

# RESONANCES

Engaging Music in Its Cultural Context

Esther M. Morgan-Ellis  
Editor-in-Chief





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# Contributions and Acknowledgments

The textbook and accompanying materials were produced by a team of faculty collaborators at the University of North Georgia, each of whom contributed as follows:

**Esther M. Morgan-Ellis** developed the concept, managed the project, wrote the text (unless otherwise attributed), produced the listening guides (unless otherwise attributed), edited contributions from collaborators, selected/captioned the images, and created the accompanying PowerPoint slides.

**Rebecca R. Johnston** wrote the Chapter 1 sections entitled “The Power of Music” and “Music and Human Development, Learning, and Wellness” and produced the test bank questions in collaboration with **Marie Graham**.

**Louis Hajosy** wrote the Chapter 8 section entitled “The Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*” and the passage concerning Hendrix’s performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” that appears in the Chapter 7 section entitled “1969: An Aquarian Exposition.” He also contributed to the Chapter 9 discussion of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” produced the “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” listening guide, and created Appendix B, in addition to providing valuable feedback on the text.

**David R. Peoples** contributed to the Chapter 13 sections entitled “1965: The Duke Ellington controversy” and “1997: Wynton Marsalis, Blood on the Fields.” He also typeset all of the listening guides and examples and produced all of the graphics, in addition to providing valuable feedback on the text.

**Arielle P. Crumley** wrote the Chapter 5 sections entitled “Beyoncé, *Lemonade*” and “Ancient Greece: *The Iliad*” and provided feedback on the remainder of the text.

**Alexandra Dunbar** wrote the Chapter 4 section entitled “Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton*” and produced the accompanying listening guides. She also provided feedback on the remainder of the text.

**Philip Snyder** created the notation-based videos in Chapter 2, contributed some images, and provided valuable feedback on the entire text.

**Lisa Prodan** created the teaching videos in Chapter 2.

**Bart Walters** contributed to Appendix A, provided valuable feedback on the text, and corrected the initial proof. He also created the YouTube channel that accompanies this book, uploaded videos as necessary, and built playlists in collaboration with **Serena Scibelli**.

In addition, **Jura Pintar** formatted listening examples for the typesetting process and **Noël Hahn** selected some of the images used in Chapter 1. These contributors were not compensated and we appreciate their support.

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# How to Use This Book

## OUR VISION

Welcome to *Resonances: Engaging Music in Its Cultural Context!* Although this book is intended primarily for use in the college music appreciation classroom, it was designed with consideration for independent learners, advanced high school students, and experienced musicians. That is to say, it includes enough detail that expert guidance is not required and is written using broadly-accessible language. At the same time, it addresses advanced topics and positions music as a serious object of study.

Unlike most music appreciation textbooks, this volume is organized thematically according to the many ways that music is and has been used in human societies. It brings together examples from classical, folk, and popular traditions from around the world. The text offers a thorough grounding in the cultural and historical context of each work and a close examination of its characteristics. While the book can certainly be read from beginning to end, one can also move freely between chapters and examples without missing crucial information.

This textbook is in no sense comprehensive. There are lots of important and influential works that are not discussed in its pages, many vital musical concepts that are not addressed, and countless ideas that are left unexplored. However, this is a feature, not a bug. The authors of this book reject the idea that a comprehensive overview of “important” music is either desirable or possible. Instead, our approach values diversity and depth. Each chapter includes wildly dissimilar examples from various times and places, each of which is uncovered as both a sonic object and a cultural artifact. The result, we hope, will be renewed interest in the music one hears every day, broadened taste for music that was once unfamiliar, and expanded awareness of the music that is still waiting to be discovered.

In short, this book does not offer a definitive curriculum. What it offers is a new approach to thinking about and engaging music—an approach that we have already piloted with a variety of student audiences and know to be successful. Whether you are reading this book on your own or using it as part of a course, we hope you will find that it is full of new ideas and sounds that change the way you listen to and think about music.

## NOTES TO THE INSTRUCTOR

This text is meant to be highly adaptable to your desired curricular and learning objectives, and you are welcome to use it in any way you see fit. It is accompanied by a complete set of teaching materials, including PowerPoint slides, test banks, and videos. These can be accessed through the UNG Press website and the UNG Music Department YouTube channel.

What follows are some guidelines and suggestions for using this text:

1. By our estimation, this textbook contains enough material for four semester-length music appreciation courses. This allows the instructor to select the desired chapters and/or examples and also to change the curriculum from semester to semester. We strongly advise that you **do not attempt to teach this entire text in a single semester**. You will find that the outcome is much more satisfactory if you lead students to engage deeply with a limited number of examples.
2. This textbook is designed to be modular. Any subset of chapters can be assigned in any order, and individual examples can be skipped. Although we advise that you teach one chapter at a time, choosing which examples to use and which to omit, it is also possible to reorganize this volume at the level of the musical example. For instance, one might choose to teach only works from the Western classical tradition, and to do so in chronological order. While this is not ideal, the fact that each example is self-contained means that it can be done. (You might also find that individual entries are of use in other music courses.)
3. In addition to being a textbook, this volume proposes a new approach to organizing the music appreciation curriculum. The examples reflect the expertise of the authors, but they are by no means exhaustive. It goes without saying that many important and interesting musical works are not included. As such, you are invited not only to chart your own path through the examples but to add your own. Please feel free to integrate additional material under the appropriate chapter headings!
4. Although the musical examples linked in this book are primarily audio-only, we recommend videos of live performances for pedagogical use, and have included our recommendations in the chapter playlists on the UNG Music Department YouTube channel. Live performances are also linked in the PowerPoint slides. We chose to link to audio recordings supplied to YouTube by record labels with the hope that they will remain accessible for the life of this text, which in turn means that the listening guides will remain relevant and useful. We have found, however, that students respond much more positively when they are able to watch a performance.

5. You will find that some of the musical examples are accompanied by listening guides, but that many are not. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, the authors felt that only certain examples would benefit greatly from listening guides. Although guides can be helpful, we don't want them to limit students' engagement with the examples. Finally, we thought that the creation of listening guides for the remaining examples would make a good assignment for your students to complete.
6. This textbook is only a tool in support of a great music appreciation course, the most important elements of which are listening, discussion, and reflection. The focal point of any course, whether in person or online, should be direct engagement with the musical objects under consideration. This means focused and repeated listening/watching, accompanied by guided observation. It is up to you to change the way your students perceive and understand musical objects. Happy teaching!

## **HELP MAKE THIS BOOK BETTER!**

The authors intend to issue at least one revised edition of this book, which was developed on an abbreviated timeline and does not contain everything we could have wished. We want our revisions to reflect the needs and interests of those who use the text. Is it missing examples that you would like to teach? Is there an additional unit or chapter that could be integrated? Can information be added to a discussion? Could the text package incorporate additional teaching tools? Did you find an error? If you are interested in helping us to improve this book, please contact Esther Morgan-Ellis with your feedback and ideas.

# **Unit 1**

**MUSIC AS A FIELD OF PRACTICE AND STUDY**

# 1

## Music in Human Life

*Rebecca R. Johnston and Esther M. Morgan-Ellis*

### WHAT IS MUSIC?

It is surprisingly difficult to define the term “music.” More specifically, it can be challenging to determine what is *not* music, and to explain why.

For example, is bird song music? It is beautiful and enjoyable to listen to, and bird song often features clear, catchy melodies. Some birds learn songs from one another, thereby developing diverse repertoires. Is it a problem that birds sing primarily to communicate and attract mates? Humans certainly make music for those purposes. Does the reason for singing determine whether a song counts as music or not? Can music even be made by non-humans, or is it a uniquely human phenomenon?

Let’s consider another example. Are the noises of the city music? How about when they are carefully recorded and curated for release by a record company? In 1964, Michael Siegel issued an album entitled *Sounds of the Junk Yard*<sup>1</sup> on



**Image 1.1: Is bird song music?**

Source: PxHere

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Folkways Records. Does this enshrinement turn the sounds into music? Does your opinion change when you consider that the rock band Sonic Youth was directly inspired by *Sounds of the Junk Yard* and sought to replicate its sounds in their playing? How about when noises are painstakingly arranged into a collage by a composer? The 1952 work *Williams Mix*<sup>2</sup> by John Cage is made up entirely of pre-recorded sounds. How about when they are imitated by a musical instrument? Henry Cowell set out to capture the sounds of the New York subway with his 1916 piano composition *Dynamic Motion*<sup>3</sup>. Or when they are integrated into a concert work, such as the real car horns used in Gershwin's 1928 orchestral composition *An American in Paris*?

1.		Siegel's 1964 album <i>Sounds of the Junk Yard</i> has inspired musicians. This example is titled "Loading Pick-Up Truck."
2.		Cage's 1952 <i>Williams Mix</i> is made up entirely of real-world sounds that he recorded, organized, and assembled. Is this music?
3.		Cowell's 1916 <i>Dynamic Motion</i> imitates the sounds of the New York subway.

The broadest definition of music to date was provocatively set forth on August 29, 1952, by the American composer John Cage. He made his statement not in words but with a performance of a composition that is known as *4'33"*. The premiere of *4'33"* was given by pianist David Tudor, who came out onto the stage and proceeded to sit in silence at the keyboard for the time indicated in the title, interrupting his performance only to open and close the keyboard at predetermined time markers. The musical contents of the performance, therefore, were not sounds that emanated from the piano but rather the incidental sounds that audience members happened to perceive during the allotted time: rustling programs, whispers, laughter, a passing train. The composer certainly did not know what these sounds would be and exercised no control over them—and indeed, the sounds heard during performances today would in some cases have been unimaginable to the composer, who died in 1992. The object of this composition was to make the case that any sounds could be music as long as they were listened to as music. In other words, music is in the ear of the beholder. It is defined not by its source or by the intent of its creator. It is defined by the act of listening.

There is continued debate over how to define “music.” The Google Dictionary definition—that is to say, the definition that one is most likely to come across—reads

“vocal or instrumental sounds (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion.” This describes most music, to be sure. But does music have to be beautiful? If so, who is the arbiter of what is beautiful? Does music have to express emotion? And what about music that is created not by voices or instruments but by computers (e.g. electronic dance music)? The above definition excludes a lot.

For a more clinical take, we can turn to Merriam-Webster, which describes music as “the science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity.” This definition is more difficult to criticise, but it still seems lacking. What about the power of music to make us cry, or dance, or become overwhelmed with nostalgia? What about the significance of music to personal and cultural identity? A dictionary definition certainly doesn’t have to address these dimensions, but they are integral to a deeper understanding of what music really is.

## THE POWER OF MUSIC

Although we might argue over what is and what is not music, there is no question that music is important. Its significance ranges from the historical to the cultural to the biological. Music has played a role in every documented human society of the past and present. The oldest instrument found to date is an ivory flute created about 43,000 years ago—clear evidence that music is not a recent development. But why did humans start making music? The answers to that question might be discovered by examining the extraordinary effects that making and listening to music has on our brains.



**Image 1.2: This bone flute from the Geissenklösterle cave Germany is the oldest known musical instrument.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

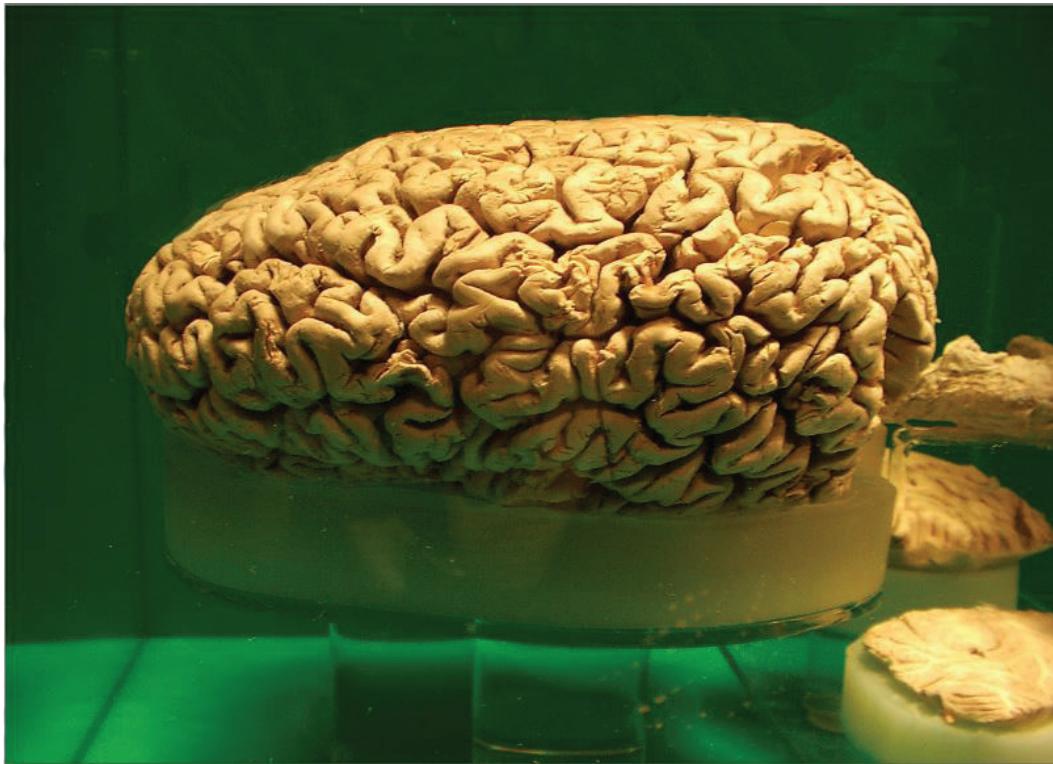
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## Music, Human Experience, and the Brain

All of our activities are governed by the amazing organ situated inside of our skulls and between our ears: the human brain. And it is clear to religionists and evolutionists alike that there is something distinctly different between humans and other animals. But what is that difference? What makes us capable of complex reason and emotion? What gives us the ability to have an awareness of our own

thought processes? It can't simply be the *size* of our brains, as the brains of blue whales are much larger than those of humans, yet we don't credit them with equivalent intelligence. Conversely, gorilla brains are only a little smaller than human brains, and they are not capable of the extreme creative and processing power of humanity. So what is it that makes our brains different?



**Image 1.3: This brain, which belonged to a sperm whale, is many times the size of a human brain.**

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## What makes us human?

