

Humor in Music
Music 36N

Stanford University
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 11:00-12:30
Braun Music Center 102
Professor Mark Applebaum
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Office: Braun 218
Office hours by appointment

Humor can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.

E.B. White

Required Text

Morreall, John. *Comic Relief: A Comprehensive Philosophy of Humor*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. [Available at the Stanford Bookstore.]

Articles and Chapters

- Arias, Enrique Alberto. *Comedy in Music: A Historical Bibliographical Resource Guide*. Chapter 1: Introduction. [In the Reference Room of the Music Library.]
- Covach, John. *Stylistic Competencies, Musical Humor, and "This is Spinal Tap."* [See: <http://www.spinaltapfan.com/articles/covach.html>]
- Frith, Simon. *What is Bad Music?* in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, edited by Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno. [On reserve at the Music Library.]
- Giles, Bourhis, Gadfield, Davies, and Davies. *Cognitive Aspects of Humour in Social Interaction: A Model and Some Linguistic Data*. Chapter 7 in *Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications*, edited by Antony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot. [On reserve at the Music Library.] Study figure on pp. 140-141.
- Haig, Robin. *The Anatomy of Humor: Biopsychosocial and Therapeutic Perspectives*. Chapter 2: Theories of Humor—A Chronological Glimpse; Chapter 3: Biological Aspects of Humor. [On reserve at the Music Library.]
- Klosterman, Chuck. *Give Me Centrism or Give Me Death!* [See: <http://www.spin.com/articles/give-me-centrism-or-give-me-death>]
- Kuipers, Giseline. "Where Was King Kong When We Needed Him?" *Public Discourse, Digital Disaster Jokes, and the Functions of Laughter after 9/11* in The Journal of American Culture, Theme Issue, Volume 28, Number 1, March 2005.
- Rothbart, Mary K. *Incongruity, Problem-Solving and Laughter*. Chapter 2 in *Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications*, edited by Antony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot. [On reserve at the Music Library.] Study figure on p. 39.
- Slonimsky, Nicholas. *Lexicon of Musical Invective*. [On reserve at the Music Library.]

Additional Books of Interest (on reserve at the Music Library)

Boston, Richard. *An Anatomy of Laughter*

Calder, Andrew. *Molière: The Theory and Practice of Comedy*.

Cowan, Louise, editor. *The Terrain of Comedy*.

Garfitt, McMorran, and Taylor, editors. *The Anatomy of Laughter*.

Greig, J. Y. T. *The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy*.

Gruner, Charles R. *The Game of Humor: A Comprehensive Theory of Why We Laugh*.

Mulkay, M. J. *On Humour: Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society*.

Olson, Elder. *The Theory of Comedy*.

Provine, Robert R. *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*.

Stott, Andrew. *Comedy*.

Wilson, Christopher P. *Jokes: Form, Content, Use, and Function*.

Websites of Interest

The Funny Music Project: <http://www.thefump.com/>

Picklehead: http://www.picklehead.com/ind_comedy.html

Parody and Comic Music Guide: <http://www.xlrg.net/>

Dr. Demento <http://www.drdemento.com/>

<http://www.maxlevinson.com/humor.html>

Evaluation

PRESENTATIONS (30%)

- 15% Duo Presentation: on a given topic (8'-12').
- 15% Final Presentation: on a piece of humorous music selected by each student (5'-8').

PAPER (20%)

- 15% Review of *This Is Spinal Tap* (4-5 pages). Due on October 23.
- 5% Written response (1 page) to a colleague's paper. Due on November 1.

CREATIVE HUMOR PROJECT (30%)

- 15% Project 1: Write an original song or song lyric, make a piece of visual music humor, etc. Presentation on November 6. Duration, including set-up, must be 5' or less.
- 15% Project 2: As project 1, however this time as a duo collaboration. Presentation on November 29; projects—in progress—must be presented on November 14 in a focus group workshop setting for peer feedback. Duration, including set-up, must be 8' or less.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (20%)

Class Preparation/Participation

- Attendance, Class Participation, Discussion Leading.
- Readings and Music Listening.
- Synopses of Historical Figures (from the Morreall Text; to be completed by October 4).
- Presentation of Two Jokes, each 30 seconds or less; October 2, November 27.

Special Events

- This Is Spinal Tap* Film Screening: Tuesday, October 9, 10pm-midnight, Campbell.
- Control Freak*—Applebaum Solo Concert: Saturday, October 13, 7:45-9:30pm, CCRMA.
- Class Dinner: Friday, October 19, 6:00-10:30pm, Chez Applebaum.
- Creative Humor Project 2 Focus Group Workshop: Weds, November 14, 8:00-10:00pm.

