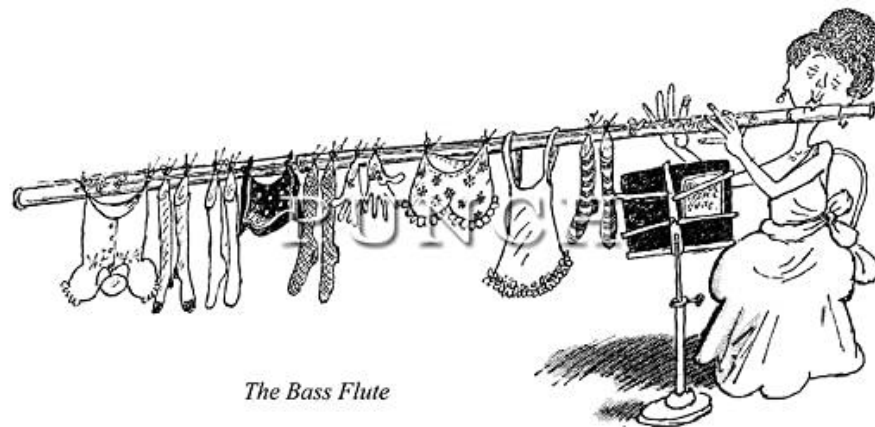




Associate Professor Patrick Shepherd

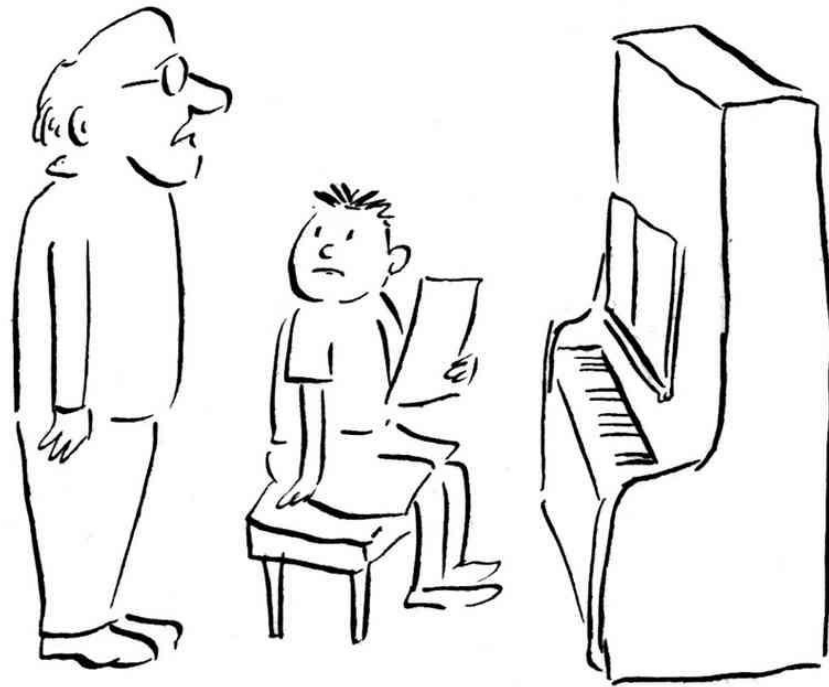
Faculty of Education, University of Canterbury

U3A Timaru 10 August 2026



The Bass Flute

Just to get the party going and to set the tone...

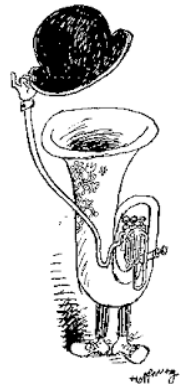


“Before I heard you play it, that used to be my favorite piece.”



What is “humour in music”?

- Like humour itself, it is highly subjective, but what is “humour in music”?
- There is a range, from the quirky, thought-provoking wit that tickles the mind to full-blown laugh-out-loud physical humour
- Origins of musical humour – how did it start and how did it change?
- Musical humour can be loosely around the sub-categories of:
 - Humour “about” music, often by musicians themselves and expressed as jokes, cartoons or anecdotes with little or no musical knowledge required to appreciate them
 - Humour “in” music i.e. musically-situated humour that can’t easily be translated into another medium, often “intellectual” humour
 - Humour “through” music i.e. using music as a comic tool
 - Intentional and unintended humour
 - “Novelty” items and curiosities
 - ...and some outliers...





