

The History of Classical Music – The 6 Eras.

Classical musical works and their composers are usually described as belonging to a specific era or time. **Bach** wrote "Baroque" music. Another composer **Chopin** was a "Romantic" composer.

There are six eras of music: Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and 20th Century. We will learn about the composers of these periods. We will also explore how musical style changed from era to era.

Eras of European Music

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|------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Middle Ages: | 500 – 1400 AD |
| 2. Renaissance Period: | 1400 – 1600 AD |
| 3. Baroque Period: | 1600 – 1750 AD |
| 4. Classical Period: | 1750 – 1825 AD |
| 5. Romantic Period: | 1825 – 1900 AD |
| 6. Modern Period: | 1900 – 1950 AD |

1. Middle Ages Era (500 – 1400 AD): What was happening in the world?

The Dark Ages

The Middle Ages era represents almost a thousand years of the music history of Europe. Much of the music of this time has been lost. This period is also called the **Medieval period** and the **Dark Ages**. Many people died of disease during this period. It was a dark time in history. There was lots of ignorance, sickness, and death.

Most of the composers of this time are **anonymous**. That means we don't know who they are. They didn't sign their work. They were told it would make God unhappy if they took credit for what they created.



- **The spread of Christianity**

The Christian religion was the official religion of the Roman Empire.



- **The Beginning of a European culture**

The Roman Empire fell in the 5th century. Barbarian lords ruled these lands afterwards. These lands were eventually united by the French kings.

- **The Chinese Invented Gunpowder in 700AD.**

- **The Black Death (1347 to 1353)** The Black Death (the plague) spread throughout Europe. This was the worse natural disaster in European history. Between 19 to 35 million people died. The plague was spread by rats. The rats were infested by infected fleas. The plague originated in Asia. Ships carried infected vermin to the island of Sicily (Italy). The disease spread northward throughout Europe. It took two hundred years for Europe's population to recover.

Middle Ages (500 – 1400 AD): What was happening with music?

- **The Music of the Church**

In the Middle Ages Era, most composers and artists belonged to the church. They were given money by the church.

- **The Beginning of Musical Notes**

In the ninth century monks invented musical notes. Most music written before the 12th Century was written for the church.

- **Secular Music:** This is non-religious music. Traveling musicians called **troubadours** would go from town to town. They played love songs. They learned their music by ear. **Drums, harps, recorders, and bagpipes were popular instruments for these wandering musicians.**

- **The Birth of Polyphony**

Polyphony means “many sounding”. It is when more than one melody is played together in one piece of music. Polyphony is a special feature of European classical music. Composing Polyphonic music is hard. Composers were trained by monks in the churches or at universities. Women were not allowed to go to monasteries or universities. **This explains why there were very few female composers.**

Middle Ages (500 – 1400 AD): A Composer:

HILDEGARD VON BINGEN.

Born: 1098 AD. Germany; Died: September 17, 1179 AD.

Hildegard was one of the most remarkable women of the Middle Ages. She was very privileged for a woman in the 12th Century! At the age of eight, her parents sent her for religious training.

Hildegard was a mystic. She saw visions from an early age. She called them "the divine light". These visions were accepted as real by the church. This added to Hildegard's reputation.

Hildegard also excelled at composing music. She wrote music for use in churches.

Hildegard was not the only woman of her time to write music. But the music of others is lost because they signed their work "anonymous". Hildegard, unlike other composers of her time, signed her own name.

2. Renaissance Era (1400 – 1600 AD): What was happening in the world?

A Rebirth of Knowledge

Renaissance means **rebirth**. The Renaissance saw a rebirth in knowledge. The Renaissance was turning from God to man. Science and the arts became more important than the church. **Christopher Columbus** discovered America. **Michelangelo** was painting the Sistine Chapel. **William Shakespeare** was writing his famous plays.



Secular music is non-religious music. Secular music became more popular during this time. So did instrumental music and dance music, too.

The **printing press** was invented during the Renaissance. The printing press was the most important invention of the last thousand years! The printing press allowed music to be printed quickly. Before the Renaissance, music had to be copied by hand.



One of the most famous people from the Renaissance was **Leonardo da Vinci**. He was called the **Renaissance Man**. He was called this because he could do many things well. He was a painter, architect, inventor, scientist, poet, musician, and teacher.

