

A History of Classical Music

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Music: Divertimento in D K136, Mvt I (Mozart)

ABSTRACT: What is classical music? How has it evolved over time? In this talk, I'll give a tour of the last 400 years of classical music. We'll explore a selection of composers, wander through different periods and styles, and of course, listen to some music. No musical background is required for this talk. Whether you are completely new to classical music, or have season tickets to the symphony, I hope you will find something interesting in this talk.

Outline

Overview of the different periods and styles of the last 400 years

Music clips from various composers

Note: A high-level overview simplifies many of the finer details, and many definitions are vague.

A lot of content (four courses). Sorry if I skip your favourite composer.
Definitions are vague and fuzzy. History and art isn't so neat and tidy. This isn't math.

Classical music

Definition:

- European tradition, with a specific written notation
- “Serious or conventional”
- Distinct from folk, jazz, or popular music

Not to be confused with the **Classical period**.

2 (278)

DIVERTIMENTO
(Vierundzwanzigstes Quartett)
für 2 Violinen, Viola und Violoncell

Mozart's Werke. **W. A. MOZART.** Serie 11. N.º 24.
Rösch. Verz. N.º 136. Composit. 1782 in Salzburg.

Allegro.

The image shows the beginning of a musical score for a string quartet. It features four staves: Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Basso. The music is in 3/4 time and begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The score shows the first few measures of the piece, with various rhythmic patterns and dynamics.

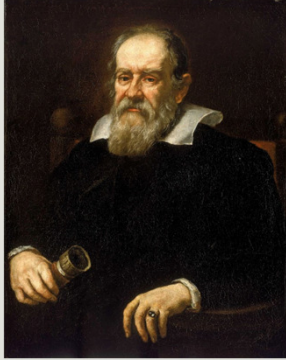
The Baroque Period

c. 1600 – 1750



Music: Cello Suite No 1, Prelude (Bach)

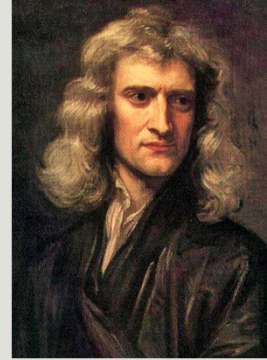
Historical Context (c. 1600 – 1750)



Galileo Galilei
1564 – 1642



Johannes Kepler
1571 – 1630



Isaac Newton
1642 – 1726

Scientific Revolution. Galileo charged with heresy. Kepler's laws of planetary motion. Newton's Principia (laws of motion, calculus).

Historical Context (c. 1600 – 1750)



Rembrandt, *The Night Watch*, 1642



Vermeer, *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, c. 1665

In literature, Shakespeare just died. *Paradise Lost* (Milton) and *Robinson Crusoe* (Defoe) are published.

In history, Louis XIV is King of France. Thirty Years' War. English Civil War.

The Baroque Period (c. 1600 – 1750)

Baroque from Portuguese *barroco* (misshapen pearl)

- Pejoratively named by 18th century critics who disliked extravagance and ornateness

Characteristics

- Complex, multiple voices, long phrases
- Basso continuo

Instruments

- Violin family (Stradivari)
- Early wind instruments
- Harpsichord, organ



Examples: harpsichord and basso continuo from Brandenburg 3 mvt I. Note the long phrases, continuous motion, multiple voices.

George Frideric Handel

Born 1685 in Halle, Germany; died 1759 in London

Travelled around and worked in Germany and Italy, before settling in London

Was immensely popular, both during and after his lifetime

Known for: *Water Music*, *Music for the Royal Fireworks*, *Messiah*



Music: *Messiah* (Rejoice greatly). Note the basso continuo, long phrases, and ornamentation. Loud and quiet contrast.