Consider just a few of the qualities that are claimed to be unique to humans. We recognize ourselves in the working order of things, and are capable of standing back as a spectator and seeing our part in the greater picture. In other words, we have *self-consciousness*, and are capable of making choices based upon that information. Scientists use the mirror test (whether or not an animal species recognizes reflections of themselves as self, rather than another animal) to measure self-consciousness. But there are many species of primates that recognize their reflections as self, so that characteristic isn't unique to humans. We have an appreciation of beauty and of aesthetic things, and are compelled as a species to create art. But there are birds who decorate their nests, exhibiting nuanced preferences for certain colors and items in the process—does this mean that they possess our same capacity for appreciation of aesthetics?

What about humor? All people possess a sense of humor (though some have less than others) and can appreciate and express humor. Not only does humor require intelligence and understanding of situational variables, but it also requires the ability to see the odd, absurd and ironic. But there are chimpanzees that “laugh” when they are tickled, and if you watch young chimps playing long enough, you will eventually see one pull a prank on another and run away “laughing.”



**Image 1.4: This satin bowerbird has decorated its courtship stage with a wide variety of blue objects. Bowerbirds appear to have a keen artistic sense and decorate with exquisite care.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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What about awareness of death? While many creatures exhibit behaviors we could characterize as mourning when they lose a beloved human or fellow animal, humans have elaborate funeral rituals upon death. The ancient Egyptians actually buried people with physical objects so that they would have things with them in the next life. But elephants<sup>4</sup> have been observed burying their dead (and the dead of other species) in addition to placing food, fruit, and flowers with their bodies. That sounds a lot like a funeral.

4.



This video captures elephants seeming to mourn a dead companion.

What about awareness of time? Humans experience sequence of events, form memories, and then predict future outcomes, and we have ways of measuring the passing of time in equal intervals (think second hand on a watch). Dogs and other animals certainly don't have clocks or devices, but they reliably know when it is dinner time. Is this because of biological processes, or do they, too, have some sense of time?

What about love? It is arguably one of the most important motivational forces in a human's life, but are we alone in this? Animals display behaviors that clearly indicate affection, but do they love each other the way we do? Cats will rub their companions and purr, whales can deliberately save seals from attack, and dogs display extraordinary altruism towards their owners and other creatures. In humans, these behaviors signal the thing we call love. Do animals experience it the way we do?

What about language? Humanity is the only species that uses language, although we are clearly not the only species that communicates. So what is different about us? Animals communicate in many ways with one another, and some gorillas have been taught sign-language. Koko the gorilla reportedly understood over 2,000 spoken words and was able to use more than 1,000 signs to convey thoughts and emotions. She was even able to communicate compound ideas by using signs in ways they had not been taught to her. This certainly was a form of communication and language use, although Koko could never learn to speak. In addition, while some animals can understand words, sounds, and tone of voice, they do not comprehend syntax or communicate in complex sentences. Throughout history, human beings have devised hundreds of languages and endless dialects, despite the fact that we are born with no way to verbally communicate, at all. So what is it about our brains that makes them capable of complex language, when the composition of our brains is so similar to chimpanzees and gorillas?



**Image 1.6: Bonobos Kanzi and Panbanisha are pictured here communicating with a pictorial "keyboard."**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

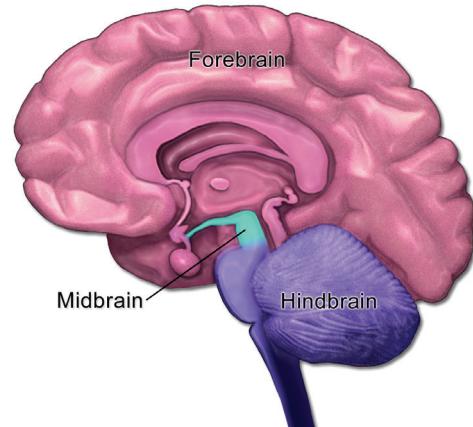
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## Language and the Human Brain

It comes down to the structure of our brains and to what those structures do. Generally, the human brain can be divided into three regions: the **forebrain**, **midbrain**, and **hindbrain**. This characteristic is absent in most animals. Although the *size* of the brain itself does not determine complex intelligence, the size of the brain in relationship to the size of the body matters. Humans win the rodeo with the largest brain of all animals in comparison to the size of their bodies. In addition, the human brain has more neurons in its outermost layer (the **cerebral cortex**) than do other animals, and the insulation around nerve fibers in the human brain is thicker than that of other animals, enabling more rapid signal transfer between neurons. We literally *think better and faster*. But it is the structures responsible for language production and comprehension (Broca's and Wernicke's areas) that are unique to human beings. And, interestingly, both of these areas are heavily involved in the processing of music, which brings us to the crux of the matter: human beings are the only animals who employ "music" and "language". That is what separates us from every other species on the planet. And it seems as though we do these things because we have been endowed with neuroanatomical structures that are unique to us. So what do these two critical brain regions do? And how is music cognition different from language cognition?

Early investigators learned about particular regions of the brain that control speech by observing patients' limitations and then conducting postmortem exams. A French neurologist named Paul Broca observed a patient who understood language but who was unable to produce more than a few isolated words. When that patient died, Broca conducted a postmortem exam



**Image 1.7: These are the regions of the brain.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 1.8: This engraving from ca. 1881 depicts Paul Broca, a French neurologist responsible for making foundational discoveries about language and the brain.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

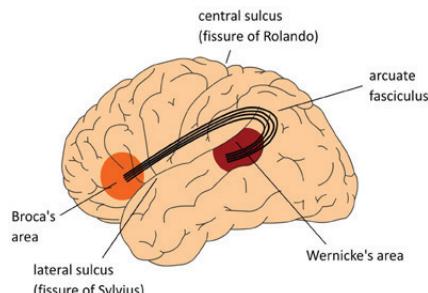
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and found a lesion in the man's forebrain in the **frontal lobe**. He deduced that this area was associated with the production of speech, and it was termed **Broca's area**. Persons with damage to Broca's area understand heard language and know what they wish to say but are unable to speak. They can't speak because Broca's area controls the *physical production of speech*. Essentially, our brains take in auditory stimuli, then Broca's area (in conjunction with Wernicke's area, which we will discuss

in a moment) converts the stimuli to neuronal representations that are then translated into the physical motions involved in producing speech sounds. To put this more simply, that area of the brain helps us understand what we hear, formulate articulate thoughts and then convert them into speech.

About ten years later, a neurologist named Carl Wernicke identified a similar, but different, problem in patients who were unable to comprehend language or to construct meaningful sentences, even though they did not experience difficulty in producing articulate words. In postmortem examination, he found lesions at the junction of the parietal, temporal, and occipital lobes. He deduced that this area, now termed **Wernicke's area**, had something to do with the understanding of language. Conjunctly, Broca's and Wernicke's areas handle the input of sound, conversion of sound to understanding, and utterance of spoken language. And these two areas are distinct to humans. The genuinely fascinating thing is that for many years, these areas were thought to be exclusively involved in the processing of language. But recent researchers have discovered through fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) technology that the two language processing centers are activated during listening to and processing music, even when it contains no text. In other words, your two language centers fire when you are listening to instrumental music and are not processing language. How bizarre is that? Why might that be? How are music and language similar in such a way as to explain this phenomenon?



**Image 1.9: Broca's area and Wernicke's area handle the input of sound, conversion of sound to understanding, and utterance of spoken language.**

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**Image 1.10: The German physician Carl Wernicke, photographed here in the early 20th century, expanded on Broca's observations.**

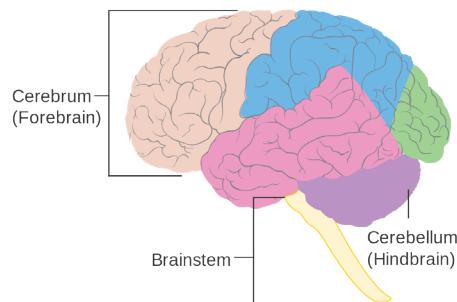
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## Connections Between Speech and Music

What two things do you think of most easily when someone asks, “What is music?” Probably variation in pitch (frequency) and rhythm (time), even though those are not the only elements of music. Is there a pitch and a rhythm to speech? Read that question aloud to yourself, and note the fact that not all words are the same pitch. This is because we emphasize more important words and increase pitch when asking a question. Read it again and note the fact that not all of the words are the same speed or length, due to the fact that we vary the rhythm of speech sounds. And not only that: there is a **syntax** (the orderly arrangement of sounds in a system) to both language and music. They behave similarly in that the arrangement of sounds is predictable and conforms to patterns. And there we have it. Our brains are uniquely constructed for the successful intake, conversion, and execution of *language and music*. And the reason other animals can’t and don’t make music or speech (some animals make musical sounds, but the construction of these sounds doesn’t conform to syntactical rules, so these sounds aren’t actually music in the way we understand it) is because their brains lack the two areas involved in the processing of orderly sound systems. How crazy is that?

But what does this really mean about the nature of music and speech? It suggests that those are the two primary things that make us human and that distinguish us from all other creatures on the planet. That’s a significant point. But music isn’t only processed in Broca’s and Wernicke’s areas, although speech primarily is.

Before we examine that, however, we need to discuss how the brain is generally structured. The brain is divided into three main parts: the **cerebrum**, the cerebellum, and the brain stem. The cerebrum is the part that gives the brain its wrinkled appearance. It is divided into a left and right hemisphere separated by the **corpus callosum**, a bundle of fibers that transmit messages from one side of the brain to the other. The cerebrum performs higher functions like receiving and analyzing sensory input such as touch, sight, and sound, and also processes reasoning, emotion, memory, and fine motor control. Both Broca’s and Wernicke’s areas are situated in the cerebrum. The cerebellum is located under the cerebrum. It primarily coordinates muscle movements, and processes the body’s position in space for purposes of balance. The brainstem is the most evolutionarily primal area of the brain—one that we share with other primates. The brainstem performs primarily autonomous functions—those that don’t involve voluntary thought, like heart rate, breathing, body temperature, digestion, swallowing, coughing, and vomiting. You



**Image 1.11: The brain is divided into the cerebrum, the cerebellum, and the brain stem.**

Source: Wikipedia

Attribution: Cancer Research UK

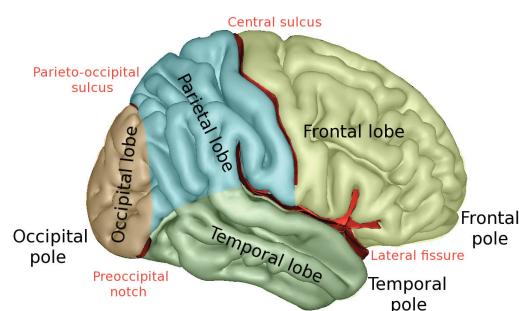
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can see that as you move upward from the brainstem, the functions of the brain become more complex.

Now that we've handled some of the less-interesting technical information about the way the brain is structured, let's go back to the cerebrum, where most complex brain function occurs. If we can arrive at an understanding of the way the cerebrum is divided and what kinds of information are processed in each area, it will help us to understand the differences in the way the brain processes language and music—perhaps the two most significant markers of what it is to be human. As previously mentioned, the cerebrum is divided into a left and right hemisphere that communicate with one another across the corpus callosum. Not all functions of the two hemispheres are shared. In general, the left hemisphere controls the physical motion on the right side of the body and the right hemisphere controls the physical motion on the left side of the body. Also, in general terms, the left hemisphere processes speech, comprehension, arithmetic, and writing. The right hemisphere controls creativity, spatial ability, and artistic and musical skills. This explanation is a bit misleading, however.

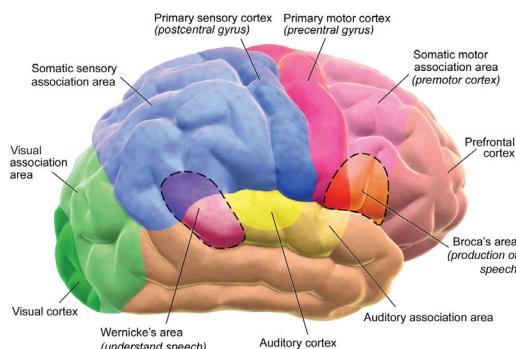
If you look down at a brain from the top, you can see it is divided into two distinct hemispheres. But if you look at the brain from the side, you can see that each hemisphere has distinct fissures that divide the brain into chunks, called lobes. Each hemisphere has four lobes. Moving from front to back, they are the frontal, parietal, temporal, and occipital lobes. Each can be divided even further into areas that serve specific functions (like Broca's and Wernicke's areas). But it is important to understand that no lobe or area of the brain functions in isolation. There are complex networks between the lobes of the brain and between the hemispheres that interact to process information. In that sense, our brains are the most complex computers on the planet! We'll quickly take a look at what is generally processed in each lobe before circling back to talk about the differences between language and music processing in the brain.

Frontal lobe processing determines personality, behavior, emotions, judgment, planning, problem solving, speech (Broca's area), fine body movement, intelligence,



**Image 1.12: This diagram illustrates the lobes of the human brain.**

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**Image 1.13: This diagram illustrates the functional areas of the human brain.**

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concentration, and one of the other defining characteristics of human beings: self-awareness. You can see that the frontal lobe (put your hand up to your forehead—that's where the frontal lobe is) handles most of the things that make you, well... *you*. This is why traumatic injury to the frontal lobe from head-impact is often absolutely devastating to the individual. You can lose what it is to be you if that area is damaged. The parietal lobe processes senses of touch, pain, and temperature, and interprets signals from vision, hearing, motor input, memory, and spatial perception. It also plays a role in the interpretation of language and words. Moving further back, the temporal lobe handles the understanding of language (Wernicke's area), memory, hearing, sequencing, and organization. And finally, the occipital lobe interprets visual stimuli, including color, light, and movement. Whew! That was a lot of information about our highly complex human brain.

So let's go back to examine language processing a little more deeply. First, our ears take in sound waves and translate them into electrical impulses that travel through nerves to different parts of the brain. The first place they go is the auditory cortex in the temporal lobe, where the sound is translated into neuronal representations (basically, your brain's "image" of the sounds). The neuronal representations are then transmitted to the areas of the brain involved in interpreting them and deciding what to do with them. In the case of speech that is only heard, the auditory cortex and Wernicke's area are primarily involved. In the case of language that is read and interpreted, the visual cortex and Wernicke's area are primarily involved. In the case of speech that is produced, Wernicke's area transmits neuronal representations to Broca's area, which converts them into spoken language with involvement in the motor cortex. But if language and music are so similar, what is different in the way that the brain processes language and music?

