

CLASSICS 4 KIDS: Music Inspired by Mark Twain

Good morning and welcome to Classics 4 Kids. I'm your host, Kathy Lawton Brown. We have a very special show for you today, which links to visual and audio resources on our website, Classic1073.org.

The year of 2021 was Missouri's "Bicentennial" year...that means its 200th anniversary. On August 10th, 1821, Missouri officially became the 24th state in the union. The Missouri State Historical Society celebrated the occasion for an entire year!

One of Missouri's most notable characters was a gentleman named Samuel Clemens...he was a journalist, a riverboat captain and a famous speaker and much more, but you might know him best by the name he adopted as his pen name (his author's name) ... Mark Twain.

In November of 1835, 14 years after Missouri gained her statehood, Samuel was born in Florida, MO – in Monroe County, about 24 miles from Hannibal. The 6th of 7 children, he was 4 when his family moved to the much larger city of Hannibal. There he had a wonderful boyhood growing up on the Mississippi River, where he met fascinating people with all sorts of backgrounds and life experiences. He loved listening to their stories and songs, which gave him great insights into human nature, and helped him create the colorful characters that we all know and love. There's Jim, a loyal, honorable man who was a runaway slave living in Missouri just before the Civil War; Becky Thatcher, one of the neighborhood girls; and of course, the two unforgettable boys, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn.

When Samuel was only 11, his father passed away and he had to leave school to work as a printer's apprentice. There he got his first taste of news from far beyond Hannibal – from all around the world,

actually – and it inspired him. When he turned 18, he headed east to New York and Philadelphia, working as a journalist for several newspapers.

All this experience came in very handy later on, because several years later, he began writing short stories, with his first published in 1867, *“The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County”*...isn't that a great title? It was about frog-jumping contest in a mining area of California and how a stranger slipped buckshot into a frog's stomach so the expected winner couldn't get off the ground! Because of his natural sense of humor and the colorful stories and characters of his boyhood, Samuel's writing had a special twinkle and appeal. Starting with his frog story, he quickly became a well-known writer.

Several of Samuel's stories and books had already been published by 1881, when he released the novel, *“The Prince and the Pauper.”*

The story is about two identical boys, born on the same day. The first was a real historical person, the youngest son of King Henry the VIII, Edward Tudor, (later King Edward VI), who was born to a life of royal splendor. The other boy (the fictional one) was Tom Canty, the pauper, who lived in the slums on Pudding Lane with an abusive father who forced him to beg in the streets.

In the story, Edward rescues Tom from a rough palace guard, and has him brought inside. When the two boys try on each other's clothes, they look so much alike, they both get mistaken by the guards. They toss Prince Edward out into the streets to make his own way, while Tom, who has no idea how to behave like royalty, causes the nobility to think he's going mad. In these very different circumstances, each boy learns many lessons about life and how to be a better person. Eventually their mistaken identities get straightened out. Edward grants Tom a title, and then, because of what he learned when he was living in the streets, he changes laws to improve the lives of the poor people.

This story was first made into a film in 1937, directed by William Keighley [*pron.* KEETH-lee] and starring real-life twins Billy & Bobby Mauch, and adult actors Errol Flynn and Claude Rains. The original film score was recorded by the Warner Brothers Studio Orchestra, with the score's composer, Erich Korngold, conducting. The recording we hear today is played by the London Symphony Orchestra under André Previn. Mark Twain's timeless story, *The Prince and the Pauper*...

PART II

As we continue learning about and celebrating the life and times of one of Missouri's favorite sons, Samuel Clemens – or Mark Twain – let's look at a few other aspects of his life. He was one of the most interesting people who ever lived! For one thing, he was a river boat captain – we'll learn more about that in a few minutes. In 1861, riverboat traffic was halted because of the Civil War. Samuel found himself out of a job. But his brother OR-ion (spelled like Orion) had helped Abraham Lincoln, who then appointed him Secretary for the Nevada Territory – it wasn't even a state yet. So Sam arranged for the two of them to travel there. (It was in Nevada that he adopted his pen name "Mark Twain".) He stayed there with his brother for a while, and tried his hand at gold mining.

Truth be told, Samuel Clemens wasn't much of a miner...but you can bet he got a lot of stories out of the experience. And, true to form, he managed to laugh about them. For instance, he once said, "The definition of a mine is 'a hole in the ground with a liar standing next to it.'"

His ability to find humor in almost any situation set him apart not only as a writer, but also as a popular speaker. The cantata we're about to listen to, written by Gregg S. Smith, is based on Mark Twain's humor

and satire. (Mr. Smith's widow, Rosalind, graciously provided all the lyrics that you'll find on the website.) Here is **The Mark Twain Cantata – Songs of Humor and Satire** by Gregg S. Smith – sung by the Gregg Smith Singers.

