

HUMOR IN MUSIC ☺

What makes us laugh? What makes us smile?

Jokes, anecdotes, videos, comedians, slapstick, cartoons ... but music? In truth, the history of music is full of ‘musical jokes’ - some of which only ‘professional’ musicians ‘get’, but there is also an abundance of aural humor that even ‘non-musicians’ can enjoy ☺

An illustrated lecture presented by Dulais Rhys, Ph.D

Some (not many!) composers had a sense of humor. J.S. Bach, living in age of social and religious austerity, was not one of them ☹ ... but see below ☺

Classical composer Haydn, in his *Surprise Symphony*, startled his audience with an unexpected *fortissimo* chord! And in his *Farewell Symphony* had his orchestra members leave the stage one at a time as a light-hearted protest over pay ... which, fortunately, their tightfisted employer found hilarious!

Even Beethoven – known for being grumpy – has examples of musical humor, such as a clever depiction of drunken musicians in his *Pastoral Symphony*.

Mendelssohn fooled his audience into thinking that an overture was ‘coming to an end’ - then re-started the music from the beginning ...

In *Carnival of the Animals*, Saint-Saens slowed down fellow Frenchman Offenbach’s famous ‘Can-can’ to a crawl and renamed it ‘Snails’ ☺

In the 20th century, many professional musicians made a career of combining music and humor. One of the most famous was concert pianist Victor Borge, who would play an ‘inverted’ version of Strauss’s *Blue Danube Waltz* ... because his music copy was upside-down!

In England in the 1950s, raconteur Gerard Hoffnung amused audiences with concerts full of crazy and hilarious musical items, such as a *Concerto for Hose-pipe* and a *Horroratorio* ☺

Similarly, American musician-comedian Peter Shickele, using the stage name P.D.Q. Bach, claims to have discovered long-lost works by a ‘forgotten son’ of J.S. Bach - such as a *Pervertimento for Bicycle, Bagpipes and Balloons*.

Conversely, there are examples of ‘serious’ (usually amateur) musicians, whose noble - if not successful - efforts cannot help but make us smile. American socialite and wannabe soprano Florence Foster Jenkins filled concert halls (which she paid to hire) in spite of a critic’s comment

that: “No one, before or since, has succeeded in liberating themselves quite so completely from the shackles of musical notation.”

The same could be said of ‘Portsmouth Sinfonia’: a motley 1970s collection of keen – but technically limited – instrumentalists whose ‘renditions’ of the classics filled concert halls. You have to smile!

This compilation of musical funnies - from the simply amusing to the downright weird – is guaranteed to brighten your day. Clean handkerchiefs will be provided for stuffing into mouths ☺

DURATION: c1 hour

FEE: \$250

EXPENSES: a contribution toward travel costs is appreciated.

Thank you for considering my proposal and please contact me for more information.

Sincerely,
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REFERENCES, RECOMMENDATIONS & REVIEWS

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