

ENCOURAGING YOUNG LISTENERS AT TRADITIONAL ORGAN RECITALS

Diane Heath

"Kids Sheets" are program supplements that can be used at traditional organ recitals. Their purpose is to help children focus by giving them listening clues. Most importantly, they can inspire children to put their active imaginations to work as they listen to music. Not surprisingly, parents and other adults love "Kids Sheets" as much as the children. As this type of supplement grows in popularity, so will the audiences, and a new generation of listeners can continue to support the legacy of great organ literature.

Children's supplemental programs are best developed by creative performers themselves; however, they can also be written by parents and teachers, or ideas could be sought from children. Whenever possible, some color should be used on supplemental programs to make them visually interesting, and slightly larger print helps make them more accessible.

The following "Kid's Sheet Concert Program" was used at an organ recital on the Summer Series at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. While a beautiful room with an impressive organ, the audience cannot see the performer at all, and so the concert experience was made more vivid for young people by use of the supplemental program, which aimed to build on children's previous experiences. This particular Kid's Sheet is not historically oriented, but rather fulfills the objective of encouraging young listeners to exercise their imaginative listening abilities. The only criticism that I have received has been from adults who found that the information greatly enhanced their concert experience and suggested that the sheets be entitled "Concert Program for Kids of All Ages."

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M O N T R E A L J U L Y 4 - 1 5 2 0 0 5

Concert Sheet for Kids of All Ages

Good Evening!!! Welcome to an ALL BACH CONCERT! It's obvious that you have very cool parents who wanted you to celebrate New Year's Eve with some of the greatest music ever written. (DON'T tell me they MADE you come!) Bach is considered by many people to be the greatest composer who ever lived. This is because his music is both beautiful when you listen to it for the first time, and beautiful after you have practiced and thought about the pieces for 50 years.

Here are some fun facts about JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH:

Bach had 20 children, who were also named Bach.

He had 2 wives, but not at the same time. One of them was also his cousin.

He owned 7 harpsichords and 5 coffee pots.

He wore a wig when he went to work and taught Latin in addition to music.

He lived in Germany from 1685 to 1750. In America during this time, George Washington was born. In France, Champagne was invented.

Now . . . on to the music . . .

MUSIC TITLE: TOCCATA IN F MAJOR

A lot of chasing goes on in this piece because of all of the canons (rounds) that Bach put into his composition. First the left-hand part chases the right-hand part, then there is a virtuoso pedal solo (sort of like playing soccer—no hands allowed), then the right-hand part chases the left-hand part, then another pedal solo, and then everybody gets chased all up and down the keyboard and pedalboard until the end. As is the case with a lot of Bach's music, we don't know exactly what occasion he wrote the pieces for. The F-major Toccata is unusual because it uses both the very highest notes and lowest notes on both the keyboard and the pedalboard. When I play this piece, I like to imagine Bach showing off a new organ that he really loved.

MUSIC TITLE: SONATA I

Bach wrote this piece for his son, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, so that he would practice a lot and become a very good organist. When the player performs this piece just right, it will sound easy to play. The truth is that it is a very hard test of whether someone can play the organ well. Bach's Sonatas are often required in organ playing competitions because they are so difficult. This piece is a trio, which means no more than three notes are sounding at one time—one note for each hand and one note in the feet. You can think of the right hand as imitating a flute, the left hand a violin, and the feet a very fast moving cello. When one player has to do all three instruments, coordination is COMPLICATED. It's like juggling! The three movements of the piece are fast—slow—fast, with a pause in between each. The audience waits to clap until the third movement has ended.

THREE CHORALES FROM THE ORGELBÜCHLEIN (Little Organ Book)

It's sing-along time! Make sure you can see a copy of the Program, which includes all of the words for three songs in which the audience participates. These are hymns that were sung in Bach's time to celebrate the New Year and mark the passing of the Old Year. After each one is sung, an organ piece based on that exact melody will be played. Bach can be quite sneaky about hiding the melody in these chorale preludes. In fact, he got in trouble with his employer who had to "reprove him for having hitherto made many curious variations in the chorale, and mingled many strange tones in it, and for the fact that the Congregation has been confused by it."

Although the notes can be confusing, the mood of Bach's music is not confusing at all. The second chorale, "The Old Year Has Passed Away," is E-X-T-R-E-M-E-L-Y sad. The music for the third chorale, "In Thee Is Gladness," is E-X-T-R-E-M-E-L-Y happy.

THREE ARIAS FROM BACH CANTATAS

An "Aria" is a song, and Rosa Lamoreaux is going to sing three of them, accompanied by organ, violin, and cello. This is when you're glad to live in Washington and that it's New Year's Eve. Rosa is a phenomenal singer, traveling all over the world to sing arias. She brings the beauty of Bach's music to life like no one else. She will sing in German because that's the language that Bach used. The songs are all religious and about God's love. Look in the program to see a complete translation of all of the words.

MUSIC TITLE: PASSACAGLIA IN C MINOR

Before you read the description of this music, think of something that repeats over and over and over and over, BUT—that changes just a little bit each time, eventually changing quite a lot. For example: You might tell your parents, "I want a horse. I really want a horse. I would like to have a horse of my own named Cannon Ball. If I owned a horse I would ride him for hours, traveling with my sister and her horse, and stopping for a picnic lunch in the meadow. When I have my horse I will train for the Olympics and eventually will work with horses as a career." Repetition can be a good thing. It can help people understand better.