Continuing with our exploration of Samuel Clemens' (or Mark Twain's) life, we begin to realize how deeply attached he was to the river. One well-known fact is that he was a riverboat pilot. That might not mean much to us these days, but being the captain of a riverboat was (and still is) a VERY difficult job that requires great skill and knowledge. You see, the flow of the water causes silt and sand on the riverbeds to constantly shift, which means that the depth of the water can change, sometimes a great deal in a very short period of time. The pilot had to know how to read those waters and stay in the channel, the deepest part of the river. Often, especially after a flood or a drought, the captain would need to know exactly how deep the water was so that the riverboat wouldn't run aground. The 'leadsman' would stand up front and measure the depth of the water with a rope that had a lead plum or weight on the end of it. He would call out the depth in fathoms – one fathom equals 6 feet. So if he had two fathoms, he would call out two – or 'twain'. So Mark Twain, Samuel Clemens' pen name, literally means "Two Fathoms". OK – so if one mark or fathom is six feet deep, how deep is mark twain? Right – twelve feet! Good job! Kind of interesting he chose that for a name, isn't it?

During the 1800s, there were all sorts of hazards for riverboat captains. Besides their steam engines blowing up, which they often did, one of the worst dangers was the tree stumps that had broken away from the river banks and floated downstream. In those days, river boats (also called packets) were steam-driven. Steam was created by burning wood to heat water. The steam then turned the gears to the large paddle wheel, usually in the back of the boat, but there were also some side-wheelers. When the crews cut down trees for wood, it was easier to cut them about waist-high, but that left tall stumps. The constant flow of the river slowly eroded the banks,

exposing the tree bottoms and roots. Eventually they would break away and float down river, often just below the surface. And because they were flowing with the current, they would hit the boat head-on, smashing a deep hole into the hull and sinking the packet. It was really quite a problem, and hundreds of river boats were sunk by tree stumps. That was one of the many things that riverboat captains had to watch for. But it was also a lot of fun being on the river... and it still is!

Let's take a little ride with Howard Hanson and the Eastman-Rochester Orchestra as we travel down the Mississippi River! The piece, written by Ferde Grofe (the same composer who wrote the Grand Canyon Suite) is in 4 descriptive movements. We start at the headwaters, or, as he called it, the ***Father of The Waters***, where we begin to feel all the waters coming together and flowing. We then hear a perky march on either side of a quiet section depicting – who else? – ***Huckleberry Finn***, one of our favorite Mark Twain characters. The third moment is the laid-back feeling of ***Old Creole Days***. We end our journey with the easy-going southern hospitality of ***Mardi gras***.
Mississippi Suite by Ferde Grofe.

Mark Twain was a truly remarkable man. Besides what we've already mentioned, he was also a publisher and an entrepreneur, but it was primarily his humor that made him one of America's most beloved writers and lecturers. So many of his sayings came out of good old-fashioned common sense that began developing when he was still a boy in Hannibal. He also had the deep conviction that it was important to treat people – all people – the way he wanted to be treated. For instance, he used to say, "Kindness is the language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

And how about these two quotes? "Give every day the chance to become the most beautiful day of your life." And... "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why."

We're going to listen to a Doobie Brothers piece, written in 1974 and called "Black Water". According to the group's website, it's a song about the Mississippi River. Its lyrics are likely inspired by Mark Twain's books *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, and the stories about rafting down the river. Written by guitarist Patrick Simmons, who also sang lead, it has the 'Louisiana swamp rock' feel of a couple of the group's earlier songs

Their record company never thought it would be a hit! But it started getting played on the radio in Roanoke, VA, and then in Minneapolis, MN. The Doobie Brothers' front man, Tom Johnston remarked, "...then all of a sudden it became #1, and we've been playing it ever since."

And no wonder! Listen closely to the end after the instrumental break – all the different vocal phrases cleverly layered on top of each other. Really fascinating... and catchy!

It seemed that "Black Water" was a good way to wrap up our visit with Mark Twain today. If you're not there already, be sure to visit our website and enjoy all the great resources that are waiting there... **Classic 1073.org**. And I'll leave you with one final piece of advice from Mark Twain..."If we were meant to talk more than listen, we would have two mouths and one ear." (Now wouldn't that look odd?!)

I'm your host, Kathy Lawton Brown, reminding you to share that beautiful spirit and that dazzling smile of yours with at least 3 people every single day – especially with somebody who needs it – and just see how their day (and yours) brightens up! I'll see you next Saturday at 9 right here on Classic 107.3 for Classics 4 Kids.