

# SOUNDS FUNNY

What do you get when you cross classical music with Comic Relief? **Jo Caird** finds out

**THE MOST NOISE YOU'LL GET** out of the average audience at a classical music concert is polite applause. At Classic Relief, however, the first classical music event in the history of Comic Relief, the bi-annual charity funfest, things are going to get a lot louder.

'My vision is to show the world what classical music can do,' says Rainer Hersch, a man who has made a career out of finding the funny side of classical music. 'It's not just fuddy-duddies doing music that was written 200 years ago, talking about key changes. It's something that can smack you in the face, and be really funny! Classical music may seem like unlikely material for comedy, but according to Hersch, that is exactly what gives it such potential. 'People have a far too serious impression about how it should be handled. That is a perfect set-up to do comedy.'

Classic Relief will combine Hersch's

irreverent stand-up with humorous arrangements of well-known works. The programme includes Rossini's *William Tell Overture (Ruined)*; Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons (Abbreviated)*; and Strauss's *Pizzicato Polka (to Juggling)*. Hersch plays with the audience's expectations and highlights the fun moments he says are already present in this music.

'All classical composers have got a sense of fun,' Hersch insists. 'The common feature of classical music is the funny movement in the symphony! He sees his role as just a matter of letting the audience relax enough to see the funny side. And with a show that includes conducting-by-juggling and a waltz 'based on tunes from Windows XP', which he credits to 'Bill Gates/Strauss', he succeeds.

Joining him for the two Red Nose Day concerts is a host of top British classical musicians, including the respected pianist Alfred Brendel, the 21-year-

old Scottish violinist Nicola Benedetti and one of Britain's leading percussionists, Evelyn Glennie.

Hersch is keen to open the genre up to young people. The problem, he says, is that too many children 'don't come into contact with classical music. Their feelings about it are governed by a general belief about it rather than what it is'. By involving so many young British musicians in Classic Relief, Hersch hopes to show kids that classical music isn't just for nerds and the middle-aged. 'You can get that taste for it a lot earlier. Me, Evelyn Glennie, Nicola Benedetti – we're normal people who like a good laugh!'

**Classic Relief: A Gala Comedy Concert in support of Comic Relief, 7 Mar, Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, London SE1, tel 0871 663 2500, [www.southbankcentre.co.uk](http://www.southbankcentre.co.uk); 13 Mar, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, tel 0161 907 9000, [www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk](http://www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk)**

Stick it to 'em: Rainer Hersch orchestrates the laughter

