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## *Cell phones, candy wrappers, and crying babies – what do they have in common?*

*A quick look at concert etiquette!*

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During this relentlessly dreary, dark winter day, I look ahead with great anticipation to the national ACDA convention in New York City. There are no guarantees that the February skies will be any less gray but the city lights will be bright and the music...oh, the music!

Perhaps the most anticipated moment will be sitting in an audience of fellow ACDA members and knowing that I will hear every word, every nuance and every silence that is intended to be heard. ACDA audiences are wonderful because of their noticeable respect for the performers, the sweet spot of silence that happens while everyone is holding their breath after the last cutoff and the consideration to the rest of the audience. It is such a rare treat to know that I can have a true aesthetic experience, uninterrupted by several uninvited noises and movement.

Then, we find our way back home and invite the public to our concerts or sit amongst them clutching our ticket with one hand and crossing the fingers of the other, looking around nervously, hoping that we have been blessed with a seat far from the clever person who knows how to program “Fur Elise” into his cell phone ringer.

We hopelessly sigh as the parents of the darling, angelic baby politely excuse themselves while they crawl into the middle of the row, knowing that the sweet bundle of joy is sure to awaken, as if on cue, and interject its own interpretation of the *Lacrymosa* at a fortissimo.

We’ll tense up and cringe at the slightest shuffle, knowing the distinct possibility of the well-meaning person that will spend most of Morten Lauridsen’s *Lux Aeterna* trying to quietly remove a piece of hard candy from its wrapper (think water-drip torture). We fantasize about acts of revenge that we would bestow upon the incessant talkers (oh, excuse me, I mean whisperers) behind us. By the time our thoughts drift back to the music, we have missed the lush chord we were waiting to hear at the climax of the Imant Rammish *Ave Verum Corpus*.

Maybe this sounds a little obsessive but I think many of you have pulled your hair out over the dilemma of addressing concert etiquette (or the lack thereof). What can or should we do? I have started observing, taking mental notes and brainstorming approaches to how this problem is addressed. Let me share a few ideas.

An atmosphere that promotes the kind of attentive audience we yearn for can be established before the day of the concert by choosing an appropriate concert venue. If you have the majority of your concerts in a sports event center, expect the audience to behave like basketball fans. There are four public high school in Idaho Falls. Not one has an auditorium. If you are in a similar situation, be vigilant and creative in finding an appropriate setting for your concerts.

Check out churches in your community and avoid those that look like a multi-purpose activity room. Concentrate your effort on those with superior acoustics. Work on building a friendly relationship with the building and grounds chairperson. There is something about entering a church that brings out good behavior. You may not be able to schedule every concert there, but maybe just your annual Christmas concert. The decorations will be in place already. How convenient!

A colleague of mine rented the beautiful, newly renovated Colonial Theater in downtown Idaho Falls for her Christmas concert. In exchange for a bit of advertising space in the program she was able to get business sponsors to pay for the rental charge. An appropriate space sets the tone for a special concert experience.

As important as the venue, be selective about the performance events you choose. If your audience becomes accustomed to hearing your choir as background music (think Festival of Trees and singing in a mall), it's harder from them to adjust to a formal concert. If your group is singing for a community event, research the location and occasion. It is difficult to control the surroundings and makeup of your audience when someone else is in charge.

Now let us ponder the wonders of modern technology. The vast array of cell phone ringing tones would add a great deal of interest to John Cage's 4' 33" and – that's about it. It's amazing that we functioned as a society without them. Yet, it's as though they have become a minute-to-minute life-support system for many. Strange, isn't it? Cell phones have wreaked havoc not only in our concert halls but in other social settings. I'll save those thoughts for my culinary editorial when I become social editor for *Bon Appetite*.

There are several approaches to addressing unnecessary distractions. The direct approach is to be straight-forward at the beginning of a concert. This

may seem negative but only those susceptible to guilt will be offended. Secretly your tune-in concert connoisseurs will be jumping for joy (silently, of course!) Another idea is to include expectations or criteria for attendance on your publicity fliers, programs or tickets. I recently saw a piano recital poster that stated no one under age six would be admitted.

A humorous approach can take the edge off. At a Tacoma Northwest Convention concert last spring, the site manager arranged for someone to ring his cell phone during his concert introductions He took the call and chatted as though it was no big deal. We sat stunned, our mouths agape, waiting for him to finish. After a brief conversation, he signed off and explained that his buddy called to remind us to turn off our cell phones. Very clever.

School concerts offer an opportunity to address the audience indirectly. At my daughter's orchestra concert a few weeks ago, the conductor explained to the audience she had been teaching her students about symphonic movements and why there would be no clapping until she put her baton down. Then she asked the audience for "a favor." As the students left the stage and joined the audience, we were to observe their behavior because she had taught them concert etiquette. She now had the student's teaching the parents. Again, a clever solution.

In this new age of multi-media complete with rewind and pause, it's no wonder that live performance has suffered from disengaged audiences. You expect excellence from your singers, expect it from your listeners as well.  
BRRRRRRNG!