



Comedy

Comedy : Funny ha ha or funny peculiar, either way, we love that music with a sense of humour, a sense of the surreal and absurd. Vicki and Ergo reflect on the aftermath of chancing a visit to a village hall full of leaping lederhosen. Listen to, amongst others, Mary Schneider, Liszt, The Goons and a bunch of WFMU DJs.

The idea of "funny music" is sometimes taken to imply music that is less viable or relevant than more "serious" music, as if to make somebody laugh or smile is a negative result of an artwork. But ask yourself, would you rather sit intently stroking your chin and becoming increasingly morose, or sit, enjoy, and laugh?

Of course, it's not that simple. Of course there is a place for serious music, sombre music, morose music, passionate music. But there is also a place, on an equal level for comic music.

There is a tradition of comedy music, primarily through parody, that goes back centuries, but is usually considered a lower art form than, say, Grand Opera. However, there are many of the world's most renowned composers who have written music of humorous intent. Haydn's "Toy Symphony", many of the strange and beautiful compositions of Erik Satie, and let's not forget Mozart's classic torch-song "Lick My Arse".

However, with such an abstract form of expression as music, where it is difficult to convey a precise meaning, it may not be immediately apparent just how humour and comedy can be conveyed. David Huron, in a paper on the modern composer PDQ Bach (<http://www.humdrum.org/Huron/Publications/MP040049.PDF>) , gives an excellent series of categories analysing humour in music:

Incongruous Sounds - the introduction of sounds into a composition that seem to have no place within the patchwork or structure of the piece

Mixed Genres - the bringing together of genres and styles which we are not accustomed to hearing simultaneously

Drifting Tonality - when key-signatures and chords behave in ways they are just not supposed to!

Metric Disruptions - instances where the time-signature or regular pulse of a piece is unexpectedly thrown into disarray

Implausible Delays - long, long pauses

Excessive Repetition - long, long loops, way beyond the point of boredom then back again

Incompetence Cues - music performed in such a way as to sound crude and amateurish

The unifying factor between all of these techniques is the confounding of expectations. We have certain ideas about the behaviour of a piece of music, and when these are - deliberately or not - thrown off-kilter, our natural response, often, is laughter.