchestras were almost completely operated by the music director including leadership and marketing. This mass concentration of power in one figure allowed them to have a profound influence on the character of an orchestra. For example, de Lancia notes how the long tenures conductors like Toscanini, Szell, and Koussevitzky (of the NY Phil, Cleveland Orchestra, and BSO respectively) shaped the sound that each ensemble created, allowing these major orchestras to define themselves to the public. However, increasing corporatization of orchestral management has disrupted this imprinting process and has led to greater costs. Conductors of major orchestras often now spend less than 20 weeks per year with their orchestra because of how lucrative guest conductor contracts are and the shifting of management responsibility from the conductor to an administrative team, and this leads to increased costs for the orchestra for personnel and conductors. Additionally, new recording technologies have supplanted 78s, spawning an endless pursuit of a previously-unattainable perfection that further reduced sonic differences. Finally, financial pressures motivate orchestras to shift their available time to performing more concerts than rehearsing, which reflects a shift toward profit-seeking and decreased interest in focusing on an orchestra's artistic ability.

Social Stratification



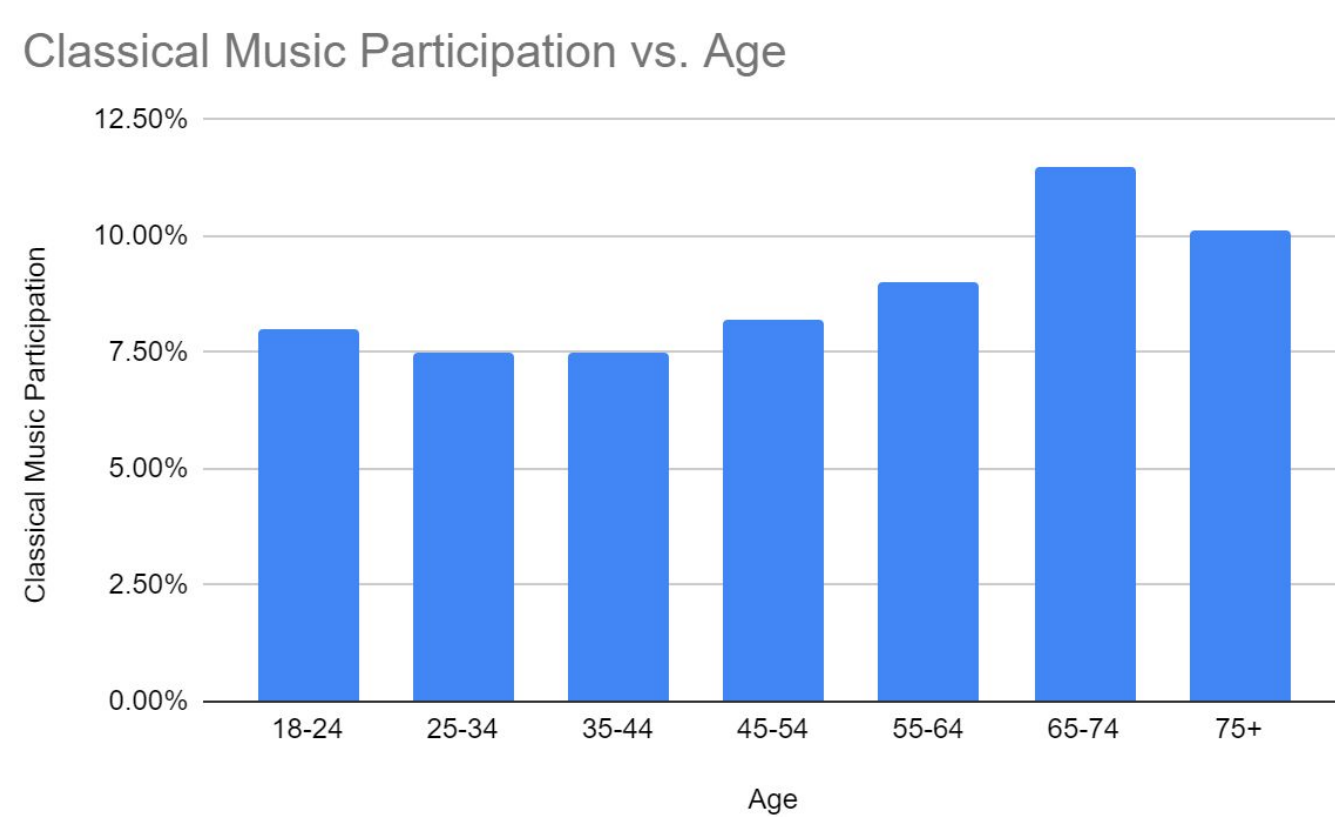
Source: National Endowment for the Arts (2017)