Well, to begin with, language processing is fairly isolated. As we've discussed, depending on the type of language activity a person is engaging with, there are a few areas primarily involved in processing the information. In the case of music cognition, however, the brain lights up like a Christmas tree. There is activity all over the place: in both hemispheres, in all four lobes, in the cerebellum, and even in the brain stem. With the advent of fMRI, we can see which areas of the brain light up as a person is engaging with music. As in the case of language, it depends upon the way in which you are engaging with music. But the one thing that is consistent is that no matter how you are engaging—whether you are listening passively, or listening actively (listening *and* thinking about what you are listening to), whether you are hearing music with or without words, whether you are playing music, reading music, writing and composing music, or improvising music—a unique neural network lights up all across the brain. Normally unrelated areas of the brain work in synchronicity to process music, even when they do not coordinate to process any other type of information. That is pretty crazy! Even the brain stem—the part of the brain that handles automatic and subconscious processes—assists in music cognition.

So here we come to the crux of it. The human brain is an incredibly complicated computer. It handles incomprehensible amounts of information every second, and is more complex than the brains of other animals. There are two primary things that separate us from all other animals on the planet: language and music. Our brains are structured differently than are those of other animals, and it is these specialized structures that allow us to engage in language and music. But while language processing is complex, music cognition is even more complex, involving more brain regions and involving activity in both hemispheres, all lobes, the cerebrum, and the brainstem.

Beyond this, music also activates the limbic system within which emotions and feelings are processed. It is capable of eliciting sympathetic emotional response from listeners even in the absence of words, and our memory systems are intrinsically woven into the brain's processing of music. This is why music can be used to "bring back" patients with Alzheimer's<sup>5</sup>, and why you can remember a song even if you haven't heard it for 40 years. Suddenly, you'll find yourself singing along and wondering how in the world you still have that information in there—but it's in there because the retrieval pathways were laid down in more than one way. You won't remember a poem or a story, or any other information, the way you remember music. For this reason, it is a profound educational tool: information can be entrained quickly and permanently when connected to music. Think about how many things were taught to you as a child through song, beginning with learning your letters! The A-B-C song is the most commonly taught song in the U.S. (and many other places have their own version) because it is such an effective way of teaching children to remember otherwise unfamiliar and disconnected information (the sound of each letter and the order in which they occur in the alphabet). If it is such a profound educational tool because of the effects on memory and retention, how else can music be used?

5.



This video details the experience of Henry, a man with Alzheimer's Disease, who remembers who he is through the use of music.

## MUSIC AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, LEARNING, AND WELLNESS

Due to the information that we have gained from the field of neuroscience, the use of music therapy has exploded in the past decades. **Music therapy** is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a licensed music therapist. And because music is processed all over the brain, music therapy can be utilized to rehabilitate patients suffering from a broad host of disorders, ranging from traumatic brain injury to cerebral palsy, from learning disabilities to Parkinson's Disease. It can be

used to regain voluntary movement or return speech skills when they have been lost because of a blood clot or stroke. And the remarkable thing is how genuinely effective these interventions are.

## The Field of Music Therapy

It is important to talk about what music therapy *is*, and what it is *not*. Although all people can participate in music, and music teachers spend time creating music and working with students, board certified music therapists are the only individuals who participate in an allied health profession that is research-based, and that, in the words of the American Music Therapy Association, “actively applies supportive science to the creative, emotional, and energizing experiences of music for health treatment and educational goals.” Music therapy is applied in either an educational or clinical context, and music therapists must hold a music degree(s) and a degree in music therapy. The degree involves clinical internship and certification by the board of the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA). Licensing involves many hours of training in order to understand which musical activities to apply in a given context, and it may be used to improve individuals’ functioning, health, or wellbeing.

So why does music therapy work? Because it is a stimulus that activates every major region of the brain simultaneously. Because music processing occurs globally in the brain, it develops more comprehensive and stronger neurologic processes. According to Sharon Graham, founder and director of the Tampa Bay Institute for



**Image 1.14: Here, a music therapist works with a patient who is recovering from traumatic brain injury.**

Source: Military Health System

Attribution: Caitlin Russell

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Music Therapy, “Music is used as a stimulus when one encounters trauma, disease or disorder, and is the most powerful non-pharmacological tool we have to address any deficits that arise.”

What is music therapy used for? The possibilities are almost limitless! It may be used for physical rehabilitation and facilitating movement, because when we hear rhythmic information, the motor cortex in our brains is activated: It is for this reason that you are compelled to move on the beat when you hear a peppy song. Have you ever noticed how people unconsciously coordinate themselves in time when music is played? Pay attention when music is playing outdoors—nearly everyone will begin to walk at the same tempo as the music. The funny thing is that they don’t even realize they are doing it! The activation of the motor cortex can be utilized by music therapists to increase motor function and voluntary movement in people with Parkinson’s and Multiple Sclerosis and in physically injured veterans.

Music therapy may be used to facilitate improvement of mood and reduction of depression. This works for multiple reasons, not the least of which is that music is enjoyable. However, it also works because we have an immediate physiological response to the music we enjoy. Engaging with liked music causes the release of

serotonin and dopamine- neurotransmitters in the brain, which leads to feelings of happiness and well-being. It also releases norepinephrine, which can result in a sense of alertness and euphoria. The act of singing, in particular, releases endorphins—the “feel good” chemicals in the brain. Choral singing (singing in a group with others) has been shown to cause the release of oxytocin, which enhances feelings of trust and bonding and results in reduction of depression and loneliness. One study recently indicated that choral singers have lower levels of cortisol, indicating lower stress, while multiple studies have indicated that singing relieves anxiety and contributes to quality of life. And the best part is, you don’t have to be a good singer to reap the rewards: A 2005 study indicated that group singing “can produce satisfying and therapeutic sensations even when the sound produced by the vocal instrument is of mediocre quality.”

Studies have indicated that music can be used to reduce insomnia and to reduce the perception of pain, and it can be used as part



**Image 1.15: This music therapist is visiting Renown Children's Hospital in Reno, Nevada.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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of a rehabilitation protocol after injury or surgery. One study from the General Hospital of Salzburg found patients recovering from back surgery had higher rates of healing and less pain when exposed to music. Music therapy can be used with older adults to lessen the effects of dementia and Alzheimer's Disease and it can be used to restore speech when aphasia (loss of ability to speak) occurs as a result of injury or stroke. Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords used music therapy to regain speech after surviving a gunshot wound to her brain. Interestingly, music can also be used to reduce the symptoms of asthma, can be used in premature infants to improve sleep patterns and to increase weight gain, and can be used to help people with Down's Syndrome or Autism when speech is limited. In fact, it seems that there is little that music therapy cannot be utilized to improve. So what should we take away from all of this? That music is awesome, of course, and that everyone should engage with music actively throughout the course of their lives.

### Why do (and should) humans make music?

If music can help rewire a brain that has been damaged or is limited in some way, it can also be used to create new brain growth and increase processing efficiency in all students. This is why there is a strong correlation (relationship) between studying music and higher grades in other subject areas. In 2015, the



**Image 1.16: Studying music can lead to higher achievement in other areas.**

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Every Student Succeeds Act replaced No Child Left Behind, and for the first time codified music as part of a core, well-rounded academic experience with which all children should be provided. The current academic environment focuses on and prizes primarily STEM subjects, but we have learned that it is actually the A in STEAM (Arts) that provides training ground for the things employers say they prize more than subject-matter knowledge: creativity, initiative, and the ability to generate new solutions to problems not previously encountered. No child should go through school without access to these subjects.

Humans have engaged in music for as long as we have written history. Even before humans had the ability to write down the music they were creating and performing, they produced written descriptions documenting the fact that they valued music. The Biblical authors wrote about people engaging in music by playing instruments, dancing, and singing. Clearly, music was a part of those ancient cultures. We don't know what that music sounded like, because they didn't have a system to write it down, but we know they were doing it.

We also know that humans have been "musicking" since *long before* written history, as evidenced by prehistoric bone flutes found in various parts of the world. The existence of these instruments suggests that music may actually have preceded formalized spoken language as we understand it, and certainly preceded writing. To put this in perspective, humans were creating and playing instruments when wooly mammoths and saber tooth tigers roamed the earth. And to make that fact even more intriguing, when researchers blew through those flutes, they heard the pentatonic scale still in use in elementary school music today. Why would those early humans have created music, when the primary objectives were to eat, not die from the elements, and not be eaten? We can't answer this question definitively, but one theory is that they were imitating the sounds they heard in nature. Another is that humans utilized music to coordinate themselves in time together (think: *one, two, three - pull!*). Yet another is that music simply feels good and touches something spiritual in humans. We will likely never know. All we can say for certain is that music is one of the things that separates us from every other animal on the planet, including our closest relatives, and that it was part of human experience before modern humans existed.

One final consideration is that it appears as though music and language acquisition skills are innately learned by humans. No one sits down with children and attempts to formally teach them to produce language or music. They simply learn those things by listening to and imitating the sounds being used in their environment. All humans in all cultures the world over uniformly amass both language and music skills simply by being immersed in an environment in which those systems are being used. And this tells us that our brains are *hardwired* for success with those two systems. Even if we didn't have fMRI scans to show us that, we can deduce it from the informal experiences of babies. Studies have even shown that newborn infants who have had no experience in the world whatsoever recognize and respond to essential musical elements. These elements, which will be described and discussed in the next section,

include tonic and dominant (I and V in the scale—the two most important chords) and meter (the way beats are grouped and divided). How is it that babies' brains are able to do this with no training? *It's hardwired!*

## Music and Innate Aptitude

We have all seen that some people seem naturally to have more musical ability than others. Some children seem born singing beautifully, while others struggle to develop musical skills. We tend to look at children who sing early and well, and think, "Oh, she's so *talented*." But that perception can be a little misleading, and here's why.

Researchers have indicated that there are two primary things that contribute to musical ability. One of them is **aptitude**, which is defined as the ease and speed with which your brain processes certain kinds of information. Aptitude is innate. You're born with it. It is woven into the development of the grey matter in your brain as you are developing in your mother's womb. Strangely, research indicates that aptitude is developmental until somewhere around age eight or nine. In other words, the ease and speed with which your brain is able to process certain types of information is formative until you reach age nine, at which time it stabilizes. From that point forward, you will be reliant on whatever aptitude you developed during your earliest years. This doesn't mean you can't learn to do new things or develop new skills. We can all learn to do things within whatever aptitude we possess. It just means that the ease and speed with which we work doesn't fundamentally change beyond that point.



**Image 1.17: Everyone has an aptitude for music, even though some people have a greater aptitude than others.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Interestingly, the same is true of aptitude for language, which makes sense, because the two systems are so intrinsically similar. Research has indicated that the same developmental window (birth to age nine) exists for language aptitude. For both of these, early exposure, and early development, are critical for the rest of the life of a human being. How do we know language aptitude stabilizes at that age? Obviously, it would be horribly unethical to lock children up for the first nine years of their lives and expose them to little or no language to see what would happen. We can't do that. We do, however, have multiple stories of severe neglect that shine some light on what happens when children don't develop language aptitude while they are young.

In one particularly famous case, a young girl was born to an abusive father who kept her chained to a potty chair or in a crib, and rarely let anyone speak to her or interact with her. Because there was no interactivity with the sound system, this child did not learn to speak. When she was rescued, around age 12, she was immediately taken into custody, and teams of researchers attempted to teach her to speak. She learned the use of some nouns and verbs and was able to communicate simple things, but she never learned the complex grammar that all children innately learn simply by hearing language spoken around them and having people interact with them using language. In fact, researchers estimate that all she could achieve was the basic communicative ability of Koko the gorilla (who had limited ability to form compound or complex thoughts, and did so with sign language). Why was this? Because a child's aptitude for certain kinds of processing is developmental, and is developed, during the first years of life. Once that developmental window closes, the child is working with established aptitude.

In another famous case, a child was kept contained in a room with a television on all day. The child was hearing language spoken regularly, but by abstract people on the television. In other words, no one was interacting with the child while using language. Interactivity is critical—just *hearing* language isn't enough. That child did not learn to speak just by listening. In the same way, music aptitude is not developed simply by listening. Children must hear others around them singing and see them moving rhythmically, and others must interact with them as they do these things.

In addition to aptitude, the thing that most determines a person's skill is **achievement**. This is what an individual *does* with the aptitude they have. Do they learn to sing and play an instrument? Do they learn to read and write? Do they regularly engage in creating music? If the answer is yes, then chances are, their achievement (or skill) will be relatively high. Does high innate aptitude automatically mean a person will have high achievement? No. There exists only a correlation between the two variables—not a causative relationship. A child may be born with lower aptitude but work her entire life and emerge as a person with relatively high skill after years of training. By the same token, a child may be born with relatively high aptitude but never engage with it or use it. That child is likely to have much lower achievement than the one who worked at it. Interestingly, the same seems to be true of language.

And in both cases, there is no such thing as a person with *no* aptitude. I've frequently heard people say: "Oh, I can't sing." My usual response is: "Yes, you can. Everyone can." Usually when people make statements like that, what they actually mean is: "I don't sing *well*." But our society has robbed so many people of their birthright by fooling us into thinking that music is something only the most talented and skilled should do while everyone else watches, and, as a result, these people believe their aptitude is so low that they just shouldn't do it. Knowing what we do about music and the brain, and about the benefits of engaging in music over the course of a lifetime, this is a pretty tragic thing! If I told you that simply singing, reading music, playing an instrument, or writing music over the course of a lifetime could decrease the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's when you are older, would you change your mind about whether or not you should pursue it? (I hope so!) All humans have aptitude for music and for language. This aptitude is generally distributed along a bell curve. There are people with higher aptitude and people with lower aptitude. But none of us have *no* aptitude, because it is a matter of our brain structure.

