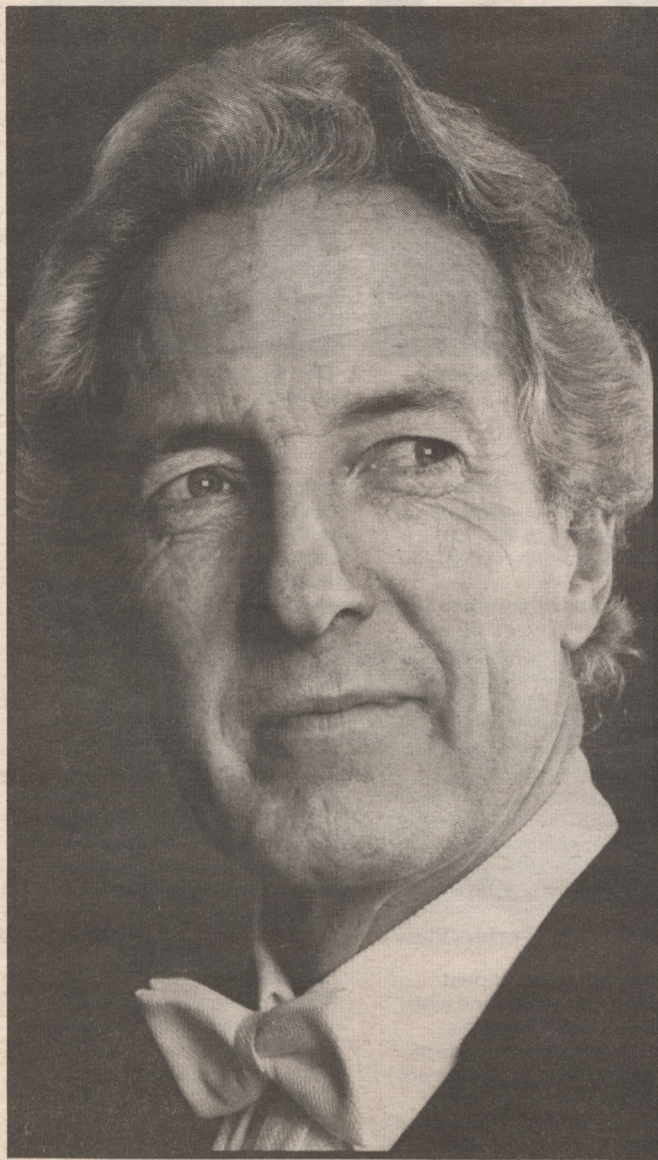


HE BANS THE DRUMS

THIS MAN THINKS YOU ARE A MORON!



'Fares please!'... Top baton-wielder Dennis Vaughan waits for the inevitable caption about Debussy conductors...

● Rock is bad for you — OFFICIAL! According, that is, to DENNIS VAUGHAN, top classical conductor and author of a virulently anti-pop blast in this week's soaraway *Musical Times*. STEVEN WELLS dons his dickie bow and has it out with the man who would ban the "beat group".

Screaming Christian fanatics, racist scumbags, fascists, Stalinists, folkies, crotch-clutching prudes, moralists, perverts, "concerned parents", Detective Chief Constables, Tory MPs: all sorts of weird and wonderful dickheads HATE rock music.

But when someone as sensible as Dennis Vaughan — top classical conductor and acknowledged expert on acoustics — shakes his baton angrily at all those drum machines

and screaming guitars then you've got to take him seriously. In an article in this week's *Musical Times* Dennis claims that rock music is partly to blame for a rising tide of crime and violence. The only way that Britain can be saved is to replace rock culture with classical concerts and physical jerks.

In the article he recalls a gig he attended at the Marquee where "the huge volume of music, the mechanical hammering of its rhythm, its sheer physical impact and total lack of nuance left an audience to trail out at the end in a state of mental stupor, drugged, numbed and impervious to feeling".

Do you hear that? DRUGGED! On the continent, says Den, the kids are still able to listen to classical music and opera. British youth, however, are exposed to a non-stop diet of "violently repulsive" rock. No wonder, then, that "the Union Jack is now regarded with the fear we used to associate with the swastika".

Rock, says Dennis, bombards the body "with sounds which alienate it from its natural emotional climate" so that "it can no longer behave in a subtle emotional way". Sceptical? Well, says Den, just take a look at the "glassy-eyed wearers of Walkmans on the tube".

"The raucous, throaty delivery of many rock singers bases itself... on the sound of lustful ejaculation". Add that to the licking and sucking of microphones and Dennis claims that the confusion between the mock intimacy and the actual distance between performers and the audience is seriously f—ing with our brains.

DENNIS, YOU'RE my kind of guy. I tracked you down to your ace Covent Garden flat. You made me herbal tea and whilst I admired the firm and lean physique you possess for a man of your age (probably down to the daily aerobics you practice) you played me some VERY QUIET music on your clavichord. Later I realised that this was a test. You wanted to see if I myself had been so emotionally ravaged by the Rock Monster that I could no longer respond to the "long-forgotten plane of the serenity, peacefulness and illumination" to which the instrument was my chariot.

You showed me graphs and dense blocks of print that contained words like "essesntic", "numeric matrix representation" and "pulse microstructure" and they didn't mean bugger all to musically illiterate me. Then you started talking about "life energy" and about how you could test if sugar was bad for you by dunking a pinkie in the bowl and then having someone push your arm down and I thought OH NO! NEW AGE BOLLOCKS TIME OR WHAT! But, as an atheist, I thought, live and let dribble, and what has this got to do with Brother Beyond anyhow?

