

Historical periods, musical styles, and principal genres in western music

Students are encouraged to listen to several examples of each style at online sources available through Classical Music.net, Naxos, or other online sites and to listen for the characteristics given below.

Middle Ages (also referred to as medieval music): 800-1400.

Generally called the Middle Ages, this long historical era can be broken into several distinct developmental periods and falls between Classical Antiquity and the Renaissance.

Early medieval music to 1000: mainly plainsongs (chants) written in Latin for the church

sacred: worship music for the church, always in Latin

texture: monophonic

motion: conjunct melodies

text settings: syllabic and melismatic

rhythm: free rhythms based on the syllables of the text

scales: modal, based on the pitches D (dorian), E (phrygian), F (lydian), G (mixolydian)

ranges: narrow, usually less than an octave

notation: neumes --groups of notes in symbols, showing the direction of the melodic patterns.

musical staff: ranging from one to four lines, c-clefs, no bar lines or meters

accidentals: B-flat only

sources: manuscripts are hand copied on parchment

genres: numerous types of chants (songs in Latin for the church services)

composers: mostly anonymous

Development of polyphony: 900-1300

textures: polyphonic

scales: modal

harmony: perfect consonances (perfect fourths, fifths and octaves)

harmonic motion: parallel, then in contrary and oblique motion

melodic motion: conjunct in each voice part

text settings: syllabic and melismatic

languages: mostly Latin, some French

rhythm: repetitive rhythmic patterns in compound time called rhythmic modes

notation: modal; signs (neumes) show the groups of notes that form each rhythmic unit

musical staff: four to five lines, c-clefs, no bar lines or meters, no dynamics or expression marks, voice

designations: tenor, duplum, triplum, quadruplum

sources: manuscripts are hand copied on parchment

genres: organum (chant combined with polyphony),

motet (polyphonic settings with new and separate texts added to each voice

chants

composers: Leonin and Perotin (Notre Dame, Paris)

Development of secular music: 1100-1300

secular: worldly music not written for religious services

texts: vernacular languages - French, German, Spanish, English

texture: mostly monophonic

motion: conjunct melodies

text settings: syllabic and melismatic

rhythm: mostly unmetered rhythms until 1250, metered for dances

scales: modal

ranges: narrow, usually less than an octave

traditions: troubadours (South French), trouvères (North French), Minnesingers (German)

instrumental dances

instruments: organs, recorders, sackbuts (trombone), shawm (double reed), vielles (string)

composers: Bernart of Ventadorn, Beatrice of Dia, Adam de la Halle, and hundreds of others

Late medieval music: 1300-1400 —the New Art (Ars nova)

textures: polyphonic

texts: vernacular languages and Latin

rhythm: complex rhythmic patterns, simple and compound metrical groups, often syncopated

melodic motion: conjunct lines

harmony: consonances: (P=perfect) P4, P5, P8, some thirds

ranges: often an octave in each voice

cantus firmus: a pre-existent melody (chant, for example) used in the lower voice (tenor)

musical notation: mensural; early time signatures (mensuration signs), but still no bar lines

5-line staff with c and f clefs, flats and sharps used on individual notes, and flats at the beginning of a line apply throughout the line, but not as "tonal" key signatures.

voice designations: tenor, contratenor, triplum, cantus

sources: manuscripts are hand copied on parchment

genres: isorhythmic motets, masses, dance songs (ballade, virelai, rondeau)

composers: Philippe de Vitry, Guillaume de Machaut, Francesco Landini

Renaissance ("rebirth"): 1400-1600

scales: modal

texture: polyphonic, often organized by imitation and canons, or homorhythmic

motion: conjunct lines with some wider skips

rhythm: regular pulses, but often without a metrical pulse in vocal music; metrical rhythms and strong downbeats in dances and instrumental music

harmony: triadic, cadences on perfect fifths and octaves (some Picardy thirds at cadences – the name Picardy comes from north French region where many of these composers originated)

ranges: expand to utilize the full SATB registers

genres: growth of numerous sacred and secular genres

vocal: predominant in sacred and secular music

sacred music: sung *a cappella*

secular music: can be sung with instruments

notation: mensural; early time signatures (mensuration signs), but still no bar lines.

