

Bad reviews **Facing the music**



Dejan Lazic © Susie Knoll

Pianist Dejan Lazić recently caused a stir by asking the *Washington Post* to delete a negative review of one of his concerts from its website. But musicians need to face up to criticism of their performances, argues Christopher Gillett, who has had his fair share of painful reviews...



I was doing a new opera last year in Vienna. Barely had I crawled out of bed the morning after the premiere when my agent's assistant started emailing me with news of reviews. The reviews were in German, of course, and he wasn't sure if one of them was good or bad. It turned out to be decidedly so-so.

I hadn't wanted to look at the reviews at all, but my agent's assistant, like an eager but untrained puppy, had done the equivalent of a poo on the sitting room carpet of my post-performance bliss. It was going to be a while before I could get the stains out my inner shagpile.

There were also some good reviews, and these, of course, were put up on the agency's website for all to see. The bad one was supposedly forgotten.

Only it wasn't. Not by me at least. That's how it is with reviews – you only remember the bad ones.

That's the trouble with Googling yourself: you will keep bumping into your own shortcomings

So it must be very galling for Dejan Lazić, when he does the occasional online vanity search, to keep coming face-to-face with his own canine doo-doo. That's the trouble with Googling yourself: you will keep bumping into your own shortcomings – or rather, what other people *think* are your shortcomings.

My first suggestion to Dejan is that he stop the vanity searches, for that way lies depression. Though, having read the offending *Washington Post* [review](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/05/AR2010120503272.html) (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/05/AR2010120503272.html>) by Anne Midgette... well, if he thinks that's a bad

one, he should take a look at some of the doozies I've had over the years. No, I'm not going to provide links.

Midgette has written a very personable and well-reasoned [response](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2014/11/04/laffaire-lazic-a-pianist-and-reviewer-face-off/) (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2014/11/04/laffaire-lazic-a-pianist-and-reviewer-face-off/>) to this media mountain-out-of-a-molehill (as has [Ivan Hewett](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/classicalmusic/11203787/Do-negative-reviews-have-a-right-to-be-forgotten-by-Google.html) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/classicalmusic/11203787/Do-negative-reviews-have-a-right-to-be-forgotten-by-Google.html>)) that should be read, as it covers the legal implications of Lazić's request to have the 'bad' review taken down. There's nothing I can add to that. Midgette hits the nail on the head when she says: 'I write for the audience, not for the artist, and I always encourage artists to do their best not to read reviews at all, since even the most kindly-meant write-up may contain a line or two that can lodge in the subject's brain and fester.'

I'm not the first person to point out that if you take notice of the good reviews you also have to hear the bad ones

Now that I'm looking at the flabby bulk of my career in the rear-view mirror, I can honestly say that no critic has ever said anything about me that wasn't fair. Painful, yes, but unfair, no. I hated some of the things that have been written about me, but then it's always hard to acknowledge one's own failings, let alone have them printed in a newspaper. I'm not the first person to point out that if you take notice of the good reviews you also have to hear the bad ones.

A big penny dropped for me recently when I realised that many performers think that good reviews come with some entitlement attached: 'I got good reviews, therefore I deserve better work.' That way lies madness. It's much more complicated than that, and the sooner any performer can forget that little canard, the happier they will be – and the better they'll perform, too.

Read more of [Christopher Gillett on Sinfini Music](http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs) ([/uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs](http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/features/blogs/christopher-gillett/singers-on-the-road-with-dogs)).

The tenor's own blog is [christophergillett.co.uk](http://www.christophergillett.co.uk). ([http://christophergillett.co.uk/](http://www.christophergillett.co.uk))

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