

The Classical Musical Educational Project of *Sesame Street*

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October 31, 2021

On a summer evening in Saint Louis I was listening to the radio in the kitchen. In the research for this paper, which had grown from a character study on Yo-Yo Ma to encompass the themes of education and public broadcasting, I had decided that I should actually own some kind of broadcast receiver. After looking into mini televisions, I settled on the conservative option of a radio. As I chopped onions, my local NPR station's weekend programming buzzed in the background.

A program on the recent events in Afghanistan had ended and the PSA space, where a commercial station would have run ads, began. I heard a woman's voice say "STLPR: understanding starts here."

My ears perked up. What an intriguing declaration. It is not "STLPR: your source of news," or "STLPR: hear the nation." Instead, the slogan is a promise to increase your *understanding*. NPR is offering not just to inform you, but moreover to provide some kind of ethical education, presumably into cultural-socio-political events such that one comes away *understanding*.

A strange word, "understanding" In the context of the socio-political, cultural and economic topics under the purview of national public radio, something seems very kind about the word. It feels emotionally laden and steeped in empathy.

Its usage does not imply factual understanding, something like "Let us factually

explain what's going on in Afghanistan," but rather, "cultivate an understanding of the human experiences of Afghanistan along with us."

Etymologically, the first half of the word understand does not mean the more modern "below" but rather, among or in between. To understand is to be among, and in a certain way to stand with. What NPR is offering, then, is empathy in a broadcast. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/understand>

This fits with the [995]founding rhetoric of NPR and its focus on hearing common people speak.[/z]