Cartoons



Anecdotes

- Opera stories
- Hierarchies – drummers, singers, bassonists and viola players
- Musicians on musicians



HISTORY OF HUMOR IN MUSIC

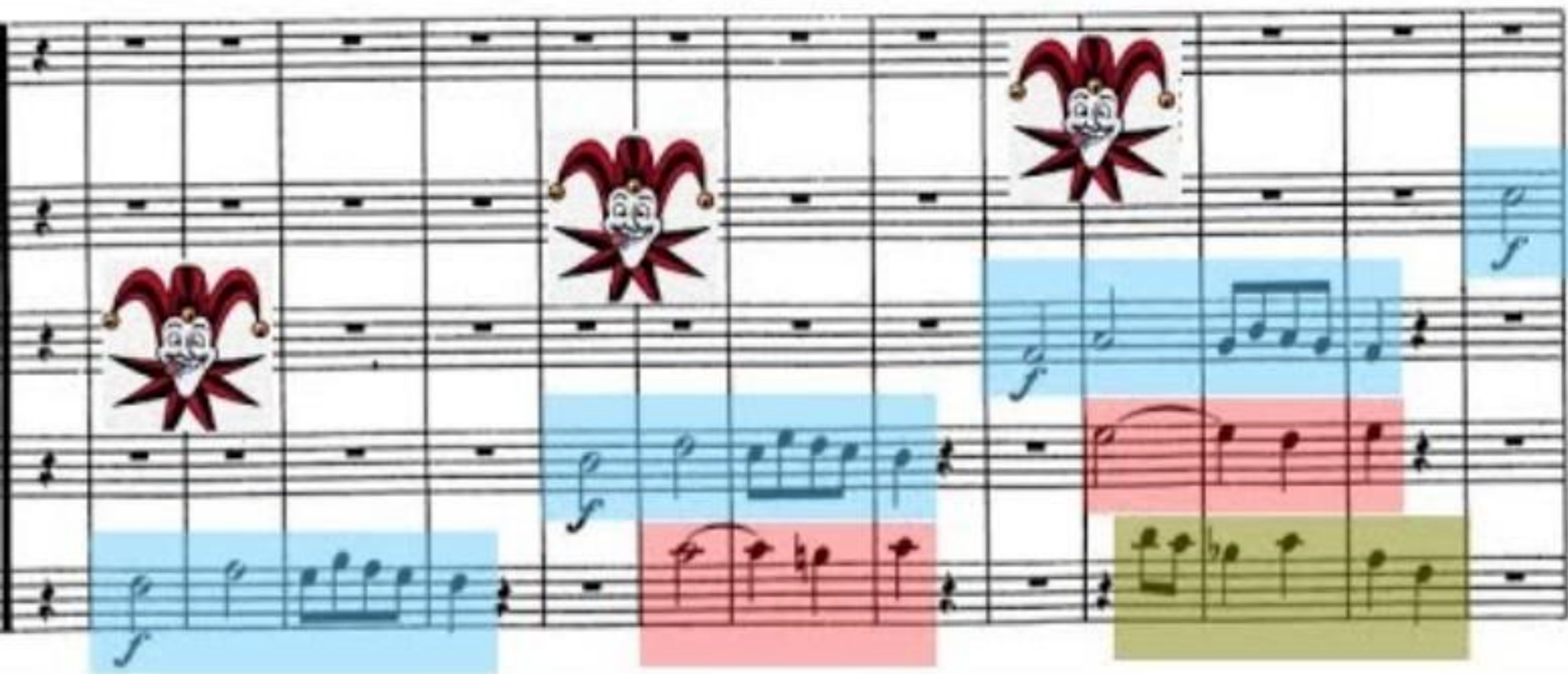
- In the 1600s, the Italians developed their “Opera Buffa,” leading the way to comic opera, which in France became the “Comedie Française” and in Germany the “Komische Oper.”
- Karl Haas says that in England it led to John Gay’s “The Beggar’s Opera,” (1728), and in the 1850s and 1860s to Offenbach’s satirical masterpieces.



