

Fridays are jazz nights, including a cabaret evening of Martinu's *Cuisine Review*, Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, and Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*. Saturdays are theme nights: "Paris Romance" with music by Chausson, Fauré, and Ravel; "An Evening in Vienna" with Mozart and Johann Strauss II; "Souvenirs of Florence" by Puccini, Rossini, and Tchaikovsky; and a six-hour Mendelssohn marathon that includes *Songs Without Words*, selections from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, trios, quartets, a sextet, and (best of all) the Octet.

Other performers include the Afiara and Claudel-Caminex Quartets, pianists Wonny Song and David Jalbert, violinists Rachel Barton Pine and Jonathan Crow, cellist Denis Brott, and string bassist James VanDemark. All concerts are on Wednesday through Saturday nights at St James United Church in downtown Montreal.

www.festivalmontreal.org
514-489-3444

Meet the Critic:

Patrick Hanudel

A native of Akron, Ohio, Patrick Hanudel has had 15 years of experience in classical music as a performer, teacher, and writer. He has served as Principal Clarinet of the Tucson Symphony, attended the Tanglewood Music Center and Banff Arts Centre, and for three years taught clarinet and saxophone in the Houston public schools. His teachers include Michele Gingras of Miami University (Ohio), David Peck of the Houston Symphony, and Richie Hawley and Ron Aufmann of the Cincinnati Symphony.

Mr Hanudel is completing a Doctorate in clarinet performance at the University of Cincinnati Conservatory and serving as Principal Clarinet of the Columbus (Indiana) Philharmonic. In addition to his studies at CCM, he designs and administers the Masters oral exam for the clarinet studio, and he serves as a mentor and advisor to minority graduate students who need assistance with their research-related writing skills. In his spare time, he enjoys playing chamber music with friends, discussing current events, and following Cleveland sports teams.

Critical Convictions

The Distracted Generation Victims of Technology

It has long been my position that some technologies have a bad effect, an evil influence. Some people have argued with me that technologies are neutral; it is the use we make of them that is bad. My response is that the technologies themselves inspire the use we make of them. Also, given human nature, do you really think we can resist the lure they represent? Could we have not constructed and detonated an atomic bomb? The technocrats want you to think technology is neutral—want you to think you are in charge. But more and more we are technology's victims. We are not running it; it is running us. It's much worse than Thoreau's cow.

My models have always been the automobile, TV, and the cell phone. But in the consumer society there are many more examples. Think of bottled water and computers in terms of isolation (the former is so stupid that it amazes me to come across so many apparently "normal" people with water bottles in hand).

The problem with most of these technologies is that they isolate people, kill conversation, and encourage sedentary behavior (make people lazy and fat). They are also huge time-wasters. Television, for example, isolates people and destroys conversation. These days the family seldom even watches television together—there are too many sets in every household. TV destroys attention span—just another way it turns people against reading. It creates passivity, controls people's thoughts, sets the terms of politics, teaches people to want things they don't need, and stimulates the appetite for junk food. It is mind-numbingly intrusive and invasive. Its speed and aggression are downright pugnacious. It is turning people into wimps. I feel abused—even bruised—by it after ten minutes. It leaves people it affects deeply hardly human and certainly not free. Most of this is the very nature of the medium: it is one-way, not interactive. All you are expected to do—all you can do—is sit there and let it wash over you (or beat you black and blue). Content makes no difference at all.

TV of one sort or another is getting more invasive. I am confronted with TV screens at the post office, at the bank, in the airport and on planes, and at most restaurants. Since I hate television, it is getting harder and harder

to find a place where I am not assaulted. TV is one of the all-pervasive technologies that has changed the world so much that I no longer feel at home in it.

