

Inside Out **Don't give music critics the boot**



(c) Pablo Blasberg

Much as tenor Christopher Gillett likes to grumble about critics and their opinions, he is horrified by the *Independent on Sunday's* decision to axe its arts reviewers.



Performers argue a lot about whether or not we should read reviews. I've haven't yet met a singer who doesn't; perhaps not straight away, but at some time or other. Even if you try to avoid reviews, there'll always be some bright spark who's only too happy to thrust them in front of your face, particularly the bad ones.

From September we needn't bother looking in the *Independent On Sunday* any more, as the paper is reportedly axing all its arts reviews and replacing them with a digest of what critics from other papers have written. This seems like an odd thing to do for a major newspaper, tantamount to admitting it has no opinion of its own since it's quite happy to poach everyone else's.

The *Independent On Sunday* is axing all its arts reviews and replacing them with a digest from other papers

I can't say I'm surprised; we've seen this coming. Over the years, the column inches given to reviewing classical music have shrunk like a diva's boil-washed ballgown. Open a 30-year-old broadsheet and you'll find entire half-pages devoted to reviewing new opera productions. These days you'll be glad of five paragraphs and a photo. As a singer you'll be lucky to get a mention, spoiled by more than a few words. All those weeks of rehearsal, the challenge of singing a long and fiendishly difficult role, rewarded simply by a single-word description in the paper: 'So-and-so was an earnest Ferrando.'

You might think that performers would be enjoying a fat helping of schadenfreude with an extra portion of gloat on the side, seeing critics lose their jobs. 'Haha! Serves them right. A taste of their own medicine, etc etc...' but I certainly am not.

Our greatest fear is that our art form will be pushed entirely into the wings by popular culture

I'll admit, over the years there have been one or two critics I'd have happily nudged in front of a bus, but much as we moan about them - and boy, do we moan - their gradual disappearance sets lots of alarm bells ringing. Our greatest fear isn't that we won't get our name in the papers; it is that our art form will be further sidelined, pushed entirely into the wings by popular culture. Popular culture is all very well, but it is usually driven by forces other than the pursuit of quality. Without critics to keep a beady eye on them, the 'arts' that succeed will simply be the ones that splurge the most on the dark forces of Public Relations, whose so-called 'features' garner the most readers for the paper, and if the *Independent on Sunday* thinks that I, for one, am going to bother to buy a newspaper that simply regurgitates marketing puff as arts news, then it can kiss my wrinkly old backside.

[christophergillett.co.uk](http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/index.htm) (<http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/index.htm>)

saddoabroad.blogspot.com (<http://saddoabroad.blogspot.com/>)