

BRIEF SURVEY OF WESTERN MUSICAL STYLES

Music in Western civilization has undergone several major style phases, but it is perhaps simplest to think of them in this chronological sequence:

1. **EARLY MUSIC** (c1100BC-1700AD)
2. **COMMON-PRACTICE MUSIC** (c1700-1900):
3. **MODERN MUSIC** (c1900-present):

Within each category are style subdivisions that you may be familiar with:

EARLY MUSIC

- **Ancient Greek and Roman** music (c1100BC-450AD)
- **Medieval** music (c450-1450)
- **Renaissance** music (c1450-1600)
- **early Baroque** music (c1600-1700)

COMMON-PRACTICE MUSIC

- **late-Baroque** music (c1700-1750)
- **Classic** music (c1750-1820)
- **Romantic** music (1820-1900)

MODERN MUSIC (c1900-present)

- **early 20th-century** music (c1900-1945)
- **Avant-garde** music (cutting-edge experimental music)
- **Modern Popular** music

Each of these historical eras is covered in greater depth in specific chapters of this webbook, but here is a quick basic overview of the stylistic distinctions of Western music.

1. EARLY MUSIC

Ancient Greek and Roman Music (c1100BC-450AD)

The word "music" comes from **the muses** (the daughters of Zeus and patron goddesses of creative and intellectual endeavors). Music was an essential part of Greek life, and they gave us many concepts and terms that we still use today; however, almost no examples of ancient Greek written music have survived, and it is uncertain how to interpret the notation of the examples we do have. What we know about ancient Greek music comes primarily from written philosophical commentaries and epic poetry, sculptures/pottery depicting musicians, and the remains of preserved instruments. After conquering the Greek states by 146AD, the Romans adopted Greek musical traditions and preserved them, eventually passing them on to the Medieval era.



Figure 1: An ancient Greek vase depicting a lyre player.

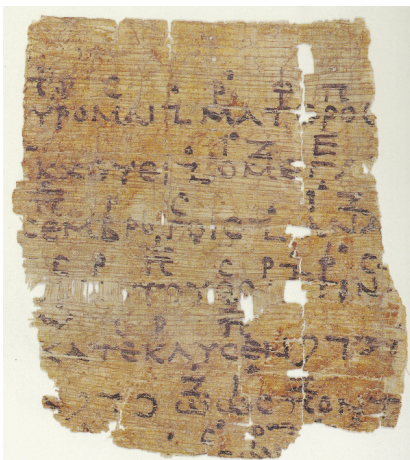


Figure 2: A fragment of written ancient Greek music

Medieval Music (c450-1450)

Music in the Middle Ages or Medieval era began as **monophonic chant**, such as this *Haec dies* chant for written for Easter Sunday c800:

Example: Anonymous--*Haec dies* chant

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xxox8JF1gyw>



Figure 3: A beautiful handwritten Medieval chant manuscript.

Around 1000 A.D., harmony was added through the interaction of multiple simultaneous vocal lines, creating new types of **polyphony** that gradually expanded in rhythm, harmony and texture until reaching an extremely complex style in the late 1300s, such as this example by Guillaume de Machaut from c1350 ("

Example: Machaut--"Agnus Dei" from the *Mass of Notre Dame*

(translation= "Lamb of God [Jesus], who takes away the sins of the world have mercy on us.")

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHRAYbgdxew#t=00m09s>

Renaissance Music (c1450-1600)

In contrast to the ragged and rather unpredictable complex phrasing and rhythms of late-Medieval music, the Renaissance choral style was smooth, controlled, and expressive, with **imitation** (echoed entrances) as an essential feature.

Leading Renaissance composers who used these techniques are **Josquin Desprez, Palestrina, and Weelkes.**

Here is an example of a piece by Josquin Desprez written around 1510 and dedicated to the Virgin Mary:

Example: Josquin Desprez--*Ave Maria...virgo serena*

(translation of the first line: "Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you, serene Virgin.")

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwCtYOb2OA4>

In the later 1500s, sacred choral music got even bigger in scope, and richer/more expressive in sound:

Example: Giovanni da Palestrina--"Agnus Dei" from the *Pope Marcellus Mass*

(translation of the first line: "Lamb of God [Jesus], who takes away the sins of the world have mercy on us.")

