

# A History of Classical Music

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MING-HO YEE



# Outline

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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.

# Classical music

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## 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. Serie 14. N<sup>o</sup> 24.

von  
**W. A. MOZART.**  
Köch. Verz. N<sup>o</sup> 136.

Allegro. Componirt 1772 zu Salzburg.



Violino I.  
Violino II.  
Viola.  
Basso.

# The Baroque Period

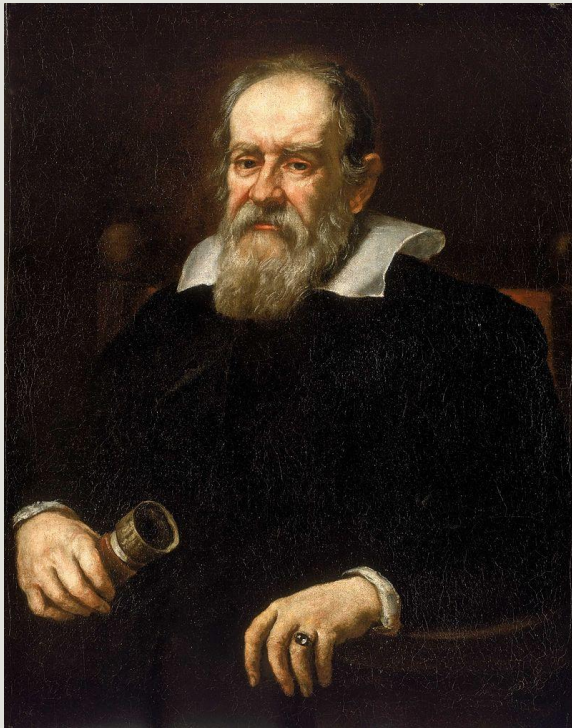
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c. 1600 – 1750



# Historical Context (c. 1600 – 1750)

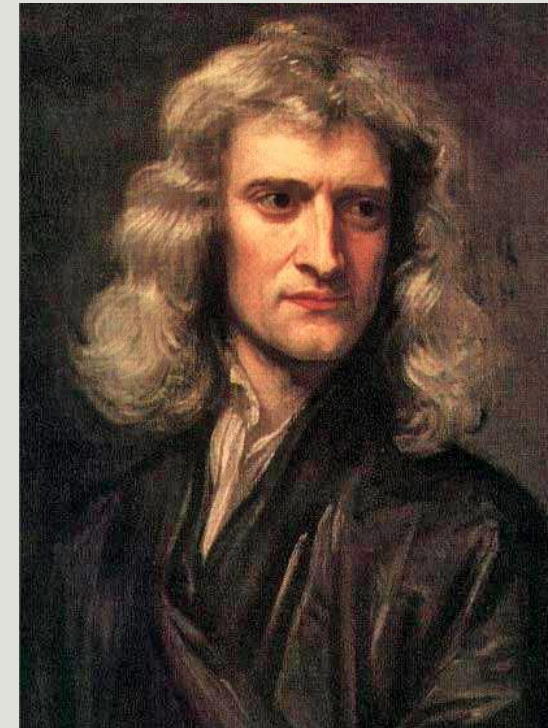
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Galileo Galilei  
1564 – 1642



Johannes Kepler  
1571 – 1630



Isaac Newton  
1642 – 1726



# Historical Context (c. 1600 – 1750)

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Rembrandt, *The Night Watch*, 1642



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

# The Baroque Period (c. 1600 – 1750)

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*Baroque* from Portuguese *barroco* (misshapen pearl)

- Pejoratively named by 18<sup>th</sup> century critics who disliked extravagance and ornateness

## Characteristics

- Complex, multiple voices, long phrases
- Basso continuo

## Instruments

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



# George Frideric Handel

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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*





