

Quarantine Oboe Jokes Now!

By Aaron "Dodo" Knacks as told to Jud Barry

People are always telling me "C'mon, Dodo, lighten up," or "Dodo, don't take it so seriously," or "Look, Dodo, people don't really peel M&M's to make chocolate chip cookies. It's just a joke, OK?"

You call peeling M&M's a joke? It is if you're one of those insensitive people who plays Schumann's three Romances like "Three Blind Mice." I'll have you know that peeling M&M's to make chocolate chip cookies is much too onerous and ill-paying to be made light of.

I should know. I almost didn't even get the job because the job description called for a violist, but I put on my sweet-talking best during the interview and described oboe reedmaking to the personnel lady. Boy! Was she sold! Here was someone who knew a thing or two about onerousness! And ill-paying! I should be paying them for the favor of getting to peel M&M's, she said. I thought she was joking, but she wasn't. Then I reminded her why she was hiring me: "He who pays the piper calls the tune."

To which she replied, "She who pays the piper tells him never to play."

People should think before indulging in a cheap chuckle. The humor might come back and bite you. A joke might just reflect the ignorance of the person telling it. For example, this one:

Q: Why is a bassoon better than an oboe? A: Because a bassoon burns longer.

Well, I'm sorry, but I put this one to the test, and I found out that a wooden Heckel bassoon (borrowed from a former friend) takes less time to burn than a plastic Noise-R-Us oboe, which in consumability ranks right up there with a tire dump. Not to mention that the bassoon just plain ol' flamed, whereas the oboe was transformed into a molten state, ran across the floor, ignited the curtains, set the whole trailer on fire, and destroyed it, thus proving to my satisfaction that the plastic Noise-R-Us oboe is worth more than the wooden Heckel bassoon. As they say in geometry class, Q.E.D, which is the Latin abbreviation for "So there!"

And then there's the one that goes Q: What's the difference between a Scud missile and a bad oboist? A: A bad oboist can kill you.

You know, you hear something like that, and you just have to shake your head, because close study of formerly classified defense documents relating to the Gulf War (a.k.a. Operation

Desert Renard by Fox with Third Octave Key \$248 Extra) reveals a hitherto-unknown link between Scuds and oboes.

We can laugh now, but what was it that made us so afraid of Scuds? It was the potential of their warheads to carry chemical or biological agents. It now appears that chief among the biological agents used by the Iraqis included bad oboists--zealous volunteers from the world over, dying for an opportunity to pierce unsuspecting ears and other, even less-suspecting orifices, with the sonic bacteria *Arundo anthrax*. Strapped inside the nosecone, these Kammerkamikazes became potentially the most lethal force since Elvis.

How was Saddam Hussein equipped with this destructive information? An amazing accident. Apparently his spies hacked their way into a top-secret server at MIT. However, they were using machetes, which destroyed all files except the instrument jokes website. Armed only with this tantalizing but incomplete data, the Iraqis, influenced by reactionary Islamic fundamentalists, supplied their oboists with baroque instruments tuned at 415 rather than at 440. As a result, apparently, the missiles always landed almost a half step away from their targets and did damage only in residential areas populated by violists (who did little to protest).

Anyone whose tenuous grasp on life has been threatened by an enthusiastically insensate oboist shudders to think what would have happened had those oboists been armed with instruments at modern pitch. Scud missiles, dangerous AND accurate, would have landed smack-dab on the conductor's podium, the applause from the orchestra would be deafening, and you know what deaf musicians are worth. We'd all have to fall back on our day jobs as our sole source of fulfillment.

This is why I'm not laughing. Peeling M&M's isn't fulfilling. The chocolate confectionary uncoating workplace is a high-stress environment. In fact, on a scale ranking levels of stress from 1 to 10, it's probably approximately just about circa 9.53467982. Not as stressful as, let's say, having to do last-ditch reedmaking during the big concert, because all of your other reeds have been condemned to death by the U.N. war crimes tribunal, a situation that ranks somewhere between 11 and blithering insanity. But it's a high enough ranking that notices occasionally turn up on the staff lounge bulletin board advertising vacations sorting mail at the local post office. So some of my friends (not including the above-mentioned owner of the Heckel that contributed so much to the scientific debunking of a dangerous joke) decided to enroll me in a workshop that promised to help me handle the stress of my present "real" job.

