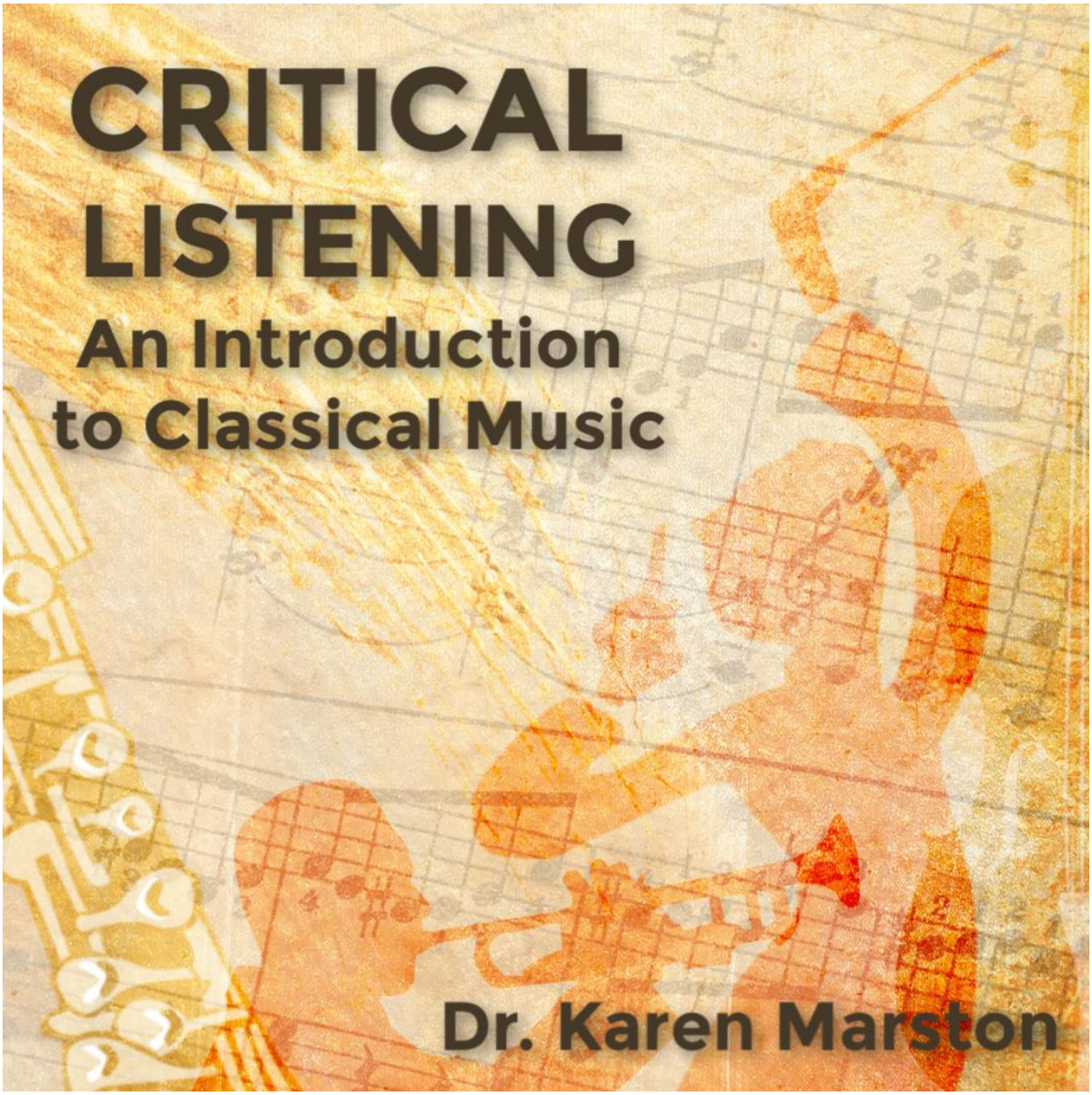
Critical Listening: An Introduction to Classical Music



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Last update, June 2020

About this book

Although this text can be used by students at any level, it is intended for the non-major who has little or no previous training in music. As such, it is necessarily broad in its overview of historical events and musical works, for the purpose of providing students with key guideposts in the cultural evolution of music. It is not a comprehensive course of either music or culture, and should not be regarded as the final word on any events, genres, composers, or styles; rather, the goal is to draw meaningful connections between culture and expression, for the purpose of making Classical music relevant to non-musicians. In all cases, events, people, and musical works are presented for the express purpose of showing their meaning in broader cultural contexts, and it is suggested that the instructor focus learning in this area, since there is much to be gained from a clearer understanding of culture and its intersections with the arts. To that end, the number of musical examples is limited, as compared to other books on this topic, so that there is ample time to study each composer and their work in an in-depth way.

About the author

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Suggested supplements to this book

Met Opera, Magic Flute Guide:
https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/discover/education/educator-guides/magic-flute-the/magic.flute.guide.pdf
Met Opera, Madama Butterfly Guide:
https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/discover/education/educator-guides/madama-butterfly/butterfly.guide.pdf
Berlioz Interactive, from the San Francisco Symphony: https://keepingscore.org/interactive/berlioz-symphony-fantastique
Howard Goodall's, Twentieth Century Greats (Leonard Bernstein):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3KAhq_vHmQ&t=160s

Repertoire in this book

Medieval

Recordare mei, Anonymous
O virtus Sapientae, Hildegard von Bingen

Renaissance

"As Vesta was from Latmos Hill, Descending," Thomas Weelkes
"Flow my Tears," John Dowland

Baroque

"Pur ti Miro" from *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Claudio Monteverdi
Marche pour la cérémonie turque from *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Jean Baptiste Lully
La Primavera, I. Allegro, from *Le quattro Stagioni*, Antonio Vivaldi
Orchestra Suite No. 3 in D major, Air, BWV 1068, Johann Sebastian Bach
Fugue in G Minor ("Little"), BWV 578, Johann Sebastian Bach
Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, Prelude, BWV 1007, Johann Sebastian Bach

Enlightenment

Symphony No. 94 in G Major, II. Andante, Franz Joseph Haydn
Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550 , I. Molto Allegro, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Die Zauberflöte, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart *
"Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen"
"O Isis und Osiris"

Ludwig van Beethoven

Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, All Movements

Romantic

"Die Erlkönig," Franz Schubert
Symphonie fantastique, Hector Berlioz
IV. *Marche au supplice*
V. *Songe d'une nuit du sabbat*
Madama Butterfly, Giacomo Puccini*
"Dovunque al Mondo"
"Un bel di"

20th Century Modernism

Le Sacre du printemps, Introduction, Igor Stravinsky

20th Century Postmodernism

West Side Story, Mambo, Leonard Bernstein

*Note that Mt San Antonio College maintains a subscription to Met Opera Live on Demand, available to students and faculty through the Library

Table of Contents

Lesson 1: INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC LISTENING

Why study music?

If you are not a musician (and if you are enrolled in a general course like this one, that is probably the case) why take a class on music-listening? If you ask a musician why *they* study music, you will probably get an earful of personal stories and enthusiastic explanations, all of which boil down to something like, **why *not* study music?** Musicians could not imagine a life without it! But, for someone with only a casual relationship to music, what might be gained by learning more?

Figure 1: Image courtesy of Unsplash

Hopefully, by the end of this semester, you will have a great answer to that question. For now, we will start by thinking about how music is used, both personally, and collectively within our culture, and take stock of where you are likely to encounter it in your life. As you read through the following topics, think about how you interact with music, what it means to you, and why it might be enriching for you to explore your own experiences in a more in-depth way.

Where do we encounter music?

For most of us, the answer is probably *everywhere.* If you live in a typical American city, you probably cannot *help* but hear music every single day. In fact, as an experiment, see if you can actually *avoid* hearing any music for a 24-hour period – it is likely impossible. Music is everywhere, all around us, all

the time. Sometimes we can choose what we hear – in the car, at home, or on our phones – but, much of the time we spend in public, we are bombarded with an involuntary soundtrack that impacts our moods and feelings. Music is playing at the grocery store, the gym, or on hold with the bank – how does all this aural stimulation influence behaviors?

Unfortunately, this level of saturation can result in *non-attention.* Since music is always there, it is easy to take it for granted. At the same time, as the world gets more crowded and we are increasingly bombarded with technology, the sounds around us can actually become overwhelming too, so that we just shut down and quit paying attention. TED Talk alum, musician, and sound and communication expert Julian Treasure asserts that listening is the most impactful of the senses, but that the increasing "noisiness" of our environment has desensitized us to its impact.

> *Somewhere along the way, our oldest, most natural, powerful and effective mode of communication* [listening] *got taken for granted, devalued and then left behind as the world became ever-noisier and technology beguiled our eyes and appropriated our fingers too.*[1]

According to Treasure, the world "doesn't sound too good," especially in public places that we all share – stores, airports, and the like.

> *They look great, but they sound terrible – they are cacophonous, noisy, threatening, stressing places. We get fatigued.*[2]

Surprisingly, Treasure advocates *removing* music from these environments, since it is actually something that is intended to be the focus of attention – we should be stopping to listen! Plastering music all over community spaces like audio wallpaper only increases noisiness and does nothing for our listening skills. Instead, ambient noises – what Teasure calls a "soundscape" – would do more to reduce stress and bring balance to discordant public places, while preserving our energy for listening experiences that really matter.

> *My favorite city in the world is Venice. And it wasn't until I'd been there many times that I realized why it was my favorite city – there's no tire noise, there's no traffic noise, there's the noise of diesel engines on the canals which is actually pretty pleasant. But it's an amazing relief from the noise that we have in the background so often in cities.*[3]

Reflection Question: Does the noisiness of public spaces cause you to stop listening? What about the ever-presence of music in our lives – do you find yourself shutting down, in terms of listening? How does this impact your listening skills overall?

[1] (Treasure, The tyranny of the eyes, 2020)
[2] (Treasure, Julian Treasure: Make Good Noise, 2017)
[3] Ibid.

Music as Personal Expression

As a modern music consumer, you probably relate to the idea that music can be a form of personal expression. In popular culture, artists cultivate (and advertise) a unique, discernable identity or image, and talk, dress, and perform according to that persona. You might think of this as creating a personal "brand," a phenomenon now fueled by the culture of social media and online videos. Consider your favorite artists. What do they stand for? How is this persona reflected in their music?

The connection between sound and meaning is at the heart of what makes music enjoyable. When we hear a message we can relate to, and our emotions are moved by the music, and this gives us a sense of belonging, almost as if the artist is speaking directly to us. When we feel heartbroken, we listen to songs about heartbreak, and use them to help us process our feelings. *Authenticity*, or how "real" and personal the artist's message seems, is often used as a measure of musical quality. When an artist can make us feel what they feel, we seem to really like it.

In popular music, this connection is usually made through words, or *lyrics.* Classical music can also have words – usually referred to as the *text*, or in the case of opera, the *libretto.* When combined with music, words certainly have tremendous power, but are words the reason that music is expressive? Aside from that, how to musical sounds themselves impact our moods and emotions? What qualities of music enable it to do this?

Figure 2: Image courtesy of Unsplash

Reflection activity: **Listen to your favorite song, and try to notice some of the non-verbal aspects of the music. Do you hear anything that you hadn't noticed before? How do the musical elements of the song impact your listening experience?**

Music as a Language

Figure 3: Image courtesy of Unsplash

As we have already discussed, music has the power to convey meaning; therefore, at a basic level, it is *communicative* (*able to impart information*). In our interactions with it, music is "talking" to us, and manipulating our feelings (even if we are not aware that this is happening). Could it be beneficial to have a more nuanced ability to be aware of what music is saying?

Think about written and spoken languages. Chances are, during your formative years, you spent a lot of time in classrooms learning the nuances of proper grammar, syntax, speech, and other language skills. The goal was to make you an effective verbal and written communicator, as well as thoughtful listener, so that you would be equipped to take control of your own professional life as an adult.

Given the predominance of music in our daily lives, there is a strong argument to be made that it is *another* very significant and impactful language, which works its power on our thoughts and feeling; however, general education rarely targets musical literacy as a developmental skill for children. Unless you opted-in to a targeted program, such as a school band, orchestra, or choir, you likely had only a few general music courses in primary school. Depending on where you grew up, even this basic level of music learning may not have been a part of the curriculum.

Since music is such an active part of culture, shortfalls in music education for children is unfortunate. Like written languages, a working knowledge of music as a form of communication better equips us to function socially, while having the added benefit of understanding which musical experiences can enrich our lives the most.

Reflection activity: Over the next few days, become mindful of music in the world of advertising. How is music used to sway your emotions, and/or to get you to buy things, or change your opinions? If you have the chance, pay special attention to political ads, as these are often highly targeted toward persuasion.

Music as Cultural Expression

Musical experiences are layered, meaning they represent more than just a personal connection with a feeling or idea. Consider the music that the older members of your family might prefer. Does it sound like your music? Most likely, not. Does that mean your parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles are just fundamentally different than you? Again, probably not. Why then would their tastes seem so strange?

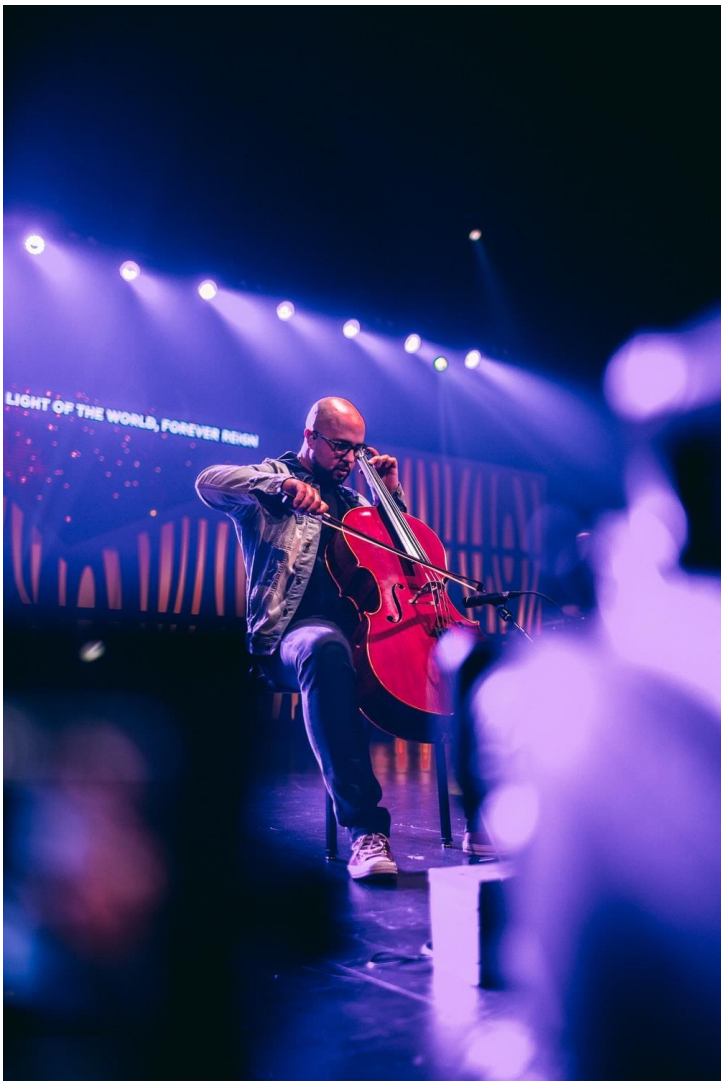


Figure 4: Photo by Joshua Hanson on Unsplash

The only constant about culture is that it is always evolving. As we move through the historical aspects of this course, you will see huge pendulum swings of ideas and opinions, as societies move from one preference to the next, and explore all manner of philosophical, political, and religious imperatives. This is true on the grand scale, from one century to the next, as well as within the context of a single lifetime. In short, the culture your parents grew up in was quite different than yours, and the music they relate to reflects that.

Does this mean that we cannot appreciate music created by another culture, or time in history? Of course not, but we probably need to put forth a little effort in order to connect with something that may not sound like the songs we already like. When we learn about the origins and purpose of music in a given time and place, we can understand what it says about the people who created and listened to it. This has the wonderfully positive side effect of helping us to appreciate people who are different than we are, which certainly provides a very strong argument in favor of expanding our musical tastes to include new experiences.

Unfortunately, the power of familiarity works against our efforts to seek out newness and change. Kenneth Aigen, a researcher at New York University describes this effect:

> *It's part of our identity construction. Some people say you are what you eat. In a lot of ways, you are what…you listen to….Each time we re-experience our favorite music, we're sort of reinforcing our sense of who we are, where we belong, what we value…*[4]

In short, humans are hardwired to function within a community, and familiar music reinforces the sense of belonging that we all need. Given this, expect your first experience with something new to generate negative feelings – this is normal! But, simply listening *again* will often change the experience. In reality, expanding your tastes is really just about overcoming a little initial discomfort. The second time you hear something, it is not new anymore!

Program directors at radio stations rely on this phenomenon. Of course, popular music follows trends, so that artists and producers can tailor new music to match the styles audiences already like, but new music still has to "break out," in order to become a hit. It might surprise you to know that this is not a magical process – pop hits do not simply spring forth from a mythical wellspring!

iHeartRadio, a streaming and radio service with a current base of 250-million[5] listeners, leverages their massive influence to help drive audience tastes. For example, the program, "On the Verge," saturates the market with a target song (chosen by corporate management), so that listeners are veritably bombarded into liking it. Have you ever listened to pop music radio, and noticed that the same song plays over and over? That is why! Familiarity alone can be enough to make you like something.

There is so much music out there to explore – be open to new experiences!

Reflection activity: Think of a song or artist that someone older than you (a parent, aunt, uncle, cousin) loves, but that you think sounds terrible. Start a conversation with this person on this topic and ask them why they love the song or artist so much. Chances are, you will hear a story about an event or experience from their youth. In that discussion, look for clues about culture, and how social expectations and experiences may have been different when they were growing up.

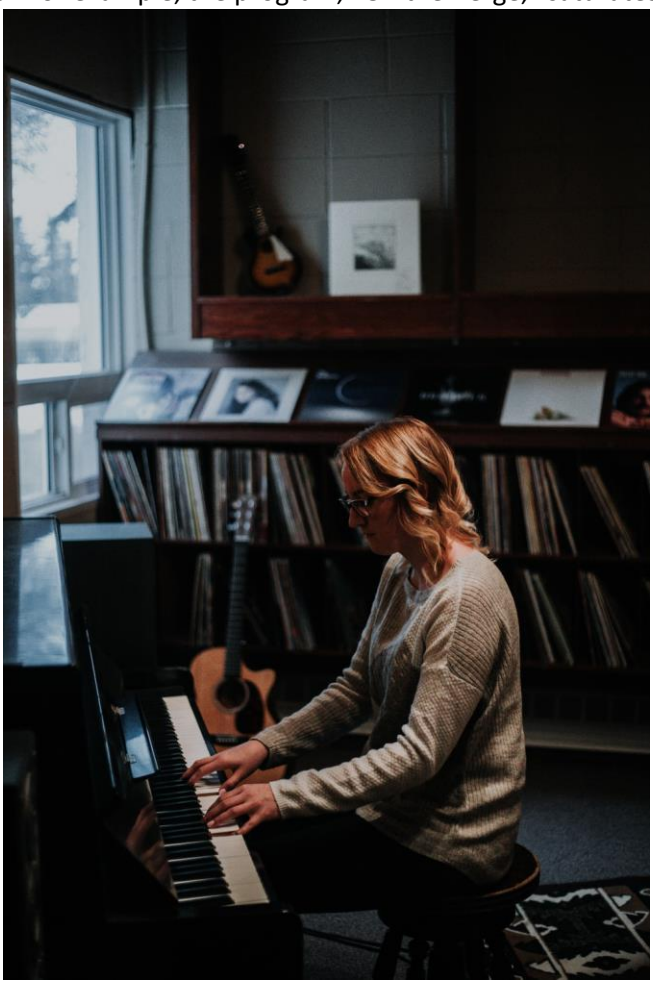


Figure 5: Photo by Pricilla du Perez on Unsplash

[4] (Pittman, 2018)
[5] (Dudley, 2019)

Music as a form of Learning

There are many different kinds of musicians in the world today. Some are highly trained, attending years of music school and spending hours day striving for the highest level of artistic and technical performance. These musicians might easily be compared to elite athletes, since they gain the opportunity to perform through highly competitive means. The players you see in elite orchestras or renown Jazz venues, or the singers who breathe life into mainstage musicals and operas, have likely spent most of their lives studying their craft, and probably hold multiple university degrees in music performance.

At the same time, there are many popular musicians who rely solely on intuition and listening, and cannot actually read music at all. One of the most notable examples is Taylor Swift, who in fact, seems to be the antithesis of the Classical musicians described above.

> *I would not have majored in music because when music becomes technical for me I don't like that part of it. I can't read music. I can a little bit. When you're reading music for me it turns into math. I like for it to go the way it's going to go. I'm not as much into technique as I am into the emotion of it.*[6]

Swift is not alone. None of the Beatles could read music, and Michael Jackson, who is widely celebrated as a songwriter, did not actually write a note. He brought new songs into the studio as a complete textures in his head, and then taught his ideas to the other musicians through singing.[7]

Obviously, these two camps – the highly trained and the intuitive – can find themselves at odds. It is not uncommon for one to point out the perceived shortcomings of the other, as Swift does above. Classical musicians get criticized for being elitist and stodgy, while pop stars can be quickly labeled as overly simple, derivative, or trendy. Is there a happy medium between these two extremes?

Time will tell – perhaps there will be a future cultural moment when Classical and Popular styles will meaningfully collaborate, or even merge; but for now, there is a noticeable discrepancy in terms of what it *means* to be a musician.

At the same time, logic tells us that learning more about something is always a path to experiencing it more deeply and meaningfully, and in terms of music, this notion is borne out in significant research. Turns out that learning about music is one of the most beneficial things you can do for your brain, and here is why.

At the most basic level, music is an abstract collection of sounds, organized in a manner that is "pleasing." This is highly subjective, and so it is exceedingly difficult to quantify what makes music "good," and why people like listening to it. As such, music is a source of great interest to scientists, particularly those who study brain function and mental health.

As a result, we now know that music-listening causes the neurotransmitter dopamine – a "feel-good" chemical – to be released in the brain. When this happens, you might experience anything from relaxation, to joy or elation, depending on how closely to relate to or engage in the experience. At the same time, levels of the stress hormone cortisol go down. Music has even been shown to reduce pain

[6] (Grigoriadis, 2009)
[7] (Desborough, 2020)

during medical procedures, and to improve retention and learning during memorization tasks. Obviously, these effects are dependent on the quality of the musical experience, so that something "happy" or music that is perceived as "good" will have the best outcomes. Similarly, "bad" music can spark negative feelings, such as fear and anxiety – easily observed in a horror movie, when "spooky" music helps to raise the tension.

Simultaneous to these "feel good" effects, music also stimulates the more analytic parts of the brain, making it a multi-dimensional experience that is unlike any other art form or activity. While we perceive pitch in the right temporal lobe of the brain, we need the cerebellum, and entirely different cognitive area, to process rhythms. All the while, the frontal lobes are dealing with and interpreting emotional responses. The more we engage in this multi-faceted, "whole brain" experience, the more we stretch and challenge the brain to adapt. If music-listening is beneficial, learning to play or sing is even better.

Studies touting the educational benefits of music abound. The National Association for Music Education lists 20 positive outcomes for students who learn to sing or play at a young age, including improved SAT scores, stronger critical/creative thinking, positive emotional development, staying engaged in school, and improved skills in academic tasks, such as memorization, pattern recognition, language development, and special intelligence. [8]

Reflection Activity: Listen to your favorite song or artist and be mindful of your emotions. Does the music change how you feel? Is the affect positive, or negative? What do you hear in the music that accounts for how you feel?

How we listen

While virtually everyone has some sort of relationship with music, we may not all experience it the same way. Some people are drawn to music and enthusiastically seek out opportunities to listen whenever possible. These audiophiles are quick to seek out new songs, are open to trying different styles, and might even thrive on talking about their tastes with friends. For others, music is more about entertainment, with most listening experiences taking place in the background, while the main focus is on other activities. These listeners may use music during studying, driving, or other tasks, but primarily stick with artists and styles they know, and quickly turn off anything they do not like.

Many of you probably fall in between these two extremes, between *active* and *passive* listening – even more likely, your listening habits vary, depending on the situation. Active listening is mostly about *paying attention*, which is not something we always have the time, energy, or desire to do. That is perfectly acceptable. We are all passive in our listening sometimes. There is nothing negative about using music to relax, or in focusing on conversation with friends as music plays softly in the background; on the contrary, passive listening allows music to color and enhance other experiences in a positive way. Even so, if this is your primary listening mode, you are unlikely to have many experiences that expand your musical tastes.

In order to understand our own likes and dislikes, and to benefit from a range of moods, styles, and messages in music, we have to be willing to give the experience our full attention, within the context of

[8] (NAFME, 2014)

an open mindset. If you have never been a music enthusiast, this make be uncomfortable, or even frustrated at first. You may even find yourself feeling bored. All of this is normal. Like any skill, active listening takes time to develop. What feels difficult at first is often much easier on the second or third attempt. And, as the old saying goes, we have two ears and only one mouth – we are meant to listen twice as much as we talk!

Figure 6: Photo by Precilla du Perez on Unsplash

What is passive listening?

Passive listening refers soft attention – you might be enjoying the music, but focus is on other things. After a passive listening experience, you may not fully remember what you heard, or be able to recall specific details about it. Passive listening often happens while you are doing something else, such as cleaning your house or driving a car. If you hear something you do not like, you might reflexively turn it off, or you may even sing along with favorite songs, but for the most part, your attention is primarily focused on elsewhere.

There is nothing wrong with being a passive listener some of the time. Our goal is not to eliminate passive listening, but to recognize that it is not the most attentive way to experience music.

Characteristics of passive listening

- Music is not the main focus of the activity

- Opinions are formed quickly, and intuitively
- The experience is enjoyable, but not transformative
- You may or may not remember much about what you heard

What is active listening?

By contrast, active listening brings music into the focus of attention. The experience takes centerstage, and other tasks are set aside. A good first step in learning this skill is to work on paying attention to specific details, such as which instruments are playing. In any active listening experience, work to be open to what the music has to say, and be willing to allow opinions to develop thoughtfully over time.

In short, active listening is more than just *hearing*. It is a purposeful act, to which we apply our mental and emotional processes, and process audio information through thoughts and feelings. As musician and sound engineer Julian Treasure describes:

> *My definition of listening is making meaning from sound. So you select some of what you hear and you make it mean something. And that's a mental process, it's not related to the process of hearing. And what you make it mean is going to be very possibly different from what I make it mean, because you've got different contexts and different parameters, different filters that you've developed along the way.*[9]

This requires the energy of our focus – we must commit to listening, and give it our full attention, as Treasure also describes:

> *…It is impossible to listen to somebody and do anything else at the same time. Listening is 100% of your attention being focused on the other person* [or the music]*. That means…not looking at your phone, or screen, or device, or anything else that you're doing.*[10]

This is a great practice to adopt when attending live music concerts! And, think of how much your friends and family will appreciate the gift of your attention, as you carry your refined listening skills from music into social situations.

Characteristics of active listening

- Make music the main focus – set other tasks aside
- Wait to form an opinion until the listening experience is complete
- Be open to listening multiple times, in order to hear everything/form an opinion
- Be fully engaged and open to changing thoughts and feelings as you listen
- Notice as much detail as possible about what you hear

Reflection Activity: Are you mostly an active, or a passive listener? Why do you think you prefer this listening mode? What are the benefits of active listening, vs. passive listening? Listen to your favorite

[9] (Treasure, Julian Treasure: Make Good Noise, 2017)
[10] Ibid.

song or artist, and work on your active listening skills. What do you notice about the music that you may not have been aware of before?

LESSON 2: CRITICAL LISTENING

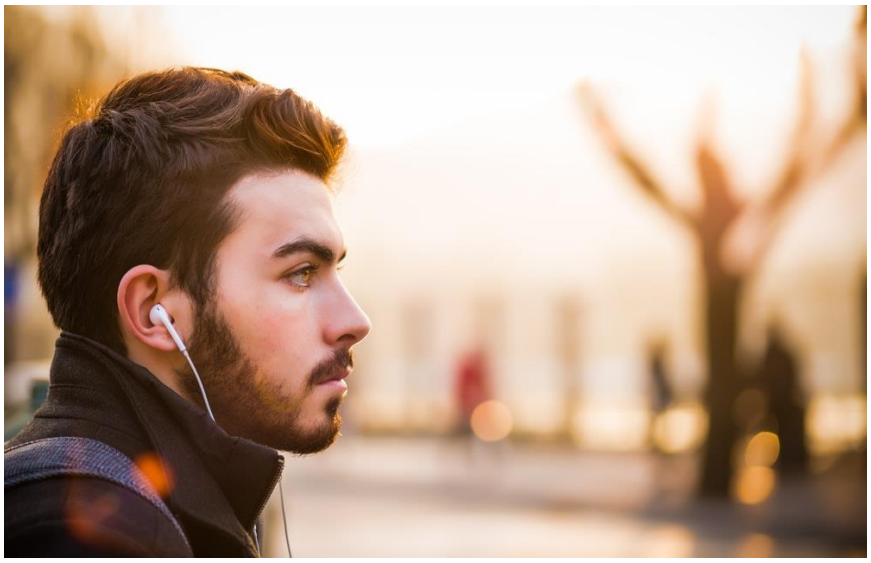


Figure 7: Image courtesy of Unsplash

It may sound cliché, but a short time ago (by historical standards), our current relationship to music (and all media) would have sounded like a futuristic dream.

When music streaming was a brand-new technology, there was a commercial which aired on television, and offered a revealing perspective. It featured a man and a woman staring at a jukebox. The man asked, "what's on it?" and the woman answered, "everything." The image faded out into a dramatic shot of the universe. The implication was clear – technology was about to create a whole new world for music. Suddenly, anyone could have any music they wanted – literally everything at the touch of a finger. How has this impacted our listening habits, as a generation of music-consumers?

If this is hard to conceptualize, take a minute to think about what music listening was like just a generation ago. Kids growing up on the 1980's, for example, had no cell phones or music on demand. If they wanted to hear their favorite song, they would either have to purchase it (on a record or cassette, which were expensive), or sit in front of the radio (or MTV, which still played music) and wait for it to play. Any self-respecting teen of the era would have been willing to wait *hours*, if that is what it took. In the process, they would have been exposed to a whole lot of music that they did not necessarily want to hear. After all, stepping away for even a few minutes might mean missing out. In the meantime, when their favorite song finally did pop up, the listener was likely to be fully engaged, and even excited to hear it. How do you this might have shaped musical opinions of the time?

How do we choose what we listen to?

Music is everywhere in modern culture. We can access it any time we want, take it with us wherever we go, and our listening experiences are completely customizable. Looking for a fast, driving track to motivate you at a workout? It is easy to find! Craving a slow song to relax your nerves? No problem – any number of streaming services can hook you right up, on demand! While we all love and make use of these benefits, we should also consider the ways in which such high levels of access might lead us to take musical experiences for granted.

If we go back a little further, to those living before recorded sound, access was even more limited. The only way to hear music was to have a musician present, or to perform it yourself. Listeners might hear their favorite song only rarely, and larger works, such as a grand symphony of Beethoven, might be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Attending a concert would have been accessible only to those with the means to purchase a ticket and travel to a venue, and the experience would not have been customizable – you would hear whatever was on the program. Even so, music would have been such a rare treat that it would likely capture one's full attention

Figure 8: Image courtesy of Unsplash

The total access that we enjoy in modern culture is both a blessing and a curse. We can craft our own individual experience with music, which can be both empowering and exhilarating, but we are rarely challenged to experience anything new, so we can easily overdose on the music we already love, while ignoring everything else. It is so easy to access our favorite artists, that anything else is likely to be perceived as a negative. Pop music producers count on our preference for the familiar in order to maintain the success of their artists. Once they find a formula that hooks listeners, they duplicate it. There is a price for complete control over our music listening – we can quickly get stuck in a rut and repeat the same experiences over and over.

Could there be some benefit to exploring new music and challenging yourself to move outside of your comfort zone? Historically, people certainly thought so. The ancient Greeks believed in that music has the power to transform our emotions, a concept referred to as the *Doctrine of Ethos* – a notion that has been meaningfully supported by modern research. The great mathematician Pythagoras used music to restore "harmonia" to the mind, body, and soul, and to bring about healing from all manner of physical

and emotional afflictions. Both Plato and Aristotle frequently cited music as a critical part of building good character and cited its importance to a well-rounded education. Medieval composers believed that music could bring listeners closer to God. In the Renaissance, peopled looked to music to decode emotions and to provide a release from negative feelings. Baroque composers evoked the beauty of nature in their work, while in the 19th Century, music was venerated as a path to enlightenment, and even transcendence. More recently, music has been used as a powerful tool for social change, such as in the protest songs of the Civil Rights Movement.

Given all that music has accomplished historically, is it possible that it can be more than just entertainment in your life?

How do we rate our musical experiences?

We have established that modern music listening is characterized by high access and customizable playlists, so that we can generally avoid (if we choose) music that we do not like, while submerging ourselves in familiar experiences. Based on this, how can we devise a method for assessing the quality of music? A common response to this question is that music is too subjective to be evaluated, since people's tastes can differ so widely. After all, who are we to tell someone else that their music is bad?

At the same time, there seems to be a commonly held social notion at this time and place in history that music should match and enhance our mood, so that "good" music is anything that makes us feel good or uplifted, and "bad" music is anything that fails to enrich our emotions. If we use this measure, there can be no criticisms of music, since any music can be considered successful if it hits the right audience, at the right time. Unfortunately, this leaves little room for music that actually *changes* your mood.

The emotional response is certainly one of the things humans love about music, but in terms of evaluating what we hear, it can be quite limited, since two people may experience the same emotion in very different ways, and mood can vary widely within a single individual, even minute by minute. If we rely *only* on subjectivity, our conversations about music are likely to be quite limited, making it exceedingly challenging to discuss matters in an informed way.

This likely accounts for the absence of thoughtful conversations on musical style within contemporary media culture. Most reviews of new music are highly subjective, or focused on the artist's fashion, reputation, or the meaning behind the lyrics – talk of *musical* aesthetics is rare. Particularly with popular styles, it can be easy to get distracted by the external aspects of a musical performance – showmanship, staging, attire, etc – instead of assessing the music itself.

This speaks to the music *literacy* of the society in which we live. With the number of ways that music impacts our lives on a daily basis, it seems logical that we could benefit from an informed discourse on the quality of our experiences with it, even if only for the purpose of strengthening or expanding our own preferences. After all, other major art forms – film, dance, visual art – can be readily discussed, since they are more concrete and tangible – their elements are seeable. By contrast, music is just sound, and is far more difficult to define.

The goal of this course is not just an introduction to Classical music, which is important, but to provide a framework for interacting with music in a more profound and in-depth way, across all styles.

Critical Listening Format

The goal of Critical Listening is to develop the skills needed to discuss and measure the quality of a musical experience from a variety of perspectives, so that we can articulate a well-informed, comprehensive opinion. Like any good analysis, Critical Listening combines *thoughts* and *feelings*, or *facts* and *opinions*, and draws meaningful connections between them.

Critical Listening has seven components: Mood, Imagery, Culture, Biography, Musical Elements, Meaning, and Genre. This may seem overwhelming, but once we break it down and practice, the process will become second nature.

- MOOD (opinion)
  - ✓ Mood is an opinion-based, subjective response in which you describe your emotions and feelings. There are no right or wrong answers and your opinions may differ greatly from other students in class. If you have trouble articulating mood, think in terms of *ambiance* – how the music "sets the stage" or creates a specific environment. Strive to use strong descriptors and as much detail possible. Avoid generic terms like "calm," "soothing," or "relaxing."
- IMAGERY (opinion)
  - ✓ Imagery refers to the ways in which music triggers the imagination; what it reminds you of – a story, picture, or personal experience. Imagery is also subjective, so there are no right or wrong answers, but again, work to be a specific and descriptive as possible. If you struggle with this response type, it can be helpful to imagine the music as a movie score – describe what you think would be happening on the screen.
- CULTURE (fact-based)
  - ✓ Culture refers to collective, shared experiences. All music reflects the culture in which it was created. Artists are both *shaped by* and *shape* the world around them, in that they absorb cultural information, process it according to their own ideas, experiences, or feelings, and create something new, which in turn has the potential to change society. For this response type, focus on the philosophies, social issues, political events, or other shared experiences that would have impacted anyone living and working in a specific time and place in history.
- BIOGRAPHY (fact-based)
  - ✓ Composers are individuals, capable of processing experiences in unique ways. Often, it is the uniqueness of a specific artist's perspectives that make them feel most authentic and compelling to the listener. When we think about who the artist might have been as a person, we can gain important insights into their message and musical style. What aspects of their personality or life experiences likely impacted their work?
- MUSICAL ELEMENTS (fact-based)
  - ✓ *Musical elements* refer to the construction and theory of music. Music is technical – the patterns, structure, organization, and pacing all contribute to our experiences and guide emotions as we listen. While this is a non-technical course and you will not be asked to read or write music, we will learn musical terms, which will help you to articulate what you hear. Always use and define specific terms, wherever possible.
- MEANING (fact-based)

- ✓ Not all composers intend for their work to have a specific meaning or message, but virtually all music is written to serve a purpose. While it is common for music to tell a story, there are plenty of examples which are just about beautiful sound – music for its own sake. This is its own form of meaning, of course. Sometimes, the meaning can be quite clear, such as in song lyrics, while in other cases, we need to learn a bit about the composer in order to understand what they meant to accomplish. In either case, meaning is a fact-based response, which describes the composer's purpose in creating their work.

- GENRE (fact-based)
  - ✓ You have likely heard the term *genre* before, in discussions on media and culture. It refers to a *style category* – it is a convenient way to group musical works with common characteristics. From the broadest perspective, *all* music in this class is in the Classical genre, so obviously, this is not specific enough to be meaningful. Throughout this book, genre will be both listed and discussed, for each major work. Your goal is to determine whether the music is like, or unlike, others in the same category.

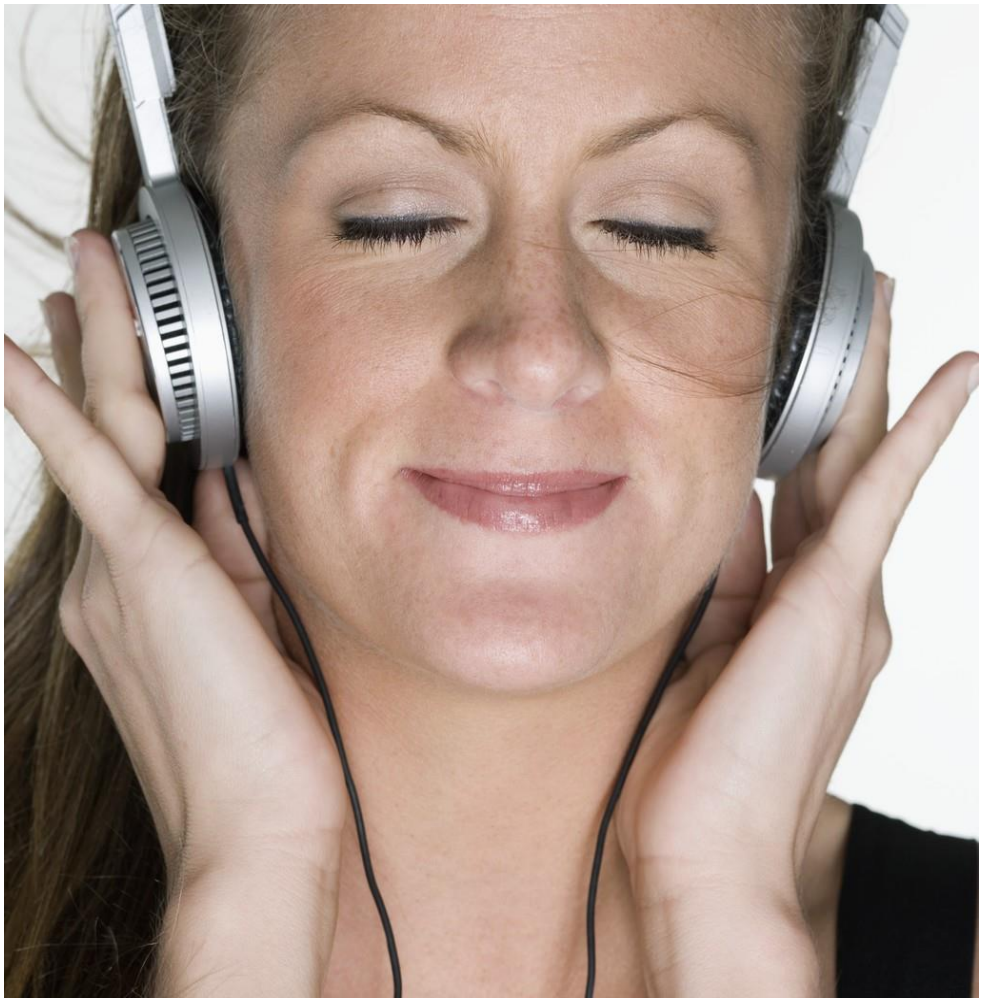
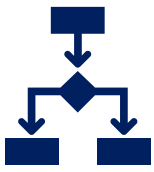


Table: Critical Listening Response Types

Response Type	Fact/Opinion	Definition	Critical Question
MOOD	Opinion	The feelings or emotions created by a listening experience.	*How do I feel?*
IMAGERY 	Opinion	How a listening experience triggers your imagination; Associations you have with the music.	*What do I think of?*
CULTURE 	Fact-based	Social, political, philosophical, or religious trends that would have impacted anyone living at a specific time in history.	*What social issues would have impacted this composer and their music?*
BIOGRAPHY 	Fact-based	The personal life story of a composer, specifically in terms of how it impacted their work as a musician.	*What aspects of the composer's personal life impacted their music?*
MUSICAL ELEMENTS 	Fact-based	The technical building blocks of music, and how they are used in a specific musical example.	*How is the music constructed?*
MEANING 	Fact-based	The intended message or theme behind a piece of music; Why it was composed.	*What was the composer intending to communicate or accomplish in this music?*
GENRE 	Fact-based	The specific style category of a piece of music.	*How is this music like or unlike other examples of the same style?*

INTERLUDE: UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

The concept of "culture" can be tricky, since it is driven by social events but experienced personally. According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of "culture" is quite broad:[11]

- the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group
- the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time (Example: popular culture)
- the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic
- the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations

Taking these perspectives, and filtering them through the purpose of this course, here is the definition of culture we will use this semester:

The political, social, religious, artistic, and philosophical trends, fashions, or opinions and major societal events that impacted large populations of people, at a given time and place in history.

Take a moment to think about this definition, and how culture impacts your life. None of us lives in a vacuum; we are all subject to the same social experiences, even though we are likely to think and act in unique ways, based on variations in our own dispositions, differences in the ways we were raised, personal views, etc. The concept of culture describes what it means to live in a community – how we interact with each other – even though we each have unique experiences within that context. Although the events of the past are certainly different than modern culture, the composers were every bit the part of shared experiences, and subject to the unique limitations and opportunities of their own time and place in history.

Culture is constantly reinventing itself, evolving and changing. Sometimes change is slow, and hard to achieve, such as in the case of Civil Rights and the myriad fights that its leaders had to undergo in the 1960's. In other cases, specific events are so massively disruptive that they become turning points in human thinking. One terrible example is the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, which immediately and permanently changed the way America interacted with the world. On a personal level, Americans were forced to cope with a range of shocking emotions – from rage, to sorrow, to disillusionment – while at the same time, the country as a whole responded with massive shifts in political thinking. The events of 9/11 changed everyone, even as those changes may have been felt in very individual ways.

The Arts encapsulate the intersection between individual and group thinking. Artists both live in and create culture; meaning, creativity both *responds to* and *fuels* collective experiences. This places the arts at an important focal point in scholarly work. The study of history can tell us what people did, or

[11] (Mirriam-Webster, 2020)

describe the events in a particular time and place, but it is within the arts that we can actually understand how people felt, how they responded, and what they really valued.

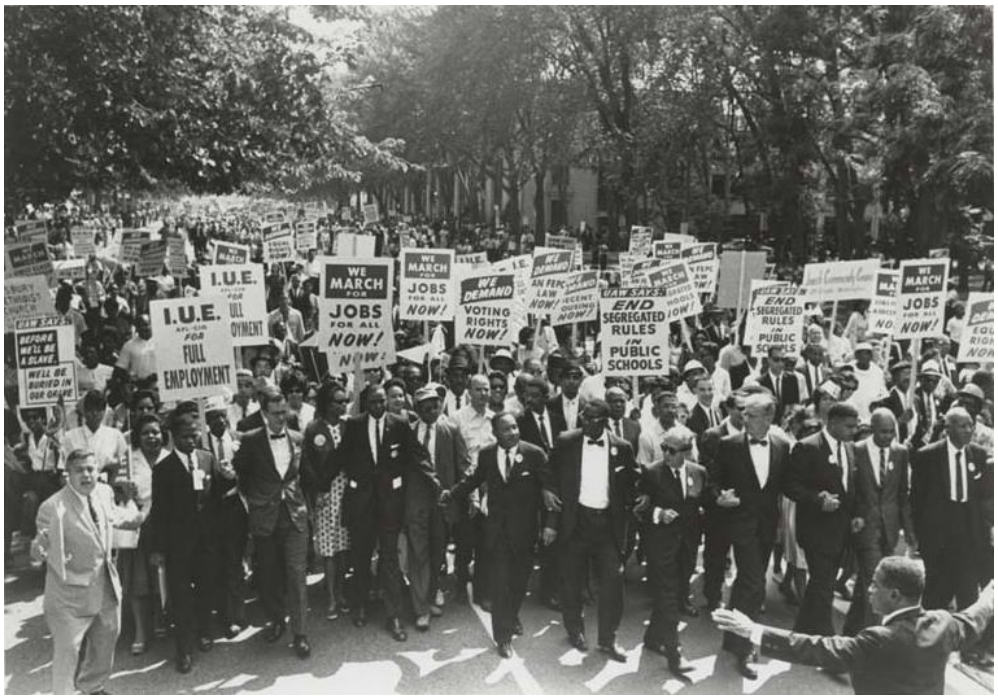


Figure 9: Dr. Martin Luther King leads protesters at the March on Washington in 1963; Photo used with permission, Center for Jewish History, NYC

Given this, the study of the arts, and their relationship to cultural trends is vital, since it gives us meaningful insight into how humanity has evolved and changed. Critic and novelist John Berger characterizes art in this way:

> *No other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times.*[12]

In short, art (and music) tells us how one person saw another person, or in many cases, how that person viewed the world, through the lens of their own experiences and that of the culture in which they worked. As Berger notes, "In the Middle Ages, when men believed in the physical existence of Hell, the sight of fire must have meant something different from what it means today." Consider the implication! As people have evolved, so too has their perception of the world around them. Understanding how past societies identified themselves, and how those perspectives have changed, is at the heart of artistic expression.

In this respect, "Classical" music *cannot* be irrelevant, since it is intrinsically linked to history, and in fact builds on our understanding of the events and philosophies of the past in a meaningful way. Where historians stop, artists begin. They tell us stories – either directly, or indirectly – about their own lives and worlds. As Michael Kimmelman describes in his book, *The Accidental Masterpiece*, the fundamental skill of the creative mind is "making art out of life" – to *see* the potential for expression in everyday experiences and to put those perspectives into meaningful work. Artists show us "the value in looking at something very closely."[13]

[12] (Berger, Ways of Seeing, 1972)
[13] (Kimmelman, 2006)

From this perspective, artists are an important commodity to society. They show us versions of ourselves that push us to consider alternative perspectives and to think about our world in new ways; however, this process only works if we are willing to engage. As Berger states:

> *We can only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice.*[14]

This means that as listeners and viewers, we must commit to giving the experience a chance. We must meet the artist halfway and bring our own attention to the equation. Without someone to receive the message, what is the purpose of art?

Figure 10: The Walt Disney Concert Hall, home of the LA Philharmonic, is an iconic cultural landmark; Photo by Joachim Riegel on Unsplash

Since culture and art are so intrinsically linked, we must necessarily start our understanding of expression by peaking back into the past and attempting to comprehend what life might have been like at a given time and place in history. If we can situate creativity in its own context, we can better understand its purpose and impact, both at the time of its conception and for us, as modern viewers. As it pertains to this course, the study of culture will be broad and focused on big trends and major events, rather than the comparatively more detailed and in-depth study found in history courses. Always, our goal is to better understand the culture and music of our own lives, by assessing the progress of the arts through time.

[14] (Berger, Ways of Seeing, 1972)

LESSON 3: INTRODUCTION TO MUSICAL ELEMENTS

All music is *sound*, but not all *sound* is *music.*

That may seem obvious, but as a starting point, it is important to define our canvas. How do we differentiate between music and noise? Consider a notorious evening in music history…

On a warm summer evening in 1952, outside of Woodstock, New York, a small audience gathered for a concert in an austere venue called the Maverick Concert Hall. The music of American composer John Cage (1912-1992) was on the program. Halfway through, pianist David Tudor stepped on the stage to perform a work called *Four Pieces* (later to be infamously titled *4'33"*), but instead of opening the keyboard and playing "music," he sat on the piano bench, timing "interludes" of silence on a stopwatch. Where was the music? By Cage's estimation, it was a combination of the "noises" in the environment – nature, as it wafted in from the outdoors, people breathing and shuffling in their seats, and the sounds of mounting discomfort, as the audience slowly realized that they were to experience "silence" as music. Cage disrupted the traditional notions of music as something "beautiful" or "moving," and forced consideration of the very question we are asking here: *What is it?*

This is a question that musicians and philosophers have long contemplated[15], with debates on musical aesthetics dating as far back as the ancient Greeks. On a personal level, we tend to equate music with very subjective measures, such as the emotions it generates in us as we listen; meaning, music is sound that makes us feel *good*. If Cage is to be taken seriously (and he was), how could his ideas fit into such a definition?

At the same time, music is extraordinary powerful, so whatever its qualities, it is successful in capturing the attention of massive audiences. In the US alone, the recording industry is worth some $11.1 billion annually.[16] That's an impressive number for an art form that seems to defy defition!

An in-depth debate on musical aesthetics is beyond the scope of this book (although that discussion is highly recommended), so we will turn instead to a commonly accepted definition as a starting point. Music is:

> *the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity*[17]

Here, the "art of ordering" is key. Music is sound with *intent* – sound to which structure has been applied. By this definition, Cage's "silence" fits, since he created a framework around which attention would be drawn to ambient noises; hence, music.

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[15] For those interested in learning more about musical aesthetics, here are some recommended videos. These resources are also excellent for class discussion:
John Cage, on silence: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcHnL7aS64Y
Turning Music into Sound, Why do we do it? https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ESeRaLKE7YU&t=5s
The Transformative Power of Classical Music, Benjamin Zander:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9LCwI5iErE&t=224s

[16] (Rys, 2020)

[17] Merriam-Webster: Definition retrieved from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/music

This begs another question; namely, what makes music "good" or "bad?" Obviously, this is also subjective, in that the means by which music is structured is a matter of taste, style, and time period, but there are some general rules and practices which have been relatively constant since around the 15th-century (give or take a few hundred years), so that the basic building blocks of music are consistent and definable. Gaining an understanding of these building blocks will help, in terms of developing discerning tastes!

In the discussion on Critical Listening, recall that one of the response types was *musical elements*, or the construction of music. Since this is a non-technical course, specific skills like music-reading or analysis are not required, but we will learn general vocabulary to use in describing musical features.

Musical elements refers to the *specific techniques of sound, collectively and purposefully employed, in the construction of a musical work.*

For the purposes of this book, we will organize elements into six categories. While each will be revisited in-depth later, we can start with some general definitions now.

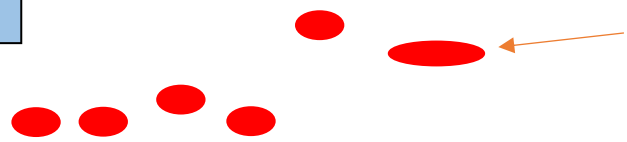
At the most basic level, any sound which has at least one of these elements – melody, rhythm, harmony, dynamics, tone color, or form – purposefully applied, would be considered music; however, most music is more complicated than that, and is comprised of many elements. The way in which music is assembled from elements is referred to as *musical layers*. The specific relationships between the different elements, or layers, in the music is called *musical texture*.

Musical Elements: Terms

Melody: *Pitches organized in succession*
Rhythm: *The movement of music through time*
Harmony: *Pitches organized to sound together*
Dynamics: *Volume*
Tone Color: *Attributes of sound not related to pitch; Which instruments or voices are sounding*
Form: *Musical organization, in terms of the amount of repetition, variation, and contrast*

Musical Layers: *The number and type of elements happening at a given time*
Musical Texture: *The relationship between layers in a piece of music*

Let's walk through an example, to make this clearer. The last time someone in your family turned a year older, you probably sang a popular song – *Happy Birthday.* If we could conceptualize this sound as a graph, it would look something like this:



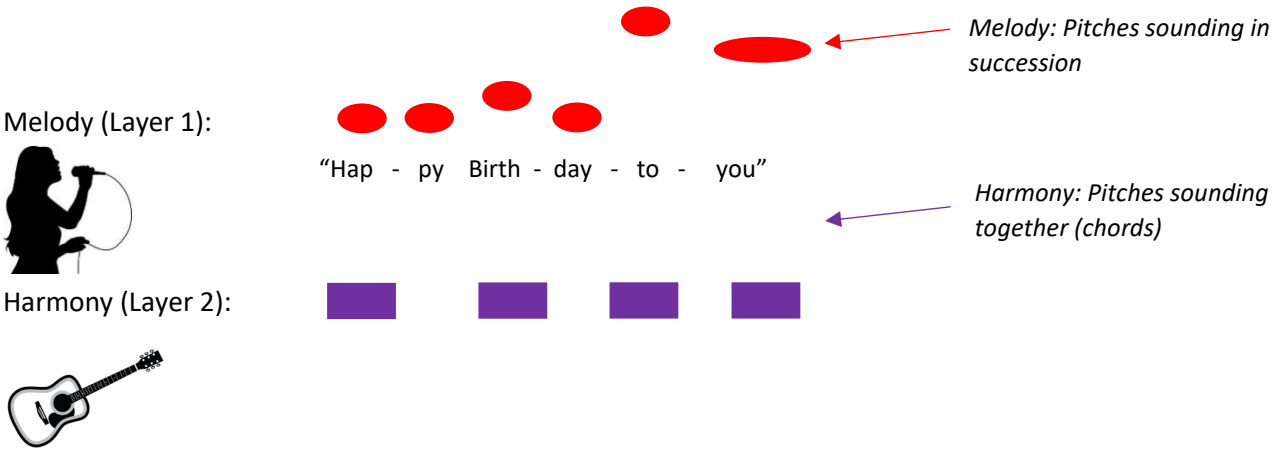
Melody: Pitches sounding in succession

Melody (Layer 1):

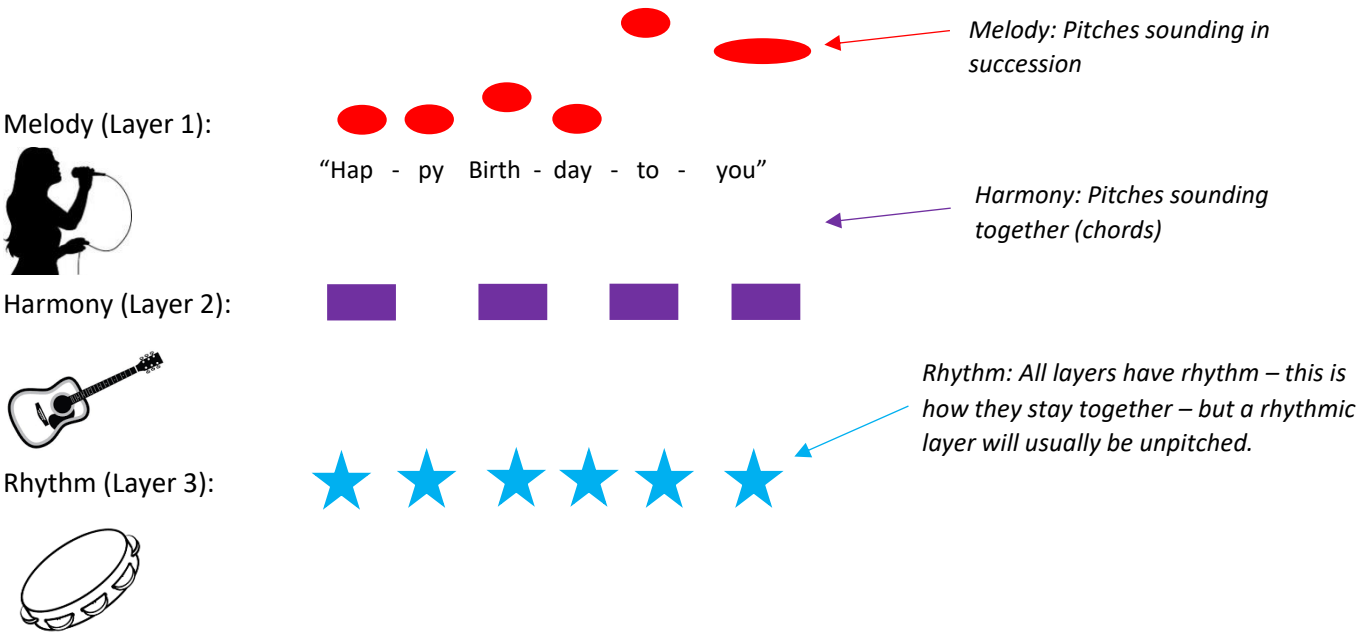
"Hap - py Birth - day - to - you"

If everyone in the room sings the same melody together, this is a *single layer* of music, since everyone is doing the same thing at the same time. (Keep in mind that "layers" and the number of people performing may be different.)

If someone in your house brought a guitar into the room, and played an accompaniment (chords), this would add a second layer – *harmony.* Now the sound would look like this:



If there were another musician in the house, and they brought in a tambourine, there would be a third layer – *rhythm.*



The music outlined above is the most common *song texture*, especially in popular music – melody, harmony, and (optionally) rhythm – called *homophonic.* Although musical texture will be revisited in an ongoing way throughout the book, we can get a head start by reviewing some of these concepts now:

Musical Texture: Terms
Monophonic: *A single line of melody with no accompaniment*
Biphonic: *A single line of melody, accompanied by a single, sustained pitch (drone)*
Polyphonic: *Multiple melodies sounding at the same time*
Homophonic: *A single melody, accompanied by chords, and/or a bass line*
Homorhythmic: *Multiple layers moving together, but sounding different pitches*

Listening for layers is a great way to practice active listening and will help you to better understand the details in the music you hear. You can start now – next time you turn on the radio, try to identify *layers*.

Introduction to Melody: Pitch

In 2012, researchers uncovered the oldest known musical instrument – a flute (a type of pitched whistle, in this case, fashioned from a mammoth tusk). Found in a cave in southern Germany, it was made between 42,000 and 43,000 years ago – what an incredible thing to contemplate! First, scientists assert that this is evidence of the dominance of Homo-sapiens, meaning they clearly had a superior intellect if they were able to practice music, and this is one of many capacities that enabled them to win out over the less developed Neanderthals. This fact does not necessarily help us to understand musical elements, but it does show how important music is to human development![18] Secondly, the flute is a *melodic* instrument – even from our earliest musical utterings, we put our ideas into tunes.

This seems true even today. If you have ever been around little kids, you know that they love to sing and chant words in rhythmic patterns. Making music in this way as fun as it is fundamental, so it is great place to start, in terms of learning more about elements.

Pitches, which *locate and define specific sounds within the complete range of sound*, are the building blocks of melody. More specifically, *pitch* refers to *the relative highness, or lowness of a musical sound*. Some of you are no doubt thinking right now that you are "tone deaf," or cannot "carry a tune," but your aural acuity is likely far better developed than you think. Can you tell the difference between male and female singers? If so, that is dependent in part on recognizing *pitch*.

When creating a melody, a composer or songwriter selects pitches, and places them in a row or sequence. The process for choosing pitches is both subjective – what "sounds good" – and objective, or influenced by the rules of *music theory*, which guide all musical construction. In short, there is both an art and a craft to writing a melody.

[18] (BBC News, 2012)

All About Melody

What makes a great melody?

Some melodies stand the test of time, enduring century after century, whistled and sung by generations of people. There are many examples – *The Star Spangled Banner, Ode to Joy* (look it up), or any number of Christmas carols. What makes them so special? This is a question not easily answered, but at least one factor is related to how *catchy* it is – or how easily the melody gets stuck in your head. Catchiness is subjective, but it has been suggested that something simple enough to be singable, combined with a danceable rhythm and some interesting contrasts of range (*the span of pitches, in terms of how high or low the music reaches*) will get the job done.