- **Explorers** like Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) and Ferdinand Magellan (1480-1521) found new lands and changed Europe's view of the world.
- **Astronomers and scientists** like Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) started questioning the church. The church believed that the Earth was the centre of the Solar System. Instead Copernicus and Galileo Galilei believed the Earth moved around the Sun.

- **Henry the Eighth** was King of England (1509-1547). He invented divorce. Henry had six wives (not at the same time!). He was also a composer.

Renaissance (1400 – 1600 AD): What was happening with music?

- **The rise and rapid spread of music printing:** Because of printing it was quicker to copy music. More music and books about music became available.
- **More money was given to support music:** the governments of the Renaissance started to fund music. Churches continued to give money to musicians and composers too.
- **More Wealth:** explorers and new colonies brought great wealth into European cities.
- **Travel:** People traveled around Europe and to the colonies. They heard different types of music. This influenced composers.

Renaissance (1400 – 1600 AD): A Composer:

JOHN FARMER

Born: Active between 1591 and 1601

English composer and organist.

In the Sixteenth Century, English composers composed “madrigals”.

John Farmer composed the madrigal "Fair Phyllis I saw sitting all alone". It was the most popular piece of music of the Renaissance. Farmer used clever word painting. The story is about a shepherdess, Phyllis, and her lover. He searches the hills for Phyllis. He finally finds her. It is a pleasant piece to listen to. More importantly it is a fun piece to sing. This is a primary goal of the madrigalists.

3. Baroque Era (1600 – 1750 AD): What was happening in the world?

Baroque means **highly decorated**. The word **Baroque** was borrowed from architecture.

Music of the Baroque period is **complicated**. **Baroque Music** is like listening to four or five people talking at the same time.

Musicians of the day made up music as they played it. That's called **improvising**. It let performers "show off."

People who supported musicians were called **patrons**. They were usually kings, queens, dukes, and wealthy business people. The church continued to support musicians.

Sir Isaac Newton lived in this period (1642–1727): He was an English mathematician and scientist. He is considered to be the greatest scientist that ever lived. He discovered gravity!

The Taj Mahal was completed in India: The Taj Mahal is one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. The Indian Mughal Emperor Jahan ordered it built. Emperor Jahan had it built after the death (1629) of his favorite wife, Mumtaz Mahal.

Baroque (1600 – 1750 AD): What was happening with music?

Music became more important

- Opera became more important. Opera is a blend of music and story. It became a very popular form of entertainment.

A Growing Awareness of National Styles

- Different countries (Italy, France and Germany) began to compose their own styles of music.

New Instruments were invented and they became just as important as the voice in music.

- Instrument makers created new types of instruments (especially wind instruments).
- The violin moved to center stage as the most important string instrument.

Baroque (1600 – 1750 AD): Some Composers:

- **ANTONIO VIVALDI**
Born: March 4, 1678. Venice, Italy
Died: July 28, 1741. Vienna, Austria

An Italian composer of instrumental music and opera.

Vivaldi was a priest. One of his duties was to supply music for the orchestra. He composed over five hundred concertos. Some were for solo instruments (violin), and some were for combinations of instruments..

Vivaldi's most famous groups of concertos is the *The Four Seasons*.

- **GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL**
Born: February 23, 1685. Halle, Germany
Died: April 14, 1759. London, England

English composer, but born in Germany. He is remembered for his operas.

George Frideric Handel began his life in Germany. Handel was the son of a barber-surgeon. His father wanted him to study law. He died an English citizen. When he died, he was the most famous musical figure of his day. Handel showed great musical talent at an early age. His father allowed him to study with a local organist and composer. At age seventeen, the young Handel went to Hamburg, where he played violin in the opera orchestra.

His most famous piece of music was written for George 1st, the English King. It was called the *Water Music*.

Handel composed less when he got older. But he continued to conduct and perform (he was a brilliant organist). One day, at the end of a performance of one of his works, *Messiah*, he collapsed. He died three days later.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH



Born: March 21, 1685. Eisenach, Germany

Died: July 28, 1750. Leipzig, Germany

German composer and organist. He is the most important composer of German Baroque.