# Johann Sebastian Bach

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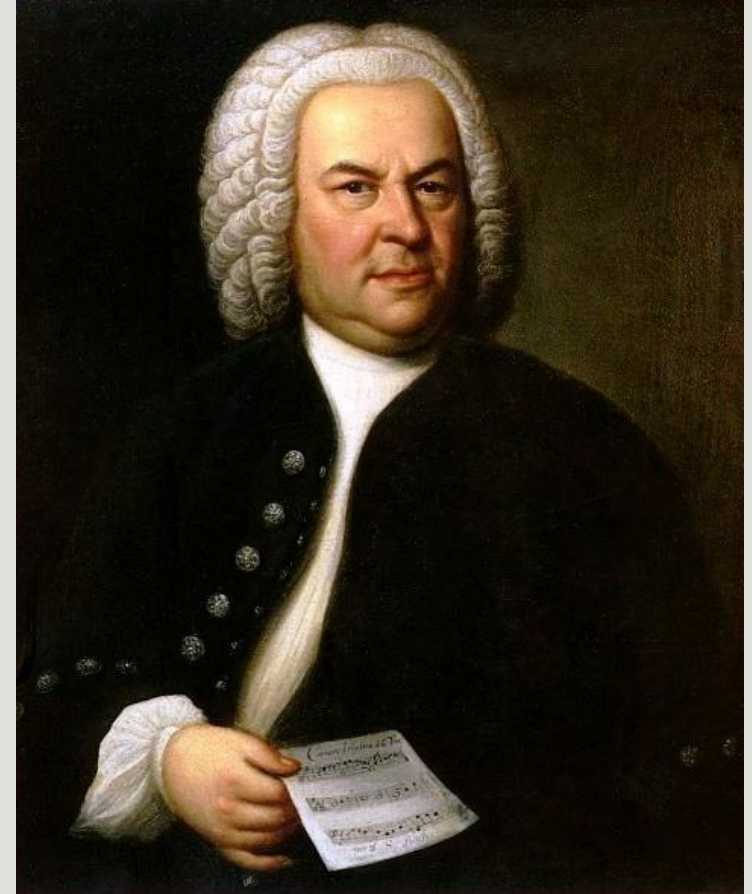
Born 1685 Leipzig, Germany; died 1750 in Leipzig

Bach was relatively obscure until a revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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*



# The Classical Period

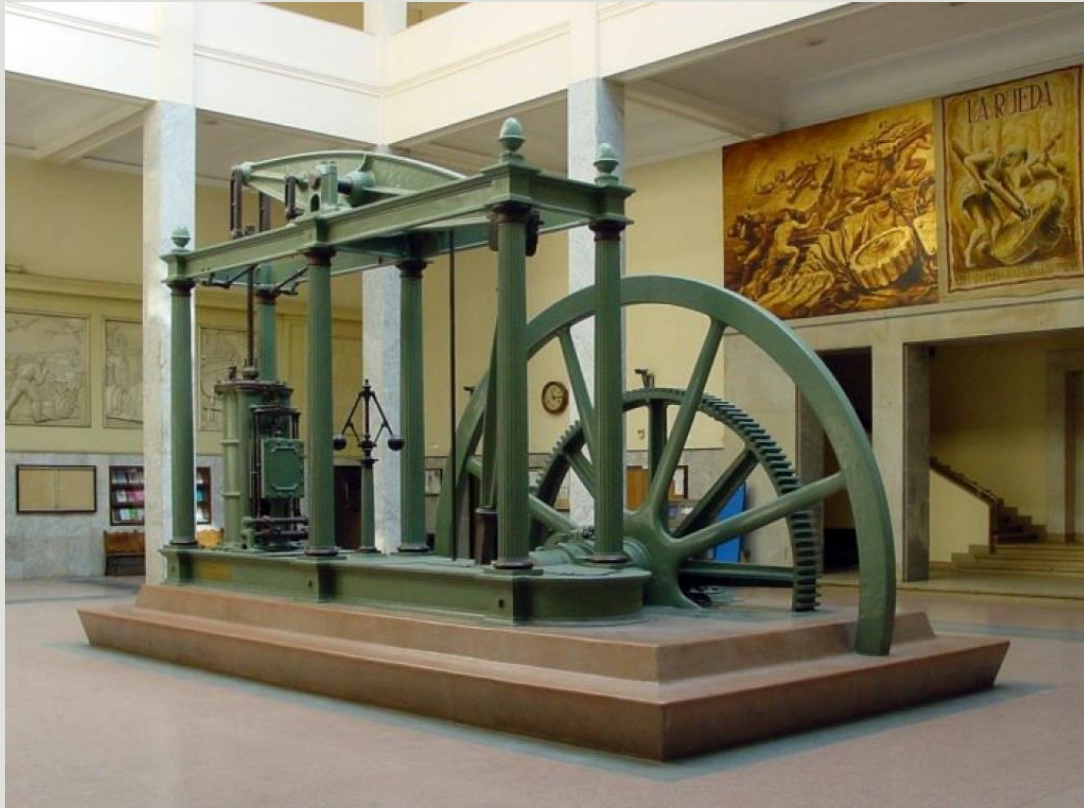
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c. 1730 – 1820