Dudley Moore & Sir Peter Ustinov improvising opera



Before we leave Mozart behind, there is, of course, the aptly named “Musical joke”



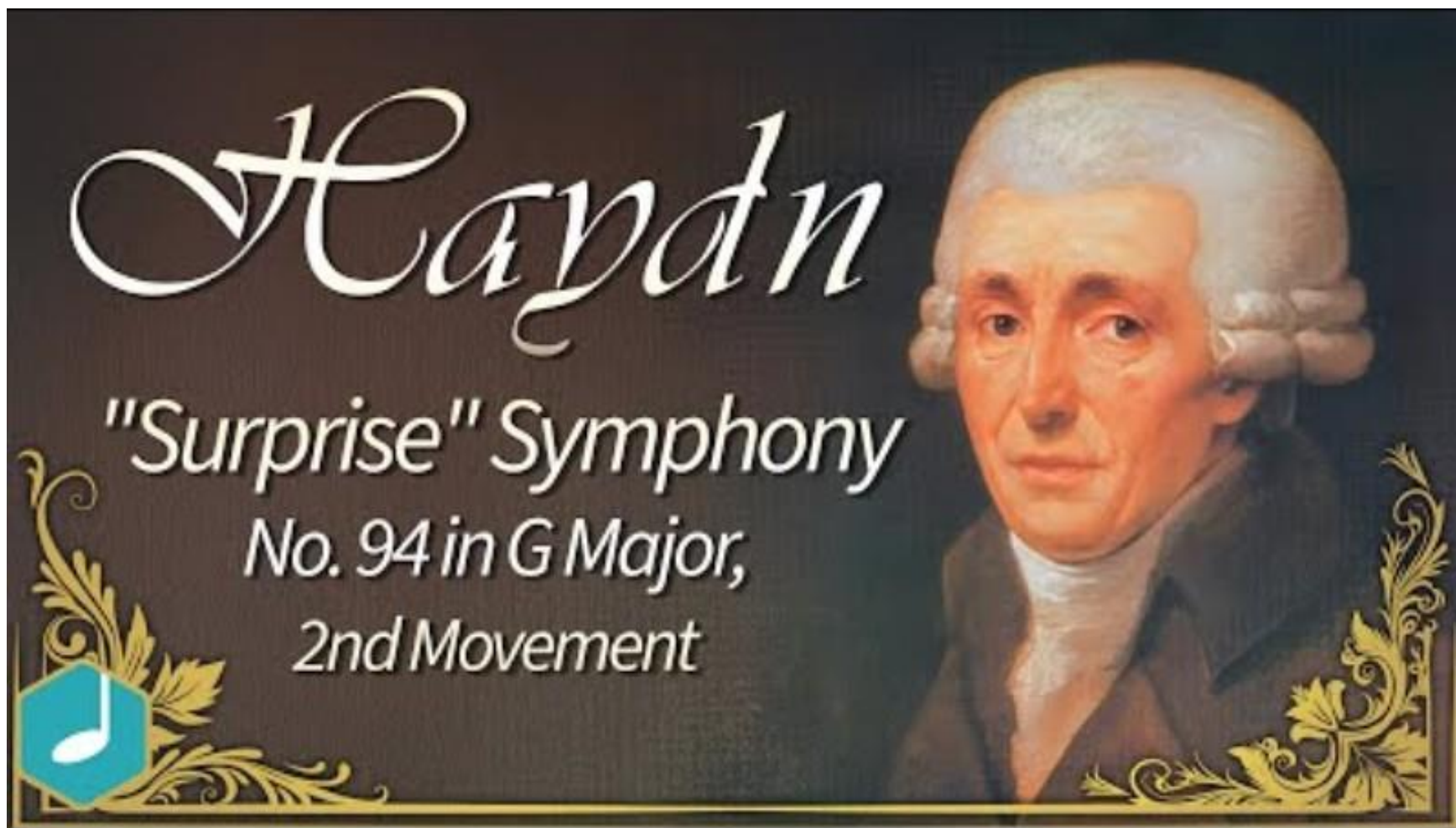
Yes, but is it *funny*...?



Talking of noticing things....



Not the audience participation bit (don't worry, it isn't you)... but was it funny at the time?