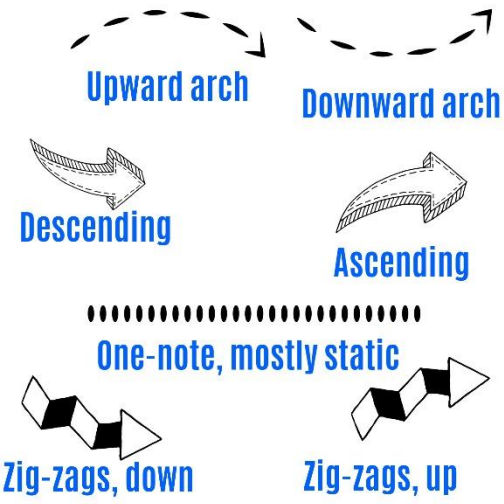
What are the catchiest melodies you have heard? What characteristics to you feel make them catchy?

You probably know a lot of melodies that use *range* to create interest and intensity – the pacing slowly builds energy over time, reaching a peak, with a high note somewhere in the middle. This is a common formula that probably describes hundreds of popular and folk song melodies. In fact, it helps to explain why some artists are known for their *range*. For example, the singers Mariah Carey and Ariana Grande have an incredibly *high range*, while Avi Kaplan (formerly of the band Pentatonix[19]) is revered for his ability to sing bass lines, and to exploit the *low range* of the human voice.

What if the music does not have a singer? Can there still be a melody? Of course! Even in an instrumental composition, the melody is usually the main focus, separated from other layers either by range or dynamics, so that it stands out. Sometimes, music may also have a second melody, or *countermelody*, to complement and enhance the main melody.

Melodic Shape

Melodic shape refers to contour, in terms of range – literally, the shape of the pitches, as they move higher or lower. Creating a melodic shape is dependent on *intervals*, or the *spaces between pitches*. If the composer predominantly uses large gaps, the melody is described as *disjunct*, and likely feels jarring and intense. *Conjunct* melodies, or those with intervals that are mainly *smaller or closer together*, may feel more calming.



Many melodies follow the arch-shape described above – rising in pitch to a *high point*, or *melodic climax*, then falling back to the same place as the start. The beauty of this contour is that creates a sense of emotional build-up and release, making the music feel like a complete experience. The opposite shape is also valid – an inverse

[19] Avi Kaplan was a student at Mt San Antonio College 😊

arch, where the melody gradually moves downward, to a low-point, and then ascends back up. Obviously, this might have a more mellow or striving feeling than an upward arch.

Other shapes can induce different moods and effects. For example, melodies that stair-step up or down create a sense of longing, dreaming, or contemplation, which might be very effective right before the chorus, or "hook." A great example is Ed Sheeren's "Thinking Out Loud." On the words, "And darling I will be loving you 'til we're 70," listen for the melody to step up and then back down several times in a row. See if you can hear it!

Another melodic shape is the "one-note," or static melody, which stays on, or very close to, a single pitch. It may seem like this would be boring, but it can actually be used quite effectively, to create angry or nervous energy. Listen for it in Niki Minaj's "Turn me On," on the line, "Boy, I'm achin', make it right, my temperature is super high." How does this "one-note" melodic shape impact the music?

Composers and song writers usually employ a mix of melodic shapes, to gradually build or release tension, create interest and contrast, or tailor the music to specific moods.

Melodic Style

Melodic style refers to the connection, note to note; meaning, how smooth or separated the pitches are from each other. *Legato* is a *smooth connected style*, while *staccato* melodies are *short and separated*, and an *accented* style is *emphasized.*

Melody: Terms

Phrase: A small section of a melody, like a sentence in speech
Pitch: Relative highness or lowness of a musical sound
Range: The highest and lowest points of a melody or phrase
Melodic Shape: The contour of the melody in terms of range
Legato: A melodic style that is smooth and connected
Staccato: A melodic style that is separated and short
Accented: A melodic style that is emphasized
Interval: The distance between two pitches
Disjunct: A melody or phrase with predominantly large intervals
Conjunct: A melody or phrase with predominantly small intervals
Countermelody: A second or complimentary melody, layers against the main melody
Melodic Climax: The high point of a melody

LESSON 4: THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD: 400-1400

Figure 11: Serfs work the land under the command of a vassal, England, c. 1301; Image is in the public domain

To begin our study of music as an expression of culture, we will start with the origins of contemporary history in Europe – the Medieval Period (400-1400). It can be difficult to conceptualize this era, since it is such a long span of time, during which there was so little cultural evolution that historians have chosen to throw it together under a single heading.

The "Dark Ages" is another label given to this period, with countless movies capitalizing on romanticized Medieval fantasies, full of noble knights, damsels in distress, and evil warlords bent on mindless pillaging. How accurate is this image?

Medieval Period Snapshot

- The Catholic Church is both a political and religious body, and influences all aspects of life
- All art and learning is centered in the church, and is therefore religious in scope
- Overall, there is a lack of centralized governments across the European continent
- Under the Feudal System, most of society is relegated to a peasant class
- Most people (even the wealthy) are illiterate

From an historical perspective, the Middle Ages are situated between the "Classics" of the Greco-Roman period and the European Renaissance (which means "rebirth" in Italian), both of which are regarded as prolific times of cultural advancement and artistic expression. This is where the "middle" part comes in – this period is bookended by two "better," or more culturally productive times in history. Is this really an era without any culture?

If we could step back in time and take a snapshot, this society would certainly look bleak. For most (as much as 85% of the population), it was a peasant's life, full of manual labor and farming, inspired by the

desperate hope of growing enough food to survive another year. Days were spent in the fields, tending crops with hand tools, and at night, workers retired to humble huts where the few livestock they tended shared the meager indoor space. Children did not attend school; instead, they learned the basic skills of survival from their parents. Illness, famine, or attack were an ever-present threat, so that the average lifespan of a Medieval peasant was only around 30 years. Life-threatening dangers only intensified in the waning years of the Medieval Period, when the bubonic plague, or the "Black Death," killed almost a third of the population of Europe in a span of only five years.

These conditions were a product of the *Feudal System*, which was a social order based on controlling land and resources. Wealthy landowners, or *lords*, parsed out their holdings to land managers, who in turn granted small plots to *serfs*, or peasants, who worked the land and provided food for the rest of society. In exchange for the opportunity to farm, serfs were indentured (unfree) and tied to the land. The resulting society was decentralized and scattered, with pockets of peasant families congregating in villages or larger estates, governed by a local manager. Within this hierarchy, virtually no one was educated, since reading, writing, music, or other "cultured" pursuits would have seemed unimportant to a society organized around conquest, and in any case, no one really had the time or means to worry about being creative.

The Rise of the Catholic Church

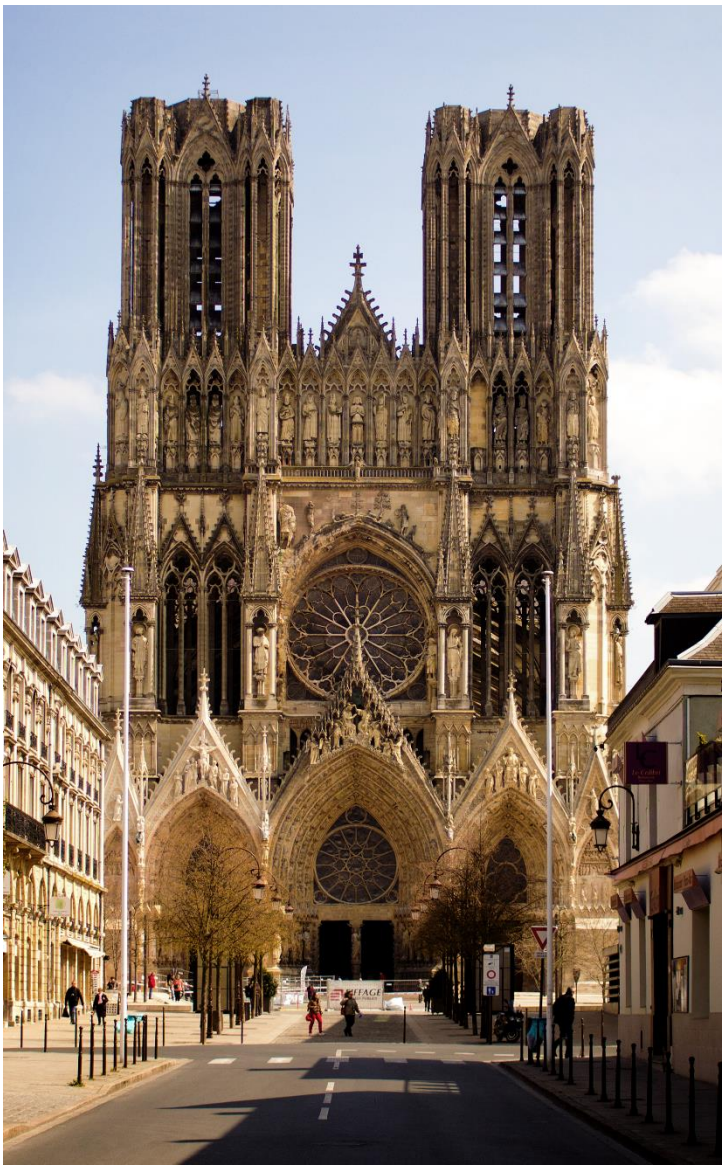
In the Catholic Church, there was an entirely different culture, largely removed from the violence and squalor of the period. Men or women who took religious orders and dedicated their lives to the church lived in autonomous compounds called monasteries (for men) or convents (for women). These communities were havens for prayer, meditation, reading, writing, learning, and even music. Moreover, since virtually everyone in Europe was also a Christian, the church was both a political and a spiritual body, and wielded immense cultural power.

This was not the case in the early centuries of the A.D. period, when the Roman Empire dominated the political landscape. Under its traditions and laws, Christians were a rebellious cult, subject to harsh judgment and even persecution. As a result, Christians became quite clever, meeting in secret and developing an array of coded symbols and communications to spread their message – a fact that would later color the art of the church.

The subversive influence Catholics exercised on this society was strengthened when one of its greatest leaders became a convert. On October 27, 312, while preparing his troops for battle, the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great (272-337) claimed to see the symbol of the cross hovering above the sun – an image which he interpreted as a message from God. He converted to the Christian faith, and a year later issued the *Edict of Milan*, granting Christians religious freedom. He went on to establish church dogma and to solidify Christianity as a powerful cultural force.

When the western side of the Roman Empire finally collapsed a century-and-a-half later, the church was already heavily entangled in the politics of the day, so that it was easy for Christianity to fill the power gap left by the loss of a centralized government. Since by that time, virtually everyone had converted to Christianity, even those with high social standing were also subjects of the Church, giving the *Pope*, or the leader of the Catholic Church, ultimate power in all things. By proxy, the clergy (the administrators of the church) exercised great social influence over all of society – rich or poor.

Since all Christians are required to tithe (donate) at least 10% of their income to religious needs, the Catholic Church amassed great wealth in this period, as evidenced by the many Gothic cathedrals were erected across Italy and France – grand, foreboding monuments which still stand today. As you consider the image at right (the Cathedral in Rheims, France), note the size of the structure, relative to the people. What impact would such a massive and ornate building have had on a lowly Medieval peasant? Certainly, it would have been awe-inspiring (as it is today)!



To this point, it is important to consider that a Medieval Christian would have regarded church dogma in a very fundamental way, even viewing the afterlife as the real and literal destination of the human soul. This would only have increased the cultural influence of the church, which was seen as God's messenger on earth – the path whereby people could ensure their place in heaven. As Europe progressed through the Medieval period, and most of society was broken into warring city-states, the Church benefited from a well-organized and profitable social network, governed by a hierarchy of powerful officials.

As a result, all Medieval culture emanated from the church. One of the most notable examples of Catholic art is the great body of *illuminated manuscripts* produced by generations of monks in this period. Printing technologies were still many centuries into the future, so books were written and copied completely by hand. As shown in the image below, this process was undertaken with great skill and care, with intricate illustrations adorning the text. The beauty of these artifacts is even more inspiring, when we consider that every element, from the animal skin parchment, to the quills, ink, and metallic pigments, were hand-made by a team of artisans. It could take months or longer, just to produce a single book.

These artifacts also reveal significant cultural and aesthetic trends of the era. First, "illuminating" (from the Latin, "illuma," "to light") was intended to elevate the words, making them more significant, or sacred – a practice that would eventually extend to music. Secondly, not only was art produced in service to religion, but it was only practiced by the most educated members of society. It was an *intellectual* activity; creativity as we conceptualize it today – as a form of personal inspiration – really did not exist.

Lastly, illuminated manuscripts are littered with symbols and icons, which were an innovative solution to the fact that no one outside of the church would have been able to read – pictures replaced words, in communing meaning to the masses. In fact, according to the aesthetics of the day, it was believed that the soul could be elevated simply by being in the presence of a religious symbol – there was no need for the viewer to actually understand what they were seeing.

This also influenced music. Like reading, people at large were not expected to *understand* music; instead, the purpose was to frame words and make them important – there was no need to also make them meaningful or even intelligible. The idea that listeners engage personally or on an emotional level with music was really a goal; rather, hearing the powerful words of the Bible – comprehensible or not – would be enough to uplift the soul.

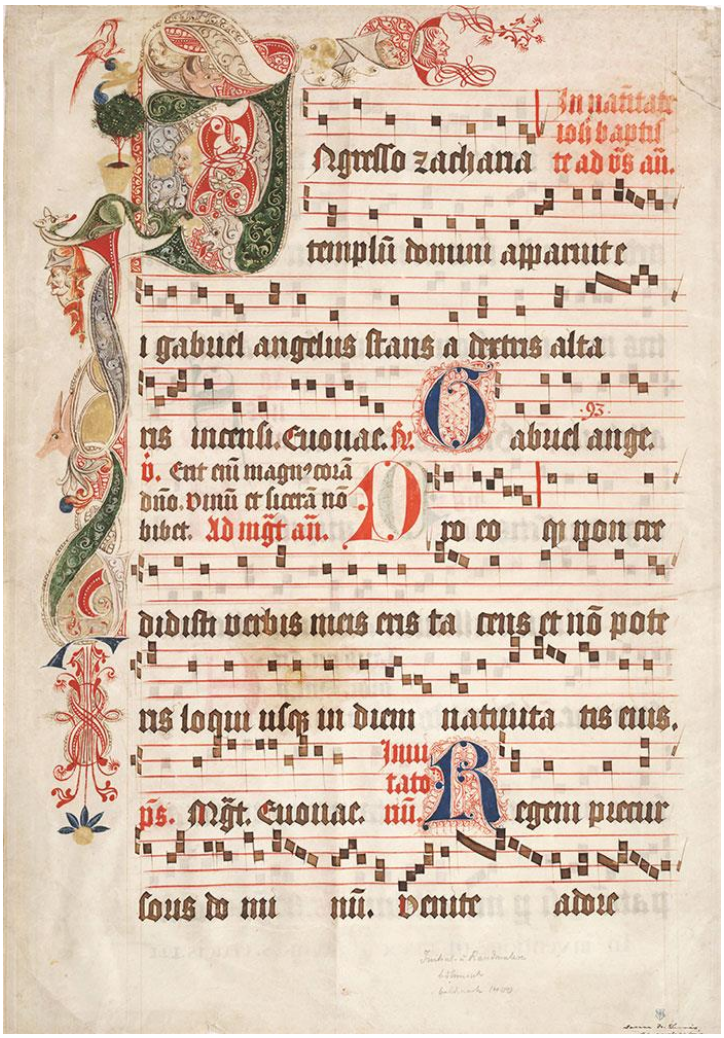


Figure 12: An illuminated manuscript with music notation; Used with permission from the Free Library of Philadelphia

Medieval Music and the Church

In the early years of the Catholic era, musical activities were likely rare. Music held a prominent place in Roman celebrations and was therefore regarded as an ecstatic expression of paganism – highly taboo for a brand new, fledgling religion. Those people who were unfortunate enough to live in the early centuries of this period probably had little music – maybe a roving singer from time to time, if they were lucky, but otherwise, things were likely rather quiet, musically speaking.

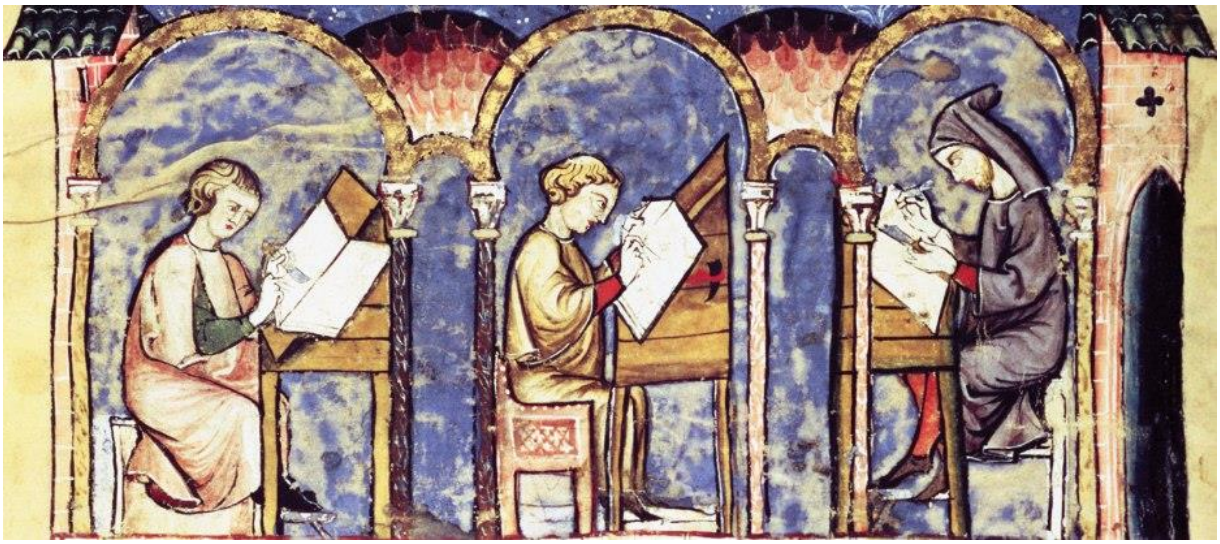


Figure 13: Monks in study, depicted in a Spanish manuscript, 14th Century; Image courtesy of medievalfragments.wordpress.com

Eventually, singing emerged out of rather practical needs. Monks had a daily schedule of prayers and devotions, which required the memorization of many pages of text. Around the year 400 or so, it is believed that they began to "intone" words as an aid to memorization. Although these recitations were very simple, they added a musical impetus to the words, and eventually evolved into a large body of *plainchant*, or *monophonic melodies sung to liturgical (Biblical) texts*. Like many other aspects of the church, plainchants would have been a mystery to most of society, since they were sung in Latin – an ancient language only learned or used in monasteries.

For modern listeners, there is an added element of mystery to Medieval plainchants, in that they are virtually all anonymous, as if emerging from some spiritual source; however, this too is the product of practical issues. Medieval culture was focused on work and communal effort as a means for survival. The idea of *individuality* was not sensible, considering the daily challenges of life. People were identified with their work and social standing, more so than their personhood. Further, for many centuries, plainchants were passed down through singing (i.e. an *oral tradition*), rather than being written down, and so were not considered the source of individual authorship.

Genre Snapshot: Plainchant

1. **Time Period**: Medieval
2. **Texture**: Monophonic (Single line of melody)
3. **Melody**: Based on the church modes (patterns no longer in use today)
4. **Rhythm**: Non-metered (no specified rhythm or beat)
5. **Words and meaning**: Texts from the Bible; In Latin
6. **Composers**: Anonymous monks of the Catholic Church

Over time, plainchants became ubiquitous in the church, with melodies designated for each part of the Catholic mass, and special chants for holy days and celebrations. Before a system of musical notation was developed (around the 10th Century), melodies varied greatly by region, but there are several features which are common to all of them.

First, the texture is *monophonic*, meaning there is a single line of melody only. Secondly, there are no specified durations or rhythms – singers likely took their cues from the words, in terms of pacing. In addition, pitches were chosen according to the *church modes*, which are patterns of intervals no longer used in music today; meaning, the melodies will sound directionless and meandering to modern ears. Lastly, plainchants are *sacred*, meaning created by and for the church.

The plainchant *Recodare mei* dates from around the 6th Century (although it was not written down until much later) and is typical for the time. It is written on a sacred text from the Bible, taken from the

Figure 14: Monks read from a notated music manuscript, England, 14th Century; Image is drawn within the "C" of the words, "'Cantate Domino," "Sing to the Lord"; Used by permission from the British Museum, Catalog of Illuminated Manuscripts

Offertory, or the blessing of the bread and wine in Catholic Communion. It is sung by a male choir, as was common. Although women in convents had more freedoms than their counterparts outside of the church, they were generally relegated to needlework and other handcrafts, rather than music or scholarly pursuits.

Another interesting feature is the use of *melismas*, or strings of pitches sung to a single syllable of text. Stretching out words in this manner makes them virtually incoherent, demonstrating that Medieval music was not intended to spark a personal connection for the listener. Further, given that the words are in Latin, plainchant probably just sounded like beautiful noise to most people in the period (as may be the case for you). To the church, this level of impersonality did not diminish the importance of the words, or the significance of delivering them.

Plainchant is sometimes referred to as *Gregorian Chant*, named for Pope Gregory I (540-604). As depicted in the art of the time, Gregory is said to have received melodies straight from God, in the form of a bird singing into his ear. He is remembered today as the first person to catalog and standardize much of the existing body of Catholic plainchant.

Musical Snapshot: *Recordare mei*

1. **Genre**: Gregorian Chant
2. **Composer**: Anonymous
3. **Time Period**: Medieval (6th Century)
4. **Language**: Latin
5. **Sacred or Secular**: Sacred (Liturgical)
6. **Texture**: Monophonic (Single line of melody)
7. **Melody**: Use of *melisma* (many pitches per syllable of text)
8. **Words and meaning**: Liturgical text, taken from the *Offertory*; Sung in Latin

LATIN TEXT
Recordare mei, Domine,
omni potentatui dominans,
et da sermonem rectum in os meum
ut placeant verba mea in conspectu principis.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION
Remember me, O Lord,
you who dominate all authority
put the right words on my lips,
so that my speech may be convincing in the presence of the King.

Suggested Recording: *Schola cantorum Gregoriana Assen, Arnold den Teuling*, *conductor*:
https://imslp.org/wiki/Recordare_mei_(Gregorian_Chant)

Composer Focus: Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)

Given the limitations of Medieval gender roles and the cultural view of music as a tool for the church, the life and career of German nun Hildegard von Bingen is remarkable. At a time when women were not allowed to celebrate mass independently and were under the direct supervision of their male counterparts, Hildegard emerged as a cultural leader, and was widely known as a visionary composer, philosopher, and theologian. Men across Europe sought her counsel, and she traveled widely, preaching her unique and progressive views on religion and life. She directly challenged social limitations, and eventually became the founder of her own independent convent in Bingen, Germany, where she wrote and performed original musical compositions, created art, and authored numerous texts about her philosophies.

Hildegard was born the youngest of ten children to an upper-class family in Germany. For women of the time, there were only two practical options: find a man to marry or join the church. Since her family had many children and some wealth, a convent was an ideal option, since it relieved the need to find husbands for all the females. As such, Hildegard was given to the church, and at the age of seven she was sent to live at a convent in the town of Disibodenberg. This proved fortunate, since convents were a refuge for female intellectuals in the period, and Hildegard was destined for an exceptional life.

Figure 15: Hildegard's visions, as depicted in her book, "Scivias," 1151-1152; Image courtesy of Wikimedia

At the convent, Hildegard was turned over to a nun named Jutta, who had taken strict religious vows as an *anchoress*, or an ascetic who is cut off from the material world in order to live a life of prayer and meditation. Jutta resided in a single windowless room, with only a small opening where supplies could be exchanged, or pupils like Hildegard could come and go.

Within this severe environment, Jutta was by all accounts very kind, and became a close friend to Hildegard, who learned to read and write, and to play the psalter (a harp-like instrument) from her mentor. Hildegard's access to education would have been incredibly uncommon at the time, especially for girls. In addition, she had the rare opportunity to hear music daily, as it was performed for the services at the adjoining monastery.

From a young age, Hildegard experienced headaches and blackouts, during which she felt a burning in her eyes and saw a great light. She emerged from these encounters believing she had been in direct communication with God. Although she spent many years denying and fearing her experiences, as she matured and told others what she saw, she was encouraged to write down and share her visions. Eventually she gained the endorsement of the church and became renown as a spiritual advisor. People who sought her counsel also left donations, so she also became a financial asset to the Disibodenberg Monastery.

Rebelling against the restrictions of living in a male-dominated environment and seeking the freedom to express the truth of her visions, Hildegard requested permission to build her own convent. Ironically, she called upon the prejudices of misogyny itself in support of her divine inspiration, claiming that a lowly woman could *only* possess her level of knowledge if she were under the direct guidance of God.

Figure 16: Hildegard's "Cosmic Egg," as depicted in "Scivias"; Image courtest of Wikimedia

Even so, the monastery was extremely hesitant to release their lucrative nun, and only relented when Hildegard fell into a debilitating illness that was interpreted as God's punishment for keeping her from her destiny.

In 1150, at the age of 52, Hildegard established her convent in Bingen, a small village on the banks of the Rhine River. She oversaw all aspects of the building, which included such modern conveniences as running water.

Hildegard then set to writing books and music, and charged her nuns with creating art, all of which outlined her holistic views of God, the church, and life. Central to her ideas were the concepts of *verditas* ("Greenness") and *sapientia* ("Divine Wisdom"), the latter of which is included in the musical example we will hear at the end of this lesson.

Verditas referred to Hildegard's reverence for the natural world as an extension of the divine. She contended that nature glorifies God and is a life force that flows

through all things, including man. This contrasted the Medieval notion that the world is essentially sinful, and its riches to be avoided. *Verditas* was enhanced by *sapientia*, or *divine wisdom*, which flows through all things; meaning, mankind is essentially an expression of the divine. From Hildegard's perspective, the creative power of the divine was provocatively expressed as feminine, which can be seen in her view of the universe as a "cosmic egg" (see image above).

Hildegard believed that music connects its listeners to God in a personal and immediate way, and that it is an earthly version of God's wisdom and love – something heavenly that humans can interact with directly. Considering the predominant view of music as a tool for communal and impersonal worship, her ideas were revolutionary.

Hildegard's Music

To give her music special meaning, Hildegard wrote her own poetic texts and original melodies, rather than using existing plainchants or passages from the Bible, as was customary. This allowed her to control all elements of expression, so we can infer that any connections or meaning we find are purposeful and intended to convey a message. Since Medieval aesthetics in general did not view musical sounds as possessing inherent expressiveness, her techniques were especially innovative.

As an example, her original plainchant, *O Virtus Sapientae* ("O Virtue of Wisdom"), was written to express the knowledge of her visions. The poem is an homage to her concept of *sapientia*, or *wisdom*, and its presence in all things. Hildegard urges the listener to connect with "wisdom" on a personal level, writing that it is "enclosing all" things. Such notions are common in New Age spirituality today, but would have been a direct contradiction of the idea that the Medieval church was the earthly link to God.

Figure 17: A statue of Hildegard at the modern-day convent bearing her name; Image courtesy of Wikipedia and Gerda Arendt

Hildegard also uses positive and affirming imagery, with wisdom being described as "lifegiving" and "circling" all things. The poem references both earth and heaven ("heights"), and links them together, as wisdom is "everywhere." In so doing, Hildegard tells her listeners that they are a part of that wisdom; meaning, they are significant, important, and themselves, divine. It is no stretch to imagine that she was encouraging people to break out of the illiterate and anonymous society of the Medieval period, and to embrace their own individuality. This is certainly mirrored in her own choice to create new works, and to sign them as her own.

Musical Snapshot: *O virtus sapientia* (exact date unknown)

1. **Composer**: Hildegard von Bingen
2. **Genre**: Plainchant
3. **Country**: Germany
4. **Time Period**: Late Medieval (11th Century)
5. **Language**: Latin
6. **Sacred or Secular**: Sacred
7. **Texture**: Biphonic (Melody + Drone); Note that only the melody was notated
8. **Melody**: Melodic climax on the word "soar"
9. **Words and meaning**: Poetic text, expresses her own views on religion

LATIN TEXT	**ENGLISH TEXT**
O virtus Sapientiae, quae circuiens circuisti comprehendendo omnia in una via, quae habet vitam, tres alas habens, quarum una in altum volat, et altera de terra sudat, et tertia undique volat. Laus tibi sit, sicut te decet, O Sapientia.	O strength of Wisdom who, circling, circled, enclosing all in one lifegiving path, three wings you have: one soars to the heights, one distils its essence upon the earth, and the third is everywhere. Praise to you, as is fitting, O Wisdom.

Suggested Recording: *Karen Clark, contralto, Hank Dutt, violin,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SK1mLpRxO3M.

From a musical standpoint, Hildegard devised innovative melodies that strengthened her message. The poem paints imagery of circling and rising upward, culminating in the line, "one soars to the heights." From there, "wisdom" returns to earth and diffuses its influence everywhere. Taken as a whole, this implies an arc, which rises and then falls – a perfect match for an arching melodic contour, which Hildegard cleverly employs. Such a shape was common to plainchants, but in this case, Hildegard's melody has an extra, very meaningful feature. An intense *melodic climax* (highest note) is written on the apropos word, "heights" ("altus"), so that the pitch directly imitates the meaning of the word being sung. This connection between words and music was totally new, and completely challenged the prevailing notions about music in the period.

Hildegard may have been the first composer to conceive of music as inherently expressive. She saw the potential to move listeners, and to open their minds and hearts to new and potentially transformative ways of thinking. This is a remarkable innovation, considering that all aspects of the culture around her would have pointed to a far more impersonal view of both religion and music. Although it would be many centuries before her ideas would become common practice, she is an inspiring example of a pioneering thinker and musician, who broke through the restrictions of the culture in which she lived.

FOCUS ON ELEMENTS: HARMONY

As music progressed through time, it naturally became more complicated, with layers added to make it sound richer and fuller. In particular, harmony emerged as a way to enhance melody and increase its expressiveness. Although harmony does not have to be only accompaniment – it can sound musical all on its own – this element usually functions in a supportive role, providing a backdrop to the tune.

By definition, harmony occurs when pitches sound *simultaneously*, organized into chunks of two or more. Most commonly, *chords*, or the *basic building blocks of harmony*, include three pitches, but plenty of variations are possible, with groups of four, five, or even more pitches sounding together – the more there are, the more "dense" the sound.

Harmony is built on the concept of *consonance*, which refers to *pitches that blend well together*, and generate a composite sound that is clear, balanced, and homogenous. These types of pitch groupings color the melody, without adding tension. Given this, as you can likely guess, not all harmony is consonant, just as all music is not happy and tension-free. Harmonies built on *intervals that do not blend well*, or seem to oppose each other, are called *dissonant.* While it may seem undesirable to use harsh harmonies, there are plenty of reasons why music might need to sound this way – sometimes, if only for the purpose of making happy music seem even happier.

Given this, harmony is all about mood. It can completely change the impact of a melody, taking it from passive and calm, to intense and energetic, just by shift of the chords.

The word *tonality* describes the varying *moods* that harmonies can convey. Although there are **many** tonalities available to composers, at the most basic level, we can categorize them as either *major*, which sounds *happy and joyful*, or *minor*, which is *sad or serious*. Almost all the music you have ever heard is likely written predominantly in one of these two tonalities.

Harmony: Terms

Harmony: Pitches organized to sound simultaneously
Chord: Basic unit of harmony; 2 or more pitches sounding together
Tonality: Mood or color of the harmony
Major: Harmonies which sound happy
Minor: Harmonies which sound sad or serious
Dissonant: Intervals or harmonies that sound harsh or do not blend
Consonant: Intervals or harmonies that blend and sound at rest

Based on this, consider the following:

Symphony No. 5 in C minor, by Ludwig van Beethoven

This tells us quite a bit of information about what we can expect to hear: it is a *symphony* (more on that later), the *fifth* written by this composer (Beethoven), and it is in *minor*, meaning it will be more somber than joyous. It is worth noting that music in minor is *primarily* minor; meaning, there will still be some major chords included for contrast. The same is true of music in major – some of the chords will also be in minor.

LESSON 5: THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD (1400-1600)

Renaissance Period Snapshot:

- Revival of culture and philosophies of ancient Greece and Rome
- Humanism takes precedent over divinity or religion
- The first "masterpieces" are created – Shakespeare, Da Vinci, Michelangelo
- Education is common for all social classes, and includes the arts, music, and humanities
- The church splits into Catholics and Protestants, and loses social influence
- The "Age of Exploration" – Europeans reach the New World and other lands
- Gutenberg's printing press makes books (and music) inexpensive and available to all

By the 15th Century, Florence, Italy was in the midst of a *Renaissance*, or "re-birth," fueled by the new prosperity of capitalism and a desire to revive the expressive art and culture of ancient Greek and Rome. To bring their city out of the "Dark Ages," Florentines celebrated their budding economic success with masterworks of art and architecture, adorning public spaces not for the glory of God, but to exploit the strength of man.

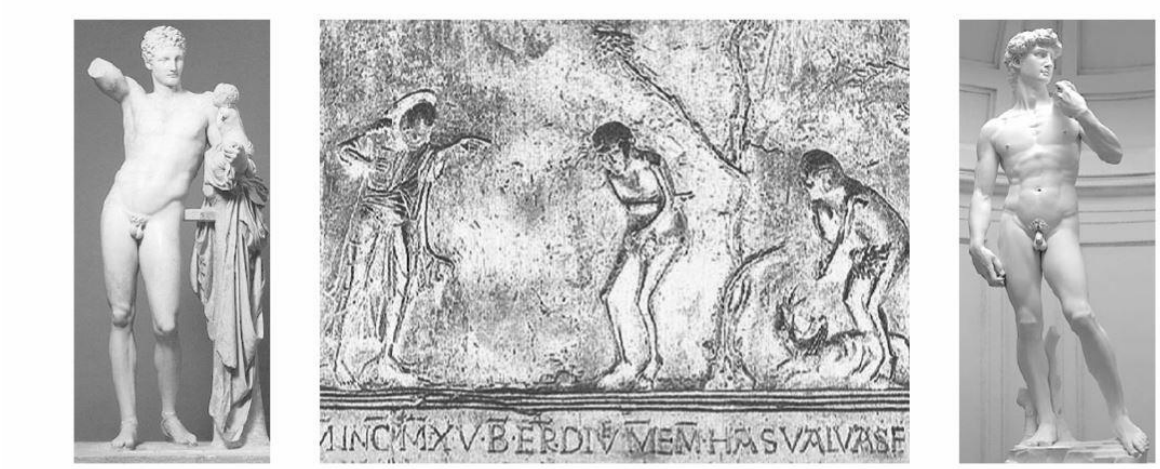
Figure 18: Donatello's "David"; Image courtesy of Patrick A Rogers, Flickr

One such early work was Donatello's *David* (at right). While still based on a Biblical story, it is a Classical nude, rejoicing in the energy of its youthful subject and relishing in the perfection of the human body. Fifty years later, when Michelangelo created his *David* (left), an unapologetic and colossal homage to the power and vitality of man, all of Europe had joined Italy in its pursuit of *humanism.*

Figure 19: Michelangelo's "David"; Photo by Alex Ghizila on Unsplash

These developments were facilitated by a new perspective on the "Classics," or the writings of ancient Greek scholars, playwrights, and philosophers. While the Medieval church did not regard such texts as sources of truth, since that was reserved for the Bible alone, it did recognize their capacity to teach one how to reason and think. Since the church had no educational system of its own, it co-opted Greek thinking for its own purposes, by combining it with theology and employing it as rationale for church dogma. In the process, the Classics of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates were preserved through Europe's Dark Ages.

The goal of the Renaissance was to not only learn about antiquity, but to recapture and emulate its greatness – a monumental cultural shift away from the Medieval period. A comparison of Michaelangelo's *David* with two other iterations of the human form – one from ancient Greece, and other from the Medieval period – demonstrates how massively perspectives changed over time (Fig. 22).



Hermes by Praxiteles (left); God confronts Adam and Eve, from the bronze doors at Hildesheim (centre); David by Michelangelo (right).

Figure 20: Classical, Medieval, and Renaissance conceptions of the nude in art

At left is a Classic nude – a celebration of strength, beauty, and human perfection. In the center is a panel taken from the doors of a Medieval cathedral in Germany – a depiction of Adam and Eve, confronted by God and hiding their bodies in shame. In addition to the flatness and lack of detail, they do not appear as *nudes*; rather, they are *naked,* or stripped of their clothes, and expressing the Medieval belief that man is fundamentally wicked and sinful. When we arrive again at Michelangelo's *David,* centuries later, he has returned to his natural state, unabashedly standing on earth, feet firmly fixed, venerated for his worldly beauty.

As another example of shifting aesthetics, the *Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore*, or Florence Cathedral, was built on the cusp of the new era. Begun in 1294, the initial design was in the Gothic style, with soaring spires pointing skyward toward God and heaven; however, construction took so long that by the time there was a push to complete the final section, Florence had emerged into the Renaissance. In keeping with the new focus on creativity, a competition was held to find the most visionary architect.

Figure 21: The Cathedral in Florence was begun in the Medieval period, and completed in the Renaissance; Photo by Keith Zhu on Unsplash

Filippo Brunelleschi submitted the winning proposal – a grand free-standing dome, fashioned in the style of the Pantheon in Rome. This Classical feature was attached to the existing Gothic sections of the building, so that the structure now stands as a memorial to the transition between the Medieval and Renaissance periods in Italy.

Philosophical Focus: Humanism

Humanism is a philosophical perspective and social movement which took hold in Europe in the 15th Century. While the Medieval period focused on the will of God and the dogma of the Church, the society of the Renaissance was interested in the potential of man – his strengths, weaknesses, and the force of his thoughts and emotions. Humanists sought to engage actively in the world around them, were motivated by a desire to learn, and strove to maximize the potential of mankind. While not entirely against religion, Humanism emphasized the needs of people in this life, rather than their potential for resurrection in the next, and so fueled a shift toward secularism.

Figure 22: Visitors to the Louvre Museum in Paris clamor to see the small Mona Lisa; Photo by Mika Baumeister on Unsplash

Humanism takes its inspiration from Greco-Roman philosophy, which regarded the mind as a source of truth – if only mankind could be sufficiently stimulated to discover it. This is the classic Socratic method,

no doubt familiar to you from seminars in school – posing questions and using reasoned thought to find one's way toward new understandings. Humanists embraced this idea, and turned inward, to study and find meaning in their own thoughts and feelings. During the long centuries of the Dark Ages, emotions were focused on piety; now, people were inspired to live in and experience the world.

Not surprisingly, the Renaissance was a prolific and transformative time culturally, and is the source of the first masterworks in all of the arts. Probably the best known is Leonardo Da Vinci's enigmatic *Mona Lisa*, with its commanding depiction of individuality and personhood. Whereas Medieval art focused on social status or religious symbolism, Da Vinci's presents his subject as a genuine, realistic person. The fact that the woman's identity is a mystery does not distract from the effect, but serves to support the idea that her portrayal is not linked to a socially-constructed identity – she is an individual.

Da Vinci's landscape also offers clues to the culture of the Renaissance. Behind his *Mona Lisa* is a wide-open landscape exhibiting both lifelike perspective and immense depth. It is almost *too* realistic, in that the terrain seems fantasy-like in scope. This shows a highly developed command over the canvas, in that the artist is able to recreate the natural world through an expert use of elements – angles, shapes, shading, and the like. Such a visual feat would not have been possible just a few generations prior, since it relies on mathematical accuracy and knowledge of the natural world – innovations of the Renaissance.

In England, playwright William Shakespeare used the theater, a mainstay of the ancient Greeks, to tell stories about the follies and misfortunes of human emotions. The tragic ending of Romeo *and Juliet* is well-known, but not all of his plays are quite so high brow. There are comedies, such as *Much Ado about Nothing*, which riotously explore mankind's foibles, as well as twisted, murderous tales like the revenge-horror *Titus Andronicus,* in which two families take turns retaliating against each other until there is virtually no one left. In all cases, the Bard's tales characterize and study people – what makes us love, hate, laugh, and mourn.

Some of Shakespeare's more edgy subjects are related to a larger aesthetic trend: *Renaissance Melancholia*. Since Humanists were motivated by authentic expressions of emotion and experience, they tended to focus on intense feelings, such as sadness, loss, or grief. Happy feelings are fun, of course, and there are plenty of cheerful songs from this period, but artists saved their most important work for more contemplative states, intended to spark introspection and reflection. In this regard, Humanists followed the model of Greek tragedies, favoring melancholia as an expressive subject. Further, art was both the motivation and the remedy, particularly in the case of sad music, which was believed to give the listener a feeling of *catharsis*, or a release from negative emotions.

The Age of Discovery

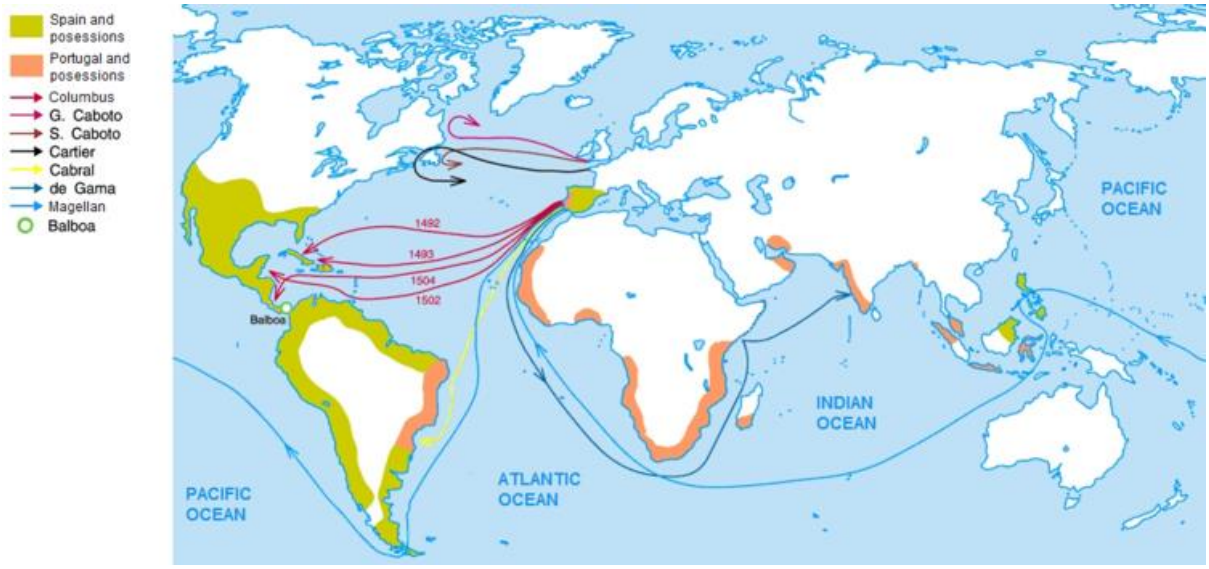


Figure 23: The Age of Discovery; Europeans reach new lands; Image Public Domain

As the arts were focused on the inner terrain of human emotions, Europeans also mapped the outer world. This is the *Age of Discovery*, when explorers reached the New World, as well as parts of Africa, India, and Oceania, bringing back both ideas and goods, which impacted culture and thinking at home. Although the urge to explore was driven by the noble pursuit of Humanism, in most cases, the influx of Europeans to other lands ultimately proved devastating to the indigenous peoples of the world. Despite the great strides in thinking that occurred in this era, history offers many heartbreaking reminders that humankind had much evolution left to achieve.

The thirst for discovery also generated new and impactful inventions, including the microscope and telescope, both of which enabled scientists to redefine the boundaries of the known world. Even more significantly, the printing press, first introduced by Johann Gutenberg in 1440, modernized bookmaking, bringing knowledge and information to wide audiences and making education accessible to all tiers of society.

By the mid-15th century, music printing had evolved into a lucrative business, with a newly prosperous middle-class enthusiastically buying sheet music for at-home performances. This fulfilled the need for *pastimes*, or activities undertaken solely for fun and pleasure – a clear indicator that society had evolved past the restrictive and comparatively uncultured life of the Medieval period.

Sacred Music and the Church

The influence of the church on civic matters faded in the Renaissance, since its status was diluted both by dissidents and its own internal scandals. As political leaders solidified their own power, they no longer felt the same need to follow church edicts. In one famous example, when the pope failed to bend to his demands, Henry VIII of England simply created his own church, so that he could do what he wanted; namely, to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Although this ultimately lead to intense

conflicts, since not all English subjects wished to denounce Catholicism, the Church of England still exists today, and is treasured for its repertoire of sacred choral music in English.

Henry's split from Rome aligned England with the larger *Protestant Reformation* taking place in Europe. Lead by the German theologian Martin Luther, Protestants believed that the path to salvation is personal; meaning, congregants can access God themselves, and do not need the clergy of the Catholic Church to dispense salvation upon them.

In this, Luther took a decidedly *Humanist* view of religion, and actively put his philosophies into practice. He translated the Bible, so that German Christians could, for the first time, read it themselves, and was an advocate of *congregational*, or *group singing*, so that all in attendance could participate in mass together (instead of listening to monks recites passages in Latin). In fact, Luther himself composed the beloved hymn, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A Mighty Fortress is Our God"), which continues to be sung by Protestant congregations around the world today.

Figure 24: Martin Luther (1529) by Lucas Cranach the Elder; Image Public Domain

In response, the Catholic Church initiated the *Counter-Reformation*, a period of reform convened under a committee of bishops called the *Council of Trent* (1545-1563). Among the many issues discussed, the role of sacred music was a matter of contention. In particular, the Council felt that Humanist trends lead to overly complex and emotional music, which in turn caused musicians to turn masses into a personal concert. They blamed these issues on polyphony (multiple melodies sounding at the same time), a texture which had emerged in the late Medieval period. Initially, they were prepared to censor all new styles, and revert to the monophonic plainchants of the Medieval period; however, Italian composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594) provided an example of polyphonic music that was more balanced and simple, and persuaded them that new trends could find a proper place in the church.

Secular Music

While composers continued to work within the church and to produce music of great spiritual depth, *secular*, or *non-religious* music was a new and booming movement. For the first time in history, it was possible for musicians to work successfully outside of the church, and as such, there was greater freedom to explore a range of popular styles and themes. Love, politics,

Amateur musicians were plentiful, and many people could both read and perform music to entertain friends and family at home. As a result, composers were challenged to publish new music at a quick

pace, and to create things that were pleasing, fun, and interesting. This also meant that audiences were musically literate, and so were discerning in their tastes. Composers had to maximize expressiveness and creativity in order to be successful.

Cultural Spotlight: The Madonna and Child

Leonardo DaVinci is known as the "Renaissance Man," because he was learned and successful in many academic and artistic disciplines. Born as the illegitimate child of a peasant mother, he had no special educational opportunities and was largely self-taught. Culturally, this is significant in that the Renaissance period offered avenues for social mobility and advancing one's lot in life.

While he is best known for his artistic works, DaVinci was much more, studying and writing on such diverse topics as science, philosophy, and anatomy, and contributing innovations to the fields of architecture and weaponry. Amazingly, some of his sketches foreshadow the technology of future inventions, such as parachutes, diving suits, self-propelled vehicles, and much more. In his appetite for knowledge and learning, Da Vinci truly embodies the spirit of this era.

No doubt, Da Vinci's enigmatic *Mona Lisa* is familiar to you, but have you ever wondered why this small portrait of an unknown Renaissance woman is so famous? This period is the first in which works of art can be regarded as "masterpieces"; meaning, artists could create images that were as emotionally striking as they were realistic and detailed. Paintings of this era seem, for the first time in history, to have a living, breathing spirit, as if the subject might jump off the canvas.

In particular, Da Vinci is renown for the depth and clarity of his paintings. In fact, he was so interested in faithfully recreating reality on his canvases that he participated in dissections of cadavers in order to better understand the anatomy of the human body. He also used geometric accuracy in configuring the proportions of his landscapes. The parallel in music would be composers learning how connect musical elements with words and meaning, to create a more expressive and holistic composition.

While the *Mona Lisa* is certainly the most famous of his works, DaVinci's *Madonna of the Yarnwinder* offers a unique window into the shifting cultural perspectives of this period, since its subject is one common to so many other paintings over time. The female figure at the center of the image is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Known as the *Madonna*, she is venerated by Christians as a symbol of love and purity. On her lap is her infant son. The Madonna and her child became the subject of religious art as early as the 5th Century, and continues to be celebrated today.

To understand the significance of DaVinci's portrayal, we will compare his work to an earlier depiction, created by Italian Deodato Orlandi (1284-1315) in 1320, approximately 200 years before Da Vinci. It incorporates elements common to the Medieval aesthetic.

Figure 25: Orlandi's "Madonna and Child"; Image courtest of Wikipedia, Sailko

First, the perspective is rather flat, meaning there is no sense of depth in the background or in the clothing or features of the central figures. Second, the depiction is rather impersonal, in that the subjects' facial features are not particularly distinctive from each other and show no real sense of emotion or expression. They are portrayed according to their iconic role in Catholic theology, as symbols, and not as representations of their own individuality or experiences.

This is perhaps most apparent in the size and demeanor of the baby Jesus, who appears not as a child, but as an almost fully realized, miniaturized adult – a portrayal of his significance, instead of his personhood. Lastly, the colors are bright, but unrealistic in their lack of consistent shading or contour. In short, this image venerates the figures as icons, rather celebrating them as individuals.

By contrast, Da Vinci's *Madonna*, painted in the same triangle-shaped posture of the mother holding her child, is full of soft colors, subtle shading, and natural elements. While not exactly photo-realistic by modern standards, her image feels more tangible and organic.

We can see the delicate curls of her hair and the cherubic smile of her son. The figures also express movement and seem to have been caught in a moment in time. Behind them is a vast landscape depicting a grand valley, river, and cliffs. This sprawling scene is a celebration of the natural world, and a demonstration of the artist's advanced control of dimension and depth on the canvas. Knowledge of math and science was required to accomplish this feat, which is a sign of the more educated culture of the time.

It is easy to imagine that this pair is out for an afternoon stroll and has stopped to take rest. They seem like real people, captured in a snapshot. A plump and precocious toddler, Jesus has snatched something from his mother, as children do, and is carelessly playsing with it, as she reaches out to take it from him. It is a *yarnwinder* (a tool for winding yarn), and is innocent and practical enough, but carries some important symbolism. First, we can also see that it is sharp and probably not safe for a baby. Secondly, it eerily mirrors the shape of undeniable importance: the Christian cross.

As Shakespeare would say, “there’s the rub”; meaning, this is where the seemingly idyllic scene conveys a tragic undertone. As viewers, we know the final chapter of Jesus’s story – he is to be crucified on a cross. He will face a violent and untimely death in the name of the Christian faith.

Given his mother’s posture, as she reaches out to save him from this sharp object (notice the disproportionately large size of her hand), the viewer is suddenly confronted with the suffering Mary will one day face, since we already know that she will not be able to save her son from his ultimate fate.

Mary is not just a symbol of the church; rather, she is a real flesh and blood mother, who will cope with untold grief. It is a poignant depiction that asks us to grapple with conflicting emotions. Like much of life, it is a dichotomy that feels both beautiful and bittersweet. It is these moments of emotional engagement that Renaissance artists sought in their work – moments of *melancholic* reflection.

Figure 26: "Madonna of the Yarnwinder," from the studio of Leonardo Da Vinci; Image public domain, courtesy of Wikimedia

Cultural Hotspot: Elizabethan England

When Queen Elizabeth I ascended to the English throne in 1558 amid political rivalries and religious anxieties, she united her kingdom using a combination of shrewd leadership and clever marketing. As a female ruler, she was in the awkward position of needing to justify her power, since women were regarded as emotionally undisciplined and temperamentally unfit to rule.

Figure 27: Queen Elizabeth I of England in her coronation robes; Unknown artist; Image courest of the National Portrait Gallery

As a testament to her intelligence and political talent, she cleverly presented herself not as a substitute for male dominance, but as a symbol for England herself, a bright, glittering jewel bound for a glorious destiny. She carefully crafted a public image, always cloaked in opulence and acting with grace and a quick wit that could quickly defuse even difficult political issues. It is no surprise then that this era in English history belongs to her. Like the Christian Madonna herself, Elizabeth was a symbol of purity, virtue, and spiritual authority.

Behind her public persona, Elizabeth was also a strong political leader who shepherded her kingdom through a period of peace and prosperity. The country she inherited was embroiled in religious conflict, having endured the rocky reign of Mary I, who sparked tension by reinstating Catholicism in Henry VIII's Protestant England. Elizabeth deescalated the situation by taking a middle ground; she restored Protestantism but repealed the laws that enabled persecution of Catholics. Her most famous victory came in 1588, when the Spanish Armada, under the rule of the Catholic King Phillip II, threatened the shores of England. Elizabeth famously rode to the coast, took up arms (at least figuratively) with her men, and lead her forces to victory against a much larger and more powerful aggressor, securing her place as a beloved and powerful monarch.

While her strength in diplomacy built a prosperous England, vigilance was required in order to maintain her power. This was true for any ruler at the time but was especially pressing because of her gender. Under constant pressure to marry and produce an heir to the throne, Elizabeth had to devise crafty methods for avoiding marriage and the abdication of her rule to a husband. She kept potential suitors in an ongoing game of chase, while carefully building a public image that would placate her subjects and courtiers. Over time, she emerged as the "Virgin Queen," wedded to her country. To strengthen this image, she was portrayed as perpetually youthful and beautiful in the art and music of the time.

Elizabethan England was a cultural hotspot, with all forms of expression thriving under the Queen's influence and patronage – and always, in celebration of her beauty and purity. The royal coffers threw support behind such iconic works as Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, which refers to "Our Radiant Queen," in veneration of the monarch. In music, she was immortalized in poetry and song, under the names of Greek goddesses or by her popular nickname, "Gloriana." Painters endeavored to capture her likeness in images that were perpetually youthful and fresh, and her portrait was crafted into fashion accessories, such as rings or broaches, to be worn by the socially elite – a testament to her cultural influence.

Figure 28: Elizabeth's "mask of youth"; This was the face the queen approved for use in all future portraits, to maintain her image as strong but youthful; Unknown artist; Image courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery

Elizabeth herself could sing, dance, and play the lute (see instrument focus below) and the virginal (a small keyboard instrument). It was common for noble women to be educated in music, and to use their skills and knowledge as evidence of their high breeding, but females were unlikely to make a habit of performing in public; rather, they were expected to be discerning patrons, or supporters, of the arts. Elizabeth's love of song and dance was then somewhat of a political liability. Much like her own power, she had to dispense music shrewdly, lest she be accused of using her feminine wiles to incite sexual hysteria in the men around her.

Incredibly, as with so many other aspects of Elizabeth's political acumen, she skillfully turned both music and gender to her own needs. In keeping with her image as the Virgin Queen, those seeking influence had to win her attention, virtually in the same way that a lover might pursue the object of his desire. Elizabeth played her part expertly, casting out those who angered her, and seducing those who suited her needs. Access to a concert in her private chambers was

considered a sign of her favor, and courtiers vied for these important spots. Hearing a performance of the queen herself was an even more intimate gesture; meaning, she could employ her musical skills as a manipulative tool. She was clever indeed!

While music strengthened her political standing from a practical standpoint, the messages were often more subliminal, drawing on the ancient philosophies that were undergoing a revival in the Renaissance. According to the Greek mathematician Pythagoras, music is not only a melodious and pleasing sound, but also possesses the power to create *harmonia*, or *order from disarray*. He described this phenomenon in terms of the *Music of the Spheres*, or the idea that the universe – the stars and planets – move in *harmony*, as a form of *music*. The audible kind of music mirrors this order, and can therefore generate *harmonia* in people, society, and the world. In short, music has the power to make us better.

Whether they were simply caught up in a cultural phenomenon or they were directly influenced by the queen herself, the poets and musicians of Elizabeth's court venerated her as a source of *harmonia*; meaning, her power and grace transcended both man and nature, and sprung from the universe itself. This had the effect of bypassing the gender-based arguments against her rule, since her mythical persona could rise above any such trivial objections. As an example, Sir John Davies' poem, "To the Queen," dating from 1594, refers to Elizabeth's power to create harmony out of discord, as a metaphor for her political strength:

> *What music shall we make to you*
> *To whom the strings of all mens hearts*
> *Make music of ten-thousand parts*
> *In tune and measure true*
> *With strains and changes new?* [20]

Davies is asking how her subjects can praise her in music (or in any form), when she herself is so much more; in fact, she can take the music of "ten-thousand parts" and tune it to "measure true." This ascribes a divine level of power to Elizabeth's rule, and presents her in a goddess-like manner. The intensity with which artists of this period venerated their queen has been called by historians the "Cult of Elizabeth," and was an integral component of her success as one of England's greatest and most influential monarchs.

Genre Focus: Word Painting and the Renaissance Madrigal

Elizabeth was also the subject of a book of *madrigals* called the *Triumphs of Oriana* (1601), compiled by the composer and music printer, Thomas Morley (1558-1602). Madrigals were a

[20] (Hurst-Wajszczuk, 2007)

style of group singing imported from Italy, characterized by a polyphonic texture and tuneful poetic verses on love or nature. They had just the right balance of challenge, fun, and musical interest to make them an ideal choice for Renaissance pastimes. Amateur musicians sung them at home and the Queen herself enjoyed madrigal performances from her court singers. In addition, by emulating "continental" styles, composers felt they were legitimizing English culture on the greater European stage.

Madrigal: Terms

***Declamation**: Rhythms and melodic shapes imitate speech patterns, so that the words being sung are understandable*

***Word Painting**: Musical elements imitate the meaning of specific words in the text*

***Imitative Polyphony**: Musical texture in which short melodic ideas are immediately echoed or repeated across other layers*

Madrigals merge music and poetry, and three compositional techniques were employed to achieve this goal. First, it was important to make sure that the words were understandable. In contrast to the plainchant melodies of the Medieval period, which obscured syllables by dragging them out over lengthy strings of pitches, Renaissance madrgalists strove for *declamation*, or *rhythms and melodic shapes that imitate speech*, to make the words understandable when sung. Second, *word painting* was employed to emphasize the meaning of key words in the text; meaning, *musical elements imitated the meaning of the words*. Lastly, *imitation*, or the *echoing of short melodic phrases across layers*, allowed the music to maximize the impact of a line of text, since it could be repeated multiple times.

Figure 29: Gerard van Honthorst's "The Concert"; Dutch, 1623; Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Art/Wikimedia

Morley compiled the *Triumphs of Oriana* as a gift to the Queen. Three years prior, she had granted him a highly profitable monopoly on music printing, so he needed to return her favor. He commissioned 23 madrigals from a cross-section of modern composers – young and old, well known and obscure – and contributed two himself. All included the refrain "Then sang the shepherds and nymphs of Diana; Long live fair Oriana," in celebration of Queen Elizabeth. The line is somewhat ironic, since by this time she was in her seventies and her beauty and vitality had long faded. Even in the waning years of her rule, composers continued to revere her as a goddess, reigning over paradise.