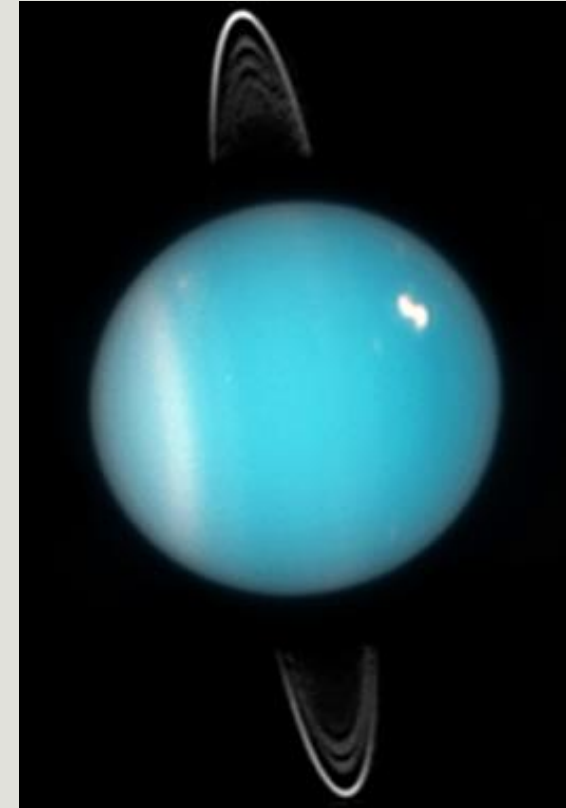


# Historical Context (c. 1730 – 1820)

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Watt steam engine, 1763 – 1775



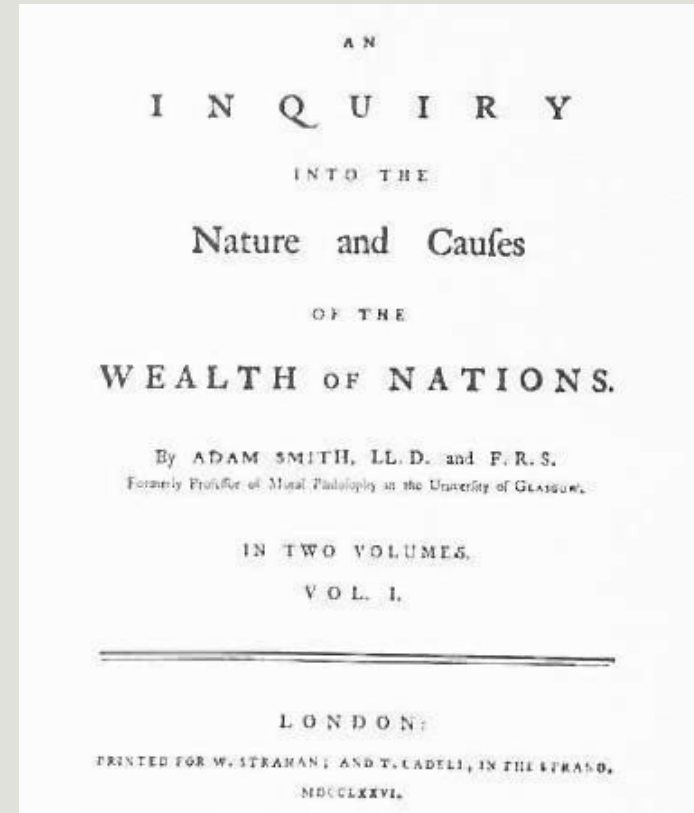
Discovery of Uranus, 1781

# Historical Context (c. 1730 – 1820)

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Turnbull, *Declaration of Independence*, 1817



Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776



# The Classical Period (c. 1730 – 1820)

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## 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





# Joseph Haydn

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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*



# Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

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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



