

Musical Escapes



Gioacchino
Rossini

1. Music and Mood

October 28, 2025

1. Music and Mood

WHAT IS THE MECHANISM BY WHICH MUSIC CAN AFFECT OUR MOODS?

We begin this course with an experiment, listening to a short piece of music in four distinct movements and discussing our reactions to each of them in turn. Many of the topics raised will crop up later in the course, but for now we focus on the sense of aspiration that many people hear in the opening movement.

Music has the power to circumvent our conscious minds and bring us a sense of order, radiance, or joy. It has long held a place in religious worship, yet spirituality in music can take many different forms, and may not even be attached to specific religious doctrine. Our second hour will thus be devoted to ecstatic experiences of all kinds, and in many different contexts.

The featured composer of the week is Gioacchino Rossini. *rb.*

A. An Experiment in Listening

Many people, thinking of Rossini's overture to *William Tell* (1829), leap immediately to the infectious *galop* that forms its closing section. They may even think of the many times they have heard this in a TV show or animated cartoon. But in fact the overture is a symphonic poem with four quite different sections, each descriptive of a different mood. So part of this Experiment in Listening involves forgetting that we know how it ends, and taking each section as it comes, as a piece of absolute music that works on its own terms. We will follow the discussion of each movement with two further clips of at least tangential relevance.

Rossini: *William Tell* overture (Daniel Harding, Shanghai SO)

Rossini: *William Tell* overture, arranged for 7 by cellos by Blaise Déjardin (Chicago Lyric Opera)

TV clip: *Lone Ranger* title sequence

Rossini: *William Tell* overture, finale (André Rieu in Tuscany, 2004)

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

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

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

Wagner: *Die Walküre* (Met 2011), opening

Villa-Lobos: *Bachianas Brasileiras* #5, opening (Barbara Hannigan)

Lennon & McCartney: "She's leaving home" (in *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 1967)

Raffaella **Aleotti** (1570–1646, *Italian composer*), Johann Sebastian **Bach** (1685–1750, *German composer*), Jerry **Bock** (1928–2010, *American composer*), Osvaldo **Golijov** (1960–, *Argentinian composer*), Sheldon **Harnick** (1924–2023, *American lyricist*), David **Lang** (1957–, *American composer*), John **Lennon** (1940–80, *English singer-songwriter*), Paul **McCartney** (1942–, *English singer-songwriter*), Steve **Reich** (1936–, *American composer*), Gioacchino **Rossini** (1792–1868, *Italian composer*), Gottfried Heinrich **Stölzel** (1690–1749, *German composer*), Heitor **Villa-Lobos** (1887–1959, *Brazilian composer*), Richard **Wagner** (1813–83, *German composer*)

The course website is www.brunyate.com/MusicalEscapes
I will always respond to mail at rogerbrunyate@gmail.com

B. The Music of Exaltation

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?

Anna Magdalena Bach notebook: "Bist du bei mir" (Benjamin Appl)

Rossini: *Stabat Mater*, "Cuius animam" (Bonisolli)

Rossini: *Stabat Mater*, "Cuius animam" (Polenzani)

Raffaella Aleotti: "Ego Flos Campi" (c.1600; Marian Consort)

Lang: "I want to live where you live" (2004; Trio Medieval)

Reich: *Tehillim* (1981), opening (Colin Currie Group)

Golijov: *Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind*, excerpt from movement II (perf in Holland, 2025; players not listed)

Bock & Harnick: *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964), wedding (film 1971)

Want Still More?

Check out the above website a few hours after class. In addition to all the clips listed here, you will find:

- uses of the *Wm Tell galop* from Hoosiers basketball to Bugs Bunny;
- a Scottish version of Rossini's Swiss dance;
- orchestral storms by Vivaldi and Beethoven;
- cellos featured in works by Elgar and Suppé; and...

...a staging (yes) of an aria from a Haydn mass that is not only a beautiful piece for baritone and cello soloists, but also raises further questions about performing sacred music in secular contexts (or secular music in sacred ones).