

Study Guide for “Who’s Afraid of Classical Music?”

WHAT WILL YOU SEE?

You will meet Beth Sussman, an award winning classical pianist and Juilliard graduate. Beth shows students that classical music is all around us: at the movies, in cartoons, on television and in commercials. If you’ve seen the movie “Fantasia 2000”, seen Tom and Jerry or Bugs Bunny cartoons, or have heard commercials for United Airlines, you’re already familiar with some classical music!! Beth plays snippets of music featured in cartoons, movies, etc., to help demystify classical music. She is down-to-earth, fun, engaging and warm and vows to rid kids of the impression that classical music is performed by stuffy guys with white hair who wear tuxedos.

HOW SHOULD YOU PREPARE?

Let’s take a minute to think about concert manners. If you’re watching a movie or television, you could be talking or eating and wouldn’t disturb the performers. This is not the case with a live performance! It requires your attention – especially since you will be participants in the performance.

A LITTLE BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COMPOSERS

George Gershwin – born in New York, 1898, died in Hollywood, CA 1937. Famous for writing Broadway musicals and concert works which fused jazz with classical elements. His most famous pieces are Rhapsody in Blue (featured in Fantasia 2000) and the opera Porgy and Bess. He had a great gift for melody and is one of the most popular American composers. (Weird fact: Gershwin was quite the ladies man and when he lived in Hollywood often dated glamorous movie stars)

Robert Schumann (elementary grades only) 1810 – 1856. German composer. Schumann began his musical career as a pianist, but after inventing a device to strengthen the 4th finger, he permanently injured his hand and turned to composition. He was one of the greatest composers of piano music in the Romantic period. (Weird fact: Schumann married his piano teacher’s daughter, Clara, who was one of the best pianists of her time)

Nathaniel Dett (middle and high school only) 1882- 1943. An African American composer, Dett did much to preserve Black folk music. He was dedicated to uplifting his race through education and was, himself, a much admired teacher and conductor. (Weird fact: Dett's parents owned a motel near Niagara Falls)

Frederic Chopin (middle and high school only) 1810 – 1849. Polish born composer who lived in France for much of his life. (his father was French) He transformed how pianists played the piano and his music is very inventive both melodically and harmonically. Some of his music has a strong Polish influence. Died of tuberculosis at the age of 39. (Weird fact: Chopin was romantically involved with a writer named George Sand, who was a woman!! – She used the pen name George Sand so publishers wouldn't know she was a woman. Remember: this was 150 years ago)

Bela Bartok (1881- 1945) Hungarian born composer who traveled throughout both Hungary and neighboring Rumania in order to collect and preserve the folk music of these countries. Emigrated to the US in 1940. Bartok is known for having a strong sense of rhythm in many of his works. (Weird fact: Bartok started studying the piano at age 5 with his mother. He began performing in public at the age of 11)

Claude Debussy (1862 - 1918) French composer who, like Chopin before him, approached the piano in a unique way. Influenced by Impressionist painters such as Monet and Renoir who were famous for conveying an “impression” of the scene painted by using blurred outlines. The term impressionism was applied to Debussy because of the way he conveyed moods and emotions inspired by the subject. Although the piece we will hear on Beth's program is not an example of Impressionism, you may want to listen to his famous piece “Claire de Lune” (light of the moon) which is a good example. (Weird fact: Debussy's girlfriend shot herself after an argument with Debussy. Many years later, Debussy's wife also shot herself after arguing with her husband. Fortunately, both women lived to talk about it)

VOCABULARY:

Syncopation: rhythmic accent or emphasis where you don't expect it.

Dissonance: a group of notes or a chord that is jarring to the ear.

Harmony: the simultaneous sounding of notes, which supports a melody. For example, chords.

Folk Songs: - songs of unknown authorship passed down from generation to generation. (Ex. "Turkey in the Straw")

SOME ITALIAN TO IMPRESS YOUR PARENTS WITH:

Forte – loud Piano – soft legato – smooth staccato - detached

EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS of "WHO'S AFRAID OF CLASSICAL MUSIC?"

- ◆ Teaches kids to focus
- ◆ Motivates kids to be inquisitive and participate*
- ◆ Classical music opens up pathways to learning and stimulates the brain in ways that other subjects do not
- ◆ Encourages students to seek multiple interpretations to questions, rather than simple right or wrong answers (critical thinking skills)*
- ◆ The effects of listening to classical music are long lasting*
- ◆ Learning in the arts can lead to improved achievement in other academic subjects*

(*from California Arts Council's "An Arts in Education Research Compendium")

This highly interactive assembly is an exciting and joyful experience, which relates to subjects across the curriculum including: Social Studies, Geography, Math and Vocabulary.

INCLUDED FREE: A CD of the pieces performed at the assembly.
Teachers playing this CD in class have reported these benefits:

- ◆ The demeanor of the class improves
- ◆ Student's creative writing is better organized & flows more easily
- ◆ Encourages kids to listen to more classical music