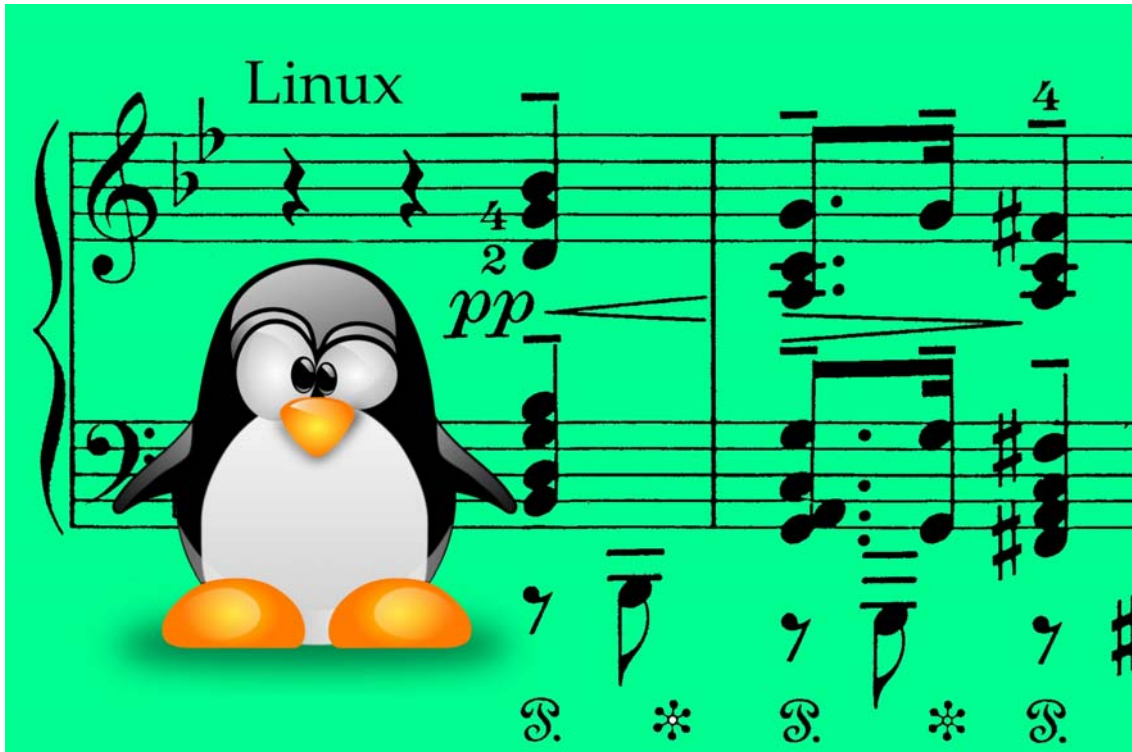


7 Reasons Why Switching to Classical Music is like Switching From Windows to Linux

A great somewhat geeky article written by someone under the alias of BrendanTheNavigator making comparisons between Linux and classical music.



Back in 2008, there was a great article that was hosted on a now discontinued website called www.classicalconvert.com written by someone under the name of BrendanTheNavigator. Should it be forgotten, I've resurrected it below. If anyone knows who wrote this article, please let me know.

here is his (or her) article...

7 Reasons Why Switching to Classical Music is like Switching From Windows to Linux

By Unknown, circa. Feb 2008

This just might be the geekiest thing I have written, but what do you expect? I'm a physics graduate student. I've gone through both of these conversions myself, and realized that there are some interesting similarities between the two, and that the kind of people willing to do the geeky one are probably pretty well suited to doing the musical one. So here we go:

1. It's a deceptively different experience

Both situations involve switching to something which, on the surface, doesn't seem too different from what you are used to, whereas in fact, both are radically different. For example, many people think of classical as basically long-winded and unstructured, especially compared to non-classical stuff. What you don't realize until you're well entrenched is that most classical pieces are structured around one of a few basic, but somewhat complex, underlying structures: sonata form, rondo form, etc. Identifying and understanding these forms is geek heaven. In a similar fashion, people new to Linux get a load of the tarted up window managers and see it as basically a free, slightly different looking, version of Windows. Of course, you find out quite quickly that that is just the very tiniest tip of the command-line based iceberg.

