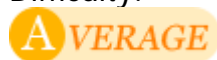


Rare Violins Play Starring Role in Concert

Difficulty:



Date of release:

Tuesday 10 January 2012

Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report was about a concert held in December. What was special about it? What kind of music was played? Where did it take place?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = What was so special about the concert presented in the report? What kind of music was played? Where did it take place?

1. What do we learn in the report about the Library of Congress' concerts?
 - Given every year in December to mark the death of Antonio Stradivari.
 - They exist to show off the rare instruments of the library's music collection.
 - They are also given to honor Gertrude Clarke Whittall, benefactor of the collection.
 - The current senior concert producer is Ann McLean.
 - The library plans to continue its yearly tradition of commemorative concerts.
2. Who performed in December's concert, what was its program and what instruments were used?
 - The Borromeo String Quartet with pianist Seymour Lipkin. The program included:
 - Franz Schubert's Quartet in D minor, "Death and the Maiden", (played on Stradivarius instruments).
 - Ludwig van Beethoven's Sonata no. 7 in C minor. The quartet's first violinist, Nicholas Kitchen, played a violin made by Stradivari's contemporary, Giuseppe Guarneri, with pianist Seymour Lipkin.
 - A modern composition, Quartet no. 4 by Gunther Schuller.

Which of these pieces do you know?

3. What did we learn in the report about the Library of Congress' music collection?
 - It includes six Stradivarius instruments.
 - It began in 1935 when Gertrude Clarke Whittall donated five Stradivarius instruments.
 - Since then, the library's music division has acquired five additional rare stringed instruments (including the Guarneri violin) through other donations.

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Classical music and you.

1. Do you listen to Western classical music? How often? On disc, in concert, on the radio? If you answered "yes", who are your favorite composers and what do you appreciate in their music? If you answered "no", explain why this kind of music does not attract you.
2. Many professional musicians in the field of classical music today come from cultures which have their own rich musical tradition (China, Japan, Korea, ...). Can you name any such musicians? In your opinion, does this phenomenon:
 - indicate that Western classical music is a "universal language"?
 - reflect the cultural domination of the West over the rest of the world? (think also about rock music as a dominant form of music).
3. What is "crossover" music? [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossover_\(music\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossover_(music))
When classical musicians take part in crossover projects, do you think they are diluting "pure" classical music or breaking down musical barriers? Find an example of a "classical to pop" crossover in the above link, research it and report back to a partner or to your teacher.
4. Traditionally classical music had a very "formal" image; musicians wore formal dress and appeared serious. This is changing. Classical musicians like violinist Nigel Kennedy have a "rock star" look, have their own fan clubs, get involved in crossover projects and do not hide their enjoyment of the music they play. In your opinion, is this a change for the better or for the worse? Justify your answer.

OR, Topic = Are Stradivarius violins really so special?

1. In the report you heard that Stradivari instruments are noted for their "craftsmanship" and that they were made "several hundred years" ago. Do some Internet research to get more details on exactly when and where they were made. Share your findings with a partner or with your teacher.
2. In the report you heard Gunther Schuller say "Not everyone can hear the distinction between a Stradivari and another instrument, (...). But, of course, the musicians really can feel that instantly." Do you think you could tell the difference between a Stradivarius and another violin just by listening?
3. Read the following abstract of a recent experiment done with Stradivarius violins and modern violins. It was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. What did the researcher find? The article is written in the academic style of scientific abstracts: can you describe the experiment in your own words?
<http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2012/01/02/1114999109.abstract?sid=c7f382ec-47c7-4718-9a11-a004b5397f93>
4. Listen to the English Addicts report "Secret of the Stradivarius Found by Texas Chemist" from 20 March 2009. What is the message of this report? Does it question the special quality of Stradivarius violins?

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = The Library of Congress.

1. Imagine you are planning a visit to Washington. Using the official site of the Library of Congress (link below) plan a visit to the library. Find out how to get there by public transport, opening times, etc. Using information in the site, plan what you would like to see (your visit can last a complete day if necessary). Compare your planned visit with that of a partner or your teacher. <http://www.loc.gov/index.html>
2. You should now have a good idea about the Library of Congress. Does a similar institution exist in your country? If so, share this information with a partner or your teacher.
3. Using the official site of the Library of Congress, find out some facts about this institution. The pages "Fascinating facts" and "Frequently asked questions" are good places to start. Make a list of four "facts" about the Library of Congress. Three facts should be true and one should be false (but appear to be true). Present your list to a partner or to your teacher, who must guess which is the invented fact.

Audioscript

Music...

The Borromeo String Quartet performed Franz Schubert's Quartet in D minor, "Death and the Maiden," at the Library of Congress in Washington.

The memorial concert takes place every year in December, to mark the anniversary of the death of Antonio Stradivari, a man many consider the master craftsman of stringed instruments.

"Death and the Maiden" was one of three compositions that were played with instruments from the library's unique music collection, which includes six Stradivarius instruments. This year's concert featured two of his violins, a viola and a cello.

"For this concert we wanted something beautiful to show off the rich, rare sound of the instruments."

Ann McLean is the senior concert producer at the Library of Congress.

" 'Death and the Maiden', the Schubert ensemble work, is just universally beloved."

Another precious stringed instrument from the library's collection was featured in Ludwig van Beethoven's Sonata no. 7 in C minor. The quartet's first violinist, Nicholas Kitchen, played a violin made by Stradivari's contemporary, Giuseppe Guarneri, with pianist Seymour Lipkin.

The Library of Congress instrument collection began in 1935 when five Stradivarius instruments were donated by Gertrude Clarke Whittall. Since then, the library's music division has acquired five additional rare stringed instruments through other generous donations.

Those classic instruments are perfectly suited to modern compositions as well. The memorial concert also featured Quartet no. 4 by composer, conductor and jazz historian, Gunther Schuller.

"I have to think not so much about what it does for me in the performance, but to the pleasure of the performers to play on these incredible instruments. Not everyone can hear the distinction between a Stradivari and another instrument, maybe a lesser-made violin, because those are very subtle differences. But, of course, the musicians really can feel that instantly."

Schuller says he often marvels at the craftsmanship that went into the creation of the iconic instruments.

"There is this mystery that we still don't quite know how Stradivarius and Guarneri and some of the other great violin makers..., how they did that. We've been researching that for, well, several hundred years now. And it's all here in this wonderful Library of Congress."

The library plans to continue its yearly tradition of honoring both Antonio Stradivari and its generous benefactor, Gertrude Clarke Whittall, with these special, commemorative concerts.

Julie Taboh, VOA News, Washington.

Music...