Johann Sebastian Bach

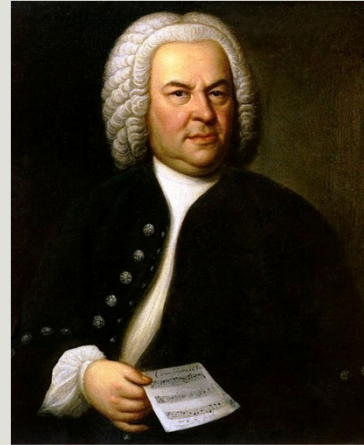
Born 1685 Leipzig, Germany; died 1750 in Leipzig

Bach was relatively obscure until a revival in the 19th century

Came from a family of musicians

- Four of his sons became prominent musicians

Known for: *Brandenburg Concertos*, *Well-Tempered Clavier*, *The Art of Fugue*, *Goldberg Variations*, *St Matthew Passion*, *Mass in B Minor*



Music: Brandenburg No. 2 Mvt III. Note basso continuo and multiple voices.
Music: Chaconne (Partita No. 2, Mvt V) Solo violin, but phrases are still long.

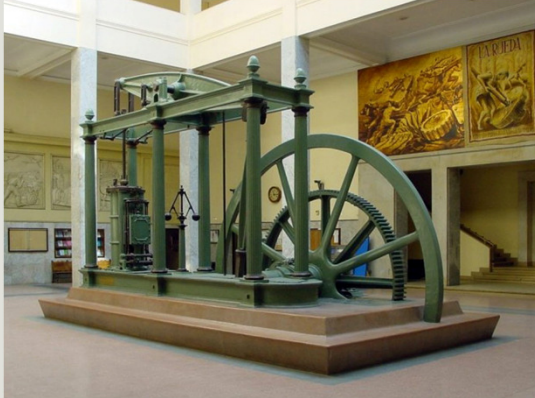
The Classical Period

c. 1730 – 1820

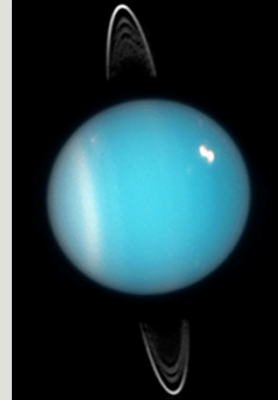


Music: Marriage of Figaro, overture (Mozart)

Historical Context (c. 1730 – 1820)



Watt steam engine, 1763 – 1775



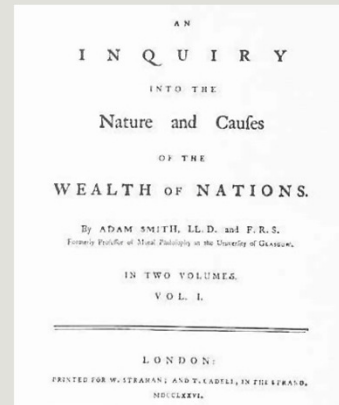
Discovery of Uranus, 1781

Industrial Revolution

Historical Context (c. 1730 – 1820)



Turnbull, *Declaration of Independence*, 1817



Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776

The Classical Period (c. 1730 – 1820)

Characteristics

- Periodic melodies with light accompaniment
- Clear, refined, elegant
- Natural, easy to understand
- Contrast the “extravagance” of the Baroque period

Instruments

- Fortepiano (early piano)
- Clarinet



Example: Fortepiano vs piano(forte). Theme from Mozart Piano Concerto No. 26.
Note that the fortepiano is muted/harsher and doesn't sustain the sound.

Joseph Haydn

Born 1732 in Rohrau, Austria; died 1809 in Vienna

Developed the symphony and string quartet

Contemporary of Mozart and Beethoven

Known for: 106 symphonies (including *Surprise*, *Clock*, *Farewell*), 20 concertos, 68 string quartets, *The Creation*



Music: Surprise Symphony, Mvt I

Music: The Joke (ending of Op 33 No 2 Mvt IV). Not sure of when it's actually the end.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Born 1756 in Salzburg, Austria; died 1791 in Vienna

Prolific composer

- Started composing at the age of 5
- Taken on tours across Europe as a child to perform and learn

Known for: 22 operas (*The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute*), *Requiem*, 55 symphonies, 27 piano concertos, 15 other concertos, 26 string quartets



Music: Variations on *Ah! vous dirai-je, maman*. There are 12 in total, but here's the theme and last variation.

Music: Jupiter Symphony Mvt IV. Note contrast.