5-line staff with c and f clefs, parts written on individual sections of the page, no dynamic markings

voice designations: tenor, contratenor, cantus, later changing to cantus, altus, tenor, bassus.

sources: music printing develops in 1501 in Italy. Manuscripts also continue to be hand copied.

genres: single-movement compositions, except for the Mass cycle and dance pairs

mass cycle: sacred choral, a capella composition with specific Ordinary sections of the Catholic service composed as a group, often with the same cantus firmus in the tenor part

motet: sacred choral, a capella composition with words in Latin

chorale: sacred hymn with words in German

chanson: secular polyphonic composition with words in French

madrigal: secular polyphonic composition with words in Italian

Lied: secular polyphonic composition with words in German

ayre: secular polyphonic composition with words in English

canzona: instrumental composition in the style of a chanson

dances: usually in pairs, like the slow pavan and the fast galliard

musical instruments: harpsichord (also called the virginal), clavichord, lute, viola da gamba family (also called viols), recorders, cornetto, shawm, sackbut. The violin is developed, but is mostly used outdoors. Instruments are not usually specified for compositions.

ensembles: called "consorts." A whole consort is an ensemble of the same family (e.g., all recorders, SATB) and a broken consort is a mixed ensemble.

composers: Du Fay, Dunstable, Binchois, Ockeghem, Josquin des Prez, Palestrina, Byrd, Morley, Dowland, Marenzio, Monteverdi, and hundreds or others

Baroque Era: 1600-1750

textures: homophonic, polyphonic, and contrapuntal

rhythms: metrical rhythms, strong and weak beat pulses

motives: short ideas become the basis for continuous pitch and register manipulation, often presented without regular pauses in the music

scales: major and minor scales develop

harmonic rhythm: changes often occur on every beat or every two beats

basso continuo: bass line played by the harpsichord and cello or other solo bass instrument

figured bass: develops c. 1600; number notations that inform the continuo player of the intervals and accidentals in relation to the bass notes; the realization of the harmonies is improvised.

terraced dynamics: contrasting piano and forte in abrupt dynamic shifts

ornamentation: melodic decorations, often improvised or added from symbols given in scores

affections: music expresses specific emotions

concertato style: contrast is emphasized through alternating groups of voices and/or instruments

polychoral: a composition for multiple choirs or voices and/or instruments

ritornello: instrumental refrain that frequently returns, as in a concerto or between verses of a song

notation: modern symbols, time signatures, key signatures, dynamics, bar lines,

instruments: the violin family, horns and trumpets (without valves) are not new instruments, but begin to appear and gain importance in specific ensembles. Harpsichords, and especially organs, become more fully developed as solo instruments. The oboe and bassoon replace the shawm and the dulcian as the principal double reeds.

ensembles: string orchestras are expanded with individual instruments that contrast in timbre

genres: numerous multi-movement compositions

opera seria: Italian opera, serious in nature, in which the narrative (recitative) and reflective (aria) numbers are all sung, and including staging, costumes, scenery and dramatic acting.

oratorio: work for soloists, chorus and orchestra, based on a sacred story; with no acting costumes or scenery.

cantata: a composition for one or more voices and accompaniment

chorale cantata: soloists, chorus and orchestra, incorporating hymns into the composition

trio sonata: two solo instruments, keyboard and continuous bass instrument

fantasia/prelude/toccatà: improvisatory compositions, often paired with a fugue

fugue: paired with an improvisatory composition (fantasia, toccata or prelude)

suite: a collection of dances (allemande, courant, saraband, gigue)

solo concerto: a solo instrument and a chamber orchestra

concerto grosso: a small group of solo instruments contrasted with a chamber orchestra. A multi-movement composition

overture: instrumental movement used at the beginning of an opera or oratorio

composers: Monteverdi, Schütz, Corelli, Couperin, Handel, Vivaldi, J. S. Bach

Classical Era: 1750-1800

aesthetic: balance, symmetry and formality, reflecting the rational objectivity of the Enlightenment