Cars were always the strongest isolating element in our society. People mostly commute one person to a car—no conversation, no human contact. The other drivers on the road might as well be aliens and are treated that way. As a lifelong devotee of public transportation, I can tell you that it is obvious when you talk with someone whether he is a car person. These people lose touch with reality, lose touch with the way other people think and see things. Especially they lose touch with the *range* of views. They are isolated in suburbia with people very much like themselves. They work in the office with people very like themselves. If they take public transportation, at least there they are exposed to a broader range of people and cultures (sub-cultures). People who are shocked by four-letter words are car people, for example. Cars are increasingly huge time-wasters, too. It was supposed to be a time-saving technology! Most “time-saving technologies” end up becoming major time wasters. The auto has made longer and longer commutes necessary by enabling people to move farther and farther from their jobs.

Another huge time-waster is the “cell phone” (correctly, “mobile phone”). Hours are spent in mindless conversations—all unnecessary. Mobile phones promise a few security blankets—above all they are (or were) bought with the idea that in a rough situation you would be in touch. You get lost looking for a friend’s house. You run out of gas in the middle of nowhere on a dark night. So it was sold with fear—as so many things in our culture are. But the result has been endless yacking in public places—no peace and quiet anywhere, no chance for reflection. And terrible drivers everywhere, who are distracted from the task at hand (driving). It has been absolutely proved that talking on the phone while driving is more dangerous than driving drunk. But everyone still does it (especially women)—brainwashed by the consumer society. Again, it’s the nature of the technology itself. If it’s there, the temptation just becomes too great. Driving strikes many people as boring, like most work. (Neither bores me.) Here sits that innocent looking device that can bring you a charming (if utterly innocuous and unnecessary) conversation to distract you. You are accustomed to endless distraction by TV and the computer; you seem to need it. How can you resist it?

Those endless phone calls (or, worse, “text messaging”) also completely isolate you from the people around you. You don’t bother with them; you are “connected” to a whole different (and much smaller) group of people. This is

part of why Americans are no longer listening to each other and are surrounding themselves with people who think just as they do. We no longer feel any obligation to the people around us. We rudely ignore them and talk on our damned phones. Isolation then breeds hostility.

I watched a construction crew work on our house after a huge tree fell on it last summer. They spent more time on their stupid cell phones than they spent working. And the calls I overheard were utterly stupid and unnecessary—usually girlfriends wanting to “touch base”. Women need so damned much reassurance, and I’m sure they are thrilled to death by cell phones. Men should refuse to be at their beck and call.

Computers are no longer tools that we use, any more than cars or phones are. In fact, computers are huge time-wasters and mind-controllers. The American’s constant need for distraction and truly frightening inability to concentrate on much of anything is exploited by this technology extremely well. And people who are mentally lazy—most young people nowadays—find it a godsend. They are *addicted to distraction*. In terms of current clichés, they are “unfocussed” or unable to “focus” on much of anything. Hard, serious thinking is almost dead. Most of the professors teaching science in this country are Asians—Americans are too lazy to study that hard. Serious reading is almost entirely missing from the lives of Americans. Anything they learn, they learn the easy way—and if it’s from TV or the Internet it is probably bogus. (It amazes me that people look things up on Wikipedia—an unedited free-for-all written by any dope who chooses to write. It’s not very dependable, to say the least. A few years ago it told everyone that I had died. It routinely confuses me with cousins who have the same name—there have been at least four American Donald Vroons in the last 50 years.)

Anyone who wants to do something for the world or just amount to a decent human being has to stay away from these technologies as much as he can. They are poisonous and usually unnecessary, but very seductive. I will never own a television or a mobile phone (and never have). I lived without a car for 15 years of my adult life. (It’s not possible in my current job as publisher of ARG, but I still ride the bus fairly often.) I use the computer only for my work. I read three hours a day, but I don’t know anyone else who reads even an hour a day. I am always thrilled to meet anyone uncontaminated by the garbage of contemporary culture—most of all to meet someone who, like me, is not a consumer and is not exposed to “the media”. Friendship is almost impossible in this country at this time in our history. People are too distracted.

VROON

Copyright of American Record Guide is the property of Record Guide Productions and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.