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhJTMa8iq3I>

Renaissance secular music also became popular, such as dances and various types of love songs sung by small one-singer-on-a-part ensembles, such as this English madrigal from 1601 by Weelkes:

Example: Thomas Weelkes--*As Vesta Was From Latmos Hill Descending*

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_VkA_qk9os



Figure 4: A 6-voice Elizabethan madrigal ensemble.

Early-Baroque Music (c1600-1700)

Shortly after 1600, Italian composers began to experiment with new ways to make their music move the souls of their listeners. In the process, they invented new ways to expressively sing, which gave rise to **opera**--an intense theatrical music genre combining dramatic solo singing with instrumental accompaniment, choral scenes, as well as acting, staging and scenery.

The earliest types of opera were highly experimental, such as this scene from Monteverdi's opera *L'Orfeo* from 1607, which retells the famous Greek tragedy of Orpheus--a young shepherd whose bride, Euridice, dies from a serpent bite during their wedding celebration in the forest:

Example: Claudio Monteverdi--"Tu sei morta" from *L'Orfeo*

(translation of the first line: "You are dead, my life, but I'm still breathing?...")

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ll_u870PG8



Figure 5: A painting of Orpheus trying to guide his dead wife Euridice out of Hades.

2. "COMMON-PRACTICE" MUSIC

Late-Baroque Music (c1700-1750)

During the so-called "Common-Practice Period" (1700-1900), European composers all wrote similar types of vocal and instrumental works with "home" key-centered harmony known as **tonality**. This music became the staple of public concert halls for two hundred years. It began around 1700 with the **late-Baroque style** that was focused on **dramatic contrast** and designed to evoke specific emotional responses from the listener.

Much late-Baroque music was written in **polyphonic counterpoint** (with several complex *independent* melodic lines occurring simultaneously within a work). Instruments were now used to accompany all types of vocal music. Sacred and secular styles became more similar, and purely instrumental music became widespread. thus, **it is best to make distinctions between Baroque vocal and instrumental music.**



Figure 6: A painting of Baroque musicians.

The leading composers of the late Baroque are **Vivaldi**, **JS Bach**, and **Handel**--all of whom were intensely dramatic composers who effectively used contrasting aspects in their works:

Example: Johann Sebastian Bach--"Little" Fugue in G minor (c1709)

Note: This piece is constructed as a "Fugue", which is a complex manipulation of a musical "subject" put against various types of opposing counterpoint. This fugue has four simultaneous melodic voices (three played by two hands, and the lowest played by the feet!)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1XD1MSES_8

Example: Georg Frideric Handel--"Hallelujah" from Messiah (1741)

Note: This choral movement from Handel's 52-movement oratorio, *Messiah*, depicts the joy of Christ's resurrection and eternal reign. Similar to Bach's example above, it features intricate fugal counterpoint.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtWkNxn3duA>

Example: Antonio Vivaldi--"Spring" mvt 1, from The Four Seasons (1723)

Note: *The Four Seasons* is a large work comprised of four 3-movement **concertos** for solo violin and orchestra (Mvt1:Fast, Mvt2:Slow, Mvt3:Very Fast)--one 3-mvt concerto for each season (Winter, Spring, Summer, Autumn). This example is the first movement of the "Spring" concerto.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKthRw4KjEg#t=0m3s>

Music of the Classic Era (c1750-1820)

During the Classic Era, composers sought balance, clarity, and resolution in their works. They wrote distinct **themes** (main melodies), and developed clear musical formal designs based on **tonality** (home-key centered music). These forms and related terms are covered in greater depth in the Webook chapter "Music in The Classic Era." The leading composers of the Classic Era are **Haydn**, **Mozart**, and **Beethoven**, all of whom were commoners during an age of political revolution.

