Class 1 : Music and Mood

A. An Experiment in Listening

1. Class title 1 (Barn and solo pianist)

Today we are going to talk about how Music affects your Mood. I'll explain the images on the title slide later, but first I want to try what I call **An Experiment in Listening**.

2. Section title A

When I proposed this course on Musical Escapes, I must admit I was thinking of playing a lot of pieces in various genres that would take you to different places, take you back in time, make you laugh or even cry—*musical escapism*, in short. And you'll get plenty of that. But I thought it would be much more interesting to ask *how* this happens, *when*, and *why*? And it would be more interesting still to have *you join in* this exploration, rather than listening to me tell you all the answers.

3. Rossini questions

I am going to play you a piece of classical music, about 12 minutes long. Many of you will recognize it, at least by the end, but I won't say what it is just yet. I want you to listen as if you had never heard it before, and put aside any associations you may have from hearing bits of it in a different context. Although they flow into one another, you will hear **four distinct movements**: slow, fast, slowish, and fast. Take out a piece of paper and note down for each how it makes you feel, whether you feel swept up or are listening objectively from the outside, and whether the music seems to refer to anything in the outside world—other than those associations from TV. If you feel like it, look at the conductor from time to time—he is a Brit called **Daniel Harding**; what is his role in all this, and is it the same throughout? You will see that most players are Asian; this is the **Shanghai Symphony Orchestra**. They are very good.

4. Rossini: *William Tell* overture, complete
5. — general questions

As I am sure you know by now, that was overture to *William Tell* by **Gioacchino Rossini** (1792–1868). Although it was written for the opera of the same name (1829), only one of the tunes appears in the opera itself, so it is virtually a standalone work. I am going to take a bit of time discussing each movement separately (in reverse order), and showing a couple of short clips inspired by each. The answers will also serve as a menu for the rest of the class, and indeed the course. But before we do this, I want to ask you about your impressions as a whole: <u>does anyone have any comments on the sequence, variety, or effect of the frequently-changing mood</u>?

6. — movement 4 questions

Let's take the movements in the reverse order. I found a video from Chicago, made during the COVID lockdown, which begins with the seven cellos with which the overture opens, but then continues to arrange the entire overture for these seven players! I thought it would be rather cute to play the appropriate snippet from this as we discuss the movements one by one.

7. Rossini: *William Tell* overture, movement 4, snippet and discussion
8. *Lone Ranger* title sequence

Let's get that elephant out of the room right away. Most Americans of a certain age will associate this music with the TV series *The Lone Ranger.* There is a quote (attributed to several people) that the **definition of an Intellectual** as a person who can listen to the overture *without* immediately thinking of *The Lone Ranger!* For most people, I imagine, it is intractably associated with galloping horses. But is it necessarily so? If you can possibly think of it as a piece of absolute—that is, abstract—music, can you answer these questions?

9. Daniel Harding's double life

Did you happen to notice the conductor, **Daniel Harding**? What did you see? In a piece that moves so fast, what surprised me was that he remained so *still*. He made no attempt to move his stick along with the orchestra, but just waited reading to mark accents or give course corrections when they were needed. So it didn't entirely surprise me that at the age of 39, he put his career on hold to convert his amatuer pilot's licence into a commercial one, and that he now alternates conducting—at the highest level—with flying as a pilot with **Air France**. If you think of it, the two skills, at least as he practices them, are very similar! Let me turn to a very different kind of conductor—**André Rieu**, leading an orchestra in the old-fashioned way, with a violin on his shoulder. But this time, I am not so much interested in him as in the reaction of the crowd. How would you describe it?

10. Rossini: *William Tell* overture, finale (André Rieu)
11. — stills from the above

What did you think? This was audience participation with a vengeance, wasn't it? I'm going to put that topic—how certain kinds of music can get us excited—on hold until the second hour of the class. Let's turn now to the penultimate section of the overture.

