GK Composer Questions

1. Period of music
2. When in the composer’s life was it composed
3. Some basic overarching characteristics of the period
4. Is the work of a larger collection? If so, what is the collection
5. Was there a particular influence (including another composer, for instance) or inspiration for the composition
6. What is the style and character
7. What is the form and a basic key structure
8. What instrument was the work composed for, and how may that affect the interpretation

# Bach

1. **Period of Music**: This piece belongs to the **Baroque period** (c. 1600–1750), characterised by elaborate ornamentation, contrast, and expressive musical forms.
2. **When in the Composer’s Life It Was Composed**: It was composed around **1710**, during Bach’s early years, when he was influenced by North German keyboard traditions.
3. **Basic Overarching Characteristics of the Period**: Baroque music features **high ornamentation, complex counterpoint, contrasting dynamics, and a continuous bass line** that supports expressive melodic lines.
4. **Is the Work Part of a Larger Collection?** Yes, it is part of **Bach’s seven keyboard toccatas (BWV 910–916)**, which were compiled posthumously but share stylistic similarities.
5. **Influences or Inspirations**: The piece reflects **North German keyboard traditions** and may have been influenced by **Italian violinistic themes**, as well as composers like **Dieterich Buxtehude**, who was known for his improvisatory keyboard works.
6. **Style and Character**: The toccata is **virtuosic and improvisatory**, featuring **dramatic contrasts, expressive passages, and intricate fugues**.
7. **Form and Basic Key Structure**: The piece follows a **multi-sectional toccata form**, including **a prelude, fugues, and an adagio section**. It is in **E minor**, with modulations throughout.
8. **Instrument and Interpretation**: Originally composed for **harpsichord**, the piece can also be played on **piano or organ**. The harpsichord’s **plucked strings** create a crisp articulation, while the piano allows for **dynamic shaping**, affecting interpretation.

# Mozart

1. **Period of Music**: This piece belongs to the **Classical period** (c. 1750–1820), characterised by balanced phrasing, clear harmonic structures, and elegant melodies.
2. **When in the Composer’s Life It Was Composed**: It was composed in **1783**, when Mozart was **27 years old**, during his early years in Vienna.
3. **Basic Overarching Characteristics of the Period**: Classical music features **clarity, balance, homophonic textures, and structured forms** like sonata and symphony. It also emphasises **dynamic contrast and expressive phrasing**.
4. **Is the Work Part of a Larger Collection?** Yes, it is part of **Mozart’s cycle of piano sonatas (K. 330–332)**, which were published together in **1784**.
5. **Influences or Inspirations**: The sonata reflects **Mozart’s exposure to Italian and French styles**, particularly **the galant style**, which emphasises **graceful and lyrical melodies**.
6. **Style and Character**: The sonata is **light, elegant, and expressive**, with **graceful phrasing and dynamic contrasts**. The second movement has a **lyrical and introspective quality**, while the final movement is **playful and energetic**.
7. **Form and Basic Key Structure**: The piece follows **sonata form**, with three movements:
   * **Allegro moderato** (C major)
   * **Andante cantabile** (F major)
   * **Allegretto** (C major) The first movement modulates to **G major** in the exposition, while the second movement explores **F minor and A-flat major** before returning to F major.
8. **Instrument and Interpretation**: Originally composed for **fortepiano**, the piece can be played on **modern piano**. The fortepiano’s **lighter touch and dynamic range** influence interpretation, making articulation and phrasing crucial for an authentic performance.

# Mendelssohn

1. **Period of Music**: This piece belongs to the **Romantic period** (c. 1800–1910), characterised by expressive melodies, rich harmonies, and dramatic contrasts.
2. **When in the Composer’s Life It Was Composed**: It was originally conceived in **1828** as an étude and later revised in **1830**, when Mendelssohn added an expressive Andante introduction.
3. **Basic Overarching Characteristics of the Period**: Romantic music emphasises **individual expression, emotional depth, chromaticism, and expanded forms**. Composers sought to evoke nature, literature, and personal emotions.
4. **Is the Work Part of a Larger Collection?** No, it is a **standalone composition**, though it was originally written as an étude before Mendelssohn expanded it into a full-fledged concert piece.
5. **Influences or Inspirations**: The piece reflects **Bach’s counterpoint**, **Mozart’s balanced phrasing**, and **Beethoven’s dramatic gestures**. It was also influenced by **Carl Maria von Weber’s harmonic transitions**, particularly in the Andante section.
6. **Style and Character**: The work is **virtuosic and expressive**, featuring **a lyrical Andante introduction followed by a brilliant Presto leggiero**. It showcases **delicate passagework, rapid arpeggios, and dramatic contrasts**.
7. **Form and Basic Key Structure**: The piece follows a **rondo form**, with an **Andante introduction in E major** leading into a **Presto leggiero in E minor**. It explores **closely related keys like G major and E major** before returning to E minor.
8. **Instrument and Interpretation**: Originally composed for **piano**, the piece benefits from the **light touch and shallow key fall of early 19th-century pianos**, which allow for rapid articulation. On a modern piano, performers must carefully balance **clarity, phrasing, and dynamic shaping**.