In fact, they had to search the world over to find only ten or so people to participate in a study in *amusia* (a condition in which the brain simply doesn't organize musical sounds into meaningful patterns). In people with amusia, the brain takes in sound, but it is disorganized and the individual can't perceive the structure. In other words, they don't hear music, they hear *noise*. While a normal individual might hear a beautiful symphony, an individual with amusia might perceive the sounds of New York City on a busy day. Obviously, both people *hear* the same thing, but one person's brain organizes the sound meaningfully into melody, harmony, phrases, meter, and other elements, while the other's brain doesn't organize it at all. What a terrible thing! Can you imagine not being able to listen to and enjoy music? Not being able to play a song back in your mind? Not being able to tap on a beat because your brain doesn't perceive the organization of meter and rhythm? Imagine how colorless life would be! Fundamentally, what I am telling you is this: *Of course you can sing and learn to play an instrument, and learn to read or write music.* Do you know how I know? Because you can listen to and enjoy music. Your brain is organizing the sound, which means you have the fundamental capacity to engage with it.

## Music and Human Flourishing

So what does all of this together tell us? Music is important to the human species and always has been. Though you may remember a poem or a story, the way you remember words differs from the way you remember music. This difference is why music, like literature, belongs in the curriculum. Because information can be entrained quickly and permanently when connected to it, music is a profound educational tool. It is something that engages all areas of the brain at once, and no other activity does that.



**Image 1.18: It's never too late to get involved in music!**

Source: Flickr

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Music can be used to train and grow the brain and build connections between areas, or to rehabilitate and heal individuals. It assists in the formation of long-term memories and in the retrieval of stored information, increases processing efficiency in other modes of cognition, and assists the brain in coordinating normally unrelated brain regions. It is for these reasons that music is one of life's most miraculous phenomena. It has probably been with us for the totality of our existence as a species. And despite the fact that there are a limited number of pitches and rhythmic patterns, people throughout history, in every corner of the globe and every culture ever recorded, have engaged in the creation and performance of music that is unique to them. It truly is part of our human birthright and deserves to again take its place as a *critical curricular offering* in all of our schools.

And you know what else? Even if you didn't learn to read music, sing, or play an instrument while you were in school, it's not too late! Researchers tell us that you can begin at literally any point in life and still see benefits. It truly isn't about how well you do it—it is that you regularly do it over time. So go join an ensemble or find some private lessons!

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Print

Knight, Andrew J., A. Blythe LaGasse, and Alicia Ann Clair. *Music Therapy: An Introduction to the Profession*. American Music Therapy Association, 2018.

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Patel, Aniruddh D. *Music, Language, and the Brain*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Sacks, Oliver. *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*. Revised and expanded edition. Vintage, 2008.

## Online

American Music Therapy Association: <https://www.musictherapy.org/>

*Alive Inside* documentary: <http://www.aliveinside.us/>

# 2

## The Elements of Music

*Esther M. Morgan-Ellis*

### THE DIMENSIONS OF SOUND

All sound—not just music—has certain characteristics. The distinction between music and non-musical sounds, in most cases, is one of organization: sounds that we describe as noise tend to be irregular and unpredictable, while sounds that we describe as music are more likely to exhibit patterns. This is not always the case. A jackhammer, for instance, makes a regular and patterned noise, while certain composers create patternless music.

Whether we are listening to noise or music, we will perceive the same elements: **rhythm**, **pitch**, **volume**, **articulation**, and **timbre**. These elements will combine in time to produce a sonic object of a given **texture** that either exhibits or lacks **form**. In the following sections, we will define each of these dimensions and explore the roles that each plays in the creation and perception of music.

#### Rhythm

**Rhythm** is the temporal aspect of sound. It is the pattern of “on” and “off” states exhibited by any sound as time passes. Rhythm is by no means unique to music. When you speak, the consonants of your words produce rhythm. When a car drives by, the oscillating sounds of the tires and engines create rhythm.

Music often (although not always) features rhythmic patterns. The most basic of these is the **pulse**<sup>1</sup>, which—like the pulse produced by your own heart—is a sequence of regularly-spaced sounds. The frequency of the pulses determines **tempo**<sup>2</sup>, which can range from very slow to very fast. It makes sense that music should tend to be organized around a pulse, since our very existence is organized around pulses. Our hearts beat to a pulse, we often breathe to a pulse, we walk to a pulse, and we organize time into pulses (seconds). It is usually not difficult to detect the pulse in a musical work: simply tap your foot or clap your hands, and there it is.

1.



This video demonstrates pulse.

2.



This video demonstrates tempo.

Pulses, however, are usually not all of equal weight. Some have a greater musical significance than others. When pulses are organized into groups containing strong and weak beats, **meter** is established. Each metrical group is called a **measure** or **bar**. In notated music, these groups are physically separated by **bar lines**, which help performers to easily perceive how the pulses are grouped and to identify which is the strongest. While measures can contain any number of pulses, the most common grouping are two, three, and four. These groupings are termed **simple**, **triple**, and **quadruple meter**. Each measure in all three of these meters will begin with a strong pulse, termed the **downbeat**. In simple meter, the pattern of pulses is [strong-weak]. In triple, it is [strong-weak-weak]. And in quadruple, it is [strong-weak-medium-weak].

## Pitch

**Pitch**<sup>3</sup> refers to the “highness” or “lowness” of sound. Sound, of course, is not physically located in high or low spaces, but most listeners can easily perceive the difference between a high-pitched sound and a low-pitched sound. Our use of the terms high and low to describe pitch reflects the characteristics of sound waves.

3.



This video introduces the concept of pitch in the context of a familiar melody.

All sounds are produced by vibrating bodies, which in turn produce sound waves that can be perceived by mechanisms in your ear and decoded by your brain. Pitch<sup>4</sup> is determined by the frequency of those sound waves. A high pitch is produced by a high-frequency sound wave, and a low pitch is produced by a low-frequency sound wave. The frequency of sound waves is in turn determined by the characteristics of the vibrating body that sparks them into action. All other parameters being equal, a long string, once plucked and set into motion, will produce a lower pitch than a short string<sup>5</sup>. Likewise, a thick string will produce a lower pitch than a thin string of the same length. The same principles apply when you blow across the ends of

tubes, strike bells, or beat drums: the larger, longer, and heavier the vibrating body, the lower the sound it will produce.

4.



This online oscilloscope allows you to visualize sounds. Pitch is reflected in the distance between waves, which will decrease as pitch level increases. Volume is reflected by the size of the waves, which will grow in amplitude as dynamic level increases.

5.



This video demonstrates the relationship between pitch frequency and wave form.

Music is usually characterized by the careful organization of pitches. To begin with, most musical systems recognize what is termed **octave equivalence**<sup>6</sup>. This is the consensus that you can halve or double the frequency of the pitch without changing its essential identity. To see this principle in action, attend any birthday party at which both women and men are present. When the guests sing “Happy Birthday,” they will not sing exactly the same pitches. Instead, the women will tend to sing in a high octave, and the men will tend to sing in a low octave. In technical terms, this means that the women will probably sing pitches that have frequencies equal to twice that of those sung by the men. However, all participants will agree that they are all singing the same pitches, or in **unison**. An octave is an example of an **interval**, which is the distance between two pitches.

In the Western system, we acknowledge this phenomenon by using the same letter names to designate pitches in different octaves. For example, pitches at the frequencies of 110 hz, 220 hz, 440 hz, 880 hz, and 1,760 hz are all called “A.” However, specific frequencies are still important. Music that contains mostly high pitches has a different effect on listeners than music containing mostly low pitches, even if the rhythms and sequence of pitches are the same. Additionally, **melodic range**<sup>7</sup> (the distance between low and high pitches) and changes in **register** (the use of high or low pitches) can be important musical elements.

6.



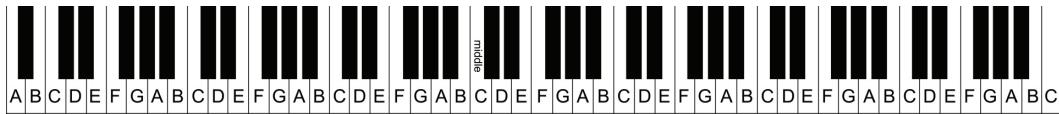
This video demonstrates octave equivalence in the context of “Happy Birthday.”

7.



This video introduces the concept of melodic range.

The Western system—that is to say, the system of musical organization that was first developed in medieval Europe and continues to dominate global listening today—goes quite a bit further in its efforts to organize pitch. Let us return to the octave. Between the A at 220 Hz and the A at 440 Hz, there are a near-infinite assortment of possible frequencies at which an intermediary pitch might sound. However, we do not use all of those pitches when we create music. Instead, we identify a limited number of specific pitches to be used. The Western system is best represented by the piano keyboard, which is both familiar and useful.



**Image 2.1: Each white key on a piano is assigned a letter name. Those letter names repeat at each octave, reflecting our agreement that every A (for example), whether high or low, is in some sense the “same” note. The black keys are named after the adjoining white keys: simply add “flat” to the name of the white key to the right or “sharp” to the name of the white key to the left.**

Source: Public Domain Pictures

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As you can see, the space between the A at 220 Hz and the A at 440 Hz is divided across twelve piano keys. This is called the **chromatic**<sup>8</sup> pitch set, and it includes all of the pitches used in Western music. However, composers only rarely use the entire chromatic pitch set. When you do hear music that uses every available note, you will probably find that it makes you uncomfortable. This is because we are used to hearing music built using a set of only seven pitches that is called a **scale**. Most music is based on one of two scales: the **major** scale<sup>9</sup> and the **minor** scale<sup>10</sup>. If the pitches in a piece of music are drawn from a major scale, it is described as being in the **major mode**. Likewise, if the pitches are drawn from a minor scale, it is in the **minor mode**. A scale can start on any pitch, which then determines the **key** of music that is based on that scale. For example, music created using pitches drawn from the A major scale is in the key of A major.

8.



This video demonstrates the chromatic pitch set.

9.



This video demonstrates a major scale.

10.



This video demonstrates a minor scale.

In most pieces of music, pitches are assigned to two different roles: **melody**<sup>11</sup> and **harmony**<sup>12 & 13</sup>. Melodies are constructed out of a sequence of pitches. This is the part of a musical work that you might sing along with or that might get stuck in your head. Melodies have various characteristics, including **shape**<sup>14</sup> and **motion**<sup>15</sup>, which can be **conjunct** (in which the melody primarily moves up and down the scale) and **disjunct** (in which the melody contains larger intervals and leaps). Harmonies are constructed out of groups of pitches that are usually sounded simultaneously and constitute **chords**<sup>16</sup>, while a sequence of harmonies is termed a **chord progression**. In a musical work, the harmony is usually unobtrusive and might be repetitive. A melody and a harmony sound good together when they are based on the same scale and contain some of the same pitches. However, every melody can be harmonized in many different ways, using various chords. Likewise, a single harmony can be used to accompany many different melodies.

11.



This video demonstrates the melody to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

12.



This video demonstrates melody and a possible harmony to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy."

13.



Here, you can hear Beethoven's melody and harmony in the context of his original composition.

14.



This video introduces the concept of melodic shape.

15.



This video introduces the concept of melodic motion.

16.



This video demonstrates chords, which are used to harmonize melodies.

Although this text will not offer a technical explanation of harmony (which can become very complicated indeed), it is often central to the listening experience. A certain chord progression can surprise you, or excite you, or break your heart. It is not necessary to understand harmonies from a theoretical perspective to feel their impact. You also don't need a theoretical background to understand the role harmony plays in establishing and then satisfying or frustrating expectations. As long as a piece of music is in a key, one chord—the chord built on the note that the key is named after—will serve as a home base, while other chords in the key will facilitate journeys away from or back towards that home base. We get used to hearing certain chord progressions and come to expect them, so we often have a sense of where the music is going to go. If we hear an unexpected chord or—most shocking of all—a chord that is not in the key of the piece of music, we tend to respond emotionally.

## Volume

Like pitch, volume—the loudness or softness of a sound—is a parameter of every soundwave. **Volume** is determined by the amplitude of the wave, such that waves with a large amplitude produce high-volume sound and waves with a small amplitude produce low-volume sounds. While volume is simple to understand and assess (we can all tell whether music is “loud” or “soft”), its significance in the creation of musical meaning cannot be overlooked. On the one hand, certain genres of music depend on volume for their identity. You cannot appreciate the impact of heavy metal by listening to it with the dial turned down, just as you cannot sing a baby to sleep at the top of your voice. Changes in volume can also communicate meaning in music. A gradual increase in volume can indicate growing excitement, while a sudden change in volume can indicate a dramatic mood shift.

A few terms will help us to talk about volume, which is also referred to as **dynamic level**. An increase in volume is referred to as a **crescendo**, while a decrease is termed a **decrescendo** or **diminuendo**. Musicians in orchestras, bands, and choirs describe volume using Italian terms including **fortissimo** (very loud), **forte** (loud), **mezzo forte** (medium loud), **mezzo piano** (medium soft), **piano** (soft), and **pianissimo** (very soft). While this book will not employ these terms, you might encounter them elsewhere.

## Articulation

**Articulation** has to do with how pitches are begun, sustained, and released, and it is driven primarily by changes in dynamic level. In music production

language, this dimension of sound is referred to as the envelope<sup>17</sup>. The envelope is independent of pitch, but it determines the character of that pitch. For example, a pitch might begin with a gentle increase in volume, or a sudden decrease, or no dynamic change. Once it has begun to sound, a pitch might be sustained for a long time, or it might be abruptly cut off. And when it is ended, it might be released with a decrease in volume, and increase in volume, or no dynamic change.

17.



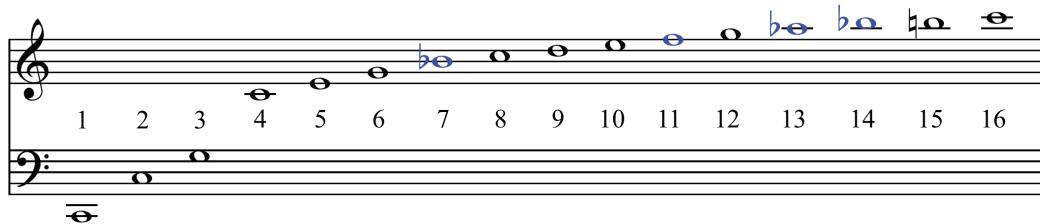
This video explains the four elements of the envelope: attack, decay, sustain, and release.

