

M.U.S.-icology 101

Lecture No. 3

Topic: April Fools' Recital Hour

Back when I was an undergrad, Recital Hour was Tuesday afternoon at 3 p.m. (Some Thursdays were added at the end of the semester when extra performance times were needed).

So in 1982, when April 1st fell on a Tuesday, someone (Malcolm Edwards, perhaps?) thought it would be a good idea to send up the Recital Hour tradition we all knew and loved. And thus, April Fools' Recital Hour was born.

The outstanding success of the 1982 version led to four more. The date was never April 1st again, but the spirit lived on. April is always a tense time of year, and it was great to let loose and have unabashed fun performing for your friends.

The recitals consisted of serious performances of comical music (e.g., P.D.Q. Bach), comical performances of serious music (add costumes and melodramatics, then stir), and comical performances of comical music (e.g., Tom Lehrer tunes like *Poisoning Pigeons in the Park*) — all done with a (relatively) straight face.

The inaugural recital was more successful than anyone could have imagined. On that day, absolutely no one tried to go in one door of the Roubakine (where you got your card punched for Recital Hour attendance) and then subtly go out the other one. I swear every undergraduate and graduate student was in attendance, not to mention most of the faculty and staff members. The "buzz" in the hall that day was like nothing you have ever experienced there. The anticipation was palpable. The supportive environment I described in my first column was given full voice that day.

Two memories stick out in my mind. A quartet of M.U.S.-types sang a medley of movie themes.

(See the excerpt to the immediate left.) And I was privileged enough to be part of the Monty Python Chorus, the act that truly brought the house down.

How did we do it? Well, we staged a medley of some Python songs that we liked, closing with the famous Lumberjack Song. Darrell Croft was the lumberjack-with-a-difference. As is the case in the original Python sketch, he does not reveal his fondness for women's clothing until the end.

But Allen Melling provided the *pièce de résistance*: he brought one of his mother's bras! I remember us trying to get this on Darrell (he is a fairly broad-chested man) in the washroom down the hall from the Roubakine. It was a bit of a stretch (literally!), but it worked. We concealed it under a vest and went on stage. So when the lyrics said, "I wear high heels, suspenders and a bra," Darrell ripped open his vest.

The crowd went berserk! I listened to the tape afterward (it *was* Recital Hour, after all) and you could barely hear the end of the song over the hysterical audience.

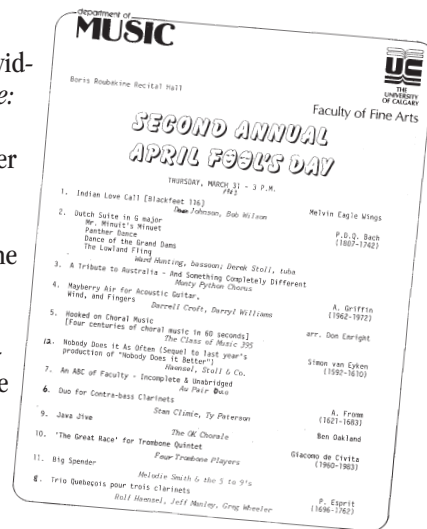
In subsequent years, there were one-joke performances (the "Mayberry Air" listed in the 1983 program was the famous Andy Griffith Show theme), improvisatory music ("The Great Race" consisted of four trombonists running around the recital hall, making engine noises), feats of daring (Derek Stoll playing a piano/tuba duet by himself), some running gags (Doug Nishimura and Lael Johnson performing a different arrangement of Greensleeves each year, truncated by gunfire), and some recurring performing groups (The OK Chorale, The Monty Python Chorus, The Society for the Proliferation of Choral Abominations [S.P.C.A.], and the Men's Choir).

With the number of student performances we have each Winter, the likelihood of there ever being another April Fools' Recital Hour in April is remote at best. But we could really use an event like this every year for the reasons I mentioned in Lecture No. 1 (*Mussenger*, February 1998).

So I am putting out a challenge to you, the music students at U of C: let's have the first annual "Half Way to April Fools' Recital Hour" on or about October 1. It would be a perfect way for the new students to get to know the rest of us (in a non-intimidating setting), and it would be at a time of year where people might actually have the time to do something really creative and fun.

So I am throwing down the gauntlet (not the newspaper, silly). I'll revive the Grad Students' Bottle Consort or the Python Chorus if you take care of the rest. Are you up to the challenge?

Have a good summer. I'll be here working....



For Hard Work Only

(sung to the theme of the James Bond film, *For Your Eyes Only*)

The initial verses described the plight of the music student, always slaving away. But in the final verse, Jeff Manley, Scott Stewardson, Tom Kehler and Rolf Haensel took a more realistic view:

For Hard Work Only has not got us anywhere.

But we will work hard because we really care (??!!)

[in falsetto] We are music students at the U of C,

And no one [lift stubby beer bottle, regular voice] drinks as much as we.

For Good Times Only.

[Drink from beer bottle]