

*HUMOR &
(CLASSICAL) MUSIC:
* 20TH CENTURY PARODISTS **

October 22, 2020

Humor & Classical Music

- Quick Introductions
- Refresher on Humor/Satire/Parody
- 20th Century Parodists
- Q&A

WHY & WHAT is something funny?

WHY

- Broken Expectations!
- Verisimilitude
- Context

WHAT

- **Music** = Emotion with a side order of analytical thinking.
- **Humor** = Analytical thinking with a side order of emotion.

Types of Funny Music

Many of these got started in Vaudeville: the world of NATIONAL MEDIA made it possible for performers to make their entire careers from satire/spoof/parody.

- Musical Jokes = Performed by a comedian, not usually a musician
- Musical Comedian = Comedian who chooses music as the medium
- Novelty Songs = Composed for the silly content

● Musical Parody & Satire

- Spoof of pre-existing work/style with comic twist

● Musical Ridicule/Incompetence

- Spoof of pre-existing work/style with demented twist

- Musical Comedy/Operetta = Feature length novelty song with plot and coherence
- Composed Humor = “Normal” composer tossing in something funny

HOW is something in music *funny*?

A. Slapstick Level

- a. Strange instruments, funny sounds, obvious musical gags
- b. Requires no musical background or context

B. Moderately Keen Music Understanding

- a. Title humor, music theory gags
- b. Requires a certain level of musical background and context

C. Musicological Esoteria

- a. Minutia jokes, structure and analysis gags, insider jokes
- b. Requires a deep understanding of music contexts

Top scores go to those pieces that can combine all 3 at once!

Spike Jones

[A & B]

- Lindley Armstrong Jones born in CA in 1911. Called Spike early on.
- Percussion on original Bing Crosby “White Christmas” recording
- Joined the Feather Merchants, started to do the occasional silly recording, and in 1941 changed their name to The City Slickers (inspired by a Cindy Walker song Spike played on).
- Would start their show with standard big band, then derail to the odd side.
- Exacting and strict bandleader: it is not funny if it is just poor.
- Very active on radio, TV, and records from the 1940s until the early 1960s.
- Many of their spoofs were takes on classical tunes (which were well known to most listeners in that time period).

The Spike Jones Story



Victor Borge

[A & B]

- “I am performing with the people in the audience. And there are all kinds of people. . . . There are musicians. There are musical amateurs. And there are people who know next to nothing about music. I have to entertain each person, each group, for 2 to 3 hours.”
- “You also have to remember that there a lot of people who are not used to thinking. They have to get the joke right away. Therefore my scope must be wide. . . . so much of the humor has to be exaggerated so that it reaches all segments of the audience.”
- “I satirize the things people do, the way music is performed. There is a lot of fun to be extracted from the attempt to do a serious concert.”
 - Born Børge Rosenbaum in 1909 in Copenhagen, Denmark
 - Started 1933 with comedic piano act
 - Escaped Nazis in 1940
 - Started performing right away, hit bigtime by 1942
 - Passed away 12/23/2000



P.D.Q. Bach

[A & B & C]

- Peter Schickele born 1935 in Ames, IA
- Studied composition with Roy Harris and Vincent Persichetti
- He and Juilliard classmate Jorge Mester started “P.D.Q. Bach” concerts for semester-enders in 1959
- By 1965 had gone career
- “One of the things that has always struck me as too bad is the stuffy association many people have about classical music.”
- “A lot of stuff goes right over the heads of pop audiences, but it is ideal when the audience is knowledgeable.”



“Weird Al” Yankovic

[A & B]

- Born 1959 and raised in Lynwood, CA
- Listened to Dr. Demento show in early 1970s
 - Got “Belvedere Cruisin’” on the show in 1976 and “My Bologna” in 1979
- First big hits were “Another One Rides the Bus” and then huge hit with “Eat it”
- Still churning them out today: Just like with Spike Jones decades earlier, many artists feel that they have not “made it big” until one of their songs is parodied by Weird Al.
- Not much with classical, yet his popularity has helped many classical parodists.



Igudesman & Joo

[A & B & C]

Yes, I know: 21st Century (just showing you that this is alive and well today!)

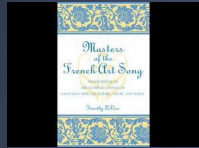
- Aleksey Igudesman (Russian) and Hyung-ki Joo (Korean-British) met at Menuhin School in London
- Started comedic act “A Little Nightmare Music” in 2004
- Bernard Haitink: “Igudesman and Joo played at my 80th birthday celebrations. I nearly died laughing. I'd like to invite them back for my 85th, but that might be considered reckless...”



Modern Parodists/Comedians

Some of the ones we did not have time to hear tonight:

- Anna Russell



- Tom Lehrer



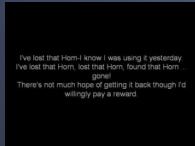
- Stan Freberg



- MozART group



- Flanders & Swann



- Rainer Hersch



- Hoffnung



- John & Darlene Edward



Q & A

- Please unmute if you have a question.
- If you feel more comfortable, type into the Chat.
- I will answer all of your questions!

Coming Soon to an **INBOX** Near You...

- You will be receiving an email from the MSOL
 - Link to these SLIDES
 - Link to recording of tonight's presentation
- Also my email if you have any follow up questions or comments
smkurr@gmail.com

Up Next:

- November: The Development of the Modern Orchestra
- December: TBA
- January: TBA
- Beyond? Perhaps--stay tuned!

Finally...

- Please feel free to fill out our monthly feedback survey so we can work to improve our offerings for you.
- [Link in the chat!](#)

Thank you!

These slides were created by Steve Kurr for the Madison Symphony Orchestra League Connect Events. Please direct comments and questions to smkurr@gmail.com.