



Smithsonian Associates

Dangerous Music!

Dr. Rachel Franklin

Tuesday, June 6, 2022 - 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. ET

Syllabus and works

If your music causes a riot, that could be a compliment. But a revolution?

Music is dangerous stuff! From Plato through Stalin to the dear old BBC and beyond, governments, institutions and individuals have sought to silence works they considered subversive. Composers as varied as Mozart, Stravinsky and Kurt Weill have found themselves the objects of outrage and censorship. Too political, too sensuous, too effeminate, too crude, too nationalistic, too chaotic, just plain evil! Nowadays it's hard to understand what all the fuss was about, but throughout history composers and musicians have been censored at best or executed at worst for producing the "wrong" kind of music. Even abstract art music without text has been viewed with the deepest suspicion. How can sounds be seditious and why on earth should we care?

We examine why Mozart's delightful "The Marriage of Figaro" was considered almost treasonous by Austrian aristocracy. Could Beethoven's "Fidelio" be preaching revolution, and is "Mack the Knife" an aria celebrating murder? Prudish Pope Clement XI actually banned public opera altogether, claiming it promoted lascivious behavior. Who knew? While you clutch your smelling salts, consider glorious 1913 Paris where audiences yelled, jeered, and duked it out at the premier of Stravinsky's revolutionary "Rite of Spring." Meanwhile, in 1899 performances of the beautiful and highly nationalistic "Finlandia" by Finnish composer Sibelius were threatened by the ruling Russian authorities, and those same authorities forbade Rimsky-Korsakov's savagely satirical opera "The Golden Cockerel" from being performed at all for several years.

In our current world where the very core of cultural utterance is under the magnifying glass, we'll take a lightning tour through just a few of classical music's most controversial works.

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Works discussed, media used:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791): *The Marriage of Figaro*, 1786, "Se vuol ballare, signor Contino"

- Luca Pisaroni, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (Paris), 2004

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z7NxN85AvHQ>

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): *Fidelio*, 1805, "O welche Lust"

- Metropolitan Opera, 2000

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdB0roPqg7Q>

- Heartbeat Opera, 2018. Featuring the voices of more than 100 incarcerated singers and 70 volunteers from six prison choirs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5O1fBAnhvo&t=471s>

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957): *Finlandia*, Op. 26, 1899

- Finlandia flashmob, Helsinki Central Station, 2012

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jaKko3VGAnY>

- Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ppy3T4NAABI>

Nicolai Rimsky Korsakov (1844-1908): *The Golden Cockerel*, 1907

- Théâtre Musical de Paris, Châtelet, Orchestre de Paris, 2002, Kent Nagano

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTTDFMR6mrk&t=426s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JO3gnPOipI0>

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971): *Le Sacre du Printemps*, 1913

- Joffrey Ballet, 1987

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo4sf2wT0wU>

- Marie Rambert reminisces in Tony Palmer's documentary about Stravinsky, "Once at a Border." (DVD)

Kurt Weill (1900-1950): *The Threepenny Opera*, 1928, "Mackey Messer"

- Kurt Gerron sings Mack the Knife (Mackey Messer), *Der Dreigroschenoper*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWPvx1KPA9Y>

- Frank Sinatra, Quincy Jones, recording session, 1984

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIazK40JKbM>

A number of you have reached out to me asking about my concert performances now that pandemic restrictions are easing. For my upcoming performance of Beethoven's Emperor Concerto, please click on this link:

<https://washingtonsinfonietta.org/>