

Harriett Lindeman:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning.

Harriett Lindeman:

Welcome back. Welcome to morning prayers here at Appleton Chapel. Our speaker this morning will be Rena Cohen, publicist at the Boston Symphony Orchestra and a former choral fellow. Welcome back.

Please rise in body or in spirit for a responsive reading of Psalm 105, found in the box altar.

"We give you thanks, oh God, and call upon your name. We make known your deeds among the peoples."

Congregation:

We sing to you, we sing your praise and speak of all your marvelous works.

Harriett Lindeman:

"We glory in your holy name. Let the hearts of those who seek you rejoice."

Congregation:

We search for you and your strength, we continue to seek your face.

Harriett Lindeman:

"You spread out a cloud for a covering, and the fire to give light in the night season."

Congregation:

You opened the rock and water flowed, covering the land in dry places.

Harriett Lindeman:

"Where you remembered your holy Word, and Abraham, your servant."

Congregation:

So you have brought forth your people with gladness, your chosen with shouts of joy.

Harriett Lindeman:

"You gave your people the lands of the nations and they took the fruit of others' toil."

Congregation:

That they might keep your statutes and observe your laws. Hallelujah.

Choir:

(singing)

Rena Cohen:

Good morning.

Congregation:

Morning.

Rena Cohen:

Today's inspired text is a quote from Ludwig van Beethoven, one of the most revered figures in Western classical music. "Music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy. Music is the electrical soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents." I have a confession to make. I'm often bored during classical music concerts. If you don't know me, this might not seem confession worthy. So here's some background. I took violin lessons for 12 years and I have sung choirs for the past 10, including as a choral fellow when I was in school here. I now work full-time as a publicist for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. According to my Spotify rap, classical music was my most screened genre of 2023. Though not to worry, Taylor Swift was my top artist. All this to say, I love classical music, and more often than not, I get bored during classical music concerts.

Now, it's not every concert. I can stay focused if it's a piece I already know and love, a soloist that I'm especially invested in, or it has melodies or lyrics that [inaudible 00:09:47] to let go. And of course, I'm not bored if I'm performing. That takes a lot of focus. But otherwise, the concert master will play the tuning A, or the choir will take its first collective prep, and within 10 or 20 minutes, my mind will begin to wander. I presented this fact as a confession because it feels so opposed to what I preach on a daily basis. Working in PR for an orchestra, we try to counteract the reputation that concerts are boring. We highlight virtuosic guest soloists and pieces with fable backstories or contemporary resonance, we call attention to composers, conductors, or performers who are from backgrounds that are traditionally underrepresented in classical music, with the hope that more people will see their identities reflected on the stage. We do everything we can to make concerts seem exciting, inspiring and unforgettable so that audiences will love attending.

But at least for me, loving and feeling bored during concerts are not mutually exclusive. While it's all PR messaging, I actually think that part of why I love concerts is that they sometimes bore me. I first learned to embrace this type of boredom at weekly synagogue services growing up. My congregation conducted most of their two and a half hour Saturday morning service in Hebrew. A language that I can read phonetically but mostly do not understand. Most of the content was sung and did not vary week by week the way that church does. So I memorized the sounds enough to participate on instinct within a few years. So instead of paying attention to the meaning of the words, my mind wandered, the familiar tunes forming a backdrop for other thoughts. I'd fantasize about middle school pressures, revel in excitement about an upcoming party, think of a thesis or a school essay or a thought for a new story. Sometimes I would make up my own prayers in my head. Sometimes I thought of nothing at all.

I used to feel some guilt about being bored at a synagogue or a concert hall, but I now think boredom is both a valid and even valuable response to sitting quietly amid a long backdrop of music. This time alone in my head has helped me clarify my hopes and priorities and reflect with gratitude on the people in my life. It has made me process experiences that have bothered me in a healthy way, because I have no other choice than to sit and think about them. I hope that people don't only experience listening to extensive works of classical or worship music as boring. Both can be incredible catalysts for emotional release or human connectedness, and I'm very glad to have had many of those experiences, but most of the time they just make me feel relaxed and grounded, and that's okay. This is a gross misinterpretation

of Beethoven's intention with the quote, but I take his words about music as the soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents as permission to daydream a little bit during concerts without feeling like I am failing some unspoken mandate to always pay attention.

Soon after I started my job at the BSO, I spoke on the phone to a good friend outside of the classical music world who told me that she had just gone to an amazing orchestra concert [inaudible 00:13:12], but she couldn't stay focused. She asked me what she was doing wrong. At the time I offered jumbled suggestions about how to better appreciate the music, things like tracing musical motifs among the different instruments, or carefully reading the program notes so that she'd know all the context for the piece. What I wish I had said is that she wasn't doing anything wrong. That there is no wrong way to experience music, including music regarded as especially sophisticated or sacred, that it's okay to appreciate or even love something without feeling engaged by it 100% of the time. That boredom doesn't have to mean the music was bad or that the listener didn't have enough education to understand it. Just that sometimes music is the soil, and that's enough.

Harriett Lindeman:

Please rise in body and spirit for prayer. Loving creator God, we are grateful you have brought us together on this day that you have made returning from time apart or finding this space for the first time. Be with us in finding the places and rituals and rhythms that allow us to be with ourselves, that open our minds and hearts and leaders and help us find grounding in this overwhelming world. Amen. And now let us pray as Jesus, taught, saying...

Congregation:

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Harriett Lindeman:

And now let us sing the hymn, we gather together to ask the Lord's blessing, number 27.

Choir:

(Singing)

Harriett Lindeman:

Now as we prepare to leave this place, the peace of God be in your heart, the love of God be in your hands, the joy of God be in your soul. Go in peace. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.