

3:04

EXCERPT: LETTERS FROM THE COUNTRY by Carol Bly

*to music, in music*

A painful fact of American life is that people from small towns are afraid of directness. Small-town kids, unlike suburban kids, can't take much from the shoulder. *lecture demonstrations -* Example: A suburban Minneapolis child with a first-rate music instructor goes off to her piano lesson. She is working up a small piece of Mozart, she hasn't done her homework, and she smears the counting. The music instructor tells her it's an irresponsible job, sloppy phrasing, whatever she tells her--in any case, it won't do. The child returns home and works the piece up much more conscientiously next time, having learned that music is a disciplined pleasure. *LD*

*she stopped*

A rural piano student cannot be spoken to so plainly. It is hard for her to be stirred into being responsible to the music at hand because the instant a teacher tries to correct her directly her soul sags into mere self-condemnation. Our style, in the countryside, is not to criticize children at all: we very seldom tell them the plane model was glued carelessly and the sleeve set in without enough easing. (The counterpart of this is that we seldom praise them much for anything either. "You played a real good

*cool*

*fast + bland*

*CARE*

game against Dawson"; "You did a real good job of that speech contest"--not "I knew you'd do well at the speech thing: I didn't know that I would cry-- in fact, I'm still moved by what you said!") *+ Alan R later. D* // So the children develop neither stamina about criticism nor the imagination to picture to themselves

*CARE*

gigantic praise if they excel. They live lightly handed into a middle world of little comment, and therefore little incitement to devotion. *for a long time D* Should a music teacher try to explain Mozart's involvement in the music--what he had in mind for this or that phrase--the student wouldn't hear over the ground *X? idea question* noise

~~noise~~ of dismay in her own feelings. "I'm being attacked! I'm being attacked!" is all her inexperienced soul can take in. Piranhas when you're

out swimming, mean music teachers when you're taking piano--it's all the same to her. On a psychological ladder, she is rungs below being able to move from self to Mozart. *↳ birch on stage*

What we need in rural life is more Serious Occasion. *we saw Bucky.* By the time a child is ten, he or she should have heard, at least a few hundreds of times,

"I loved that dying cowboy routine. Do it again. Do be quiet, Uncle Malcolm. Noah's going to do his dying cowboy routine." ~~And adults would have shut up, listened, and praised.~~ *without any clothes* That moment would have been a Serious Occasion. ~~Then, after some hundreds of such occasions, one can take in a conversation about music--what does Mozart want out of this piece?~~ *Becky's buttons*

Remember: we are not now talking about you or yourself. We are talking about someone other--a musician long dead--and he is making a demand on us, and we are going to meet that demand! We are not going to scream and flee, because discipline is not the same thing as piranhas in the river. *↳*