Although the preceding description was highly technical, the effects of articulation are easy to perceive. At one end of the spectrum, a series of pitches might be heavily punctuated, with forceful onsets and no sustain. The traditional Italian term for this articulation is **staccato**—a term that means short and accented, and which is difficult to replace with an English equivalent. At the other end, a series of pitches might be smoothly connected, with gentle onsets and a great deal of sustain. The term for this articulation is **legato**. Between these extremes are an enormous variety of approaches to beginning, sustaining, and releasing notes, many of which are unique to the instruments that produce them.

## Timbre

The final characteristic that is universal to all sounds is **timbre** (TAM-ber), which describes the quality of a sound. Whether one has no musical training or is an accomplished performer, we are all skilled at identifying minor variations in timbre. This ability lets you know that your mother is calling you from the other room, not your sister. It helps you to tell the difference between a guitar and a piano. Not only does every voice and every instrument exhibit a unique timbre, but performers can alter the timbre they produce by changing their technique. Timbre is also integral to genre and style: A symphony orchestra produces one range of timbres, while a rock band produces another.

Variations in timbre are made possible by the existence of the **overtone series**, which is a sequence of higher-pitched frequencies that are activated every time a pitch is produced. When you strike a key on the piano, for example, you are not only sounding the pitch associated with that key, you are also activating dozens of pitches at set intervals above that pitch, each of which might sound at a relatively high or low volume. The combination of these **overtones** produces timbre. Two instruments playing the same pitch sound different, therefore, because they are activating different pitches in the overtone series at different volumes. The complexity of this process allows for near-infinite variety in timbres.



**Image 2.2:** These are the pitches of the overtone series as they might be notated on a staff. Even if you cannot read notation, you can see that the pitches get closer together as they get higher. When one plays a low C on any instrument, most of these pitches are sounded to some degree. The pitches in blue will be out of tune.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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If you engage with every example in this volume, you will experience an extraordinary range of contrasting timbres. Audiences for various genres develop unique preferences and expectations for timbre, and timbre is often one of the most distinctive characteristics of a musical tradition. Variations in timbre are often not hard to identify: A piano trio, for example, had a different sound quality than a thrash metal band. These differences, however, can be very difficult to put in to words. While timbre is easy to perceive and measure, it is hard to describe.

For the most part, we will consider timbre in the context of individual examples. We will investigate different ways of producing sound with the human voice (which is capable of extraordinary diversity), the various instruments that are responsible for the characteristic sounds of non-Western classical traditions, and the electric instruments and sound processing techniques that have contributed to popular music of the last seventy years. There is one sound source in particular, however, that pervades this volume: the symphony orchestra. For an overview of the instruments that make up the orchestra, please see Appendix A.

## Texture

We are now really to move from sound to music, which usually exhibits some additional characteristics. One of these is **texture**<sup>18</sup>, which concerns the contents of and interactions between various layers or voices in a musical work. We use four basic terms to describe texture, although these terms can tell us little about what a piece of music actually sounds like. **Monophonic**<sup>19</sup> music has a single melody line, performed by a soloist or in unison, with no accompaniment. If you add an accompaniment that has different pitches (probably chords) but that is secondary to the melody, you have **homophonic** music. In **polyphonic** music, every voice is independent but equally important, and there is no distinction between melody and harmony. And in **heterophonic** music, multiple instruments or voices each perform a unique version of the same melody, such that unison is not achieved. We will encounter these terms in the context of specific examples throughout this volume.

18.		This video introduces the concept of texture.
19.		This video explores variation in texture.

In addition, texture can be described using qualitative terms. It can be thick or dense, meaning perhaps that there are many independent and highly-active parts, or it can be thin or sparse, meaning perhaps that there are few instruments, each of which can be clearly identified and tracked. Consider, for example, two songs from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, discussed in Chapter 8. The concluding thirty seconds of "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite" are irrefutably dense: There is so much going on that it is difficult to identify individual sources of sound, and the listener's focus is constantly attracted by new and varied voices. The first verse of "A Day in the Life," on the other hand, has a thin texture, made up only of guitar, bass, and shaker. It is possible to focus on individual instrumental parts and to hear the unique articulation of each.

## Form

Finally, we need a way to talk about how music unfolds over time. This element is known as **form**. Most musical compositions exhibit formal characteristics, although some pieces are very amorphous or difficult to describe in terms of form. At the very least, creators of music usually plan the formal dimensions of their work. John Cage's 4'33" doesn't have form, per se, since its sonic contents are always different, but at least the composer decided how long the piece was going to last.

In most cases, the creators of music rely on three organizational principles that produce form. These are **repetition**, **variation**, and **contrast**. Repetition occurs when we hear the same thing twice, whether it is a long and complicated melody, a short melodic fragment, a rhythm, or a harmonic pattern. Variation occurs when musical material returns, but with alterations. Contrast, naturally, refers to musical material that has not been heard before.

Repetition is key to our ability to understand and enjoy music. When we hear something new, internal repetition allows the music to quickly become familiar and helps us to predict what is going to happen next. For this reason, all popular music features repetition of various kinds. When an unfamiliar song comes on the radio, you can expect to hear the chorus (the catchy part with words and melody that both repeat) several times. Most popular songs also have repetitive chord progressions and some sort of repeating accompaniment, known formally as an

**ostinato<sup>20</sup>**. Ostinatos are important in many types of music and will play a role throughout this book.

20.



The bass line at the beginning of White Stripe's "Seven Nation Army" provides a good example of an ostinato. This seven-note melodic figure is heard throughout the song.

Variation and contrast are what make music interesting. We enjoy and rely upon repetition, but we can only take so much. However, music that contains constant variation or lacks repetition altogether requires more of the listener. Most people cannot relax and enjoy music that is constantly changing and that offers something new and different with each passing moment. At the same time, such music can communicate a great deal and be particularly rewarding for an engaged listener.

The degree to which music relies on repetition or contrast is often linked to its purpose. Dance music, for example, tends to be repetitive. When people are dancing, they don't want much contrast. They want the music to maintain a constant tempo, rhythmic character, and mood. Minor variations might make dancing more interesting, but major changes can make dancing impossible. In addition, when you're dancing you don't pay careful attention to the nuances of the music. Music belonging to a sung theater tradition, however, is much more likely to exhibit contrast. In the first place, it is probably being used to express emotions or to portray a nuanced character. Variation and contrast allow for more complex and meaningful communication. In the second, audience members are paying full attention to the music, and, therefore, have a higher tolerance for contrast and change.

## MUSIC IN THE WORLD

With the exception of its opening passages, which considered the problem of defining what music even is, this unit has so far emphasized the empirical qualities of music. We have acknowledged the documented effects of music on the human brain, and we have acquired a variety of terms and concepts that can be used to understand and describe music as a physical phenomenon. Now it is time to address some of the messier aspects of talking and writing about music.

### Categories

What kinds of music do you like to listen to? Country? Hip-hop? Classical? EDM? Top 40? Whether we are talking to a friend, using a streaming service, or browsing records in a store, we like to think about music in terms of categories. These categories can be very useful. They can help us pick a radio station we might enjoy, or decide whether or not to buy tickets to hear an unfamiliar band. At the same time, these categories are both artificial and extremely limiting.

Let us begin by considering the classic tripartite division of music into the categories of “classical,” “popular,” and “folk.” This approach has been around for a long time, and it has persevered because, in many ways, it works. If I tell you that I like “classical” music, you immediately understand that I probably mean orchestral music, or opera, and that I probably listen to music that is fairly old. But there are problems with this categorization. To begin with, much of what is “classical” today was “popular” in the past. When Mozart wrote his symphonies, for example, his object was to satisfy popular demand and sell concert tickets, and his audiences behaved the same way that fans at a rock concert do today. And what if I actually prefer experimental orchestral music composed last year? It is common practice to refer to such repertoire as “classical,” but it’s about as far from Mozart as you can get.



**Image 2.3: “Classical” music is usually associated with certain performance conventions, including formal dress, music reading, and standard ensembles such as the orchestra and choir pictured here, but none of these are essential.**

Source: Pexels

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How about “popular” music? This category is generally understood to contain commercial music that appeals to large numbers of people. But what about individual artists or songs that fail to achieve any popularity whatsoever? What about experimental rock bands that take the same attitude towards their work as serious “classical” composers? Mozart, a “classical” composer, might have more in common with a “popular” artist like Jimi Hendrix than Hendrix has in common with Pink Floyd. Mozart and Hendrix were both gifted instrumentalists who

dazzled their audiences with virtuosic performances and wrote music to showcase their skills, while the band Pink Floyd is known more for their nuanced production, complex song structures, and unusual instrumentation. Again, however, this category is not without its value. While there is an enormous diversity of “popular” musics, they tend to be characterized by certain forms, instrumentations, styles, and performance venues. There might be much to separate Jimi Hendrix and Pink Floyd, but their music shares important elements of instrumentation and style, and it might be heard in the same types of settings.

“Folk” is also a slippery category. “Folk” music is typically described as music of unknown authorship that is passed down from generation to generation in a particular region. It tends to be fairly simple and in a distinctive style, and it is performed on instruments that are integral to the local musical culture. However, problems quickly arise as we try to label individual pieces or practices. In the United States, for example, the works of Stephen Foster have long been considered folk music. Songs like “My Old Kentucky Home” and “Camptown Races” have certainly entered folk culture, and many who sing or play them know nothing of their composer or origin. But can a commercial song, created and published by a professional composer, truly be considered “folk” music? Different problems arise as we address the musical practices of non-Western societies, many of which do not employ musical notation and reject notions of individual authorship. But do the absence of a named composer, official sheet music, and copyright notice mean that a work in the North Indian classical tradition is “folk” music? The complexity, sophistication, and technical demands of music in this category would suggest not.

A further challenge arises when we try to identify *the* “folk” music of a region or nation. Let us take the United States. If I tell you that I listen to American folk music, you will probably imagine someone like Joan Baez playing guitar and singing songs from the Anglo folk tradition. Indeed, music such as hers has come to be known as Folk music (with a capital F). If I ask Spotify to play Folk music for me, I’ll hear Joan Baez and others like her. However, her music represents only one cultural strain within the United States.



**Image 2.4: Woody Guthrie, pictured here in 1943, is an icon of American folk music. However, he mostly performed songs that he himself wrote and had a successful commercial career—characteristics that put him more in line with “popular” musicians.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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What about the polka music of midwestern communities? What about the corrido ballads of Spanish-speaking communities near the southern border? What about the dance music heard at Native American pow-pow gatherings? Are any of these traditions less “folk” or less “American” than the others?

For all the reasons explored above, this narrative is going to steer clear of “classical,” “popular,” and “folk” as categories and terms. They have been addressed here only because their use is so widespread. Instead, we will focus on what music across these categories shares in common: the purposes for which individual works were originally created and continue to be consumed. This book is organized around categories, but these categories have little to do with the style of the works contained therein. Instead, they have to do with the roles music plays in society. These categories lead us to first understand what music is *for*. Only then will we seek to address how the music works, who created it, and how it is rooted in its historical and cultural context.

These categories also have their shortcomings. Many musical examples included in a given category could just as easily be included in another. We will admit that at the outset. All the same, these categories seem more useful than “classical,” “popular,” and “folk,” and they tell us much more about what really matters: music as an integral aspect of the human experience.

## Genres and Subgenres

This book will engage with another mode of categorization: **genre**. Genre is a way of making connections between closely-related works and musical artists that share stylistic, formal, and cultural elements. You are sure to recognize a large number of genres—rock, pop, R&B, country, hip-hop—from your own musical consumption. Each of these genre names tells us something about what the music is like and who listens to it. Each also hosts a variety of **subgenres** that communicate more specialized information about the music contained therein. For example, the genre EDM (electronic dance music) contains all computer-produced music intended primarily for dancing, whereas the subgenre dubstep contains only bass-heavy EDM that uses specific timbres, is in duple meter, and falls within a narrow tempo range. The label “dubstep” also gives us a clearer picture of who consumes the music and what a concert might be like. Finally, subgenres tend to come and go, each leading to the next, while genres remain relevant for longer periods of time.



**Image 2.5: Genre is primarily a marketing tool. Customers in this store can easily find the music they are likely to be interested in because the recordings are organized by genre.**

Source: NeedPix

Attribution: User "StockSnap"

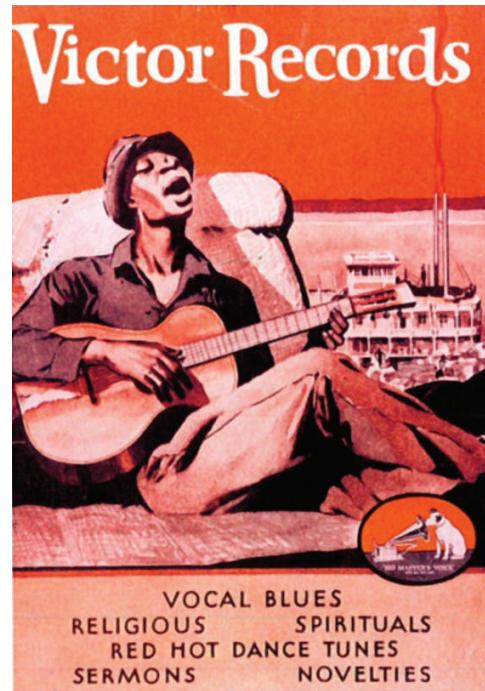
License: CC0

gives us a clearer picture of who consumes the music and what a concert might be like. Finally, subgenres tend to come and go, each leading to the next, while genres remain relevant for longer periods of time.

It is important to acknowledge that genre in the 21st century is primarily a marketing tool. The main purpose of genre is to help record companies efficiently label their merchandise, identify consumers, and advertise music to the people who are most likely to buy it. Genre also helps the music industry to track sales; consider the Billboard music charts, which have been in use since 1958. Of course, genre is meaningful to consumers as well, and subgenres are often named not by faceless corporations but by the fans themselves. Genre can also help listeners to find music that they will enjoy, and it can serve to create communities of listeners and concertgoers.

At the same time, genre can be divisive. Historically, genre has been used to separate black and white performing artists whose music was stylistically identical. This happened in the 1920s, when the marketing categories of “race records” and “hillbilly records” were invented to segregate the music of black and white Southern musicians, and again in the 1950s, when the distinction between performers of R&B and rock ‘n’ roll was often one of race. It is important, therefore, to be critical of genre, and to repeatedly assess exactly what genre is telling us.

