



## Don Farmer: Our Pop Culture Clash

By DON FARMER

Thursday, September 18, 2008

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This is a story about a bumpy ride through America's pop culture one recent evening in Naples.

It began with a dinner party at the elegant home of a cultured, classy woman. The conversation included politics, with a range of earnestly held opinions, left and right, peppered with rancor-free humor and not an ounce of hubris.

We moved to the Philharmonic Center for the Arts to enjoy "Classic Light 1 - Around the World in 80 Minutes."

Guest conductor Stuart Chafetz brought his spirited style to the talented musicians and the kind of tip-of-the-tongue music that raises the spirit and even some of the concert-goers' voices.

The play list was familiar, toe-tappable favorites, from "My Fair Lady" to "Swan Lake," from the "Dance Macabre" to "Man of La Mancha." Does every American know the words to "The Impossible Dream"?

It was satisfying stuff, inspiring but not treacly, especially with the exciting performance of concertmaster Glenn Basham, the terrific tuba of Aaron McCalla, the fun-loving, talented percussionists and too many others to list here.

This memorable evening was a shared American experience with music from around the world.

After meeting some of the Philharmonic Orchestra musicians backstage, we left the hall happy and fulfilled. Comity was king and the musical experience in a way continued the pre-concert dinner conversation. All good, not just feel good.

At home, we turned on "Saturday Night Live" for a laugh or two. We got that, with Tina Fey's crafty take on Gov. Sarah Palin and Amy Poehler's dead-on Hillary Clinton. But by the second commercial, this once-great show, this weekly tonic of helping America laugh at itself, had drowned in its own polluted stream of ugly, low-rent "comedy," gratuitous cheap shots, ethnic insults and snotty pseudo elitism.

One feature was Alaska Pete, a shameful stereotype of an Alaskan, as stupid and insulting as the black face comics of yore.

Johnny Carson had a similar character on the Tonight show, but in Carson's hands it was smart, subtle and hilarious. His plaid-jacketed, hunting hat-wearing Floyd R Turbo did common man commentary that was biting but without fangs. Example:

"(I like) Baseball the way it was meant to be played, on real grass with no designated hitter and all white guys." Funny but not putrid.

Alaska Pete insulted Eskimos. The character called Gov. Palin a popular acronym to describe an attractive mother. MILF. The audience roared. We had to look it up. It's obscene.

Johnny Carson's Floyd was classy humor. SNL's Alaska Pete was a childish rant.

Other SNL skits trashed home schooling and religious fundamentalists, repeatedly mentioned "meth" with no apparent reason and required guest host Olympian Michael Phelps to utter a gutter phrase of bathroom humor.

Trashy and infantile? Sure. But we know we can count on some of each on SNL these days. And we can turn it off any time. The sad thing is that the SNL, but for Ms. Fey and Ms. Poehler doing Gov. Palin and Sen. Clinton, just wasn't funny.

The Philharmonic and SNL are both part of the culture. One is pop, the other is flop. Going from one to the other is to go from warm glow to an "I need a shower" icky place.

I can't wait for Classic Light II, "Born In the USA," Oct. 3-4 at the Phil.

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