An organ passacaglia is a piece that has a pedal line that repeats over and over and over and over. You will hear it all alone at the very beginning. Listen carefully to that part, because it is the essence of the piece. It is the "I want a horse" of this composition. After that, you should be able to hear the theme in the feet and also in the hands throughout the whole piece, which gets more and more excited and intense for about 13 minutes.

WHAT HAPPENS AT THE END OF A CONCERT?

If you clap very loudly for a long time, the performer will come back and play a special piece called an "Encore," which means "again" in French. If you think the concert was already long enough, don't be concerned. Encores are always short and are very special pieces, so you are lucky when you get one. After the encore (if there is one), there will be a reception. YOU are invited to come and have a snack and to say hello to all of the performers.

KID'S SHEET CONCERT PROGRAM

Music Title: Rubrics

Composed by Dan Locklair (U.S., born 1949)

This piece will knock your socks off. It's in five different movements, so don't clap until the very end, even though you may feel like it. Also, don't throw tomatoes until the end. Better yet—don't throw anything, except maybe roses.

Here are the titles of the five movements and some things to listen for:

1. "... Hallelujah' has been restored..." Imagine sledding down a steep snowy hill. That's what a glissando is, and this movement is full of them. The organist takes her thumb and slides it across all of the keys, making a very cool sound. The same thing will happen with the feet on the organ pedals—glissandi up and down all of the pedals.
2. "Silence may be kept." What do you think music about silence should sound like? The bells that you will hear at the end of this movement are actual bells sounding from the tall tower outside, and they will ring both inside and outside. I wonder what the neighbors will think about that.
3. "... and thanksgivings may follow." Before I tell you what this movement reminds me of, you should listen to it and decide for yourself. Then you can look at the bottom of this sheet to see my impression*. Disclaimer: I don't know what image, if any, the composer, Dan Locklair, had in mind, so the item at the bottom is just my opinion. By the way, the tinkling sound that comes and goes is called a Zimbelstern. This is an organ stop that causes little bells to go around and be struck by a mallet.
4. "The Peace may be exchanged." What would world peace look like and sound like?
5. "The people respond—Amen!" Warning: this piece could cause dancing. The ushers probably wouldn't like it if you did that during this concert though.

Music Title: Où s'en vont ces gais bergers

(French for, "Where are the gay shepherds going?")

Composed by Claude Balbastre (France, 1727-99)

Mr. Balbastre created this piece by making variations on a French Christmas carol. Some things to listen for:

Ornaments—similar to Christmas Tree Ornaments, they are pretty little trills that are stuck on notes. The player's fingers go very fast back and forth on just two notes.

Registration—different kinds of sounds, coming from different groups of pipes, including flutes, cromhorns, and trumpets.

Strange but cool chords—that you can hear in the last variation, and a final chord that is a little bit goofy as well.

Music Title: Choral in B Minor

Composed by César Franck (France, 1822-90)

I think this piece is like a very big house—a mansion, in fact—with tons of different rooms, lots of stairways, and a large and interesting yard. There are several different characters who sometimes are alone and sometimes together. Let your imagination tell the story of who they are and what they do. Hint: The second time the piece gets really slow and soft it's time to end your story. If you like to draw, you could try to sketch out the plot.

Music Title: Toccata in F Major

Composed by Johann Sebastian Bach (Germany 1685-1750)

A lot of chasing goes on in this piece because of all of the canons (rounds) that Bach put into his composition. First the left-hand part chases the right-hand part, then there is a virtuoso pedal solo (sort of like playing soccer—no hands allowed), then the right-hand part chases the left-hand part, then another pedal solo, and then everybody gets chased all up and down the keyboard and pedalboard until the end.

Music Title: Le Banquet céleste

(French for "The Celestial Banquet")

Composed by Olivier Messiaen (France, 1908-92)

Olivier Messiaen marked "Tres Lent," which means "very slow," at the top of the music score. When Messiaen says slow, he means R-E-A-L-L-Y S-L-O-W. In this composition, Messiaen intentionally tried to alter the listener's sense of time. Some people fall into a kind of hypnotic trance when they listen to this music, and that might happen to you. When the music ends you will come back to normal awareness, so don't worry about becoming trapped in the trance.

Music Title: Final from the First Sonata-Symphony in D Minor

Composed by Félix-Alexandre Guilmont (France, 1837-1911)

Have you heard the expression, "pulled out all the stops"? That saying comes from the organ. When organists pull out all the stops, they make as many pipes as possible play at the same time. This can get very loud. Toward the very end of this piece I will add a special stop called the Pontifical Trumpet. Occasionally, audience members need to cover their ears because it is so loud that it hurts. I won't be offended if you need to do this, but try leaving your ears uncovered and see how much sound you can take.

This KID'S SHEET CONCERT PROGRAM was written by today's performer, Diane Lewis Heath, who lives in Washington, D.C., where she teaches organ and piano to both young people and adults. She has an eleven-year old son and a husband, who is a kid at heart. After finishing high school, Diane went to music school for about eight years, which means that she completed 20th grade!

* a very fast moving carousel that has bumps built in.