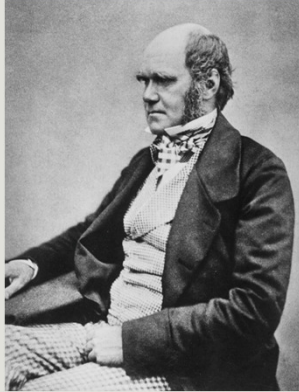
The Romantic Period

c. 1780 – 1910



Music: Symphony 5, Mvt I (Beethoven)

Historical Context (c. 1780 – 1910)



Charles Darwin
1809 – 1882



Ada Lovelace
1815 – 1852

Historical Context (c. 1780 – 1910)



Harris, *The Fathers of Confederation*, 1884



Queen Victoria

The reign of Queen Victoria. Confederation of Canada. French Revolution, Napoleon, and the Battle of Waterloo.

In literature: Goethe's *Faust*, *Frankenstein*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *War and Peace*

The Romantic Period (c. 1780 – 1910)

Characteristics

- Focus on individuality, originality, fantasy, expression of emotion
- Contrast easy-to-understand, “entertainment” of the Classical period

Instruments

- Piano
- Modern instruments
 - Trumpet, horn, flute



Ludwig van Beethoven

Born 1770 in Bonn; died 1827 in Vienna

“Bridge” between the Classical and Romantic periods

- “Early”, “middle”, and “late” periods

Started losing his hearing around 1798; was completely deaf by 1818

Known for: 9 symphonies, 11 overtures, 5 piano concertos, 1 violin concerto, 32 piano sonatas, 16 string quartets



Music: Symphony 1, mvt IV. Note the similarity to Classical composers.

Music: Symphony 3 mvt I. Eroica, originally dedicated to Napoleon. Note the grand, heroic opening, and then a sort of “weakness.”

Music: Symphony 9 mvt IV.

Other Romantic Composers



Franz Schubert
1797 – 1828



Franz Liszt
1811 – 1886



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
1840 – 1893



Schubert: Over 600 *lieder*, 9 symphonies (including *Unfinished*), 35 chamber works.
Music: Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel. Note the “spinning wheel” piano.

Liszt: 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies, *Sonata in B Minor*, 13 symphonic poems
Music: La Campanella (the little bell)

Tchaikovsky: 3 ballets (*Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, *The Nutcracker*), 6 symphonies, *1812 Overture*
Music: Violin Concerto, Mvt II

The 20th Century

1901 – 2000

Impressionism (or not?)

Characteristics

- Detached observation
- Evoke a “feeling, mood, atmosphere, or scene”

Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918)

- *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*, *La mer*, *Pelléas et Mélisande*

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

- *Boléro*, *Rapsodie espagnole*, string quartet, 2 piano concertos



Claude Debussy



Maurice Ravel



Music: *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*. Note flute and harp.

Music: *Piano Concerto in G*. Opens with a whip crack. Has a very “light” feel, but also jazz-inspired.

Expressionism (or not?)

Characteristics

- Distortion of reality to evoke emotion
- Convey “extreme and irrational states of mind”

Arnold Schoenberg (1874 – 1951)

- 4 operas (*Erwartung*), *Five Orchestral Pieces*, *Pierrot Lunaire*

Alban Berg (1885 – 1935)

- *Wozzeck*, *Lulu*, *Lyric Suite*, *Violin Concerto*

Anton Webern (1883 – 1945)

- *Six Bagatelles*, *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, *Concerto for Nine Instruments*



Arnold Schoenberg



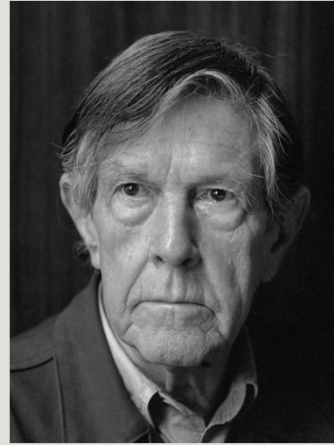
Music: *Erwartung*. Atonal, dissonant, doesn't sound natural.

“Avante-Garde”

John Cage (1912 – 1992)

- Different tools for instruments
- Composition by chance

- *Sonatas and Interludes, Construction, Imaginary Landscape, 4'33"*



Music: Sonatas and Interludes. (prepared piano)
Music: 4'33"