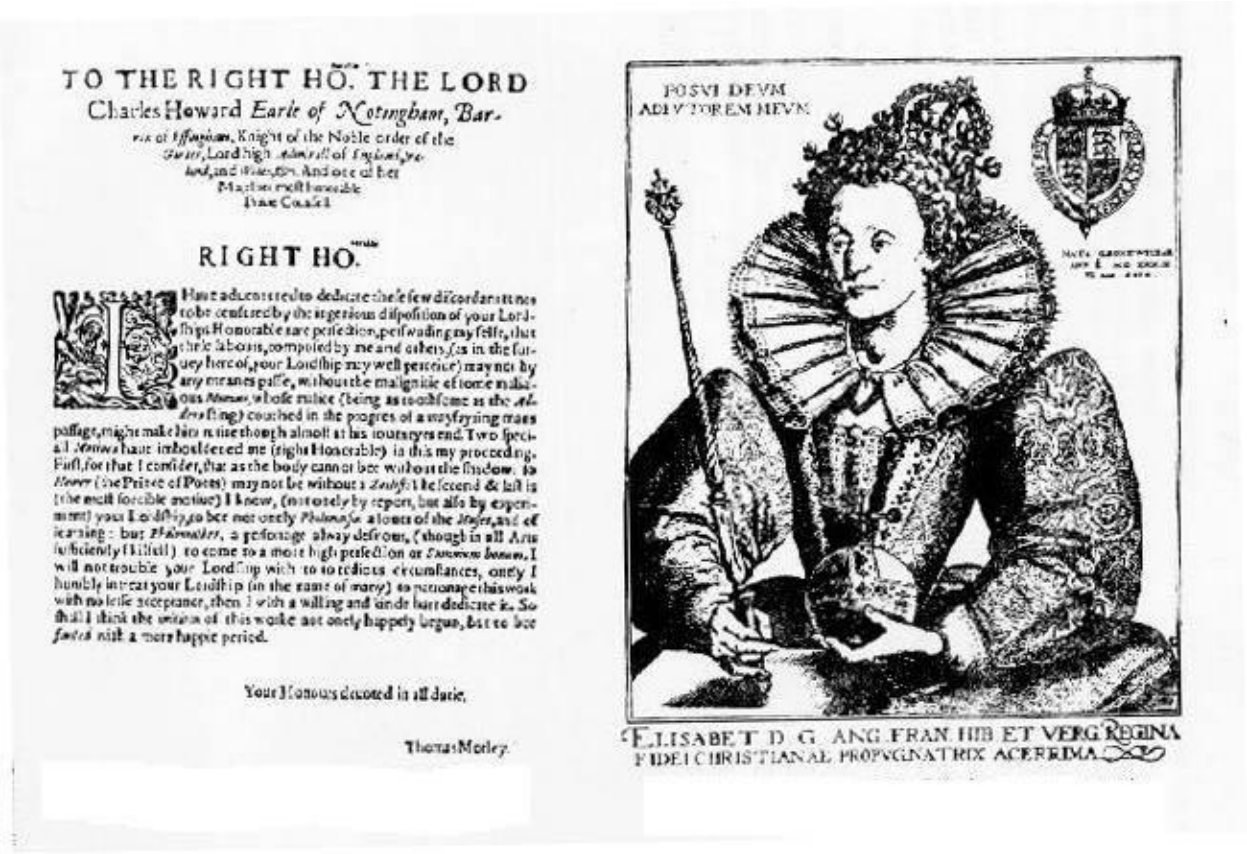

TO THE RIGHT HŌ. THE LORD
Charles Howard *Earle of Nottingham, Bar-*
RIGHT HO.
I Haue adiourned to dedicate the few discordant notes to be censured by the ingenious disposition of your Lordships Honorable rare perfection, perswading my selfe, that their labours, compiled by me and others, (as in the iurney hereof, your Lordship may well perceiue) may not by any meanes passe, without the malignitie of some malicious *Momus*, whose rancke (being as toothsome as the *Aretine*) couched in the progres of a mayfrying mans passage, might make him runne though almost at his iourneyes end. Two speciall *Momus* haue imboldered me (right Honorable) in this my proceeding. First, for that I consider, that as the body cannot bee without the shadow, so *Homer* (the Prince of Poets) may not be without a *Zoilus*: the second & last is (the most forcible motiue) I know, (not onely by report, but also by experiment) your Lordship to bee not onely *Philomusus*, a louer of the *Muses*, and of learning: but *Philomathes*, a professor alway desirous, (though in all Arts sufficiently skilfull) to come to a more high perfection or *Summum bonum*. I will not trouble your Lordship with to tedious circumstances, onely I humbly intreat your Lordship (in the name of many) to patronage this work with no lesse acceptance, then I with a willing and single hart dedicate it. So shall I think the trauaile of this worke not onely happily begun, but to bee finished with a more happie period.
Your Honours deuoted in all dutie,
Thomas Morley.
POSVI DEVM ADIVTOREM MEVM.
ELISABET D. G. ANG. FRAN. HIB. ET VERG. REGINA FIDEI CHRISTIANAE PROPVGNATRIX ACERRIMA

Figure 30: Portrait of Queen Elizabeth on the dedication of The Triumphs of Oriana, 1601; Image Public Domain

The name Oriana was taken from a popular chivalric romance of Spanish origins, called *Amadis de Gaula*. It is a mythical fantasy, full of knights and wizards; of course, Oriana is the queen, so the reference would have been immediately obvious to Elizabeth. Although the madrigals have no unifying story or plot, they send Fair Oriana through a variety of adventures as the "Maiden Queen of a Fairy Land" (Daniel Norcome's *With Angels Face and Brightness*), and the "Queen of all queens renowned" (John Bennett's *All Creatures now are Merry-Minded*), as she spreads joy to all who behold her. At the end of every madrigal, the "nymphs of Diana," the goddess of chastity, sing her praises.

One of the more famous in the set, Morley's *As Vesta was from Latmos Hill Descending*, is a prime example of Renaissance word painting. In contrast to the melancholic songs that

populate the darker edges of the Renaissance, it is a jubilant celebration of an idealized natural scene, in which all are drawn to Oriana's grace and beauty. Vesta, the virgin goddess of hearth and home, has the misfortune of encountering the fair Oriana on a hill. Her entourage of nymphs deserts her, first "one by one," then altogether, to cheer at the Virgin Queen's arrival, leaving the poor goddess all alone.

Musical Snapshot: *As Vesta was from Latmos Hill Descending* (1601)

1. **Composer**: Thomas Morley
2. **Genre**: Madrigal
3. **Country**: England
4. **Time Period**: Renaissance (Elizabethan England)
5. **Language**: English
6. **Sacred or Secular**: Secular
7. **Texture**: Imitative Polyphony
8. **Performers**: Six-part mixed choir; 3 males, 3 females; Acapella (no accompaniment)
9. **Words and meaning**: Extensive use of word painting (see below); Declamation

ENGLISH TEXT WITH WORD PAINTING ANNOTATIONS

As Vesta was from Latmos hill **descending**,	Fast downward passage, imitation
She spied a maiden Queen the same **ascending**,	Fast upward passage, imitation
Attended on by all the shepherds' swain,	
To whom Diana's darlings came **running down** amain,	Fast downward passage, imitation
First **two** by **two**, then **three** by **three** together,	Number of singers reflects number (2, 3, together); "all alone" Solo female voice
Leaving their goddess **all alone** hasted thither;	
And mingling with the shepherds of her train,	
With mirthful tunes her presence entertain.	
Then sang the shepherds and nymphs of Diana,	Sudden homorhythmic texture symbolizes unity; Sung in rapid imitation, to sound like a crowd cheering
Long live fair Oriana!	

Suggested recording: The King's Singers, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJV6srLTHkg

FOCUS ON INSTRUMENTS: THE LUTE

The lute was the most popular instrument of the Renaissance period. It is a guitar-like instrument in structure, with a hollow-body and wood construction, but it has a larger, pear-shaped body with an angled neck, and more strings than its modern counterpart.

The lute is a cousin of the Arabic *ud,* which had been brought to Spain by North African Muslims during their 9th-century conquest of Spain. Christian Crusaders returning to the continent from Africa in the 13th-century introduced the instrument more widely across Europe. Earlier instruments had fewer strings, which were played using the tip of a quill. Later, Europeans added the innovation of finger-plucking, which allowed for greater complexity of both technique and musical layers, enabling the instrument to function in the comparatively more complicated textures of Renaissance music.

Figure 31: Lute; Image courtesy of Ching on Flickr

The lute has several features that made it conducive to Renaissance needs: it is portable, relatively easy to maintain, and capable of performing a fully-voiced piece of music. Further, its guts strings and open body rendered a delicate tone that complimented the voice well, so that it became a favored instrument for singing. Over time, with the development of a usable tablature for notation, the lute came to be valued on its own, and composers contributed a wide range of solo instrumental works.

The lute was the first instrument that amateurs purchased for at-home pastimes, and it was the medium through which professional musicians in the Renaissance gained renown for their skills and technique. Noble patrons commonly offered outrageously high salaries to obtain the best lutenists, even sometimes engaging in a bidding war with rival courts. Most importantly, the lute was an excellent match for the somber, melancholic songs of the era, since its soft volume and relatively short sustain left plenty of tonal space for an emotive singer.

Composer Focus: John Dowland (1563-1626)

As a composer who captured the spirit of his era and performed the music that people most wanted to hear, Englishman John Dowland might aptly be described as the first "pop" musician, at least in terms of how we define that concept today. He rose to prominence throughout Europe, and was celebrated internationally for his distinctly melancholic style. Unfortunately, his Catholic faith caused him to become entangled with the politics of Elizabeth's Protestant England, and as a result, he failed to achieve the prestige he felt he was due.

Although little is known of his early life, by his early twenties Dowland was already on his way to a promising career. After working for the English ambassador to the French court and earning a Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Oxford, he applied for a position as lutenist to the Queen, no doubt anticipating a successful outcome. When the rejection came, he was furious at the idea that he had been excluded on religious grounds, and left England to tour on the continent.

Figure 32: John Dowland; Image Public Domain

Dowland traveled throughout Germany and Italy, where he was well-received by the nobility. He also had the opportunity to hear and absorb many unique regional styles that were not known to other English composers, giving his music an attractive and unique "continental" flavor. Specifically, he picked up the clear declamation and simpler textures of the Italians.

When he returned home two years later, he published his first book of songs, and it was so successful that the printing went into four editions. By this time, music publishing was a highly profitable business, but reprints like this were rare, since set-up was expensive and audiences preferred new music. Given this, it is clear that he was extremely popular with the English people.

Even so, Dowland still had no job prospects with the Queen, and so departed his homeland once again, this time leaving a wife and child behind. He entered into the employment of King Christian IV of Denmark, who was so enamored with the English lutenist that he paid astronomical sums of money to keep him at court. In return, Dowland was a rather poor employee, overstaying his frequent trips to England, where he visited family and continued to publish his music.

Unfortunately, his association with Denmark only further damaged his reputation with the Queen, since the two countries were entangled in a nasty trade dispute. In an attempt to finally win her favor, Dowland betrayed his employer and agreed to become a spy for England. It is even believed that he devised a clever code embedded in musical notation, in order to send secret messages back to England. Regrettably, his efforts did not amount to much, and the

arrangement abruptly evaporated with Elizabeth's death in 1603, leaving Dowland with no political supporters in either country. He was dismissed from his post in disgrace.

Nonetheless, by this time Dowland was the most famous lutenist in Europe. This is a substantial accomplishment, since his notoriety would have been achieved almost entirely by word-of-mouth and publications of his sheet music. Interestingly, he strategically crafted a public persona as a melancholic artist, cleverly signing all of his music with the motto, "Semper Dowland, Semper Dolens," or "Always Dowland, Always Suffering." Although most his ninety or so songs are rather upbeat and happy, his tragic, melancholic laments became his well-known brand – then, as now.

Dowland was nearly fifty years old when he finally achieved his lifelong goal of obtaining a post in the English court. It was not Elizabeth who bestowed this honor; but, at long last, her successor, James I. True to the fickle nature of fashionable trends in any era, by this time Dowland was considered out-of-date, and had been surmounted by younger players and newer styles. Although he remained at the post until his death in 1626, he composed little, and publicly lamented that his music had fallen from popularity.

Dowland's story is an interesting commentary on how artists navigate popular styles. On the one hand, he rose to success and fame publicly, but by the time he had achieved the cultural status he desired, his music was no longer trendy. Despite this, he has stood the test of time well, and his songs have continued to be performed up to the modern day. As an example, 383 years after the composer's death, English pop superstar Sting recorded an album of Dowland's songs, which reached number 25 on the Billboard Pop charts! Should artists create works that will be popular, or that will be lasting? Dowland seems to have achieved both, at least for a time.

Genre Focus: Melancholia and the Renaissance Lute Song

If the madrigal was the popular genre of Renaissance pastimes, the *Lute Song* (*written for a single vocal soloist accompanied by a lute*) was its more serious and artistic cousin. Also a medium for merging poetry and music, Lute Songs were more advanced and difficult musically, and generally performed by professional musicians in formal settings, rather than being a source of entertainment for amateurs at home. As is particularly the case with John Dowland, the genre's most famous and successful composer, Lute Songs allowed for more emotive power, since a single soloist could linger on specific words and lavish emotion on important moments in the text. As such, this

Genre Snapshot: Lute Song

- Solo Voice and Lute
- Usually homophonic texture
- Heavy use of word painting
- "Art" song of the Renaissance; Performed by professionals, rather than at-home amateurs

genre is known for its tragic lamentations and cathartic power.

Dowland's *Flow my Tears* represents the height of Renaissance Melancholia. The text, which may have been written by Dowland himself, is a dour meditation on loss and suffering, full of dark imagery and dramatic metaphors. At first listen, the most obvious source of his pain would be the heartbreak of a lost romance, and while that interpretation could well be true, his words also allude to a more stylized subject related to the politics of the time.

A one-time favorite of Queen Elizabeth and a member of her Privy Council (advisors), Robert Deveraux, Second Earl of Essex (1565-1601), was a great patron of the arts. Most importantly to Dowland, he was supportive of Catholics, and could be relied upon as an ally in his campaign to win favor with the queen. Unfortunately, his cultural standing was not permanent. After a failed military campaign in Ireland, during which he defied the Queen's commands, he was disgraced and place under house arrest. For Dowland and others who supported him, he became a "poor man condemned" – an idealized figure of a romantic hero, fallen from grace by misfortune and circumstance.

Remember that Elizabeth's relationships with courtiers often took on a pseudo-amorous tone, with those seeking influence "courting" her as one would pursue a lover. For his part, Devereaux seems to have misjudged his intimacy with the Queen, wrongly believing he could act autonomously in her name. It is no surprise that Dowland would then see himself as a comparable figure, having himself been twice spurned by the wily monarch. This is the negative side of the "Cult of Elizabeth," with Dowland suffering as an outcast of her domination over English culture. As it turns out, defying the Queen was indeed dangerous, since Deveaux was ultimately executed for treason.

If Dowland was inspired by this very public story of a nobleman's fall from grace, does *Flow my Tears* represent his personal feelings? Is this a stylized Renaissance lament, or did he really experience loss and suffering on the level expressed here?

The answer is unclear, since historians are at odds to agree on the nature of his temperament. While some insist that is temperament was unpredictable and his moods prone to fits of despair, others contend that this dark persona was only a marketing strategy, and that his actual personality was quite upbeat and social. Either way, there is no question that he was an expert at capturing emotional turmoil in music. As the musicologist Maureen Buja describes, he "brought the art of weeping to an exquisite height."

Drawing on the word painting techniques that were perfected in popular madrigals, Dowland uses musical elements to emphasize the emotions of *Flow my Tears*. First, and most famously, the opening phrase imitates falling tears with a descending melody, dropping a total of four pitches. This melodic shape allows the singer to emote, as if the words are being sung while crying. Dowland is also sensitive to *declamation*, making the rhythms evenly-spaced and the words understandable, so that the singer can deliver dialogue clearly – like an actor. This would

not have been possible in Medieval music since it was obscured by *melismas* (*long strings of pitches on a single syllable*) and had no pulse or rhythm.

For obvious reasons, Dowland predominantly employs minor harmonies in *Flow my Tears*, so that the overall mood is introspective and gloomy; however, there are some key moments of contrast. For example, the middle section ironically shifts to major, even as the words continue to dwell on suffering. The line, "never may my woes be relieved," marks the start of happier sounds, even as the singer continues to lament the inevitability of his pain. "Pity has fled," even as the cheerfulness of a major harmonies surround him.

Throughout the poem, there are references to light and dark, which seem to be synonymous with happiness and sadness, respectively. In his state of mourning, he is confined to dark nights, where the blackbird (a symbol for his lost soul), "her sad infamy sings"; whereas, "light," or happiness, "doth but shame disclose," meaning the happiness of others, or the world in general, only serves to highlight suffering. In an ironic twist, the words do not strive for recovery; instead, he sings, "there [in suffering] let me live forlorn." This is a man overcome with isolation and grief, who has no interest in changing.

As a final punch, the closing stanza features the lines:

> *Happy, happy they that in hell*
> *Feel not the world's despite*

Here, Dowland uses the imagery of tormented souls, writhing in Hell, as an example of people who are happier than he! To accentuate this irony, the word "happy," which in any other context should imply a release from suffering, is set to a minor chord, giving it a strained and painful feeling. It is also the melodic climax of the song, so that it sounds like someone crying out in pain, straining to find happiness where there is none.

Figure 33: A representation of Renaissance Melancholia from the Italian painter, Domenico Fetti; Image Public Domain

There are many other moments of emotional intensity in Dowland's music. For example, on the words "tears," "sighs," and "groans," the vocal line repeats a pattern of upward, sweeping gestures, set to two ascending pitches. The effect sounds like a hopeful declaration, as if the melody is striving for relief, while the lyrics continue to convey a future of grief and pain. To strengthen this moment, the lute creates a dialogue with the singer, melodically imitating

each of the “sighs” right after they are sung – as if offering emotional support. Since most of the song is homophonic, this moment of polyphony is notable, as it emphasizes the emotional content.

With so much misery in a single song, you might wonder why someone would write something so depressing. The answer is as simple as it is timeless. When people are in pain, they seek out sad songs to help them cope. Music is extremely useful in these moments, as it allows the listener to work out their feelings, and to experience a sense of release. Furthermore, sad music is not just for sad people. When we are happy, melancholic music is also appealing because it feels bittersweet and poignant. Sad music offers an opportunity for reflection and self-assessment. It serves a real purpose, even in the best of times.

Do you listen to sad music?

Musical Snapshot: *Flow my Tears*, John Dowland (1600)

1. **Composer**: John Dowland
2. **Genre**: Lute Song
3. **Country**: England
4. **Time Period**: Renaissance (Elizabethan England)
5. **Texture**: Homophonic (with some imitation)
6. **Performers**: Solo voice and lute
7. **Words and meaning**: Extensive use of word painting (see below)

ENGLISH TEXT WITH WORD PAINTING ANNOTATIONS

Text	**Word Painting**
Flow, my tears, fall from your springs! Exiled for ever, let me mourn; Where night's black bird her sad infamy sings, There let me live forlorn.	Descending, four-note melody, imitating falling tears
Down vain lights, shine you no more! No nights are dark enough for those That in despair their lost fortunes deplore. Light doth but shame disclose.	Same four-note melody is repeated, meaning is similar
Never may my **woes** be relieved, Since pity is fled; **And tears and sighs and groans** my weary days Of all joys have deprived.	Shift to major harmony, used ironically, to symbolize that relief is illusive Upward, two-note "sighs" and imitation in the lute on "tears and sighs…."
From the highest spire of contentment My fortune is thrown; And fear and grief and pain for my deserts Are my hopes, since hope is gone.	
Hark! you shadows that in darkness dwell, Learn to contemn light. **Happy, happy** they that in hell Feel not the world's despite.	"Happy" is melodic climax, also ironically harmonized in major

Suggested recording: Phoebe Jevtovic Rosquist, soprano & David Tayler, lute,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3clX2CJqzs

FOCUS ON ELEMENTS: RHYTHM

All music has rhythm, meaning it is subject to the constraints of time, and ordered so that sounds occur at specific intervals, according to basic mathematical concepts which organize musical tones into equally spaced divisions. This is the element of music that inspires dance and movement. Regularly-spaced pulses, and the durations that interplay between them, trigger the muscles into action, and transform listening into a full-body experience.

Figure 34: Drums and other non-pitched instruments add rhythmic layers to a musical texture; Drummers in San Diego, photo by Claudia Schillinger, Flickr

In thinking about rhythm and its role in a musical texture, it is helpful to first identify *pitched* and *non-pitched* sounds. Both have rhythm, of course, but *pitched* sounds, or those which also produce melody or harmony, use rhythm as a means of organization, emphasis, and pacing, whereas *non-pitched* sounds, such as those from a drum or tambourine, do not move around the spectrum of pitch range, but instead apply rhythmic patterns to a single (or just a few), indefinite pitches. A drummer in a Rock band is an example of a non-pitched, rhythmic layer. By contrast, a singer performing the melody would also dependent on rhythm, but the pitch of their voice would be changeable.

From there, rhythm is about dividing time into patterns. Usually, those patterns are regular and symmetrical, which is what motivates the body to move, but rhythmic "surprises" can also be interesting, fun, or even shocking, depending on how unexpected the event feels to the listener.

To understand how rhythm works, it is helpful to think of a moment in time as a shape – a rectangle. We will assign that symbol a time duration of one-second. It now looks like this:

One-second of time ->

From there, we can use basic mathematical fractions to divide that second into pieces, like halves and thirds:

One-second of time, divided in half ->

One-second of time, divided in thirds ->

If we stack up a few of these chunks, we can create a rhythmic pattern:

We now have four-seconds of time, with two of them divided in half. Look at a clock with a second hand and see if you can find the halfway point, which cuts a one-second duration into two equal parts. Then, try to read the *rhythm* above. Can you do it?

Using these symbols, we can identify some important concepts about music in time. First, the dark green rectangles symbolize the *beat*, or the *regular pulse* underlying the music. The beat is a means of organization. Without a regular pulse, there would be nothing to divide.

The light green shapes refer to *rhythm*, or the *divisions of the beat*, and the patterns they create. Rhythm is needed to create variations and interest – if all durations were simply aligned to the beat, the music would have no contrasts or accents, and would flow unending through equally spaced events - monotonous and boring! Rhythm makes the music surprising and engaging.

The terms *beat* and *rhythm* are often confused. People say "beat" when the actually mean "rhythm," and this issue has been further confused by the phrase "mixing beats," which actually refers to mixing rhythm tracks – or rhythmic layers which have been extracted from existing recordings – to create something new. From now on, you will know which is which!

The beat also needs a pattern, otherwise it too would be a monotonous stream of unchanging sounds. Imagine if the patterns above were repeated, something like this:

This very basic example demonstrates how beats are organized into groupings, or *meters* – in this case, based on fours. Since this number is divisible by two, it is called a *duple meter.* Duple meters feel regimented, like a march, whereas *triple meters,* or those divisible by three, feel more lilting, like a dance. To hear meter, listen for an emphasized beat that occurs regularly. Classic rock is a great genre to practice listening for meter, since there is usually someone at the drum set, hammering it out!

Tempo, or the *speed of the beat*, also has a big impact on the music. The examples above use one-second beats, or 60 BPM (beats per minute), but this is certainly not a constant in music. Tempos can be changed to any speed. Fast tempos might feel energetic or driving, while slow tempos are more likely to sound peaceful and contemplative – even so, all of those moods are also impacted by other musical elements, so the possibilities are truly endless.

Lastly, *syncopation*, which is extremely common in Popular musical styles (and is in fact one of the primary features that differentiates it from "Classical" music) occurs when rhythms are *off-the-beat*. This creates a sense of excitement or surprise, which can give the music a driving feel. In the example below, the shapes sounding half-way through the beat, would be *syncopated*.

Rhythm: Terms

Beat: Regular pulse underlying the music
Rhythm: Patterns of duration; when events occur in time
Meter: Patterns of beat groupings
Duple: Meters based on divisions of two, sound march-like
Triple: Meters based on divisions of three, sound dance-like
Syncopation: Rhythms which occur off-the-beat

FOCUS ON ELEMENTS: DYNAMICS

Although performers have almost certainly always used volume as an expressive element, it was not specified by composers until the late Renaissance/early Baroque periods. This was due, at least in part, to the fact that instruments were not technologically advanced enough to produce meaningful shifts in volume, until that point.

In music, volume is referred to by the term *dynamics*. Taken from Italian, "loud" music is communicated by the word *forte* (abbreviated in music with a stylized letter "F"), and "soft" by the term *piano.* Musicians today read a range of dynamic markings, but for our purposes, loud and soft will do.

Figure 35: Image courtesy of Camilo Rueda López, Flickr

Initially, dynamics were conceived of as sudden shifts between soft and loud, called *terraced dynamics*, since that was a match for the capabilities of earlier instruments, but later, composers added more subtle techniques, with the *crescendo* indicating a slow increase in volume over time, and the *decrescendo* instructing musicians to do the opposite – decrease volume gradually.

Dynamics: Terms

Dynamics: Volume
Forte: Loud
Piano: Soft
Terraced Dynamics: Sudden contrasts of loud and soft
Crescendo: Gradual increase in volume
Decrescendo: Gradual decrease in volume
Terraced: Sudden contrast of volume

All dynamics are relative, meaning different performing media will have individual thresholds for what constitutes "loud" and "soft," so it is best to think about this element in terms of how it works within the context of a particular song or piece. While we all love the excitement of loud music, that extreme becomes even more powerful when contrasted by something soft. Ideally, music has both!

LESSON 6: THE BAROQUE PERIOD (1600-1750)

Baroque Period Snapshot

- Society is once again structed into strict social classes
- Absolutism: Monarchies rule with absolute power
- Upper class tastes rule culture
- The "Age of Reason" – science and logic govern thinking and the arts

Figure 36: The sculpture, Le Seine, designed by Girardon, modeled by Le Hongre, and cast by the Marsy brothers between 1685 and 1694, was one of a set of 16 allegorical figures placed around the Parterre d'Eau (Water Terrace) on the west side of the Palace of Versailles, France; Source: Wikimedia Commons

While the Renaissance was more or less a purposeful movement with specific goals, namely, the revival of culture for the purpose of improving quality of life, the Baroque had an ambiguous start; so much so, that it wasn't even recognized with a name until after the period had passed. By the late 18th Century, historians began to describe a specific aesthetic as *baroque*, a term that was intended to be a criticism of a needlessly ornamented and extravagant style. The word was borrowed from jewelry-making, where it referred to a misshapen pearl, not suitable for setting – certainly not intended to be a compliment. In 1768, the influential Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau described his opinions:

> *A baroque music is that in which the harmony is confused, charged with modulations and dissonances, the melody is harsh and little natural, the intonation difficult, and the movement constrained.* [21]

Clearly, his was not a glowing review. How then did society come to embrace a cultural trend that was so uninspiring to later critics?

The key to answering this question is a better understanding of the audience for Baroque art and music. By the 17th Century, society had narrowed into a far more rigid class system than existed in the Renaissance. As strong rulers expanded their control over all matters of state, governance evolved into a state of *absolutism*, or rule by sovereign monarchies. Access to such power was passed through families and bestowed by divine right, meaning royal lines were ordained by God. This gave kings and queens a sort of godly status on earth, so that their opinions – or even whims – were above rebuke. For their part, monarchs were expected to uphold a social contract in which they respected the rules of morality and natural order and acted in ways that were beneficial to their subjects, but as the hindsight of history shows, such power given to a single person is dangerous. If we jump ahead a few centuries, we know that this system eventually broke down.

Although the monarch was at the helm of state, he or she required a social network to keep the levers of government moving. The nobility of the Baroque period, whose social status was also hereditary, were virtually a culture unto themselves. In France, this was codified in the *Estates-General*, a social theory dating from the Medieval period, which held that society should be administered by the clergy and the privileged social classes, with everyone else (the majority) having very little control over the course of their own lives.

The most successful rulers smartly rallied the nobility to their cause, capitalizing on their influence in order to strengthen their power. The resulting social structure was focused upward, with most people working for the benefit of an aristocratic culture with extravagant tastes. Musicians and other artisans were employed within the *patron system*, as servants of wealthy families, churches, or courts, and performed their duties on-demand, at the discretion of their employers. Culture was driven not by the people at large, but by those wealthy and privileged enough to purchase it. This gives us the first answer to our question – music, as with all the arts, was a tool of the highly affluent, and reflected their excesses.

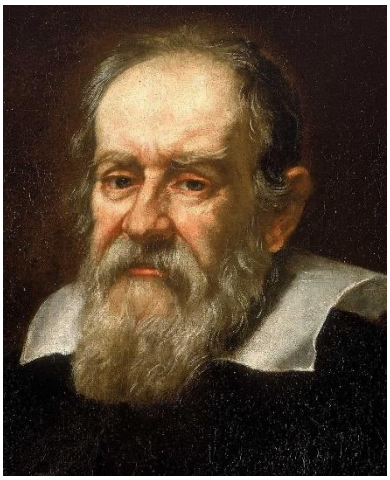


Figure 37: Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564-1642); Image in public domain

At the same time, science was a new and emerging discipline. While this may seem at odds with absolutism – a political system that does not seem

[21] (Carter & Butt, 2005)

very logical – it was actually rather complimentary. Renaissance Humanists followed a Greek model and sought to think their way out of the big questions of life. From this perspective, the human mind itself was the source of ultimate knowledge. By contrast, the great thinkers of the 15th and 16th centuries turned to the natural world and developed a more objective method of observation and testing, known as the scientific method today. This led to some radical new ideas, such as Galileo's discovery that the Earth was not (as previously believed) the center of the universe, and Sir Isaac Newton's mathematical explanations of gravity.

Figure 38: The immaculate gardens at Louis VIX's Palace at Versailles; Photo Credit: lienyuan lee / CC BY (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0)

New ideas such as this not only contradicted the great thinkers of antiquity but were heretical to the Church; thereby, greatly reducing the influence of two very important philosophical instigators of the past. At the same time, if man could codify the great mysteries of the world with the power of his observational skills, certainly he had conquered the natural world, and was powerful indeed. In the battle of man against nature, at least in this era, man believed he was winning. There was no greater symbol for this strength and power than the glorified monarch, as a source of all earthly authority. The religious convictions of the past were diverted into reverence for a singular ruler – God's representative on earth.

Figure 39: "Apollo and Daphne," marble sculpture by Italian artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini, depicts the exact moment, according to myth, that Daphne is transformed into a tree; Completed between 1622 and 1625; Photo Credit: Architas / CC BY-SA

Music in the Age of Reason

The scientific mindset of the Baroque lead to music that was more ordered and structured than in the past and many of the rules that shape music today were developed in this era. It is for this reason that the Baroque is the oldest music frequently heard on mainstream Classical concert programs today. Baroque composers learned how to create music that was clear but complex, while expressing an effervescence and energy that is unlike any other period in music. Most likely, you have heard and enjoyed Baroque pieces, even if you are unaware of their source.

First, Baroque music is well-organized. Melodic phrases are balanced and logical, with a pacing that is easy for the listener to follow. The texture in this period is usually *homophonic*, with a

melody in the forefront, to capture the listener's attention. At the same time, both melodies and accompaniment can be excessively *ornamented*, meaning full of twists, turns, florid diversions, and flowery spins of pitch. Like the filigreed archways of the monarch's palace or the gilded decorations of a fine piece of furniture, Baroque music is prone to opulence, extravagance, and luxury.

To this end, composers strove for intensity of emotion, described in this period as an *affect.* This evolved from the Humanism of the Renaissance, with its attention on sentiment and feelings. The revival of Classical philosophy reminded Europeans that emotions were not just a two-sided coin of happiness and sadness but had all sorts of nuances. This was rather groundbreaking, since the Medieval notion was that humans are essentially sinful, and our emotions the source of wickedness.

As the Baroque processed all of that through the lens of science and further bent aesthetics to meet the needs of highbrow tastes, composers amplified emotional affect to a theatrical level, virtually overstating feeling in their work. Baroque art and music favors *isolated moments of intense emotion*, almost as if to study each affective state – much as a scientist might isolate and observe a variable.

In music, a *Doctrine of Affections* was widely written about by theorists in the 17th and 18th Centuries, in an effort to categorize emotions according to their corresponding musical techniques. For example, in "Der vollkommene Capellmeister" ("The Perfect Chapelmaster"), German composer Johann Mattheson outlined many such musical/emotional pairs, asserting for example that small melodic intervals would spark sadness, whereas ferocity could be stimulated by dissonant harmony and a fast-moving melody. Such a formulaic approach to expression may seem like a limit on personal creativity, but Baroque composers regarded it as a useful framework for infusing their music with emotion. At the same time, this is the source of some of that Baroque "strangeness," in that composers would go to extremes in their efforts to trigger the affectations of the listener.

Figure 40: An image from French artist Charles Le Brun's "Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière" ("Method for Learning How to Draw the Passions") published in 1668; Shows stylized and intense facial expressions and their expression of specific emotional affects; Image public domain.

To emphasize emotion and capture attention, Baroque music and art is prone to high contrast. Sudden shifts between *forte* (loud) and *piano* (soft), major and minor, or between different instruments were common. Likewise, between *movements*, or sections, of a larger piece, the emotional affect was often noticeable different. These features mirrored visual art, where painters would create a stark, dark background, only to bathe the foreground in a warm pool of light.

To keep all of these elements – ornamented melodies, intense emotions, and high contrast – held together within a single composition, music almost universally adopted a strong bassline, known in this period as a *basso continuo*. Rather than being played by a single instrument, as is usually the case in modern music, the *basso* of the Baroque was a small ensemble. A low melodic instrument, usually a cello, played a written bassline, while a keyboard instrument, such as an organ or harpsichord, improvised ornate harmonic accompaniments. The resulting texture gives Baroque music a wonderful sense of vigorous forward motion that still feels grounded and dance-like. It is this unique tension between motion and structure that makes Baroque music unlike anything else in history.

Figure 41: Harpsichord; Image courtesy of Gérard Janot

FOCUS ON INSTRUMENTS: THE HARPSICHORD

By the Baroque, technology existed for the first time to create a wide range of instruments that could be played reasonably well in tune, and keep pace with the virtuosity of vocal music. String, wind, and keyboard instruments were built and widely performed, and in some cases, looked almost the same as they do today.

Strings included a full consort of violin, viola (called the *viola da gamba* in this period), cello, and doublebass, and already had their characteristic shape. Brass instruments did not yet have valves, and so their technique was more limited, but they were widely used in ceremonial and sacred music. Winds such as the flute and recorder were popular as solo instruments.

Even so, the most characteristically Baroque tone color comes from the harpsichord. It is keyboard instrument, but differs from a modern piano in several ways. Both are constructed of a hollow body fitted with strings, but in a harpsichord, they are plucked, rather struck by a hammer, as in the piano. This allows a pianist to apply different levels of pressure to the key, so that both volume and timbre can be changed according to performance needs. By contrast, the small plectrum of a harpsichord, called the "jack," can activate a vibration on the strings only, and is not capable of creating any nuance of sound or dynamics. Instruments were fitted with a damper, so that they could be made either loud or

soft, but no other shadings were possible. The resulting sound is somewhere between a guitar and a harp, with a much more percussive sound than either.

Harpsichords were the instrument of choice for the basso continuo and can be heard in all genres of Baroque music, flying through harmonies with florid rolls and fancy arpeggios. While the instrument continued to be used in operas of the following century, the harpsichord is quintessentially Baroque, and its sound is to closely associated with this period, that it is often used in movies to represent royalty.

Cultural Spotlight: Revisiting the Madonna and Child

Figure 42: Orazio Gentileschi, Italian (1563 - 1639), "The Virgin with the Sleeping Christ Child," 1610; Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift through William A. Coolidge in memory of Marian Lady Bateman; Used with permission

There are certain cultural icons which capture attention across generations, appearing in different incarnations across many works of art over time, so that each differing example can offer a unique insight into the personal and cultural perspectives of its artist. Thinking back on Da Vinci's Renaissance version of the Madonna and child (as well as the Medieval portrait on the same subject), it is easy to see that Gentileschi's *The Virgin with the Sleeping Christ Child*, completed in 1610, is a wholly different take.

Take a moment to study the image. What do you see?

First, and probably most striking is the blunt contrast between light and dark, a technique in painting known as *chiaroscuro.* Juxtaposition of elements is fundamental to Baroque art and music, and was employed as a technique for capturing the attention of the observer – usually a wealthy patron. Furthermore, bathing the subject in light symbolizes importance and prestige, which in this case is employed in a religious sense, identifying the baby Jesus as the Christian source of salvation. For portraits of the nobility, and in this period there were many, chiaroscuro shined a light on social status.

From a more practical standpoint, this contrast of light and dark makes the image appear theatrical, as if the figures are perched on a stage. While intense and striking, it probably also feels more removed, and less personal than the soft, natural lighting surrounding Da Vinci's Madonna. This is why Baroque art is referred to as *stylized*, meaning it portrays emotions and subject matter as larger-than-life, and therefore somewhat overdone and unrealistic.

At the same time, the play of light in Gentileschi's painting draws attention to its exquisite detail, which has far more depth than the delicate shading of Da Vinci's portrait. Painterly technique had clearly evolved in the hundred or so years between the two images, so that the Baroque Madonna appeara almost photographic. Even so, Gentileschi does not portray her with realism, at least in terms of her story in the Bible. Mary was only a teenager when she gave birth, and as a resident of Nazareth, Israel, likely had dark hair and olive skin; here, mother and child share a fair complexion, with the baby Jesus's hair almost a blonde hue. Further, her opulent robes of gold and blue (the colors of royalty) would have been unlikely for someone of Mary's social status. By portraying her as a princess of the church, this portrait shows the extent to which art mirrors the cultural expectations of its consumers. Wealthy patrons expected to see wealthy subjects, even in sacred art.

From a symbolic standpoint, the Baroque Madonna is similar to her Renaissance counterpart, in that the viewer is again prompted to contemplate the future death of her son. With his cherubic face frozen in slumber, the delicate fabric that his mother drapes over him seems almost like a burial shroud. In his hand is an apricot, which at this time in history was a symbol for the original sin of man, a burden Jesus accepts with his death on the cross. While these elements certainly pack an emotional punch, it probably feels less poignant than the *Madonna of the Yarnwinder*, owing to the stylized nature of the image. Mary and her son seem to have been placed in state of suspended animation, floating somewhere in the lofty realms of imagined purity. While the Baroque Madonna is a beautiful and statuesque image of idealized piety and maternal love, it does not feel personal or intimate, as was the case with Da Vinci's version of the same subject.

Genre Focus: Opera

As with the Renaissance, the Italians lead the early charge into the new styles of the 17th-century. Although Baroque music would evolve into a continental phenomenon, its origins were in expressive melodies, draped in dramatic emotional potency, a trend can be traced to the city of Florence. There, a wealthy count named Giovanni de' Bardi gathered writers, thinkers, musicians, and other influencers to his home, and charged them with evaluating and reimagining the cultural status quo. This thinktank, called the *Florentine Camerata*, is the origin of the Baroque's most influential genre – opera.

Genre Snapshot: Opera

- Developed by the Florentine Camerata
- Based on model of Greek Tragedies
- Music drama: Combines theater and singing
- Two singing styles developed:
    - *Recitative* (speech-like, conveys plot)
    - *Aria* (lyrical and melodic, conveys emotion)

The members of the Camerata were fundamentally Humanist, and so turned to Greek dramas as a model for both the aesthetic and expressive purpose of art. Most significantly, they were influenced by the Italian scholar Girolamo Mei (1519-1594), who had read virtually every Greek treatise written on the subject. Despite the lack of direct documentation, Mei was convinced that Greek dramas had been sung, rather than recited. Since the Camerata was critical of Renaissance madrigals, contending that polyphonic textures clouded the emotional potency of the music, Mei's ideas about combining speech and melody were appealing. In particular, they liked the idea that a solo singer could perform a straightforward melody while emoting in the style of an actor.

Over time, the Camerata's new, declamatory singing style grew into full length music dramas, eventually called *operas.* Merging theater and music, at the most basic level, an opera is melodic storytelling (or dramatic singing), but fans of the genre contend that it far surpasses the sum of its parts; meaning, it is more than just words set to music. Instead, an opera is a full-blown onslaught for the senses; a spectacle of epic proportions, in which song becomes a vehicle for deep emotional experiences.

In order to balance the need to convey a plot with the intensely emotional moments that would become the signature feature of the operatic genre, two styles of singing evolved over time: Speech-like monologues used to tell the story, called *recitatives*, and lyrical, emotive songs called *arias*. While these distinctions did not develop fully in the Baroque, the seeds of their eventual arrival can be traced there.

Figure 43: Claudio Monteverdi; Image Public Domain

Composer Focus: Claudio Monteverdi

While the Camerata devised the basics of the new singing style, none of its members were accomplished enough to meaningfully carry it out. That was the task of opera's first great composer: Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643). Born in the 16th century, Monteverdi's early career took place during the height of the Renaissance, and he was successful as a composer of Italian madrigals and sacred music. Regarded as both a prodigy and a hard worker, Monteverdi eventually became the "maestro della musica" ("master of music") to the Duke of Mantua, in 1601. His employer had an affinity for theatrical music and in his role as a patron, likely sought the prestige of being at the forefront of a new musical genre. In 1607, the Duke commissioned Monteverdi to compose an opera on the Greek myth of Orfeo and Euridice, and *L'Orfeo*, the first masterwork of opera, was born.

Before opera took over the continent, Monteverdi would go on to compose at least eighteen of them, although only three complete scores survive. He is credited with creating characterization through music and in presenting stories with realistic experiences, emotions, and reactions. His operas are full of intense scenes, from clandestine and passionate love encounters, to angry confrontations. Also significant to Monteverdi's use of the voice is his differentiation between speech-singing and a more lyrical, expressive melodic style, which foreshadowed the *recitatives* and *arias* that would appear in later operas.

Genre Focus: Monteverdi and Baroque Opera

Composed in the final year of his life, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* ("The Corontation of Poppea") is considered his greatest masterpiece. The story is one of deceit, murder, and selfish ambition. Deriving its subject from historical facts – a first for opera at that time – the plot centers on the forbidden love between the Roman Emperor Nero and an ambitious courtesan, Poppea. After several acts of plotting and scheming, Nero and Poppea successfully defeat all who stand in their way, including Nero's wife and Poppea's fiancé, so that they can rule the empire together. Their final, ecstatic duet and the dramatic climax of the story, "Pur ti Miro" ("I adore you") is less a declaration of love than it is a celebration of their shared lust for power.

Like all of Monteverdi's operas, emotional intensity is enhanced by music elements. As the lovers languish in ecstasy, singing directly to each other, Monteverdi employs word painting on "moro" ("death") and "peno" ("grieving"), both of which are sung in the context of their love being a release from suffering, but which are musically presented with strong dissonances between the two parts. Since Poppea and Nero arrived at their union through conniving and devious means, these tense moments color the lover's embrace with what should be shame, although neither character seems capable of that emotion. At the same time, as the ambitious lovers sing, "I enchain you" ("Pur t'annodo"), the melody is a long melisma, imitating the idea of encircling each other. "Pur ti miro" is also written over a *ground bass*, or *repeating bass line.* This was a common feature in Baroque music, especially operas, since it allowed for a freely-varied melodic line, while the accompaniment remained stable.

Musical Snapshot: *"Pur ti Miro,"* from *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1643)

1. **Composer**: Claudio Monteverdi
2. **Genre**: Opera
3. **Country**: Italy
4. **Time Period**: Early Baroque
5. **Texture**: Homophonic (with imitation between voices and a **ground bass**)
6. **Performers**: Vocal duet (soprano and castrato, countertenor, or a female); Baroque orchestra (basso continuo; Strings, winds, lute, harpsichord)
7. **Words and meaning**: Word painting (see below)

TEXT AND TRANSLATION WITH WORD PAINTING ANNOTATIONS

ITALIAN	ENGLISH	Word Painting
Pur ti miro,	I adore you	
Pur ti godo,	I embrace you	
Pur ti stringo,	I desire you	
Pur t'annodo,	I enchain you	Melisma on "enchain" – imitates the idea of encircling
Più non peno,	I no longer grieve	
Più non moro,	I no longer die	Dissonances between the two vocal lines on "grieve" and "die"
O mia vita, o mi tesoro.	Oh my life, Oh my treasure.	
Io son tua…	I am yours	
Tuo son io…	You are mine	
Speme mia, dillo, dì,	My hope, say it, say,	
Tu sei pur, speme mia	The idol of mine, Yes, my love,	
L'idol mio, dillo, dì,	You are mine, tell me so	
Tu sei pur,	The idol of mine,	
Sì, mio ben,	Yes, my love,	
Sì, mio cor, mia vita, sì.	Yes, my heart, my life, yes.	
Pur ti miro,	I adore you	
Pur ti godo,	I embrace you	
Pur ti stringo,	I desire you	
Pur t'annodo,	I enchain you	
Più non peno,	I no longer grieve	
Più non moro,	I no longer die	
O mia vita, o mi tesoro.	Oh my life, Oh my treasure.	

Suggested recording: *Teatro Real, Madrid, Philippe Jaroussky and Danielle De Niese*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_isL0E-4TsQ

FOCUS ON INSTRUMENTS: THE VOICE

Since it comes pre-installed in human anatomy, the voice is likely the oldest instrument of all. Songs were our first musical utterings and singing continues to be the focus of most popular music today. Great singers are revered as superstars who can move the emotions of the audience at will and have always been a source of audience adoration.

Vocal range is a prized skill, with high voices often garnering the most praise. Modern talent shows, such as *The Voice* or *America's Got Talent*, are an example, since singers who can punch into the stratosphere and hold loud, high pitches usually get an immediately positive response from the audience. Even so, low voices have their own special flair, and can really dig deep into the soul of a melody.

Voices are placed into general categories, based on gender and range, from high to low – soprano, alto, tenor, and bass – with the top two voices falling in the female range, and the bottom two in the male; however, there are many more categories, based on what specific singers can do in terms of technique and tone color.

In operas, range is linked to specific character archetypes. For example, the *coloratura soprano* is a vocal superstar, capable of singing extremely fast, agile passages in the highest range of the voice. These singers are cast as the dramatic heroine, so that their emotional experiences can serve as the musical focus of the story, with melodies that appropriately showcase their talents. By contrast, the lowest male voice, called the *basso profundo*, often plays the role of a villain, or an older patriarch, and the highest male voice, the *lyric tenor*, is likely to be the romantic interest, destined to win the girl in the end.

These distinctions are largely a matter of genetics, based on the natural qualities of the voice; even so, successful opera singers will undergo years of training and study, before gaining the skills to sustain a performing career.

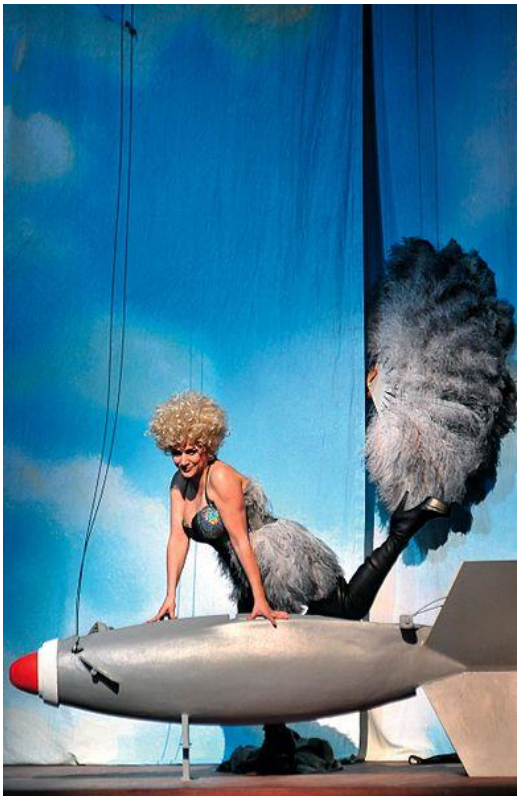


Figure 44: Cecilia Bartoli, an Italian coloratura mezzo-soprano (upper middle voice) appearing as Cleopatra in the Salzburg Festival in 2012. Image credit: Luigi Caputo

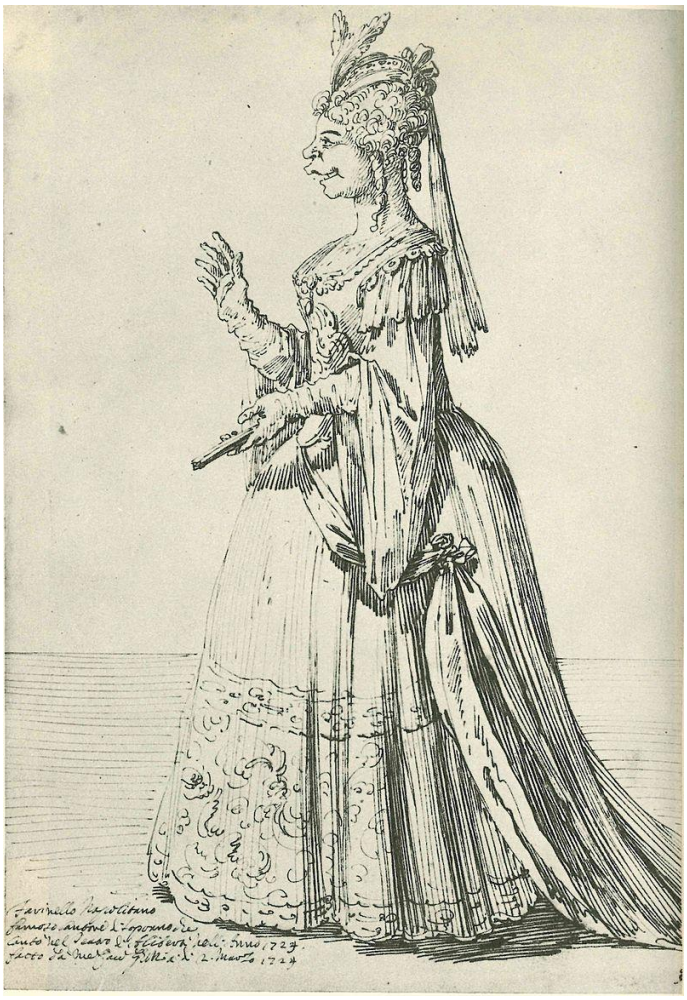


Figure 45: A caricature of Farinelli (a top castrato of the day) in a female role, by Pier Leone Ghezzi 1724; Image Public Domain

Culture Shock: Castrati

Although *Pur ti Miro* is a male/female duet in terms of characters, the listener will quickly notice that both voices are singing in the high female (soprano) range. This anomaly is a contributing factor to the Baroque period being labeled as "strange" by later historians. Perhaps critics also should have called it barbaric and depraved, since the male sopranos of this period were not natural variations of genetics – as is the case with modern performers (called countertenors).

Owing to a strict interpretation of a Biblical verse found in Corinthians – "let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak"[22] – the pope had disallowed women from singing in church or appearing on theatrical stages. Despite the decreased influence of religion in this era, this version of gender discrimination persisted, particularly in Italy.

Despite this fact, sacred and secular music of the period still had a need for high voices. Unfortunately, the solution was tragic. Talented boys, sometimes as young as six years of age, were castrated before puberty, in order to retain their high soprano vocal range.

If these singers' vocal skills continued to develop well into adulthood, and they were successful in performing on stage, they could become the proverbial rock stars of their day, satiating a public that was hungry for opera and morbidly attracted to the spectacle. *Castrati*, as they were called, also performed in churches and courts, and were common in Italy through the 16th-18th centuries. Although the practice died out thereafter, isolated instances still appeared, with the last known castrato, a singer at the Vatican named Alessandro Moreschi, living into the 20th century.

At the height of their popularity, it is estimated that as many as 4000 boys per year were subjected to the cruel surgery, with most coming from poor families hoping to provide their sons with a chance at fame and wealth. Aspiring castrati were sent to conservatories, or specialized schools, where they committed to a rigorous schedule of vocal training, and classes in music theory, improvisation, and music literature – a curriculum that could last up to ten years. When deemed ready by their trainers, usually around the age of fifteen, a young castrato would debut in a series of concerts, hoping to be well-received. Those who did not launch into opera would likely end up working in churches. Worse yet, those who failed were left as social pariahs, forbidden to marry, or even to attend church.

[22] (Koutsiaris, Alamanis, Eftychiadis, & Zervas, 2013)

Accounts of the castrato voice vary. Some describe a low female timbre, while others liken them to the voices of angels. What is certain is that they were capable of performing in the high female vocal range, while also possessing the physical strength of a man, giving them the ability to achieve epic levels of virtuosity – some are said to have been able to hold a high note for a minute or more. In addition, their years of rigorous training far surpassed anything available to other performers of the day, and so they became the artistic elite, favored by many composers – even Mozart wrote for the famous castrati of his day.

We can only guess as to what sort of mental and emotional anguish these singers may have experienced. Publicly, many seemed to relish in their fame and renown, but that image apples only to those who were successful. Castration at such a young age caused loss of testosterone and severe changes to body development, so that these singers were unusually tall, with large barrel chests, and feminine features, such as wider hips and beardless faces. In short, they were males who looked like females, in an era when the concept of gender was otherwise quite rigid. At their best, famous castrati could expect to be met with equal parts fascination, derision, and admiration. At worst, they would have been forced to cope with the emotional fallout of having been castrated before the age of consent. Their story is both fascinating and tragic.

Today, roles originally written for castrati are performed by a countertenor, a male whose voice naturally falls into that range, or a female singer dressed as a man – affectionately referred to as performing a *pants role*.

Cultural Hotspot: The Sun King of France

In the Age of Absolutism, the French king Louis XIV set the cultural standard in all facets of life – fashion, art, and politics. Known as "*le Roi Soleil,"* or the "*Sun King*," he was said to bring light to all he touched. A master stateman, Louis consolidated his power by plying the French nobility with extravagant pastimes at his opulent palace in Versailles, while setting all of France to the task of glorifying his name through music, art, dance, and all forms of cultural pursuits.

Figure 46: The Hall of Mirrors in Palace of Versailles in Versailles, France; Photo: Myrabella / Wikimedia Commons

Louis's mother, Ann of Austria, had suffered four prior miscarriages and was already thirty-seven years old when she gave birth to the new king, so from the beginning, he was regarded as a miracle from God. This solidified his own belief in rule by divine right; in fact, the idea of an entire country being embodied in the personhood of a king originates with Louis XIV. The phrase "L'état c'est moi," which literally translates as "the state, it's me," or "I myself am the

nation," if not spoken by Louis himself, was attributed to him, and used to describe his authority over French society.

Louis was groomed as royalty from birth, and his education included studies in culture and the arts. He was an accomplished dancer who performed publicly well into his thirties, prompting court composers to write new music for him, in the form of *ballets*. In fact, his nickname – the Sun King – was taken from a ballet he danced at the age of thirteen, when he played the role of the Apollo, god of sun and music. Louis could also play the lute, guitar, and keyboard, and so it is no surprise that music was at the center of his courtly activities.

Like Elizabeth of England before him, Louis's appropriation of culture was strategic. In 1661, he set in motion plans to expand his father's rural hunting lodge into a royal estate of epic proportions, thereby creating a monument to his own power and greatness. Located some twenty miles outside of Paris, the site forced the nobility to travel to him, which proved to be an extremely effective tactic for controlling them. Known today as the Palace at Versailles, Louis extravagantly outfitted the buildings and grounds, and leveraged his sprawling estate to distract courtiers with food, games, intrigues, and entertainment, so that they were too preoccupied to oppose him.

It is difficult to quantify the level of Louis's extravagant excesses, but some facts about Versailles give an indication of the resources that were required. It is estimated that some 36,000 workers built a total of 2,300 rooms, 2,153 windows, 1,200 fireplaces, and 5,000 pieces of furniture. The main palace is a whopping 721,206 square feet, with artists having contributed over 6,000 paintings and 400 sculptures, in order to adorn its rooms with symbols of Louis's greatness. Clearly, all of France would have been mobilized to do the king's bidding.

Figure 47: Portrait of Louis XIV, When he was 63, Painted by Hyacinthe Riguard, in 1701; Public Domain

Musicians were also an integral part of the allure of Versailles. Inheriting a staff of 24 *Violons du Roi* ("*The King's* Violins") from his father, Louis expanded his musical entourage to unprecedented proportions. Courtiers at Versailles could enjoy performances in the gardens, the royal chapel, or in the on-site opera theater. Musicians serenaded visitors at mealtimes and other gatherings throughout the day, and were even present for the royal bedtime, which was a formal ritual with an audience of nobility. The *Grand Trianon*, a second palace on the estate and Louis's private hideaway, also had its own staff of musicians.

Despite his unrestrained obsession with power, it cannot be denied that the Sun King had an immense and lasting impact on culture, in France and elsewhere. He funded and established the *Académie Royale de Musique* ("*Royal Academy of Music*"), a public theater for the performances of French operas and ballets. This eventually became the *Paris Opera*, a premier performing arts organization that continues today. Classical ballet was developed there, and so at least in terms of patronage, the Sun King can take credit for the impact of that artform around the world. Throughout his reign, composers also dedicated works to the king, from instrumental pieces, all the way up to grand tragic operas. Most importantly, foreign visitors spread his renown across Europe, so that other rulers were inspired to create a national culture through the arts.

One negative aspect of Louis's legacy is that it has contributed to the lasting notion that Classical music is elitist. This is an image which persists today – one that you may even agree with! While its use at this time was certainly intended to be a show of wealth and power, music in Louis's court was created not by aristocratic patrons, but by composers themselves, who were artists dedicated to their craft. In this regard, composers might be seen as creating beauty *in spite* of their foppish patrons. If we think of musicians as having been limited in their ability to act independently, can we then regard their music as a flowering of expression under socially restrictive circumstances? Does that change how we might regard the music of the Baroque, and/or Classical music in a broader sense?

Composer Focus: Jean-Baptiste Lully and Music for a King

Getting his start as the leader of Louis's *Violons du Roi*, the ambitious composer and dancer Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687) rose through the ranks, eventually composing ballets and operas, and leading virtually all music at Versailles. A favorite of the king, owing to their shared love of dance, Lully was famously vicious and competitive with rival composers, and even employed some questionable tactics to secure his influence at the court, and in Paris.

Figure 48: Jean-Baptiste Lully, around 1670; Image Public Domain

At the height of his career, Lully gained a monopoly on the patent for the production of operas, so that no composer in France could write a dramatic work, without his permission. Leveraging the favor of the king, he also took control of the famous Palais Royale Theater in Paris and set rules to ensure that only his own music could be successful there. His ambition yielded results. When he married, Lully was so well-regarded that the king signed the marriage license himself, an honor usually reserved for nobility.

This was rather ironic, since Lully was from a family of peasants, and was not even French. Born in Italy, his parents worked in a grain mill, and had no resources to offer him a quality education, in music or otherwise. He later claimed that a local monk had taken pity on him and given him some tutoring in music. In either case, Lully took to street performing to earn his keep, often dancing, clowning, and playing his violin.

His antics caught the attention of a member of the French royal family, who was visiting for a Marti Gras celebration, and the young Lully was taken to Paris, where he worked as an Italian tutor for the king's cousin, Anne-Marie-Louise d'Orléans. This likely gave him the opportunity to hone his musical skills, since he was able to work with the musicians employed in the household. Even more importantly, he refined his social graces, so that when the time came to hob-knob with the nobility at Versailles, he was well-prepared.

The young composer's social ambitions were remarkably similar to the plot of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* ("The Bourgeois Gentleman"), a play by Molière, to which Lully composed incidental music in 1670. Presented as a *comédie-ballet*, or a sort of variety show with singing and dancing, the production was first staged in the court of King Louis XIV, with subsequent performances in Paris. Owing to the king's generous patronage, the show featured the finest performers of the time, with the composer himself dancing in the role of a Turkish dignitary.

Le Bourgeois tells the story of the earnest Mr. Jourdain, a middle-class gent who finds himself newly-wealthy. With this change in status, Jourdain also fancies himself a member of the aristocracy, but the more he tries to advance himself, the more he is played the fool. When his daughter Lucile vies to marry the young Cléonte, Jourdain refuses on the grounds that he is not a gentleman. Undaunted, Cléonte disguises himself as a Turkish prince, and promises to grant Jourdain a noble title in exchange for his daughter's hand. Unaware of the ruse, Jourdain enthusiastically agrees, with Cléonte staging a preposterous fake ceremony to "ennoble" the preening, would-be gentleman. The absolutist moral of the story is that the dignity of the aristocracy is not attainable through money or learned behaviors – only the nobility can be noble.

For obvious reasons, such a story would have appealed to the likes of Louis and his courtiers and reflects a larger body of literary and artistic works aimed at justifying the aristocracy's power over society. The mockery of Turkish culture would also have pleased the king, who had been recently offended by an ambassador claiming that the court of the Ottoman Empire was finer than Versailles. Although comedic, Moliere's play is satire, poking fun not only at the buffoonish Jourdain (a metaphor for all ambitious social climbers), but also taking aim at religion, social class, the arts, and even the aristocracy themselves – often in ways that would play as inappropriate by modern standards.

Lully composed twenty-five short musical numbers for *Le Bourgeois*, all of which typify high French Baroque style. Most are dances, owing to Louis's love for them, with a few comedic interludes between scenes. The "March for the Turkish Ceremony," is part of the satirical presentation of Cléonte as a prince and bears all the pomp and grandeur of a true royal march. It is in a minor tonality, which lends a serious mood, and features ceremonial percussion with march-like rhythms. Like most Baroque music, the instrumentation would have been dependent on who was on hand, but Lully called for a "grand assembly of instruments," likely including a core ensemble of strings, with some wind instruments like bassoon. Flourishes in the form of *trills*, *or two close pitches which are rapidly alternated*, and dotted-rhythms lend a royal flair to the style.

In the end, the composer fared better than Jourdain. In a 1681 Paris revival of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Lully was so popular and well-received that Louis immediately granted him the title *Conseiller Secrétaire du Roi* ("Advisor Secretary to the King"), making him an ad hoc member of the nobility. This does not seem to have fooled all of the public, however, with one music critic of the time, Le Cerf de la Viéville, writing that Lully's face was "not at all noble," and that he had a "a large nose," implying that his lineage could not be aristocratic. Nonetheless, Lully's success at leveraging social relationships his own benefit granted him a level of creative control over his music that few composers would have enjoyed under the Patron System.

Musical Snapshot: "Marche pour la cérémonie turque" from *"Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme"* (1670)

1. **Composer**: Jean-Baptiste Lully
2. **Genre**: Instrumental March (taken from a comédie-ballet)
3. **Country**: France
4. **Time Period**: Baroque
5. **Texture**: Homophonic (with some countermelodies)
6. **Performers**: Baroque string orchestra with basso continuo (harpsichord) and drums
7. **Musical features**: Minor tonality, terraced dynamics, March-like style
8. **Programmatic elements**: Sarcastic "royal" march for the non-royal Mr. Jourdain of Moliere's play (March for the Turkish Ceremony)

Suggested recording: *2013 BBC Proms*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-pSRs6DLOk

Lully was also an innovator as a conductor, in that he devised a means for keeping time in large ensembles by hitting the floor with a large wooden stick. Unfortunately, this lead to his untimely death, in a freak accident. While conducting a performance of his own works in Paris, he accidentally struck himself in the foot – one can imagine that he must have been a rather energetic, or at least forceful, performer. When he refused medical treatment, the wound became gangrenous, and he died a couple of months later. Lully is remembered as a tyrannical conductor, a vicious competitor, an unapologetic social climber, and a favorite of King Louis.