You said that you didn't blame all violence on rock music. Violence is in our blood, you said, rock music just brings it out. So what about bloody classical music-drenched Weimar Germany? I sneered politely. Try blaming The Third Reich on AC-DC! And to be fair you didn't. You blamed Hitler on the strict upbringing German parents give to their children. I coughed nervously but the alarm bells in my head were ringing OTHER PLANETVILLE HIPPIE TIME OR WHAT?

Look, Dennis, I said, so maybe they have got lots more opera houses in Germany than in Britain, and maybe their teenage men are less likely to brick your

teeth in for fun but Germany is a ROCK WASTELAND! Name one decent rock band that Germany has produced in 30 years of trying. THERE ARE NONE! Dennis, I said, Britain is the envy of Rock Europe. Kids from Milan, Rome, Berlin, Paris — they flock to London to get away from the huge women in horned helmets singing about f—ing swans. Except I didn't say f—ing. Aha, you said:

"You are leaving out a whole range and variety of human emotions. They're new to you because you've lived and grown up with rock. It's like eating only one food. Fish and chips or nothing. I think everyone should have a wide experience." Um, what you mean Dennis is a "wide" experience that *doesn't* include rock music. Although you rather patronisingly damn rock musicians with faint praise ("absolutely marvellous personalities") it's clear that in your opinion rock is utterly and irredeemably worthless. Your article claims that rock is aural pornography.

"It diseducates the emotions," you claim. "So a synthesised rhythm section with an immaculate, mechanical beat is totally unnatural and estranging". And you quote *Clockwork Orange* as an example of the violence that can result.

Dennis wants a national lottery to encourage "emotional development" through the arts, physical and social development through "organised sports" and



Megadeth? "violently repulsive"... "the sound of lustful ejaculation"... Yeah!!

spiritual development through "the environment". If that sounds like your idea of a green public-school hell, if you think that Dennis sounds like Baden Powell with New Age leanings, then you could be right.

I mean, what's all this stuff about being "drugged"? "Look, I stuck two-and-a-half hours of it. As people were coming out they couldn't speak, they weren't aware of what was happening around them."

What's so bad about that? It's an escape. Life's shit, why not numb yourself?

"Huh! Well, If you get your kicks by blacking out!"

But people have done that throughout history. People use music or drugs or whatever to escape from poverty, from misery, from alienation, from boredom.

"But those things are only in the mind. They're not really there."

Eh? Poverty isn't real?

"No, no all of them are just mental constructions. Awareness is the way out."

That's hardly an argument you could use in Ethiopia!

"Anywhere!"

And you passed me this book. *You Are The Key — A Guide To Self Discovery* co-written by yourself and Shaun De Warren. It was full of stuff about, "shankras" and the importance of the ability to

"relate to the Oneness of others". Er, do you have a particular spiritual belief?

"I believe what is in that book. I believe in spiritual awareness."

Oh, Dennis, I thought you were going to blind me with pure science and I find you've got a religious belief system up your sleeve! I asked you, given that you partially blame crimes of violence, including child sex and football hooliganism, on rock music, would you say that my behaviour during the interview was typical of a rock fan?

"No because I think you're very intelligent, very open and you're ready to explore."

Is it fair to try and sum up your argument by saying that a human being, to be a full person, to be civilised, needs to have access to music which reflects the whole range of human emotions and rock music stops them attaining this?

"Yes." You attack mechanical rhythm, amplification and distortion?

"Yes." So Jimi Hendrix was crap?

"No, no, no. He's a personality. Don't confuse the issue. I'm attacking things which debase your appreciation of your senses. You're being put down because you become frustrated and no longer does your body function with the superb and miraculous sensitivity that it has."

So how do we drag the lager louts and jobs away from the Acid House and Megadeth?

Mr Vaughan, when you were 16, when your gonads kicked in, weren't you eager for a culture that spoke your language, for a music that reflected the sexual frustration and latent violence that was twisting every bone in your body?

"Well, er, no. At 16 I was solidly into classical music, I was playing the organ like a devil, I was playing the bass in a classical orchestra and had a little swing group which I ran in the evenings. But, uh, I was balancing it out..."

AND THAT'S the crux. Dennis *doesn't* understand the music he's criticising. He's never screamed his head off or wet his knickers at a Beatles or Bros gig, he's never strutted to Eddie Cochran at the local church hall disco, he's never masturbated his guts out on an electric guitar, he's never danced himself into a throbbing slobber at an Acid bash, he's never tried to shag to the first Slayer album. Like the racists and Christian fundamentalists and blue rinsers, Dennis attacks rock from a position of ignorance. He was either unwilling or unable to name a single rock act or performer as an example of the sort of stuff you should be avoiding.

So maybe his research is correct. Maybe rock does "desensitise" its listeners to "a whole range of emotions". But to blame music, even partially, for criminal behaviour is hysterical and absurd. Dennis shares company with porn-rape feminists, Tipper Core, the Reverend Bob Larsen and all those other reactionaries who seek to find some cause for the shit they find themselves knee deep in other than the fact that we live in a shit society based on greed and human degradation.

According to the CIA General Noriega is a satanist, a murderer and a drug dealer. He also possessed a massive classical music and opera CD collection. My flatmate Martin is a very nice person, a socialist and a diamond geezer. He f—ing HATES classical music and he only hits people for very good reasons. Then again, it is rumoured that Ceaucescu was a Big Fun fan.

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★ STAR ★ INTERVIEW

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GEORGE MICHAEL
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