A Touch of Classical

PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE

Classical music is an “exact music,” meaning that when a composer writes a piece he or she expects it to be played as written without altering the notes, rhythm or instrumentation. In classical music each performer feels and interprets the music differently so there will be variations in their timing, energy, feel or phrasing while still staying within the confines of the composer’s written work. This is what makes audiences respond differently to various artists playing the same works.

The piano was invented about 300 years ago in Italy and is a stringed keyboard instrument. However, it is classified as a percussion instrument because the pianist strikes the keys to make a sound. The original name of the instrument was the “Pianoforte” or “Fortepiano” because it could play both loudly and softly as opposed to its predecessor the harpsichord which could only play at one dynamic level. When you play a key on a piano, a hammer hits the string or strings. Meanwhile a damper (which is covered in felt) moves away from the strings so they can vibrate. As soon as your finger is off the key, the damper goes back to rest on the string(s) stopping them from vibrating. If the Sustaining Pedal (the one the furthest to the right) is pressed, then the dampers stay up so the strings can continue to vibrate.

THINK ABOUT IT

What classical music have you heard before and where were you when you heard it? Can you hum some of the melody?

Which piece did you most enjoy? What specific things did you notice about it? Did anything surprise you?

DIG DEEPER

To learn more about composers who wrote music for piano, check out The Music Center’s Artsource Curriculum: “George Gershwin”
https://www.musiccater.org/education/Teacher-Resources/Artsource-Curriculum/Available-ArtSource-Units/George-Gershwin/

TRY THIS CHALLENGE

Mexican composer Manuel Ponce’s piece (the only piece in a slow tempo on the program and was for the left hand alone) is called A Pesar de Todo (In Spite of Everything). Taking into account the mood of the piece as well as the title, write a paragraph evaluating what you think this piece expresses. (For example: Love? Loneliness? Dreaming? Fighting? Joyfulness?) Back up your interpretation with musical terms including tempo, forte, piano, legato and staccato.