

Understanding Classical Music

With The Proms in full swing it may be that you are a little overwhelmed by all the classical music around at the moment and have questions about understanding the genre. Cwg has helpfully put together a fact sheet for you to address your most common queries.

Q. What should one wear to a concert?

A. These days anything goes from a bikini to a baseball cap, from a football shirt to a fur coat.

Q. What should I do if my mobile phone goes off during a concert?

A. Answer it as quickly as possible and explain to the caller that you are in a concert and it might be difficult to have anything other than a short conversation at this point. You might like to tell your caller what is being played at that moment and maybe put your microphone on if you know how to do so, so that the caller can hear some of the music too whilst you add a short commentary as to what is going on.

Q. Was Johann Sebastian Bach Welsh?

A. Probably but we cannot be sure. His nickname was 'Taffy' so this may give us a clue.

Q. Is there any other music about Cake apart from Bach's Battenberg Concertos?

A. Try 'If I Knew You Were Comin' I'd have Baked a Cake', recorded by Eileen Barton in 1950 and reworked by The Westminster Abbey Choir and performed at the wedding of Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson. There is also 'Tea For Two (and a slice of Madeira)' arr. Kipling, featuring the BBC Singers, conductor Amol Rajan.

Q. Is there any other music about soft fruit apart from Tchaikovsky's 'Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy'? (From 'The Nutcracker' sponsored by Cadbury's)

A. Try Prokofiev 'For the Love of 3 Oranges' although strictly speaking citrus and not soft. And there is also the 'Marriage of Figaro' (composer unknown).

Q. What to do if you find the Percussion too loud?

A. Sit further back.

Q. Did Elgar take his name from an anagram for a brand of Lager?

A. No. We all know that Elgar is an anagram of Large. Elgar was rather portly and changed his name to avoid drawing attention to the fact.

Q. I want to be a classical composer but my family name is Vaughn Williams. Would it help me achieve success if I change it to something beginning with SCH...?

A. SCH does not seem to be a likely candidate for success in the world of classical composing. Nobody with a name like that has ever produced anything worth listening to.

Q. Is it true that Beethoven's Symphonies were given ratings as a guide as to how good they are? So Number 1 is the best and Number 9 is the worst?

A. Yes. Well-spotted.

Q. Was Stravinsky dyslexic? I ask because I have noticed a glaring spelling mistake in the title of one of his most famous pieces. Surely it should read 'The Right of Spring'?

A. You are of course not Rong.

Q. Is Rossini's 'Cats' Duet' ever performed by real Cats?

A. Funny you should ask that. Indeed there are many examples of feline productions of this work and a controversial gala charity performance of the piece will take place in the Autumn at Battersea Home for Dogs and Cats starring Rover and Tibbles in the title roles. It will be interesting to see how Rover essays the part of a cat. STOP PRESS! Guest appearance by none other than LASSIE.

Q. What is the easiest instrument to learn to play?

A. The Ukulele.

Q. Which piece should I learn first on the ukulele?

A. Start with 'When I'm Cleaning Windows' by George Formby and before you know it you will be playing 'Ode to Joy' by Beethoven.

Q. Can you play the same pieces of music on a flute as you can on a cello?

A. Yes, but don't try blowing into a cello.

Q. It is rumoured that this year may really be the Last Night of the Proms. Is that true?

A. Depends on how many people pay the BBC Licence Fee.

We are indebted to Sir Simon Rattle, Sheku Kaneh-Mason and the late Ozzy Osbourne in the compilation of this fact sheet.

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