The most dramatic and influential musical design created in the Classic Era is **sonata form**---a debate between two opposing harmonic key centers (the "home" key vs. some "other" key):

EXPOSITION (Tonal Opposition)

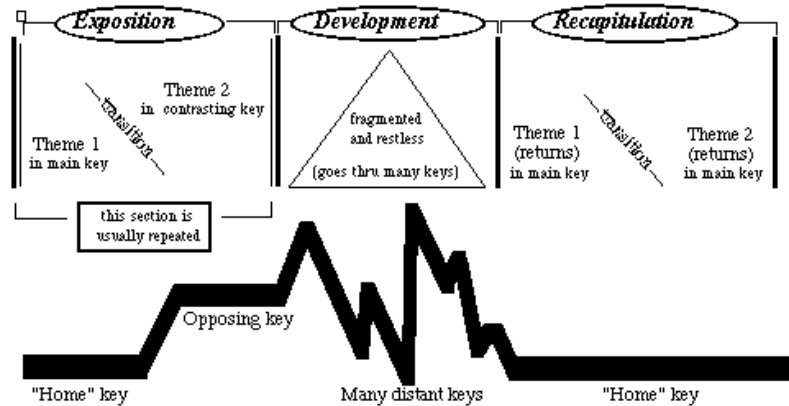
The two opposing key centers (and associated themes) are introduced: **Theme 1** is in the "home" key; **Theme 2** is in a **different key**--the two are separated by a "Transition" passage. [The Exposition section is often repeated before moving on to the Development]

DEVELOPMENT (Escalation of tension)

The material passes rapidly through many distant keys, and may be fragmented/reworked in a variety of ways.

RECAPITULATION (Tonal Resolution)

Theme 1 and **Theme 2** both appear in the "home" key. (In the tradition of Classic debate, **Theme 2** realizes its *weaker* stance, and wholeheartedly throws its support to its opponent's *stronger* argument--the "home" key.)



A famous example of **sonata form** design is the first movement of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* ("A Little Night Music")--a **serenade** for small string ensemble:

Example: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart--Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, 1st movement (1787)

Note: This YouTube example has written commentary labels in French, but the section divisions are easy to match to the english terminology above.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEdwkm1fqnc>

During the "common-practice period", most instrumental works had four movements: (Mvt.1:Fast, Mvt.2:Slow, Mvt.3:Medium, Mvt.4:Very Fast), including symphonies [for orchestra], sonatas [for 1 or 2 instruments], and string quartets [for 2 violins, viola, and cello].

Example: Franz Josef Haydn--Symphony No. 94, 2nd movement (1791)

Note: This is the slow second movement of Haydn's Symphony 94, which states a **theme** and then varies it several times (a formal design known as **Theme and Variations**).

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNwMXj0Y1_Y

Example: Ludwig van Beethoven--String Quartet in C minor, Op.18, No.4, 4th movement (c1798)

Note: Beethoven brought a new attitude and power to music through his symphonies, sonatas, and string quartets. Here is the exciting final 4th movement to one of his early string quartets--a movement that states its main idea ("A") in alternation with two other contrasting ideas ("B" and "C") to create a **rondo form**:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vL-AIDdlrT8>

Example: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart--Final Scene from *Don Giovanni* (1787)

Note: Mozart wrote many kinds of music, but was especially daring and social-revolutionary in his theatrical works. *Don Giovanni* is an **opera** that depicts lower class servants struggling against the self-indulgent excesses of the out-of-control aristocrat, Don Juan. In this final scene, Don Juan is "visited" by the Commander he had previously killed in the first act, whose soul cannot find its eternal rest until he either convinces Don Juan to repent for his evils or drags him down with the demons of Hell.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0lv28yYMCc>

Music of the Romantic Era (c1820-1900)

Around 1820, composers took the anti-establishment lead from Beethoven's experimental late works, and began an era of flamboyant and colorful personal expression known as **Romanticism**. Music got bigger, longer, louder, more colorful, and more daring. A wave of musical **nationalism** resulted that promoted the individual musical traditions, native tongues, and politics of the composer's native country.

As composers began to write for paying audiences, instrumental **programmatic music** (music intended to tell a story or evoke a specific image through sound) became more popular than **absolute music** (musical sound with no story or extra-musical reference). Some representative composers of the Romantic Era are **Schubert** (Austria), **Berlioz** (France), **Chopin** (Poland), **Wagner** (Germany), and **Tchaikovsky** (Russia).



Figure 7: A painting depicting a fantasized gathering of several famous Romantic composers.