12. Rossini: *William Tell* overture, movement 3, snippet and discussion

How abut this? It's calmer, isn't it? The movement is a **pastorale**, gentle music associated with the soothing calm if the countryside. In this case, the specific countryside of Swiss Alpine meadows. It is in fact one of the few real Swiss tunes that Rossini used in the opera; it is a *ranz des vaches,* or **call to the cows**. The other traditional Swiss tune is part of the ballet music in Act III; you may well know it is. Here it is, taken out of context, danced by two soloists at a festival in Vail

13. Rossini: *William Tell* ballet, Swiss dance (Vail)

Charming, isn't it? A real bit of **musical tourism**, enhanced by some pretty dancing. The piece just breathes natural innocence. But here's a point that will come up again and again: *the same music can*

have a totally different effect in a different context. In the opera, Switzerland has been under draconian Austrian occupation for 100 years, and in Act III, the soldiers force the conquered people to sing their folk music and dance as a tribute to the cruel Austrian governor, **Gessler**. I wish I had a better video to illustrate it, but this old clip from a performance in the Rossini Festival at Pesaro should at least give you the idea.

14. Rossini: *William Tell* ballet, Swiss dance (Pesaro)

The second movement of the overture is probably the easiest of the lot to discuss. Note that while I am using the seven cellos for consistency, they are in fact playing music written for many other instruments in the orchestra: piccolo, flute, timpani, trombones.

15. Rossini: *William Tell* overture, movement 2, snippet and discussion

What about that? I would be surprised if you didn't all say that it represents a storm, and a very literal storm at that, starting with the first raindrops, a distant growl of thunder, and a gust of wind, before all the elements break loose. Storm music was something that composers often did, and there were formulae for it. **Vivaldi** has one in the *Four Seasons*. **Beethoven** has one in the *Pastoral Symphony*. And **Rossini** has several. Here is the interlude leading into the final scene of *The Barber of Seville* as currently performed at the Met. Used like this to change the set and show the good guys setting the ladder by which the hero can elope with his sweetheart, the effect is certainly comic.

16. Rossini: *The Barber of Seville* (Met 2025), storm

But storms can be terrifying too. Here is the opening of *Die Walküre*, the second evening of the tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelungen* by **Richard Wagner** (1813–83). It is normally played with the curtain down, but in the 2011 production by **Robert Lepage**, you see the entire stage tilting up to a vertical position, then turning into a thick forest of tree-trunks, through which the wounded hero **Siegmund** is fleeing for his life, pursued by footsoldiers of the enemy clan whom he has offended. The effect is not comic at all, but elemental. And I think it would still have this effect if you were just listening to the orchestra. The conductor here is **James Levine**, before his illness and exile. I'll also post a video with **Daniel Barenboim** conducting it in the pit at La Scala.

17. Wagner: *Die Walküre* (Met 2011), opening
18. Cello section ("A Unique Opening")

I am going to play a longer section of the opening of the overture, because it was written for the actual instrumentation of seven cellos that we have here. So far as I know, it was unique.

19. Rossini: *William Tell* overture, movement 1, snippet and discussion

What does this do for you? I find this the most moving of the four movements, but also the hardest to talk about, because it is the only one that does not directly correlate to anything in the real world. It has something to do with the sound of the cello, I think: emotional, yearning, the closest of all instruments to the human voice. I wondered if anything about this might be called sacred; it is a question I will return to after the break, with another work featuring the cello. But for now, since I promised to play two clips

for each movement of the Rossini, let me offer the two things that first came to mind when I thought of music for voice and cello, one classical, the other popular. The classical one is the opening of *Bachianas Brasileiras #5* (Brazilian Bach) by **Heitor Villa-Lobos** (1887–1959). Written for soprano and 8 cellos, it is a song with words in the middle, but the opening and closing, the most striking parts, are wordless. This is the Canadian soprano **Barbara Hannigan** with members of the Göteborg Symphony Orchestra (Daniel Harding's old group).

20. Villa-Lobos: *Bachianas Brasileiras* #5, opening
21. *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, album cover

My other example is the song "She's leaving home" by **Paul McCartney** (1942–) and **John Lennon** (1940–80) that appeared on the Beatles' 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. I was immediately struck by the cello line that interweaves with the song; that is what I most remember.

22. Beatles: *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, "She's leaving home"
23. Class title 2 ("a musical escape")

That was literally **a musical escape**. Actually, it has a special meaning for me. Just as how the context in which a piece is presented can affect our reactions to it, so can the context in which we first hear it. This was the first Beatles record I had ever had, and it was given to me by one of my students while I was teaching at the University of Glasgow. She too thought of running away, and appeared at my door one evening. Not knowing what to do, I asked my fiancée, who lived a block away, to give her a bed for the night; the girl called her parents and told them she was staying with a friend. The next day we drove her down to the seaside to give her a day out. Then we took her back to her parents and helped smooth things over. I think she gave me the record the next week. Would the song have stuck with me without this context? Who's to know?