Duo Presentation Topics

October 18

The Comedy of Aristophanes & Menander

October 25

Black Comedy, Gallows Humor

October 30

The Comedy of Dante & Shakespeare

November 1

Sarcasm, Satire, Parody, Lampoon, Comedy of Manners, Caricature, Burlesque

November 8

Literary Technique Grab Bag:

Hyperbole, Exaggeration, Metonymy, Metaphor, Pun, Spoonerism, Oxymoron, Non-Sequitur

November 13

Slapstick, Farce, Screwball Comedy

Blue Comedy, Euphemism, Ribaldry

November 15

Irony

Absurdity

November 27

Joke

Anti-Joke, Shaggy Dog Story, Metahumor

A Provisional Taxonomy of Humor in Music
Mark Applebaum

Music Comedians

Musical Jokesters

Visual Musical Humor

Parody

Heaviness Masquerading as Levity I: Self-Mythology, Clowns, & the Signifying Monkey

Heaviness Masquerading as Levity II: “Tonal” Inversion, Survival Humor

Bad Music (Unintentional Humor)

Satire I: Lampooning Musicians

Satire I.5: Lampooning “The Industry” (Musicologists, Composers, Music Technologists, Record Companies)

Satire II: Black Comedy, Cringe Comedy

Satire III: Sarcasm, Politics, and Topical Comedy

Satire IV: The Comic Musical

Nervous Laughter (in response to intensity, conviction, and the alien)

Absurdity

Blue Comedy, the Humor of Euphemism

Hilarious Audacity

Amusement in Musical Hooks (the unexpected, “funny odd”)

Word Play, Idiosyncratic Prosody

Funny Ontologies I: Repurposing, Bricolage

Funny Ontologies II: Performer Identities

Funny Ontologies III: Cultural Collisions, Mashups, and Surrealism

Culture Clash (Highbrow/Lowbrow Collisions)

Huh? Incongruous Expressions

The Bizarre Cover Version

The Dozens

The Romantic Comedy (seduction and the foibles of those falling in love)

Feature Film, Mockumentary

The Humorous Musical Number

Animated Adaptations

Songs for Adult Kids

The Novelty Song

The Guilty Pleasure

Humor in European Common Practice Music

Foolish Judgments

Humor in Writing on Music

Bizarre Album Cover Art

Funny Musical Data

Schedule, Topics (subject to modification)

Tuesday, September 25

Introduction

Aphasia, Concerto for Florist, Tlön

Musical Jokesters

Thursday, September 27

What is the Music Trading On? Challenges in the Exchange Value of Music.

Contingent, Tactical, Ontological, Modal Problems in Apprehending Humor in Music.

Read: Morreall Chapter 1—*No Laughing Matter: The Traditional Rejection of Humor and Traditional Theories of Humor*

Tuesday, October 2

Incongruity in Cognition: Surrealism, Illusion, and the Paranoic Critical

Music Comedians

Read: Morreall Chapter 2—*Fight or Flight—or Laughter: The Psychology of Humor*

Read: Morreall Chapter 3—*From Lucy to “I Love Lucy”: The Evolution of Humor*

Prepare: JOKE #1

Thursday, October 4

Funny Musical Data

Film Screening: *Waiting for Guffman*

Due: Morreall Index Synopses

Tuesday, October 9—Note: this class session continues to 1:00

Funny Ontologies I: Repurposing, Bricolage

Funny Ontologies II: Performer Identities

Read: Morreall Chapter 4—*That Mona Lisa Smile: The Aesthetics of Humor*

Humor in Jazz: AJPD, Dinkelspiel Auditorium

Special Event: **Tuesday, October 9:** *This Is Spinal Tap* screening, 10pm. Campbell Recital Hall.

Thursday, October 11

Funny Ontologies III: Cultural Collisions, Mashups, and Surrealism

Culture Clash (Highbrow/Lowbrow Collisions)

Huh? Incongruous Expressions

Read: Morreall Chapter 5—*Laughing at the Wrong Time: The Negative Ethics of Humor*

Read: Morreall Chapter 6—*Having a Good Laugh: The Positive Ethics of Humor*

Special Event: **Saturday, October 13:** *Control Freak*: Mark Applebaum solo concert. CCRMA Stage (3rd floor); 8pm. Arrive by 7:45pm; seating may be limited.