Examples of Romantic Programmatic Instrumental Music

Example: Frederic Chopin--Nocturne in E flat major (1831)

Note: This **character piece** (1-movement programmatic work for piano) is an expressive "nocturne" that stirs up nighttime recollections of one's sweetheart.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EvxS_bJ0yOU

Example: Hector Berlioz--Symphonie Fantastique, 4th movement "March to the Gallows" (1830)

Note: This **program symphony** (a multi-movement work for orchestra that tells a specific story) is a "symphonic fantasy" about a distraught young man who is rejected by his lover and then tries to commit suicide by taking an overdose of opium. He doesn't take quite enough and ends up having five increasingly-intense hallucinagetic dreams about the woman. In this fourth movement, he dreams that he murders his lover and then is sentenced to death by guillotine. After his head is cut off, there is a fifth movement in which the woman gets her revenge by haunting him for eternity as a witch. To make sure that his audience understood, at the public premiere of this work Berlioz was the first composer to provide program notes for his audience.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roX70PAu3oA#t=0m8s>

Example: Peter Tchaikovsky--"March" from The Nutcracker (1892)

Note: This **ballet** (programmatic theatrical work for dancers and orchestra) depicts a child's Christmas Eve fantasy with dolls and tin soldiers that come to life at midnight to fight the evil Mouse Queen.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0GImuXg6qQs>

Examples of Romantic Vocal Music

Example: Franz Schubert--Erlkonig (1815)

Note: This **Lied** (German song) by Schubert is based on a text by Goethe. The singer has to portray four different characters (narrator, father, son, Erlking) accompanied by a piano depicting a horse's pounding hooves. The singer begins in the role of a narrator who sets the scene of young boy who is being rushed someone in his father's arms on the back of a galloping horse in the dark of night. The boy screams out to his father every time he sees the Erlking (a spectre of death) appearing in the misty woods. The father tries to calm the boy, but eventually he becomes as fearful as his son. The child sees

the Erking trying to sweetly beckon him to death, but soon the Erking grows impatient and just takes the child by force. At the end of this 4-minute song that accelerates and intensifies like a rocket, the horse finally stops at its destination, but the father looks in his arms and his son is dead.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XP5RP6OEJI>

Example: Richard Wagner--"Die Walkure" from *The Ring of the Nibelungs* (1815)

Note: Wagner was the most influential composer of the Romantic era. His works were full of socio-political meaning and controversy. He significantly increased the brass power of the orchestra, and established new expectations for theatrical singers and producers. He called his stageworks "**Musikdramas**" to highlight their German political focus and language that was very different from Italian opera. *The Ring of the Nibelungs* is a massive 4-night/20-hour Musikdrama that depicts the eternal struggle between the Nordic Gods and mortals to possess the power of a magic ring. In this youtube scene from the second night, Siegmund pulls a magic sword from a tree because he needs to defend Sieglinde in a duel the next morning with her abusive husband.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r0qEUMX2UaE#t=5m48s>

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3. MODERN MUSIC

Around 1900, a new way of thinking about music started to emerge, opening the way to "Modern Music", in which each composer established their own sound and musical language, and each piece of music was an opportunity to explore entirely new musical aspects.

Early Modern Music (c1900-1945)

In the first half of the 20th century, composers began to think very differently from the past, creating new and completely individual compositional approaches. The most important of these early pioneers of modern music are **Debussy** (France), **Schoenberg** (Austria), and **Stravinsky** (Russia).

Example: **Claude Debussy--Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun (1894)**

Note: This *symphonic poem* (1-movement programmatic work for orchestra) established the new modern style of *French impressionism* by using woodwind color, subtle dynamics, and sensual floating harmonies that evoke the dreams and erotic fantasies of the pagan forest creature "Pan" (half man/half goat).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rB6VOY55hxw>

Example: **Arnold Schoenberg--"Moondruck" from Pierrot lunaire (1912)**

Note: This example is the song No. 1 of a 21-song cycle for singer and small orchestra that depicts the internal psycho-emotional drama of a "lunatic" (someone controlled by the cycles of the moon, who get particularly intense when the moon is full). This style of German expressionism established the new modern style of *Austro-German expressionism* is intended to disturb the listener and put them in a troubled mindset. This music is *atonal* (has no home key), focuses on dissonant harmonies not heard before, and the singer is doing *Sprechstimme* (speaking and singing in an eerie ghost-story type of voice). By the end of this song, the obsessed lunatic is literally drunk on moonrays!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UV-GoWf2Yfw>

[Translation of the first few lines: "At night, the moon drenches thirsting eyes, and a flood wells up on their still horizon. Tremored sighs travel up through the swelling emotion, as waves of wine for thirsty eyes gush forth from the moon at night. The poet, deep in devotion to the moon grows drunk of this "holy drink"..."]

