

# The weather has tuned out nice again

By Pilita Clark,  
Environment Correspondent

Britain's rotten weather has been blamed for everything from sudden plunges in high street sales to a national predilection for warm beer.

Now it turns out it may also have made the country's composers twice as likely to write music with a climate theme as their counterparts abroad.

British composers "easily lead the way with musical weather", say two atmospheric scientists from the universities of Oxford and Reading, who have studied how often weather is depicted in classical orchestral music, from the 17th century to today.

The French and the Germans come next, according to the researchers, Dr Karen Aplin from Oxford university's physics department and Dr Paul Williams from the University of Reading's department of meteorology.

"You could put it down to the stereotype that the British are more obsessed about

the weather," said Dr Aplin. "But our climate is more variable than others... We're influenced by more Atlantic systems."

As all music lovers know, she added, "the hint of a distant storm from a drum roll can be just as evocative as the skies depicted by Constable and Monet."

The two scientists, both of whom are classical music enthusiasts, said the meteorological phenomenon most popular among musicians was the storm, which is "often used as an allegory for emotional turbulence, such as in Benjamin Britten's *Four Sea Interludes* from the opera *Peter Grimes*". Wind turned out to be the second most popular, from a gentle breeze rustling the trees, such as that at the beginning of the third movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, to a full-blown Antarctic gale such as in Vaughan Williams' *Sinfonia Antarctica*.

Dr Williams said the research, which the two undertook outside their normal scientific work, revealed that composers

were generally influenced by their own environment in the type of weather they chose to represent.

"As befits the national stereotype, British composers seem disproportionately keen to depict the UK's variable weather patterns and stormy coastline," he said.

Strauss needed both sunshine and the Alpine landscape to inspire him, the two said, while other composers, such as Berlioz, Schubert and Wagner, also

depended on fair weather conditions for their best output.

Wagner, for example, constantly wrote about weather conditions, complaining frequently about its impact on his work in his letters.

The Met Office welcomed the new study. "We love the weather and we're glad when everyone else loves the weather as well," said spokesman Dave Britton, adding classical music was by no means the only genre in which weather was well represented.

"There's [rock bands] Snow Patrol, Arctic Monkeys," he said, "and there's thousands of songs. Weather is always there in people's minds. It just goes to demonstrate the importance of weather in everyone's lives." The scientists' new research, which is to be published in the Royal Meteorological Society journal *Weather*, defines weather-themed music in a number of ways, from the title of a work, to what a composer has said has inspired the piece.



Going down a storm: the Arctic Monkeys Alex Turner