Composer Focus: Antonio Vivaldi

Figure 49: An anonymous portrait generally believed to be Vivaldi; Image Public Domain

One of the benefits of the newly functional instruments of the Baroque was the ability of composers to become *virtuosos*, or *master performers.* Obviously, for a culture of social elites, the best and most accomplished musicians would be desirable, since this showed greater influence and wealth on the part of the patron. As a result, *idiomatic* music that *showcased the impressive levels technique on a given instrument* were a focus of specialist composers. The historical success of the violin as a solo instrument owes a debt to early masters, such as Italian Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741).

Despite the lasting success of his music, Vivaldi's career was rather humble, as compared to the royal appointments of Lully and Monteverdi. He spent his early years studying for the priesthood, but left that vocation shortly after his ordination, claiming that chronic shortness of breath (probably asthma) prevented him from public speaking. Those around him also reported that he was too distracted by music, and recounted instances when he would spontaneously desert the altar during mass, so that he could jot down a musical idea that had flashed into his head. Together with his fiery red hair, his religious orders gave him the moniker "The Red Priest," a nickname which stuck, even though he left the priesthood.

The bulk of Vivaldi's career was spent as the master of violin at the Ospedale della Pietà (Devout Hospital of Mercy) in Venice. An orphanage for indigent children (and, it was rumored, the illegitimate offspring of nobility), the Pieta trained boys in trades and girls in music. This gender disparity proved advantageous, since the girls produced performances of surprising social interest, perhaps due to their novelty. Nobility and foreign visitors alike attended services at the Pieta, and the girls became an important cultural institution. Those with talent were also employed as teachers, and some, including an "Anna Maria" to whom Vivaldi dedicated several works, were successful as performers outside of the orphanage. Part of Vivaldi's job was to write new music for the girls, and he excelled at this task, eventually composing over 500 assorted instrumental works.

Vivaldi also maintained an active freelance career as a performer and a composer and was celebrated as a virtuoso. To most of his contemporaries, his playing was far better known than his own music, with some finding fault in his compositions as being too "wild and irregular,"[23] which was regarded as a symptom of his own incredible skills as a violinist. He was known to be boastful and vain, did not take criticisms well, and was prone to over-representing his successes to others. He was also a hard businessman, focused on receiving large sums of money for his work. Nonetheless, this disposition seemed to suit him well, with at least one critic remarking that it gave him a "fury" for composing.

[23] (Talbot, 2019)

FOCUS ON INSTRUMENTS: THE STRING FAMILY

Figure 50: Image courtesy of Jonathan J Castellon, Unsplash

Although Vivaldi composed for a range of wind and string instruments, he is best known for his violin music, and together with several of his contemporaries, established that instrument as a favored soloist, a position which it maintains today. Orchestral strings share some traits with lutes and guitars, in that they are hollow-bodied and made of wood; however, the primary tone production mechanism of the violin and its family is the *bow,* a wooden stick strung with high tension horsehairs. Players draw the bow across the strings, creating a vibration, while controlling pitch by applying pressure to the fingerboard (located on the instrument's long neck).

Organized from high to low, the four instruments of the string family are: violin, viola, cello, and bass (sometimes called double bass), with their ranges roughly equivalent to the vocal categories of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. The four strings are shaped almost identically, with each one increasing in size, according to pitch. Violinists and violists hold their instruments on their shoulders, while cellists are seated, with the instrument resting on the floor, and the double basses are so large that the musician must stand (or sit on a high stool).

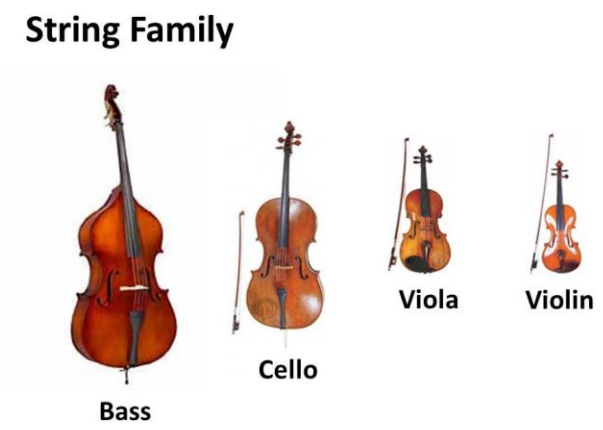


Figure 51: Image, public domain

String instruments are prized for their lyrical qualities, and are capable of long, sustained, intense passages, since the player can reverse the bow direction, to hold pitches almost indefinitely. Strings are also favored as soloists, especially the violin and cello, since they are equally adept at brilliant technical passages, and delicate, legato melodies. In a modern symphony orchestra, the strings are the largest section, with 20-30 violins, 10-15 violas, around 10 cellos, and 8 or so double basses. Individual strings are soft in volume, but when placed in large sections, they can create a mass of sound, which gives the orchestra its characteristic tone color.

In the Baroque, strings were usually organized into small ensembles of around 15 or so players, accompanied by a basso continuo. By the 18th-century, a few additional instruments – flutes, clarinets, trumpets, horns, and drums – were added for color. By the 19th-century, more brass, woodwind, and percussion were included, eventually leading to the full-size symphony orchestras found in most major

international cities today. According to the National Endowment for the Arts, as of 2014, there were 1,224 US orchestras, contributing $1.8-billion to the US economy, annually.[24]

In our local area, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, currently directed by Gustavo Dudamel, the celebrated conductor from Venezuela, performs at the Disney Concert Hall, and has a schedule of diverse performances throughout the year (https://www.laphil.com/). There are many other orchestras in the area, including the Pacific Symphony in Costa Mesa, the Long Beach Symphony, the San Diego Symphony, the Santa Barbara Symphony, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, and more. Southern California is rich in culture – consider attending a concert at one of these outstanding performing arts organizations!

Genre Focus: Program Music and the Concerto

The word *concerto* is derived from the Latin, *concertare*, which means "to debate," and also "to work together." This is an apt definition, since concertos pit an instrumental soloist against a larger ensemble, thereby exploiting the Baroque love for contrast. Concertos are generally in three contrasting *movements,* or *larger sections*. A common format for the first and last movements is the *ritornello form*, in which an instrumental *refrain* alternates with sections featuring the soloist.

Telling a story through musical elements was new in Vivaldi's day, so it did not really have a name yet; however, by the 19th-century, such techniques came to be called *program music*, owing to their need for a story, descriptive title, picture, or other extra-musical idea to provide context for their meaning. Today, program music is common in Classical music, in the form of movie scores. Have you ever listened to the music from a movie, and been able to imagine the action on the screen?

Composed between 1716-1717, Vivaldi's *Le quattro Stagioni* ("The Four Seasons") is a set of four concerti, each of which describes a season of the year – spring, summer, autumn, winter. To provide a framework for musical storytelling, Vivaldi drew from a set of short sonnets (poems), which he many even have written himself. Each "season" has three movements/poems, depicting a pastoral scene in nature, sometimes sprinkled with allusions to Greek myths, and often featuring contrasting imagery, allowing for parallel contrasts in the music. In a concert setting, the audience would receive copies of the poems in a written program, hence the name *program music* (*instrumental music that tells a story*).

While the entire set of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* is popular and continues to enjoy frequent performances and recordings up to the modern day, the opening movement of *La Primavera* ("Spring") is likely the best known. The accompanying poem predictably describes a sunny day in nature, with birds singing joyously at the return of spring. For contrast, dark and turbulent thunderstorms sudden roll in, "casting their dark mantle over heaven," then subside just as quickly, allowing the birds to "take up their charming songs once more." These extremes of light/dark and melodious/harsh, allow Vivaldi to craft vivid musical contrasts that bring the details of the story to life.

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[24] (Voss, Voss, & Yair, 2016)

Firstly, the opening melody, which is probably quite recognizable, is a swift, upward swooping *tutti*, or *full ensemble* texture, played in the major tonality, at a robust forte. The phrase is rhythmic and bouncy, with a steady pulse in the basso continuo, offset by upward leaps in the violins. This corresponds to the first line of the poem ("Springtime is upon us") and is also a *refrain*, or a phrase which serves as the anchor, *repeating several times*, between scenes depicting new imagery. The opening is contrasted by an immediate repeat at a piano volume, for emphasis.

The next line of the poem, "The birds celebrate her return with festive song," is a contrasting episode featuring first the soloist alone (monophonic), and then the soloist and first violin from the *ripieno*, or the *orchestra*, in a busy polyphonic texture. The two players engage in a lively and virtuosic call and response dialogue that imitates birdsong, using *trills*, or *rapid alternations between two pitches that are close together*. Quick flourishes between the players generate increasing energy, until the refrain returns.

From there, Vivaldi sets the scene with "murmuring streams…softly caressed by the breezes," depicted by the cellos, playing a slower, softer, conjunct, legato melody in a lower range. After a repeat of the refrain, the thunderstorms set in, with fast, upward sweeping scales in the solo part, and a forte dynamic and accented style in the orchestra. To emphasize this contrast, the refrain returns in minor ("casting their dark mantle over heaven"). As the storms lose their intensity, and "die away to silence," the texture changes to biphonic, with a drone in the bass and a melody in the violin. Of course, in the end, sunshine returns once more, signified by the last repeat of the refrain, again in its jubilant major tonality.

Musical Snapshot: *"La Primavera"* from *Le quattro Stagioni* (1716-1717)

1. **Composer**: Antonio Vivaldi
2. **Genre**: Concerto
3. **Form**: Ritornello
4. **Country**: Italian
5. **Time Period**: Baroque
6. **Texture**: Homophonic, Monophonic, Biphonic
7. **Performers**: Violin Soloist + Baroque string orchestra
8. **Musical features**: Extensive pictorial affects in musical elements (program music)

SONNET WITH PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS ANNOTATATIONS

Springtime is upon us. The birds celebrate her return with festive song, and murmuring streams are softly caressed by the breezes. Thunderstorms, those heralds of Spring, roar, casting their dark mantle over heaven, Then they die away to silence, and the birds take up their charming songs once more.	**Major, Homophonic, Upward sweeping melody** **Soloist and first violin, polyphonic, trills** **Cellos, piano dynamic, legato, slower rhythms, conjunct** **Forte, fast upward scales, virtuosic** **Refrain repeats in minor** **Biphonic texture** **Return of the refrain in major**

With the poem as a reference, it is easy to "hear" this little story of a spring day in Vivaldi's charming musical pictures. The ensemble and soloist imitate scenes with surprising clarity, almost as if the music is its own narrative, telling the story through sound and tonal gestures. This fits with cultural ideas of the Baroque, which was a time for man to capture, control, and study nature – in this case, it is through music, instead of science.

LESSON 7: JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Given the influence of Louis XIV over the culture of the Baroque, it may be surprising to learn that one of its greatest and most loved composers, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), lived and worked far from the fashionable French court, in the more rustic corners of Germany. This likely suited him, since he was focused on his craft, and quite uninterested in the social maneuvering that would have been needed to secure a position among the nobility. Bach was a dedicated worker and a pious Lutheran whose life centered on family, work, and realizing his own vision for his music, even when (and sometimes especially when) external forces rallied against him.

Figure 52: Johann Sebastian Bach (aged 61) in a portrait by Elias Gottlob Haussmann, copy or second version of his 1746 canvas; Image in Public Domain

Bach was born to a musical family in Eisenach, Germany. His father was a trumpet player, serving in the local court of the Duke of Saxe-Eisenach and working as music director for the city. His brothers, uncles, and eventually his own sons all worked in the region as musicians, and so the Bach family name was well-known, both before and after its most famous son.

Johann's early childhood was a happy one, probably steeped in music, as he learned the musical trade from this father and older brothers. The family lived near the town center, and the Bach children attended the nearby school – the same that Martin Luther himself had attended as a child. Johann also accompanied his father to work and probably had the opportunity to sing in some of the services at St George's Church as a young boy.

Despite the idyllic life he enjoyed in Eisenach, illness was a common occurrence in the parochial town, and before Bach was even ten years old, he lost three of his siblings and both parents. Now an orphan, he was sent to live with his older brother, Johann Christoph, who was working as an organist in the nearby town of Ohrdruf. This arrangement seems to have been short lived, however, since by the age of

fifteen, Bach's school listed him as "ob defectum hospitiorum," or "[lacking] of board and lodging." Apparently, either Christoph had died, or by then had too many children to continue supporting his younger brother.

In either case, the young Bach was hired as a choirboy in the city of Lüneburg, some 180-miles away. Incredibly, since he had no other resources to draw on, he simply walked the journey to his new job, relying on the charity of monasteries along the route. From that point forward, he would never again reside with family, and was completely on his own to build a life for himself. Considering his eventual success, this certainly speaks to his strong character and will to succeed.

In Lüneburg, Bach quickly rose to prominence and was employed in the top choir. Payroll records indicate that he was also earning more than his base pay, so was probably successful as a contract performer for special events, such as weddings or funerals. These accomplishments were temporary, however, since his voice changed and he lost the boy-soprano range that had won him the job. Never daunted, the industrious young Bach switched to a post as an instrumentalist, playing the harpsichord and organ for rehearsals – one of many times that he would adapt to the challenges of his circumstances.

At the age of 18, Bach was hired as the organist for the town of Arnstadt. Although his responsibilities were rather light and his salary was high for someone so young, he struggled to make it work. In addition to professional musicians, the church had a student choir program, and Bach was obligated to perform with them. This quickly caused conflicts, however, since Bach was actually several years younger than most of the pupils he was charged with teaching. It is probably no surprise that the feisty Johann complained bitterly to his bosses about the issue, insisting that he should be promoted to the directorship so that he could take control over musical quality. When tensions reached a head, he publicly called one of the students in a "zippel fagottist"[25] (slang for "weenie bassoon player") and found himself in a street brawl with the offended party. Rather lowering himself to the humility of issuing an apology, Bach blamed the church for failing to protect him from his attackers.

Probably weary of conflicts and in search of new job prospects, he traveled to the town of Lübeck, intent on hearing the famous organ virtuoso Deitrich Buxtehude, who was close to retirement. It is likely that Bach was offered his job, but was put off by the stipulation that he marry Buxethude's daughter, who was already considered old at the age of 30. In either case, he overstayed his leave by nearly two months, and upon his return to Arnstadt, eagerly implemented the new musical techniques he had heard on his trip. Unfortunately, his church bosses were not impressed, and harshly reprimanded him for playing choral accompaniments there were complex for the singers to follow. Predictably, the headstrong composer did not respond well to this criticism, and decided to look for a new job.

He took a post in Weimar, a small town of only around five-thousand people, working under the employ of the Duke, who was an enthusiastic supporter of the arts. During this time, he became increasingly well known as the top organist in Germany. Students traveled great distances to work with him, and he was frequently asked to perform recitals, dedicating new organ installations in towns across the region. Since these instruments were also complicated, technological machines, they required a master player to check them out, and Bach's tests were legendary. He pulled out all the stops and stretched new

[25] (Wolff, 2002, p. 84)

organs to their peak volumes, causing the builders to tremble in their boots when they heard what Bach did to their instruments.

As an example of Bach's dominance as a performer, he became embroiled in a rivalry in nearby Dresden, when his friend Jean Baptiste Volumier, music director to King Augustus of Saxony, called on him to help vanquish the young and overly-ambitious Louis Marchand. Rumored to be the best harpsichordist in all of France, Marchand was a pompous social climber, who was attempting to out-maneuver Volumier at court. In a clever scheme, Volumier chose not to take on Marchand himself, but instead suggested a musical dual with Bach. The event became a sensation. No doubt at the urging of Volumier, the king offered an award to the winner, which quickly prompted aristocratic patrons to enthusiastically announce their plans to attend. Overwhelmed by the hype and facing the prospect of a public humiliation, Marchand did not even attempt to take on Bach, and instead skipped town without a word on the morning of the contest. Of course, Bach put on a solo concert (to great acclaim) for those in attendance. This humorous story certainly shows his mastery as a performer, and admiration he earned from his colleagues.

Unfortunately, his patrons were less enthusiastic. The environment in Weimar became difficult, with the ducal family abusing their staff as pawns in personal conflicts. At one point, Wilhelm, the family patriarch, threatened to fine Bach if he provided any services to his nephew, even though the musicians were contracted to perform for the entire family. On top of that, Bach was passed over for a promotion, then discovered that the family was looking to replace him. He demanded to be released from his contract, to which Wilhelm responded by throwing him in jail. After letting him stew there for an entire month (Bach spent the time composing), the Duke release the spirited composer from his job – in disgrace.

Figure 53: 1908 Statue of Bach in front of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig; Image credit: Zarafa / CC BY-SA

Never to be defeated, Bach quickly leveraged personal contacts in nearby Köthen, and was offered the position of music director there. Incredibly, only eight days after his release from jail, he had already made the move and was performing for his new boss, the young Prince Leopold. This was the start of a happy and productive time. The prince was a musician, an enthusiastic supporter of the arts, and interested in all that was new and fashionable. Bach enjoyed many opportunities to travel, compose, and perform.

Sadly, upon returning from a tour with the prince, he learned that his young wife, Maria Barbara, had not only passed away, but that her funeral had taken place months prior. Devastated at the loss and

now facing life as a father to four motherless children, he considered leaving his post and returning to the church, but seems to have seems to have instead poured his grief into work and composition. In particular, his celebrated *Partita in Dm* for solo violin is believed to have been written for his late wife.

Several years later, a young singer in the court named Anna Magdalena Wilcke caught Bach's eye, and the two were married. Although he was sixteen years her elder, by all accounts, she was kind to Bach's children, and the couple had a happy and loving relationship. They remained together for the remainder of Bach's life (twenty-eight years), and had thirteen children, although many died in infancy or childhood. Since Anna Magdalena was herself a musician, there is conjecture that she may have composed some works under her husband's name; however, these theories are hotly contested.[26]

Figure 54: St Thomas Church, Leipzig; Photo: Zarafa / CC BY-SA

The prince married shortly thereafter, and in Bach's opinion, a lack of taste on the part of the new princess caused the quality of music in Köthen to decline sharply. He applied for a job in Leipzig, but was not well-received. Although his skills as a performer were known, his compositional style was not considered fashionable. The job was offered instead to Georg Philipp Telemann, the most popular composer in Germany at the time, but he turned it down, as did several other (more preferable) candidates. Famously, one member of the hiring committee remarked that they would have to make do with "mediocrity," and the job was offered to Bach. This was only the start of conflicts with his municipal bosses, who consistently failed to recognize the quality of his work.

Nonetheless, the composer was to remain in Leipzig for the reminder of his life (nearly thirty years), and he thrived in the progressive, metropolitan city. The job was busy, requiring him to compose and rehearse music for the four main churches in town, teach lessons in both voice and on various instruments, compose on-demand for church services and various events, and even for a time, to teach Latin and other academic subjects. Most notably, he was required to compose a new *cantata,* or *music to accompany the mass*, weekly. Given his years in Leipzig, it is probable that he eventually composed hundreds of them (150 are known).

After around six years at his post, he would have built up enough compositions to begin recycling, and the workload would have lightened somewhat. Freer to pursue other projects, Bach took over the directorship of the local Collegium Musicum, a volunteer ensemble comprised of musicians from the local court and university. The Collegium performed outside in the summer, and at Zimmermans, the local coffee house, in the winter. To help fund special events and visiting musicians, subscriptions were

[26] For those interested in learning more about the research into Anna Magdalena Bach, the documentary *Written by Mrs. Bach* covers this topic, and can be accessed here: https://www.amazon.com/Written-Mrs-Bach-Broken-Silence/dp/B07XJ9W3LX

offered, so that the cost was split between all those in attendance. In effect, this was one of the first examples of public, ticketed concerts in history, and was a distinct innovation over the patron-funded models of the time.

The audiences at Zimmermans were diverse and enthusiastic, and attended solely for the music, rather than to fulfill the typical social duties of court. This environment must have felt very freeing for Bach, after spending a lifetime fighting his obligations as a servant to aristocratic patrons. He seemed energized by the creative freedom this project afforded and composed many new works for the Collegium. Although it would be many years before public concerts would become the norm, the Collegium set the stage for a middle-class musical culture that would blossom in the Enlightenment of the 18th Century. This was truly cutting-edge work.

Toward the end of Bach's life, he began to lose his eyesight, possibly due to years of composing in dimly lit rooms. He underwent two surgeries, which only lead to infections and made his condition worse. Despite this, he continued to compose by dictating music to his sons, who were then grown and working as musicians themselves. Amazingly, he produced some of his most treasured works in this period, including the *Mass in B Minor.*

Bach's music was almost immediately forgotten after his death, since most pieces were stored away after they were performed, rather than being published. Although he was well-known as an organist, his compositions were not widely distributed and his style was often derided as old-fashioned, so much so that he earned the nickname "Old Bach," as compared to his more cosmopolitan sons.

Most of what we now know and love of his work today was only "discovered" during the 19th-century "Bach Revival," when Romantic composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) resurrected and performed many of Bach's greatest works, to renown. Given this, we cannot know for sure how many pieces the hardworking German composer wrote, but the current count is well over a thousand.

Modern listeners might be surprised to learn that Bach's life was so unglamorous and ordinary. He struggled with raising and supporting a family, battled unaccommodating bosses, coped with unimaginable losses, and navigated the many

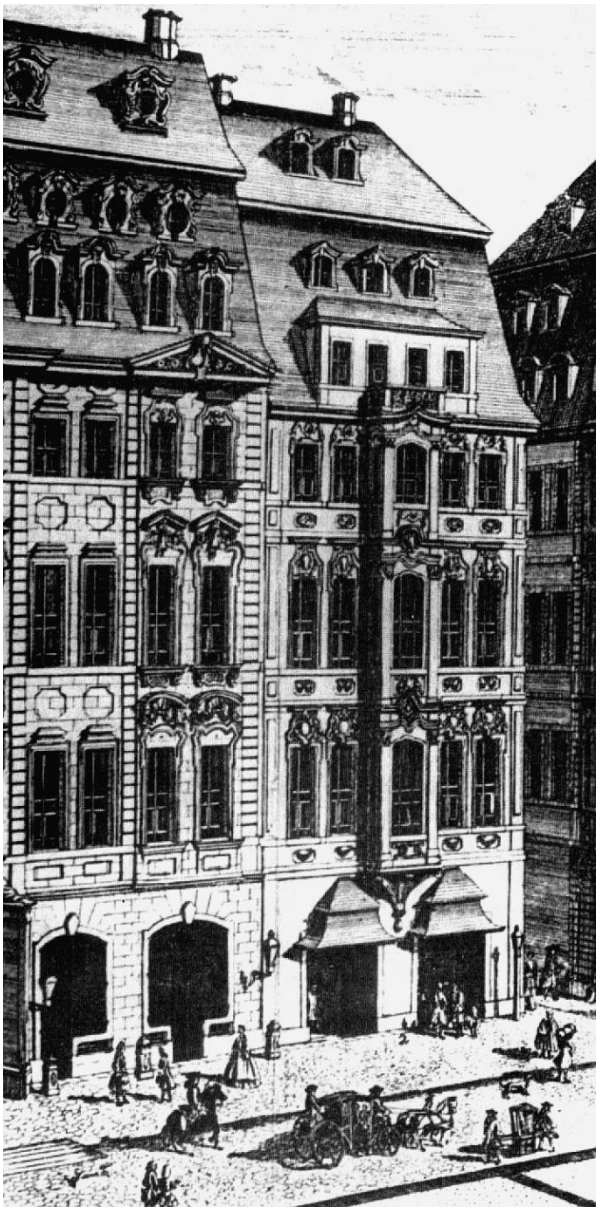

Figure 55: Café Zimmermann, Leipzig, where the Collegium Musicum performed; Image Public Domain

mundane and complex issues that make up the very real experience of someone who works for a living. Given the level of greatness with which his name is now associated, the fact that he spent his life in service of others points to his immense talent and vision, especially since those around him were so often unsupportive. There are some good lessons in that, certainly.

Bach's Styles

Composers that are remembered by history are generally known for innovating a particular genre or popularizing a specific style; however, in the case of Bach, such narrow categories fail to capture the scope of his incredible work. Bach composed in all genres popular at the time, apart from opera. Even there, he made a notable attempt, when he adapted the sacred *cantata* style, itself an off-shoot of opera, to the performances at Zimmerman's, and composed his comedic *Schweigt stille, plaudert nicht* ("Be still, stop chattering"), known popularly as the *Coffee Cantata*.

The diversity of Bach's work cannot be overstated. He composed massive sacred pieces of over two-hours in length, such as his monumental *Mass in B minor*, and wonderful miniatures, like those for unaccompanied solo instruments (his *Cello Suites* being the most popular). He crafted infinitely complicated polyphonic textures in his monumental *fugues*, but is equally known for his delicate, expressive, austere melodies, such as can be heard in the *Air on the G-string*. While he composed music on demand, always meeting the requirements of his bosses, he also found time to give voice to his own creativity, writing some of his most popular works, such as the virtuosic *Brandenburg Concerti*, outside of patronage. It is impossible to capture the range of his work from a sampling, but we will look at three very diverse pieces, as a start.

"Air," from Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068

At the time of this writing, a tally of the top ten search results for this little *Air* by Bach reveals that it has been heard close to 40-million times on You Tube. What an incredible feat for a short and simple piece, written some 300 years ago, by an obscure composer in Germany! Clearly, Bach's music has stood the test of time well.

Even so, it is difficult to categorize Bach's music – he is somewhat of an enigma. He did not create music to tell a story (program music) like Vivaldi, nor did he cater to the self-important tastes of the nobility, like Lully; instead, he seemed fully focused in the beauty and structure of music for its own sake, and followed that imperative where it lead him. His music is the height of balance and perfection, and he became an inspiration to all composers who followed him – everyone from Mozart to Beethoven studied Bach as both a standard and an innovator.

As YouTube commentator Rick Beato notes in his video, "What Made Bach Great" (which itself has nearly 1-million views):

> *[Bach's] limitless musical explorations expressed the order of the physical and biological universe in exquisite mathematical precision and detail. His music was written to express*

> *the divine beauty in all creation, and his influence on all successive composers is unparalleled.* [27]

From this perspective, the best way to conceptualize Bach's music is akin to the splendor of nature, as you might experience a picturesque landscape, or in the way that you feel inspired by a grand mountain scene or the notion of a vast and sprawling sea. While it is not necessarily telling a story, the grandeur of nature certainly inspires. Bach is like that – precision, balance, and beauty.

One of his most popular works, the exact date of the *Air on the G String* (named for a string on the violin) is unknown. Like so much of Bach's music, it went unpublished at the time, so cannot be accurately dated, but most historians agree that is was likely written for the Collegium in Leipzig, due to its instrumentation. In addition, the surviving manuscript includes copying work by one of Bach's sons and one of his students, suggesting that the composer was too busy to write out parts himself. If it was composed for the Collegium, we can infer that Bach was following a creative impulse, rather trying to please a patron.

Suites were one of the first instrumental genres. Appearing initially in the Renaissance, suites grew out of dance music, with musicians simply transferring dance styles from a sideline accompaniment to a mainstage attraction – concert dances, essentially. As with so many aspects of Baroque culture, French composers like Lully were the standard, but suites were also popular in Germany and many composers besides Bach wrote them.

Baroque suites generally opened with a grand French *overture* (from the French, "opening"), evoking the pomp of the French court, with several contrasting dance movements to follow. Bach follows convention, but also adds this *Air*, a song-like movement imitating the lyrical style of Italian opera. Bach's music is surprisingly simple, with a thin texture that showcases an effortless, lyrical melody in the violins. There is a lovely tension between the upper voices, who play long, legato phrases, and the bouncing, staccato, dance-like bass. The movement is written for strings and basso continuo, but other movements in the suite include trumpets, timpani, and oboe, which most likely reflected the diverse and excellent musicians of the Collegium.

Musical Snapshot: "Air," from Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068 (1730/31)

1. **Composer**: Johann Sebastian Bach
2. **Genre**: Suite
3. **Country**: Germany
4. **Time Period**: Baroque
5. **Texture**: Homophonic (listen for the basso continuo)
6. **Melody**: Legato
7. **Melodic Shape**: Ascending leaps, followed by descending shapes
8. **Performers**: Baroque string orchestra

Suggested recording: Voices of Music, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzlw6fUux4o

[27] (Beato, 2018)

Fugue in G Minor ("Little"), BWV 578

In contrast to the simplicity of Bach's *Air*, his fugues are a veritable tour de force of keyboard virtuosity. Even today, after musicians have had 300 years to refine playing techniques, they continue to challenge the best of players. The fugue is both a genre and a compositional technique; meaning, the name refers to the complex musical layering that characterizes the construction of these dense works. Fugues start out deceptively simple, with only a single voice sounding a balanced phrase in a monophonic texture, but soon enough, a second layer joins the first, then a third, and usually – as is the case with this example – a fourth, all playing competing melodies at the same time.

The opening phrase of a fugue is called the *subject*, a melody which recurs, and serves to provide structure and somewhat contain its frenzied texture. Each layer in a fugue enters by initially repeating the subject, before launching into its own free-form stream of melodic extrapolations. As the layers number of layers increases, so too does the complexity of the texture, so that the reappearance of the subject at regular intervals is needed, to bring sense of order to the chaos. As such, fugues have a wonderful tension between instability and repetition.

Obviously, fugues are extremely difficult to perform. This is even more true for organists, since they are a single player, performing four separate and independent layers. To give some context, when single-line instruments such as strings perform a Bach fugue, it takes a minimum of four players to cover all the parts, and the texture is sufficiently complex that Bach's fugues have even been scored for performance by a full orchestra. Organists use both hands **and** both feet to get the job done – certainly an impressive feat (pardon the pun)! As we already know, Bach was the greatest organist of his generation, and likely of many others as well. He would have been one of few Baroque musicians capable of performing at such a high level, so part of the achievement of this piece is its virtuosity.

As with many of Bach's works, it is difficult to accurately date his *Little Fugue*, but it generally believed to have been composed during his first post, in Arnstadt, when Bach was only in his twenties. The opening melody, in minor (as reflected in the title), displays the common Baroque technique of *compression*, in which the *rhythmic values become progressively faster* across the phrase, generating a feeling of

Musical Snapshot: Fugue in G Minor ("Little"), BWV 578 (1703-1707)

1. **Composer**: Johann Sebastian Bach
2. **Genre**: Fugue
3. **Country**: Germany
4. **Time Period**: Baroque
5. **Texture**: Monophonic to start, then polyphonic as layers enter; Dense, thick texture
6. **Harmony**: Minor; with a contrast in Major in the middle; Ends in Major (Picardy Third)
7. **Rhythm**: Compression (rhythms speed up across the phrase)
8. **Melodic Shape**: Disjunct
9. **Performers**: Organ

Suggested recording: Ton Koopman, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhRa3REdozw

increasing energy. The melody is also predominantly disjunct, which makes it more difficult to perform. About halfway through the piece, the subject makes an entrance in major, which feels particularly triumphant, given the intensity of all the driving rhythms. The harmony eventually rolls back into the minor, only to end on a sudden major chord, a technique known as the *Picardy Third.*

Even without the context of this technical information, the music is extremely listenable, especially for something so intricate. The melody is another of Bach's triumphs, and would be interesting on its own, even without additional layering. It displays one of Bach's trademark skills – complex melodies created from simple materials. The pitches are straight from chord-tones and are not particularly special or revolutionary. Bach's ability to collect them into attractive patterns is a strength of his writing, and something that can be heard in many of his works. In fact, he still manages to make the melody catchy, almost sing-able (see if you don't have it stuck in your head after listening), despite its relative complexity.

Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, Prelude, BWV 1007

Considered one of his most profoundly creative works, Bach's *Cello Suites* are a triumph in miniature. Written for a single, (mostly) monophonic voice, the set of six multi-movement solo pieces seems to conjure the sound of greater performing forces, with phrases unfolding in cascading rhythms that create the illusion of harmony and depth. What sounds like a full orchestra is only a single player, moving through virtuosic melodic contortions that are endlessly inventive.

Despite their renown today, the Cello Suites languished in relative obscurity all the way up to the 20th-century. At that time, the existing manuscripts were second-hand, having been copied by Bach's sons or his wife, Anna Magdelena, and so lacked notations by the composer, such as dynamics or performance instructions. As such, most who came across them dismissed the pieces as technical etudes – practice pieces. Further, they are sufficiently difficult that only top-notch players could attempt them, so they needed a champion to bring them to light.

This they got in Spanish cellist Pablo Casals. In 1889, at the age of 13, Casals came across an old manuscript of all six suites in a Barcelona thrift shop. Something about them piqued his interest. In his own words:

> *I forgot entirely the reason of my visit to the shop and could only stare at this music which nobody had told me about. Sometimes even now, when I look at the covers of that old music, I see again the interior of that old and musty shop with its faint smell of the sea. I took the suites home and read and reread them. For 12 years after that I studied and worked every day at them…was nearly 25 before I had the courage to play one of them in public.* [28]

Casals championed Bach's suites and programmed them on recitals throughout his long career, but limited as this was to live audiences, the suites remained obscure until 1936, when he was finally convinced to record them. The album, completed over a three-year period at the famous Abbey Road Studios in London (later to be home to the Beatles), was the wide world's first taste of Bach's little

[28] (Whitman, 1973)

suites. They met with acclaim, most notably due to Casals' interpretation, which brought out the expressiveness of what at first glance, appeared to be complex technical exercises. Although recorded by countless artists since, Casals' original performance is archived to YouTube, and even now, nearly 100-years later, has 1.1-million views. Interestingly, the top search result for "Bach Cello Suites," a recording by Russian-Israeli cellist Mischa Maisky, has a whopping 40-million views.

Despite its popularity, the piece is built from exceedingly simple elements – it is only a single instrument, playing almost entirely in a monophonic texture. Bach's choice to write for solo cello is also impressive, since the instrument was still relatively new at that time, and there was no established repertoire of other solo pieces to serve as a model. It is generally agreed that the suites were composed during Bach's time in Kothen, and so could have been inspired by one or more excellent cellists in the orchestra there; but even so, the 18th-century cello was an instrument of the basso, and not at all regarded as a solo, or even melodic instrument. Bach's use was highly innovative – he saw potential for the instrument, where other composers did not.

The *Prelude*, or opening movement of *Suite No. 1* is likely the best known, having been featured in many contemporary movies and commercials. Astonishingly, in addition to its single line of melody and single solo instrument, it also uses only a single rhythmic pattern, with no variations. Cellists often add interpretative elements that include variations of tempo, so that performances may feel as if the rhythms fluctuate, but in Bach's writing, the movement is a steady, unchanging pattern. Interestingly, this helps to give the illusion of depth, since pitches have time to resonate over each other and create a sort of false harmony. Bach also uses one of his best tricks – the melodic pitches are derived from chord-tones, so that the music has a sense of drive and forward-motion, especially in the hands of a great cellist.

Bach builds the melody to a triumphant peak, even limited as he is in musical elements. Over the course of the movement, he successively increases the size of the already disjunct intervals to build energy into an astonishing melodic climax in the high, bright range of the cello. Despite its limited materials, the movement overall still manages to give the impression of expansion and compression – a complete journey, solely owing to Bach's choice of pitches. The ability to create such a coherent statement out of

Musical Snapshot: Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, Prelude, BWV 1007 (1717-1723)

1. **Composer**: Johann Sebastian Bach
2. **Genre**: Suite
3. **Country**: Germany
4. **Time Period**: Baroque
5. **Texture**: Monophonic
6. **Harmony**: Major (although there is no harmony per se, the pitches chosen give the illusion that it is there)
7. **Rhythm**: Unchanging; One pattern throughout
8. **Melodic Shape**: Disjunct, ascends to a melodic climax
9. **Performers**: Cello

Suggested recording: Yo-yo Ma, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGgG-0lOJjk (Note: Full suite is included in this recording)

so few materials is a testament to Bach's immense technical skill, while the attractiveness of the music certainly shows his intuitive creativity and expressiveness.

Taken together, these three pieces by Bach – one of great beauty, one of fantastic complexity, and one of incredibly simplicity – offer a snapshot of this artist and his capacity to innovate; however, it is so important to bear in mind that he did much mor, well over a thousand pieces, to be exact. This diverse, but too small sampling barely scratches the surface of what this composer has to offer – and we did not even hear any of his choral music!

Bach has a lifetime of work to share. If this intrigues you, set out to learn more. We live in a time when any music is readily available, and free to try. Do not hesitate to be adventurous in your tastes. Type "Bach" into a search bar and see what you find!

FOCUS ON PERFORMERS: YO-YO-MA

Cellist Yo-Yo Ma has recorded over one hundred albums, nineteen of which are Grammy winners, covering categories as diverse as Classical and World Music. He has won numerous awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2010) and the National Medal of the Arts (2001). He has performed for eight US presidents and was a featured performer at Barak Obama's inauguration in 2009. In 2018, he set out to perform Bach's complete *Cello Suites* in thirty-six locations around the world, a project which supports his mission to show audiences "how culture connects us and can help us to imagine and build a better future."[29]

Figure 56: Ma performs in Mexico in 2018; Image courtesy of Secretaría de Cultura Ciudad de México, Flickr

Ma was born in 1955, to Chinese parents then living in Paris. He began studying cello with his father at the age of four. When the family moved to New York City, he continued his studies at the prestigious Julliard School, and went on to pursue liberal arts training, eventually earning a degree in anthropology from Harvard. His recital debut came in 1962, when he appeared on a television program called the "American Pageant of the Arts," hosted by the great conductor and composer, Leonard Bernstein – President John F. Kennedy was in the audience. Interestingly, this debut came at the prompting of Pablo Casals, who had recently heard Ma, and was impressed. The seven-year-old prodigy was featured the next day in an article in the *New York Times* – the

[29] (Ma, 2018)

first of over one-thousand times that they would write about him.

Over his long career, Yo-Yo Ma has collaborated with musicians in many styles, and has become a cultural icon in his own right, and has made frequent appearances in the media, including Comedy Central's *Colbert Report*, *Sesame Street*, and National Public Radio's *Tiny Desk Concerts*, and he was even a character on *The Simpsons*. Ma has performed with a diverse roster of musicians and artists, including Galician bagpipe player Cristina Pato, street dancer Lil Buck, Classical-pop crossover Bobby McFerrin, multi-style bassist Edgar Meyer, and many more. His work as founder of *Silkroad*, an ensemble dedicated to multi-style collaborations, lead to his being named a United Nations "Messenger of Peace." All of this, of course, is in addition to his many appearances as a premiere Classical soloist, over a career spanning some fifty years.

If you are new to Classical music, Yo-Yo Ma would be a great place to start exploring, since he has recorded music in many styles, from Jazz to Bluegrass to Popular music.

FOCUS ON ELEMENTS: MUSICAL FORM

Musical form refers to the *organization of a piece of music*, as defined by its level of *repetition*, *variation*, and *contrast*. Form describes what happens when, how many times it happens, and how often the music repeats the same idea, or changes into something new.

Whereas "musical elements" refers to melody, harmony, rhythm, tone color, and dynamics, these three terms are the basics of musical form:

Repetition: All musical elements are the same, repeated
Variation: Some musical elements are different, and some are repeated
Contrast: All musical elements are different

Like many other concepts we have discussed, form may seem difficult to understand at first; however, patterns are so much a part of music-listening that they become engrained, if the listener is unaware of their presence. Even pop songs have form. Sticking to a tried and true plan for writing a song helps listeners to understand, enjoy, and support the music, even when it is new.

For example, pop songs usually have some sort of introduction, then a *verse* followed by a *chorus*. In poetry, this is the same as a *stanza* and a *refrain*, and since music grew out of speech and then singing, it is a good analogy. A *refrain* (also a term used in music) is a *phrase or group of lines that recurs*, usually at the end of each stanza. This gives the poem/song a sense of structure and usually emphasizes a main idea.

As an example, we will use Bob Dylan's folk-style song, "Blow'in in the Wind":

Words and Music Snapshot: Bob Dylan's "Blow'in in the Wind"

How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
Yes, 'n' how many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, 'n' how many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they're forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Stanzas (in music, verses)

Refrains (in music, choruses)

How many years can a mountain exist
Before it's washed to the sea?
Yes, 'n' how many years can some people exist
Before they're allowed to be free?
Yes, 'n' how many times can a man turn his head
Pretending he just doesn't see?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

How many times must a man look up
Before he can see the sky?
Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?
Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind

Since songwriters generally follow the structure of the words, this poem to conceptualizes how the music-writing process might be organized. Each refrain has the same words, so it makes sense that they would share a melody. We can listen to Dylan's song and hear that this is so. While the word *refrain* can also be used in music, more commonly this section of a song is called the *chorus*. Between refrains, there are stanzas. Since each of these have different words, a songwriter might choose to mirror this contrast in music; however, more commonly, the *same* melody is used for each stanza (usually called a *verse* in music). The balance between repetition and contrast in this way helps to give a song continuity and structure, which makes the listening experience more logical and engaging.

If we map the words and their relationship to music, the *musical form* described above would look something like this:

WORDS	**MUSIC**
Stanza 1	Verse
Refrain 1	Chorus

Stanza 2 Refrain 2	Verse Chorus
Stanza 3 Refrain 3	Verse Chorus

The repetition of a verse and chorus is the most common and durable of all song forms and it has been used for centuries – in genres ranging from folk music, to sacred hymns, and the Blues. In music, this form is called *strophic* (a song in which *all verses are sung to the same music*). The opposite would be *through-composed*, or a song with *different music for each verse*.

As a shorthand, musical form is often designated with letters, so that the organization of a song or piece of music can be more easily discussed. If the *theme*, or *main idea*, is given the letter **A**, contrast is designated with **B**, and variation, **A'** (repetition would just be another A). Using the same format, shorter ideas, or phrases contained within a larger section, are designated by lower case letter. From this, a strophic song like "Blowin in the Wind" could be expressed as **AAA**, since the same material repeats three times. In addition, the verse and chorus are also contrasting, so it a more detailed diagram would look like this:

WORDS	**MUSIC**	
Stanza 1 Refrain 1	a b	**A**
Stanza 2 Refrain 2	a b	**A**
Stanza 3 Refrain 3	a b	**A**

A composer can add all sorts of things to a simple song form like this one. An introduction, or a *closing section* (called a *coda*), can make the music feel more complete, while a short *interlude*, or a *break for an instrument to play the melody*, provides a pleasing sense of contrast. Another common technique is to add a *bridge*, or a contrasting section to offset the repetition, right before the final verse (**AABA**). None of these extras are required, but all are ways to personalize a standard form.

Since all music evolved from singing, instrumental composers take their cues from song forms, so that even longform symphonic music shares a similar pacing in terms of repetition and contrast. In the Enlightenment, form was especially important, since making the music easy to follow improved the chances that audiences would like it. Then, as now, if listeners know what to expect, they are more likely to enjoy the experience.

How does musical form impact the listening experience?

Musical form is the glue that holds even complex works together. Creating continuity and a sense of structure allows composers to write music that listeners can follow. Without form, music would just be random, beautiful sounds that would be unlikely keep the anyone's attention for very long. While forms can be vastly complex, especially in symphonic music, for this class we just want to get familiar with the basics: *repetition*, *contrast*, and *variation*.

How do listeners respond to repetition?

In general, more repetition means that music will be quickly and easily consumed. Humans crave familiarity. When the music goes where it is expected to go, the listener is very likely to experience a feeling of knowing, belonging, or understanding, which the brain equates with positive emotions. On the downside, too much repetition can get really boring.

How do listeners respond to contrast?

On the other hand, contrast makes music interesting. When music abruptly switches gears, it can be surprising and fun, especially if for someone who enjoys active listening. Contrasts are one of the ways that music challenges, excites, delivers big impact, and really shows its emotional power. Think of the "hook" in pop songs - this is usually a catchy, but sudden change that quickly grabs attention.

As a negative, too much contrast can be confusing or even disorienting, so the that listener develops a negative opinion about the music. This is especially true if the listener is expecting the music to be simple and familiar sounding.

Balancing repetition and contrast is a fundamental aesthetic of musical expression. While both are needed, too much of either can be problematic. Music that is intended to be “popular” usually leans toward repetition, while “art” music is often more complex, with more contrasts. At the same time, even Popular music needs enough contrast to be interesting, and Classical music needs at least some repetition to keep the listener involved. It is tricky.

What is variation?

Variation is a compromise between contrast and repetition. Variation uses almost the same idea, but changes *some* of the musical elements. For example, the melody could be the same, but the rhythms are twice as fast/slow, the dynamics have been changed, or it is moved to a different instrument. Variation is common to almost all types of music - from symphonies to pop songs. Variation means that the music is still basically recognizable - it has just been changed a little.

How do I recognize the main idea?

To understand how repetition, variation, and contrast work in music, we need to identify a main idea, to which these techniques are applied. Basically, this tells us *what* is being repeated, varied, or contrasted. In music, the “main idea” is called the *theme*. Usually, this will be the first melody you hear. From there, we can understand form in terms of what happens to the theme – is it repeated, changed a little, or changed a lot?

FOCUS ON INSTRUMENTS: WOODWINDS

Instruments of the woodwind family were added to the orchestra during the Enlightenment era, and you will hear them in the examples in this lesson. Woodwinds are light and agile, and compliment the tone color of strings, without being overbearing, so they were a good choice for the bright music of the Classical period.

Woodwinds are some of the oldest instruments, with evidence of rudimentary flutes created by prehistorical peoples, dating as far back as 40,000 years ago. In the Renaissance and Baroque, they were used in dance and ceremonial music, and later, as soloists – especially the flute – or in *consorts* (like instrument ensembles).

Woodwinds create sound by blowing *across* something, either an open hole, as is the case with the flute, or a single-reed (thin sliver of wood), as in the clarinet (and the saxophone, which is also a woodwind instrument, but only used rarely in symphony orchestras), a double-reed (two thin slivers of wood, lashed together), such as in the oboe, or its lower cousin the English horn (also called *Cor Anglais*), and the bassoon (and its lower cousin, the contra-bassoon). Pitch is changed by opening or closing holes, or keys, in the body of the instrument. While all instruments of the woodwind family were originally made of wood, today, flutes are made of metal.

Woodwinds are known for fast, technical passages that add both airiness and action to the sound of the orchestra. They are also great soloists, since lyrical, expressive playing is comes naturally for them, and the tone colors within the family offer a nice palette of contrasts, ranging from the voice-like sound of the clarinet and oboe, to the bright, sharp tone of the flute, and the deep, booming timbre of the bassoon.

Figure 57: Members of the United States Army Band, image courtesy of US Army Band, Flickr

LESSON 8: THE ENLIGHTENMENT PERIOD & CLASSICAL MUSIC

The era of Mozart and Beethoven, known in music as the *Classical Period* (1750-1800), has some important lessons to teach modern listeners. The name can be rather confusing, since in a general sense, "Classical" tends to refer to all of the music in this book. More specifically, and from an historical context, it describes a short period in music history, during which composers were faced with the most challenging of audiences – the public. As tricky as it was for art and fashion to find balance under the fickle tastes of Baroque patrons, the onslaught of public, ticketed concerts in the Enlightenment was an even tougher test, since composers had to figure out how to appeal to mass crowds of people at once. As such, there are some *enlightening* insights in terms of how we might understand contemporary culture, and its ability to bend mass media to its needs.

Classical/Enlightenment Period Snapshot

- Historically, "Classical" refers to the music of this era (although it is often used as shorthand for all music not a part of popular or folk culture)
- Enlightenment philosophers apply rationality to social problems
- "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness" becomes a rallying cry for all people
- Monarchies, the church, and other sources of absolutely power are seen as corrupt
- Revolutions in France and America change the political landscape
- Enlightened Rulers adopt progressive policies, while maintaining absolute power
- Culture (and music) are for everyone, not just the socially elite

Unlike other periods, the Enlightenment was a self-made movement, with philosophers across the continent, and even in America, declaring themselves "enlightened," and then calling for radical social change. Reacting against the extravagance of the Baroque and the economic suffering that the nobility had inflicted on the people at-large, Enlightened philosophers turned society upside-down, calling for equality and fairness for all, and uniting under the French rallying cry of *Liberté*. This era sought to apply the logic of science to social issues and to correct the ills of humanity through reasoned, informed thought.

The Enlightenment grew out of the scientific revolution, which held that the universe is governed by natural laws that are measurable, explainable, and knowable. These notions would not sound radical to a modern reader, but as compared to the church dogma that prevailed in the Medieval period, it is clear that society had undergone a major shift. As rationality became the standard by which social institutions were measured, the natural world was a model for justifying new ideas about rights and equality. The prevailing idea was that man is born free and can think, rationalize, and apply logic to the problems and tasks life, and so he should live in a society which allows him the liberty to do so.

Philosophers rightly asserted that the idea of social class is powerful only because the population chooses to see it that way, and not because of any innate qualities bestowed upon those lucky enough to be of higher birth. Similarly, they reasoned that the king's word carried authority only because his subjects accepted his laws as truth, and not because of any intrinsic power he held as an individual. In other words, without the faith of his people, a king is truly nothing. Eventually, Enlightened thinking took hold and spread across the continent, ultimately making its way to America, where it proved fundamental in the forming of the United States.

By the end of the Baroque period, monarchies had drained the coffers dry in many countries. As a result, absolute power came to be seen with a high level of mistrust and disdain. Governments faced a pressing imperative to modernize or face the consequences of an increasing sense self-awareness among the middle and lower classes. Ignoring the social climate was dangerous. Rulers who failed to modernize were, for the first time in history, subject to harsh criticisms, and even rebellions.

Society was ready for change and many people angry enough that they were willing to fight back. The opulent monarchies of the Baroque had drained state coffers so that the average citizen was subjected to increasingly oppressive levels of tax burden, in order to compensate. In the American Colonies, where people lived as subjects of the British crown, but had no representation in British Parliament, these tensions sparked the protests which became the seeds of the American Revolution.

Figure 58: King Louis XVI of France; Portrait by Antoine-François Callet / Public domain

King Louis XVI of France, grandson of the famous Sun King, was an important ally for the colonies. Without his troops and ships, the Americans might never have defeated this British crown. Ironically, this proved to play an important role in his downfall, since the cost of the American Revolution became a final blow to the already feeble French economy. To compensate, Louis XVI raised taxes, a burden which impacted the lower classes most profoundly, while the wealthy to continued living in luxurious fashion.

Eventually, king Louis XVI became the symbol for all that this oppressive system represented. In 1789, a group of French revolutionaries made up of the proletariat, or working class, stormed the Bastille, a medieval fortress that stood in the middle of Paris as a symbol for the tyranny of the monarchy. Louis XVI was eventually tried for treason by his own people and executed in January of 1793. His wife, Marie Antoinette, who had also become an icon of aristocratic excess and elitism, was beheaded later that year.

The Limitations of Enlightenment

Sadly, as the hindsight of history shows, the European Enlightenment reserved its rewards for white men only. The 18th century was a time of rampant debate on all sorts of topics, with the idea of "naturalness" at the core of the inquiry. Despite gender equality being given significant attention (French philosopher François Poulain de la Barre and his assertion that "the mind has no sex" is a good example[30]), the notion of womanhood as inherently unsuited to artistic or intellectual pursuits not only persisted, but was justified through a pseudo-scientific dialogue focusing on female physiology. If it could be proven that women were inherently different, then their continued exclusion from formal society was not only justified, but in a perverted way, seen as a kindness.

[30] (Bostic, 2010)

The power of reasoned thought was so strong that it could be twisted to support prejudice, so long as the justification appeared rational. As an example, anatomists presented drawings of the female skeleton which wrongly depicted the brain cavity as smaller, relative to men. French philosopher Denis Diderot categorized the uterus as an erratic organ prone to exercising a frenetic influence over the mind and emotions, exciting in the imagination "all sorts of phantoms." The *Encyclopédie*, a seminal Enlightenment anthology which gathered the collective thoughts of dozens of (male) philosophers, described gender in this way:

> *The two sexes have almost equal advantages. To one, nature gave strength and majesty, courage and reason; to the other, graces and beauty, delicacy and sentiment.* [31]

This notion, which characterizes women as emotional and men as reasoned, excluded an entire gender from the most fundamental aspect of Enlightened thinking – rationality. As such, women were regarded as lacking the capacity for higher thinking, which was required for any major worldly pursuit, such as writing, art, music, politics, or science. Instead, the domain of women was the home. She could perform her talents enclosed in private circles, but a public life was beyond her.

Similarly, "naturalism" and the illusion of "rights" justified the continued oppression of Africans. It cannot be overlooked that when the Constitution of the United States was ratified in 1789, congressional representation devalued enslaved Africans as only three-fifths of a person, despite the rationality with which the Constitutional Convention debated the issue. Such notions were justified in Enlightenment writings, with philosophers such as German G.W.F. Hegel specifically excluding Africa and its inhabitants from the course of world history, regarding them as inherently brutal and in need of control. Such unfounded and grossly misinformed depictions planted the seeds for racism in the 20th Century, and beyond. This egregious truth cannot be ignored, despite the social progressivism of the era. Given this, it seems best to conceptualize the Enlightenment (and its influence on music) as an ideal to which society might aspire, rather than a moment of epiphany for the world at large.

Figure 59: The Mozart family on tour: Leopold, Wolfgang, and Nannerl. Watercolour by Carmontelle, ca. 1763; Image Public Domain

A Case Study: The Mozarts

Women and minorities have increasingly become the focus of scholarly inquiry over the past fifty years, so that we now have a much clearer understanding of

[31] (Bostic, 2010)

why European music "history" has so few composers outside of the exceptional white male. It is the work of progressive historians that has given us the story of Hildegard von Bingen, for example. Nonetheless, for many years (and still sometimes today) the question of women's inclusion in historical anthologies has been met with condescension and impossible retorts like, "Were there any female Mozarts?" This burning inquiry hits at the very heart of women in music – if they did not contribute on the same level as men, why should we talk about them?

Firstly, there could have been female Mozarts. In fact, the famous composer, Wolfgang Amadeus, had a sister, Anna Maria (nicknamed Nannerl), who was equal in talent, but relegated to the background by an ambitious father who sought to maximize the potential of his son. As a result, the world knows of Wolfgang very well (as we surely should), but Nannerl is lost. The playwright Sylvia Milo, who wrote *The Other Mozart*, describes the issue this way:

> *The society was as such that, of course, there were women composers, but the ones that could show their work were nobility. Women had to play for nothing. If they made money off their music, they were thought of as prostitutes.*[32]

In short, women were systematically kept from playing the same game as men. In her seminal work on women's studies, *The Creation of Patriarchy,* renown historian Gerda Lerner surveys history from a female perspective and finds three phenomenon which explain why extraordinary women in history are rare.

First, women were usually kept from formal schooling, so they were taught by their mothers, aunts, and sisters; therefore, expectations (staying in the sphere of the home, for example) were systematically perpetuated across generations. Outliers were likely met with derision, since their actions would be seen as offensive to those in their immediate social circle. Second, there was no community of females in public life, so an exceptional woman required a sympathetic man to champion her work and legitimize it for public consumption. Without such an endorsement, and regardless of her talent, a woman was likely doomed to obscurity.

Lastly, women rarely had the means to leave a legacy; meaning, there was unlikely to be another woman to take up her work, nor was there a model for an ambitious female to follow. Mozart built on Bach, and Beethoven built on Mozart, but there was no such support system for Nannerl, or others like her. As a result, exceptional women required not only talent and dedication, but the necessary social circumstances to allow those qualities to take root – a situation that was exceedingly rare. With no path for women's development, there were only outliers. Unfortunately, Nannerl had no champion to support her, or mentor to follow, and as such, has been forgotten by history.

Nannerl: In her Brother's Shadow

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a child prodigy of mythical proportions. He possessed innate skills for music-making that blossomed from some sort of divine source – he was seemingly born knowing music. By the age of three, he was already climbing up to the keyboard and picking out little tunes. At four, he was playing full pieces, and by five years of age, he started writing his own music. He had a perfect memory for pitch and was soon able to memorize and perform complete works, on a single hearing.

[32] (Duca, 2015)

Leopold, Wolfgang's father, was also an experienced musician, and so recognized the talent in his son early, even referring to him as a miracle. In fact, he quickly abandoned his own aspirations as a composer, and pursued instead a grand vision for Wolfgang's future. He cast the net wide, parading his brilliant son all over Europe, touting him as a child prodigy (which he certainly was), and procuring invitations to perform for kings and queens – everyone from Louis the XV of France, to the English royal family. At the tender age of six, Wolfgang astonished Emperor Franz I of Austria in a private recital, to which the court composer, Christoph Wagenseil, exclaimed, "You are a real musician!"[33]

Figure 60: Portrait of Maria Anna Mozart (1751-1829), Pietro Antonio Lorenzoni; Image Public Domain

This story is familiar and is the basis for the well-deserved mythology surrounding Mozart's legacy. The supernatural qualities of his talent have rightfully drawn renown and admiration for generations. There is not doubt that Mozart achieved greatness and his music was a wonderful gift; however, could there have been another family talent, lost to history? Far lesser known is the story of Nannerl, and the fact that she too was an unsurpassed talent, possibly even more so than her brother. In the early years, she was part of the act. It was the Mozart *children*, and not only Wolfgang, who delighted audiences. In fact, it was Nannerl's lessons with her father that first sparked the boy's interest in music.

In a letter in 1764, Leopold remarked:

> *My little girl plays the most difficult works which we have… with incredible precision and so excellently. What it all amounts to is this, that my little girl, although she is only 12 years old, is one of the most skillful players in Europe.* [34]

At that point, her brother Wolfgang was already seven, and well on his way to renown, so it appears that Nannerl was still easily able to keep pace with him. Similarly, Count Karl von Zinzendorf, a servant in the Austrian government who attended a performance of the Mozart children, recorded the following:

> *The poor little fellow plays marvelously. He is a child of spirit, lively, charming. His sister's playing is masterly and [Wolfgang] applauded her.* [35]

[33] (Mozart Media, No date)
[34] (Rusch, 2011)
[35] (Rusch, 2011)

Once the children's touring was in full force, Leopold also wrote to his friend, Johann Lorenz Hagenauer:

> *Nannerl no longer suffers by comparison to the boy, for she plays so beautifully that everyone is talking about her and admiring her execution.*[36]

In these accounts, it seems as if Nannerl is the real superstar; even so, she would nonetheless find herself taking a backseat to her brother, more often than not. Although she was the older sibling, it is unlikely that any talent on her part would have made her the center of interest. Father Beda Hubner, the librarian in the childrens' hometown of Salzburg, described them thus:

> *The girl, it is true, [played] with more art and fluency than her little brother, but the boy with far more refinement and with more original ideas, and with the most beautiful inspirations, so that even the most excellent organists wondered how it was humanly possible for such a boy, who was already so good an artist at the age of six, to possess such art, so as to astonish the whole musical world.*[37]

One can imagine that Wolfgang might have been more impressive than his sister, even if he only had half the talent, since he was also much younger; but even so, the above quote is telling. Hubner admits to Nannerl's superior skill but goes on to celebrate her brother.

This likely became the norm, between the siblings. During a tour to the German city of Munich, only Wolfgang was invited to perform for the local nobility. After his recital was well-received, the Elector of Munich (Maximillian III) was so astounded that he asked to hear Nannerl as well. She presented a recital two days later, and while she was applauded, it was clear that her younger brother had been given first billing. She must have felt like her concert was an afterthought. We can only guess as to how this might have impacted Nannerl's confidence or love for music, since she never outwardly showed signs of jealously, and always regarded her brother with love and admiration.

In total, Nannerl toured and performed by Wolfgang's side for three years, visiting a whopping eighty-eight cities. This would have been a childhood unlike any other for the time. She hob-knobbed with kings and queens, visited cities across the continent, and dressed in fine clothes – things that most Europeans could only have dreamed of in the 18th-century. But, her time in the limelight was to end, and abruptly. When she reached what Leopold considered "marriageable" age, Nannerl was left behind in Salzburg, completely cutoff from the glamorous childhood she had come to know.

While Wolfgang spent his comparatively short life in constant conflict with their father's controlling nature, Nannerl was compliant – perhaps she felt she had no choice. She stayed home, soaking up accounts of Wolfgang's many adventures, recitals, and premiers in his frequent letters. Wolfgang almost always sent her his new works, and sometimes even held them in secret, for her eyes (and performance) only – a clear sign of his respect for her skills. There were other women in Salzburg at the time who had active careers as court singers, and maybe Nannerl saw in them the possibility to pursue her own potential, but if she did, she never made it known.

Ironically, despite having been sidelined on her father's insistence that she find a husband, Nannerl was not married until the age of thirty-two, many years after the end of her public performing career. Her husband was an older widower with five children, and lived in a secluded village in the country. Her new

[36] (Glover, 2013)
[37] Ibid.

Figure 61: Portrait of Anna Maria Mozart (1720-1778) in 1775; Rosa Hagenauer-Barducci (1744-1809); Image Public Domain

home was so remote, in fact, that she could not even have her piano delivered. In any case, her new life as wife and mother left little time for hobbies, and she was fully isolated from the what she loved the most – her music.