melody: sometimes tuneful and folk-like; at other times motivically constructed; lyrical themes contrast with dramatic ones

phrasing: periodic, multiples of 4, usually separated by rests; balanced antecedent-consequent phrases

tonality: major and minor keys, with major more prevalent

texture: homophonic, with occasional counterpoint, especially in developmental sections

harmony: triadic with 7th chords used for color and tension; primary chords (I –IV-V-I) predominate

harmonic rhythm: slow, changing every two to four beats

modulations: to closely related keys (e.g., to IV or V in Major; to III in minor).

accompaniments: broken triadic patterns (Alberti bass); repetitive broken octaves (murky bass)

instrumentation: homogeneous sounds (orchestras with doubling of winds), musical material organized by families; standardized combinations of instruments within a genre; piano and clarinet (both invented in the Baroque) added to the repertory

forms: standardized sonata form, theme and variations, minuet & trio, rondo, concerto-sonata

dynamic gradations and expansions: crescendos, diminuendos, piano and forte dynamics (pp & ff very occasionally); occasional accents on off-beats, sforzandos

genres:

opera seria

comic opera

oratorio

mass

Lied

sonata, especially keyboard sonatas

string quartet

symphony

solo concerto

composers: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven

Romantic Era: 1800-1900, or nineteenth-century music

aesthetic: freedom from boundaries, including those that separate the arts: music becomes more programmatic, merging with literature, art, and philosophy; programmatic elements reflect this trend; interest in the subjective, including the emotions and the supernatural, in contrast with the more objective and rational Classic.

melody: long, emotional, and memorable, using wide leaps for expression

phrases: of irregular lengths, with less symmetry than those of the Classic

rhythm: displaced accents, shifting and overlapping of duple and triple patterns

texture: homophony predominates, highlighting the melody, but counterpoint appears at times

harmony: more extensive, with chord extensions and greater dissonance

tonality: tonal, but with distant chord progressions and modulations; chromaticism is used extensively; key areas often change freely within movements; minor mode predominates, in contrast with the

Classic accompaniment: complex, sometimes contrapuntal, with wide ranges and disjunct intervals

dynamics: dramatic, at extremes of the dynamic range; tempi use expressive terminology

meter and tempo: freer meters and tempi

forms: less clearly defined by sections and tonality

instrumentation: larger forces of the orchestra, with a greatly expanded range of timbres that demanded instrumental evolution (valves for brass instruments, more keys for winds, larger and stronger pianos, pedaled harps; new instruments, including the tuba, saxophone, and celeste); inclusion of voice and chorus in later symphonic works

scale: on one hand, short, intimate compositions for piano (character piece) or voice and piano (lied, chanson); on the other, expansion of proportions of the symphony, chamber music, concerto, sonata, mass; opera roles demand bigger voices to match more grandiose dramatic concepts

genres:

cyclic symphony

symphonic poem/tone poem

symphonic suite

concert overture

concerto

ballet

chamber music

Lied and chanson

song cycles

music drama

nationalistic opera

lyric opera

mass and oratorio

piano sonata

single-movement character pieces and dances for piano

composers: Schubert, Robert and Clara Schumann, Verdi, Brahms,

Twentieth-century music: 1900-2000

wide range of tonal, modal, whole tone, atonal, serial, and approaches to composition

wide range of harmonic structures: triadic, quartal, clusters

rhythms: polymeters, asymmetrical meters

melodies: disjunct, Sprechstimme (half sung/half spoken)

timbres: non-traditional uses of instruments, global instruments, electronic sounds

mixed media: music combined with film, art, theater

form: traditional and non-traditional structures

expression: ranges from subdued works (Impressionism) to excessive exaggeration (Expressionism)
nationalism and folk elements

return to musical characteristics of earlier periods: Neo-Classicism (including Neo-Baroque elements)
and Neo-Romanticism

minimalism

jazz and other African-American influences

composers: Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Debussy, Bartok, Ives, Barber, Copland, Cage, and Glass.

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