Minuet to Scherzo – adding humour to the dance



SCHERZO
 Franz Schubert Op. 9, No. 3

Allegretto (c. 180)

1

2

Humour “in” music - Victor Borge



Rowan Atkinson



Les Dawson

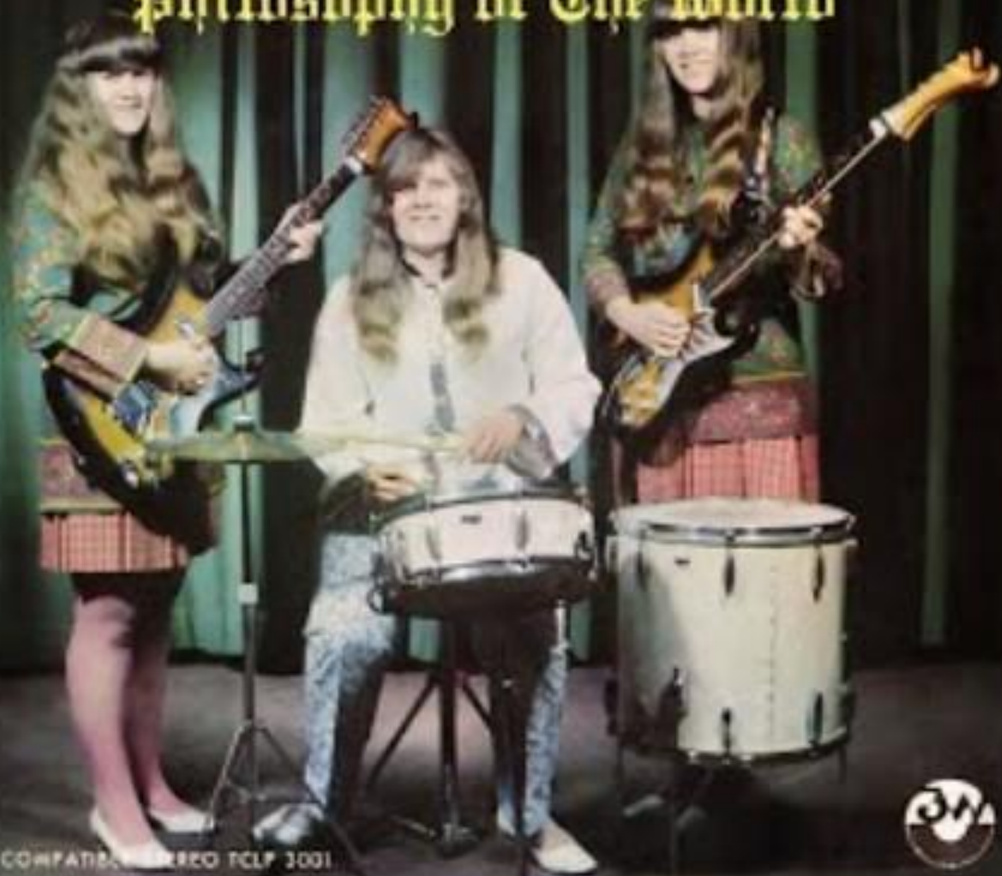


Florence Foster Jenkins



THE SHAGGS

Philosophy of The World



Novelty Items

Michel Lauziere's extraordinary talents with the "*Honking Symphony*" and the Klaxofon



Atonal Country Music – a novelty indeed!



Novelty Items

Leroy Anderson "The Typewriter"