Indeed, genre can convey a wide variety of types of information, but not all genres convey the same types of information. Let’s look at two examples: “string quartet” and “French reggae.” The former provides us with precise information about instrumentation (two violins, viola, and cello) and suggests a multi-part concert work intended for the stimulation of players and listeners. We might also make assumptions about the consumer of such a genre, who is probably (although not always) well-educated and reasonably well-off, and we might expect to hear performances in a formal concert hall, surrounded by well-dressed and attentive listeners. However, genre in this case tells us nothing at all about style, geographical origin, historical context, or social significance. A work in this genre might have been composed in 1780, or 1880, or 1980, or yesterday. Although the string quartet originated in German-speaking Europe, this genre has been accessible to composers, performers, and listeners across the globe for at least the past one hundred years. A string quartet might be pleasant and lyrical, or dissonant and jarring. It might be fairly simple or



**Image 2.6: This is the cover for a Victor “race records” catalog published in the 1920s. Various “race” genres are listed at the bottom.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Unknown

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mind-bogglingly complex. It might last eight minutes, or eighty minutes. And genre provides us no idea about what sort of meaning—political, social, or otherwise—might be contained in such a work.

The case is quite different with “French reggae.” On the one hand, this genre tells us less about instrumentation. We can expect to hear certain instruments—electric guitar, electric bass, drums, and perhaps electric organ, trumpet, and saxophone—but taking away or adding instruments does not fundamentally destabilize the genre. On the other, it tells us much more about everything else. First and foremost, the “reggae” designation tells us all we need to know about style, which is a core identifying feature of the genre. It also limits the scope of time and place. Reggae has only been around since the late 1960s, and it was developed in Jamaica by Rastafarians—a nation and culture that are central to the genre’s identity no matter where individual songs might come from. The subgenre identification of “French reggae” tells us even more about geographic location and language. Finally, reggae carries certain political, social, and racial connotations. It is usually performed by musicians of African descent, and it often espouses ideals of pan-African unity and social justice. These values in turn help us to understand how and why people consume the music, and how French reggae might become an integral part of someone’s identity.

### Fixed Composition vs. Improvisation

The two genres just discussed exhibit an additional pair of features that require deeper discussion: string quartets tend to be **fixed compositions**, such that the pitches and rhythms in every performance are identical, while reggae invites **improvisation** and variation from performance to performance, such that two renditions of the same song might sound quite different. In a tradition that relies on fixed composition, it is assumed that the creator of a work will make all decisions concerning pitch, rhythm, form, instrumentation, and length, and that performers will follow these instructions precisely. Fixed compositions are usually enshrined in notated music, although they do not have to be. This does not mean, however, that every performance of a fixed composition will be identical. Performers are usually invited to make minute adjustments to some of these elements, such as articulation, tempo, and dynamics, with the result that each rendition is unique to the discriminating listener.

Improvisation is much more difficult to sum up. This is due to the fact that there are nearly as many approaches to improvisation as there are musical traditions. Improvisation implies the production of new musical elements in the course of a live performance, but it always occurs within a set of boundaries. No improviser is free to play or sing whatever they want. Instead, an improviser will tend to apply formulas to the transformation of musical material while respecting certain fundamental characteristics of the style and composition.

In jazz, for example, improvisation is guided by the form and harmonic structure of a fixed composition that serves as the basis for a performance. While



**Image 2.7: In the United States, improvisation is most closely associated with jazz. Here we see Coleman Hawkins improvising a solo in 1947.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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improvising, a player is free to choose pitches and rhythms—but they must fit with the predetermined harmonies, so choices are limited. Improvisation means something different to a balafon player in West Africa, who will constantly vary a repeated melodic figure used to accompany singing (see Chapter 5). It means something different again to a member of a Javanese gamelan, who might not know how a performance will unfold ahead of time but understands exactly how to vary their melody in response to instructions from the drummer (see Chapter 4). And it means yet something else to a Baroque violinist, who performs a fixed composition but is free to add ornaments and flourishes according to stylistic guidelines.

When we talk about fixed composition versus improvisation, we are talking about different roles in the creation of music: the role of the composer versus the

role of the performer. Not all traditions distinguish between these roles, which makes it particularly difficult to define our terms. Throughout this volume, we will identify and examine the contributions of different individuals—composers, orchestrators, arrangers, adapters, and performers—to the creation of unique musical objects.



**Image 2.8: North Indian classical musicians, such as Shruti Sadolikar Katkar and Mulye Mangesh, also engage in improvisation. Their performances, however, are guided by entirely different principles than those of jazz musicians.**

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## Emotional Expression and Cultural Context

Emotional expression is, for many listeners, the main reason to interact with music. It is also the most difficult to pin down or explain. While we can make some generalizations and predictions, emotional response to music happens at the individual level, and it is impossible to know exactly what impact music will have on a given listener. A piece of music might make one person cry, another feel uncomfortable, and another feel bored. The extraordinary diversity of genres is itself a testimony to the wide-ranging responses that people have to music. There is something out there for everybody to love, and something for everybody to hate.

All the same, members of a given culture tend to agree, at least to some extent, about the emotional content of music. As an example, consider two excerpts from a musical work created by the German composer George Frideric Handel in 1740 entitled *The Cheerful Person, the Thoughtful Person, and the Moderate Person* (original Italian: *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*). For most of this work, two archetypal characters—the cheerful person and the thoughtful person—argue

about whether it is better to be happy or pensive. Each calls forth the emotional state for which they advocate, the cheerful person with an aria (song) entitled “Come, thou Goddess fair and free,”<sup>21</sup> and the thoughtful person with an aria entitled “Come, rather, Goddess sage and holy.”<sup>22</sup> Although this music was written over 250 years ago, the emotions expressed are still easy to perceive by many today. But what is it, exactly, that makes the first aria sound happy, and what makes the second sound reserved?



**Image 2.9: This 1845 painting by Thomas Cole captures the allegorical figure of L'Allegro, or “The Cheerful Person.”**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Thomas Cole

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21.



Handel’s aria “Come, thou Goddess fair and free” represents bright and cheerful emotions in music.

22.



Handel’s aria “Come, rather, Goddess sage and holy” captures a sober and introspective emotional state.

The answer can be arrived at by comparing and contrasting the dimensions of sound that were enumerated above. The first aria is quick in tempo, while the second is slow. The first contains fast-moving rhythms, while the second does not.



**Image 2.10: Here we see Cole's representation of Il Penseroso, or "The Thoughtful Person."**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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The first is in the major mode, which we often hear as communicating positive emotions, while the second is in the minor mode, which can sound sad or serious. The vocal line in the first aria jumps around, skipping notes in the scale, while that in the second generally does not. The articulations in the first are bouncy and accented, while those in the second are smooth and connected. The first aria features bright-timbred wind instruments—oboe and bassoon—while the second relies on the mellower strings.

However, we still haven't answered the question. After all, what do oboes have to do with cheerfulness? Why does a melody that moves stepwise suggest sobriety? Why does the minor mode signify a somber mood? There are two ways that we can begin to answer these questions. The first has to do with the web of relationships between music—a purely acoustic phenomenon with no required visual component—and the “real world.” Our brains easily map high pitches onto elevated physical locations, rapid rhythmic activity onto frenetic physical activity, and melodic leaps onto physical leaps. The other has to do with cultural signification. There is nothing objectively sad or serious about the minor mode, for example, but in the Western tradition we have developed an association between minor-mode music and profound emotional expression. (This is largely due to the complex inner workings of Western harmony, which are beyond the scope of this book.) Other cultures have not made this association, and listeners in those traditions might respond to minor-mode music differently than those acculturated to Western music.

This has been only a brief introduction to questions that will occupy us throughout this book. Our object will not be to answer these questions, but rather to carefully consider how music can create an emotional experience, how we respond to it, and how it has been used by humans over the span of centuries and continents.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Print

Duckworth, William. *A Creative Approach to Music Fundamentals* (11th edition). Cengage Learning, 2012.

### Online

Music theory lessons and exercises:

- <https://utheory.com/>
- <https://www.musictheory.net/lessons>

# **Unit 2**

**MUSIC FOR STORYTELLING**

# 3

## Music and Characterization

*Esther M. Morgan-Ellis*

### INTRODUCTION

Music may have originally developed for the purpose of communication, and it has become a powerful tool in the telling of stories. Over the next four chapters, we will explore ways in which music has been used to convey, enhance, or transform stories in a variety of cultural contexts.

Most storytellers use music with great care. They do so because it is powerful. Music can help to set the mood in a video game, or allow a character on stage to express emotion by singing, or add interest and gravity to the recitation of an epic poem. It can encourage an audience member to get more involved in a performance, either emotionally or by joining in with the music-making. It can help a listener to remember the words to a story. And it can “say” things that go beyond words and images.

Music is used to tell stories in many different ways. Sometimes it accompanies images, such as in a film. Sometimes it is combined with stage action, as in ballets and musicals. Sometimes it is paired with a text, which might be sung or provided to the listener to read. Of course, we can choose to hear a story in any piece of music, and we will encounter examples later in this book that seem as if they must be communicating *something*, even if we can’t say exactly what it is. In the next four chapters, however, we will examine pieces of music that are used to tell clearly defined stories, and we will focus on understanding how music enriches and impacts those stories.

### JOHN WILLIAMS, STAR WARS

We will start with an example that is familiar to most listeners: the music created for the *Star Wars* films. We will examine this music on its own terms, but through it we will also encounter five other works and styles that strongly impacted the creation of this score. No art exists in a vacuum. New works are built upon old, and creators rely upon cultural memory to communicate meaning. Even the *Star Wars* films were not conjured out of a vacuum—director George Lucas based his creation on Akira Kurosawa’s 1958 samurai film *The Hidden Fortress*.

You probably already have a wealth of associations with the *Star Wars* soundtrack—both personal and general—as a result of having watched these films. On the personal level, you might find that this music evokes nostalgic memories of watching *Star Wars* with your family as a child, or it might make you uncomfortable if you found the films particularly scary or sad. Such responses are valid and worth exploring. Here, however, we will focus on objective characteristics of the music that help us to explain how it enhances the story.

## Williams's Career

The soundtrack to the *Star Wars* films was composed by one of the most prolific and influential of all cinema composers, John Williams (b. 1932). Williams's career took off in 1974, when director Steven Spielberg recruited him to score his first feature production, *The Sugarland Express*. The two went on to produce a string of hit films with memorable soundtracks, including *Jaws*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T.*, *Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan*, the *Indiana Jones* films, and the first two *Jurassic Park* films. This kind of collaboration has long played a role in the production of great music, and we will see similar partnerships at work in opera and ballet. It was Spielberg who recommended Williams to George Lucas, the director of the *Star Wars* films. His scores for the original *Star Wars* trilogy—*A New Hope* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and *Return of the Jedi* (1983)—are among the best-known musical works created for the big screen.

Williams—who had studied music at UCLA and the Juilliard School—certainly knew his music history and concert repertoire. He also had decades of experience as a **session musician** in Los Angeles, recording soundtracks for television and film. He came to the task of



**Image 3.1:** John Williams frequently conducts live performances of his film scores, as in this 2011 appearance with the Boston Pops orchestra.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 3.2:** Director George Lucas is best known for his work on the Star Wars films.

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writing film scores, therefore, with a deep understanding of how music can shape the viewer's experience of a drama.

## The Star Wars Soundtrack

At the heart of Williams's soundtrack is a series of themes—about eleven per film—that represent individual characters, settings, or ideas. The viewer doesn't need a guide to these themes. Instead, one quickly connects music with onscreen action as themes return throughout the films. Here, we will examine themes associated with Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Yoda, and the Force. Williams carefully crafted each of these themes to represent the character or idea, and they are used both to amplify the onscreen action and to enrich the storytelling.

		<p>“Main Theme” from Star Wars          Composer: John Williams          Performance: the Skywalker Symphony,          conducted by John Williams (1990)</p>
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	intro	The opening fanfare features the brass section
0'06"	A	This triumphant trumpet melody contains multiple upward leaps
0'17"		The A theme is repeated with changes in the accompaniment
0'26"	B	This melody features the strings
0'48"	A'	When the A material returns, the melody is played by violins and horns, giving it a different character
1'10"		<i>End of listening guide</i>

We will begin with Luke Skywalker's theme (officially titled “Main Theme”), which is first heard over the opening title. This is clearly the music of a hero. The opening fanfare suggests royalty, while the **duple meter** and moderate **tempo** tells us that this is a march. This, in combination with brass-heavy instrumentation, suggests a military character—a good representation of the Rebel Alliance. The melody soars into the upper **range**, confirming Skywalker's confidence and authority with a series of leaps up to the high **tonic scale degree**. (This is the first and most important note of the scale on which the melody is built.) Trumpets, with their bright **timbre**, are more prominent than the other brass instruments. And,

of course, Skywalker's music is in the **major mode**. In addition, this theme has more emotional depth than Darth Vader's. It is in a three-part form, which might be described as a b a'. While the a section has the characteristics described above, the b section features the string section, thereby introducing a warmer timbre and indicating that our hero has a human side. Finally, the fact that we hear Skywalker's theme over the opening title tells us from the start who is going to emerge from this conflict victorious.

	<b>“The Imperial March (Darth Vader’s Theme)” from <i>Star Wars</i></b>		
Time	Form	<b>What to listen for</b>	
0'00"	intro	The strings and percussion lay down a pattern of dotted rhythms suggesting a slow, militaristic march	
0'09"	A	The trombones and trumpets play a low, ominous melody	
0'18"	B	This section of the melody begins with a leap to the high range followed by a twisted chromatic descent	
0'28"	B'	The repetition of B' concludes differently	
0'38"	<i>End of listening guide</i>		

The theme that represents the villain, Darth Vader, has many of the same characteristics. It, too, is a march (the theme is entitled “Imperial March”), and it features similar instrumentation. However, this theme is in the **minor mode**, which lets us know that this is the bad guy. The fact that the melody is played in a low range makes the music ominous, while the **chromatic** pitches and unusual **harmonies** make it mysterious. Darth Vader’s theme is forceful and threatening, perhaps even unstoppable, but it is not heroic.

