

Reading:

CAE Part 2

Gapped text

1  How often do you go to see a performance of a play, a classical music concert or an opera?
Are members of the audience expected to behave in a certain way?
What type of behaviour might other members of the audience find annoying?

2 You are going to read an article about the way people sometimes behave in the theatre or concert hall. Six paragraphs have been removed from the article. Choose from the paragraphs A–G the one which fits each gap (1–6). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use.

THE TROUBLE WITH MODERN AUDIENCES

Stephen Pollard believes that many of us need to be educated in the norms of social conduct – in particular, concert etiquette.

According to the reviews, the performance of Mahler's Sixth Symphony that I went to last week was 'transcendent', 'emotionally perfect' and 'violently good'. A friend called me the following morning and told me that it was one of the most powerful experiences of her life.

1

Sitting in the row in front of me, you see, was the family from hell. I don't know their names, but let's call them the Fidget-Bottoms. Mr and Mrs Fidget-Bottom spent the entire time stroking and kissing their kids, mock conducting, stretching out their arms across the back of their seats as if they were on the sofa at home and, just for good measure, bobbing their heads up and down in time with the music.

2

I planted a well-aimed kick in the back of the seat. Nothing. A killer combination of the family's total self-absorption, and the seat's wooden solidity, meant that the only effect was a painful toe. So I resorted to another equally fruitless tactic; that of seething with righteous indignation.

3

Now there is a more *laissez-faire* attitude, which, whilst opening up cultural institutions to millions, has its own drawbacks. Today, you

come as you please, and behave as you please. It's your right. If you want to flick through your programme, fine. If you want to use it as a fan, fine. If you want to cough, fine.

4

But we are not at home. The very point of the theatre is to be out of the house, and part of a crowd. And being part of a crowd has obligations – not shouting 'fire' out of mischief, for example, in a crowded room. When travelling by bus, I do not sing arias from Handel's *Messiah*. Nor do I whistle along to the music at weddings. I behave as is expected of me.

5

As a result we have forgotten – or more truthfully, never learned – how to listen. When the *St Matthew Passion* was written it was heard at Easter, once every very few years. A performance was an event, an event which we had no way of even attempting to recreate. Today, we can record the performance and then listen to it in the bath. We can have its choruses playing as background music while we eat.

6

It's hardly surprising that we take that behaviour, and that attitude, into the concert hall with us. Mr and Mrs Fidget-Bottom, and the little Fidget-Bottoms, certainly ruined my concert last week, and I am fairly sure they are going to ruin quite a few others as they get older.

A This particular family may have been especially horrific, but they are merely grotesque extensions of the downside of the increasing accessibility of culture. The old formal rules of behaviour at the theatre, concerts and opera – dressing up in black tie and all that, and the feeling that unless you were part of a closed circle then it wasn't your business to attend – were indeed far too stifling.

B Rarely, if ever, do we sit down in our own home to listen to a full performance of a piece of music, with no other distractions. And if we do make an attempt, then no sooner have we settled into our armchair than we think of something else we could be doing – and we do it.

C Which is more than can be said for the Fidget-Bottoms of this world, who seems oblivious to the norms of social conduct. The problem stems from the fact that culture is now too readily accessible. We no longer need to make an effort with it. You wanna hear Beethoven's Ninth? Pop on a CD. Fancy Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*? Which version?

D I felt then, as I do now, that my outburst of temper was fully justified. What these people, and people like them clearly need, is an education in how to behave in public, beginning with a basic introduction to concert etiquette. On no account should you kiss your children once the concert has started. Indeed, save that for when you get home.

E I wouldn't know. My body was in the concert hall, and my ears are in full working order. But neither were any use to me. The London Symphony Orchestra might as well have been playing *Chopsticks* for all the impact the Mahler had on me.

F Unwrapping sweets, fidgeting, wandering off to the toilet and chatting are also on the list of things you can do during a performance. When going out is as easy, and as normal, as staying in, then we behave the same in the theatre or the concert hall as we do in the living room. And so we don't have a thought for those around us.

G They were cocooned in their own world, with not the slightest concern for anyone around. I doubt that it even crossed their mind that they were doing anything wrong, so unabashed was their behaviour. The situation called for action.

Reacting to the text

Do you agree with the writer's views? Why/Why not?

There has been much debate in Britain in recent years about the 'dumbing down' of culture, a reduction in the quality and/or educational value of television and the arts, brought about by the desire to make them more accessible.

How true is this in your country? Do you think young people have greater or less cultural knowledge than previous generations?

