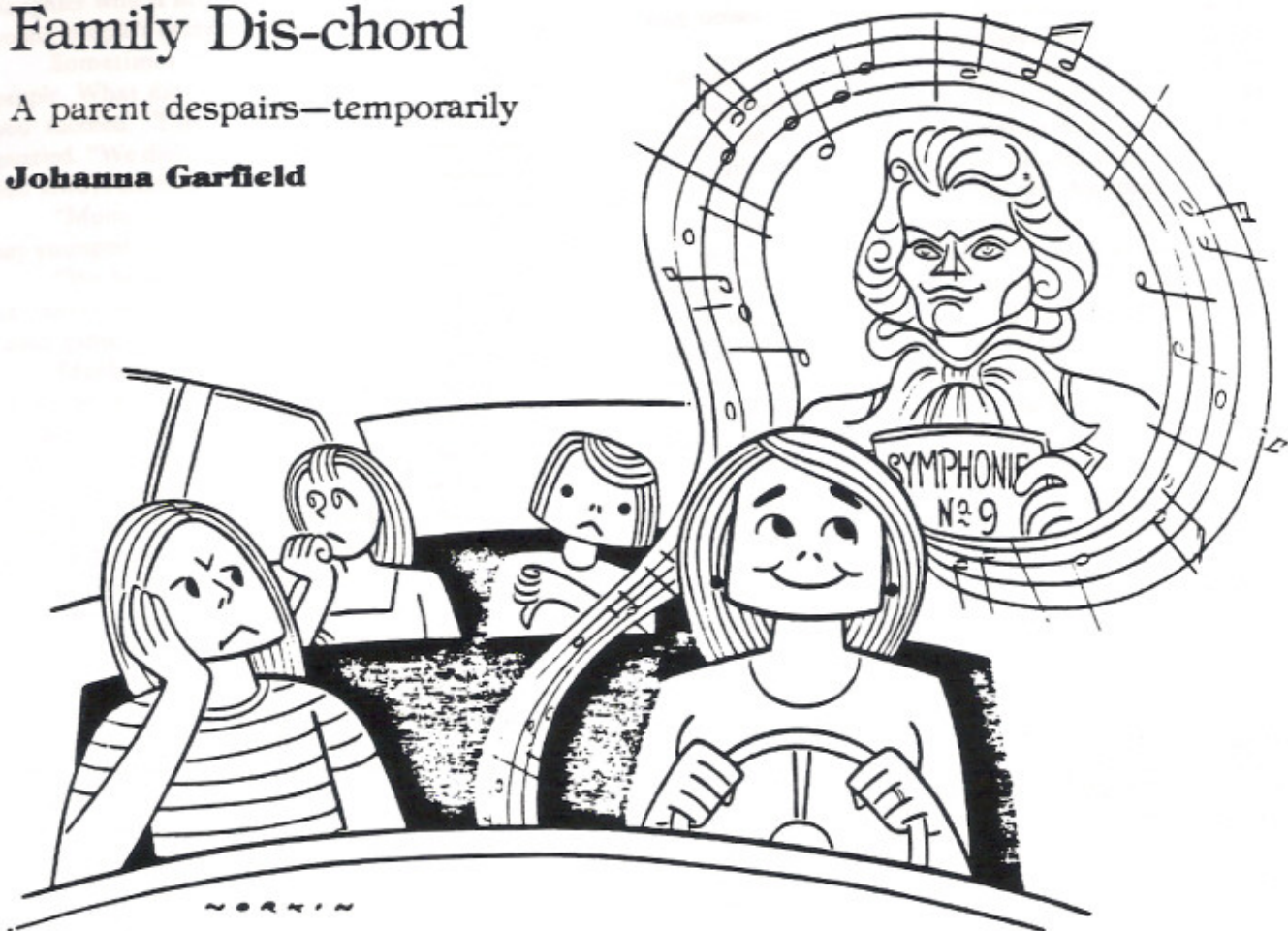


## Family Dis-chord

A parent despairs—temporarily

Johanna Garfield



Beethoven's Ninth is soaring to its climax on the car radio, and I try to ignore the restless twitchings of my three teenage children. Suddenly, one of them says, "Hey, isn't your half-hour on QXR up yet?" I look at him in horror and then suddenly realize that there was no special malice in his putting the question to me at that particular moment. Hard as it is for me to believe, the glory of the music simply hasn't reached him. And my own pleasure in it sours somewhat as I feel the pressure of their combined indifference. For here is another area where I ("we" really, since my husband shares my passion for music) have seemingly failed. Years of re-

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corded exposure to the classics at home, to live concerts, to music lessons, have done nothing to instill a love of classical music in my children.