The other themes are similarly suited to their subjects. Leia’s theme<sup>1</sup> opens with a winding chromatic melody in the flute and oboe before unfolding into an expressive melody for french horn with muted strings in the background. The music suggests seduction and romance, while largely ignoring her role as an action hero (although there is a historical connection between the horn and heroes of the opera stage). Yoda’s theme<sup>2</sup> is heard in the cellos and oboes with a peaceful accompaniment of strings, bassoons, and harp. The instrumentation resonates

with his life in the woods, while the simplicity of the melody communicates his character. Both themes are heard at the same moderate tempo—an indication of romance in one case and peace in the other. Perhaps the slowest theme is that used to represent the Force,<sup>3</sup> but now the tempo signifies inevitability and power. The theme itself is in the minor mode, not because it is tragic but because it is serious. It starts with a lone french horn, supported by **tremolo** in the strings, but grows dramatically in volume to embrace the whole orchestra.

1.		"Princess Leia's Theme" from <i>Star Wars</i> Composer: John Williams Performance: The Utah Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Varujan Kojian (1983)
2.		"Yoda's Theme" from <i>Star Wars</i> Composer: John Williams Performance: London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by John Williams (1980)
3.		"The Force Theme" from <i>Star Wars</i> Composer: John Williams Performance: London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by John Williams (1980)

This has been a fairly technical description of each theme's attributes, but the character of the music is easy to perceive without specialized knowledge. It is worth a reminder, however, that our understanding of what music expresses is determined by our own cultural contexts. This music builds on centuries of stylistic development and depends on each listener's lifetime of experience. We understand what it is trying to communicate because we dwell in the same musical world as the composer. Sound, however, seldom has objective meaning. We recognize the sounds of a military march because we have heard one somewhere else. We know that swelling strings signify romance because we have seen a hundred other movies, which in turn build on older theatrical traditions. A listener from a culture that had no military bands and in which, say, organ music was understood to signal romance would not make these connections.

## RICHARD WAGNER, *THE VALKYRIE*

We are now going to explore that cultural context. John Williams was well educated in the Western concert and theatrical traditions. He served in the U.S. Air Force Band from 1952 to 1955, during which time he played piano and brass, arranged music, and conducted. His piano degree from the Juilliard School in New York City came with a thorough grounding in music history. And his decades recording film and television scores as a session musician in Los Angeles allowed

him to become deeply familiar with the conventions of the screen.

Our examples, however, will come not from television or movies but from older traditions of theatrical music. We will begin with an example from the opera repertoire. In the European tradition, **opera** is a staged work of music theater, complete with costumes, sets, and dramatic plot twists. Most operas employ an orchestra to accompany the stage performers, who often sing throughout. While Richard Wagner's style and melodies certainly influenced Williams's work (the "Imperial March," for example, is clearly derived from a theme Wagner's wrote to represent a magical helmet known as Tarnhelm<sup>4</sup>), we will focus here on Williams's use of a technique that Wagner perfected: the technique of assigning a unique theme to each character, object, place, and idea in a drama. Wagner called such a theme a **leitmotif**.

4.



This theme by Richard Wagner bears a clear resemblance to Williams's "Imperial March."

## Wagner's Career

Before examining Wagner's music, some biographical context is called for. It is possible that Richard Wagner (1813-1883) has had a greater impact on the development of Western art music than any other composer. For such a towering figure, however, he got off to a very slow start. He did not exhibit any particular talent as a child and never became an accomplished performer. In his twenties, he dedicated himself to the composition of operas, although it was many years before he made a success of the endeavor. In 1839 he actually had to crawl through the gutters of Riga to escape his creditors after having his passport confiscated by the municipal authorities. Then in 1849 he became involved in an attempt to overthrow the Dresden government. He not only helped to plan what is now known as the May Uprising, but actually participated, throwing grenades in the street. After the uprising failed, Wagner fled to Switzerland, where he remained in exile for most of a decade.

In Switzerland, Wagner shifted his attention from practice to theory. He quit writing music for several years and instead



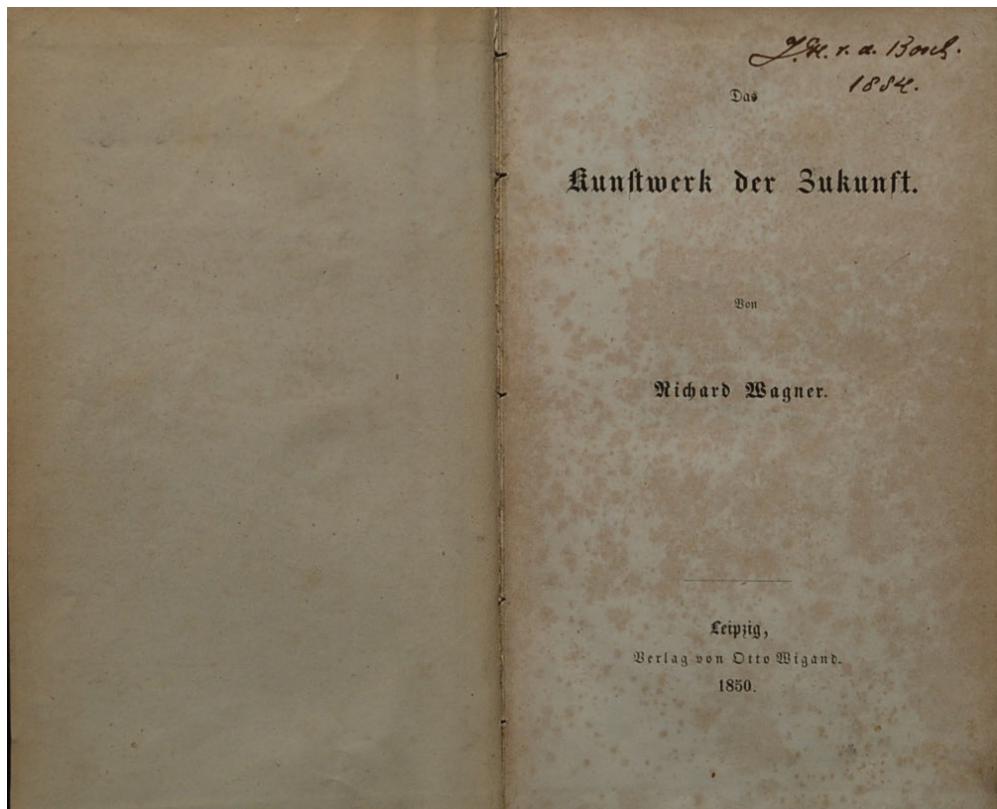
**Image 3.3: This portrait of Richard Wagner was painted by Franz von Lenbach.**

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wrote *about* music. In one 1849 essay, “The Artwork of the Future,” Wagner theorized a ***Gesamtkunstwerk***, or “total artwork,” that would bring together all art forms—music, dance, gesture, poetry, image—into a single, ideal medium of artistic expression. Naturally, he imagined himself as the artist who was most capable of achieving this fusion. To prove the power of his ideas, he set to work on a monumental cycle of music dramas that would take him decades to complete. In a highly unusual move, Wagner not only wrote the music for these operas but also developed the narrative, wrote the libretto (the sung text), and even designed the theater in which the operas were eventually premiered. The project took him decades to complete, and the entire cycle was not premiered until 1876. By this time, Wagner had returned to Germany under the patronage of the King of Bavaria, who admired his work and offered him permanent financial support. The King also financed the construction of a grand opera house (the *Festspielhaus* in Bayreuth) to Wagner’s specifications. It was there that the complete cycle was finally staged.



**Image 3.4:** This early edition of Wagner's manifesto was published in 1850.

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## The Ring Cycle

Wagner's *The Ring of the Nibelungs* (German: *Der Ring des Nibelungen*)—or, as it is now known, the Ring Cycle—consists of four massive operas and takes about fifteen hours to perform. The story derives from Norse mythology, which Wagner understood to describe the ascent of his own German race. The operas enact a prolonged struggle between the gods and the humans. The gods are ruled by Wotan (the German version of the more familiar name Odin), who seeks to consolidate their power, but he is finally defeated by the human Siegfried. The story begins with the forging of a powerful ring out of gold extracted from the Rhine river and ends with the return of the ring to the river, the burning of Valhalla, and the flooding of the Rhine. These catastrophes mark a new age of human rule—the Norse myth of Ragnarök.

Like John Williams and George Lucas, Wagner relied on centuries of cultural history in crafting his masterpiece. The story outlined above is not original. His approach to setting that story to music was also not original, although he took pre-existing techniques to new heights. To begin with, Wagner expanded the size of his orchestra, introducing new instruments into the brass section. These instruments—which included the bass trumpet, contrabass trombone, and a euphonium-type device now known as the “Wagner tuba”—allowed him to produce a more subtle variety of timbres for the creation of diverse sound worlds. His musical style, like that of other composers of the time, was highly varied and expressive, although many of Wagner's contemporaries felt that his music set the bar for intensity of emotional content. Finally, Wagner adapted and transformed a practice that had long been common in opera: the use of recurring melodic themes (leitmotifs) to help tell the story.

If a listener sits through Wagner's entire fifteen-hour drama, they will hear hundreds of leitmotifs, most of which are frequently repeated. Some span all four operas, while some are restricted to an act, or even a single scene. Each is connected to an important element of the drama, and each is introduced along with that element. The first time Wotan picks up his spear, for example, we hear a forceful, march-like descending melody in the brass. This music then returns every time we see the spear or hear a reference to it. Wagner's leitmotifs are often melodically connected to each other, such that themes representing related ideas or characters sound similar to one another. The leitmotifs<sup>5</sup> can also be transformed as the power of an idea or object shifts over the course of the story. Most importantly, however, the leitmotifs can be used to communicate information to an audience that is not included in the libretto or onstage action. We will see this principle at work in our example.

5.



This video, produced by the brass section of the Metropolitan Opera orchestra, presents several important leitmotifs and demonstrates how they can be transformed to communicate meaning.

## The Valkyrie



“Wotan’s Farewell” from *The Valkyrie*  
 Composer: Richard Wagner  
 Performance: Bryn Terfel with the Berliner Philharmoniker, conducted by Claudio Abbado (2002)

Time	Leitmotif	What to listen for
7'53"	Powerful destiny	Heard in the trombones as Wotan prepares to put Brünnhilde into an enchanted sleep
7'59"	Renunciation	Heard first in the horn and continued in the oboe
8'06"		Wotan announces that he is about to strip Brünnhilde of her immortality
8'40"	Magic sleep	Heard first in the woodwinds, then the strings
9'26"	Innocent sleep	Heard in the strings
9'36"	Wotan's grief	Heard in the strings in combination with “Innocent sleep”
11'10"	Powerful destiny	Heard in the trombones in combination with “Innocent sleep”
11'35"	Wotan's spear	Heard in the low brass
11'43"	Loge as fire	The collection of leitmotifs related to Loge as fire enter the texture
11'45"		Wotan calls forth Loge, the demigod of fire
12'05"	Wotan's spear	Heard in the low brass
12'11"	Ambivalent Loge	We hear hints of this leitmotif interwoven with “Loge as fire”
12'44"	Ambivalent Loge	Heard in the woodwinds
13'19"	Magic sleep	This version of “magic sleep” moves at a much quicker tempo than that heard at 8'40”

13'33"	Innocent sleep	Heard in the woodwinds
13'43"	Siegfried's heroism	To the melody of "Siegfried's heroism," Wotan declares that any man who fears his spear will be incapable of crossing the flames
14'11"	Siegfried's heroism	Repeated in the brass
14'36"	Wotan's grief	Heard in the cellos
15'25"	Powerful destiny	Heard twice in the low brass

We are going to take a look at the final scene (Act III, Scene 3) of the second opera, *The Valkyrie* (German: *Die Walküre*). This scene contains two characters, Wotan and his favorite daughter, Brünnhilde. At this point in the drama, Brünnhilde, daughter of the god Wotan, has disobeyed her father's orders by interceding on behalf of the humans Siegmund and Sieglinde. Despite her efforts, Siegmund is killed, and Brünnhilde is left to face Wotan's fury. The punishment for disobeying the ruler of the gods is death, but Wotan takes pity on Brünnhilde,



**Image 3.5:** These two engravings both appeared in the 1917 *Victrola Book of Opera*. The first depicts Wotan taking pity on his erring daughter Brünnhilde, who in the second has fallen into a magic sleep.

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whom he loves dearly, and instead declares his intention to strip her of her immortality and powers and put her into a magical sleep on top of the mountain. He conjurs Loge, the demigod of fire, to erect a ring of flames around Brünnhilde, and declares that only a hero who does not fear his spear will be able to pass through the fire and wake his daughter.

This scene, which lasts less than twenty minutes, contains twenty-one separate leitmotifs. Indeed, the listener hears virtually no music that cannot be classified as a leitmotif. Most of the themes in this scene were introduced in the first opera and have been heard many times, although some do not return after this scene. Four themes, however, are introduced in this scene and proceed to play an important role in the remaining operas. Although various music scholars have counted and named Wagner's leitmotifs in different ways, we will use the descriptions supplied by Roger Donington in 1963.

According to Donington, the scene in question contains the following leitmotifs: love as fulfillment, Wotan frustrated, powerful destiny, unavoidable destiny, Valkyries as animus, Valhalla, Wotan's spear, relinquishment, Volsung as destiny, the love of Siegmund and Sieglinde, downfall of the gods, the curse, Siegfried's heroism, sword as manhood, magic sleep, innocent sleep, ambivalent Loge, Wotan's grief, renunciation, and Loge as fire (two different versions). As you can see, these themes connect with a wide variety of dramatic elements. Some are straightforward representations of objects or places, while others embody abstract concepts. All enrich the drama and aid in telling the story.

Like Williams, Wagner did not randomly pair themes with objects and ideas. Each leitmotif expresses meaning in sound. We will examine a few of the themes used in this scene before seeing them in action. The music associated with "Loge as fire,"<sup>6</sup> for example, is meant to capture the characteristics of flame. This passage features high-pitched instruments with bright timbres, such as the flute, and the sharply-articulated melody leaps about. The music almost sparkles. Swells and ebbs in the music—created using rising and falling dynamic levels and pitches—represent the unpredictable spread of fire across the ground. (This kind of music has long been associated with wind and storms.) In contrast, both of the "sleep" leitmotifs are slow and peaceful, and they feature the soothing sounds of strings and harp. "Magic sleep"<sup>7</sup> consists of a gradual chromatic descent that comes as close as music can to representing the act of falling asleep. "Innocent sleep,"<sup>8</sup> on the other hand, is easily recognized as a lullaby, with its rocking rhythms, lilting melody, and stable harmonies.