B. The Music of Exaltation

24. Section title B

The examples in this hour all have to do with a sense of the **sacred**. Not necessarily literally sacred, in the sense of being part of some liturgy, but music that creates a space of contemplation and wonder. Much religious music is slow, but is slowness itself a necessary component of sacred purpose? And is it not possible to use fast music to express spiritual exaltation?

25. Bach (?): "Bist du bei mir," text

I'll start off by playing another song with a prominent cello accompaniment. It comes from the notebook of **Anna Magdalena Bach**, the second wife of **Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685–1750), and it has long held a beloved place in the sacred repertoire: "Bist Du bei mir" (Be Thou with me). Probably we all know it; it is as lovely example as you can imagine of the total trust of the believer. Look at the words, then hear the wonderful baritone, **Benjamin Appl**, making a recording of it.

26. Benjamin Appl recording "Bist du bei mir"
27. Text (repeat)

If there is anyone who does not know the current research abour this song, I'd love to hear what you think of it. I myself have always thought it one of the simplest and loveliest of Bach's works, and the very definition of a sacred song. But it appears I was wrong.

28. Stölzel: "Bist du bei mir," text transformation

It is now pretty well establised that "Bist du dei mir" os not by Bach himself but an earlier composer, **Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel**, written down by Anna Magdalena Bach to be played in the family. More surprising than that, it comes from an opera, *Diomedes*, now lost, and given that title, it would seem it is not a sacred song at all; the "Du" in the song is not Christ, but some earthly lover! Did the Bachs know this? Or did the simple process of removing it from its dramatic context make it sacred? Or is love in the face of death a sacred emotion in *any* context?

29. Quiz questions

One reason we treat it as sacred is because it is so slow. But not all religious music *is* slow. Let's try a little quiz, going back once more to Rossini. The lady shown here is going to play a theme twice on the piano. It is from a religious work, having to do with some aspect of the Christian story. I wrote this originally for a Zoom poll, but I can do it live just as easily. After we have heard it, I'll ask for a show of hands for each selection—but please, if you actually know it, don't vote at all!

30. Rossini, theme of "Cuius animam" played on the piano
31. Quiz questions (repeat)

What does the poll say? It is actually an aria from the *Stabat Mater* (1842) by **Rossini**. The title refers to the grieving Mary standing beside the Cross, watching the torture and death of her son. The text is a 13th-century Latin poem in rhyming three-line stanzas; here are the first four:

32. *Stabat Mater*, text of the first four stanzas

Of course this is only one aria in an hour-long work that has plenty of moments of tragedy, and any composer would have to vary the pace. This particular aria has become a showpiece for tenors. I am going to give you a rather subtle comparison: a couple of versions of this opening, in audio only, one from 50 years ago sung by the Italian tenor **Franco Bonisolli**, the other from 5 years back sung by the American **Matthew Polenzani**. As you listen, consider the tempo chosen by each conductor, and what each singer does with his high notes. Each clip is about 1¼ minutes long.

33. Rossini: *Stabat Mater*, "Cuius animam" (Bonisolli)
34. Rossini: *Stabat Mater*, "Cuius animam" (Polenzani)
35. Bonisolli and Polenzani

So what did you think? My own view is that **Bonisolli**, with his ringing high notes and bouncing beat, is by far the more exciting. But **Antonio Pappano**, conducting the Polenzani version, seems deliberately to

have forsworn all that, choosing a slightly slower tempo, softening the rhythm, and encouraging **Polenzani** (who has never been a showboat tenor by temperament) to take those high notes as part of a continuous line rather than a display of fireworks. Does this make it more genuinely religious?

36. Vittoria Aleotti: Madrigals (title page)

I am going to play you a lovely piece by an early seventeenth-century composer called **Raffaella Aleotti** (1570–1646). Believe it or not, there may have been another successful female composer with the same last name active at the time, **Vittoria Aleotti**, though many scholars believe they were one and the same. As you see here, Vittoria at least published madrigals—secular music. My questions, as I play this piece by Raffaella, are: (1) is this secular or sacred? And (2) when did you know: when you first heard the **sound**, when you read the **words**, or when you saw the **setting**. Remember, just because something is slowish and in an earlier style does not necessarily make it sacred.