At Carnegie Hall, one son used to stuff his ears with cotton; the other children remained quiet only when bribed with candy bars. At Tanglewood-on-Parade (an annual day-long "happening" featuring the Boston Pops plus amusements for the kids), the lure was always the helium balloon, the train without tracks, the fireworks—never the music. One night four years ago we had a terrible fight about it. "Stay here and listen or we'll leave; we won't even have our picnic," I screamed, furious at their indifference, at their refusal to give even fifteen minutes to Schubert when the train and the balloon would be there for hours. A friend of ours

(and a favorite of the kids) was conducting a short afternoon program in the Theatre, but they didn't care. Eyes glazed, they stayed ten minutes, then sneaked off when they thought I wasn't watching.

In the car (the chief, but by no means the only arena for our musical conflicts), I ponder the problem. What happened? I wonder. Did we try too hard? Did we care too much? I have begun to suspect that there is a mathematical/psychological principle of our era at work here: Children will hate/tolerate/like/love music (art? literature?) in a direct and opposing ratio to the amount their parents do. A friend who has never listened to anything heavier than Guy Lombardo has a Mozart freak for a son. Our dentist, whose Muzak is his idea of heavy music, has a



daughter who is first violinist with a young people's orchestra.

Sometimes I question these people. What did you do? How did you succeed? They look surprised, puzzled. "We didn't do anything. He just always liked it."

"Mom, isn't it a half-hour yet?" my youngest groans.

"We have seven minutes left," I say, ashamed to be playing this ridiculous game.

Maybe, I try to comfort myself as we drive on, it's just part of the teenage rebellion thing. I study their faces furtively as they sit there, grim and tight-lipped, for signs of secret pleasure in the music—a bemused smile, a tapping foot, a head nodding in rhythm. But they remain stony, impatient, annoyed—too concerned with the battle over equal time to have any energy left over for actual listening.

Now my son in the front seat tries to tease me by darting his hand towards the radio as though he were going to switch the dials. I make a strategic mistake—two, really—attempting to shake them up through criticism and a reproach. "How can you listen to this and not get a thrill?" I am surprised to realize that my voice is trembling. "You don't even give it a chance." And then I add resentfully, again aware of how childish I sound, "I listen to what *you* like; why won't you listen to what *we* like?" (I refuse to make such irrevocable distinctions as "your" music and "ours," though the kids make them all the time.)

There is no reply, just an exchange of smirks, as my middle child questions wearily, "What time is it now? How many minutes do we still have to wait?"

The movement hasn't ended, but my joy in it has.

"O.K., put on WABC."

Surprised, delighted, and totally unconcerned with the motivation for my change of heart, they lean forward expectantly. Their faces light

up as a torrent of inexplicable mouthings and harsh, pulsing noises pour out of the radio.

Johnny, only thirteen, comes alive. Winningly, hopefully (even as I was, just minutes before), he says, "Mom, listen to this one. It's great. You're gonna love it."

Smiling bitterly at the irony, I try to take an interest. "Who's singing? What's this song about?" I ask. I am trying to identify with their passion. When I was their age, I loved Dorsey, Harry James, and Glenn Miller; the singing of Dinah Shore, Margaret Whiting, Peggy Lee; the songs of Cole Porter, Frank Loesser, Alan Jay Lerner. But I knew all the lyrics, knew the composers, could recognize the singers' voices.

My daughter, it turns out, knows the words but won't tell them, convinced that I wouldn't understand. She mouths them silently to herself. At home, she keeps a beautiful notebook of the more poetic lyrics done in all colors of the rainbow. They are, to her, what Browning and Shakespeare were to me—and some, in fact, are not bad, when decoded.

The boys are indifferent to the potential poetry. They revel in the pure sound. Johnny replies, "Gee, Mom, I'm not sure who's singing, but isn't it great?" We drive on.

A few weeks before this, I had had a sudden ray of hope. The opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth were being used as background for a TV commercial (to herald the opening of a new savings bank, no less) and to my amazement, the kids were humming along. I was delighted. Had the long-awaited breakthrough occurred? But no, in a few measures, they broke into the jazzed-up, obscenely syncopated version that was so popular last year, and my joy turned to ashes.

No, for them, unless a miracle occurs, there will be no revelation on a rainy day at Tanglewood, as there was for me when I was eighteen. The beauty of the opening bars of

Brahms' Fourth Symphony, which I'd listened to respectfully but without much enjoyment for years, struck me that misty afternoon with almost physical force, and my life was changed forever. But years of listening had contributed to that one moment, and the harmonies and rhythms of Dorsey and James weren't so far removed from the classics as are the tribal chants of much of today's rock music. There was a connection then. There is no connecting now, and no long afternoons with classical music in the background as they read and dream. Today's kids don't need to sit around and listen to "boring" music when TV and the radio offer so much more—and so much more quickly.

I want to share my joy with them, but for now, I am defeated. There are no more arguments. The radio stays on WABC for the rest of the trip. MA

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