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Culture for the hoi polloi

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I had lived here for a few years before I finally discovered that musical and other cultural events do in fact exist, but it's not as easy to squeeze into the world of "culture" that we are offered in a medium-sized city.

In San Sebastian, we have a very limited amount of cultural events and they are usually a concentrated number crammed into a week or a fortnight or a "festival." By the time you find out about it, it's nearly finished! The beginning and each following step of the process of culturalization is somewhat of a nightmare. Oh! What we must endure to hear a symphony or see a bit of independent cinema!

The first step is acquiring a ticket. You can buy a season pass but this is impractical not only because of its exorbitant price, but also because it is impossible that you would want to go to every single concert offered. Some, however, do. They are mostly retired folk who don't really appreciate music but have money up the wazoo and nothing to do on any given evening of the year. They snatch up all the good seats before you even get a chance to decide that you want to go. Then one glorious morning the tickets go on sale. You must be on the Internet waiting for the moment, otherwise you'll end up in row 8,432. If it's the film festival we're referring to, the seats aren't numbered but all the good movies get sold out in a matter of seconds.

Once you've got your ticket, you very excitedly go to the event of your choice, whether it be Hadyn, Shostakovich, or *Mon Fils à Moi*. You are immediately overwhelmed by the perfume your fellow concert attendees have previously bathed in. Once you finally get in, you find your seat. The event begins late because people are having *uber*-important conversations or trying to get into the bathroom before the concert. Any attempt to ring a bell to herd the people in is futile, at least the first two times.

The concert or film then begins and people have to wrap up their ultra-important conversations. This may go well into the incorrectly-applauded first movement or past the credits. Your evil eye goes unnoticed. They eventually stop but then inevitably some *señora* starts having hot flashes and whips out her fan. Pchpchpchpch... In the tensest moments or a flowing adagio, which require silence, there is coughing. This is not discreet coughing due to a tickle in the throat. This is phlegm-expelling, lung-clearing coughing. And it only happens in the quiet moments. If the performance happens to last longer than thirty minutes (most do), people begin to whisper, again completely oblivious to your most malicious glances. I particularly appreciate the conjectures as to how a film will end.

If the event happens to be a concert, there is an intermission. This is good if you have a weak bladder (and are of the masculine gender) or a smoker, but bad if you have no patience. You have to wait for everyone to leave, wait for everyone to relieve themselves, and wait for them to get back in when the bell again rings. Prepare the evil eye for another hour of coughing, fanning, and whispering. People are bored. They don't want a second half. They just want to leave. Why don't they?

Then the performance comes to an end. Once the applause begins, the Cinderellas start pushing and shoving to run out because they are late for...nothing. Be patient; it's almost over. Do not think about the mindless chatter you are hearing. Think about the music you just heard or the film you just saw. Be patient. This is culture.

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