

# The New Criterion

## Music

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### Harnoncourt conducts Beethoven

by [James Penrose](#)

On Nikolaus Harnoncourt & the Chamber Orchestra of Europe at Carnegie Hall, New York

Classical musicians in the late twentieth century appear to have largely abandoned the ambition to compose new and attractive music. And who can blame them? An indifferent population with a steadily decreasing attention span has made up its mind about new music. Kingsley Amis, with characteristic subtlety, put it best: “Twentieth century music is like paedophilia. No matter how persuasively and persistently its champions urge their cause, it will never be accepted by the public at large, who will continue to regard it with incomprehension, outrage and repugnance.”

This is no revelation, particularly to musicians. Drawing on the risk-allocation techniques developed by their brethren in the financial world, the more adaptable of the musical breed have hedged the risk of creative downside (i.e., composing a dud) by simply choosing works by name-brand members of the canon and devising novel renderings for t ...

**James Penrose** writes about music for *The New Criterion*.

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