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British composers are obsessed with the weather

Research confirms national stereotype extends to music

It's true, Brits are obsessed with the weather, even composers (photo: Shutterstock)

Research by the Universities of Oxford and Reading has shown that British composers are twice as likely to write music about weather than their international counterparts.

Dr Karen Aplin and Dr Paul Williams, experts in atmospheric physics and meteorology, have analysed the depiction of the weather in orchestral music from the 17th century to the present day.

'British composers seem disproportionately keen to depict the UK's variable weather patterns and stormy coastline,' revealed Dr Williams. 'Their works befit the national stereotype'. Our musical obsession with the weather was distantly followed by the French and then the Germans.

Aplin and Williams note the importance of weather in 20th-century British masterworks, such as Britten's Four Sea Interludes and Vaughan Williams's Sinfonia Antarctica. The obsession extends to living composers. In a Podcast from 2009, Sally Beamish recalls her precocious eight-year old self 'insisting that I could write much better storm music than that,' on hearing rehearsals of Peter Grimes at Sadler's Wells.

It comes as no surprise that composers are highly influenced by their surrounding environment. In a letter to Clara Schumann, Brahms wrote of 'the most dreadful thunderstorm. It looked as if the whole city were aflame...it must be an earthquake, or the end of the world.' It was in this summer of 1885 that Brahms completed his Symphony No 4 in ominous E minor.

'Meteorological phenomena in Western classical orchestral music' will be published by the Royal Meteorological Society in October 2011, in *Weather*, and is also available online from today.

<http://www.gramophone.co.uk/classical-music-news/british-composers-are-obsessed-with-the-weather>