

Perfect Storms ... of the musical variety!

How Beethoven, Rossini, Strauss and Britten use an orchestra to imitate a storm. Learn about the composers, their music styles along with the background and structure of the music.

An illustrated lecture presented by Dulais Rhys, Ph.D

The history of music is full of imitations of the sounds of nature, the most successful (always a matter of opinion!) being achieved by a full orchestra. Though smaller ensembles were the norm during the Baroque era (c1685-1750), composers such as Telemann and Vivaldi still attempted to replicate storms, as in the latter's famous 'Four Seasons'.

Arguably the easiest nature sounds to portray in music are birdsongs. Modern French composer Olivier Messiaen spent many a happy hour up a tree notating birds singing which he then included in his compositions. At the other end of the scale (pardon the music pun!), some composers attempt to replicate the sound of the sea, the most famous example being Debussy's *La Mer*, which uses a huge orchestra to portray the power of an ocean in all of its moods.

Although instruments were added to the orchestra during the Classical period (c1750-1825), few composers ventured from the musical 'purity' of the era to imitate the sounds of nature. For example, though Haydn's 39th Symphony is subtitled 'storm at sea', its musical portrayal is relatively lightweight. Though Beethoven is considered a 'classical' composer, his later music style is Romantic, i.e., connecting with non-musical genres such as art, literature ... and nature. The storm movement from his 'Pastoral' Symphony is a glorious depiction of the elements of a storm, including rain, thunder, lightning and wind.

Italian contemporary, Rossini, made enough money from his grandiose operas enabling him to 'retire' as a composer at age forty! Most operas have an orchestral introduction, and within Rossini's famous *William Tell* overture is a dynamic portayal of a storm, the dying away of which leads to a frenetic closing section which is forever and inextricably linked with 'The Lone Ranger' television series themesong.

Composer Richard Strauss bridged the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his most well-known works being *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (used at the opening of the movie '2001: a Space Odyssey') and his romantic comedy opera *Der Rosenkavalier*. Strauss's 'Alpine Symphony' of 1915 uses an enormous orchestra to musically illustrate ascending and descending a mountain and which includes an array of percussion instruments to depict a powerful storm.

Benjamin Britten was one of England's most beloved 20th century composers, whose first opera, *Peter Grimes* of 1945 broke the linguistic strangle-hold of Italian, German and French operas. His 'Storm Interlude' depicts both a wild tempest and the emotional turmoil within the principal singer's mind.

DURATION: c1 hour

FEE: \$295.00

EXPENSES: a contribution toward travel costs is appreciated.

Thank you for considering my proposal and please contact me for more information.

Sincerely,

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