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History

Classical Music

During the Renaissance, composers started to experiment with the limits that were previously taken for granted. What are acceptable rhythms? Which harmonies can be used? What chord progressions would be most appropriate? All of the previously common-knowledge answers to these questions were being overturned. Composers could be more expressive. Secular and sacred music influenced each other and helped each other evolve. Some instruments that only came into existence in the Renaissance were the violin, guitar, lute, piano, and organ, as we know them today. The Gutenberg press made sharing music on a large scale possible and practical. Polyphony (having multiple intertwining melody lines) became more and more intricate through the 14th century, whereas in the 15th century music tended to be more simple and smooth. Some characteristics of music from the Renaissance are modes, four or more parts with gorgeous texture, mixing strands rather than contrasting them, and focusing harmonies on flow and progression of chords.

After the Renaissance came Baroque music. The word “baroque” is derived from “barroco”, which means misshapen pearl in Portuguese. During the Baroque period, tonality—writing a song in a specific key—became widely used. Musical ornamentation became more elaborate, and new playing techniques were developed. The opera, cantata, oratorio, concerto, and sonata were all developed during this time.

Antonio Vivaldi was an Italian Baroque composer, today widely considered one of the greatest Baroque composers. Born in 1678 in Venice, he learned how to play violin from his father. He was composing music by the age of 13, and went to work at an orphanage at 24 as the *maestro di violino*, or “master of violin”. He was promoted to teacher of *viola all’inglese*, a type of viol, then to *maestro di coro* (master of choir). The school’s board of directors didn’t much like Vivaldi, and at the yearly vote to keep him in 1709 voted against him 7 to 6. A year later he was unanimously re-hired and was promoted again to *maestro de’ concerti* (music director) in 1716. He wrote many operas and oratios throughout his life, but ironically the work he’s most famous for is neither; rather, it’s a set of four violin concertos called The Four Seasons.

Another famous Baroque composer was the German Johannes Brahms. He spent much of his life from May of 1833 to April of 1897 in Vienna, Austria. He, Bach, and Beethoven are sometimes referred to as the “3 Bs”, due to his popularity and talent. Brahms composed for piano, chamber ensembles, symphonies, and voice and chorus, but not opera. He was also a gifted pianist and would often premier his own works. He was very close with Robert and Clara Schumann, two famous Romantic composers.

The next period of music was the Classical period. Some characteristics of music during this period were \_\_\_. Some new instruments developed during this period were \_\_\_.

One well-known Classical composer is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Born in \_\_\_, he’s best known for \_\_\_.

Another of the most famous composers from this period is Ludwig van Beethoven, who lived from \_\_\_ to \_\_\_. Out of the enormous collection of music he composed, some of the most well-known are \_\_\_, \_\_\_, and \_\_\_.

Joseph Haydn (\_\_\_–\_\_\_) was an Austrian composer of the Classical period. Born in \_\_\_, he spent a lot of his life \_\_\_. He mostly wrote \_\_\_. \_\_\_ is one of his most well-known \_\_\_s.

The Romantic period, from around 1780 to 1910, was characterized by \_\_\_. Some new instruments were \_\_\_.

Frédéric Chopin was a Polish composer and pianist of the Romantic era. Born in February 1810, he mainly composed \_\_\_, but also a few \_\_\_. He is most famous for \_\_\_.

Franz Liszt was another composer and pianist, best known for the Hungarian Rhapsodies. Mostly writing \_\_\_, he

A famous composer of the late-Romantic period was Pyotr Tchaikovsky.