2. There are alternate versions of the same basic material

Linux has different distributions, classical has different conductors and orchestras. Each performance consists of fundamentally the same material (the notes played are almost always the same) but each gives a remarkably different experience by varying the tempos, the relative volume, and the emotional feeling of each section of the orchestra. Although all the notes are written down, everything else is defined in only the loosest terms. One of the roles of a conductor is to choose and enforce particular choices for those three variables, resulting in the same fundamental material being presented in a multitude of different ways. Everybody will have a particular version of a piece which they think is superior, just as everyone has their own pet distribution. Part of the classical experience is working out what suits you best.

3. They are both open source

If you want to see exactly what Beethoven's 5th symphony consists of, you can pop down to your local university music library and examine the same sheet music used in a concert performance. You can see what each instrument is required to play, and how they all interact with each other. Instead of releasing pre-performed recordings (as is the case with most music) the fundamental unit of classical publishing is the score. It's up to someone else to do the job of actually playing it, and anyone who does is free to sell their performance. In the same way you can examine the source for every piece of open source software, you can see exactly how it's put together if you want to. Analogously, most people only see the finished product, the compiled program, the recorded concert. The key is, the underlying material is there if you want to see it.

4. The first steps are disproportionately challenging

Linux and classical music are both difficult to get into. You can't understand the latter after a single listen; it takes many attempts before the parts of a piece start to make sense and come together in all kinds of unexpected ways. This comparatively large time investment is particularly shocking when you switch over from the world of non-classical songs, which are designed to infiltrate themselves into your brain in the snappiest amount of time possible. Accepting the fact that you are not going to understand a classical piece on the first, second, fifth, even tenth listen is one of the most important steps in learning to like the genre. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that if you don't get it straight away that means it's too boring and highbrow, it'll take a bunch of attempts before it makes sense.

5. There is always an enormous amount more to learn

When I fall in love with a piece, the repeat button gets wedged down for a few hours or days. With a non-classical piece that's basically all it'll stand up to: a day or so of repeated listening. At that point it stagnates. Popular pieces are way too easy to use up, after thirty listens you know them backward, forward and inside out; there are few, if any, surprises left. With a classical piece you will always find new things, and they are often dramatically new. In fact, until you've heard a piece at least ten times, you pretty much don't understand it at all. In the same way, with Linux there is always a better way of doing stuff, just waiting for you to learn it. There is always some new configuration tricks, or shell scripting magic, or... you get the idea.

6. They are both ultimately more rewarding

Intimately intertwined with the last point — the generous complexity — are the intellectual and emotional rewards you get from dealing with all the difficulties in understanding. As soon as you can coherently follow the first melody through a movement, everything else will begin sliding into place. The weird unrelated offshoots turn out to be variations and inversions; everything is connected and stands on a structure which was previously unseen. The complexity results in a much more elongated, extended, and intimate relationship with each piece - you'll be listening to your favorite pieces for years and still discovering more of their hidden facets. When you start to understand how Linux works after coming from windows it feels very similar, those initially arcane looking commands suddenly give you the power to do pretty much whatever you want to do, as long as you invest the intellectual effort to work them out.

7. After a while you'll find it hard to go back... and you'll be surprised by this

Going back to Windows is frustratingly constraining after getting used to a real operating system. Likewise, sometimes I'll have a whopping huge desire to listen to something from the non-classical directories on my hard drive: a bit of Mr Scruff, Bentley Rhythm Ace or Portishead. They're still amazing, but when I return to the thicker, soupier and more full of notes classical pieces, it feels infinitely better. This effect is magnified about 1,765 times when listening to the trashy pop which makes up the bulk of non-classical. That crap'll rapidly have you diving for the Bach like a telecommunications cable saboteur.

In short, if you are prepared to make the brain-splattering jump which is Windows to Linux, then you absolutely are ready to give classical music a go - just remember it's hard and it's going to take you a little while. But it'll be worth it.