



YouTube: The New Media of Record

In just a few short years, YouTube has become one of the most visited websites on the Internet. (Alexa.com rates the volume of YouTube's traffic number three in the world, behind only Google and Facebook.) It was launched in May 2005 by two young computer geeks, Steven Chen and Chad Hurley. They conceived of YouTube after becoming frustrated when they tried to swap, online, video clips from a party they had attended. Their aim was to keep the site simple enough so that amateurs could use it.



The site now pumps over 100 million video clips posted from all over the world — ranging from 1 to 30 minutes or more — and receives as many as 65,000 new ones every day, most of them produced by rank amateurs. Sometimes these videos go "viral"; sometimes they force the major media to cover stories that otherwise would never have seen the light of day.

But what drew me to YouTube was not the tons of trash to be found among the millions of clips, but the treasures of classical music that provide hours of superb listening and viewing pleasure. Watching great artists play their instruments adds an emotional dimension to the music you can't get by simply listening to a performance on a CD or tape.

My favorite video is of Jacqueline du Pre, the English cellist, whose performance of Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto may be considered the single greatest performance by any instrumentalist in the history of music. Although filmed in 1967, the fact that we can view it today is something of a technological miracle.

Jackie, as she liked to be called, is considered by many as the greatest cellist in musical history. Yet, her career as a performer spanned a very short period of time. At the very height of her musical virtuosity and fame, she was stricken with multiple sclerosis and died in 1987 at the age of 42.

Watch her play all four movements of the Elgar Cello Concerto, conducted by her young husband, Daniel Barenboim, and you will either fall in love with Jackie, or become a life-long fan, or both. Thanks to YouTube you can watch her performance any time of the day or night. The comments left by thousands of viewers will equally intrigue you.

By the way, if you want to see a much older and grayer Barenboim conduct an Elgar piece, there's a great video of him conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in a very moving performance of Nimrod, from Elgar's Enigma Variations. It may move you to tears.

If you enjoy Tchaikovsky, you'll be awed watching Evgeny Svetlanov conduct the USSR Symphony Orchestra in the 3rd movement of Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony, the most brilliant scherzo ever written. It's rare that we get a chance to see and study a great conductor in action at our leisure. Evgeny Svetlanov managed to become one of the world's greatest conductors during Russia's Communist regime, which then fired him when he became too popular with other European orchestras.

If you want to see a younger conductor at work, watch Noam Zur conduct the Israel Philharmonic



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on December 28, 2010

Orchestra in an exhilarating performance of the 4th movement of Hector Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*. It gives us confidence that the future of classical music is in good hands.

Another great performance is that of the Osaka Philharmonic Orchestra playing Gustave Holst's *Jupiter*. A superb, spine-tingling performance led by a highly emotional and animated Japanese conductor, Eiji Oue, who took every nuanced note to heart. The photographer of this video gives us excellent views of this great orchestra at work. Where else would you be able to see the Osaka Symphony Orchestra at work than on YouTube?

There is also a great performance by a brilliant young American cellist, Daniel Gaisford, playing the Saint-Saens Cello Concerto. Young American classical musicians find it difficult to make their way in the international world of symphony orchestras. But we expect that Gaisford will break through the sound barrier on the basis of his sheer virtuosity.

There are also some remarkable musical prodigies on YouTube. My favorite is Oliver Aldort, who, at age 13, plays Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 with the dignity, aplomb, clarity, and virtuosity of a 65-year-old. His fingers run up and down the keyboard with great dexterity and authority, emphasizing the power of each note, soft or strong, living up to the original name of the instrument, the pianoforte, which, in Italian means soft and strong or soft and loud. Aldort also plays the cello, and you will be able to view other videos of this brilliant young instrumentalist.

This is just a tiny sample of what you can see on YouTube. If you are a political junkie, you'll find more than you can possibly watch. If you missed a particular press conference on TV or Cable News, you'll no doubt find it on YouTube. Also, if you like to travel, you can visit just about any country on the planet via YouTube.

If you enjoy new cultural fads, they'll be on YouTube, which has become the most democratic means of world-wide communication since the beginning of time. For example you can watch the joyous phenomenon of "flash dancing" in Belgium, Poland, Australia, Israel, and elsewhere. It gives you a view of what is going on in the world you can't get anywhere else. Also, viewers can post comments on what they are seeing, which also makes for very interesting reading.

If you're interested in the Shakespeare authorship controversy, you can actually see yours truly on YouTube discussing the subject. As for education, you can watch Charlotte Iserbyt, John Taylor Gatto, and Sam Blumenfeld pontificate on YouTube. What effect or impact all of this is having on people is hard to judge. That it provides enormous pleasure, information, and beauty for the viewer to enjoy is its great positive contribution of our lives.

YouTube does have publishing guidelines, and those guidelines include disallowing most nudity, "particularly if it is in a sexual context." Nonetheless, a good deal of unsavory content can be found on YouTube.

The beauty of YouTube is that you can choose what you want to see. It has become a universe that the individual can explore at home in one's pajamas. There's never been anything like it in all of human history. It gives us an idea what's in store technologically for the human race. So it's worth getting to know this new phenomenon and finding out how to use it. And hopefully some of my younger readers may want to post a clip or two on an interesting subject. It's a good and inexpensive way of communicating with the rest of the world.



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