# Debussy

1. **Period of Music**: This piece belongs to the **Impressionist period**, which emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Impressionist music is characterised by **ambiguous harmonies, fluid textures, and atmospheric soundscapes**.
2. **When in the Composer’s Life It Was Composed**: Debussy composed this piece in **1913**, near the end of his life, when he was deeply engaged in exploring new harmonic and rhythmic ideas.
3. **Basic Overarching Characteristics of the Period**: Impressionist music often features **static harmonies, exotic scales (such as whole-tone and pentatonic), parallel motion, and an emphasis on instrumental timbres** to create shimmering effects.
4. **Is the Work Part of a Larger Collection?** Yes, it is part of **Debussy’s Préludes, Book 2**, a set of 12 piano pieces published in 1913.
5. **Influences or Inspirations**: The piece was inspired by **General Edward Lavine**, an American vaudeville performer known for his eccentric stage antics. Debussy also drew influence from **ragtime and cakewalk rhythms**, reflecting his fascination with American jazz.
6. **Style and Character**: The piece is **humorous and playful**, mimicking Lavine’s stiff, jerky movements with **syncopated rhythms and exaggerated gestures**. It has a **satirical, dance-like quality**, resembling a cakewalk.
7. **Form and Basic Key Structure**: The piece follows a **free, episodic structure**, with contrasting sections that evoke different aspects of Lavine’s performance. It is primarily in **F major**, but features **chromatic shifts and harmonic ambiguity** typical of Debussy’s style.
8. **Instrument and Interpretation**: Originally composed for **piano**, the piece benefits from **Debussy’s delicate touch and nuanced pedalling techniques**. The performer must balance **precise articulation with expressive phrasing** to capture the comedic and eccentric nature of the work.

# Table

| **Aspect** | **Bach – Toccata in E minor, BWV 914** | **Mozart – Sonata in C Major, K. 330** | **Mendelssohn – Rondo Capriccioso, Op. 14** | **Debussy – “General Lavine – Excentric”** |
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| **Period of Music** | Baroque (c. 1600–1750) | Classical (c. 1750–1820) | Romantic (c. 1800–1910) | Impressionist (late 19th–early 20th century) |
| **When Composed** | Around 1710 | 1783 | 1828 (revised 1830) | 1913 |
| **Characteristics of the Period** | High ornamentation, complex counterpoint, contrasting dynamics, continuous bass line | Clarity, balance, homophonic textures, structured forms, dynamic contrast | Individual expression, emotional depth, chromaticism, expanded forms | Static harmonies, exotic scales, parallel motion, instrumental timbres |
| **Part of a Larger Collection?** | Yes, part of Bach’s seven keyboard toccatas (BWV 910–916) | Yes, part of Mozart’s cycle of piano sonatas (K. 330–332) | No, it is a standalone piece | Yes, part of Debussy’s *Préludes*, Book 2 |
| **Influences/Inspiration** | North German keyboard traditions, possibly influenced by Dieterich Buxtehude. | Italian and French styles, particularly the galant style | Bach’s counterpoint, Mozart’s phrasing, Beethoven’s gestures, and Carl Maria von Weber’s harmonic transitions | Inspired by General Edward Lavine, American vaudeville, ragtime and cakewalk rhythms |
| **Style and Character** | Virtuosic and improvisatory, dramatic contrasts, expressive passages, intricate fugues | Light, elegant, expressive, graceful phrasing, dynamic contrasts | Virtuosic and expressive, lyrical introduction, brilliant passagework, dramatic contrasts | Humorous and playful, syncopated rhythms, exaggerated gestures, dance-like quality |
| **Form and Key Structure** | Multi-sectional toccata form, E minor, modulations throughout | Sonata form, three movements: Allegro moderato (C major), Andante cantabile (F major), Allegretto (C major) | Rondo form, Andante in E major leading into Presto leggiero in E minor, modulations | Free episodic structure, primarily F major, chromatic shifts and harmonic ambiguity |
| **Instrument and Interpretation** | Originally for harpsichord, crisp articulation, and dynamic shaping on piano | Originally for fortepiano, it requires balanced articulation and phrasing | Originally for piano, it requires clarity, phrasing, and dynamic shaping | Originally for piano, it relies on delicate touch and nuanced pedaling |