Tuesday, October 16

Satire I: Lampooning Musicians

Satire I.5: Lampooning “The Industry” (Musicologists, Composers, Music Technologists, Record Companies)

Read: Morreall Chapter 7—*Homo Sapiens and Homo Ridens: Philosophy and Comedy*

Read: Morreall Chapter 8—*The Glass Is Half-Empty and Half-Full: Comic Wisdom*

Thursday, October 18

Satire II: Black Comedy, Cringe Comedy

Satire III: Sarcasm, Politics, and Topical Comedy

Satire IV: The Comic Musical

Skim: Haig, Robin. *The Anatomy of Humor: Biopsychosocial and Therapeutic Perspectives*. Chapter 2: Theories of Humor—A Chronological Glimpse

Duo Presentation:

The Comedy of Aristophanes & Menander

Special Event: **Friday, October 19**, 6:00pm: Class Dinner, Chez Applebaum

Tuesday, October 23

Due: *This Is Spinal Tap* response paper; be sure to first read John Covach’s *Stylistic Competencies, Musical Humor and “This is Spinal Tap.”* [see aforementioned link], and peruse related materials on reserve at the music library.

Amusement in Musical Hooks (the unexpected, “funny odd”)

Thursday, October 25

Heaviness Masquerading as Levity I: Self-Mythology, Clowns, & the Signifying Monkey

Heaviness Masquerading as Levity II: “Tonal” Inversion, Survival Humor

Nervous Laughter (in response to intensity, conviction, and the alien)

Read: Kuipers, Giseline. “Where Was King Kong When We Needed Him?” *Public Discourse, Digital Disaster Jokes, and the Functions of Laughter after 9/11* in *The Journal of American Culture*, Theme Issue, Volume 28, Number 1, March 2005.

Duo Presentation:

Black Comedy, Gallows Humor

Extra Credit Event: **Sunday, October 28**, 1:00-5:33pm: Cage Musicircus, Yerba Buena, SF.

Tuesday, October 30

Read: Arias, Enrique Alberto. *Comedy in Music: A Historical Bibliographical Resource Guide*. Chapter 1: Introduction, pp. 1-5 only.

Duo Presentation:

The Comedy of Dante & Shakespeare

GUEST: Heather Hadlock, Musical Humor in Offenbach

Thursday, November 1

Humor in European Common Practice Music

Parody

Due: Response to colleague’s paper

Duo Presentation:

Sarcasm, Satire, Parody, Lampoon, Comedy of Manners, Caricature, Burlesque

Tuesday, November 6

Presentation of Creative Humor Project 1

Thursday, November 8

Bad Music (Unintentional Humor)

The Bizarre Cover

Foolish Judgments

Humor in Writing on Music

Bizarre Album Covers

Read: Frith, Simon. *What is Bad Music?* in *Bad Music: The Music We Love to Hate*, edited by Christopher Washburne and Maiken Derno.

Read: Klosterman, Chuck. *Give Me Centrism or Give Me Death!*

Skim: Slonimsky, Nicholas. *Lexicon of Musical Invective*.

Duo Presentation:

Literary Technique Grab Bag:

Hyperbole, Exaggeration, Metonymy, Metaphor, Pun, Spoonerism, Oxymoron, Non-Sequitur

Tuesday, November 13

Blue Comedy, the Humor of Euphemism

Hilarious Audacity

Word Play, Idiosyncratic Prosody

Duo Presentation:

Slapstick, Farce, Screwball Comedy

Blue Comedy, Euphemism, Ribaldry

Film Screening: *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story*, part 1

Special Event: **Wednesday, November 14:** Focus Group Workshop of Humorous Music Project 2. (Duo collaborations are presented for peer feedback.) Two groups of eight students, locations to be determined by groups. 8:00-10:00pm.

Thursday, November 15

Absurdity

Feature Film, Mockumentary

The Humorous Musical Number

Animated Adaptations

Songs for Adult Kids

The Novelty Song

The Guilty Pleasure

Duo Presentation:

Irony

Absurdity

Film Screening: *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story*, part 2

Tuesday, November 27

Visual Musical Humor

The Dozens

The Romantic Comedy (seduction and the foibles of those falling in love)

Prepare: JOKE #2

Duo Presentation:

Joke

Anti-Joke, Shaggy Dog Story, Metahumor

Thursday, November 29

Presentation of Creative Humor Project 2

Tuesday, December 4

Final Presentations 1

Thursday, December 6

Final Presentations 2