In the years between her retirement from performing and her marriage, she remained active at home, often practicing hours per day. It seems she was also a composer. In 1770, when Nannerl was twenty-nine, she sent her brother some of her work, to which he replied:

I was truly amazed that you can compose so well, in one word, the song you wrote is beautiful; you should try this more often.[38]

Any music Nannerl may have written has been lost to history, so there is no way to know whether Mozart was genuinely impressed by his sister's efforts, or if he was just being kind. If it was the former, we can only guess as to her potential, since Wolfgang was almost certainly a discerning critic, unlikely to dispense compliments lightly.

Women in Music Today

Given the cultural limitations of the time, can Leopold be forgiven for disregarding his daughter's talent? After all, what future career could he promote for her? It seems wholly unfair to gauge female composers according to the same parameters as men, since they would have had so little opportunity to succeed; however, it is also grossly shortsighted to ignore them entirely. What does this mean in terms of the place women might take in an historical discussion? That question is still being worked out in the field at large and remains a pressing issue today.

Lest we think that women have achieved total parity, data from the film industry – one of the most highly profitable jobs for composers in modern culture – is revealing.

In 2020, Icelandic composer Hildur Guðnadóttir made history as the first solo female to win a Grammy for her score to the limited TV series, *Chernobyl* (Best Score Soundtrack for visual media).[39] At that

[38] (Spaethling, 2000)
[39] (Classic FM, 2020)

point, it had been 35 years since any woman had appeared on the Grammy ballot for a soundtrack. The last time, in 1985 (*Beverly Hills Cop*) three women were among the many songwriters recognized as a part of a compilation, and not solo artists working independently – in that regard, Guðnadóttir is a trailblazer. Also highly celebrated for her score to the 2019 film *Joker*, she was the first female composer in 23-years to win an Oscar, and only the fourth in history. Even in the 21st Century, Guðnadóttir seems to be an outlier, and has remarked: "I've noticed a bit of wariness sometimes…to trust women for these bigger projects."[40]

She also has this to say about women in music:

> *To the girls, to the women, to the mothers, to the daughters, who hear the music bubbling within, please speak up. We need to hear your voices.*[41]

The statistics for professional orchestras are similarly grim. According to a survey of the top twenty groups in the world (as ranked by Gramaphone magazine), men still account for 69% of the players. Some sections are particularly bleak – of the 103 trumpet players surveyed, there was only a single female, and in the trombones and tubas, there were none. These disparities also lead to pay inequities, since most women end up as section players in the strings, where salaries are lower.

Jesse Rosen, who is now the president of the League of American Orchestras, admits that during his own studies in the 1970s, he and his friends:

> *…had no use of women playing trumpet or trombone…We thought low brass was the pinnacle of masculinity. We thought brass had to be loud and strong, and I doubt we were unique.*[42]

Although he asserts that his opinions have evolved today, no doubt such biases persist, and impact female musicians in myriad ways, throughout their development.

Sadly, conductors seem to fare little better, with females leading only 20% of all orchestras in the United States, and only 12% of the most elite groups. These data contradict the availability of candidates, since women account for close to half of the doctoral degrees conferred in the field of orchestral conducting, during the same period. Vasily Petrenko, Principal Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, gave voice to these prejudices, when he commented in 2013:

> *…Orchestras react better when they have a man in front of them…[because]…a cute girl on the podium means that musicians think about other things.*[43]

This textbook is not sufficient in scope to fully address such a massive topic as gender inequality, but it is certainly a topic worthy of consideration. It also seems grossly unfair to fully disregard the social issues that surround the culture of Classical music. Should we dismiss exceptional composers like Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven as examples of the oppressive patriarchy? There seems no benefit to that perspective, since their work stands alone in its profundity and art is important, especially when it forces

[40] Ibid.
[41] (Willman & Aurthur, 2020)
[42] (Staley & Shendruk, 2018)
[43] (Levintova, 2013)

us to grapple with social issues we might rather forget. Further, we cannot hold specific individuals responsible for broader cultural limitations, many of which took centuries to meaningfully change.

Even so, the question remains – what have we *missed*, by society and history systematically disregarding the contributions of women?

Were there any female Mozarts?

Music and the Enlightenment

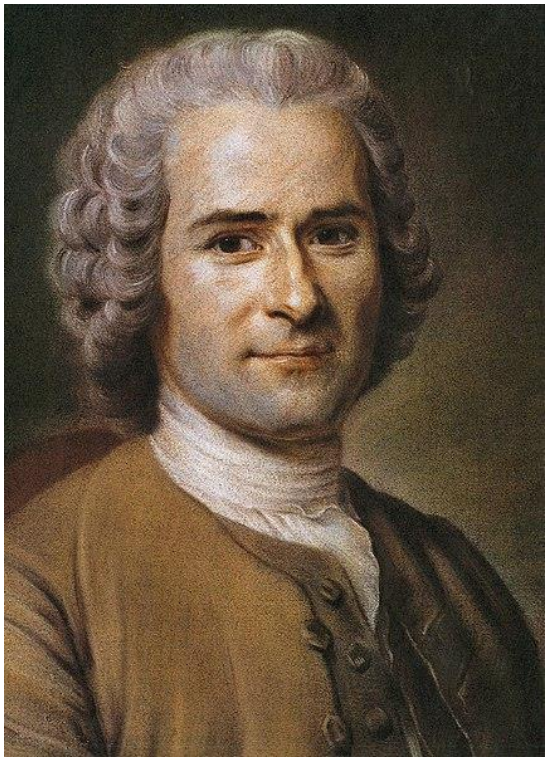

Figure 62: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, by Maurice Quentin de La Tour; Image Public Domain

Music was at the center of Enlightenment reforms. French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, himself a composer, wrote extensively on the significance of music, and regarded its style as a reflection of social liberty and freedom. Whereas subjects of a crown accept cultural norms through coercion, an audience capable of voluntarily experiencing music together is reacting to shared ideals; therefore, music which appeals to a group identity is a sign of social progress. While the Enlightenment takes its principles from *reason*, Rousseau rightly pointed out that true unity is a matter of *emotion*, of persuading another to adopt shared values. In this, he contended, music excelled over speech. Further, Rousseau believed that a society which could not experience collective emotions, such as in music, was destined for conflict and discord.

The corollary is that music can be composed with the *intention* of promoting equality; meaning, it can be crafted so as to appeal to the population at large – rather like what we could call "popular music" today. Taking on this role, music of the Enlightenment became an exemplar for a new, socially progressive world. The first step was to liberate it from the constraints of the opulent, aristocratic stylings of the Baroque – equated with the elitism of its patrons. If music was to be indicative of the enlightened society philosophers wanted to build, it should feel natural and less contrived.

According to Rousseau, the basis of music lies in melody, which is the most straightforward, immediate, and clear of the musical elements. In his estimation, harmonies were vague and sentimental – nothing more meaningful than beautiful sounds – whereas, melody he regarded as an evolved form of language: direct and informative. French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau disagreed, believing the opposite to be true – harmony should dominate over melody.

For a time, Rousseau and Ramaeu were sufficiently passionate about their views to engage in a public debate in Paris, known as the *Querelle des Bouffons* ("Quarrel of the Comic Actors"), a fact which shows the significance of music during this period. Together with several other composers and philosophers, the pair exchanged barbs and heavily criticized the opposing perspective, with Rousseau arguing on behalf of the Italian style (melodic) and harshly condemning French music (harmonic):

> *I have been made to see that there is neither measure nor melody in French music, because the language is not sensitive; that French singing is only continual barking, unbearable to all unprejudiced ears; that the harmony is brutal, without expression and feeling uniquely like schoolboys' padding; that French airs are not airs; that French recitals are not recitals. Hence I conclude that the French have no music and can have none; or that if ever they have, so much the worse for them.*[44]

Rousseau's perspective seems to have won, since simple, balanced, catchy melodies are at the heart of Classical era styles. Mozart himself wrote to a friend, "Melody is the essence of music."[45]

Taken from a fashionable French term that described someone who embodied the progressivism of the Enlightenment, the new term for art and music was *Galant.* As the philosopher François-Marie Arouet (known as Voltaire) described: "being *galant*, in general, means seeking to please."[46] In music, this meant simple, unadorned melodic phrases, thin homophonic textures that did not overly draw the focus, and logical, uncomplicated harmonies. The heaviness of the basso continuo was replaced with simple basslines, and rhythm became more flexible and varied; composers played with unexpected pauses, changes of pattern, and syncopation. In short, music was simpler, and intended to be entertaining and fun.

The predominance of melody also gave rise to the idea "catchy" music, what we would call writing a "hook," or an "earworm" today. This was a part of the business of music, which involved the potentially profitable endeavors or selling sheet music to amateurs and tickets to audiences. If people were whistling your tune, all the better for the commerce of cultural relevance. Then as now, popular melodies were light, easy to sing, and memorable. In this context, the intensity of grand, Baroque emotions was no longer workable; instead, composers favored a naturalness around feeling, so that Classical music moves freely through a wide range of moods, rather than driving focus into a single, extreme emotional event.

To that end, the sudden contrasts of the Baroque gave way to subtle shading, especially in the case of dynamics. Composers notated the *crescendo*, or gradual increase in volume, and its opposite, the *decrescendo* (gradual decrease in volume) to allow the music to move through a more natural sense of ebb and flow. Since such subtleties were not possible on the limited dynamics of the harpsichord, so the piano became the new keyboard instrument of choice. In fact, the instrument's name is short for "piano-forte," meaning "soft-loud," which describes its ability to perform at various dynamic levels – an innovation over earlier keyboard instruments.

Interestingly, the social revolutions of this period are not directly reflected in its music. Rather than the loud, bombastic, angry styles that we might associate with such war and strife, Classical music is light, enjoyable, and charming. This a form of social revolution, since complexity was regarded as the domain of the upper class, and clarity was seen as a path to inclusivity. At the same time, the implication of this shift – that in order for music to be popular, it must also be simple – is difficult to accept, when we realize the ways in which it might quash the creativity of music-creators.

This points to an important issue that can still be observed in modern culture. Who is responsible for the quality of the musical product – the composer who creates it, or the audience that pays for it?

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[44] (Scott, 2006, p. 62)
[45] (Knowles, 2013)
[46] (Heartz & Brown, 2001)

Cultural Hotspot: Vienna and its Enlightened Ruler

Figure 63: Joseph II of Austria, After Joseph Hickel / CC BY-SA

In this era of social upheaval, there was an alternative to revolution – monarchies could choose the path of Enlightenment through policy change, while maintaining the absolute power that granted them the right to do so. Catherine the Great of Russia, Christian VII of Denmark, and Joseph I of Portugal all employed this strategy and enacted significant public reforms in their respective countries.

The most famous of this group, Emperor Joseph II of Austria, summarized his philosophy with the moto, "everything for the people, nothing by the people," which is the decidedly un-enlightened perspective that citizens are not able to govern themselves. Like their Baroque forebearers, Enlightened rulers believed they were born to lead, but felt a greater responsibility to their citizens – even as they were largely unwilling to concede any of their power. Nonetheless, Joseph and others like him largely improved the lives of their subjects. In the case of Vienna, the Emperor ensured that the city lead the continent in cultural pursuits as well.

Joseph was the eldest son of the Empress Maria Theresa, herself a reformer, and as such, received an excellent education in the Enlightenment philosophies of the time. He displayed an early aptitude and interest in politics and approached his role as ruler with pointed vision and a commitment to social reform. He abolished serfdom, supported public health programs, granted freedom of the press, removed the church from matters of state, and enacted laws assuring religious freedom. Most importantly, he regarded culture as a force of unity, and worked to balance the inequity of the social classes by creating increased access to education and the arts.

Music was of particular interest to the Emperor, and he was an important patron for Viennese composers. Most notably, he favored the Italian composer Antonio Salieri, whose career has been infamously immortalized (and mostly fictionalized) in the popular movie and play, *Amadeus.* Even so, Salieri's prominence in Vienna was a symptom of the dominance of French and Italian styles, particularly in the popular art form of opera, and Joseph took on a number of projects aimed at increasing nationalistic styles. His patronage was of great benefit to many composers.

Most significantly, 18th-century Vienna became an incubator of symphonic music, with three of the most significant and impactful composers in history residing and working there. Haydn spent both is early and late years in Vienna, where he composed some of his most serious works. Mozart famously fled his parochial hometown of Salzburg to pursue a freelance career in the prominent city, and virtually all of Beethoven's symphonies were premiered in one of the Vienna's many theaters. While Joseph's funding and reforms created an environment in which composers could thrive, he could not fully drive public opinion – it was the tastes of the Viennese pubic that ultimately determined who would be successful.

Genre Focus: German Enlightenment Opera (*Singspiel*)

The 18th century was a watershed moment, characterized by drastic shifts in both thinking and creative expression, resulting in the arts emerging as a flagship for social reforms. In terms of opera, this posed some challenges, since the traditions of that genre were not exactly aligned with Enlightenment ideas. Operas are expensive to produce, and so did not fit well into the new model of public, ticketed events. In addition, the history of the genre, as an indulgence of wealthy patrons, gave operas an elitist image, which would have been at odds with the Enlightenment desire for equality. Probably most important, it was a transplanted art form for most of Europe. Hailing from Italy, and still typically sung in Italian, traditional operas would only have been understood by the culturally elite.

Enter the *Opera Buffa*, or *comic opera* – the antithesis of the high art Baroque *Opera Seria*, or *serious opera*, with its lofty stories of gods and kings. By contrast, *Buffa* was light and entertaining, featuring comedic or farcical plots, simpler music, and the addition of spoken dialogue – notably, in the vernacular. Since these works were meant to be "for the people," they also became an important expression of nationalism. In France, the style was called *Opera Comique*, in England the *Ballad Opera*, and in German-speaking lands, the *Singspiel* ("Sing-play").

In keeping with his populist views, Joseph II initiated a *Nationalsingspiel* ("National Singspiel") project, aimed at presenting new, accessible works in German. He transformed his mother's royal theater into a public venue, renaming it the *German National Theater*, and amassed an ensemble of excellent artist, including the renowned librettist Lorenzo de Ponte. This initiative serves as an early example of what can be accomplished through government-back arts funding. Joseph entrusted the management of the theater to its performers, and gave them not a royal title, but instead referred to them as "civil servants of the state." The idea of giving culture over "to the people," was truly new.

Although the overall project met with mixed success, since Italian styles remained popular, we owe three of Mozart's operas to Joseph's vision, and for his part, the young composer loved the idea of creating music for the people. Even so, the process was not without limitations. Joseph was critical if he perceived the music as too dramatic or difficult, and is rumored to have panned Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* ("The Abduction form the Seraglio") as "too beautiful for our ears, and much too many notes." [47] Even within this relatively progressive artistic environment, composers were still expected to conform to Joseph's expectations.

In the case of Mozart, it is easy to see why he did not fit in. The German composer Johann Adam Hiller (1728–1804) had set the early standard for Singspiels, and his style was primarily in the Enlightenment vein – light and fun. Hiller's melodies were easy enough to be sung by actor-singers and his productions did not necessarily require any trained musicians – it was "lowbrow" entertainment. For Mozart, this was not enough. As with so many other aspects of his work, he not only absorbed the style, but transformed it.

Mozart's supremely successful *Die Zauberflöte* ("The Magic Flute") is conventional enough to be called a Singspiel, in that it retains some key features of the genre – comedic characters, fanciful creatures, exaggerated metaphors for good and evil, and magical elements – but his melodies are far from

[47] (Rice, 2002)

amateurish. In fact, the arias from *Magic Flute* are some of the most notoriously difficult in history, and set an early standard for *coloratura*, or the highly elaborate, flowery melodies for which operas are known. While all of this was wrapped up in a seemingly innocent, fairytale of a story, Mozart's opera is steeped in Enlightenment morals and social commentary, and certainly was not a match for type of passive art that was more typical for the time.

The Freemasons and Mozart's *Magic Flute*

Mozart's *Magic Flute*, his most successful and endearing opera,[48] is a fairy tale with a moral: the path to Enlightenment lies in the ability of humans to utilize their own reason to overcome the challenges of life. This theme plays out on an individual basis, with each character subjected to their own trials, as well as from a broader perspective, with an Enlightened utopia presented as the ideal culture to which all societies should aspire. As the name implies, at the center of the story is *music*, and its ability to act as a bridge between emotion and reason. This is reflective of the writings of Rousseau, Freidrich Shiller, and others, who regarded the arts as a measure of social progress.

For the last seven years of his life, Mozart was a member of the Freemasons, a fraternal organization based on brotherhood, mutual support, and furthering the aims of the Enlightenment. The Masons are also clouded in mystery, with closed rituals members who are sworn to secrecy, so that there is plenty of room for conjecture about their alleged covert acts or mystical underpinnings. Even so, the *Magic Flute* conveys the very positive values – the pursuit of truth and the triumph of reason.

Figure 64: Michael Schade as Prince Tamino, Canadian Opera Company, 2001; Image used by permission, Canadian Opera Company, Flickr

[48] Suggested supplement to this section: https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/discover/education/educator-guides/magic-flute-the/magic.flute.guide.pdf; MT San Antonio College maintains a subscription to the Met Opera, Live in HD, available through the library

In creating *Magic Flute*, Mozart teamed with his friend and fellow Mason, Emanuel Schikaneder (1751-1812), who both wrote the *libretto* (story and text of the opera), and acted in one of its most iconic roles, Papageno the bird catcher. Schikaneder was up to the task of writing a moralist tale that would appeal to the sensibilities of Enlightened audiences, since he was already successful as an actor, writer, impresario, and composer himself. Combining elements from a number of sources, including popular novels from the time, Schikaneder drew on the magical elements, lowbrow humor, comic relief, moralizing themes, and spectacle that were common to popular Viennese plays, and crafted a grand fairytale, full of lost characters in search of meaning and happiness.

The Story of the *Magic Flute*

At the heart of the story is the mysterious Sarastro, leader of a clandestine brotherhood, and initially the would-be villain of the story; however, as the characters evolve through a series of moral dilemmas, it becomes clear that the true antagonist is the vengeful Queen of the Night. This twist may have been part propaganda, since the Freemasons were looked on suspiciously by most. Even the emperor, who was known for religious tolerance, limited the number of Masonic organizations he would allow in the kingdom. In presenting Sarastro's secret fraternity benevolent but misunderstood, Schikaneder was likely sending a message about his own Freemasons.

From there, it is challenging to identify a main character of the story, since the plot rotates around an ensemble, each with their own story arc and symbolic purpose. At the start, Sarastro, High Priest of the Sun and protector of a sacred golden disk (meant to symbolize knowledge and enlightenment), has "kidnapped" Princess Tamina, daughter of the Queen of the night. In the meantime, Prince Tamino, the "hero" of sorts, finds himself set upon by a serpent in the woods. Instead of fighting, he faints from fright. This introduces his character as one who struggles to respond appropriately to his emotions – he

Figure 65: The closing scene of Magic Flute, at the Greek National Opera in 2010; Image used by permission, Greek National Opera, Flickr

is out of balance with nature and must learn from this shortcoming. Three ladies appear and save Tamino, then leave to tell the Queen of the Night.

As they depart, a bumbling, silly character appears – Papageno, a bird catcher and the comic relief, or sidekick of the story. He falsely claims to have saved Tamino, setting up his character as one who is prone to lying. Over the course of the story, he will face this failing and learn to use his reason, even when emotions urge him to be dishonest. The ladies return and give Tamino a portrait of the Queen's daughter, Pamina. Tamino falls in love with the picture – again showing his impulsiveness. The Queen appears to a clap of thunder (revealing her magical nature) and commands that Tamino save her daughter.

Here, the Queen presents herself as a victim, and therefore becomes a symbol for the old ways of thinking – viewing one's life without agency and blaming others for personal shortcomings. Tamino believes her story without question, setting up the internal conflict he must face when later confronted with the truth of Sarastro's benevolence. To guide them on their quest, the ladies give Tamino the eponymous magic flute and Papageno, a set of magic bells. Despite their original intention on the part of the Queen, these instruments evolve into important tools on the path to Enlightenment, appearing at turning points in the story when the characters need to find a balance between emotions and reason (reflecting the prevailing notion about the purpose of music in this period).

Figure 66: The Queen of the Night in a production at Western Carolina State University in 2019; Image used with permission, WestConn Flickr

After facing many tribulations, Tamino arrives at the doors of Sarastro's palace and demands to see Pamina. To his surprise, the guard interrogates him and offerings a warning – that he should not take action without first questioning what he believes to be true. After a lengthy debate, Tamino reasons that the Queen has deceived him. Sarastro tells his priests that Pamina and Tamino will undergo trials to prove their worthiness to be united in love. Meanwhile, the Queen appears in Pamina's bedroom (revealing that her magic could have allowed her to rescue her daughter at any time), and commands that she kill Sarastro, singing the most famous aria of the show, "Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen" ("Here in my Heart, Hell's Bitterness is Seething").

Figure 67: The Metropolitan Opera takes a bow at the end of Magic Flute, in 2010; Image used with permission from Ralph Daily, Flickr

Tamino and Papageno are told that their first trial is one of self-control – they are not to eat, drink, or speak. Papageno encounters an old lady who flirts with him, and he immediately fails the test by accepting a glass of water and asking her name. Papageno decides that the trials are too difficult and wishes for a wife instead, eventually settling on the old lady. When he promises to be faithful, she is transformed into the beautiful Papagena, a bird-lady and Papageno's ideal match, but then immediately disappears. Papageno, overcome with grief and hopelessness, tries to hang himself from a tree, but saves himself by playing his magic bells, causing Papagena to return. Although his trials are less rigorous, the silly Papageno is rewarded, as he proves himself capable of growth. Papagena and Papageno joyously sing their famous duet, "Pa-pa-pa."

Having passed the trial of silence, Tamino and Pamina progress through the final two tests, and emerge victorious. The Queen makes a final play against Sarastro, but is banished by the light of his wisdom. Pamina and Tamino are married, bathed in the light of Sarastro's temple, and have proven themselves to be virtuous, wise, and courageous.

The set design, which was described by Schikaneder in detail, provides an important clue to the overriding theme of the story. Three temples occupy the stage: in the center, Wisdom, with Nature and Reason flanking on either side. The implication is that human wisdom grows out of a balance between the other two. The development of these characters then become exemplars of the path to Enlightenment, with the Queen serving as a foil – one who refuses to evolve.

The Music of the *Magic Flute*

Musical Snapshot: "O Isis and Osiris," from *The Magic Flute* (1791)

1. **Composer**: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
2. **Genre**: Opera
3. **Country**: Austria
4. **Time Period**: Enlightenment
5. **Language**: German (Met Opera performance is in English)
6. **Texture**: Homophonic
7. **Melody**: Legato, Extreme low range
8. **Harmony**: Major
9. **Tempo**: Slow
10. **Narrative**: Before Tamino and Pamino embark on their trials, Sarastro wishes success for the couple

Text in English (original is in German)
SARASTRO: O Isis and Osiris, guide them, as they now make their dangerous way. With strength and wisdom walk beside them. Protect them both from harm, we pray. CHORUS OF PRIESTS: Protect them both from harm, we pray. SARASTRO: True love is born of tribulation, but if you cannot grant salvation, think of their virtue, their tender hearts. Your everlasting peace impart. CHORUS OF PRIESTS: Your everlasting peace impart.

Suggested recording: Access Met Opera Live in HD through the Mt SAC website

Mozart's job was to compose music that meaningfully supports the main ideas of this compelling story. Not surprisingly, he masterfully accomplished this goal, particularly in the musical characterizations of his arias. For example, when Sarastro sings his loving but calm plea ("O Isis and Osiris") that Tamino and Pamina should successfully complete their trials, the rhythms are slow and methodical, the range is low, and the melodic style is a smooth legato. A calm, major tonality combines with these elements to create a clear sense of Sarastro's benevolent, father-like leadership. His intentions – to guide, rather than force – are made clear when he asks the Gods to "bestow the spirit of wisdom" on the young couple.

Musical Snapshot: ""Here in My Heart Hell's Bitterness Is Seething"," from *The Magic Flute* (1791)

1. **Composer**: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
2. **Genre**: Opera
3. **Country**: Austria
4. **Time Period**: Enlightenment
5. **Language**: German (Met Opera performance is in English)
6. **Texture**: Homophonic
7. **Melody**: Accented, Extreme high range
8. **Harmony**: Minor
9. **Tempo**: Fast
10. **Narrative**: The Queen, in her anger and hatred, tells her daughter Pamina, the she must kill Sarastro

Text in English (original is in German)
Here in my heart, hell's bitterness is seething. Death and vengeance force the vow I swore. If you refuse to murder Sarastro, then I will curse my daughter ever more. Sarastro once betrayed me! Tamino now betrays me! My daughter would betray me and her mother's love deny. Abandoned, forsaken, and tormented, his dominion I defy! And you must find the strength to kill Sarastro! Swear, swear, swear to avenge me! Swear or you will die!.

In contrast, the Queen's infamous aria, "Here in my Heart, Hell's Bitterness is Seething," is a riotous, frantic display of emotional abandon, with an intensely high range viscerally communicating the urgency of her outrage. The minor tonality, fast tempo and rhythms, and staccato singing style, provide a stark divergence from Sarastro's controlled demeanor. The Queen angrily catalogues all who have mistreated her – Sarastro, Tamino, and now Pamina – and describes herself as "abandoned, forsaken, and tormented," while casting Sarastro as an evil villain. Not only does she command her daughter to murder Sarastro on her behalf (thereby revealing her depraved character), but she even threatens to kill Pamina herself, should she refuse. The Queen is unhinged, betrayed by her own paranoia and weakness.

Notoriously difficult, the part of the Queen was first performed by Mozart's sister-in-law, Josepha Hofer (Weber), whose abilities he admired – she may even have inspired the character. In either case, it seems the Queen was a central figure in Mozart's mind. As he laid in bed, languishing through his final days, he deliriously imagined his way through the successful performances of the *Magic Flute* that were taking place down the street, whispering to his wife Constanza:

> *Quiet, quiet! Hofer is just taking her top F; – now my sister-in-law is singing her second aria, 'Der Hölle Rache'; how strongly she strikes and holds the B-flat.*[49]

In addition to communicating the intensity of the Queen's hatred and fear, this aria is a watershed moment in music history, since it is the first in a *coloratura* style, referring to its acrobatic, florid technique. Such musical dramatics would become a part of the opera mythos, moving forward. Even today, the role of the Queen is so challenging that only a handful of the best-trained singers in the world can do it justice.

This is all the more significant, since German singers did not have a reputation for virtuosity. Mozart likely needed Hofer as an exemplar, in order to conceive of something so difficult. German singers were, in fact, so notoriously bad that the composer Hiller, who is widely regarded as the origin of the Singspiel genre, claimed that his music was primarily aimed at "teaching the German people to sing,"[50] through simple, tuneful melodies. By contrast, the Queen's music far surpasses anything even remotely amateur, and certainly set a new standard for what the human voice can achieve – both in technique, and immediacy of emotion.

Mozart's *Magic Flute* was his greatest success and is considered the masterwork of the German Singspiel genre. Sadly, the composer did not live to see its enthusiastic reception. He conducted the premiere and proudly escorted his friends to many of its subsequent performances, but died only a few months into the run. Within its first year, the *Magic Flute* was performed one-hundred times in Vienna, which is an astounding feat for a city of only 200,000 people! In the coming years, the opera would spread to venues across Europe, enjoying success then, as now. According to the website *Operabase*, the *Magic Flute* was the second most popular opera at the international level (losing out to Verdi's *La Traviata*) for the 2018-2020 season, with 650 productions worldwide.[51]

[49] (Deutsch, 1966, p. 556)
[50] (Abert, 2001)
[51] (Operabase, 2019)

LESSON 9: A TALE OF TWO SYMPHONIES

While Mozart is likely better known to listeners today, Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) was the premiere composer of the Enlightenment, a period in which composers faced the ultimate challenge – entertaining the masses. The key to success in this era was in adding just enough of the unexpected to keep things interesting, while maintaining the predictability and clarity that audiences expected. Haydn seemed to know just the right formula and audiences loved him for it.

Mozart also had successes but overall, he struggled to build a lasting audience for his music. He has fared well historically, of course, and is both treasured and remembered today, but in the Classical period, people struggled to connect with his comparatively complex, emotional, and dramatic style. The contrast between Mozart and Haydn, both as individuals and as artists, presents an excellent opportunity to contemplate the dissonance between the constraints of creating music that appeals to popular tastes, vs. being true to one's own vision.

That being said, there is no evidence that Haydn's musical aimes were at odds with its popularity, or that he defied any of his inner longings by comprising in some way, in his efforts to be appealing as an artist. In truth, Haydn's music seems to match his personality well, and the same seems true of Mozart. Perhaps the latter was just unlucky enough to be born into an era that was destined to misunderstand him. Regardless, it is true that Mozart's music has stood the test of time very well, despite never enjoying true renown when he was alive. By contrast, Haydn was quite popular with audiences, but outside of a historical class like this one, most listeners are unlikely to encounter his music today.

What did each of these composers value? Why did they choose to write the music they did? What is there to learn from these examples? Answers to these questions, or at least meaningful points for consideration, can be found in a comparison of their lives, and music.

Genre Focus: The Symphony

With the public concert serving as the economic engine behind instrumental music, there arose a need for a significant work to serve as an anchor for programming – a way of touting the next big thing from a given composer. The *symphony* fulfilled this need. The word "symphony" refers both to the genre (a multi-movement work for orchestra), and the ensemble that performs it – a *symphony* orchestra. In the Baroque, instrumental ensembles were generally comprised of the musicians who were on hand, and so were mixtures of various winds and strings. By the Enlightenment, the orchestra became more standardized as a core group of strings, enhanced by pairs of woodwinds (usually flutes, oboes, clarinets, or bassoons), brass (trumpets or French horns), and sometimes a timpanist.

Of course, with so many musicians' salaries and the cost of a venue, public concerts were expensive, so symphonies needed to attract a large crowd, in order to make them financially viable. An important tool for composers in their goal of making accessible music was *form*. By balancing the predictability of a

standard plan for organization with the uniqueness of their own creativity, Enlightenment composers were able to churn out new and engaging music for public consumption at an unprecedented rate.

Mozart composed his first symphony when he was only eight years old, and had written another forty of them by the time of his death. Haydn, the great symphonic master of the era, wrote a whopping 104 symphonies in his career. In fact, the symphony was so popular that it is estimated some 13,000[52] of them were composed over the course of the 18th century, with significant libraries established in locales as far flung as the American Colonies. (Obviously, not all of these have stood the test of time, or have been preserved and performed today.) The symphony was so popular, in fact, that the Catholic Church even adapted it to a sacred setting, with individual movements performed for different parts of the mass, and amateur performers bought up copies of parts to play at home.

Enlightenment symphonies were generally 10-15 minutes in length, with four contrasting *movements*, or *sections*, each followed by a pause. By varying the style and tempo of each movement, the composer could take the listener through a variety of moods, without getting too bogged down on a single idea. Like all Classical era music, symphonies generally focused on melody, presented in a thin, clear homophonic texture. Most (greater than 90%) were composed in a major key, which was conducive to keeping the music "light," but minor was often used as a means of contrast. Unlike Baroque music, which depended on sudden contrasts to grab attention, Classical music exploits all musical elements, freely varying rhythm, harmony, instrumentation, and dynamics throughout, to create an engaging and fun listening experience.

Composer Focus: Franz Josef Haydn (1732-1809)

Austrian Franz Joseph Haydn was the most celebrated composer of his day. As a child, he displayed an early musical talent. His parents, understanding that he would never receive proper training in their country village of Rohrau, apprenticed him to the choirmaster Johann Mattias Frankh, in the nearby town of Hainburg.

Figure 68: Portrait of Joseph Haydn by Thomas Hardy (1791); Image Public Domain

Haydn was only six years old when he left home to live with Frankh, and from that point forward, would never again live with his parents. These early years turned out to be difficult, with Haydn later recalling that Frankh was negligent with the boys in his care, often dressing them in rags and not bothering to feed them.

[52] (Larue, Wolf, Bonds, Walsh, & Charles, 2006)

Nonetheless, two years later, a young Haydn caught the attention of the Director of Music at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna and was invited join the choir there. At the young age of eight, Haydn moved to glittering cultural capitol of Vienna, and spent the remainder of his youth living and working there.

Despite talent and a strong work ethic, Haydn floundered in his late teens, after his voice changed. Unable to sing in the choir, and therefore without the ability to earn a living, he was kicked out of his boarding house, and ended up homeless on the streets of Vienna. Rather than giving up and moving back home, Haydn stayed with friends, and set himself to the task of earning his living as a freelance musician.

Since he had spent his childhood as a singer, Haydn was largely untrained in hard skills like music theory and composition, so his first priority was figure out how to get more training – without any money to pay for it. He worked odd jobs, including everything from teaching music to serenading, and eventually maneuvered his way into accompanying for Nicola Porpora (1686 –1768), an important Italian composer of the day. From him, Haydn finally learned the technical skills he needed, enabling him to make a name for himself in Vienna.

As Haydn's popularity grew, he caught the attention of several wealthy patrons. In 1761, he was offered a post as assistant court composer for the wealthy Esterhazy family, working on their isolated estate in rural Hungary. He took the job, and would remain at the post for nearly thirty years, eventually moving

Figure 69: The Esterhazy estate today; Image used with permission, Istvan, Flickr

into the lead job. This post gave him the stability that his rough upbringing no doubt prompted him to crave, but it was isolating, and caused him to miss out on the cultural activity of lively Vienna.

As a musician-servant within the Patron System, Haydn spent the bulk of his career wearing a uniform, and composing on demand, according to the needs of his employer. As an example of the unique demands of his job, Haydn wrote hundreds of pieces for an obscure instrument called a baryton, which was loved by the Prince, but of little use to anyone else (even today). He also performed chamber music on demand, composed symphonies and rehearsed them with the court orchestra, provided music for a marionette theater, and even wrote operas – all at the beckon call of the Esterhazy family.

If the seclusion of the rural estate was stifling, Haydn he did not outwardly show it – he was an outstanding worker and excelled in his post. While he certainly missed his friends in Vienna, he seems to have used his separation from them as inspiration to work harder. As he said, the sprawling estate "forced [him] to become original." He married, but the match was loveless, and he lived apart from his wife – his was a life of work. As a reward for many years of service, his employer eventually allowed him to have some ownership over this work, and Haydn's music was published and distributed, to wide acclaim.

In 1791, as his duties were waning, a then-popular Haydn took a trip to London, where he was enthusiastically welcomed. Along the way, he saw the ocean for the first time in his life! This speaks to how challenging and rare such a long journey would have been.

Figure 70: Haydn Hall at the Esterhazy Estate; Image used with permission, KLMircea, Flickr

Over the next four years, Haydn spent much of his time in London, composing and performing constantly. During this period, he produced some of his most-loved works, and became (even more) wealthy, admired and successful. Griesinger, a Haydn biographer, writes that

> *Haydn considered the days spent in England the happiest of his life. He was everywhere appreciated there; it opened a new world to him.*[53]

In 1795, Haydn returned to Vienna, and returned to his post with the Esterhazy family, but this time, working part time. He spent the bulk of his days in the city, where he was immensely popular. Freed from the constraints of full time patronage, he composed some of his most beloved works during these last years, including the famous *Trumpet Concerto*, as well as the *Emperor String Quartet*, the main theme of which would spend many years at the Austrian national anthem, and is the German national anthem today.

[53] (London Firebird Orchestra, 2016)

Haydn's Musical Style

Surveying first the title of this work, "major" indicates that Haydn's music will be happy in mood, and fits within the convention of almost all Enlightenment symphonies, in that regard. "Surprise" is a subtitle, and is a clue about Haydn's infamous sense of humor. He was a jokester who loved to created puns and tricks in his music, even though he was actually very serious about his work. Lastly, "Andante" refers to the tempo, which in this case is a nice, easy, medium pace. To hear the "surprise," we will turn to the second movement, and Haydn's cleverly crafted *theme and variations*.

As the name implies, a *theme and variations* form involves repetitions of a main idea, each with slight changes. Since versions of the theme will return multiple times, it is important to write a melody that is catchy and easily repeatable, while still simple enough to allow for new elements to be added. This is just the type of formula at which Haydn excelled. In this case, his melody is so austere and simple, it sounds like a nursery rhyme (a fact which helps to make the surprise even more effective). The pitches outline a very basic chord progression, and leave plenty of open space for additional layers to be added on the variations.

Now, on to the surprise (I won't directly describe it here, so as not to ruin it – you'll know when you hear it)! To understand how this would have been experienced by an Enlightenment audience, it is important to consider that this was in a time before recorded sound, so that this concert (and any concert) would be experienced as totally new – the joy of hearing something for the first time. As such, something surprising would be just that – a total shock. Further, 18th century concerts were social events, with people mingling, talking, and playing cards, so that music was not the sole focus – maybe Haydn wanted to wake them up!

A week prior to the premiere, Haydn's student, Ignace Joseph Pleyel (1757-1831), had premiered his own symphony, and the old composer was eager to best him, which may account for why he added the "surprise" at the last minute. In either case, the London premiere in 1791 exceeded the projected profit by nearly double, and was enthusiastically received. A review reflects the intense love audiences had for Haydn's witty musical style:

> *Never, perhaps, was there a richer musical treat. Is it not wonderful that to souls capable of being touched by music, Haydn should be an object of homage, and even of idolatry; for like our own Shakespeare he moves and governs the passions at will. His new [symphony] was pronounced by every scientific ear to be a most wonderful composition.*[54]

To a modern reader, it might seem strange to see the word "scientific" used as a measure of musical discernment, but this does reveal much about the style of this period. Listeners were interested in balance and clarity, not necessarily expression and individuality. To the extent that a composer could create something perceived as "natural" and pleasing, he could expect to find success with audiences, and this Haydn accomplished with great skill.

Although the theme is repeated and varied, the "surprise" does not happen again. Instead, as Haydn's simple melody reappears in its various permutations, the ear reflexively leans in, waiting to find out if the shock will return. The phrase is symmetrical and easily predictable, so that the spot where the

[54] (Feder & Webster, 2001)

"surprise" should be is obvious, making the anticipation of it quite strong. It is truly an ingenious technique to get audiences to listen! Haydn was clever – it is his calling card.

As Haydn proceeds through the variations, his inventiveness is clear. Never veering too far from the theme, he adds layers, changes the instrumentation, or pumps up the dynamics, to make for a fun listen. Variation 1 adds a light countermelody in the violins, which is picked up by the woodwinds. A brief but dark cloud descends in variation 2, when the tonality shifts to minor, with louder dynamics, an accented melodic style, and moments of polyphony. Variation 3 returns to a lighter style, with the melody in doubled rhythmic durations, played by the oboe. The boisterous final variation brings in the full orchestra, with accented off-beats (syncopation), and strings playing a countermelody. The movement ends (coda) with soft repetitions of the melody in the woodwinds.

Musical Snapshot: Haydn, Symphony No. 94 in G Major, "Surprise," Mvt. 2, Andante (1791)

1. **Composer**: Franz Joseph Haydn
2. **Genre**: Symphony
3. **Country**: Austria
4. **Time Period**: Enlightenment
5. **Texture**: Homophonic (with some variation)
6. **Form**: Theme and Variations
7. **Instrumentation**: Classical orchestra: Strings
8. **Melody**: Exceedingly simple melody, with variations
9. **Harmony**: Major, with a variation in minor, for contrast
10. **Dynamics**: Listen for the "surprise"

Section	Musical Elements
THEME	Major, Strings, Mostly piano, Thin and simple texture (homophonic); "Surprise" provides sudden contrast (listen for timpani)
VARIATION 1	Major, adds countermelody, listen for flute
VARIATION 2	Minor, forte, strings and woodwinds; Polyphony
VARIATION 3	Major, piano, rhythms twice as fast in oboe
VARIATION 4	Major, forte, woodwinds and brass (accents in timpani), off-beat accents
CODA	Major, trumpet fanfares, pedal, closes with bassoon and oboe

Suggested Recording: *Mariss Jansons, Berliner Philharmonike,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VOLy6JxEDLw.

Despite the jolt of Haydn's "surprise," this movement is light and fun overall, with easy-to-follow variations presenting enjoyable extrapolations off a simple and very basic melodic idea. The moods range from playful to jubilant, with nothing overly intense or dramatic to cloud the pleasure of listening intently. Even as the melody is varied, it is always recognizable, so that the audience has a guide to follow, as they listen to Haydn's clever permutations. The resulting experience is quintessentially Classical, with entertainment and easiness wrapped up together in an enjoyable and engaging package.

Composer Focus: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a child prodigy, born with an innate power for deep creativity, and an unprecedented level of musical talent. By the age of three, he was already scribbling music down on paper for his father and sister, and within only a few years, his efforts blossomed into actual, viable pieces of music.

Figure 71: Anonymous portrait of the child Mozart, possibly by Pietro Antonio Lorenzoni; painted in 1763 on commission from Leopold Mozart; Image Public Domain

Recognizing his son's talent, Leopold, himself a successful musician at the Court of Salzburg, set out to promote the young Mozart. The entire family, including Nannerl, Mozart's older sister and herself an accomplished pianist, set out to grace the courts of Europe with their unsurpassed talent. The young Mozart children played for the Empress Maria Teresa, the English royal family, and countless noble men and women across the continent.

While the idea of a tour is not revolutionary today, travel in the 18th-century would have been extremely challenging, with the Mozarts spending long days in open carriages, bouncing down unpaved roads in the rain, heat, or cold, and coping with whatever nature and man might have thrown at them. Advanced planning would have been tricky, with no way to confirm that the next city would yield engagements or financial returns. Leopold worked tirelessly to gain audiences with important people, which is a testament both his ambition, as well as his notoriously overbearing disposition. Even so, touring was worth it, not only because Europe learned about the incredible Austrian prodigy, but because the Mozart family benefitted from incredibly diverse cultural experiences, seeing far more the continent than most people could have imagined at this time in history.

Leopold's efforts on behalf of his children were largely fruitful, and most of the early tours earned the family a good return, both in money and renown; however, after a few years, with their success faltering, Leopold left Nannerl at home, on the premise that she should marry, and set out with Leopold on his own. These tours had mixed success. One talented child was not as exciting as two, and as young Mozart grew into a teen, his abilities, while still incredibly impressive, garnered less interest. Unfortunately, the fickle nature of audience tastes was to impact Mozart's career for the rest of his life.

For his part, Leopold's goal was to get his son a job. Coming from an older generation of musicians, who were accustomed to the Patron System, he envisioned his son becoming one of the most successful music directors in Europe, spending his life in the service of a great king. Of course, society was rapidly changing, and Wolfgang was eager to set out on the new and exciting path of a freelancer. Even so, he

initially followed his father's wishes, and at the age of seventeen, took with his father, working for the Archbishop of Salzburg.

Figure 72: Mozart family c. 1780 (della Croce); the portrait on the wall is of Mozart's mother; Image Public Domain

Although he continued to compose, Mozart felt stifled by the limited cultural offerings of his hometown, and one can only imagine what a letdown it would have been to be back, after a childhood of touring. Most importantly, Mozart wanted to write operas, and such opportunities were rare in the parochial town. Worse yet, his salary was low, and in Mozart's estimation, not at all befitting of his talents.

In what ended up being a fortunate twist of fate, the Archbishop took a trip to Vienna to attend the coronation of Emperor Joseph II, and summoned Mozart to join him. Although he was only there in the capacity of a servant, the young composer ambitiously vied for the attention of the local nobility. His efforts won him several opportunities to perform, but the Archbishop strictly forbade him from accepting. That was a final straw. Mozart wrote to his father, "I am so eager to make a fool of the Archbishop – I would do it with the greatest glee."[55]

The conflict came to a head, and by Mozart's account, the Archbishop behaved terribly, calling him a "knave" and "a slovenly fellow."[56] Wolfgang and Leopold (who was of course still in the employ of the Archbishop) exchanged a series of heated letters, in which the father harshly admonished his son, and

[55] (Spaethling, 2000)
[56] Ibid.

firmly ordered him to make amends with their patron. Mozart was crushed at his father's lack of support and asserted that his honor was at stake – he would not back down. This was the first of many conflicts, that would eventually drive a wedge between Mozart and his judgmental father.

In retaliation, Mozart quit his job, and stayed in Vienna. He was in love with the city, and eager to start a new life, free from the constraints of his controlling patron, and assumedly, the watchful eye of his father. Public concerts were a new and exciting outlet for composers to flex their creativity, but they were also risky. With no safety net, there was no room to fail – new music had to impress, and composers were in a non-stop race to attract audiences. Furthermore, with independence came myriad responsibilities: managing finances and publicity, and continually hustling to find new opportunities.

Not surprisingly, Mozart was no more willing to bend to public opinion than he was to a patron, and his early fame as prodigy seemed only to hold him back, since it fed a perception that he was young, untested, and immature. His career was marked by incredible successes, alternating with devastating failures. Worse, when his music did turn a profit, he celebrated in lavish style, by throwing parties or buying drinks for his friends at the tavern, and rarely saved money to get him through the tough times. His finances were strained, and he was often forced to swallow his price, and write to friends, begging for money.

To make matters worse, Mozart had a family to support, a fact that was a source of intense conflict with his father. Just as Leopold had expected his son to take a prestigious post, he had pushed him to marry a noblewoman, so that she might help to further his career. Instead, Mozart fell in love with the young Constanze Weber, a middle-class girl from a family of musicians. When Wolfgang asked his father's blessing to marry, he refused to give it, but it was no matter – Wolfgang married for love anyway. This was a final break in the already stressed relationship between father and son.

Figure 73: Posthumous painting by Barbara Krafft in 1819; Image Public Domain

Despite setbacks, Mozart was a hard-worker, and composed virtually every day. Amazingly, he could write entire pieces in a single sitting, almost as if recounting them from memory. He seemed to conceive of music as entire, completed works, so that the writing phase was simply a matter of mental dictation, with no need for sketches or revisions. Such a seamless creative process is practically unheard of in music. Of his ability, he said:

The whole [piece], though it be long, stands almost complete and finished in my mind, so that I can survey it, like a fine picture or a beautiful statue, at a glance. Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them, as it were, all at once. What a delight this is I cannot tell![57]

[57] (Knowles, 2013)

Toward the end of Mozart's short life, he became overwhelmed by financial stress and was likely very overworked, after years of hustling as a freelancer. He slipped into a depressive state and became obsessed with the idea that he was dying. This was worsened by a visit from a masked messenger, who offered Mozart a large commission (payment) to write a *Requiem Mass* – sacred music for the dead.

At this point, Leopold had passed away, and Wolfgang was deeply haunted by their unresolved issues. This, combined with his compromised health, caused him to feel paranoid about the intentions of the mysterious visitor. (This is the main conflict in the movie/play *Amadeus*, by Peter Shaffer.) Nonetheless, Mozart agreed to compose the piece, insisting all the while that every note brought him closer to death.

The messenger turned out to be a novice but wealthy musician, who hoped to steal the superior composer's work and claim it as his own. Sadly, Mozart would never learn this fact, since his fears of death turned out to be warranted. He passed of an unknown illness at the young age of thirty-five, leaving his *Requiem Mass* unfinished.

Mozart was buried in a public grave in Vienna, a fact that has caused many to assume that his family was destitute, unable to afford even a funeral. While Constanze was certainly left with financial difficulties, mass internments were actually common at the time, prompted by Joseph II's practical views on such matters. Even so, Mozart died in relative obscurity, and few attended his funeral.

Ironically, had he lived just a short while longer, even just a few months, Mozart would have experienced some of the respect and adoration that his music enjoys today. His opera *The Magic Flute* had premiered in Vienna just a few months prior to his passing, and enjoyed unprecedented success. In fact, in his final days, Mozart delighted in its popularity, and it was a great boon to his spirits. He wrote to his wife, who had taken a trip to Baden, of his many friends who had attended the production, and reveled in their adoring comments.

Immediately following Mozart's death, there was a great surge of enthusiasm for his work – a taste of the popularity his music would ultimately enjoy across generations of audiences. Remembered today for his prodigal genius and his forward-thinking music, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is one of the most celebrated composers in history.

Mozart's Music Style

From the first pensive moments of Mozart's symphony, it is clear that his style is more complex, passionate, and dramatic than that of Haydn. The opening theme, which is a short, driving, accented, repetitive phrase in minor, signals the vigorous and unsettled mood that characterized the movement. Further, by 18th century aesthetic standards, the key of "g minor" was associated with "lamentation" or "suffering," so that audience might have expected that the music would be heavy-handed. Hearing the opening melody, with its repeating intervals and the suggestion of sighing or weeping, would surely have reinforced this.

If Mozart were willing to ease up a bit, perhaps Classical audiences could have tolerated a few moments of his complexity. After all, even Haydn wrote symphonies in minor, and he commonly included a somber introduction, as a means of contrast. But Mozart has no intention of taking it easy – he jumps right in with an opening melody that sets the stage for a whole movement of angsty, driving music.

Modern listeners relish this emotionality, but in the 18th century, Mozart was often regarded as too indulgent and complex.

This movement is composed in *sonata form*, which is in three-parts: ABA. Composers favored sonata form because it allows for creativity in the middle section, which is expected to be free and unstructured. It might be helpful to think of this form as something like a short story. Most plot arcs are similar, in that characters are first introduced, have some sort of conflict, and then resolve their tensions at the end. Sonata form follows this pacing in a general sense, with melodies replacing characters, and musical elements replacing words.

The "story" of sonata forms begins in the *exposition,* opening section which introduced four melodies: two main themes, and two connecting ideas. The use of multiple themes, instead of the monothematic structure of other forms, is an innovation of this form, and one that allows for increased creativity on the part of the composer. Usually, to help listeners recognize the exposition as "home base," this section is repeated. A diagram of the exposition (A section) looks like this:

Sonata form	
Exposition Theme 1: Home key Bridge: Transitions to a new key Theme 2: New key, contrasts theme 1 Coda: Closing material	A

From here, the music moves into a contrasting middle section (B), called the *development*, which is a brief *absence of form.* Here, the music has no rules – the composer can freely change, contrast, or alter one or more of the melodies from the exposition. Conceptually, the development section was totally new, since it allowed composers to freely expand on a melodic idea, instead of just repeating or varying it. This brief but exciting section was an opportunity for the composer to be creative, while providing a listening experience that is spontaneous and unpredictable. Since Classical audiences favored predictability, the development section was generally quite short – just a diversion.

Most importantly, the development builds a sense of musical tension over time. There are no rules for how to accomplish this – composer might employ dissonance, fragmentation, syncopation, changes of range, or a combination of all of these, or other techniques. In any case, this momentary episode of uncertainty makes the return of the opening theme feel especially welcome. This occurs in the last section of a sonata form, called the *recapitulation*.

The recapitulation is largely a repeat of the exposition, but usually with a few changes. First, many composers choose to vary the themes or add counterpoint or interludes, just for interest. Mozart also liked to continue developing some of his melodic ideas, so that his recapitulations are more surprising than most. In addition, a standard of the form was to keep the second theme in the home key, so that the movement ends where it begins.

Taken together, the three-part sonata form of the Classical period looks like this:

Sonata form	
Exposition Theme 1: Home key Bridge: Transitions to a new key/tonality Theme 2: New tonality, contrasts theme 1 Coda: Closing material	A
Exposition is repeated	
Development New ideas are freely extrapolated from the Exposition Builds musical tension over time	B
Recapitulation Exposition is repeated, with some alterations or additional development Ends in home key/tonality	A’

To be clear, Haydn also composed many movements in sonata form, but in his case, the music was tempered by more succinct themes, simpler textures, and less contrast. By contrast, to the complicated sonata form, Mozart adds his expressive melodies, thick texture, and sudden dynamic contrasts, so that his music sounds vibrant and emotional. Simply put, Haydn’s goal was to please and entertain, whereas Mozart was following his own ideas, wherever they lead.

After the opening theme, an energetic bridge theme interrupts in an almost fanfare-like, accented style that balances long and short rhythms to create buoyant feel. Theme 2 is longer and slower, with a legato style, and major tonality. This change, which should feel like a break in intensity, is deeply tempered by Mozart’s use of semitones, or dissonant pitches in the harmony. The closing theme is a frenzy of fast, scale-like passages that erupt into the final chords of the exposition.

For the development, listen for Theme 1. It is fragmented (shortened), played by new instruments in a call-and-answer texture, and subjected to sudden contrasts of range and volume. The orchestra alternates between a full, forte ensemble texture, and small groups or soloists, so that the music seems almost as if it is trying to catch its breath – sometimes wheezing or faltering out altogether. This gasping is reinforced by changes of tonality and sudden exclamations of counterpoint.

Mozart’s greatest twist comes in the recapitulation. True to sonata form, the shift in tonality which occurred in the exposition is omitted, so that theme 2 stays in the home key of G minor. While this is technically in the category of “expected,” the major tonality offered some respite in the exposition, so that its omission later feels rather poignant. Was Mozart sticking it his audience, in terms of ironically using their expectations against them? Modern ears likely relish his passion, but Classical audiences would have regarded it as overly sensational.

Symphony No. 40 was composed in the summer of 1788, and is one of Mozart’s last three, all written within the span of only about six weeks. There are no records to indicate that any of these were performed in Mozart’s lifetime, but there is speculation that he might have been preparing the works for some future concert series that never materialized. This makes sense, since by this time Mozart was

in desperate financial need, writing almost continually to his friends for financial support; so, was unlikely to have undertaken a large project without the promise of a future payoff. His ability to compose such sublime music and to continue working toward his musical goals at this low point in his

Musical Snapshot: Symphony No. 40 in G Minor, K. 550 (1788)

1. **Composer**: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
2. **Genre**: Symphony
3. **Country**: Austria
4. **Time Period**: Enlightenment
5. **Texture**: Homophonic (with some variation)
6. **Form**: Sonata form
7. **Instrumentation**: Classical orchestra: Strings, French Horns, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon
8. **Melody**: Two contrasting themes, and two connecting ideas (see form, below); Often contrasts conjunct and disjunct shapes
9. **Rhythm**: Freely varied
10. **Harmony**: Minor tonality (except Bridge and Theme 2, in the exposition); Uncommon for a Classical Symphony
11. **Dynamics**: Soft at opening; Uncommon for a Classical Symphony (loud is more common at the start)

EXPOSITION	
THEME 1	Minor, driving, rhythmic, conjunct, piano dynamic, strings (oboe countermelody on repeat)
BRIDGE	Major, forte dynamic, accented style, longer rhythms (like a fanfare)
THEME 2	Major, but with semitones (dissonant intervals), legato style, piano dynamic, woodwinds and strings
CLOSING	Fast, downward rushing scales
DEVELOPMENT	
Theme 1, fragmented with added counterpoint; Sudden contrasts of forte and piano	
EXPOSITION	
THEME 1	Minor, driving, rhythmic, conjunct, piano dynamic, strings (oboe countermelody on repeat)
BRIDGE	Minor and extended, forte dynamic, accented style, longer rhythms (like a fanfare)
THEME 2	**Minor**, with semitones (dissonant intervals), legato style, piano dynamic, woodwinds and strings
CLOSING	Fast, downward rushing scales
CODA	
Imitative passage, piano, strings recall Theme 1; Ends with three chords in minor	

Suggested Recording: *The Norwegian Chamber Orchestra,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxV9VytEm9c.

life is a testament to his focus and work ethic, and can serve as an inspiration to those of us seeking to understand his music today.

FOCUS ON INSTRUMENTS: BRASS

Figure 74: French horn; Image courtest of Bill in Arizona, Flickr

Although trumpets and French horns had made their appearance in the symphony orchestra by the Enlightenment period, Beethoven was the first to include their lower cousins, the trombone and tuba.

Brasses make sound through a combination of the instrument, and the body: the player blows a column of air which incites the lips to vibrate inside of funnel-shaped opening, called a mouthpiece. As such, brass instruments are capable of a soaring, vocal quality, but can also provide intense, loud impacts.

The trumpets, the highest voice of the section, are often featured as soloists, or heard riding over the top of the ensemble, providing a punch to the overall sound. French horns are great at adding depth, since their tone seems to blanket the space in resonance. Trombones, distinctive for their use of a *slide* to change pitch, and tubas are often a harmonic foundation, but can also emerge as soloists or melodic players in their own right.

Figure 76: Trombone, Image courtest of Rawle C. Jackman, Flickr

Figure 75: Trumpet, Image courtesy of Björn Láczay, Flickr

As history progressed, composers learned how to maximize the potential of brass instruments, so that their best writing is found in the mid-19th-century and later. Brass instruments were also a part of early-20th-century popular music, and can be heard in Dixieland and Jazz, as well as later styles, such as Funk and Ska.

Figure 77: A tuba player in the US Army Band, Image courtesy of US Army Band, Flickr

LESSON 10: LUDWING VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

The historical contributions of Ludwig van Beethoven are so great, that he stands alone, outside of traditional notions of genre, time period, or style. On the one hand, he was a child of the Enlightenment and grew up being inspired by its calls for freedom, individuality, and rebellion, but at the same time, he put those ideas to work in totally new ways, and created some of the most revolutionary and transformative works in history. He is one of the rare artists who functions as a bridge from one way of thinking to the next. He learned from the past, but built for the future. He was an innovator.

Figure 78: Portrait of Beethoven by Joseph Karl Stieler, 1820; Image Public Domain

Early Years

Born in Bonn, Germany, Beethoven was part of a musical family, but his childhood was totally unlike the fame and mentorship Mozart's father had bestowed upon him.

Ludwig was named for his paternal grandfather, who as a prominent musician in the local court, presided over by Empress Maria Theresa's youngest son, the Archduke Maximilian Francis, Elector of Cologne. Like his mother, the Archduke was an influential patron of the arts, and so the young Beethoven enjoyed access to an active musical life, even performing the works of Mozart, whom he greatly admired.

Young Ludwig's father was also a musician, who worked in the court as a singer and teacher. Like Leopold Mozart before him, Johann van Beethoven recognized the great talent in his son, who by the age of twelve, was sufficiently accomplished to be hired as an organist in a prominent local church; however, any similarities with the precious Austrian prodigy ended there. Ludwig was an introvert and ill-suited to public life, and his father, a sloppy alcoholic, lacked the organizational or social skills needed to successfully promote his son. Worse yet, Johann was an angry drunk, who seemed to derive joy from beating his sons. Sadly, as the oldest, Ludwig often took the brunt of his outbursts.

Despite the difficulties of his childhood, Beethoven's love for music was ever-present. He befriended a local composer, Christian Neefe, who became his mentor, advocate, and teacher. Even so, the blossoming of his creative life was comparatively slow. Where Mozart seemed to have been born with an innate skill for composition, Beethoven's genius grew out of years of hard work and study. He

labored at the piano, preferring to spend his idle hours practicing alone, instead of learning games or playing with other children.

At the age of seventeen, most likely under the patronage of the Elector, Beethoven was sent to Vienna with the intention of meeting Mozart and hopefully taking lessons from him. Unfortunately, the older composer was caught up with his own career (his opera *Don Giovanni* was soon to be premiered), and had little time to focus on a young upstart, newly arrived in Vienna. Even so, it is believed that Beethoven had a brief opportunity to play for Mozart, who remarked, "pay attention to him…he will make a noise in the world someday."[58] Unfortunately, Beethoven's mother fell ill and he was called back to Bonn. This setback certainly delayed his success in Vienna, but did not stop it.

Figure 79: Vienna in the 19th Century; Image Public Domain

Beethoven's mother was kind and gentle, and he had great affection for her, but their relationship was strained – he blamed her for not protecting her sons from Johann's rage. Given this, the young seventeen-year-old must have suffered mixed emotions when, in 1787, she passed away. Her loss was all the more devastating, since his father's drinking severely strained the family's stability. Fed up with his antics, the Elector dismissed Johann from his post, and granted half of his salary to Ludwig, effectively making him the head of his dwindling household. Beethoven added some of his own meager earnings to this income, and was able to care for his younger brothers, and keep his crumbling family afloat for a few more years.

Despite his relative isolation in parochial Bonn, word of Beethoven's talent and growing success reached Haydn, who made it a point to stop in on his way north to London. As the undisputed master of the time, such as visit could only have been encouraging. The Elector's orchestra performed a program of the young composer's music, and Haydn seemed impressed. This was a turning point, since it inspired the Elector to again send Beethoven to Vienna. This time, he would not come back.

Vienna

[58] (Fischer, 2010, p. 14)

Beethoven's first endeavor in the new city was to take lessons with Haydn, but the partnership did not go well. The young composer had an innovative vision for the future for music, even then, and Haydn was wedded to tradition and his own popular success, making him inherently resistant to change. The relationship was tumultuous, and lasted only a year; even so, Beethoven certainly benefitted from a solid foundation in Classical technique.

When Haydn left again for London, Beethoven took lessons from Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736-1809), then well into his sixties, who was a successful and highly respected composer and music director. Again, conflicts emerged between old and new, most specifically, in terms of form – the gold standard of Enlightenment style. Much to the older composer's dismay, Beethoven was happy to abandon expectations when his creativity demanded it. Frustrated with his obstinance, Albrechtsberger lamented, "He has learned nothing; He never will learn anything."[59] Even so, the young composer again benefitted, and his skills continued to develop.

