Peter Schickele is arguably the most important music humorist in the history of Western music. He performs and composes humorous works under the pseudonyms of two fictitious personae, Professor Schickele and P.D.Q. Bach. The former discovers the works written by the latter, who is the supposedly the twenty-first child of J.S. Bach. These alternate personae allow Schickele to maintain a separate career as a composer of serious concert music.

Although Schickele’s music has been well received, few authors have explored his life and works in a serious manner. His humorous classical music, the oeuvre with which he is most often associated, lacks careful examination, classification, and formal understanding.

Prior studies have asserted that the musical humor of Peter Schickele largely derives from the music itself. This study shows his humor is far more complex. An examination of his audience preparation, visual, aural, and theatrical elements, and masterful command of context reveals a complex, organic, and symbiotic methodology for musical humor that cannot be completely understood by an examination of his scores and audio recordings.

Schickele’s live DVD, *P.D.Q. Bach Live in Houston: We Have a Problem!*, allows this study to identify audience responses and discover the strategies for humor that caused them. This procedure neutralizes the need to define humor, musical affect, and compositional intention prescriptively. It also permits an examination of Schickele’s most important, yet neglected strategy for humor: Theatrical. When coupled with earlier studies by Rosanna Dalmonte, David Huron, and Tammy Ravas, the analytical model developed in this study offers a new mechanism for understanding musical humor that not only accounts for Schickele’s humorous strategies written in the score, but more importantly, it classifies and categorizes numerous procedures for humor that have never been documented.

The Analyses of Schickele’s humorous parody of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, Movement I, and *Schleptet in Eb Major* illuminate how compositions typically perceived as instrumental works are transformed during his performance into works highly
dependent upon visual and/or verbal humor. More importantly, these humorous procedures often become the focus of the performance, though many of them, as will be seen, are not directed in the score.