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p i a n i s t + c o m p o s e r

the mindful recital

event outline

Summary

- “Mindful recitals” are concerts that alternate musical performances with short discussions and mindfulness meditations.
- These meditations are a cross between mindfulness and music appreciation, guiding the listener into a calm, aware and perceptive headspace with specific cues on how to listen to these works.
- The recitals assume no prior knowledge of classical music or mindfulness on the listener’s part, presenting a welcoming, experiential approach to enhancing our listening.
- Mindful recitals are an attractive offering to both new audiences discovering classical music—with its unique format that may be less intimidating than a standard recital—as well as to veteran concert goers looking for fresh perspectives on the listening experience.
- These events combine music with education and wellness, a feature that is especially pertinent in the wake of the current pandemic.
- For examples of this kind of content, visit mindfulness.idagio.com.

Discussion

Mindful recitals are concerts that alternate musical performances with short mindfulness exercises and thought experiments. Each piece of music is preceded by a discussion and guided meditation that lasts a few minutes long. These meditations are a cross between mindfulness and music appreciation: they not only ease the listener into a calm, aware and perceptive state of mind, but also include cues about how to listen to the specific piece of music coming up, guiding the listener into a particular headspace to hear these works.

Unlike a lecture-recital, which may rely on some understanding of music theory or history, these mindful recitals do not assume any prior knowledge. On the contrary, they encourage coming to the event with fresh ears, simply bringing one’s curiosity and attention. Rather than presenting primarily factual information on the works to enhance the listener’s experience, the mindful recital instead takes an experiential approach, honing of our awareness of a broader spectrum of our moment-to-moment experience to reveal new perspectives on the process of listening.

As well as being designed for certain pieces of music, each of the meditations explore in turn various facets of the listening experience. The music they precede is thus carefully chosen to link to these concepts in certain ways. For an example of the kind of content presented and how it is linked to musical selections, please see the Mindful Listening Basics playlist on IDAGIO Mindfulness (mindfulness.idagio.com/listen). The topics discussed in the mindful recitals include the nature of our awareness and attention, how we interpret of stories and dramatic narratives, the perception and conceptualization of musical textures, and the communication and internalization of emotional affect (see the sample program below for illustration).

The process of listening to music is an ideal one for cultivating mindfulness and for developing a heightened quality of awareness. Mindfulness is also a powerful way for us to become better and more perceptive listeners, being more present for both the music we hear as well as our reaction to it. Therefore, the purpose of this kind of event is two-pronged, and each of these compliments and strengthens the other. As we become more mindful, we become better listeners, finding richer and more fulfilling experiences when listening to any kind music. As our skills of such listening develop, these in turn yield greater mindfulness both in our formal practice as well as in our daily lives. In essence, these events combine musical experiences with education and wellness—a feature that is especially pertinent in the wake of the current pandemic.

Mindful recitals can be an attractive offering for many kinds of audiences. For those new to classical music, it presents a guide to the listening process and introduction to the genre without requiring any prior knowledge, in a welcoming format that may seem less intimidating than a recital. Seasoned concert goers on the other hand will find new perspectives on the listening experience. Accordingly, the content of the presentations can be adjusted depending on the event requirements and intended audience. For example, for audiences comprised largely of classical music lovers, the discussion can be geared more towards introducing and explaining mindfulness, with a greater emphasis on the neuroscience and psychology of both mindfulness and the listening experience. For events geared towards new listeners who attend out of an existing interest in meditation and mindfulness, the focus will be more on familiarizing the audience with the music. In any case, this formula can be adjusted per a discussion with the presenter.

Sample program

Bach-Busoni: "Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ" BWV 639

Introduction to mindful listening

Rachmaninoff-Kocsis: Vocalise

Embodied awareness and the physiology of listening

Bach: French Suite in D minor BWV 812

Perspectives on visual and auditory imagination

Bowen: Fragments from Hans Andersen Opp. 58 & 61, *selections*

Deconstructing sound and the perception of sonic layers

Namoradze: Etude V, Entwined Threads

Theories of emotion and mindfulness of feeling

Rachmaninoff: Sonata No. 1 in D minor Op. 28, II: Lento

Artist background

In tandem with his musical career, Namoradze is actively engaged in various music-related fields in the cognitive sciences. His doctoral dissertation at the CUNY Graduate Center developed statistical-graphical methods of analysis for aspects of musical perception. The work, entitled “Ligeti’s Macroharmonies”, will be published by Springer in 2021 in the Computational Music Sciences series. Part of his doctorate was undertaken at Columbia University, where he studied neuroscience and Buddhism, and he now pursues postgraduate studies in neuropsychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King’s College, London, where his research interests include the effects of mental practice and mindfulness on musical performance. He is also a certified meditation teacher and the creator of IDAGIO Mindfulness, a forthcoming platform on IDAGIO, the world’s leading classical music streaming app. Besides a podcast, video series and several other resources, the core of the platform constitutes two courses: The Mindful Performer, a performance psychology and mental skills training app for performers, and The Mindful Listener, a course for developing mindfulness and music listening skills.

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