Figure 80: Johann Nepomuk Hummel in 1820; Portrait by Joseph Karl Stieler; Image Public Domain

By this time, Beethoven had made a name for himself as a pianist. His skills in improvisation were unprecedented, and he could spin out lengthy, complex performances on command, from very little musical material. In particularly, his playing was emotional and passionate, so much so, that people were moved to tears. Such intensity was entirely new, and audiences loved it.

On top of that, Beethoven was exceptionally confident, and happy to aggressively vanquish any and all rivals. One such example occurred during a musical duel with Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837). After the unsuspecting victim had been playing for some time, Beethoven famously interrupted and asked, "When are you going to begin?"[60] Needless to say, he then commenced to burying his competitor with a dazzling performance.

Although Beethoven continued to compose throughout this period and worked hard to improve his skills, his own music had yet to make a mark. It would seem that his creative force needed some sort of impetus in order to be fully realized. Sadly, this was to come at the hands of tragedy, when he first began to experience symptoms of hearing loss. Still only in his twenties, Beethoven faced the gravest of difficulties – how could composer if his hearing, a capacity which should be most developed in musicians, was failing? Doctors could offer little in terms of treatment and suggested that he take a vacation in the country to rest and recuperate.

[59] (Fischer, 2010, p. 25)
[60] Ibid., p. 32

Heiligenstadt Testament

Although Beethoven's impending deafness was a debilitating blow, to be sure, it also seems to have been the catalyst for igniting the elements of his character – his family struggles, creativity, work ethic, and talent – into a cohesive artistic vision for what he wanted his music to be. Beethoven accomplished the impossible – he transformed his own struggles into an opportunity to rewrite the boundaries of music and art. It was a turning point, not only for him, but for history as a whole. Historically, music had largely been relegated to subservient roles: an accessory for the wealthy, a pastime entertainment, or a tool of the church. In Beethoven's hands, it became a powerful vehicle for personal expression. This is why he is called a "revolutionary" – he changed culture.

By 1802, Beethoven had reached a breaking point. Convalescing in the small town of Heiligenstadt, he wrote a letter to his brothers, both confiding his worsening hearing loss, which before this point he had kept secret, and seemingly resigning himself to total defeat, stating "with joy I hasten to meet death."[61] Describing his isolation and despair at having sound and music taken from him, Beethoven wrote:

> *But what a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance, and I heard nothing, or someone heard a shepherd singing, and again I heard nothing. Such incidents drove me almost to despair.*[62]

Figure 81: Heiligenstadt, Germany, where Beethoven wrote his famous letter; Image used by permission, Wolfgang Pichler, Flickr

[61] (Thayer, 1921)
[62] Ibid.

His natural introversion turned into social isolation, as he described:

> *…how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which ought to be more perfect in me than in others, a sense which I once possessed in the highest perfection, a perfection such as few in my profession enjoy or ever have enjoyed.—Oh I cannot do it, therefore forgive me when you see me draw back when I would have gladly mingled with you.*[63]

Known today as the "Heiligenstadt Testament," the letter is equal parts suicide note and personal manifesto, in which Beethoven both accepts his fate, and simultaneously vows to fight against it. In his world, beating fate was about continuing to compose, not according to the old ways; instead, it was time to let his "fiery, active temperament"[64] lead the way.

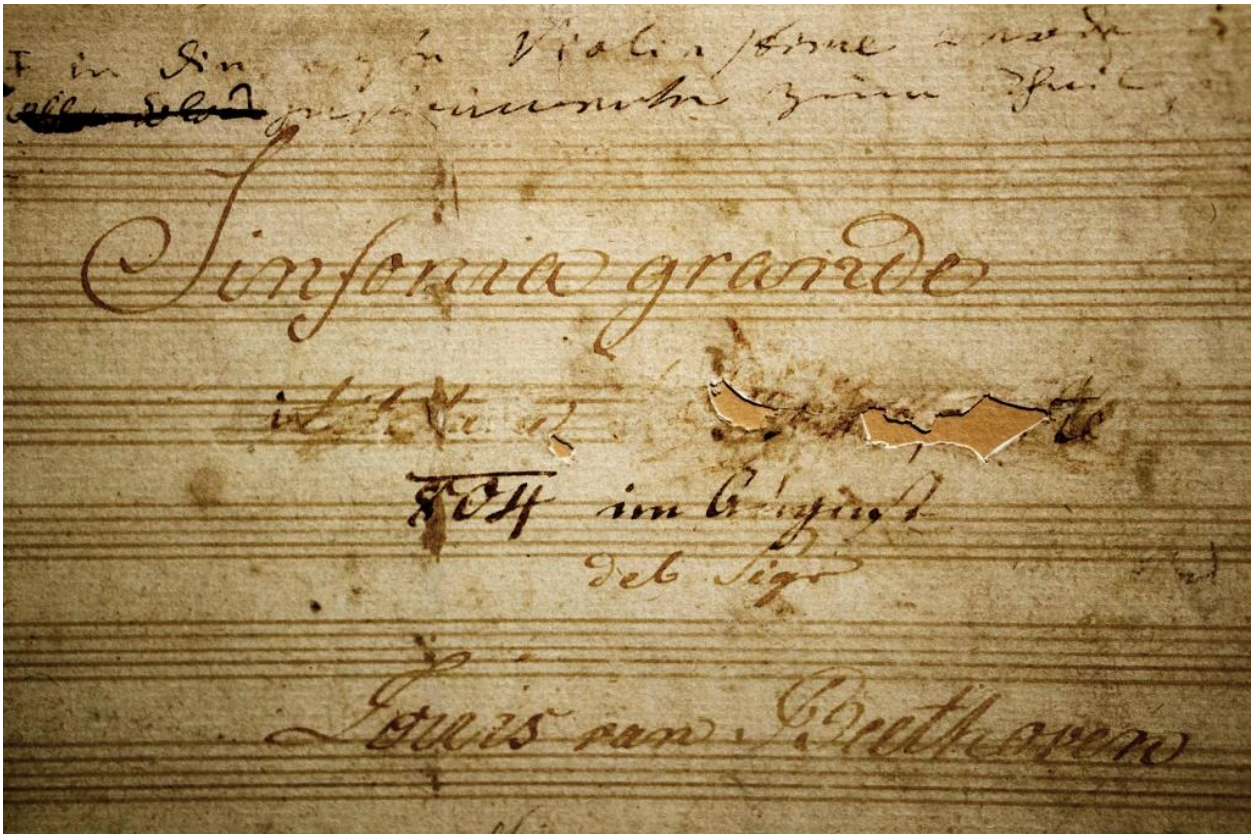

Figure 82: The front page of Beethoven's score for the Eroica Symphony, showing the removed dedication; Image public domain

From there, Beethoven's third symphony became his breakout work. In it, he first embraces the ideas of heroism for which he is know, and which would go on to inspire audiences for generations. Initially, the work was dedicated to Napoleon, whom Beethoven regarded as a hero the French Revolution, but it was later renamed *Eroica* ("heroic"), when the composer received news that the "Little Corporal" had declared himself Emperor of France. Beethoven flew into a rage and tore the dedication from the score. According to one of his pupil's, he shouted:

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

> *Now he, too, will tread underfoot all the rights of man [and] indulge only his ambition; now he will think himself superior to all men [and] become a tyrant!*[65]

Napoleon was the antithesis of Beethoven's vision of a hero. To him, heroism was not about power or control; rather, it derives from the quality of a man's character, as demonstrated by his actions.

From then on, Beethoven's aim was to create music in "completely new manner," and he became fully engrossed in this work. As he described this period of his life:

> *I live only in my notes, and with one work barely finished, the other is already started; the way I write now I often find myself working on three, four things at the same time.*[66]

The scope, length (it clocks in at almost an hour), and content of the *Eroica Symphony* was at first difficult for people to grasp. After all, we must remember that his audiences were accustomed to simplicity; however, newspaper reviews of early performances reveal that he had forced listeners to reassess what music could be – and he was winning them over. A critic in Leipzig tellingly remarked, "One must not always wish only to be entertained."[67]

Figure 83: Beethoven in 1819: portrait by Ferdinand Schimon; Image Public Domain

The Heroic Years and the Fifth Symphony

Within a few years, Beethoven was successful and thriving in Vienna, at least as far as his music was concerned. He became so prominent that several aristocratic patrons paid him an annual salary, with no requirements other than that he should remain in Vienna and continue his work. His personal life remained difficult, however, with his impending deafness also evolving into tinnitus

[65] (Lee, 2018)
[66] (The Philadelphia Orchestra Association, 2006)
[67] Ibid.

and severely distorted sound, increased his instincts to isolate himself; even so, he worked feversihly. In 1806, he heartbreakingly scribbled a self-directive in the margins of one of his scores: "Let your deafness no longer be a secret—even in art."[68]

Musically, this middle period of Beethoven's life is known as the *Heroic Years*, since his music is consistently forceful, celebratory, and inspirational. He seems to have been inflicting his *will* onto the world, by way of his new and innovative music.

In Beethoven's understanding, there were two forces exercising influence on one's life: one which can be controlled, and one which cannot. First, every person is subject to "fate," which as Beethoven seems to regard it, is the chaos of life – the things we cannot predict, influence, or change. While this simple truth is inescapable, according to Beethoven, humankind has at its disposal a great power to overcome the unfeeling, demoralizing destruction of fate: ourselves. Beethoven believed that within every person, there is the capacity to act in ways that transcend fate, and to overcome. This is the "will" – our behaviors.

When Beethoven chose to ignore his deafness and put his new musical ideas out into the world, he became his own version of a "hero." He rose above his fate, and even transformed it into something revolutionary. This is how we can understand Beethoven's idea of the hero – *an ordinary person who overcomes extraordinary odds*. It is this perspective, and its capacity to inspire, which has made this composer the most beloved in history.

Figure 84: Beethoven in 1815; Joseph Willibrord Mähler / Public domain

By the time of his *Fifth Symphony*, Beethoven's sense of purpose was in full force and he was ready to write a large-scale work to express it. In the opening notes of the massive score, which are no doubt familiar to virtually everyone on planet earth, he reveals the theme – called by many (maybe even Beethoven himself) "fate knocking at the door." Three accented, short notes descend into a long note, hammered out in the full orchestra at a forte volume. It is an anti-fanfare of sorts, calling out to the world that fate has arrived, with a threatening pronouncement. It is a jolt; something to push the listener out of complacency and a signal that the time has come to choose: will you fight your fate, or will you give up?

[68] Ibid.

Beethoven takes this little melody, which we can call the "fate theme," and uses it throughout the entire symphony. Fragments and elements of this theme appear in every movement, a technique called *cyclical* form, in order to tell the story of a hero's awakening, struggle, and eventual victory. Beethoven begins this journey in minor, as the name of the symphony implies. The first movement spins out of the opening theme, into a frenzy of activity, with the rhythm of the fate theme (short-short-short-long), an ever-present threat.

Musical Snapshot: Symphony No. 5 in C minor, I.-IV. (1804-1808)

1. **Composer**: Ludwig van Beethoven
2. **Genre**: Symphony
3. **Country**: Austria/Germany
4. **Time Period**: Early Romantic
5. **Instrumentation**: Symphony orchestra

MOVEMENT I ("Fate knocking at the door")

1. **Form:** Sonata form
2. **Melody**:
    a. **Theme 1**: Fiery, four-note Fate theme, descending in shape, and characterized by the **FATE rhythm**, short-short-short-long
    b. **Bridge Theme**: Polyphonic development of theme 1, then a fanfare in the French horns
    c. **Theme 2**: Lyrical, in major, played by woodwinds
    d. **Closing Theme**: Descending, staccato passage
3. **Harmony**: Starts and ends in minor, with dramatic shifts to major in between
4. **Meter**: Duple
5. **Tempo**: Fast
6. **Dynamics**: Sudden contrasts, with full orchestral fortes, as well as dramatic crescendos
7. **Texture**: Homophonic, with a lot of moments of polyphony and imitation

The second movement is a huge contrast to the agitation and feverish pace established at the onset. A slow, lyrical, triple-meter melody in major is played in the low strings (viola and cello), which provides a peaceful departure from the pounding, rhythmic anguish of "fate knocking at the door." The melody is so austere and gentle that it seems to harken the hero's character – simple but pure, naive but true. As we know, Beethoven believed that a hero is made through actions, not by innate characteristics; meaning, he need not be born to a family of means or have any special skills. With this melody, Beethoven seems to affirm that anyone, even of those of humble beginnings (like this beautiful melody), has the potential to beat fate.

Obviously, to demonstrate the power of his will, our hero must be tested. Beethoven brings this inevitable consequence to a head, as the rhythm of the fate theme (short-short-short-long) interrupts, first softly (in the clarinets), and later as a grand fanfare, played forte and accented in the trumpets. If our hero was considering bowing out of the challenge, Beethoven offers a reality check – avoiding fate is not an option.

MOVEMENT II (A quiet meditation on the "hero," which is interrupted by fate)

1. **Form:** Theme and Variations (freely applied, with two themes)
2. **Melody:**
    a. **Theme 1**: Lyrical, legato, major, played in low strings
    b. **Theme 2**: Clarinets play an upward sweeping motive, using the **FATE rhythm**
3. **Harmony:** Starts in major, ends in minor
4. **Meter**: Triple (flowing and lilting)
5. **Tempo**: Medium
6. **Dynamics**: Soft (piano)
7. **Texture**: Mostly homophonic

The third movement is a battle scene. Returning to the minor, it opens with a mysterious, dance-like figure in the cellos and basses, which seems to portend action. Before long, fate returns to signal that the real fight has begun. The French horns play the characteristic rhythm, now in an accented, forte style, and on only a single note. The interruption is abrupt, and sounds like a real call to arms, almost as shots fired on a battlefield. Foreshadowing our hero's eventual victory, the middle section is in a jocular major, with scurrying lines in the low strings.

MOVEMENT III (the uncertainty of battle)

1. **Form:** Scherzo-trio-Scherzo (ABA)
2. **Melody:**
    a. **Scherzo Theme**: Upward, sweeping melodic shape, minor, legato, played in low strings (interrupted by the **FATE rhythm** – listen for fanfare in French horns)
    b. **Trio Theme**: Major, fast, polyphonic
    c. **Return of Scherzo**: Listen for pizzicato in strings; Timpani plays **FATE rhythm**
3. **Harmony:** Scherzo in minor, trio in major
4. **Meter**: Triple (trio is driving)
5. **Tempo**: Scherzo is medium, trio is fast
6. **Dynamics**: Extremes of soft (pianissimo), with loud contrasts
7. **Texture**: Mostly homophonic, with polyphony in the trio

At the most uneasy point in the movement, the music gives way to a glorious finale, and proceeds without pause into the fourth movement. With three rising chords, firmly planted in the major tonality, Beethoven answers the opening theme, by turning its descending shape around, and creating a joyous, victorious fanfare. Musically, he has transformed fate – from pain to victory, from suffering to joy. At this point, the music is so jubilant, that it is virtually impossible to ignore.

MOVEMENT IV (Victory!)

1. **Form:** Sonata form
2. **Melody:**
    a. **Theme 1**: Major, three ascending chords in the full orchestra, turns **FATE rhythm** around (up instead of down, major instead of minor)
    b. **Bridge Theme**: Lyrical, French horns, major
    c. **Theme 2**: Major, ascending, using **FATE rhythm**
    d. **Closing Theme**: Major, played by clarinets and violas
3. **Harmony:** Major!
4. **Meter**: Duple
5. **Tempo**: Fast
6. **Dynamics**: Lots of forte!
7. **Texture**: Mostly homophonic
8. **Instrumentation**: The trombones are heard for the first time in the symphony (and for the first time in this genre). These instruments were historically regarded as symbolic of fate, so their inclusion is likely purposeful.

Suggested recording: Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra, Gustavo Dudamel, Conducting
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msolhqi-PC0

The Fifth Symphony is Beethoven at his best – gloriously pronouncing the power of his own will and seeking to inspire others to do the same.

The Immortal Beloved

Beethoven never married. He fell in love a few times, but suffering the misfortune of setting his desires on women who were above his social class, and so rejection became the norm. This was a symptom of his beliefs regarding his talent as a musician, in that he contended that his genius made him every bit an aristocrat as those who had titles; unfortunately, not everyone agreed.

After his death, several letters addressed to an "Immortal Beloved" were found with his possessions. Her identity has never been discovered, and so much mystery surrounds her that there was even a movie made about the subject – *Immortal Beloved*, released in 1994. The letters are passionate and certainly display Beethoven's desire to love and be loved, even though, tragically, he was never able to have a family of his own. Even here, we see Beethoven attempting to bend fate to his will:

…my ideas yearn towards you, my Immortal Beloved, here and there joyfully, then again sadly, awaiting from Fate, whether it will listen to us. I can only live, either altogether with you or not at all. Yes, I have determined to wander about for so long far away, until I can fly into your arms and call myself quite at home with you, can send my soul enveloped by yours into the realm of spirits…[69]

Karl and the Late Years

Figure 85: Karl van Beethoven; Image Public Domain

The desire for love and family rose to an obsessive level late in Beethoven's life. Upon the death of his brother, seeing that his nephew Karl was now fatherless, the aging composer sought to take over the boy's life. He even went so far as to leverage his fame and wealth in order to sue his sister-in-law for full custody. With little to draw on in terms of relationship skills – we must remember his abusive father and the early loss of his mother – Beethoven was ill-suited to the task. He smothered the boy and was possibly even abusive. In desperation, Karl attempted suicide. Downtrodden and disillusioned, Beethoven allowed the him to return to his mother.

It seems at this point, Beethoven finally accepted that he would never have a family of his own. This was a fate he could not escape, and it caused him to retreat into himself. His music became more introspective, smaller, and far less forceful. Even so, he was still Beethoven, and composed some of his best-loved works in his later years.

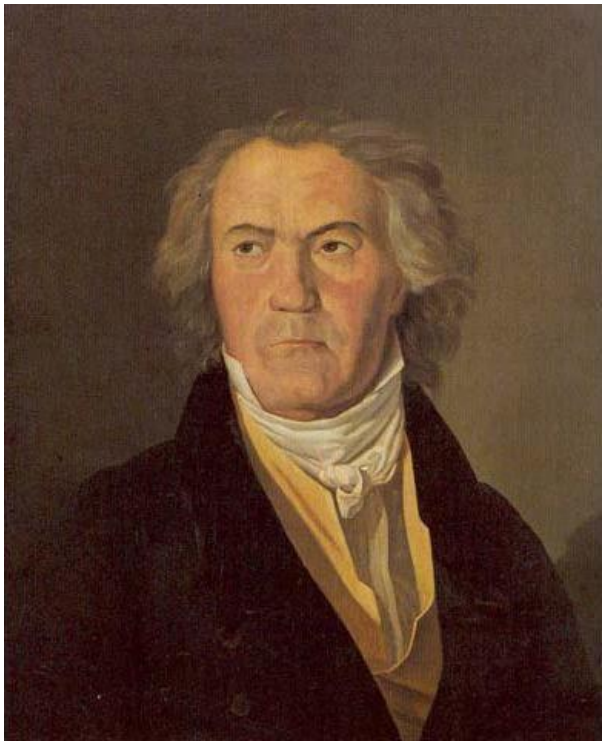

Figure 86: Beethoven in 1823 by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller; Image Public Domain

His final symphony, the ninth, includes his most famous melody, the *Ode to Joy*. At the time of this writing, the top video result on YouTube for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Muti) has 21-million views – not bad for a piece of music that is 200 years old!

Beethoven never heard his final symphony, or any of his late works, for that matter. His hearing continued to deteriorate throughout his life, so that eventually, he was profoundly deaf – able to communicate in writing only. How did he compose music that he was never able the hear? His genius

[69] (Pan McMillan, 2011)

was such that he could reproduce all he needed in his inner ear, "hearing" in his imagination the notes he would never experience in the real world.

The inspiration of Beethoven comes from his ability to overcome personal obstacles and setbacks, and in his drive to create music that is consistently optimistic. Certainly, it would surprise no one to hear such a tragic character bemoaning his problems and spreading his sadness out into the world through his work. That was not Beethoven. His goal was to inspire – to see the best in himself, and in humankind as a whole. He forces us to ask what really matters – external forces that we would rather change, or the power of our own will and its ability to transform our lives. This is the message for which he is remembered, and why his music has been beloved and celebrated for generations.

FOCUS ON PERFORMERS: GEORGE BRIDGETOWER (1779-1860)

Figure 87: George Bridgetower by Henry Edridge, 1790; Image Public Domain

Historical accounts of great composers are common, but less is known of their colleagues, the performers who brought their music to life. This is especially true in the eras before recorded sound, since no artifacts exist which can attest to the impact of great musicians. Nonetheless, without someone to bring music to a stage, the work of composers would be meaningless. How did social issues impact great performers of history?

George Bridgetower is an interesting case study. Best known as the original dedicatee of Beethoven's Op. 47 Sonata (now known as the *Kreutzer*), he was the son of a West Indian father and a European mother. His early career as a child prodigy mirrors that of Mozart, although (unlike the young Amadeus) reports of his fame were consistently associated descriptions of his ethnicity. Some, such as "African Prince" or "Son of an Indian Princess," were a part of the public image created by his maniacally ambitious father, while others, like "Son of a Moor" and "Mulatto," were products of the cultural norms for the period.

While other African-Europeans were active in the musical life of this era, they were mostly relegated to the fringe of society. In truth, Enlightenment reforms either ignored Africans, or wrongfully relegated them to a lower status, unworthy of the progressive changes that were transforming society. In London, where Bridgetower spent his prodigal years performing for the culturally elite, slavery was still legal (until 1833), making his success there nothing short of miraculous. How did he overcome the very real social limitations placed on him by prejudices of class and race to become a celebrated performer?

First, his father, John Frederick Bridgetower, was a brilliant marketer and seemed to intuitively understand how to present himself in a way that superseded stereotypes and forced important people to take him seriously. This is clear in descriptions of the father and son duo, in that John Frederick seems to have drawn much of the focus. When the eleven-year-old George was wowing audiences in Bath, Germany, Hester Piozzi, wife of a prominent musician, wrote that the father was "the handsomest of his kind and color ever seen," going on to say:

> *[He] has an address so peculiarly, so singularly fine, no words will easily describe it. Lofty politeness, and vivacious hilarity, were never so combined in any human creature that I have hitherto met with. Splendid acquirements too, with an astonishing skill in languages, and such power of conversation as can scarce be destroyed by his own rage of displaying it, adorn the manners of the Father; who were he less wonderful would please better.*[70]

One can only imagine the glory of such a character! Accounts of John Frederick also describe him has adorned in fantastic "Turkish Robes," to support a backstory that he was a displaced African Prince who had escaped slavery and a married Polish Princess. This fabrication was leaked to newspapers, almost certainly as a brilliant publicity stunt (the elder Bridgetower was born in Barbados). Even so, modern readers will recognize the subversive undercurrent of discrimination and the outlandish efforts that were required in order for the young prodigy to be given a chance to show his skills.

Although little is known of his early training, or how his father emigrated from the West Indies to Europe, the Bridgetower family notably appeared on the Esterhazy estate in the time of Haydn, when George was just a boy and John Frederick was employed as a personal page to the Prince. Good fortune seems to have intervened, since they were housed in the same servant quarters as the musicians, and George likely benefitted from mentorship there. Later, John Frederick frequently billed his son as a student of Haydn, although whether the elder composer ever took an interest in the young violinist is not known, and such claims may have just been another of the father's publicity stunts.

George also seems to have been a singular talent. Reviews of his performances are consistently positive, even adoring. Although most make reference to ethnicity, over time the focus shifted to his abilities. In particular, Charlotte Papendiek, a London socialite, was taken with the young boy, and seems to have helped him throughout his career, calling him a "fine violin player," who "pleased greatly."[71] In 1790, the London Times used a play on his name, calling him a "tower of strength," instead of defaulting to racial epithets, and later that same year, a review in the London Chronicle called him

[70] (Hart, 2017)
[71] (Wright, 1980)

"Master Bridgetower."[72] Whatever his father's maneuverings gained him, George seemed fully capable of winning listeners on his own merits.

Unfortunately, the same passion and flamboyance that made John Frederick an effective promoter also had a dark side, which ultimately ruined him. He was prone to extravagant spending and there were rumors that he had amassed gambling debts. Worse, he may have been abusive towards his son. Either from these pressures or from mental illness, he suffered a public breakdown and was removed from a concert for unruly behavior, eventually landing in an asylum.

George persevered. Thanks to his father's efforts, he was already ingratiated with the royal family, and was taken in by the Prince of Wales as his personal protégé. The mentorship provided him with a solid career as a violinist in the Prince's orchestra – a monumental achievement, even if it fell short of his original aspirations as a soloist. It is easy to compare this tale to that of Mozart, and his adventures with an ambitious father, but where the young Amadeus felt empowered to pursue his hopes of fame and artistic freedom, George smartly took a permanent post when it was offered.

Figure 88: George Bridgetower, unsigned watercolour, 1800; Image Public Domain

During his tenure in London, Bridgetower was allowed some leave to travel. Based on his associations with the English court, his reputation preceded him, and he was introduced to important people wherever he went. His concerts were well-received, and his fame began to blossom. In Vienna, he caught the attention of Beethoven. The pair became friends, and the composer agreed to collaborate on a concert – the premier of a new violin sonata, to be dedicated to Bridgetower.

For whatever reason, Beethoven delayed working on the composition, so that it was scarcely ready for the concert. He cut it so close, in fact, that there was no time to write out a part for George, so he was forced to peer at the score[73] over Beethoven's shoulder, as he played at the piano. Whether by inspiration or desperation, George improvised some changes to Beethoven's melody, to which the composer happily exclaimed, "Once more, my dear fellow!"[74] Based on what we known about Beethoven's rigid adherence to his artistic vision, he certainly seems to have respected the violinist very highly.

[72] Ibid.
[73] A "score" is a full copy of all layers in a musical work. Usually, individual players will read off a "part," which is reduced to show only their notes.
[74] (F.G.E., 1908)

Accounts of the performance were exceedingly positive, with multiple encores[75] demanded by the audience. Nonetheless, the sonata did not retain Bridgetower's name. He later fell out with the composer over an argument about a girl (the details of which have not been preserved), and Beethoven angrily removed the original dedication – not the first time he had taken such an action, of course. Bridgetower's name was replaced with Rodolphe Kreutzer, a famous French violinist and teacher whom Beethoven had never met, and who never ended up performing the piece.

Despite his successes, not all of George's musical endeavors were positive, and there is evidence that would-be patrons struggled to find appropriate outlets for his talents. In 1789, when George was still a child prodigy and aspiring soloist, a debut concert was scheduled in Windsor, England. Although advanced ticket sales were positive, the orchestra musicians cited a contract dispute and refused to perform. The organizers moved the concert to a private home and tried again, but the musicians again derailed the project. Ultimately, George played with amateur volunteers who performed only "tolerably well," while he was lauded as "perfection," possessing a "clear good tone, spirit, pathos, and good taste."[76] The reason for George's slight at the hands of local professionals is not known, but it is not a leap to imagine that discrimination might have played a role.

In the end, George had an impactful career, performing in England, Germany, Italy, and France, and inspiring works by many composers along the way. While the Classical music world has long celebrated the archetype of the singularly exceptional white male, George's story demonstrates that artistic culture was shared, and impacted by people who did not fit that mold. Even so, it would be centuries after George's life, before black musicians would be openly celebrated for their achievements.

[75] An "encore" occurs at the end of a concert. If the audience applauds long enough, the performers will often return to the stage and perform one or more extra pieces, or repeat a particularly popular movement or work from the program.
[76] (Wright, 1980)

LESSON 11: THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: ROMANTICISM

Beethoven was the first Romantic in music, but the movement toward individuality and personal expression impacted all of the arts at this time in history. In that respect, it seems that Beethoven was in the right place at the right time. Society was moving away from rationalism and into a century of emotion, and he aptly tapped into a zeitgeist that was fueling all of the arts. Whereas the Enlightened philosopher René Descartes proclaimed, "je pense, donc je suis," or "I think, therefore I am," the Romantics transformed that motto into something more like, "I ***feel***, therefore I am."

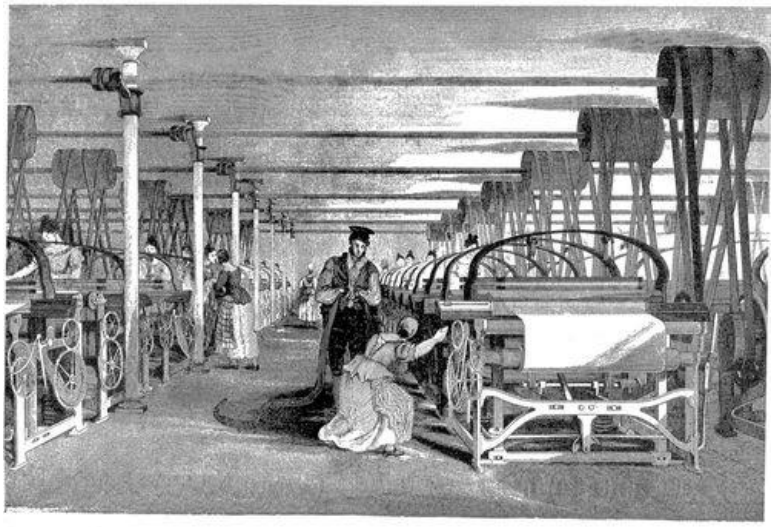

Figure 89: A woman works a power loom in 1835, Britain; Illustrator T. Allom / Public domain

This transition was largely a reaction against the Industrial Revolution, which exposed the limitations of a solely intellectual approach to life. As science, technology, and rapid progress increased productivity, urban areas were transformed. People flocked to the cities in search of work, but more often than not, found only poverty and overcrowding.

With no laws yet in place to protect laborers, salaries failed to provide a living wage, working conditions were dangerous, and the hours were abusively long. As cities industrialized, they became flooded with poverty-stricken residents, pollution, and corruption. In the face of all this human suffering came empathy. People felt that emotions could bring society back into balance.

Similarly, there was a new awareness of dark side of the French Revolution. Once a bright, shining example of the noble fight for liberty, the war had exposed an appalling level of violence and human suffering. During the *La Terreur* ("Reign of Terror"), between 1793-1794, the revolutionary government was taken over by the radical Maximilien de Robespierre, who rounded up and jailed (without the benefit of a trial) some 300,000 people suspected of being Royalists (loyal to the crown). In a ten-month period, 17,000 people were executed, and some 10,000 others are believed to have died in prison. Further, the ends did not seem to justify the means, since Napoleon Bonaparte simply replaced the monarchy with his own brand of tyranny.

At the same time, the Enlightenment's focus on the individual persisted, so that that the shift away from rationalism evolved into a focus on personal expression. Artists such as Beethoven were an exemplar, but music was not the only art form to see this shift. In writing, it was the German novelist, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), whose *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* ("The Sorrows of Young Werther") explored the landscape of personal feeling and passion. The eponymous character, Werther, follows not his head, but his heart, in falling in love with a woman who has been promised to another. Rather than making the smart choice and distancing himself from her, Werther indulges in his feelings

again and again, eventually causing himself so much grief that he takes his own life. Despite the tragic ending, or perhaps because of it, Werther's willingness to follow his desires became a symbol for the quintessential Romantic hero. Like Beethoven, the public loved Goethe's work, and he quickly shot to fame.

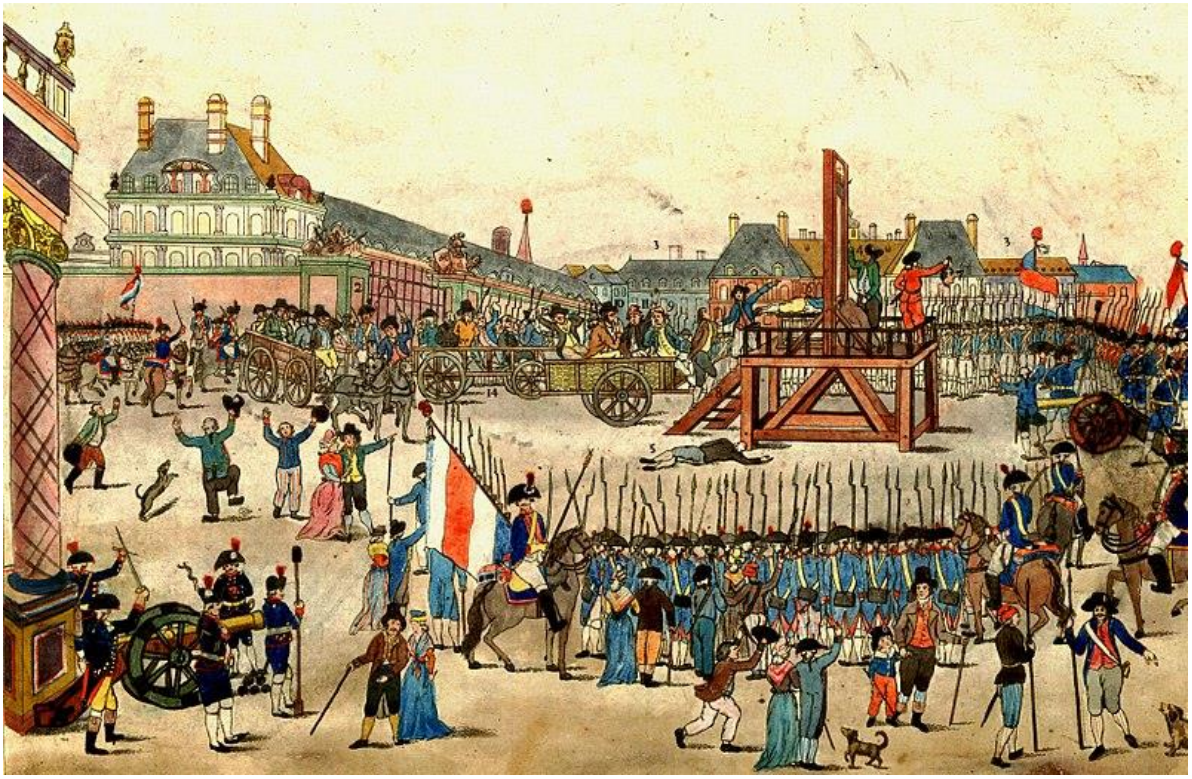

Figure 90: The execution of Robespierre and his supporters on 28 July 1794. Note: the beheaded man (6) is not Robespierre, but Couthon: Maximilien Robespierre (10) is shown sitting on the cart, dressed in brown, wearing a hat, and holding a handkerchief to his mouth. His younger brother Augustin (8) is being led up the steps to the scaffold; Image Public Domain

Similarly, François-René de Chateaubriand (1768-1848), considered one of the first and most influential of the French Romantic writers, became disillusioned with the violence in France, and fled to America, hoping to discover a new version of enlightenment in the natural, unadulterated landscape of the New World. From this, he wrote two short stories, "Atala" (1801) and "René," focusing on the theme of wandering the world, searching for meaning. In particular, Chateaubriand gave voice to the "mal du siècle," ("sickness of the century"), or world-weariness, disillusionment, and ennui[77] that was emerging in a new generation of thinkers.

In a general sense, the arts cast a critical eye on the societies that humankind had built for itself, and critically questioned whether those constructs had damaged the soul. Not surprisingly, the arts became an important outlet for social commentary on this issue. A popular example is the English novelist Charles Dickens, who used his stories to highlight the struggles of London's poor and working class. In *Oliver Twist*, the eponymous main character is a young street kid whose, naivety is constantly exploited and abused by those around him. Oliver is painted as a sympathetic character, whose vulnerability is

[77] a feeling of listlessness and dissatisfaction caused by having no meaningful purpose or work

difficult to deny. By appealing to emotions, Dickens forces the reader to confront difficult truths. Where rationality might fail to persuade, empathy succeeds in changing the heart.

Artists became the voice of this century, and were seen to possess the unique perspectives needed to unlock the illusive mysteries of life. Whereas religion and science had been the guiding lights of the past, art now filled an important void. In this new era, artists worked to create meaning, rather than bothering with the constraints of a wealthy patron or worrying about the need to entertain a fickle crowd. This was true whether or not their work yielded success or renown – artists stuck to their vision, sometime to their great peril.

This is why the 19th century is the origin of the "starving artist" stereotype – artists were unwilling to give up, regardless of the personal cost. This also fit the overall aesthetic, since searching and suffering go hand in hand. Like the melancholia of the Renaissance period, agony itself seemed advantageous, since it holds the potential to inspire deeper levels of insight and understanding. Much Romantic art deals with the biggest questions of life, and is deeply psychological.

It not surprising that this was a hugely prolific time in all the arts. Musicians, poets, painters, novelists, and sculptors alike threw themselves into their work, delving into the great mysteries of life via the depths of their own emotions. If there is an image that aptly summarizes the artistic process of the Romantics, it is the portrait, *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* ("Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog"), by the German painter, Caspar David Friedrich, painted in 1818.

Figure 91: Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog, Caspar David Freidrich, 1818; Image Public Domain

Freidrich's subject faces away from the viewer, looking out over a vast, open scene, the contours of which are only vaguely represented. It could be a massive ocean, or only an illusion, created by a misty bank of fog – both options are present in the title. Regardless, the "wanderer" has stopped, perched on a precipice. The viewer is asked to see what *he* sees – arguably, the ineffable landscape of the human imagination, the very heart of creativity. This is the essence of Romantic art – the artist provides a window into his own soul. The more personal the expression, the better.

Music and Romanticism

Since Romanticism focused on the ephemeral concepts of feeling, imagination, and a search for truth, music was an almost perfect match for the prevailing objectives of this period. In a very real sense, music is itself the stuff of imagination, since it cannot be seen or touched, and is as fleeting as the emotions Romantic artists strove to capture. Composers assumed the persona of a "Romantic hero," patterned after the model of Beethoven, and sought to use music to move the passions of the audience at will. Virtuoso performers, such as the great Italian violinist Niccolò Paganini, achieved veritable "rock star" status, as they were seen to transcend the boundaries of their instruments, through the combined powers of passion and skill – a clear example of maximizing individual potential.

As an extension of personal identity, musical *nationalism,* or a *patriotic adherence the musical techniques and styles of one's homeland*, became a driving force behind a more continental approach to musical expression. Not all influential composers of this era were from the musical powerhouses of history – Germany, France, and Italy. For example, pianist Frederich Chopin (1810-1849) achieved great renown touring and performing his own works, many of which were largely influenced by the folk songs and dances of his native Poland. The "exotic" flavors of his music gave audiences a taste of something new and identified Chopin's unique sound. Today, we might equate this to "branding" one's work with a unique identity.

In addition to nationalistic tendencies, nature was a source of inspiration, since it was seen as the antithesis of the science and industrialism that seemed to plague the era. Like the Transcendental poets Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), musicians sought refuge in nature, and believed it held the key to universal understandings. In letters, Beethoven wrote extensively on his passion for the outdoors, as exemplified here:

> *Nature is a glorious school for the heart! 'Tis well, I should be a scholar in this school and bring an eager heart to her instruction. Here I shall learn wisdom, the only wisdom that is free from disgust; Here I shall learn to know God and find a foreteaste of Heaven.*[78]

Also following the model of Beethoven, composers liked to tell stories with their music, and were prone to indulge in fanciful, imaginative themes. In particular, stories of the supernatural, focused on monsters and demons, were a popular theme. *Instrumental music tells a story* in this way is called *program music.* At the same time, some composers took a more conservative approach, and advocated for "purity," in the form of *absolute music* – music for its own sake, with no "story."

[78] (in Krehbiel, 1905)

Figure 92: "Nachtmahr," "The Nightmare," Henry Fusel, 1781i / Public domain

The Romantics are also known for extremes, with genres ranging from the massive to the miniature. In particular, the symphony swelled in size and scope, with composers expanding the length and number of movements. In the time of Mozart and Haydn, a typical symphony was 15-20 minutes in long, and composers wrote many of them. While Beethoven completed only nine symphonies, most clock in at an hour or more. One of the last great Romantics, German Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) wrote ten symphonies, but some are so massive in scope that they hardly seem related to their Classical forbearers. His 8th Symphony, for example, called for a gigantic orchestra of around 120 players, accompanying two full choruses, giving the colossal work the nickname, "Symphony of a Thousand."

At the same time, *chamber music*, or small ensembles, performed in at-home private concerts called *salons*, which were immensely popular throughout Europe, but especially in France, Germany, and Austria. As the monarchies of bygone eras no longer served as the focal point for cultural exchange, the new and artistically literate middle classes created their own version of "court," holding semi-public gatherings where like-minded individuals could meet and exchange ideas. For musicians and their supporters, salons had the benefit of being far less expensive than a public concert, and gave composers a new and accessible outlet for reaching audiences.

From a musical standpoint, it is challenging to pinpoint specific techniques present in all Romantic music, since each composer strove to cultivate an individualistic style; however, there are a few general

features which trend through the period. First, melodies tended to be long and expressive, often with symbolic meaning. Unlike the short, catchy phrases of the Classical era, Romantic melodies could be uneven in phrase length, meander through a range of emotions, or develop over time until wholly transformed. In the hands of Romantic composers, melody became an expressive element which could morph and adapt to the changing tides of emotional intent.

Most Romantic music is homophonic, but textures are thick and full, with added countermelodies or densely packed harmonic structures. Sometimes, the line between accompaniment and melody is blurred, with thick chordal passages taking the focus over traditional phrases or tunes. Harmonically, composers are adventurous, often employing dissonance to expressive ends. These extremes could be accentuated by an expanded dynamic range, with composers doubling or even tripling the instructions for musicians to play *forte* or *piano.*

Reacting against the Classical era intellectualism that had boxed music into predetermined structures, composers also became highly adventurous with musical form, often breaking the "rules," if it served an expressive end. In some cases, such as in the music of Chopin, form was virtually disregarded, to make the music feel improvised and spontaneous. Other composers chose standard forms as a starting point, but bent and changed them as needed to suit their ends.

As instrument technology improved, composers had expanded choices for coloring the orchestra with new sounds. Most brass instruments were now fitted with valves, and full sections of French horns, trumpets, trombones, and a tuba were more common. Likewise, the materials used to construct woodwinds were improved, making the instruments more agile and better in tune. Composers added full compliments of flutes and clarinets, along with the double reeds – oboes and bassoons. Percussion was expanded to include auxiliary instruments such as bass drum, snare drum, and cymbals.

The real innovation of the period was not solely in the addition of more instruments, but in the ways in which they were employed, with composers now choosing specific tone colors for symbolic purposes. French composer Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) wrote a lengthy treatise on *orchestration*, or the *art of combining the instruments of the symphony orchestra*, giving a detailed description of each instrument, and linking their sounds to emotions or musical effects. For example, he described the cello as "tender and languorous," whereas the trombone was "epic," and possessing the "highest degree of nobility and grandeur." When the goal was to "enhance gradually the power of a strong rhythm," the bass drum was the instrument of choice, whereas in moments of "noble…melancholy," the French horn would be best.[79]

[79] (Austin, 2001)

An Early Romantic: Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Figure 93: Franz Schubert, Wilhelm August Rieder / Public domain

In early 19th century Vienna, living in the shadow of Beethoven, Franz Schubert labored in relative obscurity. Like Mozart, he was both a child prodigy and an artist whose life was cut tragically short, with the entirety of his compositional output being completed in his short thirty-one years. Even so, he worked at a feverish rate, ultimately leaving a legacy of some 600 songs and seven complete symphonies, as well as operas, chamber music, and piano works.

First learning violin and piano from his father and brother, he quickly exceeded their ability to teach him. At the age of eleven, he was sent to a Catholic boarding school, where he studied as a choir boy and took lessons from the Mozart-era composer, Antonio Salieri, who lauded him as a musical genius.

When his voice broke and he could no longer sing, Schubert returned home and followed in his father's footsteps, pursuing a career as a teacher. Although he spent three years working as a schoolmaster, he abruptly left the profession to pursue a career in music full time. Unfortunately, in a Vienna still largely enamored with the great Beethoven, the young Schubert found little success. Publishers and concert promoters were not interested in taking a chance on an unproven artist, and public performances of his work remained out of reach.

Nonetheless, he spent most of everyday composing, and produced new music at an astounding rate, even as most of it went unheard. When a small group of friends and supporters in Vienna took up his cause, Schubert found the only performance space he would regularly inhabit – salons. A typical *Schubertiad*, as his friends dubbed these parties, included performances by the composer at the piano, invited soloists, poetry readings, academic debates, dancing, or other social pastimes. While an important creative outlet, unfortunately they produced little in terms of profit. As such, Schubert languished in poverty most of the time, relying on the hospitality of friends for his lodging.

In April of 1828, Schubert at long last secured the opportunity for a public concert, and the event was well-received, even turning a small profit. Sadly, this was not the start of something big, since his health quickly declined, almost certainly the result of syphilis. In his final days, a friend brought a string quartet by to play for him, and Schubert requested to hear Beethoven, having served as a torchbearer for the great composer's funeral only one year prior.

Genre Focus: The German Art Song (Lieder)

While he was adept at virtually any genre he attempted, Schubert is best-known as a song-writer, specifically as a composer of *Lieder*, or *Art Songs.* Loosely related to the lute songs of Dowland and other Renaissance composers, the goal of Romantic era art songs was to paint a musical picture of a poetic text, usually taken from popular writers such as Goethe.

Written for a vocal soloist and piano, Lieder are *through-composed*, meaning freely-written throughout, with each stanza of the poem sung to a unique melody. This allowed the composer to tailor the music specifically to the mood and emotions of the words. Most importantly, the piano is an equal player in the drama, used not as a passive accompanist, but to help paint a graphic picture of the story.

Figure 94: Scene from Goethe's poem Der Erlkönig. (Fresco at the "Belvedere", c.1837); Carl Gottlieb Peschel / Public Domain

At the young age of eighteen, Schubert composed what is likely the most famous art song in history, *Die Erlkönig* ("The Elfking"), set to a macabre poem by Goethe. Drawing from a Scandinavian folk story that had recently been translated into German, Goethe's story is a sad and dramatic tale of a father and son, riding home through the forest on a dark and stormy night. The boy is ill, and the father is desperate to deliver him to safety. The format of the poem is unique, in that it offers multiple viewpoints, with each character – the father, son, Elfking, and a narrator – speaking in their own voices. This reflects the notion that people are defined by their inner experiences, in keeping with Romanticism's focus on the individual.

As the poem opens, Schubert sets the scene with forte dynamics and an accented, repeated note in the right hand of the piano. At the same time, a conjunct, arc-shaped melody spins out in the bass range. Taken together, these elements portray the galloping of the horse, punctuated by bursts of thunder and

Musical Snapshot: *Erlkönig* ("The Elfking") (1815)

1. **Composer**: Franz Schubert
2. **Genre**: Art Song (Lied)
3. **Country**: Austria
4. **Time Period**: Romantic
5. **Texture**: Homophonic (with some variation)
6. **Performers**: Piano and Baritone (Male) Voice
7. **Introduction**: Piano sets the mood – repeated note in right hand, galloping theme in the left hand
8. **Words and music**: Characterizations are brought out through musical elements

GERMAN	ENGLISH	MUSICAL ELEMENTS
Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind? Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind; Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm, Er faßt ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.	Who rides, so late, through night and wind? It is the father with his child. He has the boy well in his arm He holds him safely, he keeps him warm.	Narrator: Middle range, minor
Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht? Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht? Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif? Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.	My son, why do you hide your face in fear? Father, do you not see the Elf-king? The Elf-king with crown and cape? My son, it is a streak of fog.	Father: Low range Son: High range Father: Low Range Son: High Range
"Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir! Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir; Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand, Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand."	"You dear child, come, go with me! (Very) beautiful games I play with you; Many colorful flowers are on the beach, My mother has many a golden robe."	Elfking: Major, Cajoling, legato
Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht, Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht? Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind; In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind.	My father, my father, and do you not hear What the Elf-king quietly promises me? Be calm, stay calm, my child; Through dry leaves the wind is sighing.	Son: Accented, forte, frightened Father: Calming,
"Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn? Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön; Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reihn, Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein."	"Do you, fine boy, want to go with me? My daughters shall wait on you finely; My daughters lead the nightly dance, And rock and dance and sing to bring you in."	Elfking: Bouncing, dance-like rhythms
Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort? Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh' es genau: Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau.	My father, my father, and don't you see there The Elf-king's daughters in the gloomy place? My son, my son, I see it clearly: There shimmer the old willows so grey.	Son: Crying out, accented, forte Father: Low range
"Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt; Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich Gewalt." Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt faßt er mich an! Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan!	"I love you, your beautiful form excites me; And if you're not willing, then I will use force." My father, my father, he's touching me now! The Elf-king has done me harm!	Elfking: Again cajoling, and then accented and angry Son: Again cries out
Dem Vater grauset's; er reitet geschwind, Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind, Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe und Not; In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.	It horrifies the father; he swiftly rides on, He holds the moaning child in his arms, Reaches the farm with great difficulty; In his arms, the child was dead.	Narrator: Music slows to tragic ending

Suggested Recording: *Philippe Sly: Bass-Baritone, Maria Fuller: piano,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZxzz-N3oxM.

flashes of lightning. The bass-baritone voice, which is in the middle of the male range, plays all four characters, with Schubert employing different musical elements for each.

First, the narrator, in his calm voice, asks "Who rides, so late, through night and wind?" When the perspective shifts to the father, the melody moves to the low pitch-range, signifying his authority, as he attempts to sooth his frightened son. In response, the boy cries out, claiming that he can see a frightening creature – the mythical Elf King – chasing them. His music is frantic, in a high pitch-range, to convey his young age, while the accented style and forte dynamics show his fear and helplessness. As he does over and over, the father tries to reassure his son, telling him that it is only wind and rain.

Unfortunately, the Elf King really is there, at least from the boy's perspective, and he continues his pursuit while sweetly cajoling the boy to leave with him. From a symbolic standpoint, the Elfking personifies death, tempting the hapless child with promises of "lovely flowers," and "garments of gold." Further, it is the version of death that would be experienced by children – a fanciful, mythical creature, no doubt conjured up by the subconscious in order to counteract fear. This puts the story into the realm of the psychological, long before such notions appeared in the scientific disciplines. When the Elfking speaks, it is deceptively melodious, with a major tonality and legato style.

Despite the father's frantic race to get his son home, the Elfking wins – the final line of the poem reveals this: "In seinen Armen das Kind war tot" ("In his arms, the child was dead"). To an uninitiated listener, the ending is a shocker, since we hope (or even expect) that the child will live; however, tragedy triggers more powerful emotions, and is better suited to Romantic aims. Nonetheless, the song wins the listener over, since it packs so much drama into a small package – clocking in at only around four minutes. Although a fairytale, the conclusion of the story is dreary. It would seem that, at least for children, nightmares are real.

Cultural Hotspot: Paris

Figure 95: Formally dressed patrons at the Salon in 1890; Jean-André Rixens (1846-1925) / Public domain

The Romantic movement did not start in France, but its main components are certainly associated with Paris, since that city was a magnet for the most ambitious artists of the day. In contrast to previous periods, it is important to remember that culture no longer congregated around wealthy patrons or the church; instead, the state took over funding of large events

and venues, while chamber music flourished in semi-public salons. Despite the political upheaval in France throughout the opening years of the 19th century, art remained at the forefront of society, so that Paris grew into an important cultural center.

While the French Revolution was an inspiration to the cause of Liberty, in the end it was regarded as having mostly failed to achieve its goals. This was part of the crisis of conscience that largely fueled Romanticism's race toward feeling and emotion. The defeat and ultimate execution of Robespierre in 1794 was only the beginning of political woes in France. Despite efforts to set up a constitutional government, Napoleon successfully took charge of country in 1799, and within only five years, had consolidated enough power to declare himself Emperor.

Ten years later, following Napoleon's defeat, a beleaguered France reverted to the monarchy, with the Bourbon line ascending to the throne, albeit with less power than in previous eras. Louis XVIII and then Charles X, both brothers of the executed Louis XVI, ruled between 1814-1830, only to be overthrown by a rival family, represented by Louis Philippe, Duke of Orléans. In turn, Louis Philippe I was overthrown by the Second Republic in 1848, which elected Napoleon III (nephew of the former Emperor) as its first president. Following a familiar pattern, this Napoleon also eventually set himself as Emperor of France.

Surprisingly, this turmoil seems to have enhanced, rather than detracted from artistic output. First, from the time of Louis XIV, Paris was home to the *Salon de Paris*, a large-scale, state-sponsored exhibition, held under the auspices of the Académie des Beaux-Arts ("Academy for Beautiful Art"), a state institution which remains today. It was a ground-breaking event, since it was held in a large commercial space, open to the public by ticket, and featured a colossal, juried exhibition of art, packed-in from floor to ceiling. In addition providing Parisians a significant access point to artistic culture, the *Salon* represented a new level of artistic freedom, since the works exhibited were not created for a patron, but to be sold as a part of the show. In addition, reports in local papers eventually gave rise to the practive of artistic criticism.

Figure 96: Le scare de Napoléon, 1807, Jacques-Louis David / Public domain

Like many rulers before him, Napoleon recognized the power of art-as-propaganda, and so retained the extremely influential *Salon* during this reign. Not surprisingly, he figures prominently in art from this period, always depicted as a hero or martyr. Likely the most famous example is Jacques-Louis David's (1748-1825) *Le sacre de Napol*éon ("Coronation of Napoleon"), which implies that the new Emperor's rise to power was an act of rebellion against the church.

In an effort to curtail any aspirations of the Émigré (those who had fled the country in the years following the Revolution, most of whom were nobility), Napoleon granted a general amnesty in 1802 to draw them back home. With lands and money mostly lost, the repatriated aristocracy nonetheless

continued their adherence to a life of culture, just on a smaller scale, usually taking the form of the private salons that were so popular in this period.

Composers in Paris had many opportunities to earn money. Not only could they expect invitations for private concerts, but once their reputations were well-established, they might be engaged as a teacher for a well-to-do family. In some cases, performers were paid to perform in-home concerts, simply for the edification of the household. Paris was also the center for many arts competitions, all of which produced new works. The most famous of these was the *Prix de Rome*, which was highly competitive and attracted aspiring composers from across the country. Music publishing and state theaters also offered important support for musicians.

Most importantly, Paris was a cultural center than fueled a sense community and a spirit of collaboration within the arts. Composers, writers, painters, and all sorts of creative folks met and socialized within the rich tapestry of Parisian café life. A sort of restaurant that spilled out onto the street, the café was a place to meet friends, read the news, eat, drink, and discuss everything from art to politics. In this environment, artits fed off each other's ideas, planned projects, and immersed themselves in the culture of the day. As a result, the French Romantics are directly tied to the society in which they lived and work, and offer an important glimpse into the politics and philosophies of the day.

FOCUS ON INSTRUMENTS: PERCUSSION

Figure 97: Members of the US Army Band; In foregruond, a xylophone player, then tambourine, snare drum, and in the back, cymbals; Image courtest of the US Army Band, Flickr

Although timpani drums had been included in the orchestra since the Enlightenment, the full range of percussion instruments was not explored until later. Percussion is a wide term, since it refers to just about anything that can be turned into an instrument by striking it with the hand or a stick. Of course, drums have likely been a part of music since virtually the beginning of time, and even pitched instruments like the xylophone appear in archeological cites dating as early as 2000 B.C., in Asia.

Figure 98: Snare drum; Image courtesy of Crystal on Flickr

Today, orchestral percussion instruments varies widely, but can be divided into two basic groups: pitched and unpitched. Pitched percussion, as the name implies, are capable of sounding melodic or harmonic tones, while unpitched instruments provide only rhythmic layers.

The keyboards of the percussion section are the glockenspiel, xylophone, marimba, and vibraphone. Like the brass family, percussion is also a part of popular music traditions, and the xylophone and vibraphone can be found in Ragtime and Jazz. The marimba is largely a solo instrument, but is also scored in larger pieces for concert bands, and in later works for orchestra. These instruments are structured like the keyboard of a piano, with sound created by tuned bars of either wood or metal, hit with specialized mallets.

Figure 99: Timpani player; Image courtesy of Yoan Koo, Flickr

The timpani is a foundational instrument of the orchestra, providing both harmonic and rhythmic support. Since these drums can be tuned to create a definite pitch, they join the other low voices of the orchestra – bass clarinet, bassoon, cello, double bass, and tuba – in bass duties, shoring up the low end of the harmonic spectrum.

Non-pitched instruments, such as the tambourine, snare drum, cymbal, and bass drum, can provide sudden points of impact, rhythmic *ostinatos* (repeating patterns), or ongoing rhythmic support for different layers in the music.

Although some of these instruments, like the tambourine, get a bad rap for being "easy," in truth, a trained percussionist can play ALL of these instruments equally, and is usually called on to rotate quickly between several of them in a single piece of music. As such, they can often be seen jumping from task to task, within a rather large collection of instruments.

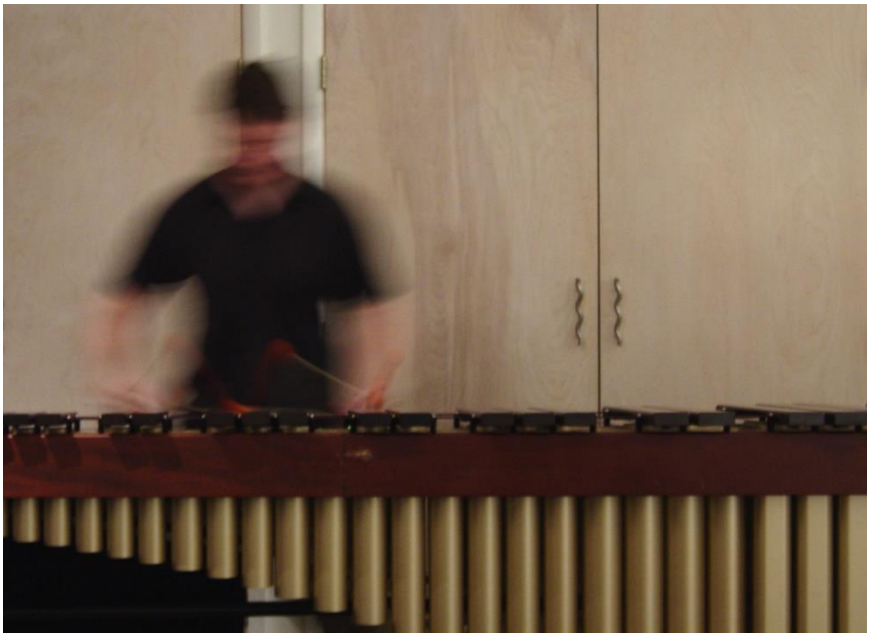

Figure 100: A marimba player; Image courtesy of Mary Streepy, Flickr

LESSON 12: HECTOR BERLIOZ AND THE PROGRAM SYMPHONY

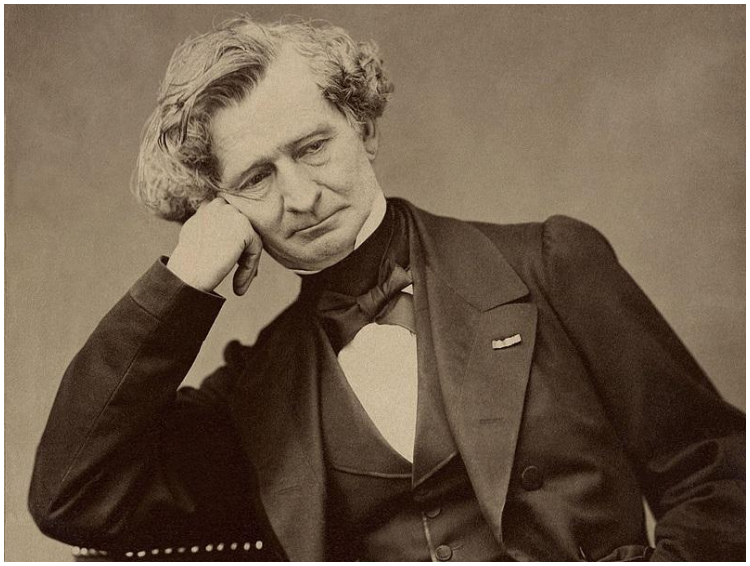

Figure 101: Hector Berlioz, photographed by Pierre Petit (1863) / Public Domain

As a cultural hotspot of the day, Paris was a magnet for aspiring artists in all disciplines. A young Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) was a dreamer, and fled his parochial village for the big city at the young age of seventeen. Pushed into a career as a doctor by his conservative father, he enrolled in medical school at the University of Paris, only to spend all of his free time at the opera or in the music library at the *Paris Conservatoire*, copying scores by famous composers. Berlioz was certain of his calling, but his obstinate father could see no worth in a music career. Of studying medicine, Berlioz decried:

> *Become a doctor! Study anatomy! Dissect! Take part in horrible operations – instead of giving myself body and soul to music, sublime art whose grandeur I was beginning to perceive! Forsake the highest heaven for the wretchedest regions of earth, the immortal spirits of poetry and love and their divinely inspired strains for dirty hospital orderlies, dreadful dissecting-room attendants, hideous corpses, the screams of patients, the groans and rattling breath of the dying! No, no! It seemed to me the reversal of the whole natural order of my existence. It was monstrous.*[80]

Berlioz was born to a middle-class family in the small village of La Côte-Saint-André, in the French Alps. Neither of his parents were musicians, but his father, who served as his primary tutor, was equipped to give him a general level of music education – the basics in terms of what would be expected in a well-cultured family. What else he learned was self-taught, as he studied scores and worked out the rules of music theory on his own. By the age of twelve, he was already writing small pieces for a local chamber group, the performers of which helped him learn a little flute and guitar. That was the extent of his childhood in music. It bears none of the rites of passage expected of great composers – no recital debuts, no tours, and no formal training.

