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Response to the NY Times Article: 'Theater's Alive With the Sound of Laptops'

By: Tom Mendel, 2007

Letter to the Editor:

Having read the above-mentioned article, I want to compliment the Times on attempting to fairly address the issue of augmenting orchestras with computer based 'virtual orchestras'. I do have a few comments.

Being a pit musician since 1978, I have seen the sizes of orchestras reduced generally for pecuniary reasons (seldom pit size because if the orchestration is wanted, the players are put in other rooms and miked).

Ticket prices continue on their upward spiral. The public is being dumbed down. In your article, you refer to the already 'canned sound' of some orchestras. Why not take this issue to the public? Why not sit in a pit and listen to the glorious sounds being played and compare it to the sound you hear in the house. If indeed many of the nuances and some times major orchestrated parts are lost, ask the sound designers why the audience isn't able to hear this. Pit sizes are also being reduced to sell more seats, yet the orchestra budget for most Broadway and Broadway type shows are usually only 2-5% of the budget. Pits are being covered so that the audience doesn't get the enjoyment and excitement of seeing, as well as hearing, live music.

Machines such as Notion, InstrumentalEase, Accompaniease, etc. are potential harbingers for the end of live music. Yes, they are designed by musicians and (currently) played by them, but ... in effect, they replace musicians.

Don't we want to promote the arts in school? Why aren't they considered essential and not expendable? Our country and our culture is so much into immediate gratification that I'm afraid art and aesthetics have gone to the wayside. Being a child of the 60's and 70's, I still remember "Make Love, Not War" which can be translated into promote soul enrichment, not greed. The intangibles gained from live music will never be replaced by a non-human element.

Tom Mendel,
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