

OPUS(S) *et al.*

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One of the many things I enjoy about music is observing animals' reactions to it. It has been my experience that dogs and cats, for instance, really like certain types of classical music and actually participate, i.e., sing, even though human beings usually do not realize that what is taking place is singing.

Dogs have a marked affinity for small black woodwinds. A clarinet repair specialist had a little dog that would come in and sit in front of a client. The dog's ears would be pointed forward expectantly as she watched a clarinet owner assemble his instrument. Upon hearing a few notes, the dog would lift her nose ceilingward, close her eyes, and let forth a special kind of AAOOO that could only be described as singing.

One day I brought in a clarinet for repairs and I played a few bars for the dog's benefit. After some inspired accompaniment, she stuck her nose up the bell to see where the music was coming from. Another time I took the oboe in for a middle-joint recorking. I wasn't sure what effect the difference in sound would have on the dog, but the instant she saw the familiar shape and color, she was ready to go. And did she ever.

I discussed the above with a cellist one day and he said he knew about it because his dog would come in and sing every time he played a certain piece by Dvorak.

After this, I began wondering if a P.D.Q. Bach concert featuring "*Fantasia for Clarinet and Basset Hound*" might not be a realistic possibility.

I have often heard it said that animals make these sounds because they do *not* like what they are hearing. This seems to be a gross misinterpretation. When dogs and cats hear something unpleasant to them, they react quite differently: they just take off. For instance, one dog of my acquaintance would run and hide under a bed when he heard the word "bath."

And when my cat Opus(s), was a newcomer to the household, she hid under the refrigerator (with just her tail sticking out) the first time she heard low E and F on a clarinet. She apparently thought it was growls coming from some bear-sized animal with its mind on dinner. (The rule is, the lower the growl, the larger the perpetrator).

At a living room rehearsal with cello and a piano, a tiny Yorkshire terrier saw and heard a cello for the first time. He stood barking away bravely in front of the huge creature growling there in the middle of his territory.

Except for Opus(s) and the clarinet, cats show bored indifference to woodwinds. But violins...ah, that's another kettle of fish, as it were. One morning I was rehearsing with a group that included a violin. The violinist began tuning up when suddenly a large black cat appeared on the ledge of an open window. "MEE-YOWW-EEYOW" he sang, right in the violin's range, nose in the air like the dogs.

After that I was not surprised when Opus(s) performed at a concert hall one evening. At this time I was living near a small concert hall which seated about 80. I was within walking distance, so on the evening of the concert I set out, instrument carrier over my shoulder. Opus(s) decided to go too.

"No, KITTY NO!" I stopped and shook my finger at her. "GO HOME! You're just gonna make trouble!"

I thought I saw a smile under her whiskers. Tail in the air like a flagpole, she continued trotting along daintily, anticipating a great time. I gave up (almost). I took a last stand at the concert hall door: I said that no one but *people* were allowed inside. She actually sat down and stayed put.

The performance began with Beethoven's *Trio for Clarinet, Cello and Piano*. After that I went to the back of the hall to hear the next piece, a duet for piano and violin.

"MEEYOWW, etc., etc." It was unmistakable, certainly in the back half of the hall. Opus(s) was right there, fortissimo in the high register, legato-ing up and down a feline minor scale. I felt an attack of hilarity coming on; I was afraid I would get into an uncontrollable, audible and visible laughing fit. I got out as fast and as discreetly as I could to take my orange marmalade-striped coloratura home.

As far as birds go, I have always associated bad days on the oboe with the duck family. Therefore, I never quite understood why the reed-testing sound is referred to as "crow." But this summer I had a surprising experience.

Jerusalem is full of gardens and parks that house many kinds of birds, especially in the summer. They call out to each other from

one garden to the next, or even a block away and sometimes keep quite animated dialogues going.

On this particular afternoon I was sitting near a window, battling a clothespin-type reed which would not respond for a while, then would suddenly let out as awful a racket as a recalcitrant hunk of bamboo is capable of. Exasperated, I took in a head of steam, blew, and out came RW-AAGH.

“KRAWW!” came from just outside the window. The timing was the next quarter note after mine. I have to admit - the crow in question

really got the pitch and the tone quality. (Translation: “You are not alone.”) I decided to pack it up for the day.

As a finale, there is a story I have heard which may be truth or may be legend.

During an orchestra rehearsal, a bird flew in and perched on a lighting fixture overhead. It started to sing. The conductor motioned for silence, and everyone listened attentively. When the bird had finished its aria, the conductor turned to the orchestra and said: “Now, why don’t *you* play like that?!”

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