In the case of Berlioz, the extent to which life imitates art (and art imitates life) is uncanny.[81] Like no other composer before or after, he seems to have so fully embodied his work that it became a self-fulfilling prophesy, in some significant respects. For this reason, it is virtually impossible to fully understand this composer, without taking a short trip through his personal life.

[80] (McDonald, 2001)

[81] Suggested supplement to this section: https://keepingscore.org/interactive/berlioz-symphony-fantastique

When Berlioz arrived in Paris, he soaked up the culture of the city at every opportunity, attending not only concerts, but events of all sorts, including the theater. These encounters were significant, since he seems to have possessed a great ability to turn external experiences into fodder for deeply psychological artistic themes, some of which would appear in his music years later. The most life-changing of these occurred in 1827, when he attended a performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* at the Odéon theatre. Performed by a traveling troupe from England, the company featured one Harriet Smithson as Ophelia, Hamlet's tender-hearted betrothed. Berlioz's obsession was as immediate as it was all-consuming – he was in love with Harriet.

He spent the next two years in a state of emotional turmoil, consumed by lust for a woman he had never even met. He pined for her continually, waiting for her intermittent returns to Paris and maneuvering in vain for an opportunity to meet her. His thoughts were so obsessive, he wrote to a friend, "this pain will kill me," describing feelings of "unbearable agitation," and lamenting that "you've no means of understanding."[82]

Among his many outlandish attempts to court Harriet, he secured a performance of his own music in a theater where she was rehearsing, hoping to catch a glimpse of her in the building. Upon seeing her on stage, Berlioz reports:

> *I gave a shriek and fled, wringing my hands. Juliet [Harriet] saw me and heard my cry. She was afraid. Pointing me out to the actors who were on the stage with her, she warned them to be careful of 'that gentleman with the eyes that bode no good.'*[83]

Harriet's reaction makes clear that this was not the first time she had caught him spying on her. Berlioz's obsession and resulting behavior had obviously become inappropriate.

His passions needed an outlet, and for him, that could only happen in music. A year prior, he had forsaken his parent's ardent wishes, and left all medical aspirations behind to enroll in the Paris Conservatoire. This decision had not come without consequences. His parents withdrew all financial support, and Berlioz was reportedly destitute. Nonetheless, he threw himself into his musical aspirations, without regret. Despite the suffering this caused him personally, it seems to have been his greatest strength, since passion ultimately became the key to his success as a composer.

Eventually, Berlioz's feelings for Harriet turned sour, when he discovered that she had entered into a relationship with her manager. In response, he set himself to the task of writing a grand new symphony, inspired by his "overpowering passion." This does not seem to have quelled his yearnings, however, since letters to friends reveal a torrent of shifting moods. Giddy with the new vision for the symphony, he first wrote, "I found consolation for all my sorrows in a new passion, into which I threw myself with enthusiasm," describing the endeavor as a "work that satisfies me completely," only to later report, "my heart is the furnace of a raging fire."[84]

The date of the premiere had been set in advance, but Berlioz failed to meet it. When he at last gathered the orchestra for the postponed performance, the score was still in need of revision, and his erratic demeanor as a conductor was counterproductive for the unusually large orchestra, which was crammed into an insufficient rehearsal space. The concert was again put-off, giving Berlioz more time to

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[82] (San Francisco Symphony, 2011)
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

revise. The third time was the charm. The work was premiered at the *Paris Conservatoire* in December of 1830. Despite its massive scope (five movements and over an hour in length), it was well-received. There were even important people in the audience, including the writer Victor Hugo, but no Harriet.

Figure 102: Portrait of Harriet Smithson (1800-1854) by Dubufe, Claude-Marie (1790-1864). Irish actress, wife of the composer Hector Berlioz. 1830. Oil on canvas, 40.5 x 32.5 cm. Inv. 1938F308. Located at the Musee Magnin, Dijon, France; Image Public Domain

Unfortunately, his success would not help him win Smithson's favor. Having won the *Prix de Rome*, a prestigious composition contest, he was immediately bound for Italy, where he would spend three years studying abroad. The trip was the coveted prize awarded to him for his achievements, but one which he detested. He was homesick, and longed to return to Paris. Further, the separation seems to have done little to calm his obsession, despite having no contact with Harriet. He described his feelings for her: "It was fate. I saw it was no longer possible for me to struggle against it."[85]

Upon his return to Paris, he had a chance meeting at a music shop with a mutual friend, who offered to give Harriet a ticket to an upcoming concert of the *Symphonie Fantastique*. By this time, virtually everyone, apparently even Harriet, knew the object of the erratic composer's desire. Berlioz turned over the ticket and readied himself for the meeting that now seemed inevitable, commenting "the suggestion made me shudder." [86]

Harriet's feelings for Berlioz, which had started as ambivalence, and moved through fear and probably anger, slowly shifted to curiosity. This was likely helped along by her circumstances – by this point, her career had waned and she was in need of a husband to support her. She agreed to meet Berlioz in person, despite the fact that the two still did not have a common language in which to communicate. It must have been an awkward meeting, indeed. Nonetheless, they entered into a courtship. As the story goes, the impulsive composer swallowed a poison and was only willing to take an antidote if she agreed to marry him.

A modern reader will certainly see relationship "red flags" in this story, and will no doubt marvel at the fact that two consenting adults could so egregiously miscalculate the potential for a successful marriage; however, we must remember that Berlioz's behavior would not have been regarded as wholly negative at this time in history. After all, following one's passions was the epitome of the Romantic artist-as-hero mythos, and by this time, it had landed him in a somewhat successful music career (at least for the time being). In any case, Harriet seemed satisfied, since she in fact married him.

To ensure that his audience would grasp the depth of his passion and emotion, Berlioz also wrote a program, or story, to be distributed at the concert. This is the key to understanding how Berlioz's personal and musical lives merged to create something truly new and unique. Subtitled "Episodes in the Life of an Artist," the story bears an uncanny resemblance to real-life events, including those that

[85] (San Francisco Symphony, 2011)
[86] Ibid.

occurred after its premiere. Since it is a snapshot of the composer's psychological state, it may make a strong case for the idea that humans are a product of their darkest desires. Berlioz seems to have manifested – at least symbolically – some of the bigger plot elements in his own story.

Symphony Fantastique: The Program

Movement 1: Reveries, Passions

The author imagines that a young musician [or artist, in some translations], afflicted with that moral disease that a celebrated writer calls *vague des passions*[87] sees for the first time a woman who embodies all the charms of the ideal being of whom he has dreamed, and he falls hopelessly in love with her. Through a bizarre trick of fancy, the beloved image always appears in the mind's eye of the artist linked to a musical thought [melody] whose character, passionate but also noble and reticent, he finds similar to the one he attributes to his beloved.

The melodic image and its human model pursue him incessantly like a double *idée fixe* ['fixed idea' – fixation]. This explains the constant appearance, in every movement of the symphony, of the melody that begins the first allegro [refers to a section in the music]. The passage from this state of melancholic reverie, interrupted by a few fits of boundless joy, to one of delirious passion, with its movements of fury and jealousy, its return of tenderness, its tears, its religious consolation—all this is the subject of the first movement."

Movement 2: A Ball

The artist finds himself in the most varied situations — in the midst of the tumult of a party, in the peaceful contemplation of the beauties of nature; but everywhere, in town, in the country, the beloved image appears before him and disturbs his peace of mind.

Movement 3: Scene in the Fields

One evening in the countryside he hears two shepherds in the distance [singing or playing] with their *ranz des vaches*[88] in dialogue. This pastoral duet, the scenery, the quiet rustling of the trees gently disturbed by the wind, certain hopes he has recently found reason to entertain—all these come together in giving his heart an unaccustomed calm, and in giving a brighter color to his ideas. He reflects upon his isolation; he hopes that soon he will no longer be alone… But what if she were deceiving him! This mixture of hope and fear, these ideas of happiness disturbed by black presentiments, form the subject of the adagio [refers to a section of the music]. At the end, one of the shepherds again takes up the ranz des vaches; the other no longer replies... The distant sound of thunder… solitude… silence.

Movement 4: March to the Scaffold

[87] French Romantic writer François-René de Chateaubriand wrote of "Le vague des passions," which refers to the boundless nature of the imagination, as contrasted by reality and the world, which is extremely limited and restrictive (and damaging to the soul). When overcome with passion, man should follow that impulse, since its pursuit promises to reveal the ineffable, or the great mysteries of life. In short, passions – emotions – are transcendent. This concept places feeling on par with religion or philosophy.

[88] A *ranz des vaches* is a tune sung or played by Swiss herdsman as they tend their flock in the fields. It is associated with homesickness.

Having become certain that his love is unappreciated, the artist poisons himself with opium. The dose of the narcotic, too weak to kill him, plunges him into a sleep accompanied by the most horrible visions. He dreams that he has killed the woman he had loved, that he is condemned, led to the scaffold, and that he is witnessing his own execution. The procession moves forward to the sounds of a march that is now somber and fierce, now brilliant and solemn, in which the muffled noise of heavy steps gives way without transition to the most noisy clamor. At the end of the march, the first four measures of the idee fixe reappear – like a last thought of love interrupted by the fatal blow.

Movement 5: Dream of a Witches' Sabbath

He sees himself at the sabbath[89], in the midst of a frightful assembly of ghosts, sorcerers, monsters of every kind, all come together for his funeral. Strange noises, groans, outbursts of laughter, distant cries which other cries seem to answer. The beloved melody appears once more, but has now lost its noble and shy character; it is now no more than a vulgar dance tune, trivial and grotesque: it is she, come to join the sabbath… A roar of delight at her arrival… She takes part in the devilish orgy… The funeral bells toll [ring], burlesque[90] parody of the Dies Irae , the dance of witches. The dance of the witches combines with the *Dies irae*[91] [as the artist's soul descends into Hell].

In the program, Berlioz reveals that his obsession with Harriet appears in his mind as a melody. It is a compulsive thought that refuses to leave him alone. As it rings in his ears, he feels an intense surge of emotions. The tune, which he calls the "idee fixe" ("fixed idea"), is the key to a narrative structure in the music. It is a theme, in that it recurs in all movements (recall Beethoven's use of the same technique), but fails to follow convention, since Berlioz freely varies the idee fixe to express his changing moods. Reflecting the full spectrum of feeling that is represented in the program – everything from "boundless joy" and "delirious passion," to "black presentiments" – this melody, first appearing as a grand and breathless proclamation of love, takes an unprecedented journey across the landscape of movements in this monumental work.

Interestingly, the opening of the symphony is *not* the idee fixe, but a tune that Berlioz composed as a teenager, in response to his first experience with rejection. Swept away by a love novel he had plucked from his father's library, a twelve-year-old Berlioz proudly proclaimed his love for a girl named Estelle, his eighteen-year-old neighbor. Not surprisingly, she laughed at him, regarding his feelings as no more serious than a child's crush. Worse yet, his family taunted him for being so impulsive. It would seem that Berlioz learned the pain of rejection at an early age, and the opening of *Symphony Fantastique* proves it. The first melody we hear is that of Estelle, a reminder of his past suffering. It would seem that Berlioz is not only predisposed to heartbreak but even expects it – welcomes it.

When the idee fixe first appears, it is a breathy, legato melody, endlessly climbing in pitch and increasing in dynamics to a bursting climax, all the while accompanied by a pulsing rhythm evoking an erratic heartbeat. The phrase length is uneven, so that this listener cannot be sure of its beginning or end, just as Berlioz's emotions seem to flow from an endless wellspring. Most significantly, it is played by the

[89] "Sabbath" refers to a day of religious observance in both Christianity and Judaism. In this context, it is a perversion of the concept, since the artist now appears to have awoken in Hell, surrounded by witches and monsters.

[90] "Burlesque" is defined as an absurd or comically exaggerated imitation of something, especially in a literary or dramatic work; a parody.

[91] The "Dies Irae" is a Medieval Christian plainchant sung at the mass for the dead.

flutes and violins, instruments which Berlioz regarded as capable of expressing "sublime lament," and "joyful feelings, reverie and passion," respectively.[92]

The second movement is a study in obsession and its impact on mood, recounting the experience of Berlioz continually viewing Harriet from afar. The centerpiece is the "tumult of a party," where he catches brief glimpses of her, as dancers spin in a frenzied waltz around him. Berlioz ingeniously weaves a playful dance tune together with intermittent, fragmented appearances the idee fixe. In addition to transforming her rhythms into dance figures, Berlioz adds the oboe, an instrument he describes as "a rustic character, full of tenderness, I would say even of shyness."[93]

Figure 103: George Clint's portrait of actress Harriett Smithson

The turning point of the story occurs in the third movement, when Berlioz imagines himself in the countryside, listening to two shepherds calling back and forth. As a storm rises, one of the shepherds fails to answer, leaving his partner in silence. From this imagery, Berlioz's emotions take a dark turn (even though Harriet is not present). The emotional backlash is solely his own – the illogical outcome of his fixations. The idee fixe attempts a return, but is repeatedly interrupted by declarations of anger that increasingly build into an emotional outburst, characterized by loud dynamics, an accented style, and fast repeated notes.

By the fourth movement, the story takes a brutal twist. He dreams that he has murdered his beloved and is marched to the scaffold for a public execution. He not only dies, but is fully dehumanized – the subject of public humiliation. The idee fixe is eerily silent throughout the raucous march, appearing only as a ghostly apparition just before the guillotine falls – "a last thought of love interrupted by the fatal blow." The energy of the gigantic orchestra suddenly stops, and she appears as a lone, monophonic melody, now played by the clarinet – in Berlioz's estimation, the "voice of heroic love."[94]

Boom! A massive, orchestral accent signifies the deathblow, and *pizzicato* ("plucked") notes in the strings imitate the sound of his severed head, bouncing off the platform.

In the final movement, the artist awakens in Hell, surrounded by demons and witches who seem to delight in his arrival. Ghastly sounds, groans, and outbursts set the dark scene, and then she appears. Even in death, Berlioz cannot escape the pain of love. Harriet, now a warped version of her original self, laughs in his face. Once "noble" and "shy," her melody has become "trivial and grotesque," bent into an obscene dance tune played in the extreme upper register of the clarinet. Here, Berlioz is masterful in recreating the sound of devilish laughter.

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[92] (Austin, 2001)
[93] (Austin, 2001)
[94] Ibid.

His soul descends into hell, as funeral bells play the *Dies Irae,* a Medieval plainchant for the dead.

In terms of interpretation, it is best to frame this fantastical story as an allegory. Although he routinely exhibited impulsivity (even writing to a friend that he wanted to murder an unfaithful mistress), there is no evidence that Berlioz ever committed any acts of violence against Harriet or any of the other women in his life. Nonetheless, it is clear that he was a narcissist of the greatest kind, fully engrossed in his own imagination and feeling. By modern terms, we might look at him with pity, since we can clearly see the

Musical Snapshot: *Symphony Fantastique*, "Dream of a Witches Sabbath" (1830)

1. **Composer**: Hector Berlioz
2. **Genre**: Program Symphony
3. **Country**: France
4. **Time Period**: Romantic
5. **Words and music**: Musical elements follow story of program – obsession with Harriet Smithson
6. **Melody**: Idee fixe ("fixed idea") represents his feelings, as they change over the story
7. **Instrumentation**: Expanded orchestra (by contemporary standards), including full brass, woodwind, and percussion sections
8. **Orchestration**: Berlioz used instruments symbolically, to represent moods and feelings; choice of instrument is important
9. **Form**: Added an extra movement to the symphonic form; Individual movements are free-form, following the story, rather than established patterns
10. **Texture**: Constantly varied, including massive, thick textures

Section	Narrative	Musical elements
Introduction	He sees himself at the sabbath, in the midst of a frightful assembly of ghosts, sorcerers, monsters of every kind, all come together for his funeral. Strange noises, groans, outbursts of laughter, distant cries which other cries seem to answer.	Random fragments; Sudden contrasts of dynamics; Unique tone colors (stopped French horn; Clarinet gliss)
Idee Fixe	The beloved melody appears once more, but has now lost its noble and shy character; it is now no more than a vulgar dance tune, trivial and grotesque: it is she, come to join the sabbath… A roar of delight at her arrival… She takes part in the devilish orgy…	Entire theme played in high, shrill range of the clarinet, with "grotesque" alterations – extra notes that sound like laughter
Dies Irae	The funeral bells toll [ring], burlesque parody of the Dies Irae	Funeral bells, and Dies Irae played in tuba and bassoon (slow), then horns and trombones (faster), and woodwinds (fastest)
Witches Round Dance	the dance of witches. The dance of the witches combines with the Dies irae [as the artist's soul descends into Hell].	A fugue, polyphonic and "joyous," at the destruction of the artist

Suggested Recording: *BBC Proms 2013, Mariss Jansons, Conductor (will need to advance to final movement)*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=yK6iAxe0oEc&feature=emb_title.

many ways in which he mishandled his emotions; however, as a Romantic hero, he is right on target – following his passions wherever they lead.

Berlioz's Life Imitates his Art

When Berlioz composed *Symphony Fantastique*, the first half of the story had already occurred. He had fallen in love with Harriet and become her stalker. In the years that followed, he eventually met and married her, only to see his ideal version of love disintegrate under the harshness of an actual, lived experience. Not surprisingly, their marriage was a failure. In a sense, his passion did change the real Harriet, knocking her down from the perception of perfection and placing her in the realm of reality, where she wholly failed to meet his outlandish expectations.

The reality of Harriet's story is even more tragic, however, and again seems to imitate Berlioz's dark imagination. After the couple separated, she fell extremely ill, eventually becoming paralyzed, with her body twisted and contorted. In a real and very sad way, she did lose the "noble and shy character" that Berlioz had loved.

Ten years after her death, Berlioz was informed that her grave was to be relocated, and he was given the option of attending the disinterment. Perhaps not surprisingly, he went, describing the macabre scene thusly:

> *The gravedigger bent down and with his two hands picked up the head, already parted from the body – the ungarlanded, withered, hairless head of 'poor Orphelia' – and placed it in a new coffin ready for it at the edge of the grave. Then, bending down again, with difficulty he gathered in his arms the headless trunk and limbs, a blackish mass which the shroud still clung to, like a damp sack with a lump of pitch in it. It came away with dull sound, and a smell.*[95]

This ghastly sight certainly seems to echo the way in which Harriet appeared to Hector in the final scene of *Symphony Fantastique*, as its outlandish scene played out in his imagination. It must have been surreal then, for this to be his last view of her – as a "blackish mass." Considering Berlioz's ardent admiration of Shakespeare and Hamlet's infamous conversation with a skull, the irony of this ghoulish sight could not have been lost on him. It seems even more likely that he would have been drawn to it.

What is the moral of the story? Unchecked, love destroys completely.

LESSON 13: ROMANTIC OPERA

Like all art forms, Romantic opera was an explosion of feeling and individuality. As funding for the arts gradually shifted to a public model, most major cities built opera houses, which became significant centers for culture and social activities, as well as sources of national identity. The overall boom in all the arts also reached opera, so that this century was unusually prolific – the most popular operas today are largely from the Romantic era.

This century also saw the impact of globalism, with both established venues and traveling groups alike performing European operas in as far-flung locales as India, Russia, China, Chile, the United States, and South Africa. Around the world, opera was produced and managed by *impresarios*, or private

[95] (Raby, 2003)

businessmen – what we might called venture capitalists today – who connected composers and performers with theaters, organized funding, and managed the productions. Impresarios were also connoisseurs, and helped to promote significant composers and new works, so that the genre flourished.

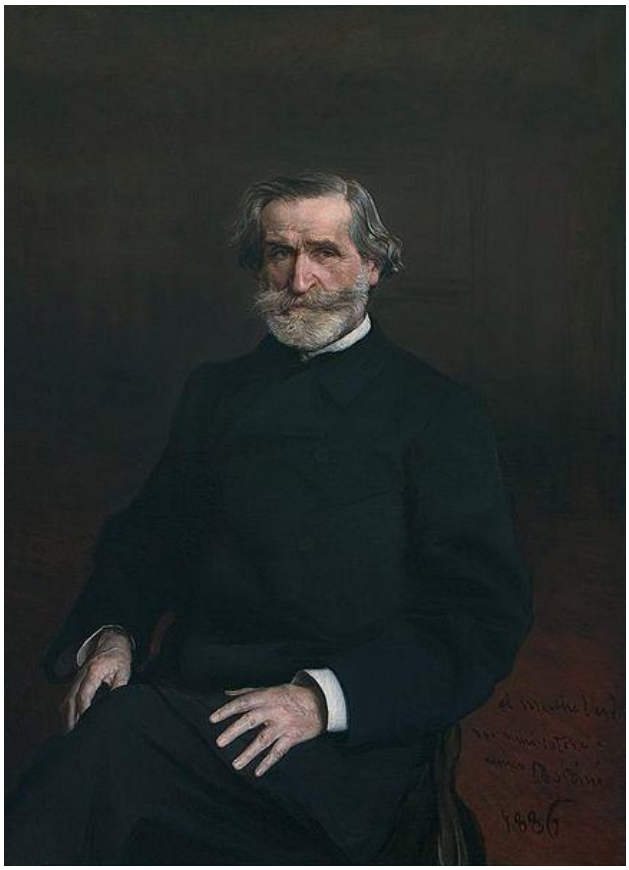

Figure 104: Portrait of Giuseppe Verdi by Giovanni Boldini, 1886; Image Public Domain

Not surprisingly, composers followed individualized paths, so that it is difficult to identify a finite set of characteristics that might define all operas of the period. Both nationalistic identities and vastly different ideas about what opera should be produced a range of narratives and musical styles. At the same time, the new success of instrumental music as serious artform spilled into opera as an increased emphasis on the epic, "symphonic" scope of the works of Beethoven and his successors.

Most prominent in the early half of the Romantic era was the *Bel Canto* style, identified primarily with the great Italian composers Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868) and Guiseppe Verdi (1813-1901), the later of whom is easily the best known and loved opera composer today, with performances of his blockbuster "La Traviata" routinely receiving around 700 performances annually worldwide. [96]

Bel Canto is the style most associated with the genre in a general sense; meaning, it is the stereotype one might revert to when thinking about the idea of an opera. *Bel Canto* features a flashy soprano or moody tenor in a show-stopping vocal extravaganza, complete with elaborate costumes and staging, all set to a surging, passionate orchestral score. *Bel Canto* means "beautiful singing," so its focus is on the musical (rather than literary) aspects of the production, with a particular emphasis on soaring, lyrical melodies set for virtuoso soloists, capable of managing both the acting and musical aspects of emoting a character in this format. Audiences attend these productions for the singing – to experience the incredible expressive power of a highly trained voice. As such, singers who specialize in this style become coveted stars, popular with audiences around the world.

FOCUS ON PERFORMERS: THE THREE TENORS

In the modern era, there are no artists more closely associated with Bel Canto singing than the stadium-filling power trio, *The Three Tenors* – Luciano Pavarotti, José Carreras, and Placido Domingo. Their

[96] (Operabase, 2019)

Figure 105: Placido Domingo (L), Jose Carreras (C) and Luciano Pavarotti (R) sing as the Three Tenors in Beijing June 23, 2001. REUTERS/China Photos (used by permission)

success as a global phenomenon in the 1990's, which even crossed over into the coveted pop music charts, has its origins in visionary Italian producer Mario Dradi, who convinced the already-famous soloists to pool their talents and perform together.

Although they had been asked many times by similarly ambitious promoters, Dradi succeeded by appealing to the artists' shared love of soccer – their first performance, held at the historic Baths of Caracalla in Rome, was a cultural finale to the 1990 World Cup. In addition, Carreras had recently beaten Leukemia, and the event was to be his reintroduction to the world stage – a difficult proposal to refuse. The concert was so popular that over 100,000 people attempted to buy tickets (priced at nearly $400 each; around $700 in today's dollars), despite the venue having a capacity of only 6,000. Globally, over one-billion people watched the concert on television.[97]

The performance was recorded and sold to the Decca label for distribution, going on to become the most successful Classical album in history, selling 10-million copies worldwide by 1994 and winning the Grammy Award for Best Classical Vocal Performance in 1991. The Three Tenors became a global success, performing a total of thirty-three concerts between 1994-2003, most of which were in large sports stadiums, such as Wembley Stadium in London and Giants Stadium outside of New York City. Their best known concert was in 1994, at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles, with 50,000 people in attendance, and 1.3-billion watching the televised event.

Die-hard Classical fans and critics panned the performances, insisting that the trio was debasing the high art of opera by programming show-stopping arias along with pop songs and musical theater. In other words, the same elements that appealed to new and wider audiences were major points of contention for purists. Nonetheless, there can be no question that The Three Tenors introduced the time-tested melodies of the Bel Canto repertoire to a massive new generation of music-lovers.

Audiences were drawn to the exciting prospect of the triple threat, to be sure, but their ultimate reward was certainly Luciano Pavarotti's ecstatic encores. The lone Italian in the group, he was the authority on the Bel Canto style which served as the high-culture centerpiece of their concerts. Pavarotti was a once-

[97] (Haberman, 1990)

in-a-generation talent who was beloved for his exquisite vocal timbre, incredible technique, and ability to connect with audiences on a transcendent level.

Although he is best-known to for concert performances of "Nessun Dorma," the beloved aria from Giacomo Puccini's opera *Turandot*, his career spanned over four-decades, and included countless operatic roles and solo concerts across the globe, usually to sold-out, adoring audiences. At the height of the Three Tenors fame, he gave a solo concert in London's Hyde Park, which drew 100,000 attendees, including the Prince and Princess of Wales, despite the outdoor event being drenched in rain.

The commercial success of the Three Tenors was only part of Pavarotti's mass appeal. From the earliest stages of his career, he appeared regularly on television, leveraging the purity of his glorious voice to capture new fans. Later, he performed with a diverse array of pop stars, including everyone from James Brown, to Sting, Michael Jackson, and the Spice Girls – a move which was highly contentious with the elites of the Classical world.

In truth, his trained voice, thick Italian accent, and ever-formal attire were at times an awkward contrast to many of the artists with whom he collaborated, but there were some bright spots too. Bono, lead singer of the band U2, together with songwriter Brian Eno, wrote the sleepy ballad *Miss Sarajevo* in 1995, to feature the Italian tenor. The song was popular throughout Europe and appeared on the pop charts in many countries.

Of his commitment to reaching new audiences, Pavarotti said:

> *I remember when I began singing in 1961, one person said, 'run quick, because opera is going to have at maximum 10 years of life.' At the time it was really going down. But then, I was lucky enough to make the first 'Live From the Met' telecast. And the day after, people stopped me on the street. So, I realized the importance of bringing opera to the masses. I think there were people who didn't know what opera was before [me].*[98]

The great Italian tenor's final performance was in 2006, at the Opening Ceremonies of the Olympic Games in Turin, Italy. At the age of seventy-one, far past the time when most accomplished singer's voices would have long-faded, and already weakened from the cancer that would take his life the following year, Pavarotti was both visibly and vocally diminished. Despite having to sing in a lowered key and needing pre-recorded sound reinforcement to make it through, he delivered his signature emotional punch, and is remembered by many as the crown jewel of the event. Italy's champion downhill skier Peter Fill had this to say:

> *He was a national hero, famous in the whole world but loved so much in Italy. He was an amazing figure, not only the voice, but the whole person. And Nessun Dorma is one of my favorite songs of his, a really great song.*[99]

[98] (Holland, 2007)
[99] (Olympic News, 2018)

Figure 106: Puccini in a studio photograph; Image Public Domain

Puccini and Verismo Opera

Over the course of the Romantic period, the *Bel Canto* style came to be criticized for its melodic dominance, since it came at the expense of the narrative, and the characters were prone to feeling overly stylized. Further, to allow ample space for extended arias, the form had retained the recitative (declamatory, plot-focused singing) and aria (melodic, emotional singing) cycle that had dominated Italian operas for generations. To some, this created a pacing that was too choppy and lacked dramatic flair.

Although he was inspired by his great predecessor Guiseppe Verdi, the late Romantic composer Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) took Italian opera in a new direction, adapting the genre to a contemporary style of literature called *Verismo* ("realism"). As with many aspects of the era, Verismo was a reaction to industrialization, and contended that it was the responsibility of the arts to accurately reflect society, especially in terms of depicting the humbler social classes, with absolute attention to realism and detail. Other composers had attempted to incorporate these goals, but it was the operas of Puccini that made their mark on the style.

In order give his stories a more theatrical feel, Puccini replaced the traditional but plot-slowing recitative with a conversational singing style, pitting characters against each other in realistic, melodic dialogues, a technique called *parlando*. This allowed the story to move along in a more organic way, preserving the literary pacing of the plot. Puccini still wrote showstopping arias, punctuating ecstatic moments of emotional intensity with gorgeous melodies and virtuoso singing, but typically used these moments to advance characterization and plot elements. Moreover, Verismo opera deals with contemporary social or cultural issues, avoiding the traditional operatic characters of gods and heroes.

Figure 107: Director Riccardo Chailly (C) and the cast acknowledges the applause at the end of the Puccini's Madama Butterfly, opening of the 2016-17 opera season at La Scala opera house in Milan, Italy December 7, 2016. REUTERS/Alessandro Garofalo; Image used by permission

Premiered in 1904, Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*[100] is one of his most popular and enduring tales – the story of a short-lived relationship between a young Japanese Geisha and an American soldier passing through Nagasaki. To understand why an Italian composer would choose a subject so far-removed from his own culture, a short history lesson helpful. Prior to the mid-19th century, Japan was closed to the world. Ruled by military commanders called *shogun*, its society was feudal in structure, with peasants working the land in exchange for protection from the *samurai*, or warrior class. As a result, Japan was not initially a part of the Industrial Revolution, and was regarded with deep curiosity by the rest of the world.

In 1853, the US Navy sailed into Toyko harbor under the premise of opening a trade deal; however, given the massive fire power of the ships, the move could hardly have been interpreted as a request. The Japanese signed the Kanagawa Treaty, which immediately opened two ports to US trade, and abruptly ended Japan's long-standing policy of cultural isolation.

Very quickly, *Japonisme*, or a fascination with all things Japan, became a fad in Europe, with traditional ephemera, including fans, kimonos, figurines, and woodprints, becoming popular items for collectors. This trend seems to have stemmed from the notion that Japanese culture was less civilized, so that it appealed to the Romantic impulse to tear down social expectations. Today, we would certainly criticize such perspectives as cultural appropriation, but in the 19th century, there were few social challenges to

[100] Suggested supplement to this section: https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/discover/education/educator-guides/madama-butterfly/butterfly.guide.pdf Mt San Antonio College maintains a subscription to Met Opera Live in HD, available through the library

prevent a dominant culture from overtaking one that was less powerful. As such, artists freely incorporated Japanese symbols, styles, and forms into their work, and composers attempted to evoke exotic lands through use of Japanese folksongs and scales.

Figure 108: A Japanese trunk, adorned with a plum tree, dated from 1646; Objects such as this would have been highly sought-after, as objects of Japonisme

Appealing to this phenomenon, French writer Pierre Loti released the novel *Madame Chrysanthème* in 1887, a fictional travelogue, or "diary," loosely recounting his own travels to Japan the year prior. In it, a French naval officer, aptly named Pierre, purchases a temporary bride and spends a summer "with this little doll…[playing] at married life." The story paints a colorful picture of an exotic land, but also established negative stereotypes about Japan that would persist for many generations. In particular, Loti presented the Japanese as insular, daft, and easily exploited. His parting words to his would-be bride, Chrysanthème, reveal his aloof treatment of her:

> *I took you for my own amusement and, although you may not have been a total success, you gave me what you could: your little body, your respect, and your quaint music. All in all, you have been sweet enough…*[101]

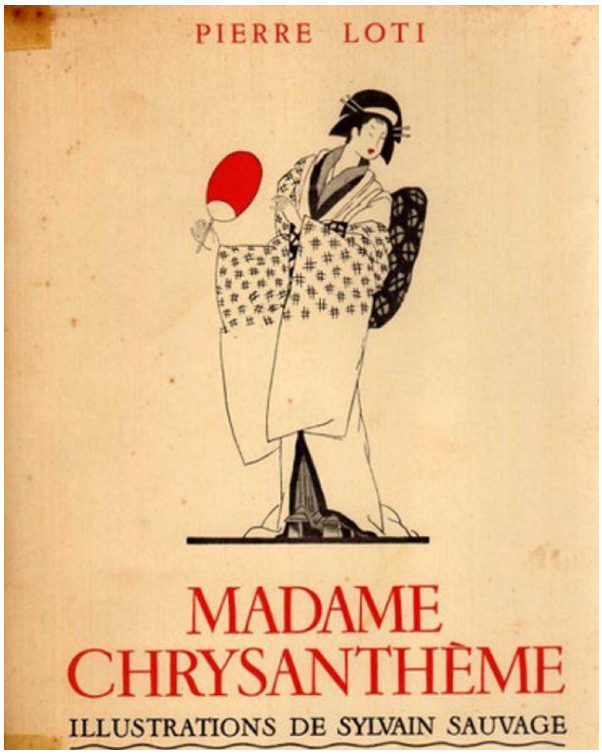

Figure 109: Image Public Domain

Despite its short-sightedness, the book was widely popular, going into twenty-five reprints in the space of five years. It was translated into several languages, including English, and inspired a veritable flood of similar works (what we might call "fan fiction" today), including an opera of the same name

[101] (Lotti, 1887, reprinted 2016)

by French composer André Messager. The writer John Luther Long further adapted it into a short story titled *Madame Butterfly,* adding plot elements inspired by real-life events recounted to him by his sister, a missionary who had worked in Japan.

In turn, playwright David Belasco added a few more events to the story, including its tragic conclusion, and staged it as a play, first on Broadway and then in 1900, at London's Duke of York's Theater. That is where Puccini encountered the story. He was visiting London to see a production of one of his own operas and was encouraged to attend.

By this point, through its various retellings, Butterfly's story was basically intact: Pinkerton, an American solider passing through Nagasaki, purchases a Japanese bride, the young geisha Cio-Cio-San (known to her friends as Butterfly), thinking that the transaction is just for the purpose of his own gratification and pleasure; however, his bride is a girl of honor and principals, who is extremely loyal to the institution of marriage – she believes the union is for life.

With a nonchalant and at times condescending attitude, Pinkerton ignores warning signs and marries Butterfly, filling her head with thoughts of commitment. The couple consummate their union, and he leaves Japan, promising to return; later, Butterfly gives birth to their son. Three years pass and she is destitute, still waiting for her husband with "unshaken faith." At long last, Pinkerton's boat appears in the harbor, but his arrival is heartbreaking. He has taken an American wife and has only returned to Japan for his son. Inconsolable and dishonored, Butterfly takes her own life, as Pinkerton is overcome with guilt.

Although Puccini could speak little English, he was nonetheless fascinated by the drama of this tragic story, and immediately sent the manuscript to his two favorite librettists, Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, to set it as an opera (in Italian). He also began researching Japanese culture, so as to set the story in a realistic, or *Verismo* context. Hearing of the Japanese actress Sada Yacco visiting Milan for a guest performance, he tracked her down and plied her with all sorts of questions about her culture. He visited the wife of the Japanese ambassador to Italy, who sang folk songs for him and provided popular sheet music. She also assisted in having phonograph records, a fairly new technology at the time, sent from Japan, and continued to consult with him throughout the writing process. Illica even took a trip to Nagasaki in order to study the local customs.

These efforts resulted in a production that was more realistic and nuanced than its source material, possibly even improving on its shortcomings; however, the audience did not initially respond positively. Premiered at *La Scala*, the famous opera house in Milan, in 1904, the opera made (in Puccini's words) a "horrible impression."[102] In fact, the audience responded quite aggressively – their yells, grunts, and heckling were so pronounced that the performance descended into pandemonium, and Puccini was both rejected and scandalized. The singer who performed the title role of Butterfly even vowed never to do it again.

It is unclear exactly why the Milanese audience was so negative, but there were rumors that Puccini's rivals had stacked the room with their own fans. In any case, he was undaunted. Puccini reworked the pacing of the show, toned down some of Pinkerton's more overtly racist behaviors, and moved the production to Brescia, a town 60 miles away. This time, success!

[102] (San Francisco Opera, 2010)

Since then, *Butterfly* has become one of the most beloved operas in history. The tragic story of a young geisha and her commitment to love has gone on to inspire many other works, including the musical *Miss Saigon*, the pop song *Poor Butterfly* (a chart-topper in 1954), a 1988 play, *M Butterfly*, which was revived in 2017, and several ballets, most recently in Houston and Salt Lake City. Operabase routinely ranks *Butterfly* in the top five shows in the United States, with 50-70 performances, annually. Its show-stopping aria, Cio-Cio-San's homage to love and loyalty, "Un bel di" ("One fine day"), continues to entrance listeners – a YouTube video of the superstar soprano Maria Callas has 8.1-million views.

Figure 110: "It Ought to be a Happy New Year: Uncle Sam and his English cousin have the world between them," Judge Magazine, January 7, 1899; Artist: Victor Gillam; Image, Public Domain

What makes the show special is not only its provocative story of love, loyalty, and loss, but the treatment of its characters as stand-ins for larger cultural issues, enhanced by Puccini's beautiful music. In fact, *Butterfly* was many decades ahead of its time, particularly in its notable efforts to portray Japanese culture with accuracy and respect (even if some aspects of that play as insensitive today).

Globalism had a much different meaning at the turn of the 20th century. Specifically, America was a rising industrial force, newly partnered with the superpower Great Britain, to take on the "white man's burden," a misguided notion that countries with advanced technology and military might were justified in their domination over "backwards" nations. Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San are not only individuals, but representatives of their respective cultures, serving to highlight the great cost of imperialism on the peoples it assimilates.

Given this, the better the audience understands these characters, the stronger its tragic conclusion and overarching message. Characterization is a main thrust of the opera – both in literary and musical terms. A comparison of two arias – one from Pinkerton and the other featuring Butterfly – reveals Puccini's masterful ability to capture unique personalities in music.

Before the couple meets for the first time, Pinkerton discusses his intentions with Sharpless, an American diplomat who has been dispatched to attend the wedding. Sharing a drink and acting in a casual, rather entitled manner, Pinkerton sings of his life philosophy in "Dovunque al Mondo" ("All over the World"), an aria that provides the audience with a context for his actions throughout the story. He opens with these words:

Wherever the Yankee vagabond roams,
he throws caution to the wind and
seeks his fortune and pleasure.
He drops his anchor where and when he wants…

His thoughts are not of his future bride, but his own "fortune and pleasure." In fact, he does not mention the young Cio-Cio-San even one time, instead going on to describe himself, the "Yankee vagabond," with the egocentric line, "He works his magic in every place he goes." Clearly, he is only seeking an adventure in exotic love, and has no intention of making a real commitment.

Figure 111: Opera singers as Lieutenant B. F. Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-san (Madama Butterfly) in a performance of Giacomo Puccini's Madama Butterfly at the Berlin State Opera in January 1946, photographed by Abraham Pisarek

Throughout the aria, Sharpless, who is older and allegedly wiser, urges caution, telling Pinkerton that his philosophy will leave him with an "empty heart." Undaunted, Pinkerton continues to celebrate his own virility, eventually dismissing any objections with the patriotic toast, "America Forever," which causes Sharpless to immediately forget his convictions and join in. The implication is that the shared culture between the two men will win out over any ethical concerns.

Pinkerton's frank, self-centered language is mirrored in the melody of his aria, which opens to brilliant fanfare with a musical quote (*a short snippet of a melody taken from another* source) of the "Star Spangled Banner," a theme which is used to identify him throughout the opera. From this ceremonious beginning, his singing style is easy and lilting, with even rhythms that convey confidence – he is not trying to argue his case, but rather presenting something he believes to be fact.

The tonality is a calm major, and the lone melodic climax only serves to emphasize his own power (on the word "boat," before the line "he raises sail and casts off again"), rather than any sort of emotional outburst. For the most part, he sings easily in the mid-range, in phrases that are evenly paced and consistent. Pinkerton shows that he is not only set in his ways, but completely comfortable with his actions.

Musical Snapshot: "Dovunque al Mondo," from *Madama Butterfly* (1904)

1. **Composer**: Giacomo Puccini
2. **Genre**: Verismo Opera
3. **Country**: Italy
4. **Time Period**: Romantic
5. **Words and music**: Character conveys an east mindset, focused on his own entitledment and gratification
6. **Melody**: Opens with a melodic quote in the orchestra ("Star Spangled Banner," to symbolize character); Mostly sung mid to upper-range, with a melodic climax, Short, predictable phrases
7. **Instrumentation**: Accompanied by orchestra
8. **Harmony**: Major
9. **Rhythm**: Even patterns help to convey confidence
10. **Characters**: Pinkerton and Sharpless
11. **Narrative**: Pinkerton has yet to meet Butterfly; He sings of his life philosopher, characterized by an entitled mindset

Italian Text	English Text	Musical elements
PINKERTON:		
Dovunque al mondo	Wherever the Yankee	Style is easy and
lo Yankee vagabondo	vagabond roams,	conversational
si gode e traffica	he throws caution to the wind and	
sprezzando i rischi.	seeks his fortune and pleasure.	
Affonda l'áncora alla ventura…	He drops his anchor where and when he wants…	
(interrupts himself to offer Sharpless a drink)		
Milk-Punch, o Wiskey?	Milk punch or whisky?	
(starting again) …finchè una raffica	…until a storm wind blows and rocks	
scompigli nave e ormeggi, alberatura.	his boat; then he raises sail and casts off again.	Melodic climax on "boat,"
La vita ei non appaga	Life isn't worth living	showing his power over his
se non fa suo tesor	unless he can make	own fate
i fiori d'ogni plaga,	all the flowers in the fields	
d'ogni bella gli amor.	his own special treasures.	
SHARPLESS: È un facile vangelo		
che fa la vita vaga	That's an easy philosophy,	
ma che intristisce il cuor.	which makes life pleasant	
PINKERTON: (continuing) Vinto si tuffa e la sorte riacciuffa.	but leaves you with an empty heart.	
Il suo talento fa in ogni dove.	Always undaunted, his luck will never run out.	
Così mi sposo all'uso giapponese	He works his magic in every place he goes.	
per novecento novantanove anni.	And so I'm marrying in the Japanese manner,	
Salvo a prosciogliermi ogni mese.	for nine hundred and ninety-nine years,	
"America forever!"	with the option to renew each month.	
SHARPLESS: "America forever."	"America forever!"	Characters repeat, in
	"America forever."	solidarity

Suggested Recording: *Access the NY Met performance via the Mt SAC Library*

By contrast, later in the show Butterfly sings the showstopper, “Un bel di” (“One fine Day”), at a point when she has reached the peak of suffering and is grasping at the last threads of hope that Pinkerton will return. Her language is poetic and dreamy:

> *One fine day, we’ll see a thin thread of smoke rising*
> *on the horizon where the sky meets the ocean.*
> *And then a ship appears.*
> *The white ship enters the harbor,*
> *booming its salute. You see? He’s come!*

Clearly, Butterfly’s happiness hinges on the reappearance of her would-be husband, her pleas a tragic contrast to Pinkerton’s anthem of selfhood. She goes on to describe the moment of their reunion, showing both loyalty and her unsophisticated, girlish views on love and marriage:

> *And then he’ll call to me… “My little wife, my darling,*
> *my sweet girl who smells of flowers”—*
> *the names he used to call me when we first met.*
> *All of this will happen, I promise you.*
> *Have no fear; I wait for him with unshaken faith!*

Figure 112: Madama Butterfly, staged at the University of Concepción, Chile, in 2008; Image used by permission, Sinfómano, Flickr

Unlike Pinkerton, Butterfly is not calm and perfunctory; in fact, she is the opposite, and works herself up into a frenzy of emotions several times, peaking in high melodic and dynamic climaxes, first on the word "die," in the phrase "…so that I don't die at our reunion" (foreshadowing the ending), and then on final line, "I wait for him with unshaken faith!"

In addition, her range and intensity is emphasized with *orchestral doubling* (*the orchestra plays the melody with the singer*) – a trademark of Puccini. Rhythms also add tension, as Butterfly's words gradually increase in speed, compressing into quick, frantic utterances, giving the impression that she is trying to chatter reassuring words to herself. It is easy to perceive that she is becoming unhinged. The aria is predominantly in major, but features a shift to minor, as Butterfly distractedly sings about teasing

Musical Snapshot: "Un bel di," from *Madama Butterfly* (1904)

1. **Composer**: Giacomo Puccini
2. **Genre**: Verismo Opera
3. **Country**: Italy
4. **Time Period**: Romantic
5. **Words and music**: Character is frantic, trying to convince herself to stay calm
6. **Melody**: Big, dramatic melodic climaxes convey her anguish; Long, expressive phrases
7. **Instrumentation**: Accompanied by orchestra, with doubling for power
8. **Harmony**: Major, with a dreamy middle section, in minor
9. **Rhythm**: Erratic, but speeding up over time
10. **Character**: Butterfly (singing to her maid, Suzuki)
11. **Narrative**: Butterfly has waited for Pinkerton's return, and refuses to give up hope

Italian Text	English Text	Musical elements
Un bel dì, vedremo levarsi	One fine day, we'll see a thin thread of smoke rising	Long, expressive melodies
un fil di fumo sull'estremo confin del mare.	on the horizon where the sky meets the ocean.	
E poi la nave appare.	And then a ship appears.	
Poi la nave bianca entra nel porto,	The white ship enters the harbor,	
romba il suo saluto. Vedi? È venuto!	booming its salute. You see? He's come!	
Io non gli scendo incontro, io no.	But I won't go down to meet him—not me.	
Mi metto là sul ciglio del colle e aspetto,	I'll go to the top of our little hill and wait,	Minor contrasting section
e aspetto gran tempo e non mi pesa	and wait for a long time, but I don't mind	
la lunga attesa.	the long interval.	
E uscito dalla folla cittadina	And emerging from the crowded city,	
un uom, un picciol punto	a man, a tiny figure,	
s'avvia per la collina.	sets out for the hilltop.	
Chi sarà? chi sarà?	Who is it? Who can it be?	Rhythms increase in speed, creating a "chattering" style
E come sarà giunto	And when at last he arrives,	
che dirà? che dirà?	what will he say? What?	
Chiamerà "Butterfly" dalla lontana.	From afar, he'll call, "Butterfly."	
Io senza dar risposta	I'll give no answer,	
me ne starò nascosta	and I'll stay hidden,	
un po' per celia, e un po' per non morire	partly to tease him, and partly so that I don't die	Melodic climax on "die"
al primo incontro, ed egli alquanto in pena	at our reunion! And then he'll call to me, worried,	
chiamerà, chiamerà: "Piccina mogliettina,	he'll call: "My little wife, my darling,	
olezzo di verbena"	my sweet girl who smells of flowers"—	
i nomi che mi dava al suo venire.	the names he used to call me when we first met.	
(to Suzuki) Tutto questo avverrà, te lo prometto.	All of this will happen, I promise you.	Melodic climax on final phrase
Tienti la tua paura – io con sicura fede l'aspetto.	Have no fear; I wait for him with unshaken faith!	

Suggested Recording: *Access the NY Met performance via the Mt SAC Library*

Pinkerton upon his return ("I'll go to the top of our little hill and wait"), reflecting her changing moods and the unrealistic nature of her expectations.

Despite the vogue of *Japonisme* and Europe's love for *exoticism*, the depth of Butterfly's character would have been out of place in contemporary literature. Loti's *Chrysanthème* is presented entirely from the male's perspective, depicting the geisha character only second-hand, with an attitude that mingles fascination with ambivalence and at times, disdain. In the end, Chrysanthème has no love for Pierre, and shows interest only in counting the money he has paid her. In a way, this justifies Pierre's having taken advantage of her.

By contrast, Puccini's *Butterfly* is a fully-realized character whose suffering is far too immediate and real to be kept at a culturally-justified distance. The show is about her, not Pinkerton. While a modern watcher might fault *Madame Butterfly* for its cultural appropriation or use of stereotypes, an early 20th century audience would have been more likely to object to its inclusion of Japanese characters in such a

Figure 113: Costume sketches for the Florida Grand Opera, 2014; Photo used by permission, Florida Grand Opera, Flickr

high-art genre as opera. A letter to the editor, submitted after the 1907 premiere at the New York Metropolitan Opera, is telling:

> *I can say nothing for the music of Madama Butterfly. Western music is too complicated for a Japanese. Even…celebrated singing does not appeal much more than the barking of a dog.*[103]

Interestingly, a scene from the opera was staged in Japan for Japanese audiences in 1914, and received only a lukewarm and rather confused response. Harold S. Williams, a European expatriate who had resided in Japan for many years, wrote that the show was full of "pseudo-Japanese scenes," and that the sight of it caused Asians to "writhe in their seats."[104] Clearly, this cross-cultural work met both renown and controversy. Modern listeners will have to decide for themselves how, this beautiful and contentious work fits within the context of clashing cultures.

For his part, Puccini was no stranger to scandal, and ironically was himself a bit of a womanizer – a "Pinkerton," as it were. In 1884, he fell in love with a married woman named Elvira Gemignani, eventually spiriting her away from her husband, to live with him in semi-secret in the small fishing village of Torre del Lago. Unfortunately, the wildly successful composer lived a glamorous life, complete with frequent illicit affairs.

Figure 114: Images from the Edmonton Opera's production of Madama Butterfly in 2014; Image used by Permission, Nanc Price, Flickr

[103] (Groos, 1989)
[104] Ibid.

Eventually, Elivira grew exasperated with his infidelity and became somewhat unhinged (not unlike an operatic heroine), accusing a young servant girl named Doria of seducing Puccini. She confronted Doria in the village, and publicly shamed her. Scandalized, the young girl took her own life. Her family ordered a medical examination of the body, which revealed that she had been a virgin, fueling a lawsuit of slander against Elvira. In an effort to save his career from the scandal, Puccini sent her away to Milan, but the ensuing complications were a great strain on his creative output. He continued composing until his death in 1924, but was never able to recreate the success of the three big operas that made him famous: *La Boheme* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), and *Madame Butterfly* (1904).

LESSON 14: 20th CENTURY MODERNISM

In 1849, a then-obscure German composer named Richard Wagner wrote a lengthy essay that condemned the music of Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864), whose operas were the talk of the day and pulling top dollar in venues across the continent. His complaints were couched in an anti-Semitic tirade – a fact which draws stark criticism, up to the modern day – but also had a musical impetus. Wagner contended that Meyerbeer had "sold out," as we might say it today; meaning, his only musical aspirations were popularity and its financial rewards.

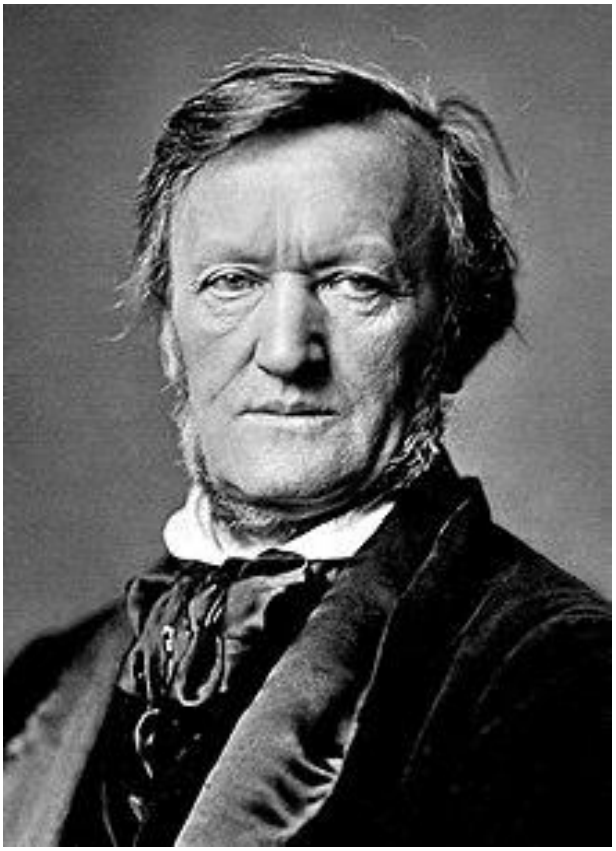

Figure 115: Richard Wagner, pictured in 1871; Image public domain

Most likely, Wagner's diatribe was fueled by jealousy, since Meyerbeer was the more successful composer at the time; however, the story is more complicated than a rivalry. Wagner was pursuing a *new* path for music, one which delved into the psychological, via a highly innovative use of musical elements and form. Specifically, Wagner was exploring an experimental use of harmony that would become a primary inspiration for musical *Modernism*, the dominant artistic movement of the 20th century. His words foreshadowed this shift when he proclaimed that his own music was, in fact, "modern." At the same time, he was making a major break from tradition, in claiming that the composer, and not the audience, should choose what is "art."

Further, the proclamation of "modern" was more than just an idea of "new." Modernists became acutely self-conscious about the role of art in society, much more so than in previous generations. In particular, they took a critical look at the historic cycles of audience taste and patronage, and the impact these external forces exercised on artistic trends.

Over the course of history, each new era had its own developments, each of which were regarded as progressive and "new." In time, innovations were absorbed into the larger culture, so that their uniqueness became diluted. For example, Beethoven was certainly revolutionary, but those who came later absorbed his language, so that it was no longer innovative. As such, Modernists had little use for the idea that their work should be "appealing," since fashionable trends were highly unstable and temporary. Instead, they were interested in reinventing all that had come before them by creating a wholly different language for artistic expression.

There were some crises of faith that contributed to these revelations. Thinking historically, artistic expression had always functioned under a well-defined, culturally relevant objective. In the Medieval period, art was for the church, a hallmark of religious worship and a communicator of its higher purpose. In the Renaissance, Humanism was the calling card of the day. This gave birth to science, which then fueled both the Baroque and the Enlightenment. Finally, the Romantic period was a riotous celebration of feeling, so limitless in scope that it was at times, gratuitous. Unfortunately, by the turn of the 20th-century, none of these philosophical underpinnings seemed to fit the scope of the modern world.

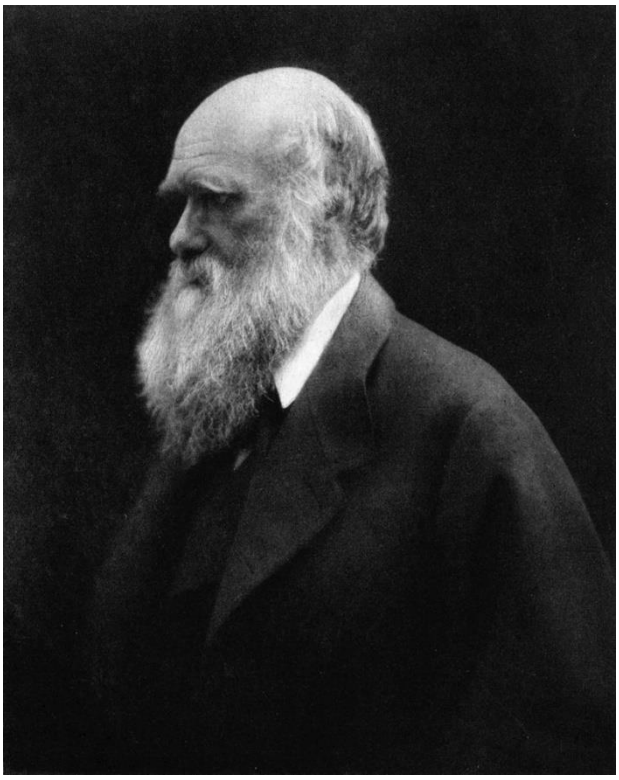

Figure 116: Charles Darwin, pictured in 1868; Image Public Domain

Firstly, science and religion had been at war for many centuries, and by this time the rift was virtually irreconcilable. In 1859, the English biologist and naturalist Charles Darwin published his book, *On the Origin of Species*, which presented for the first time, a scientifically based alternative to the creation myth of the Christian Bible. Specifically, he described the Theory of Evolution, which contends that populations of species evolved over time, through a process of natural selection and survival of the fittest – all concepts which are likely familiar from science class.

While these ideas directly contradict Christian dogma, in truth, Darwin himself expressed the opinion that evolution was simply an expression of God's divine power of creation; nonetheless, his theories eventually came to be seen as a condemnation of religion, and by the early 20th-century, fueled a growing shift toward secularism.

At the same time, science itself was undergoing a revolution, at the hands of the famous German physicist Albert Einstein. Unlike virtually any other scientist in history, he was not only an exceptional innovator in his field, but a folk hero of sorts, who captivated the imagination of the public and influenced larger cultural ideas. He is said to be have been frequently recognized on the street and asked to explain "that theory," or the *Theory of Relativity*, a concept so complicated that Einstein contended only a select few could approach a full understanding. Regardless, its basic premise, *relativity*, entered the collective consciousness as the notion that nothing is fixed or finite. In other words, the constancy of science was now in question.

Dealing in the realm of the intangible was the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, who pioneered the discipline of psychoanalysis, or the practice of using talk-therapy to improve behavioral and mental health. To achieve these ends, his work delved into the subconscious, seeking to bring repressed emotions and hidden traumas to the surface. In this way, the notion of following one's passion (as was freely practiced in the Romantic era), seemed highly suspect, since the origin feeling could not be

trusted unless examined under the lens of meaningful analysis. Given this, Modernists could not continue to follow their 19th-century counterparts into ever-increasing levels of emotional expression.

Finally, if all these monumental shifts were not enough to generate an existential crisis for art, the invention and mass production of the camera was a final straw. The availability and immense popularity of inexpensive personal cameras around the turn of the 20th century rendered the very notion of visual art redundant. Why spend years learning to create reality on a canvas through painterly skills, when even a child could preserve it with complete authenticity at the simple click of a button? As a result, artists were forced to find a new purpose. Although this lead to many innovations and new styles, it was a crisis the likes of which had never been encountered before, and one which would be repeated throughout the century, as new technologies continued to emerge.

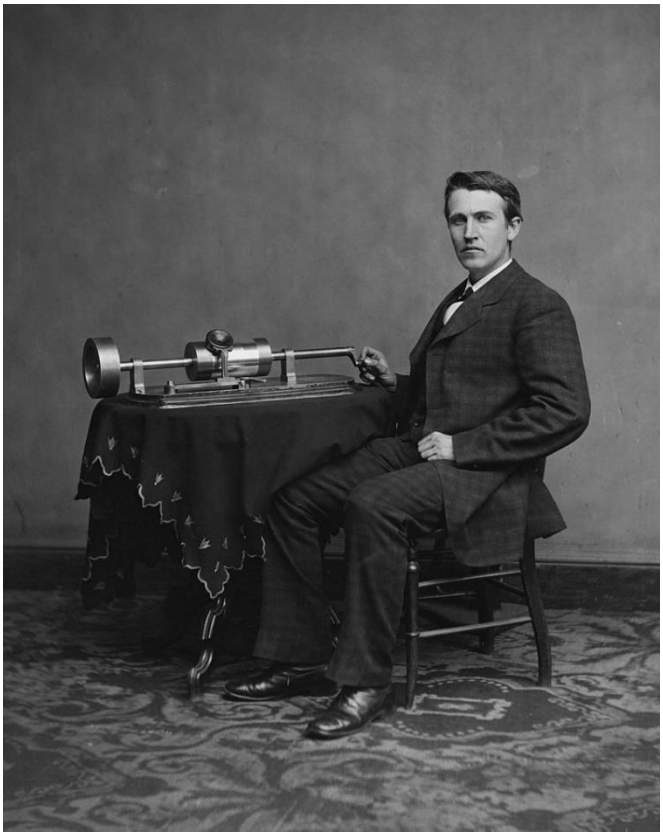

Figure 117: Thomas Edison with his second phonograph, photographed by Levin Corbin Handy in Washington, April 1878; Image Pubic Domain

Technology also changed music of course, and in some cases, these developments are so ingrained that they are virtually taken for granted today. While the music of the 19th-century was often massive in scope, with symphonies clocking in at an hour or more, early recorded sound could not accommodate such a gigantic quantity of data, so musical numbers got a whole lot shorter.

The three-minute pop song, which has been a standard for generations, is largely a product of the early phonograph record and its limited storage capacity. Even Classical composers of the day tried to create miniature works that would fit the new phonograph cylinders and disks. Further, the fidelity of early recording was extremely limited, so that louder instruments and smaller groups, such as Jazz bands, sounded a whole lot better than the competing tone colors of big ensembles like symphony orchestras.

This was also the start of listeners identifying specific artists or styles as their favorite, since now there was an ability to choose, or to have music on-demand. Over time, music-listening evolved into an expression of personal identity, so that a preference for a specific genre became a statement on one's persona or sense of style. At the same time, the social aspects of live music diminished, since recordings became more readily available and the need to attend concerts decreased, making music an even more personal and individualized experience. These issues coalesced into a new rift between what was considered "Popular" and "Classical" music, a distinction which was a brand-new idea in the 20th-Century.