He was born to a family of musicians. Johann Sebastian Bach was a genius. He would study all the music of other famous composers. Then he would rearrange it for different combinations of instruments. When he was 15 he walked 180 miles to the city of Luneberg to sing in a choir.

Unlike Handel, J.S. Bach was poor. He could not support his family by just publishing his music. Bach had to sell instruments. He had to compose music for weddings, funerals and other special occasions. Sometimes he was only given a few days to do this! But he had no choice. He had 20 children to support!

Many people believe that as a composer, Bach has no equal.

4. The Classical Era (1750 – 1825 AD): What was happening in the world?

Music of the Classical era was **very structured** and **emotions were controlled**. It was **tuneful** and **simple**. Even the size of the orchestra was small. The orchestra usually had no more than **40 musicians**.

The Classical period wanted **balance** and **contrast**. Music was not to be too loud or too soft, too fast or too slow. Nothing was done in the extreme. Control was more important than strong emotions.

James Watt, 1736–1819, was a Scottish instrument maker. He invented the steam engine. He invented a method to measure the power of an engine. Watt called this *horsepower*. We use it today. He also invented a method to measure the power of electricity. Watt called this the *Watt*!

The French Emperor, Napoleon, was defeated by at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

Classical Period (1750 – 1825 AD): What was happening with music?

More people began to think of music as entertainment

- The Industrial Revolution took place. Factories were invented. Factories produced more goods and wealth. More people became wealthy. They could afford more time relaxing. Music became even more popular to listen too and to play.
- There was more need for music. This created more need for composers.
- The **symphony** became popular in the Classical era. A **symphony** is a huge musical work in four movements.
- The orchestra grew in size during the Classical period. Famous composers during this time included **Mozart** and **Beethoven**.
- The Classical period ended when Beethoven died in 1827. Beethoven was considered the bridge between the Classical and **Romantic** periods.

The Classical Era (1750 – 1825 AD):
2 Famous Composers:

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born: January 27, 1756. Salzburg, Austria

Died: December 5, 1791. Vienna, Austria



Mozart was born in Austria in 1756. He died at the age of 35. He died under strange circumstances. Mozart was buried in an unmarked grave. He died very poor. He composed during the **Classical period**. Another composer during this era was **Ludwig van Beethoven**.

Mozart is probably the greatest genius in the history of western music, perhaps in the history of the world. He began composing at the age of five. By the time he was nine he was writing symphonies! When he was six his sister and he toured Europe. They played for kings and queens.

Mozart excelled in every way as a composer.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born (baptized): December 17, 1770. Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827. Vienna, Austria



Beethoven's father and grandfather were professional musicians. That means they were paid to play music.

Beethoven's father knew about the success **Mozart** had as a young child. The father wanted his Ludwig to be successful, too. Beethoven Senior cruelly made young Ludwig practice for hours at a time. His dream was to have his son make the family rich. Young Ludwig gave his first public performance when he was just seven years old.

Beethoven found a new teacher when he got a little older. He was becoming a fine pianist. He would often **improvise**, or make up, the music as he played it. As a teenager Beethoven traveled to Vienna,

Austria. While there, Ludwig played for the great **Mozart**. **Mozart** was very impressed with the young teen's talent. He told people to keep an eye on this young man.

At 28, Beethoven began to notice a hearing loss. At first it was slight. He couldn't hear the church bells ringing in the distance. As he got older his hearing loss worsened. By the time he was 50 he was completely deaf. How sad and strange that one of the world's greatest composers could not hear his own music! He wrote some of the world's greatest music even though he could not hear a note of it.

Beethoven cut off the legs of his piano and placed the instrument on the floor. He did this to feel the vibrations in the floor when he played.

Mozart V's Beethoven:

Mozart was happy and cheerful. He was not very responsible with money. **Beethoven** was moody and ill-tempered. But he handled business and money very well.



Mozart's music writing was neat. He completed it in his head before he wrote it down. **Beethoven's** music writing was sloppy. He was always making corrections.

Beethoven could support himself by writing music for the public. He didn't have to rely on kings and queens. His music didn't have to be for parties or entertaining.

Mozart had to depend on royalty to pay his wages.

