

MUSIC AND HUMOUR

by: Ed Lettner of The Music Studio



Music and humour have a long history of entertaining people together. This association has created distinct styles within movies, television, live theatre, stand-up comedy and even 'serious' music.

Beginning in the 1880s, Vaudeville used satirical songs about current events to entertain people in North America.

This approach continues today with comedians such as Mark Russell singing parodies of political events to the melodies of standard songs. Victor Borge made people laugh while playing the piano by doing such things as literally playing from a piece of music that was turned upside down. Steve Martin combines his talents for stand-up comedy and banjo playing to create a unique stage show. He is also well-known for his many appearances in comedy films.

Ever since the Keystone Kops made people laugh in the early days of film, comedy and music have gone hand in hand on the silver screen. There have also been comedy movies created around bands. The Rutles, a band and film co-created by Eric Idle of the Monty Python comedy group, is a parody of The Beatles. The film *This is Spinal Tap* is a satire of heavy metal bands and their lifestyles.

Humour is also found in classical music. Haydn's *Toy Symphony* was composed to be played on toy instruments. My elementary school principal played recordings of classical music each Friday during the morning announcements, and I remember hoping that he would play the *Toy Symphony* each week. The finale of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 2* features what are considered to be musical burps and other less than appealing sounds of the body. In his *Cat Duet*, Rossini has two singers meowing at each other for the entire piece. In fact, the translation of its original Italian title is, "humorous duet for two cats."

Finally, one cannot think of the circus without picturing a clown doing something funny while humorous "circus music" is played.

So, the next time you find yourself laughing while listening to music, you will be reminded of how well music and humour go together.

Ed Lettner owns The Music Studio in Etobicoke, which has offered music instruction since 1990. He is an honours graduate of the Humber College Institute of Technology music program. Ed enjoys watching and listening to a wide variety of movies. For information about the programs at The Music Studio, please call 416-234-9268, email ed@themusicstudio.ca or visit www.themusicstudio.ca