

(The group comes in marching and playing the Alfred Hitchcock theme)

(in Alfred Hitchcock voice:) good evening..

(normal voice) ...I...I mean, good morning! What a nice looking group. How are you all today?

We are Houndog's SaxyQ, saxophone quartet, and we hope to have some fun in our short time together, so just relax.

Our program is based around audience participation, so don't hesitate to ask any questions you might have about this unusual ensemble, or anything else that we might talk about.

Be prepared to join us up here from time to time as we find out a little about music, and, as I said before, have some fun together.

[Introduction of the players and saxophone family:]

Players introduce themselves and their instruments. Each tells:

-their name,

-how long they've been playing,

-any relevant personal tidbits (why they decided to play sax, when they first heard a sax quartet, any particular characteristics about the particular sax that they are playing etc.)

[Each plays highest and lowest note on their horn, and a chromatic scale from bottom to top, top to bottom]

[The bari is last. Get an audience member to come and see how they measure up height wise next to the bari]

[Ask how many altos and sopranos there are in the school chorus]

The unusual and humorous, and at the same time beautiful, sound of these four saxophones playing together is one that is rarely heard, even by many adults. We are curious to hear what comes to mind when you hear this unique sound.

We're going to play an arrangement of a classical piece right now, but I'm not going to tell you the name of it. The name of a piece can give you an idea of what the composer had in mind when he wrote it.

You might have recognized the piece we played when as we marched as the theme from the Alfred Hitchcock show.

Actually, that piece is entitled "The Funeral March of a Marionette". This is what the French composer Charles Gounod had in mind when he wrote the piece. See if you can tell from the music alone what the composer of this next piece had in mind.

(play "Flight of the Bumblebee")

So? anything come to mind?

What if we played it like this...

(play the first part very slowly w/ bari playing the melody like an elephant)

Anything different come to mind?

What was different about the way we played it that time?

How fast a piece is played can have a big effect on what it makes the audience think of. How fast a piece is played has something to do with what musicians call "tempo".

Are there any human beat boxes in the audience?

(get a volunteer to come up and show us his/her best beat.)

Great! Now, can you do a beat like this?

(demonstrate a high hat beat)

Ok. That beat is a very important part of our next piece, which is about yet another creature - we've had a piece about marionettes, a bumblebee, and an elephant so far, see what this next piece brings to mind.

Ok, go...

(everybody starts playing "The Pink Panther" at different speeds)

Hey! wait a second - what's wrong?

When more than one musician is playing at the same time, they need to share

the same beat.

How could we make sure we're all sharing the same beat, and that we start together?

With big bands and orchestras there is a conductor.

Who would you say is the conductor of this quartet?

Actually, we each take turns conducting with body gestures, depending on who is playing the melody.

A common way to get everyone to start together is to "count off" the beat before we start playing.

Let's try this piece one more time, this time with a count off. Try to guess what the composer had in mind when he wrote it.
(count off and play "The Pink Panther" theme)

Henry Mancini had a slinky pink panther in mind when he wrote that piece!
What did it make you think of?

So we see how important the beat is in music. Rhythm and tempo are what you can call the "fast/slow" of music.

Another important aspect of music is Pitch.

Does anyone know what I mean by pitch?

Pitch might be called the "high/low" of music. Pitch has to do with specific sounds, or notes.

Who can tell us how a sound, any sound, in general, is made?

Sound is made by a vibration of some kind.

What is vibrating when you speak?

on a guitar?

on a fire bell?

a violin?

piano?

trumpet?

What is vibrating on the sax?

Each sax has a piece of bamboo on it called a reed which vibrates and creates a sound or a pitch.

The way we get different pitches is to change the length of the string, or the tube that the vibration goes through.

In a band, we have instruments with all lengths of tubes.

What's the shortest instrument in a band? (piccolo)

Longest? (tuba)

Which plays higher pitches, piccolo or tuba?

Which plays lower?

So we see that the longer the tube, the lower the pitch.

The shorter the tube, the higher the pitch.

The four saxophones are like four different tubes. Each sax has a mouthpiece and a reed.

(players take off their mouthpieces and play them, making weird sounds with them)

The mouthpieces with their reeds sound pretty much the same. But when the mouthpiece is put on the tube...(players put mouthpieces on saxes) the sound that comes out of the other end depends on the length of the tube.

(each horn plays an open C#)

Based on the demonstration we had earlier, which sax would you think has the lowest note? the highest?

[the three players behind the speaker gesture towards themselves as if to say "pick me!"]

[a little contest breaks out each trying to "out do" the other: "oh yeah? I can play lower than that..." "oh yeah? well I can play higher than you" etc. until all the

horns are screeching to play higher than the next. Bari plays resounding low A to end it]

Ok, ok guys, cool off! I think everybody gets the point! Let's play a piece now and let the people listen to how the four voices and their ranges of pitch can be combined.

(play "The Entertainer")

So now you know about two important aspects of music: Rhythm or fast/slow, and Pitch which is high/low.

While each sax has its own range of pitches, there are some notes that they have in common.

[play series of unisons]

This brings us to a third aspect of music called harmony.

Who can tell us what harmony is?

Harmony is when more than one instrument play at the same time, and play different notes.

The combinations of notes can be heard as the consonant/dissonant aspect of music.

Consonant means the combination of notes is rather calm, easy on the ear.

[play chords, 1,4, and 7]

Dissonant means the combination of notes is grating, hard to listen to, and makes you go like this...(skrunch up face like eating a lemon)

[play chords 2,9, and 11]

Changing one note in a chord can make the difference between consonant and dissonant.

[play chords 1 through 11, the player who's note changes stands up]

Let's see if you hear the difference between consonant and dissonant:

[play chords 12 through 20. After each one the audience is asked consonant or dissonant]

Over the centuries, composers have used consonance and dissonance in different ways.

Here are two examples of harmony. The first was written in the late 1800's by Brahms.

(play Brahms "choral")

What kind of mood does that put you in? What came to mind?

This second harmony example is from a modern composition by DuBois.

(play religious variation)

What did that bring to mind?

Actually, both composers were trying to convey a religious mood or feeling.

The last aspect of music that we'd like to talk about today is melody.

Who can describe melody?

Melody is basically the theme, or the part of a song that you can sing.

Melodies usually begin with a couple of pitches: a musical idea or seed, which then develops into a full blown piece (no pun intended!). In this next piece, the composer used a short little fragment of notes to base his melody on.

[alto plays motive of "Praeludium"]

Over the course of the piece, the composer gives this little fragment to each of the saxes, and weaves them into a beautiful little piece.

What we would like you to do during the playing of this next piece is pay close attention to how many times the seed, or motive [demonstrate motive again] is heard.

Now, it can be a little confusing sitting out in the audience and trying to count

how many times you hear this little motive go by. So we'd like to give four people a better chance by having them come up and stand behind each sax, and see if they can keep count, while the rest of you keep track in your seats, or just take in the overall experience. No calculators please!

(play "Praeludium")

Any guesses?

That is our program for today. Thank you so much for your help and participation.

We hope you now have an idea of what four of the important aspects of music are:

Rhythm - fast/slow

Pitch - high/low

Harmony - consonant/dissonant

Melody - singability.

Try to listen for these things in the music that you listen to.

We also hope you enjoyed hearing this unusual sound of four saxophones playing together. We'd like to end by playing a piece that was written with the unique sound of a saxophone quartet in the composer's mind. So take in the overall sound, let your minds wander, and have fun.