Beethoven published his first symphony when he was thirty. **Mozart** had already written 40 symphonies when he was thirty.

Mozart married and had children. He died penniless at 35. Mozart was buried in an unmarked grave. **Beethoven** never married. He had no children. He died when he was 56. His funeral was attended by thousands of people.

5. The Romantic Era (1825 – 1900 AD): What was happening in the world?

The Romantic era was a time of **great revolutions**. Imagination was more important than logic. This was the time of the American Civil War. The **Industrial Revolution** replaced people with machines. People fought back with their feelings and emotions.

The Romantic period was the age of the **virtuoso**. This is a musician who "shows off" his talents by playing a very difficult section of the music. The most famous piano virtuoso was **Franz Liszt**. He was as popular as today's rock stars.

The **piano** was the most popular instrument during the Romantic era. **Frederic Chopin** is the best known composer of the Romantic era. Chopin composed piano music. Old instruments were improved. New instruments were invented. The **tuba**, **saxophone**, and **celeste** were three new instruments that were invented during the Romantic era.

The telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922), a Scottish scientist on Mar. 10, 1876.

New Zealand becomes the first country in the world to give women the vote in 1893

The Romantic Period (1825 - 1900 AD): What was happening with music?

- Composers took an interest in the music of different cultural groups. They incorporated it into their own music.
- Composers also wrote music about stories of exotic lands and people.
- Music was seen less as a job and more as a hobby. You had to be wealthy, talented, or lucky to become a full time composer.
- Musical schools called conservatories were set up. They trained people who wanted to be musicians and composers. Churches and governments were no longer much money to train and support musicians.
- Women found more opportunities to perform music. But there was not much support for them to become composers.

The Romantic Era (1825 - 1900 AD): Famous Composers:

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born: May 7, 1833. Hamburg, Germany

Died: April 3, 1897. Vienna, Austria

Brahms was born in Germany. Many of the great composers came from Germany. Brahms composed during the **Romantic era**. His family was poor but very musical. His father taught him the violin, cello, and piano. At age twenty, he had already composed many of the pieces that are still heard today.

Brahms lived a very full and productive life. He spent most of his adult life living in Vienna, Austria. He composed, conducted and performed on the piano. Brahms wrote every musical style except opera.

FRANZ JOSEPH LISZT

Born: October 22, 1811. Raiding, Hungary

Died: July 31, 1886. Bayreuth, Germany



List was the greatest piano virtuoso of the nineteenth century. List was perhaps the greatest of all time. List played for **Beethoven** when he was eleven. When he gave piano recitals, audiences were spellbound!

Liszt's fame and fortune grew. He became more and more restless. He wanted to be remembered for more than his ability to play the piano. He really wanted to be remembered as a composer. And what compositions he wrote! Two of his best known works include **Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2** and **Mephisto Waltz**.

Liszt's works are known for their romantic expressiveness and colorful orchestration. His music is very passionate. List, more than anyone else before or since, brought more attention to the role of piano playing.

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Born: May 7, 1840. Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia

Died: November 6, 1893. St. Petersburg, Russia



Tchaikovsky was born into a wealthy Russian family. His father wanted Peter to become a lawyer. He became a composer instead.

Tchaikovsky wrote music during the **Romantic** Era. Tchaikovsky wrote some of the most beautiful music ever composed. These piece include the **1812 Overture**, the **Romeo and Juliet Overture**, and concertos for violin and piano. His ballet music includes **The Sleeping Beauty**, **Swan Lake**, and **The Nutcracker**

6. The Twentieth Century Era (1900 to present day):

Music of the 20th century is different. It broke free of the styles and traditions of the previous periods. Composers explored different ways to produce sound. Rhythmic patterns became much more free. Melody was becoming harsher. The music moved by leaps rather than steps. **Polytonality**--the playing together of two keys at once--was occurring more frequently.

The Modern Period (1900 to now): What was happening with music?

No single style of music dominated the 20th century. African Americans made significant contributions to music. Afro-Americans were recognized for their important contributions. **Jazz** was born in America. It had a huge impact all over the world.

The most important development in **20th century music** was popular music. This included **rock 'n roll**, folk, country and western, and rhythm and blues.

Modern Period composers will be covered in the third term!!