

MUSIC APPRECIATION – Handout for October 2023 - MAIN THEME: AUTUMN – either in the title or inferentially.

We are starting with something rumbustious. The Maple Leaf Rag was written by Scott Joplin whilst in the Maple Leaf Club in 1899. It set the tone for ragtime music – in the fall, the maple leaf turns vivid red and brown

Now something entirely different. Not as famous as the Lark Ascending, but Ralph one of Vaughan Williams' (1872-1958) best-loved songs "Linden Lea" sets to music the poem by William Barnes, the Dorset polymath. Ralph wrote it while still a music student. He wrote operas, ballets, orchestral and chamber music, and songs - much influenced by Tudor music and old English folksongs so most of his music has a country feel. Play cassette

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) was an American composer, pianist, conductor and baritone singer. He wrote his first piece of music aged only 7. Advised his well-to-do parents he was homosexually inclined when young. The style of music was romantic, lyrical and harmonic with little experimentation. Most of his well-known music including his Adagio for Strings (24th in Classic FM Hall of Fame) was written before he was thirty years of age. Toscanini, when first conducting, called it "semplice et bella" ie simple and beautiful. Barber wished he would be remembered for his other works when later he went into opera. The Adagio was first performed at the funeral of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945. Later, he was travelling in his car on 22nd November 1963 and heard it being played on his radio. He switched channels three times and heard every station playing the same piece. He accepted that it was his masterpiece.

Adagio for Strings: Composed 1936. It evokes great and naked emotion, elegiac desire and conveys great grief. Snail-like tempo with a very constrained melodic line, long rests and repetition. Very mathematical, it starts with just a single note, a long pause and then a lovely chord. It proceeds 3 notes up and then another 3 notes up. A final 4 notes bring to it a fulfilling conclusion

Some snatches at the piano bars before listening to the whole piece.

Vivaldi; 1678-1741 Italian composer of Baroque music and virtuoso violinist. Ordained to the priesthood. Most famous for his violin concertos, four of which form the 4 seasons.

Autumn: Composed around 1720. The first of three movements starts very crisply and carefree. It becomes dancelike and jolly before a slower beautiful second adagio movement heralding the cooler airs of Autumn. The final third movement signifies the joy of the Hunt and has one of the most famous tunes in classical music.

Some snatches of the other Seasons and syncopation in the third movement before playing Autumn

Complete change of genre. We will be listening to "Autumn Leaves". It was composed by the Hungarian Joseph Kosma in 1945 and has the French title "Les Feuilles Mortes" ie Dead Leaves. Lots of versions including probably the most famous by Natt King Cole. Our version is played on the Tenor Saxophone.

Next: Autumn is a mix of gladness, melancholy, of reflection - a time for nostalgia, being grateful and introspection. I shall be playing a piece which I played for my Grade 8 examination - namely "Reverie" by Debussy composed in 1890 and not much liked by the composer himself. Calm, peaceful, slow and very introspective and dreamlike.

Something Different – Members’ Choice – Sir Karl Jenkins “The Armed Man for Peace” - Benedictus excerpt. His work calls for peace and has no particular religion – it was written for the victims of the war in Kosovo. Starts with Sanctus with sounds of marching feet to the words Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosannah in the highest. Benedictus has a beautiful cello solo playing to a high register. It is haunting, strident and tense.

If time allows, we may also listen to:

Less well-known composer Erik Satie (1866 -1925). Composer and pianist in piano bars. Half French and half British. Undistinguished student at Paris Conservatoire only finishing his studies aged 40. Music is sparse, unconventional, and sometimes witty. He was an eccentric dude – had only one relationship and would not allow anyone to enter his apartment. After his death from cirrhosis of the liver, they found he had 100 umbrellas. His music was the first break from romanticism. so quite unlike that of Debussy and his friend Ravel. He was closely linked to Dada and surrealist art. Loved repetition. Founded his own religion – a form of occultism. He had a rigid daily regime and only ate white food. Going out he always carried a hammer for protection. The piece we are going to listen to is Gymnopodie No 1. Its simplicity is intentional, and that's where the beauty comes from.

Back to the Mainstream: Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) Son of a mining engineer with a half-French mother of a nervous disposition from whom came perhaps his sensitivity. Early schooling in St Petersburg working as a clerk before becoming a music student at age 23. In 1876 he met Nadezda Von Meck and wrote for her private orchestra. They had an extraordinary 14-year relationship carried out entirely by correspondence. In 1877 his marriage of a month broke up and he suffered a nervous breakdown. He spent the rest of his life living on friends’ estates and doing overseas tours before committing suicide with arsenic in 1893. Our finishing piece is October Autumn Song by Tchaikovsky

Music inspired by Tolstoy's verse “ Autumn - Our poor garden is all falling down and the yellowed leaves are flying in the wind” Hopefully the music which is quite nostalgic conveys that picture. Play the cassette.

After a short break

Theme: To play something “off the beaten track”, we have chosen Sir Arnold Bax’s November Woods composed in 1917. Born in 1883 the son of Quaker parents he had a large private income and produced an enormous amount of music including seven symphonies. His style was romantic with very rich orchestration. Knighted and made Master of the King's Music in the 1940s, he wrote the Coronation March for the enthronement of Queen Elizabeth in 1953. Unconventional and a very passionate man, he never owned a house. The piece we are going to hear was written in 1917 just after the collapse of his marriage and the beginnings of his affair with the pianist Harriet Cohen. He said of the piece – “it evokes a mood and should be taken as a dark and stormy music of nature in the late Autumn” Seldom played but was in the Anniversary BBC Prom in 20023 commemorating 50 years on the throne.