

Cultural Daily

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Maestro Leonard Slatkin: The Right to Bare Our Souls

Leonard Slatkin · Wednesday, October 8th, 2014

Maestro Leonard Slatkin, Music Director for the [Detroit Symphony Orchestra](#) and the [Orchestre National de Lyon](#), France, contributes this exclusive article to Cultural Weekly: *The Right to Bare Our Souls*.



Leonard Slatkin. Photo: Steve Sherman.

“If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him.”

John F. Kennedy spoke those words more than half a century ago. They ring as true now as they have throughout history. Part of the grand design of our founding fathers was to allow citizens to express thoughts and feelings in various ways.

Today we find ourselves in a society that is more diverse than ever. But our culture, and that of the rest of the world, is changing. It seems as if many in this country have forgotten the importance of the arts as they relate not only to our history but also to community revitalization.

It was a little over three years ago that the Detroit Symphony Orchestra was on life support. The Michigan Opera Theatre was on the brink of collapse. The continuing saga of the Detroit Institute of Arts makes national headlines. Lost in all this is one simple, basic question: Do they matter?

Of course I speak as someone intimately connected with an arts institution, and perhaps my bias can be thought of as professionally driven. But I am also an observer and listener. With the increased availability of virtually everything on the planet, one has to wonder about the value of the living, breathing organism that sustains and ultimately determines the future of artistic values.

Perhaps the only true way to know if it matters is to imagine a world without symphony orchestras, ballet companies, art museums or the myriad of other artistic enterprises. The culture is what attracts business and tourism to a city. It is one of the most important aspects of how we are perceived by others. A thriving artistic community brings not only joy and hope but fiscal gain as well.

Still, one has to wonder about what this all means, especially to the younger generations. They have been shut out in so many cases by the lack of true arts programs in the schools. This is becoming the case worldwide. It seems as if the United States has forgotten about the heritage that

the classics bring to our country. The culture must be protected, nurtured and put in front of our national agenda. Without it, we are doomed to live as automatons, with imagination a thing of the past.

Detroit has always been a flourishing city for artistic expression. With many young people coming in each day, we have an opportunity to share this new age with so many new residents. Each time I return from a trip, I see the signs of growth, noticing a new business or redevelopment that was not there when I left. All of this points in the right direction.



Slatkin and the entire Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Photo: Cybelle Codish

As we prepare to begin our season, the [Detroit Symphony Orchestra](#) is in the forefront of both maintaining the past and envisioning the future. Our neighborhood concerts bring music to many different parts of the community. Our *Live from Orchestra Hall* webcasts reach an audience of thousands all over the world. The pricing structure of tickets makes it possible to come to a performance at The Max for less than it costs to go to a movie these days.

These and so many more initiatives help us to grow the culture as well as develop new ways to reach a wider audience. Education is the key, as it should be. Whether a sculpture, concerto or painting, art opens up doors to the past and can lead to an even brighter future.

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