Taking all these changes into account, Modernists rightly saw that the philosophies and mindsets which had fueled artistic expression over the course of history could no longer be relevant in the rapidly-changing, new world of the 20th-century. Darwin had wiped out religion, Einstein put science into question, Freud challenged the true origin of emotions, the camera eclipsed the very purpose of art, and for composers, recorded sound was a new and limiting medium. Cultural changes had forced art and music into a period of destruction and renewal – there was an imperative to, in the words of the poet Ezra Pound, "Make it new!"

In the end, Richard Wagner's fame exceeded that of Meyerbeer, and his music is well-remembered by history. Further, his thoughts and words, as expressed in his many essays, vividly foreshadowed the century to come, sometimes in grim detail. His music is cherished (no doubt you have heard his infamous *Ride of the Valkyries* countless times) and his philosophies are critical forerunners to Modernism. Specifically, his *The Art-work of the Future*, published in 1849, contends that the old ways ended with Beethoven, whose music represents the peak of perfection in terms of what can be achieved through a Romantic aesthetic. He was the first to push for the "new," which would define a generation of composers, and mark the passing of the old guard of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven.

At the same time, and very sadly, Wagner was also prescient with regards to the darker side of the coming century – its conflicts. Many of his ideas were fueled by his deplorable views, expressed in his essay, "Jewishness in music," in which he blamed Jewish composers for cheapening the art form, and called for their removal from Germany. This caused his work to take a second trajectory, one that ultimately aligned with Hitler and Nazism in Germany. His writings are an early voice of German antisemitism, and his music became the soundtrack for the propaganda films of the Third Reich. As such, he is an important reminder of the extremes of the 20th century – a time when the greatest advancements of humankind are contrasted by many of its bleakest days. It should be no surprise then, that the art of this period was in constant flux, with extremes of expression becoming the norm.

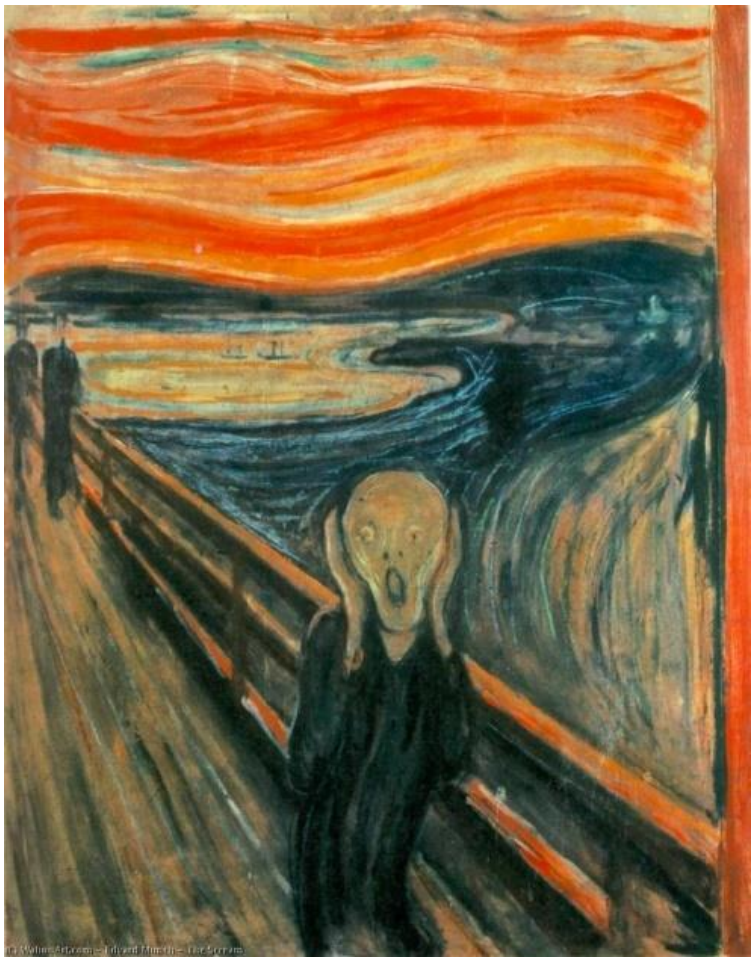

Figure 118: Edvard Munch, The Scream, 1893; Public Domain

Modernist Styles

Not all artists coped with or processed modernity in the same way, but there were

several core issues which affected virtually all creative work in this period. Most notably, the changes that took place between the 19th and 20th centuries were regarded as being far greater than those which occurred between previous periods; therefore, there was agreement that could be retained from the Romantics, since their world was wholly different. As such, composers and artists embraced the notion that standards of form and technique were subject to change and experimentation.

Secondly, industrialization, mechanization, and urbanization were seen as contributing to a loss of self – there was a sense of anxiety and struggle associated with rapid change. Given this, the idea of the artist as source of subjective reality – an alternative to the randomness of a world in flux – fueled the development of new and highly individualistic ideas. To that end, the model of empirical science was applied to artistic thought, with experimentation implemented as a process of discovery, in the search for a new language of expression.

For this reason, Modernism is fragmented, and often described in terms of its many "-isms," meaning the varied schools of thought with which artists and musicians approached the social issues impacting their work. *Impressionism*, for example, is a well-known style in both visual art and music, in which traditional lines of form and color are blurred, creating vague, dreamy images and sounds.

By contrast, *Expressionism*, made famous by Edvard Munch's 1893 painting, *The Scream*, is a reaction to the work of Freud, and explores the dark imagery of

Figure 119: Juan Gris, Bottle of Rum and Newspaper 1913–14, used by permission, Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported); Original image: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/gris-bottle-of-rum-and-newspaper-t06808

Figure 50: Kazimir Malevich, Dynamic Suprematism, 1915 or 1916; used by permission, Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported); Original image: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/malevich-dynamic-suprematism-t02319

the subconscious, using techniques which over-emphasize the traditional boundaries of color, line, and form. In both cases, art was expressed as images seen only in the eye of the artist.

The removal of art from the representation of a visual reality is called *abstraction*, and it can be observed in virtually all work in this period, to varying degrees. Abstraction is also self-perpetuating, meaning there are always ways to make it more extreme. Early experiments, such as those in the examples below, were simply distortions of recognizable images. Over time, paintings abandoned more elements, so that any form of symbolic or pictorial representation disappeared entirely. This progression can be seen in a comparison of Juan Gris's *Bottle of Rum and a Newspaper*, which is a deconstruction of real objects (fragments of which are still recognizable), and the abstract shapes and colors of Kazimir Malevich's *Dynamic Suprematicism*. In a parallel move, composers discarded the traditional notion of melody and its connection to stories and emotions, focusing instead on a more objective attention to sound (and even noise), while systematically dismantling the traditional building blocks of harmony.

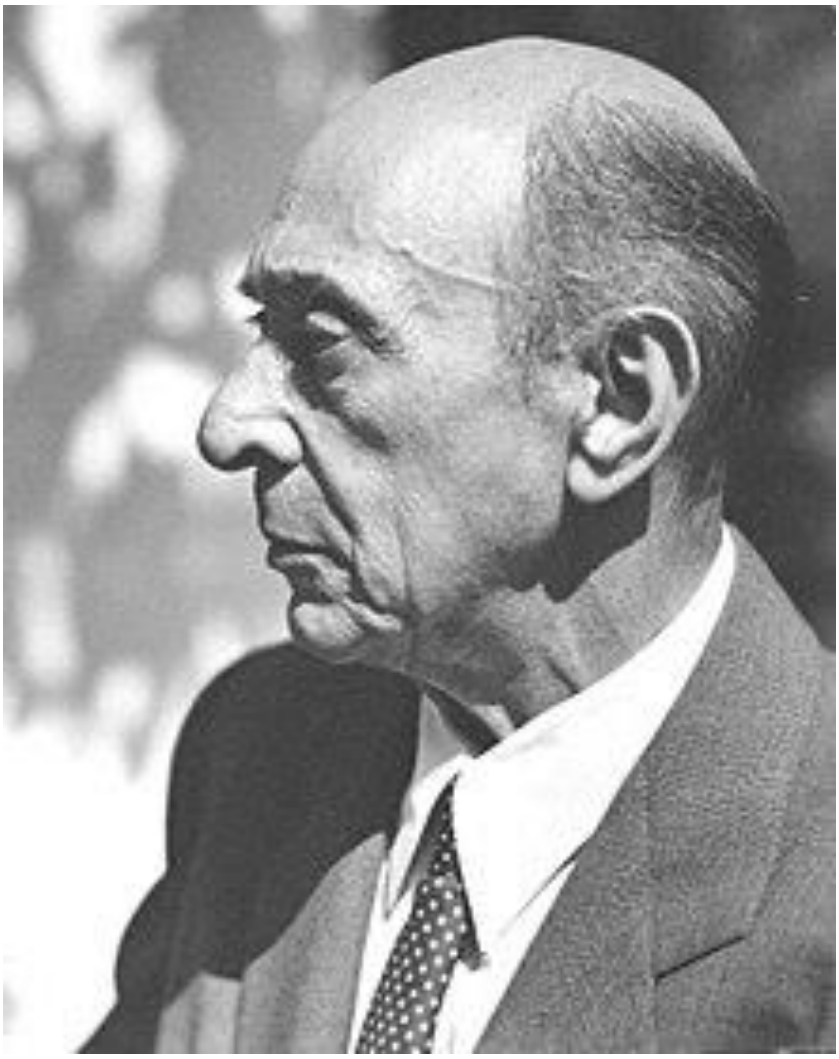

Figure 120: Arnold Schoenberg, pictured in Los Angeles in 1948; Image public domain

To understand the implications of this departure, it is important to take an historical perspective. From the time of Bach, music was constructed according to a relatively stable set of parameters, with major and minor scales dictating the pacing of melodies and chords, and rhythms providing a predictable structure around which everything might be unified, as a cohesive and listenable whole. Even as styles changed, certain elements persisted, so that music remained understandable over time. By abandoning these rules, to varying degrees, the music of the Modernists sounds (purposefully) disjointed and chaotic. To an uninitiated listener, it might be almost indistinguishable from noise and clatter.

Since harmony was no longer used as an organizational element, Modernists needed a new system to hold the music together. This emerged in the work of Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951), and his system of *atonality*, in which all twelve musical pitches are used with relative equality (rather than being placed in the hierarchy of major and minor scales).

Schoenberg replaced traditional music theory with mathematical relationships – a highly structured means for creating music that sounds extremely random. Ironically, the more chaotic music became, the more rigid its organization. Although not all composers chose to take such an extreme route, atonality was sufficiently subversive that everyone had to at least consider it, and decide where on the spectrum of dissonance they might land. Again, to a listener accustomed to popular styles, atonal music will sound mostly like noise.

While these moves may seem extreme (and they were), bear in mind that Modernists had no need to make their music "appealing" in the traditional sense. Following the model of Wagner (who ironically, was very popular), and others, the notion of audience support was seen as incompatible with the spirit of experimentalism. An adoring listener was not a valid measure of success, as would have been the case for Beethoven or Mozart; instead, composers regarded their mission to be creating new, whatever the cost. As experimentalism increased, audiences diminished, so that eventually Modernists were largely performing only for each other and their students. In the process, the common measures of musical quality – its ability to move emotions, tell a story, teach or instruct, call attention to social issues, popularity, etc. – no longer had a place within an aesthetic solely focused on forging ahead.

While there are clear and reasonable motivations for the extremes of Modernism, as has been discussed, its impact has been far-reaching and largely negative for Classical music writ large. Today, a listener raised solely on Popular styles will likely regard Classical music (which more accurately might be called "Art" music) as wholly elitist and irrelevant. It is tempting to see this as proof that Classical music is dying, but point of fact, Modernist composers pushed audiences aside at the very moment in history when recorded sound opened the door for popular consumption of music. As such, Classical music missed the boat, and Popular styles prevailed – as they continue to do today. It is not a stretch to say that Classical music was effectively a victim of its own hubris. This is an issue which continues to plague the art of music, and one which has been fervently challenged by 21st century composers (more on that later).

Nonetheless, musical cultural owes much to this movement, since many of the techniques common to popular styles are actually derived from Modernists. For example, the dissonant, ethereal noises common to horror movie soundtracks, are an echo of the Modernists' experiments with soundscapes. In 1925, American composer Henry Cowell (1897-1965) wrote *The Banshee*, a work for piano, which does not use the keyboard; instead, the player creates musical "noises" by strumming the inner strings of the instrument. An example of a similar sound in popular music can be heard in the opening to Rihanna's video for her 2008 hit song, *Disturbia.*

Figure 121: The Philips Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair 1958, where Poème électronique was performed; Image public domain.

In 1958, early sound pioneer Edgard Varèse (1883-1965) created the *Poème électronique*, a pre-recorded sampling of electronic sounds, with no live musicians present. Premiered in a pavilion at the Brussels Worlds Fair, which was especially designed for its performance, the work was characterized more as an achievement of sound technology, than music. Even so, this was the seed of a new digital age in music, starting with the noisy interludes of the Beatles' *Strawberry Fields,* or their wholly abstract soundscape, *Revolution* 9, and evolving into the many DJ's and producers whose digital music eventually took over popular culture.

If you are a fan of bands like *Coldplay*, the repetitive, pulse-inducing tracks which accompany their vocals are also related to Modernism. As a reaction against the extremes of the era, some composers moved into a style called *Minimalism*, which pares down musical elements to their most bare structures, relying on repetition and gradual variation over time. American composer and pianist Philip Glass (b. 1937) was a forerunner of this style, and continues to create music characterized by hypnotic textures

and pulsating motives today. A comparison of his *Metamorphosis* (1988) and Coldplay's 2011 hit *Clocks*, makes the similarities readily apparent.

Style Focus: Igor Stravinsky and Primitivism

Figure 122: Igor Stravinsky in an undated photo; Image public domain

On May 29, 1913, at Paris's swanky Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Russian composer Igor Stravinsky was seated in the audience for the premiere of his ballet *Le Sacre du printemps* ("The Rite of Spring"), and was shocked to find himself in the middle of what would become one of the most infamous evenings in Classical music. A seminal work in the style of *Primitivism*, the production was so jarring and disorienting that the audience broke out into shouts and jeers, and quite literally threw things at the stage. Forty members of the audience had to be removed because they could not calm down, and later accounts categorized the event as a full blown riot. Puccini called it the "work of a madman…sheer cacophony," while a local critic wrote that the night was a "laborious and puerile barbarity."[105]

Despite these early rejections, Stravinsky's *Rite* is widely considered a masterpiece of 20th century Modernism today. The German dancer Sasha Waltz, who choreographed the 100th anniversary in 2013, describes the work with a mythical quality, claiming "it conceals some ancient force, it is as if it's filled with the power of the Earth." The Finnish music director Esa-Pekka Salonen says that when he conducts Stravinsky's music, "my blood pressure is up…I have this kind of adrenaline surge."[106] How can there be such conflicting opinions about the same music, over time?

First, that riotous response was not wholly the result of negative opinions. In attendance that night were members of a loosely organized society of Modernist writers, painters, poets, and composers called *Les Apaches,* whose mission was to advocate for new and controversial works. The remaining attendees were mostly high society folks who (not surprisingly) found the spectacle offensive, and whose social prominence empowered them to loudly express their dissatisfaction. As an example, the Comtesse de Pourtalès is said to have stood up and exclaimed, "This is the first time in sixty years that anyone has dared make fun of me,"[107] to which the *Apaches* responded with raucous shouts of praise for Stravinsky's music. An eyewitness reported, "it was a war over art."[108]

For his part, Stravinsky was appalled. In his own words:

[105] (Willshear, 2013)
[106] Ibid.
[107] (Schonberg, 1997)
[108] (Van Vetchen, 1984)

> *I left the hall in a rage…and I remember slamming the door. I have never again been that angry. The music was familiar to me; I loved it, and I could not understand why people who had not yet heard it wanted to protest in advance.*[109]

What exactly caused such an extreme response? Firstly, the dancing was completely antithetical to the traditional movements of ballet, which are highly athletic, stylized, and above all, graceful. By contrast, Stravinsky's dancers were covered head to toe in heavy costumes, and mostly directed their angular movements toward the floor, with their toes and knees pointed inward so that they resembled a "row of clumsy storks," in the words of one of the dancers. Like other Modernists, the choreographer, an

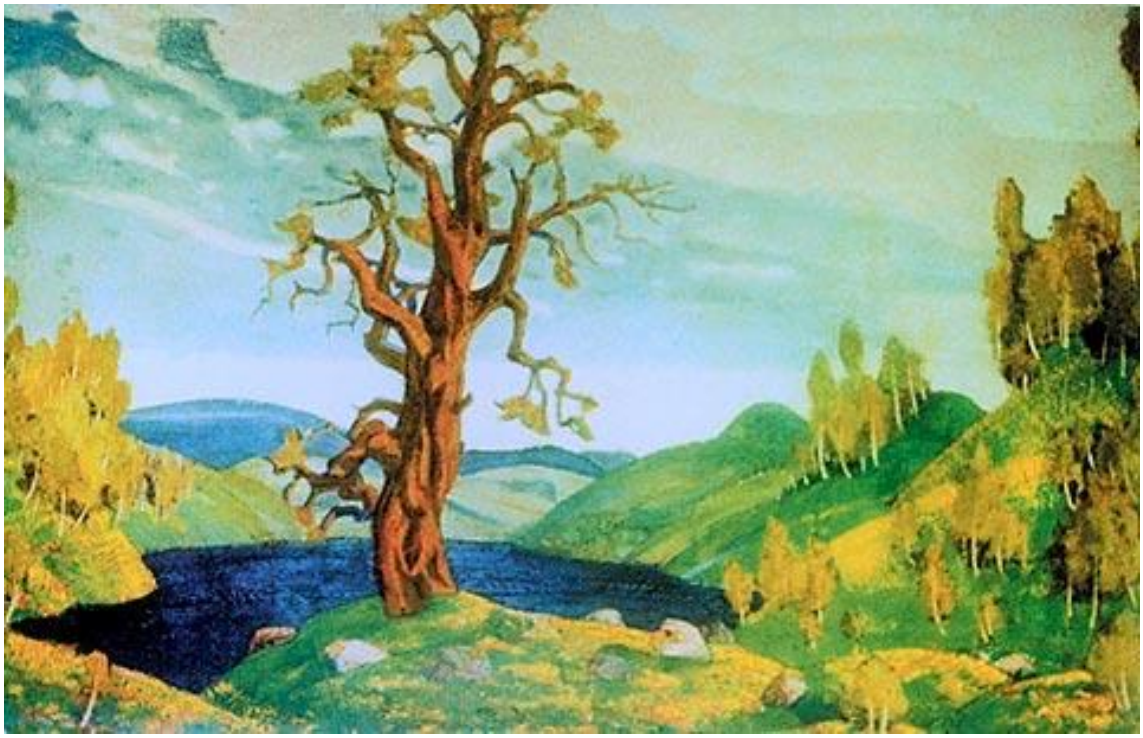

Figure 123: Concept design for act 1, part of Nicholas Roerich's designs for Diaghilev's 1913 production of Le Sacre du printemps; Image Public Domain

acclaimed Russian dancer named Vaslav Nikinsky (1888-1950), was trying to disrupt conventions, and he had certainly succeeded in that.

At the same time, Stravinsky's reputation as a Russian Nationalist pointed to the traditional stories of folktales, gods, and heroes, as was the standard of the Czar's Imperial Theater in Moscow, where his own father had been a star singer. By contrast, the narrative of *Rite of Spring* sprung from a dream, in which the composer saw a "scene of pagan ritual in which a chosen sacrificial virgin danced herself to death." After working with Nicholas Roerich, the Modernist painter charged with creating costumes and set design, the show was worked into a series of tableaus, each depicting a ritualized dance or mystical ceremony, culminating in the sacrifice of a virgin – the snapping of a young girl's neck.

[109] Ibid.

Lastly, there was Stravinsky's music itself, which is unlike anything else in all of history. It is primal and intense, with traditional melodies replaced by spastic outcries and rumbling textures, and complex, asymmetrical rhythmic patterns adding an ongoing sense of unease. Further, Stravinsky set the tone right away, with an opening bassoon solo that pushes the instrument into its extreme high range, so that it is hardly recognizable. Such a distortion of the traditional sounds of the orchestra would have been a shock to that 1913 audience.

PARISIANS HISS NEW BALLET

Russian Dancer's Latest Offering, "The Consecration of Spring," a Failure.

HAS TO TURN UP LIGHTS

Manager of Theatre Takes This Means to Stop Hostile Demonstrations as Dance Goes On.

By Marconi Transatlantic Wireless Telegraph to The New York Times.

PARIS, June 7.—"Bluffing the idle

Figure 124: The New York Times reported the sensational Rite premiere, nine days after the event; Image Public Domain

From there, the music only gets wilder. The introduction sounds like primordial ooze, slowly bubbling out of the ground, as woodwinds and strings interject sudden, disjunct hoots and hollers, all of which build to the first tableau – *Dance of the Adolescents.*

At this point in the piece, the music becomes nothing short of shocking, as Stravinsky creates an effect never heard before (or after) from a symphony orchestra. The strings repeat a single, dissonant, accented, forte chord a total of seventy-two times (with a short interlude), as explosive accents burst forth in seemingly random patterns from a massive section of eight French horns. The rhythmic effect blurs any sense of regular meter, so is in itself disorienting, while the tone color of the horns sounds something like the barking of a wild animal. At the premiere, this is the moment when Stravinsky found himself backstage, supporting Nijinsky by the coattails as he leaned out over the stage, shouting counts to the dancers, who could no longer hear the orchestra over the clamor of the audience.

Although Stravinsky was angry about the ordeal, the disruption he created was a rallying cry for the Modernists, and he became a veritable hero to the entire movement. Echoes of his innovative and provocative techniques can be heard in the music of many other composers, including fellow Russian Sergei Prokofiev, Hungarian Bela Bartok, and Frenchman Darius Milhaud (showing the international prominence of his work). He was so impactful, in fact, that there were jealous tirades even from friends, like the Impressionist Claude Debussy, who (humorously) called Stravinsky a "spoiled child" and a

"young barbarian who wears flashy ties."[110] Interestingly, for his part, Stravinsky described Debussy as an inspiration.

Figure 125: Dancers in Nicholas Roerich's original costumes. From left, Julitska, Marie Rambert, Jejerska, Boni, Boniecka, Faithful; Image Pubic Domain

Where did Stravinsky devise his notion of *Primitivism*? What inspired him to bend and distort the tone colors of the symphony orchestra into wild-sounding outbursts, and to create a piece that essentially sounds like a spastic, wild party?

Although it had not yet been applied to music, Primitivism was already well-established in the visual arts. In 1890, the French painter Paul Gaugin (1848-1903) traveled to Tahiti, bent on escaping the trappings of European society, and "everything that is artificial and conventional."[111] The impulse to retreat from modern life was related to Romanticism, but its basic tenet – that society had failed to meet the needs of humankind – was a match for the nihilism of Modernism. At the same time, Europeans were for the first time discovering the native art of Africa, the Americas, and Micronesia, and the alternative cultures these images portrayed became a source of fascination. Gaugin's portraits of unapologetic Polynesian nudes were a statement against the formality with which human expression had been historically treated in Europe, and became the seminal works in the Primitivism movement.

Stravinsky was only eight years old when Gaugin made his exodus, and had yet to display much of the brilliance that would later characterize his work. His father was a musician, of course, so music was ever-present in the household and prominent singers visited regularly. Even so, young Igor did little

[110] (Schonberg, 1997)
[111] (Paul-gaugin.net, 2017)

more than take piano lessons and play around with a few compositional sketches. He entered law school, where he remained until the age of twenty-three, when he had the good fortune to meet the famous Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1804-1908), who took him as a pupil. Perhaps Stravinsky's status as a late bloomer helped him to become an iconoclast in the musical world.

From there, Stravinsky caught the attention of Serge Diaghilev, a visionary producer who was committed to furthering Russian art around the world, and especially in the cosmopolitan city of Paris. His *Ballet Russe*, a French-based company that Diaghilev both funded and managed, showcased Russian ballet for an international audience. A mainstay in the city, the company regularly featured *avant-garde* (*cutting-edge, experimental works*) by some of the most prominent composers of the day. Although he was only twenty-eight and had a mere five years of formal study behind him, something about Stravinsky's music appealed to Diaghilev (who was famous for spotting talent), and he commissioned the music that would ultimately make the composer famous.

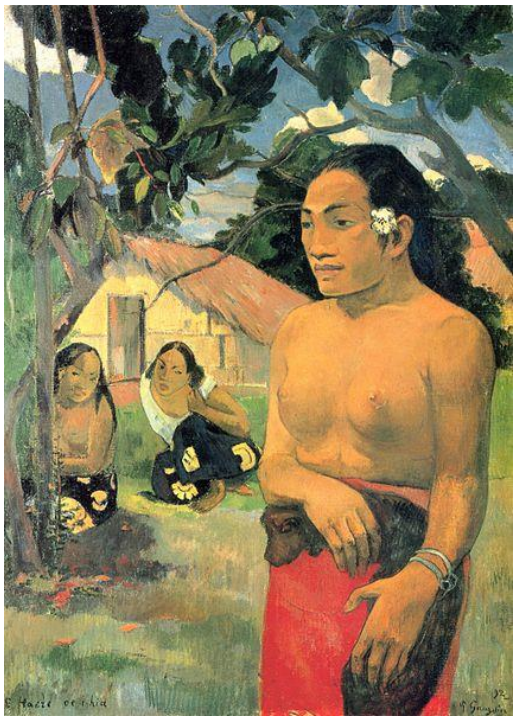

Figure 126: "Where are you going?" Paul Gaugin, 1892; Image Public Domain

Despite Primitivism's iterations in visual art, there seemed no realistic way to translate its wildness into music. The origins of Stravinsky's choice to attack the style on such a grand scale is not fully known (he only publicly referenced the dream), and we can't trace its development in any of his other works, since he never composed anything else like it. It is a unique quality of Stravinsky's that we was able to successfully change styles many times. After his success with Diaghilev – there were two other ballets, *Firebird* (1910) and *Petrushka* (1911) – he moved away from massive scores and explored instead small ensembles in the style of Neo-Classicism, a movement which combines the clarity of Enlightenment composers with the experimentalism of Modernism. Late in his career, he even tried out some of the atonality of Schoenberg. For these reasons, he has aptly been referred to as "The Chameleon."[112]

Of course, from the perspective of history, the 20th-century eventually got much more shocking, so that Stravinsky now feels tame, by comparison. This gives contemporary listeners the ability to appreciate *Rite of Spring* as a monumental, experimental work, without being as offended by its abstractions, as were some of the members of the 1913 audience. All the same, Stravinsky's music has stood the test of time well, and even today conveys a level of frantic energy that is rarely, if ever, heard in such a formal place as a symphony orchestra concert.

[112] (Schonberg, 1997)

Figure 127: Stravinsky, as sketched by Pablo Picasso, 1920; Image in Public Domain

As a postlude, there is an interesting pop culture tidbit about Stravinsky. Back in 1975, when an Australian musician named Peter Vogel developed the world's first digital music sampler, the Fairlight CMI, he fortuitously had a recording of Stravinsky's *Firebird* on hand in his studio. As he was experimenting with various sounds, he sampled a one-second clip from the album – the iconic, accented chord which opens the *Infernal Dance*. He labeled it "Orchestral Hit," and saved it to the default files on the sampler.

From there, the sample was eventually distributed to hundreds of musicians and producers, and eventually became one of the most used of all time. It was so ubiquitous in the music of the 1980's that the very sound of it instantly evokes that era, as evidenced by Bruno Mars' reference to it in his 2016 throwback hit, *Finesse.* Stravinsky's chord also appears in music by Janet Jackson, Madonna, Brittany Spears, 50 Cent, Lady Gaga, Lil Wayne, and hundreds of others.[113]

[113] For a more detailed discussion of Stravinsky's "Orchestral Hit," see the Vox Media video, "The sound that connects Stravinsky to Bruno Mars," available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8A1Aj1_EF9Y

Musical Snapshot: *Rite of Spring* (1913)

1. **Genre**: Ballet
2. **Composer**: Igor Stravinsky
3. **Time Period**: Modernism (Early 20th Century)
4. **Style**: Primitivism
5. **Instrumentation**: Symphony orchestra (experimental use of tone color: Extreme range, percussive use of strings, emphasis on brass and percussion)
    a. Woodwinds: 1 piccolo, 3 flutes, 1 alto flute, 4 oboes, 1 English horn, 4 clarinets, 1 bass clarinet, 4 bassoons, 1 contrabassoon
    b. Brass: 8 horns, 5 trumpets, 3 trombones, 2 tubas
    c. Percussion: 5 timpani (requiring two players), bass drum, tam-tam, triangle, tambourine, cymbals, güiro
    d. Strings: Violins, Violas, Cellos, Double basses (string parts extensively doubled)
6. **Orchestration:** Non-traditional instruments used as soloists (bassoon, bass drum, bass clarinet); Melodic ideas rapidly shift between different instruments
7. **Melody**: Derived from Russian folk songs, heard in short fragments
8. **Rhythm**: Highly complex and syncopated; Use of ostinatos (repeating rhythmic patterns); Mixed meter (beat groupings change abruptly; meter is uneven)

Summary of story:
Subtitled "Scenes of Pagan Russia," Rite of Spring is a collection of tableaux (scenes), rather than a director narrative, or plot. The ballet depicts pre-Christian Russian tribes, who have gathered for collective rituals and ceremonies, culminating in a virgin dancing herself to death.

Excerpt: *Introduction*, from Part I: *Adoration of the Earth*

What to listen for	Reflection
Opening Bassoon solo	• *Monophonic, until a solo horn and clarinets join – then polyphonic* • *Tune is based on a Russian folksong* • *What is unique about the range of this solo?* • *Rhythms are asymmetrical and unpredictable* • *Listen for the meter. Can you find a beat? Is it difficult?*
Instrumentation	• *Listen to how many different instruments are featured* • *How many can you identify?* • *Do any instruments sound different than you are used to hearing them?*
Texture and Orchestration	• *Notice how the melody shifts between different instruments* • *Try to focus in on just one instrument and see if you can follow its rhythms, as compared to other things that are happening. Do you think this music would be easy to perform?*
Tone Color	• *When the bassoon solo returns at the end, listen for the strings* • *You'll hear a technique called pizzicato, in which the players pluck instead of bow the strings, and harmonics, in which the players produce extremely high notes by enticing sympathetic vibrations on the strings*

Suggested recording: The London Symphony Orchestra, Sir Simon Rattle, Conducting, Oct. 2, 2017; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EkwqPJZe8ms

LESSON 15: POSTMODERNISM

As Modernism progressed, a primary feature was an attention the formal elements of music (melody, rhythm, harmony, etc), as having aesthetic value in their own right, absent of the need for external meaning or the communication of an idea. Essentially, the goal was to craft musical elements for their own its own sake, rather than in service of a specific expressive endpoint. Over time, these experiments gave birth to, among other things, *Minimalism*, which then served as a bridge between *Modernism*, and its successor – *Postmodernism.*

Figure 128: Image courtest of distillated, Flickr

Although there were several composers involved in the earlier iterations of the style, Terry Riley (b. 1935) and his improvisatory work *In C* (1964) is likely the best known, and foreshadows many of the characteristics which would later be fundamental to *Minimalism. In C* can be performed by any number of instruments, with each player repeating the same series of short, fragmented rhythmic/melodic "cells" at will, so that no two performances will turn out exactly alike. The texture is held together by a pulsing note (C – usually played by a piano), which continues, unending. Riley constructed the repeated material so that dissonance increases (and then recedes) between players over time, even though the process of change is too incremental to be consciously observed (using a recorded track to compare different moments in the music will help). Although still highly experimental in scope, the music was *listenable*, and very much so – Minimalism gained a lot of momentum, and became a popular crossover between art and pop.

Riley's own career reflects the cultural direction at this point in history, and highlights the reasons why Modernism began to fade. Following his studies at the University of California Berkeley in the 1960's, he went on to successfully collaborate with artists in a wide range of styles, including jazz trumpeter Chet Baker, North Indian Raga Vocalist Pandit Pran Nath, and the Kronos Quartet – one of the most successful Classical string quartets of all time. Riley's ability to mix genres and to interact with other musicians on

a world stage was a side effect of the globalism that increased in the last half of the 20th century. In short, the world got a lot smaller, and music became less compartmentalized.

Culturally, this shift coincides with the Civil Rights Movement, which put in stark relief the racism that had plagued the United States for generations. In particular, new voices were calling into question the very notion of "race," by categorizing it as a social construct, and directly contradicting the age-old (and scientifically unfounded) argument that people of color are biologically inferior. Over time, these perspectives chipped away at old stereotypes, a process which continues today.

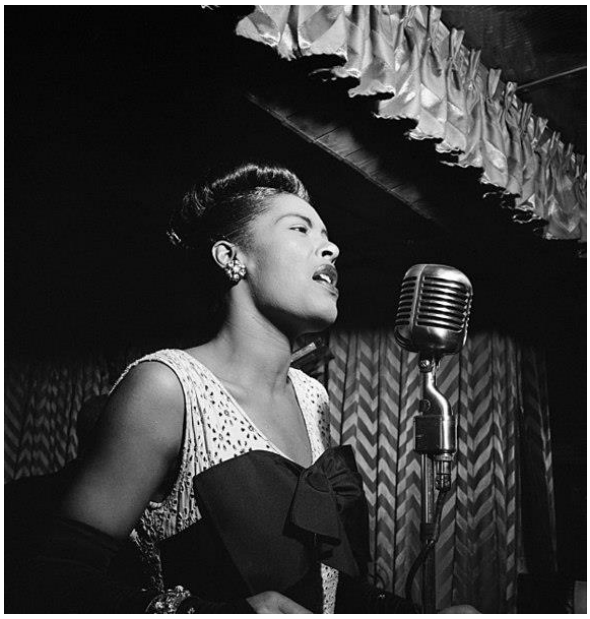

Figure 129: Singer Billie Holiday in 1947; Photo by William P. Gottlieb / Public domain

Writers like Gloria Jean Watkins (who wrote under the pen name bell hooks) connected the dots between economics, capitalism, gender, and ethnicity, and the ways in which social norms can lead to systemic oppression of minorities. Such ideas became the rallying cry of a generation of social activists, and fueled movements that continue to the present day. In the quote below, she highlights the limitations of a Modernist mindset.

> *To live fixated on the future is to engage in psychological denial. It is a form of psychic violence that prepares us to accept the violence needed to ensure the maintenance of imperialist, future-oriented society.*[114]

This sentiment is reflective of broader cultural shifts in the mid 20th century; namely, that Modernism had failed to address the evolving social issues of the period, so that "art" no longer felt relevant. It had failed to speak for or to the people, at a time when it was needed most. Simultaneous to the this downfall, popular culture had emerged as a source of inspiration, with many songs echoing the cries of social justice leaders.

Such "protest songs" had their genesis in *Strange Fruit,* written by Abel Meeropol, and recorded in 1939 by the jazz vocalist Billie Holiday. It was so significant that Ahmet Ertegun, co-founder and president of Atlantic Records, called the song "the beginning of the civil rights movement."[115] The words confront racism head on, and protest the lynching of black Americans, which were still very much happening in the South. It is so moving and powerful, that it is fully worth reviewing the words here:

> *Southern trees bear a strange fruit,*
> *Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,*
> *Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,*
> *Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.*
>
> *Pastoral scene of the gallant South,*

[114] (Hooks, 2020)
[115] (Margolick, 2000)

The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolia sweet and fresh,
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!

Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for a tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

In the meantime, there were plenty of Classical composers still tinkering with the esoteric details of form and tonality, and arguing amongst themselves about who was right. It is easy to see how they would have been regarded as wholly out-of-touch.

That is how Classical music found itself in a mounting crisis. Modernism's mission (to deconstruct music) had succeeded, and by the mid 20th-century most concerts could be described as a "museum" of sorts, mostly featuring long-dead composers, and ignoring modern styles. While a composer might be fortunate to gain a commission to write something new, subsequent performances were rare, since Classical music societies were likely to favor the old standards that audiences wanted to hear.

This forced musicians to look *backwards* as a means of self-assessment, and revisit Classical giants like Bach and Mozart, while also taking a critical look at the experimental techniques of Schoenberg and his followers, who (while intellectually stimulating) had driven audiences away. It was time to break out of the isolation and elitism that Modernism had built around Classical music.

Figure 130: The Sony Buildig in New York City; David Shankbone; cropped by Beyond My Ken (talk) 13:28, 30 January 2011 (UTC) / CC BY-SA (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

Similar developments were evolving across all the arts, with architecture offering some notable examples. For example, the aesthetics of the Sony Building in New York City (formerly the AT&T Building), created by Philip Johnson, combines traditional elements like columns and arches, with the stark lines and concrete of Modernism. This *mixing of styles*, or *fusion*, became a calling card of Postmodernism. It directly contradicts Modernism, which views art as progressing in only one direction – forward. Postmodernists were willing to take meaning where they could find it, even if that meant looking to the past, and drawing on diverse influences.

This points to another core feature of Postmodernism – *relativity*. Whereas Modernists viewed their radical works as something like a sacred object, possessing its own absolute value and truth, Postmodernists felt compelled to build relevance and value, particularly by connecting art to a

meaningful context. From a Postmodern perspective, context is meaning, and art cannot be created without it. Alternative viewpoints, multiculturalism, mixing elements, and using art to reveal something provocative or meaningful to a specific group or identity are all a part of Postmodernism.

Figure 132: A Banksy mural in England; Image courtesy of seanbjack, Flickr

The emergence of *Street Art* in the 1980's offers a great example of the Postmodern love for alternative perspectives. To a Modernist, art could only be created by an "artist," which implies an exclusive level of training, education, and ultimately, control. By contrast, the appearance of underground art, mostly in the form of graffiti, shined a light on significant social issues, while evolving into a serious genre in its own right. Mostly famously, the British renegade artist Banksy, whose identity remains unknown today, has created satirical and humorous images since the 1990's, and has inhabited street and gallery spaces in almost equal measure.

Similarly, The Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous group of feminist artists, used street art to communicate disruptive messages challenging the status quo of art as predominantly male. Starting in the 1980's, they designed and purchased billboards in New York and Los Angeles depicting their signature image – women's bodies topped with gorilla heads – accompanied by statements on the exclusion of females from significant cultural institutions. They have also organized protest events, such as an attack on the Guggenheim Museum, during which members plastered provocative stickers all over the bathrooms.

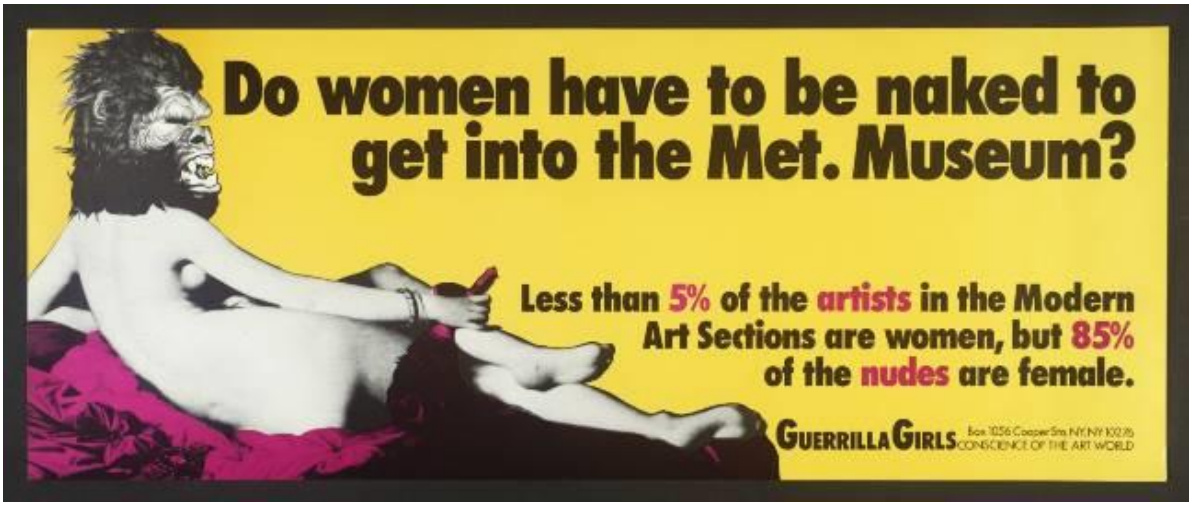

Figure 131: A New York Billboard from the Guerilla Girls; Image courtesy of CG Dibujo, Flickr

Taken collectively, Postmodernism, which literally means “after-Modernism,” is a reaction against the absolutes of the previous era, and a move toward globalism and multi-culturalism. See the chart below for a comparison of the two perspectives.

MODERNISM **POSTMODERNISM**

Early 20th Century	Late 20th Century to today
Art is an absolute object	Art is a subjective experience
“Art for art’s sake”	Art should be relevant
Artists separate into “-isms” (separate schools of thought)	Artists deliberately combine many styles
Often meant to shock, or even ridicule, the audience	Meant to draw audiences in
Focus is on the artist’s perspective and purpose	Focus is on the audience/listener’s experience
Progress and novelty	Multiculturalism and inclusion
Embraces absolute truths	Asks if absolutes are true
Emphasizes form and structure	Explores form and structure

These philosophies have impacted all aspects of life in the 20th-21st centuries, and continue comingle in society today.

Which of the quotes below are most true for you?

“Great works of art are the height of human achievement”	“Beauty is in the eye of the beholder”
“Expert opinions are the most valuable”	“Everyone is entitled to their opinion”
“That behavior is morally wrong”	“Put yourself in someone else’s shoes”

Composer Focus: The Musical and Leonard Bernstein

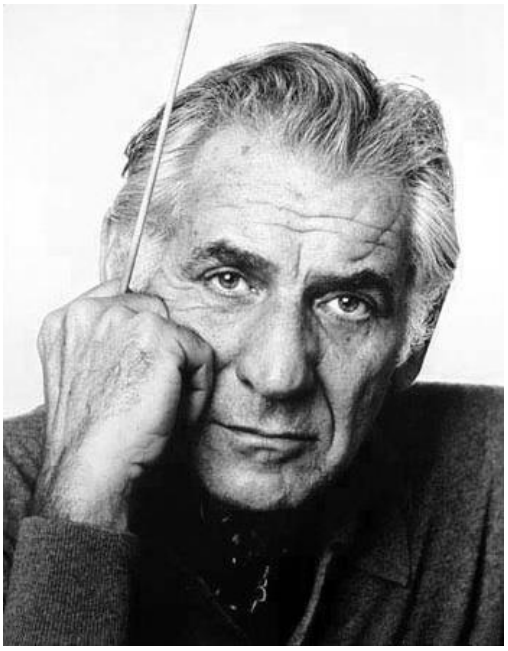

Figure 133: Leonard Bernstein; Photo credit: Jack Mitchell / CC BY-SA

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) is one of the most beloved and successful composers and conductors in American history. He became an overnight sensation at the age of twenty-five, when he stepped in at the last minute to conduct the New York Philharmonic in a coast-to-coast television broadcast. The scheduled guest, sixty-seven-year-old German conductor Bruno Walter, had fallen ill only a few hours prior, giving Bernstein virtually no time to prepare. Nonetheless, he did a spectacular job. Not only was he a magnificent conductor, but he was young, charismatic, and American – a fresh face for the flagship orchestra, which was usually conducted by Europeans.

Bernstein went on to become the first American to hold the position of Music Director in New York, and he spent a career on television, eventually becoming a household name. He was classically trained, having studied music at Harvard with the eminent Modernist Walter Piston, but as a composer, he became one of the first (and certainly the most impactful) to successfully combine Classical and Popular styles. His greatest triumphs were on Broadway, where he was able to deliver social commentary, musical complexity, tuneful melodies, and driving dance rhythms in equal measure. Using the authentically homegrown genre of musical theater, he crafted a voice for late 20th century American music that truly resonated with audiences.

By far, his most famous work is the 1957 musical, *West Side Story*[116]. After a well-received premiere, the show ran for 732 performances on Broadway, then went on to a US tour and productions in the UK, where it was performed 1,039 times between 1958 and 1960. The iconic film version was released in 1961, and won a whopping ten Academy Awards, launching the story and its music to an even wider audience. *West Side Story* went on to Broadway revivals in 1980, 2009 (with the addition of Spanish translations by the Lin-Manuel Miranda), and 2020 (although that production had to be suspended due to the COVID-19 quarantine).

A modern-day adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the story shines a light on contemporary issues of inner-city violence, and its impact on the youth living there. Replacing the Capulets and the Montagues with rival gangs, the story centers on the love between Maria, whose family is Puerto Rican, and Tony, who is white. Unlike the tragic ending of Shakespeare's story, the couple is not united in death; instead, Tony is killed, and Maria lives on, harshly chastising both gangs for their violence and hatred. Despite its tragic ending, the show is full of exuberant dances and moving love songs, so that the audience is easily swept up in the full spectrum of a dynamic and complicated human story.

[116] Suggested supplement to this section, Howard Goodall's Twentieth Century Greats: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y3KAhq_vHmQ&t=160s

Musical Snapshot: *West Side Story* (1957)

1. **Genre**: Musical
2. **Composer**: Leonard Bernstein
3. **Time Period**: Modernism (Early 20th Century)
4. **Style**: Postmodernism (Combines elements of popular music, Latin, Jazz, Jewish sacred music, and Classical)
5. **Melody**: The tritone (an interval that sounds unresolved) is used throughout (except in "Somewhere"); Resembles sound of the Jewish shofar (a sacred wind instrument)
6. **Rhythm**: Draws on Latin dances, such as the Mambo (Cuban) and Huapango (Mexican)
7. **Texture**: Often complex, polyphonic
8. **Instrumentation**: Reflects Latin influence, with heavy brass and percussion
9. **Primary characters**: The Jets: Riff (the leader), Tony (Riff's best friend); The Sharks, Bernardo (the leader), Chino (Bernardo's best friend), Maria (Bernardo's sister), Anita (Bernardo's girlfriend; Maria's friend)
10. **Plot Summary**: Retelling of Romeo and Juliet, with modern (in the 1950's) characters

Rival teenage gangs – the Sharks (Puerto Rican Americans) and the Jets (White Americans) – battle for control of the streets in a New York City neighborhood. After a confrontation, a rumble (street fight) is planned. The gangs intimidate each other at a dance; meanwhile, Tony and Maria see each other for the first time and have an immediate attraction. Bernardo angrily pulls them apart. Tony later finds Maria's building, and calls to her through the window (mirroring the famous scene in Romeo and Juliet). They profess their love; later, the couple meets at the bridal shop and talks of their dreams, including marriage.

Maria tells Tony that he must stop the rumble. When he arrives, the fighting is already underway, and his attempts to intervene only result in Bernardo having a clear shot at Riff, which he takes. Riff is killed. In a fit of rage, Tony kills Bernardo. Tony runs away and finds Maria, who is first angry, but realizes that she still loves Tony. The couple agrees to run away and make plans to meet later that evening. Chino gets a gun and goes on the hunt for Tony. When Maria is questioned by the police, she begs Anita to find Tony and tell him to wait. Unfortunately, Anita encounters the Jets instead, who taunt her with racial slurs and try to rape her. Furious, Anita tells the Jets that Maria has been killed by Chino.

The lie reaches Tony. Believing he has nothing left to live for, he comes out of hiding and goes in search of Chino. Instead, he finds Maria, but before the couple can reach each other, Chino shoots Tony, who then dies in Maria's arms. The gangs begin to descend on each other again, but Maria grabs Chino's gun and says, "Now I can kill too, because now I have hate!" Finally realizing what they have done, the gangs have a moment of solidarity, and carry Tony's body away, followed by Maria.

Suggested Performance: Mambo scene from the film, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aenJ5V43Xvk

The concept for a modern take on Shakespeare was suggested by its choreographer, Jerome Ribbons (1918-1998). As such, the show is dance-centric, combining modern techniques with Latin styles, and Bernstein's music is colored by driving rhythms throughout. Originally, the concept was *East Side Story*, focused on Jewish and Italian immigrants; however, when stories of gang violence reached the news in the late 1950's, the creative team seized on the relevance of the issue, and the story took shape. This gave Bernstein an incredible opportunity to explore Latin music, which would ultimately become a signature feature of the show. With its new storyline, Steven Sondheim (b. 1954), who would go on to become one of the most successful Broadway lyricists in history, joined the team.

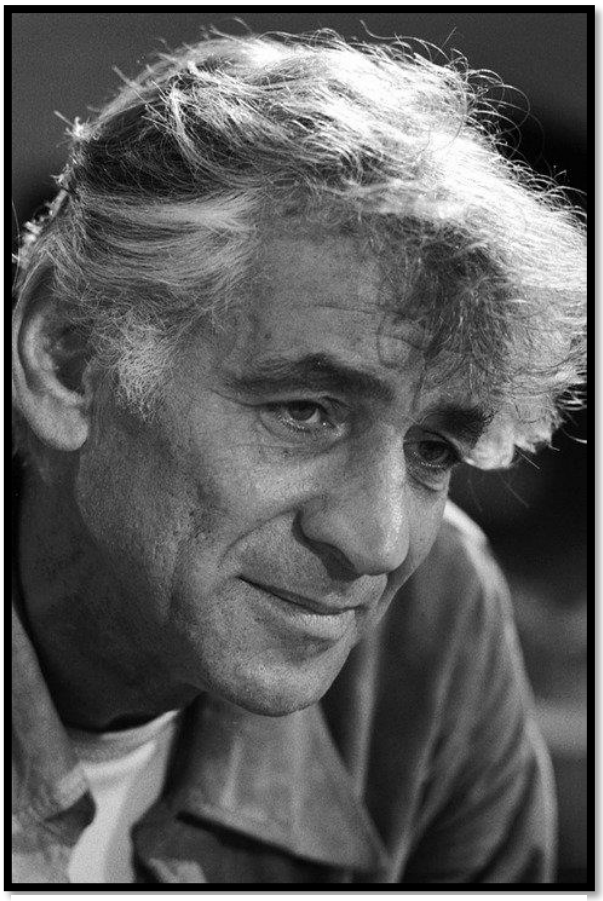

Figure 134: Leonard Bernstein; Image Public Domain

There is no question that the success of the show hinges on Bernstein's expertise in balancing its multi-cultural elements. There was some precedent for honing in on a specific cultural tradition through musical theater, but previous attempts lacked the depth of *West Side Story*, and mostly played in stereotypes.

For example, the composer/lyricist team of Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein had already enjoyed unprecedented success with *Oklahoma!* (1943), a show evoking the tranquil spirit of American rural life; however, its subject is overly idealized, the plot failed to address relevant social issues (the Tulsa Race Massacre had occurred in Oklahoma only ten years prior), and musically, there is no connection to the folk music which would have been connected to the people it portrays. By contrast, Bernstein embraced his source material, crafting music that is a true collaboration of Jazz, Popular, Classical, and Latin styles.

West Side Story is a musical, meaning it is dramatic play, with songs appearing at key emotional turning points in the story. This is unique from an opera, which is generally sung throughout. In addition, operas are based in Classical music, whereas musicals draw on popular styles. Even so, Bernstein's treatment of musical theater is innovative, since his training allowed him to meaningfully combine Classical and Popular idioms. For example, in the song *Tonight*, Bernstein masterfully scores a quintet of opposing forces into a cohesive ensemble, pitting voices against each other in a complex musical texture, and bringing the number to an exciting, ensemble conclusion. As the gangs prepare to rumble, Anita looks forward to a rendezvous with Bernardo, and Tony and Maria sing of their love – all of these storylines intermingle in the number, showing the chaos of conflicting perspectives. It is a powerful moment, and one which rivals the complexity of any opera.

Similarly, Bernstein cleverly employs musical symbolism to imbed a sense of foreboding and conflict throughout the show – a level of drama uncommon on Broadway. Although not notated in the score, the 1961 film version of the show opens in silence, which is broken by the ominous whistle of a single voice, sounding a three-note motif based on an interval called the *tritone.*

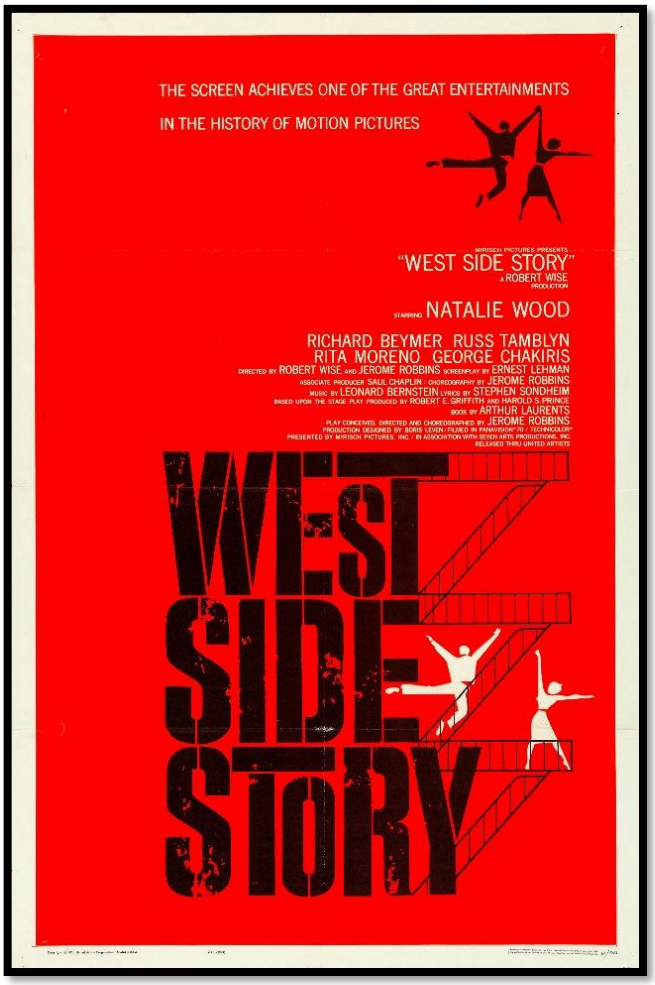

Figure 135: 1961 film poster; Public Domain

Sufficiently dissonant to be called the "Devil's interval" in the Medieval period, the tritone is both disjunct, and very unstable, meaning it feels unsettled and unresolved. From this opening (and whether the whistle is included or not), the interval permeates virtually every number in the show, save one: *Somewhere*, Tony and Maria's fantasy of a place without hate. In essence, the interval is virtually a plot character, constantly working against love. Its ever-presence is undeniable, and gives the overall show an edgy, unsettling feeling, so that the ending tragedy easily feels unavoidable.

Interestingly, the use of the tritone seems to have been inspired by Bernstein's faith, as it is almost indistinguishable from the calls of the *shofar*, a wind instrument which symbolizes the voice of God in Jewish services. The connection could have been a product of the show's early concept, but more likely, it is the personal mark of the composer. Bernstein was the son of Ukrainian-Jewish immigrants, and often cited his early experiences hearing music at his synagogue as being the inspiration for his career. This would have been all the more affecting, since the composer was only twenty-one at the start of World War II and would have witnessed news of its atrocities. Faith was a core feature of the composer's life, and he went on to write many works based on Hebrew texts.

It has also been suggested that Bernstein related to being stereotyped and marginalized, so that the plight of immigrants in New York would have resonated with him. As critic David Denby describes:

> *Bernstein, one might say, liberated the Jewish body from the constraints felt by the immigrant generation, including his father, Sam, who relinquished his severe, stiff-collar demeanor only when celebrating the High Holidays...*

This "liberation" would have been two-fold for Bernstein, as Denby also recounts:

As a young man, Leonard Bernstein was prodigiously gifted and exceptionally handsome, and he slept with many men and with women, too. He seemed to be omnisexual, a man of unending appetite who worked and played all day and most of the night, with a motor that would not shut down until he was near collapse. Conducting, composing for the concert hall, composing for the theatre, playing the piano, teaching, writing about music, talking about it on television, suffering over everything he wasn't doing—he burned the candle from the middle out. From the nineteen-forties into the eighties, he was everywhere, an intellectual American Adonis, our genius—erudite, popular, media-wise, and unstoppably fluent. Many people long to be at the center of attention; Leonard Bernstein was actually good at the center—he routinely gave more than he received.[117]

Figure 136: Figure 98: Members of the Rose-Hulman Drama Club in a scene from West Side Story, 2018; Image used with permission from Hatfield Hall, Flickr

Bernstein married the Chilean actress Felicia Montealegre in 1951, and the couple had three children, but he struggled with his attraction to men throughout his life, and the relationship was strained. Although they meticulously kept the truth from their children, a letter was found long after the couple's passing, explaining that both had been aware of Bernstein's sexuality before marrying each other. Since Lenny's exploits were a matter of public gossip, news of extramarital relationships reached and confused his children throughout their formative years. In particular, his daughter Jaime has spoken publicly of her struggles in reconciling her father's sexuality, and the lies it ultimately caused him to tell. She recounts:

[117] (Denby, 2018)

> *My brother and I were kind of going through the process of understanding it together, but as often happens in families, these things are hard to talk about: People didn't quite have the words to talk about bisexual parents. Now, that's a conversation you can have. In those days it was all very muffled. So we didn't sit down and talk about it exactly, but we kind of eased into a mutual understanding that this thing was going on around us.*

As hard as her experiences were, in the end, she expresses empathy for her father, saying:

> *He was in such dire emotional conflict all the time — about his wife and about his sexuality. He didn't talk about it, but I know that it must have been something he really suffered over. I think he suffered over the fact that his marriage and his family were not enough, that there was something else he needed that he couldn't get there. That was very hard for him, and he didn't want it to be true. But it was.*[118]

If Bernstein suffered under the weight of repressing parts of himself, his music may have served as an outlet, since it is marked by bursts of energy and emotion. The Latin dance numbers in *West Side* Story are a testament to that, providing a joyous contrast to the emotional intensity of the plot. One of the most famous, the *Mambo*, is a raucous, syncopated, exuberant celebration of movement, which simultaneously serves to intensify the tension between the two gangs. Derived from Cuba, the Mambo was a popular song-form in 1950's America, but Bernstein's treatment takes the basic formula to new heights. Driving percussion, screaming trumpets, and a thick texture of opposing rhythmic patterns brings this number to an emotional peak, just before Tony and Maria share their first, fateful glances of love.

America, one of the signature songs of the show, likewise draws on multicultural influences. Again, Bernstein's construction is wholly individual, but is clearly inspired by Latin music – in this case, a mixed-meter rhythmic pattern combining beat groupings of two and three derived from the *huapango*, a Mexican folk dance. This gives the music an uneven pulse, creating an energy and drive that is wholly infectious. Although allegedly a song about the wonders of living in America, Sondheim's words are sardonic, so that Bernstein's use of Latin rhythms lends an ironic tone to a confrontation of stereotypes. The song is at times humorous:

> *Buying on credit is so nice,*
> *One look at us, and they charge twice.*
> *I have my own washing machine,*
> *What will you have, though, to keep clean?*

But other moments are straightforward, and biting with social commentary:

> *Life can be bright in America,*

[118] (Huizenga, 2018)

If you can fight in America.
Life is all right in America,
If you're all-white in America.

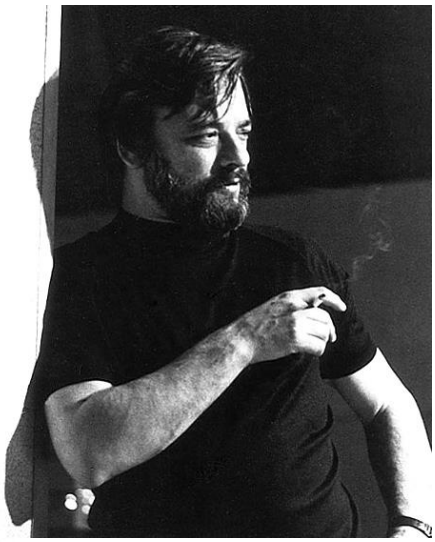

Figure 137: Steven Sondheim in 1976; Image Public Domain

Bringing these ideas to life in music was Bernstein's driving goal, and it is what made *West Side Story* so impactful. When choreographer Gerome Robbins pitched the idea to the composer way back in 1949, Bernstein was intrigued by the ability of music to express such a compelling story. In his own words:

> *Jerry R. called today with a noble idea: a modern version of Romeo and Juliet…But it's all much less important than the bigger idea of making a musical that tells a tragic story in musical-comedy terms, using only musical-comedy techniques, never falling into the "operatic" trap. Can it succeed? It hasn't yet in our country. I'm excited. If it can work—it's the first.*[119]

Clearly he was aware that wider audiences had rejected opera by this time, but was not dejected by that thought; instead, he was motivated to create something that would be both accessible and meaningful. Not only was he successful, but he ultimately became both beloved and renowned, a true mascot for American music. For all his complexities as a person, he was masterful at bringing unity to a range of perspectives, and this is certainly his greatest legacy.

In the end, he is remembered and celebrated for his steadfast commitment to peace and acceptance. In 2015, when riots broke out in Baltimore, in response to the killing of twenty-five year old Freddie Gray, a black man in police custody, one-time Bernstein student and then conductor of the Baltimore Symphony, Marin Alsop, a took her ensemble outside to play for the city, citing Bernstein's most famous quote:

> ***This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.***[120]

And that seems like a great thought on which to end our journey through the history of Classical music.

[119] (Huscher, No date)
[120] (Lessner, 2018)

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