37. Raffaella Aleotti: *Ego Flos Campi*

Of course you know by now: it is sacred. You may have recognized the acoustic at the very beginning. You may have recognized the text which, although ostensibly love poetry, comes from *The Song of Songs.* And you certainly knew when you saw the physical **context**. I keep on coming back to that; the power of music to transport us to a different mental or spiritual space is greatly enhanced by context. You could meditate on this photo and get carried away; you could listen to an audio recording of the music we have just heard, and your sense of the sacred would be even stronger; but put music and setting together, and the effect is overwhelming.

38. American composer David Lang (b.1957)

With that in mind, I want to play you a piece by the American composer **David Lang** (1957–). It is called simply "I want to live where you live," and those are the only words. Here, it is sung by the Swedish trio, **Trio Medieval**. Their performance was issued on a video, beautifully made, in a setting that was obviously chosen with some care. But the question remains the same: when you put the song together with this visual context, is the result secular or sacred?

39. Lang: "I want to live where you live" (Trio Medieval)
40. — still from the above

So secular or sacred? Although there is nothing in the words to suggest it, I feel the combination of music and filming turns that old barn at **King's Oaks** in Bucks County PA into a sacred space. It may also make a difference that this Trio was formed in 1997 in Oslo specifically to sing medieval music, most of which is religious. David Lang's music often seems to balance on a knife edge between secular and sacred; he wrote a *Passion* based on **Hans Christian Andersen's** *The Little Match Girl* ; his piece *Just* is based on *The Song of Songs,* like the Raffaella Aleotti work we just heard. Lang is Jewish, and Judaism has rather different musical traditions from the Christian ones. So I want to end with three works from that tradition, all considerably more lively than most of what we have heard.

41. Steve Reich

Steve Reich (1936–) was one of the inventors of minimalism in the 1960s, but gradually got more complex. One of his later works that I especially like is *Tehillim* (Psalms, or Songs of Praise) from 1981, for four sopranos and chamber orchestra. The opening movement is a setting, in Hebrew, of Psalm 19: "*The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork*." It is clear that the heavens are a multi-faceted location, and the glory of God twinkles everywhere, like so many stars. To create this multiplicity, Reich uses a **canon** (like "Row, row, row your boat"), with voices and instruments piling on top of one another. This is just the beginning; I'll stop once all four voices have come in. This is a performance by the **Colin Currie Group** in Amsterdam. What I love about it is its rhythmic energy and sheer joy. It's about time I played something fast!

42. Reich: *Tehillim,* opening
43. Osvaldo Golijov

Many people do not like this, but how about you? **Osvaldo Golijov** (1960–) is the son of Jewish immigrants from Romania and Ukraine. He grew up in Argentina, then went to Jerusalem and later the University of Pennsylvania to study. His music is nothing if not eclectic, combining folk influences from Latin America and Eastern Europe with a highly sophisticated technique. Though Jewish, he wrote a *Passion According to Saint Mark* in the manner of the Bach *Passions* in 2000, using the Bach layout and structures, but writen to be performed by a mixed group of Latin-American folk musicians. However, the work I want you to hear is earlier, from 1994. Called *The Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind,* it is a 35-minute piece for clarinet and string quartet. **Isaac the Blind** was apparently a great rabbi in Provence around the year 1200. The composer has likened the work to an epic history of Judaism, from Abraham to the Holocaust and beyond. I am not sure where this section fits into the time-scheme; I am playing it mainly for the style, which I am sure you will recognize.

44. Golijov: *Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, klezmer section in second movement
45. *Fiddler on the Roof*

That, of course, was **klezmer music**, which is inevitably associated with Jewish weddings. And I can't mention Jewish weddings without playing the most famous of the lot, the wedding of Motel and Tzeitel in *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964) by **Jerry Bock** (1928–2010) and **Sheldon Harnick** (1924–2023). This clip is from the 1971 movie.

46. Bock and Harnick: *Fiddler on the Roof,* wedding dance
47. Class title 3 (*Fiddler on the Roof*)