

# Classical Music Can Reduce Crime

*By Barrington H. Brennen, August 19, 2013*

Forty years ago I was studying in a college located on the beautiful Caribbean island, Jamaica. I was greatly involved in the music culture of the college and the island. I sang in the semi-professional choir, served as the church organist, and performed in all the major musical events on campus. I had the privilege of singing all over the island in church halls, music theaters, schools, and ball rooms. For two consecutive years I was elected by the national music committee as the most outstanding male singer on the entire island. What intrigued me the most was the great appreciation grassroots people had for art songs and classical music. Whether they liked it or not, I am not sure. However, one thing was certain, they showed deep respect for the performer and the art of performing, no matter what kind of music it was. When I performed in tiny country churches, people would walk long distances just to hear me sing, without an accompaniment, simple Negro spirituals. Often after singing songs like "City Called Heaven", "Ride On King Jesus" or "Were You There," there would be a standing ovation. "Sing it again" someone would shout from the audience. It was a blessing to see the response.

## A CULTURE SHOCK

When I returned to The Bahamas in 1978, I was in for an unexpected culture shock. Within two weeks of returning home I was asked to sing in a concert some of the same songs that thrilled hundreds in Jamaica. As I began singing some people started laughing, others walked out, and yet still others showed a great disinterest by the expression on their faces. Although I was determined not to let that deter me I had to tell my self to "sing on, sing on." I was grateful for the few who did express great appreciation for the performances. It was really a shock. It was just a few weeks earlier when everyone listening respected the music although some may not have liked it. Now, back home in my own country, while singing the same songs, I was being laughed at. Certainly some did not like the music and a greater number were disrespectful and could not appreciate the art form.

Several years ago I wrote an article entitled "Junkanoo Isn't Enough" from which I received numerous responses. Here are a few lines from that article: "I am often amazed how so many Bahamians get so excited over musical renditions where the performances leave much to be desired in the serious world of music. The guitars are not properly tuned. The players are picking unrhythmically loud while the drummers hit the drums tumultuously beyond the sound of the voices. The trumpets and horns are being blown through with gusts of air producing harsh sounds. In addition, the singers shout with vain-engorged necks, thus ending the performance with sore throats. The music seriously lacks dynamics or color. But to the uncultured ear, these unrefined aspects of the rendition cannot be recognized. After such cheap "grand" performance, the people stand to their feet in all excitement and "respect." But when a well-in-tuned, dynamic, harmonious form of music is presented, there is an awesome uneasiness, laughter, or disrespect. These two stunning differences are too commonly obvious at concerts in our country today."

## VARIETY IS NEEDED

It is my view that when more of the Bahamian residents develop respect and appreciation for kinds of music other than Junkanoo, we will see a decrease in the crime rate. I am not suggesting that one must like classical music. However, believe it or not, whether or not you like classical music listening to it can impact you positively. I believe there are also many forms of music that can bring discipline of mind. For example: light Jazz, light Calypso, operatic music, baroque music, traditional spirituals, southern gospel, and much more. But when one sticks to only listening to or only appreciating one kind of music it stifles growth. This is especially true for those who only listen to unrefined performance of Junkanoo music, some forms of rap music and others like this.

## MUSIC CAN IMPACT CRIME

Once more it is my view that the more we have people participating in or listen to the more refined music (classical, spirituals, etc.) it can impact the crime level in our country.

In an article entitled "How Classical Music Can Reduce Crime, Benefit Your Mood and Increase Your Spending" it talked about the impact of classical music on crime. Here are two paragraphs from that article: "In 2004 in London, England, the British Transport Police piped classical music into London Underground stations in some of the area's most dangerous neighborhoods. After playing the music for six months here's what happened. Robberies were cut by 33 percent. Staff assaults decreased by 25 percent. Vandalism went down 37 percent. . . .This is not the first time that classical music has been used to deter crime. In 2001, police in West Palm Beach, Florida installed a CD player and speakers on an abandoned building in a crime-ridden neighborhood. After playing classical music -- mostly Mozart, Bach and Beethoven -- 24 hours a day for about three months, shootings, thefts, loiterers and drug deals decreased."

## MY DREAM

I wish that more Bahamians would get excited about classical and easy listening music. I am not asking for a decrease in Junkanoo music. Instead of am seeking for greater respect and appreciation (not necessarily to love it) for the refined forms of music. I am certain this will impact our nation's anxiety and stress levels and decrease crime.

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