# The Romantic Period

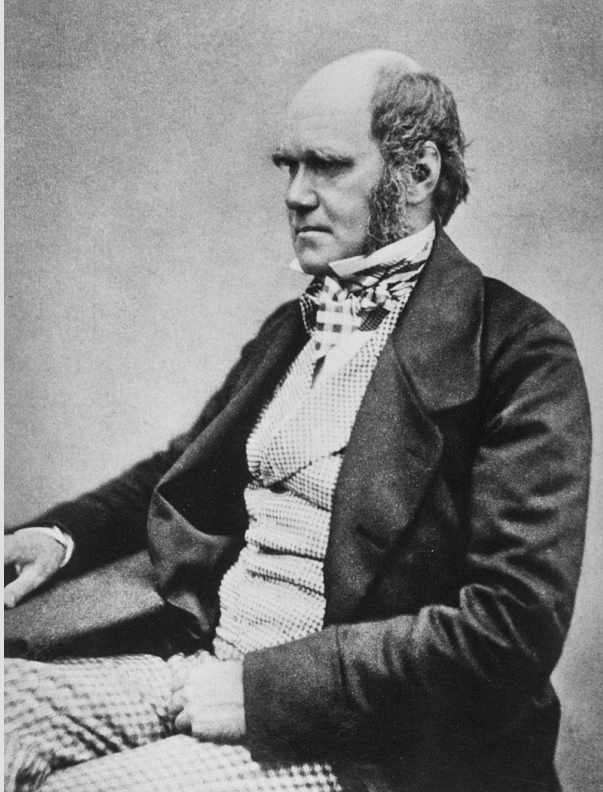
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c. 1780 – 1910



# Historical Context (c. 1780 – 1910)

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Charles Darwin  
1809 – 1882



Ada Lovelace  
1815 – 1852



# Historical Context (c. 1780 – 1910)

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Harris, *The Fathers of Confederation*, 1884



Queen Victoria



# The Romantic Period (c. 1780 – 1910)

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## 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

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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

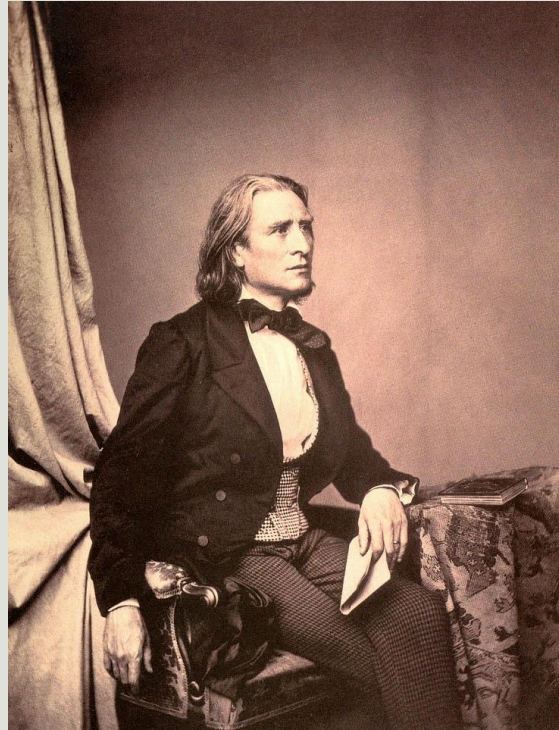


# Other Romantic Composers

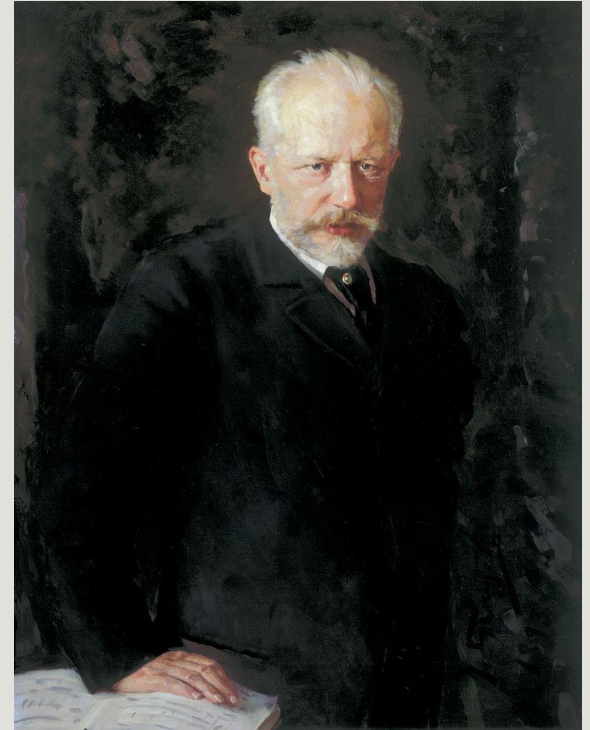
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Franz Schubert  
1797 – 1828