The title of the workshop was "How to Develop Humor as a Coping Skill." Among the topics to be explored were Finding Fun at Work, Finding Humor in Everyday Life, and Finding Humor in the Midst of Stress. This all sounded mildly interesting, but I would rather that the topics had included Finding the Perfect Fibercane Oboe Reed in the Pot of Gold at the End of the Rainbow. Then I could have laughed all the way to the bank after the inauguration of a daily solo gig at Carnegie Hall, which would have been my practice room from then on.

As it was, the workshop prospectus said it would help me develop something called an "amuse" system that would provide me with a Natural Stress Remedy. The only such remedies of which I was aware involved either a consenting adult or a dynamite reed, if not both. Under the circumstances, the first seemed unlikely (although the event was happening at that most notorious of fleshpots of contemporary Babylon, a university) and the second had always been disarmed by my flak-suited embouchure, so I guess I was more than a little dubious and figured that I had been set up to fuel the "amuse" system of my so-called friends.

Much to my amazement, I had a good time. It was encouraging, I admit, when I walked into the room and saw displayed on a projection screen the words, "A Closer Look at Airborne Pathogens." I spent the next hour looking at subtly hilarious slides of rhinovirus, diphtheria, ebola, influenza, tuberculosis, legionella, and a whole menagerie of viruses doing things that were much too funny to discern. People weren't laughing much, but I assumed that they were shy like me and were silently guffawing into their hands pathogens that, as comedians and epidemics, would be real killers.

I didn't think it would be right, however, for the audience to link airborne pathogens only to a personal "amuse" system, so during the comments period I got up and shared with them my serious concerns about Scuds, bad oboists, and Arundo anthrax. The audience greeted my remarks with appreciative, serious laughter.

At the lunch break I ran into my former Heckel-owning friend and in so doing knocked his lunch tray onto the floor. He informed me, as we harvested his peas and carrots from the cafeteria floor, that the humor workshop was next week, and that today was a statewide public health conference. (His attendance at such an event is explained by the fact that he actually gets paid to impersonate a physician. He does this to support his bassoon habit.) I was a little disappointed to find this out, because the airborne pathogens had done a pretty good job of triggering my amuse system. By next week, it would be in a dangerously depressed and susceptible state.

He asked me if he could borrow my Lorée next week for a little experiment he would be performing at the humor workshop. I was so happy. He would be my friend again. "Of course," I said.

On the following Saturday, when I showed up for the workshop, my friend asked me to be part of his presentation. I was very flattered and said I would be. There was something about his experiment that required a demonstration of the oboe and the bassoon, which in this part of the world (i.e. where Elvis never died) are thought by most people to be rare species of the ape family threatened with extinction due to their inability to mate while on the concert stage.

Anyway, my friend played first (on a brand-new Japanese bassoon that folded out into a motorcycle) and of course was greeted by laughter, partly due to his decision to perform the music from a commercial for a popular brand of anti-diarrhea medication. Next, I essayed a discursive, postmodern, multicultural exploration of monophonic microtonality, which wrenched from my listeners copious tears of unabashed incomprehension.

Beaming at my performance, my friend then asked to borrow my oboe. He also said he would need a volunteer from the audience, which might as well be me--would I mind putting on a straitjacket for his demonstration? I was glad to help. Anything for a friend.

With me securely tied, he proceeded to transform from urbane Dr. Heckel into evil Mr. Hyde as he launched into a public demonstration of the joke "What's the difference between an oboe and an onion?" With a sinister leer on his face, he revved up a chainsaw. It was horrifyingly clear what he was about to do to my precious Lorée.

He went for the onion first, but it did not respond as planned to the chainsaw: it flew out from underneath the saw. This caused my friend to lose his balance. He fell off the stage and onto his new bassoon, which was resting on the arms of seats on the front row, well out of harm's way.

The crowd sat in stony silence. It was apparent during the ensuing question and answer time that they were confused and upset by the demonstration, since a bassoon rather than an oboe had been cut up. They just didn't get it, and they stormed out, their amuse systems disengaged, to complain loudly about the non sequitur to the Elvis-impersonating sumo wrestlers in the adjoining room.

So there you have it. Stay away from oboe jokes. They are inconsiderate and inaccurate. As my work shows, they are even dangerous, especially if you live in the vicinity of a bassoon. My former friend is in the hospital recovering from his injuries and can only communicate by crowing

Morse code on a bassoon reed. His vocabulary has also been grievously impaired, as he can only speak to me in words that are four letters long.

Worst of all, he's had two bassoons destroyed in far less time than it takes to boomerang back to Baghdad a Scud missile carrying the Austral strain of Arundo anthrax in an oborigine's duckbilled plateau-fingering didjeridoo d'amore.

In other words, no time at all.