Participation in classical music is highly stratified along educational and generational boundaries. The first chart above indicates the percentage of US adults who attended a classical music concert in 2017, and there is a correlation between increased educational attainment and classical concert attendance. This trend seems to apply for other performing arts genres (see second chart), so this does not appear to be localized to classical music specifically, but the vast majority of US adults (167.0 million vs 255.4 million total) are not college graduates and therefore have not been adequately captured by orchestra outreach. This information aligns with the findings of the NEA in 1998 as presented by Kolb.

Additionally, participation in classical music, like other performing arts, varies between generations. Older Americans are more likely to attend classical music concerts than younger Americans, and this agrees with NEA data from 1998 as Kolb argued.

Entry Barriers

For one to best experience music, one should understand and appreciate its style. Due to classical music's waning popularity, fewer people have been exposed to classical music, which contributed to lower attendance. Two factors that are part of this decreased exposure are the style's recurring repertoire (as previously described) and its association with the Western European canon. This music is most closely linked with people of European descent, and according to Kolb, increasing ethnic diversity in the United States has led fewer people to be interested in classical music (and therefore classical orchestras).



Moving Forward

Social Media and Engagement

Social media allows for an unprecedented opportunity to communicate with consumers. Data has shown that social media marketing improves **brand reputation and loyalty, competitive positioning**, allows for a **customer-centric business strategy**, and **supports public relation outcomes**. (sproutsocial) Although many modern classical orchestras have begun to use social media marketing, it has yet to fully reach the younger audience. Due to the previously mentioned high barrier to entry in the classical music world, allowing for the everyday social media user to see into the classical music realm could show a drastic increase in engagement. Social media influencers such as TwoSetViolin (7.5 mill followers) and Hilary Hahn (750k followers) aid in this argument as they have continued to sell out massive concert halls as their online presence grows. Along with social media marketing, making classical music concerts more engaging and accessible will aid in attracting a more socially diverse audience. A good example of this is TwoSetViolin. They create comedic content that bridges the gap between modern-day humor with classical music, attracting an expansive audience and allowing them to host massive world tours and sell out arenas.

The Next Generation of Classical Music Enjoys

Through classical music in children's toys, I believe we could make a new generation of classical music enjoys. In the article "How Do Infants Understand and React to Music?", we see how exposure to certain music at an early age could later impact the genres of music we listen to. In another article "How to Influence Children's Taste in Music", We learn how children at an early age often do not have a taste for music and can easily learn to like to listen to any music played around them. Through the use of toy's, we create a space for children to have fun and listen to classical music and the "can't escape a situation" method in the article " How to Influence Children's Taste in Music", it explains how kids exposed to music in areas where they can't escape it led to their likeness of the music being played. There are many reasons why parents would get these toys for their children, since the parents usually want their children to have toys that help improve their intelligence. Some benefits of listening to classical music at an early age are improved brain function, improved creativity, and a calmness effect as well. These toys would be a perfect toy in the eyes of a parent as they typically look for toys which help educate their children and improve their intellect. This could lead to a future where classical music is enjoyed by not a certain class of people but every person who ever had a toy with classical music and grew older loving the genre.

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