Franz Liszt  
1811 – 1886



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
1840 – 1893



# The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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1901 – 2000



# Impressionism (or not?)

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## Characteristics

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

## Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918)

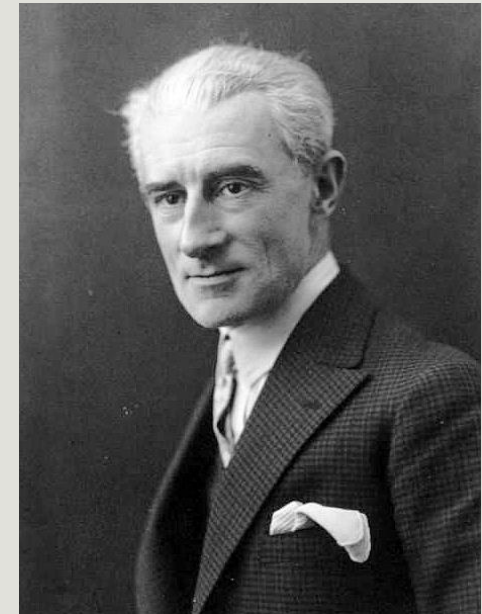
- *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun, La mer, Pelléas et Mélisande*

## Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937)

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



Claude Debussy



Maurice Ravel





# Expressionism (or not?)

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## Characteristics

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

## Arnold Schoenberg (1874 – 1951)

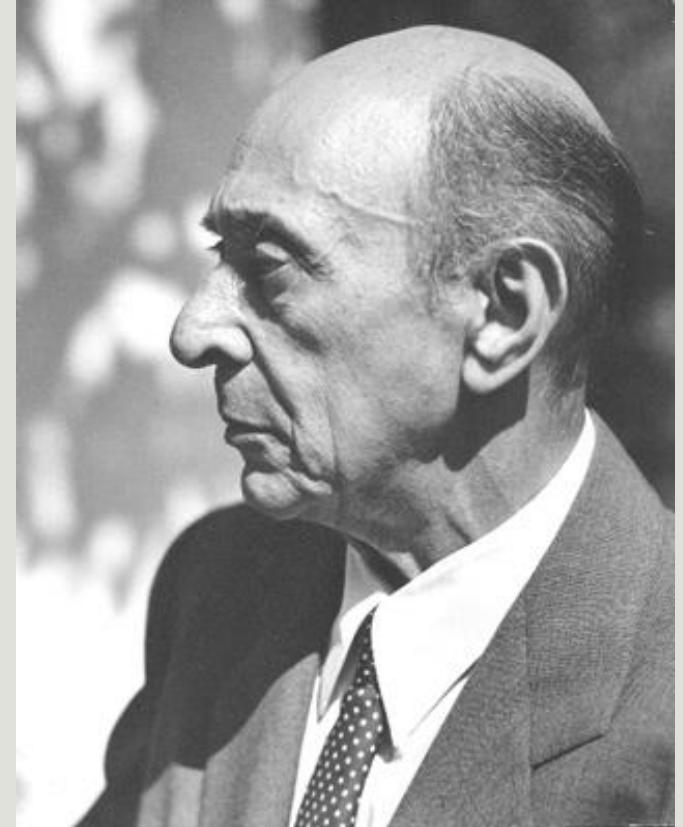
- 4 operas (*Erwartung*), *Five Orchestral Pieces*, *Pierrot Lunaire*

## 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



# “Avante-Garde”

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John Cage (1912 – 1992)

- Different tools for instruments
- Composition by chance
- *Sonatas and Interludes, Construction, Imaginary Landscape, 4'33”*