Kings of the “novelty Item”. They were all excellent musicians

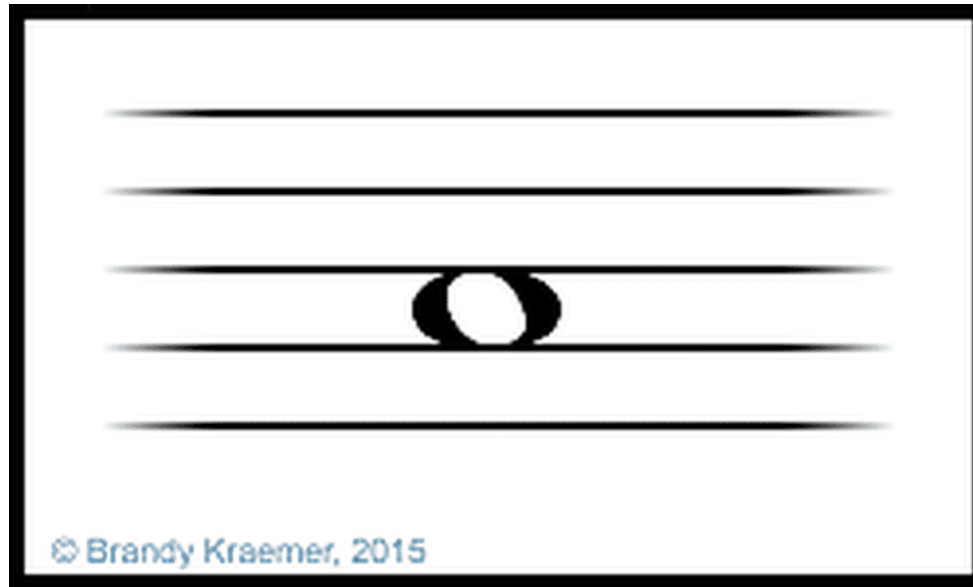
The Marx Brothers



Musical Joke #1:

A joke “in” music requiring some degree of knowledge or explanation

Q: What do you call a musician with a blocked nostril?

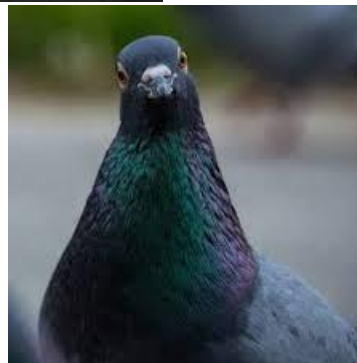


A: A semibreve

NB this joke does not work so well in North America...

Humour “through” music

Tom Lehrer. He was a graduate of Harvard, and taught Mathematics there and at other prestigious universities across the United States. He is best known for his irreverent and brilliant songs. He is also regarded as one of the first “sick” humorists



Humour “through” music Flanders & Swann



Laurel and Hardy – “Way Out West”



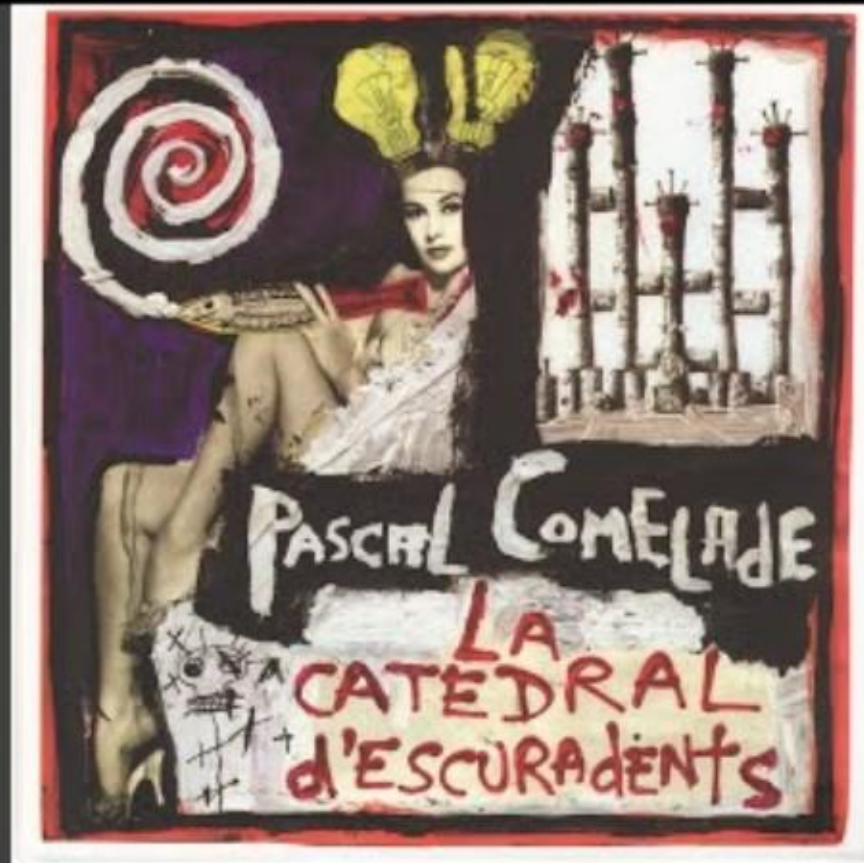
Bill Bailey



... and the curiosities.

The ultimate was, of course, John Cage with 4'33''

Pascal Comelade



Questions, comments or funny stories?