Example: Igor Stravinsky--*The Rite of Spring* (1913)

Note: Stravinsky was the most influential early pioneer of modern music. He was one of the first composers to shift the primary focus of his musical style to **rhythm** and **tone color**. His landmark *ballet, The Rite of Spring*, explores new instrumental colors/combinations, and features harsh, irregular **rhythmic accents** and **ostinatos** (short, repeated musical figures) that create strong percussive effects with the entire orchestra. The work depicts the cruelty of society--in this case by bestowing the "greatest honor" upon a young woman by being chosen as a human sacrifice.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jF1OQkHybEQ>

Avant-garde

While some composers continued to write more conservative/traditional music, many composers--particularly Americans--have strived to be on the forefront ("**avant-garde**") of musical experimentation. A few examples of this are shown below:

Example: Henry Cowell--*The Banshee* (1925)

Note: This avant-garde *character piece* (1-movement programmatic work for piano) evokes the image of a Banshee (a legendary Irish spirit that comes to transport a dead soul to the afterlife, but shrieks in excruciating pain when it has to pass through the dimensional wall of our world to perform its task). Cowell uses this *traditional* grand piano in *unusual* ways to accomplish this: one performer holds down the piano's sustain pedal, while the other performer creates a myriad of unusual sounds by *directly manipulating the strings of the instrument*.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrMga6Bcabl&feature=related>

Example: John Cage--*4'33"* (1952)

Note: Perhaps the biggest musical and philosophical avant-garde break with the past is Cage's *4'33"*--a piece based on four minutes and 33 seconds of silence from the performer (there wasn't silence from the audience at the first performance, and *that* unpredictable and colorful response from audience was the new "music" Cage was looking for in this piece. As a prefatory explanation to this work, Cage brilliantly and rather tongue-in-cheek said "The material of music is sound and silence; integrating these is *composing*. I have *nothing to say*...and I am saying it). In doing so, Cage shows us that **anything** can be considered music, if it is intended to express a musical idea.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MT7S8rNY9Jk&feature=youtu.be>

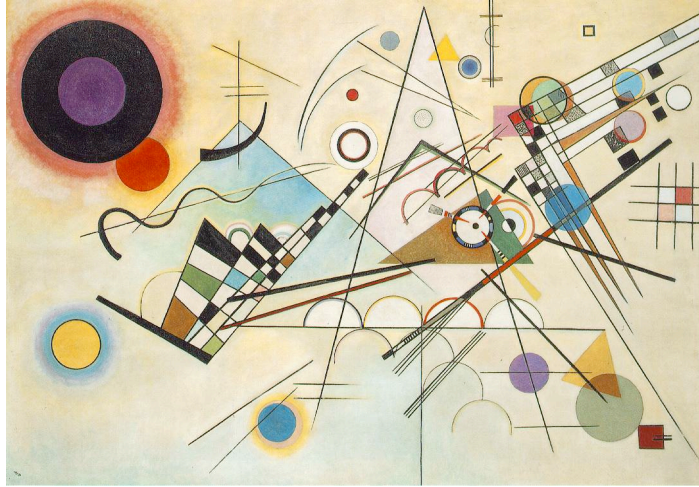


Figure 9: A painting depicting the freedom of modern music.

Creativity of Expression and Sound in Modern Popular Music

While modern art music has unquestionably reflected the modern ideal of exploring new frontiers, many modern popular musicians have been equally creative in their innovations through blues, jazz, rock and roll, rap, film music, Broadway musicals, digital multimedia, etc. Even when we think we have exhausted every possible way of making music, some ingenious new musician will take us to new ground, and continue the cycle of human expression through the art and the gift of music.

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