6.



The "Loge as fire" and "Ambivalent Loge" leitmotifs, both heard in this passage, capture the characteristics of a leaping flame.

7.		The “Magic sleep” leitmotif suggests the act of falling asleep.
8.		The “Innocent sleep” leitmotif sounds like a lullaby.

Wagner used his large brass section to represent strength and power. “Wotan’s spear,”<sup>9</sup> which features the trombones and tubas, marches confidently down a scale into the very low range. “Siegfried’s heroism”<sup>10</sup> begins with a confident leap up to the tonic and often grows in volume. (Many listeners observe that this leitmotif closely resembles John Williams’s theme for “the Force.”) “Powerful destiny,”<sup>11</sup> which is heard throughout the scene, consists of a simple but surprising shift from one harmony to another. Wagner weaves all of these leitmotifs together into a tapestry of orchestral and vocal sound.

9.		The “Wotan’s spear” leitmotif is brash and aggressive.
10.		The “Siegfried’s heroism” leitmotif represents confidence and bravery.
11.		The “Powerful destiny” leitmotif is simple but mysterious.

Finally, this scene—which is often referred to as “Wotan’s farewell”—exhibits one of the most significant powers of the leitmotif: its ability to foreshadow events yet to come. In the final moments of the scene, Wotan declares that only a hero who does not fear his spear will be able to pass through the flames and wake Brünnhilde. He sings this declaration to the melody of “Siegfried’s heroism,” which is then echoed by the full orchestra in a resounding climax. At this point in the story, however, Siegfried has not even been born. Sieglinde has only just learned that she is pregnant with him, and he will not appear until the next opera. At the same time, the theme is not new. It has been in use since earlier in this opera to foreshadow the appearance of a human hero, and it will be heard nine times in the

next opera. When we hear this music, therefore, we know exactly who is going to wake Brünnhilde, even though Wotan—who sings the melody—does not.



**Image 3.6: This engraving from the 1917 *Victrola Book of Opera* portrays the scene in the next opera in which Siegfried awakens the sleeping Brünnhilde.**

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## Concerns

There is no question that Wagner's *Ring* operas have been both influential and successful. They are staged in countless opera houses around the world every year, often at great expense. The most lavish cycle to date was produced at New York City's Metropolitan Opera House in 2012 at a cost of \$19.6 million. Every year, fans travel to the Bayreuth Festival in Germany to see the *Ring* and other Wagner operas staged in the theater that the composer himself designed. At the same time, some critics argue that we should no longer produce these operas or listen to Wagner's music. Their argument is not that the music is bad, but rather that the composer's ideology is so repugnant as to merit the erasure of his art.

Wagner's anti-Semitic views were widely known during his lifetime. In an article entitled "Jewishness in Music" (1850), he argued that Jewish composers were incapable of producing profound musical expression, and that their attempts to do so were damaging to the progress of art. Furthermore, he claimed that Jewish artists lacked the capacity to recognize or represent authentic German culture. Although Wagner first published the article under a pseudonym (presumably to



**Image 3.7: This 1910 postcard captures the interior of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, designed by Wagner himself for the presentation of his operas.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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make his attacks against other composers seem less personal), in 1869 he republished it under his own name, and with a long addendum reflecting the artistic and political developments of the intervening decades. Wagner's views provoked considerable resistance among his contemporaries, but they were later embraced by the Nazi Party. Indeed, Adolf Hitler would become Wagner's most infamous admirer.

There are also concerns about the content of Wagner's music dramas. While the *Ring* is not overtly anti-Semitic, it expresses an ideology of nationhood that tacitly excludes all but the ethnically pure "German" of Wagner's imagination. Stripped of their mythology, the *Ring* operas tell the story of a human race that rises to a position of world dominance. For Wagner, this was the German race, and the German race did not include Jews.

For these reasons, Wagner's music is unofficially banned in the nation of Israel, while music lovers around the world hold his work in disdain and choose not to program or consume it. The debate over whether we can separate an artistic work from its creator, however, is far from settled. Should the sins of the artist be visited upon the art? Can we enjoy music, films, or paintings that we know to have been created by reprehensible individuals? Does it matter that Wagner died many years ago, and can neither profit nor suffer as a result of our consumption decisions? Does support of Wagner's art suggest support of his ideas? We are forced to grapple with these questions not only in the case of Wagner but every time that the creator of beloved cultural products is discovered to have committed hateful actions.

## GUSTAV HOLST, THE PLANETS

While John Williams's approach to creating the *Star Wars* soundtrack can be traced through Wagner, his music is more heavily influenced by other composers and works. The most frequently noted of these is the orchestral suite *The Planets* (1914-1916) by British composer Gustav Holst (1874-1934). The reasons for which Williams chose to borrow from Holst are simple enough to understand. Holst was one of the first composers to write music about outer space, and he did so with a dramatic flair that has kept this work in the repertoire ever since its 1920 premiere.

### Holst and *The Planets*

Holst studied composition at the Royal College of Music in London, where he met with moderate success. He was not attracted to the life of a professional musician (Holst played the trombone), but he struggled to make a living as a composer. In 1903, therefore, Holst began teaching music in schools. Although he would write some of his most successful music for the orchestras he directed, he had little time in which to pursue his craft. Nevertheless, Holst continued to produce serious concert pieces and his reputation steadily grew.

Holst finally earned national attention in 1920, first with a work for choir and orchestra entitled *The Hymn of Jesus* and then with *The Planets*. *The Hymn of Jesus* paved the way for *The Planets'* success by establishing for Holst a reputation as a mystic and spiritual composer. As we will see, these qualities are prominent in the orchestral suite. Although the entire suite was not premiered until 1920, Holst had been at work on it since 1913. He first wrote the music for two pianos, and produced the orchestral score only after the composition was complete.

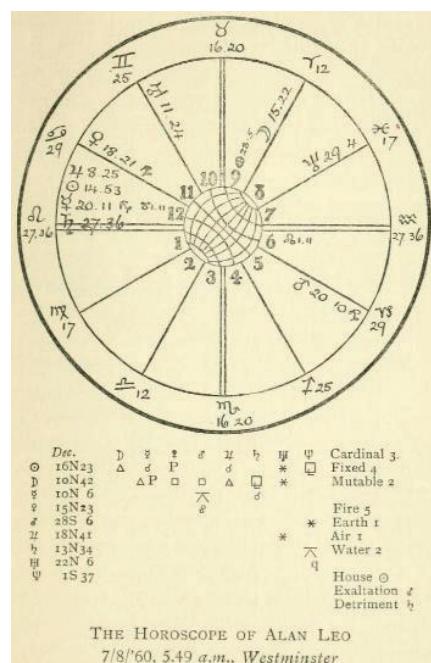


**Image 3.8:** This photograph of Gustav Holst was taken around the time that *The Planets* premiered.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 3.9:** Alan Leo's astrological work inspired Holst's compositions. Here, we see Leo's own horoscope, published in 1919.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Much of Holst's work as a composer can be traced to his personal interests. This is certainly true of *The Planets*. In 1913, Holst travelled to Majorca with a group of fellow artists, who introduced him to the study of astrology. Holst became fascinated and immersed himself in the work of British astrologist Alan Leo, reading his book *What Is a Horoscope and How Is It Cast?*. The idea of composing an orchestral suite came to him almost immediately, and he began sketching the first movement, "Mars," that same year.

Holst's intent was to capture the astrological significance of each of the planets, as described by Leo. He was interested in the specific characteristics bestowed on those who were born under the influence of each individual planet. At the same time, Holst was a composer first and an astrologer second. His primary concern was musical cohesion and expression. As a result, he frequently deviated from Leo's prescription, and in the end used Leo's writings merely as an inspiration for his own creative work.

It seems that Holst was worried that audiences would not take his music seriously. An orchestral work inspired by celestial bodies, after all, might easily be dismissed as a mere novelty, especially when compared to the traditional symphonies that formed the core of the concert hall repertoire (see Chapter 7). For this reason, Holst first titled his suite *Seven Pieces for Orchestra*, only later changing it to *The Planets*. He added the individual movement names, indicating which planet the music is about, only just before the work was published. The descriptive titles qualify *The Planets* as **program music**, a term used to identify an instrumental composition that tells a story or paints a picture. Holst chose not to order the movements in order of their distance from the sun, instead swapping Mars and Mercury. The reason for this decision is clear enough: The music that Holst composed to depict Mars makes a great opener for the work.

*The Planets* was a massive success. It was immediately programmed by orchestras all over England and has since become one of the most familiar and most frequently performed pieces in the orchestral repertoire. All the same, Holst came to regret his biggest hit. He continued to develop and grow as a composer, and within just a few years he considered *The Planets* to be outdated. Critics, on the other hand, were disappointed when Holst's new compositions did not sound like his original blockbuster. Although Holst went on to write many beloved works, he never matched the success of *The Planets*.

We will examine the first and last movements of Holst's suite: "Mars, the Bringer of War" and "Neptune, the Mystic." "Mars" served as a model for John Williams's "Imperial March" in the *Star Wars* soundtrack, while "Neptune" seems to have had a general influence on Williams's musical portrayals of space.

## Mars<sup>12</sup>

In astrological terms, the planet Mars is associated with confidence, self assertion, aggression, energy, strength, ambition, and impulsiveness. Leo described those born under the influence of Mars as "fond of liberty, freedom, and

independence,” noting that they “may be relied upon for courage” and are “fond of adventure and progress” but are also “headstrong and at times too forceful.” In mythological terms, Mars is the ancient Roman god of war.

12.



“Mars” from *The Planets*

Composer: Gustav Holst

Performance: Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by James Levine (1990)

Holst seems to have combined these influences in his music, which is overtly militaristic. The staccato rhythms heard at the beginning are the rhythms of a military march. At first they are played by the entire string section using a special technique, known as ***col legno***, for which players turn their bows upside down and bounce the wooden stick on the string. Later, the snare drum—an actual military instrument—plays the same rhythm, which is heard almost throughout the movement. There is something very strange about Holst’s march, however: It is in quintuple meter, with five beats per measure. It would be very difficult to actually march to this music.

Holst uses other strategies as well to communicate the character of Mars. The first melody we hear is low and ominous, consisting only of a rising gesture followed by a small descent. As the texture thickens, the volume increases and the melodic gestures seem more threatening. The introduction of trumpets and other brass instruments reinforces the militaristic flavor of the movement. In the middle section, the trumpets seem to be sounding battle calls. Finally, the whole movement comes to a crashing close with the strings and brass playing as loudly and violently as possible.

### Neptune<sup>13</sup>

Holst’s representation of Neptune, the final planet in his suite, is entirely different. This is natural enough, given Holst’s astrological mindset, for the influence of Neptune is associated with idealism, dreams, dissolution, artistry,



**Image 3.10:** This ancient Roman statue depicts Mars as the god of war.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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empathy, illusion, and vagueness. Holst creates music, therefore, that captures these same qualities.

13.



“Neptune” from *The Planets*

Composer: Gustav Holst

Performance: Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conducted by James Levine (1990)

We might begin with a discussion of timbre. “Neptune” includes a sound that is completely absent from the other movements: women’s voices. Holst includes two choirs of **sopranos** and **altos**, making for six separate vocal parts. The women don’t sing words, however, but are instead instructed to sustain long, open “ah” vowels. The singers therefore function in the same way as instruments, bringing an ethereal, transparent quality to the upper register of the orchestra.

Apart from the voices, “Neptune” calls for the same instruments as “Mars.” However, Holst deploys these instruments quite differently. He hardly uses the brass section at all, relegating them to low, sustained pitches in the background of the texture. Holst assigns the melody to wind instruments, with a preference for the airy sound of the flutes and the reedy timbre of the oboe and English horn. He also foregrounds the two harps and a percussion instrument called the celeste, which has a keyboard similar to that of a piano but produces the sound of bells.

The articulation in “Neptune” is completely unlike that heard in “Mars.” While “Mars” is characterized by abrupt, accented rhythms, the pitches in “Neptune” are sustained and connected. Interestingly, this is the only movement that Holst originally composed for organ instead of piano. He felt that the organ, which can sustain pitches indefinitely, was better able to capture his musical vision. While both “Mars” and “Neptune” are in quintuple meter, the differences in articulation and tempo (“Neptune” is much slower) means that the two movements have completely different effects on the listener.

Finally, we might say something about the melody and harmony. There are no catchy tunes in “Neptune.” Instead, the wind instruments and voices repeat floaty, circular melodies that don’t seem to go anywhere. “Neptune” is also not in any particular key. Instead, the music rocks back and forth between seemingly unrelated harmonies. All of this creates the sensation of being unmoored. It is hard to predict where the music is going, but easy to enjoy the beautiful sounds.

## IGOR STRAVINSKY, *THE RITE OF SPRING*

While the influence of Holst’s “Mars” is particularly evident (after all, we hear the “Imperial March” repeatedly in almost all of the films), Williams also tapped the musical language of another prominent composer working at the same time. This borrowing did not become one of the repeated themes in Williams’s score, but it is no less unmistakable. In addition, he borrowed for the same reason: Another

composer of musical drama had already succeeded in setting the mood that Williams wanted to create: a mood reflecting uncertainty, suspense, and possible danger. Why reinvent the wheel?

The scene in question comes early in the first film, *A New Hope* (1977). The droids, R2D2 and C3PO, have landed on the desert planet Tatooine, where they argue and strike off in different directions. The setting is desolate and eerie, and the music serves to amplify our feeling of uncertainty about what is to come. We follow the path taken by C3PO, who doesn't know where he is, where he is going, or what might happen to him. The music that accompanies his journey is similarly uncertain. Oscillating melodies in the winds and muted trumpets are paired with high sustained notes in the strings and chromatic interjections from the bassoon and clarinet. Low, ominous sounds from the brass and reeds suggest a lurking danger. The music is in neither the major nor minor mode, there is no sense of a "home" note (the **tonic**), and we are not provided with any conclusive musical gestures (**cadences**). Instead, the pitches seem to float about. There is no sense of direction or purpose. At the end of this brief scene, the music simply fades away.

In the context of *Star Wars*, we are talking about just over 50 seconds of music. Were it not for Williams's borrowing, this scene would hold little interest. However, the work from which Williams extracted this brief passage of music was among the most influential of the twentieth century, and it is therefore worth exploring in order to understand why Williams chose this source, why the original work was composed in the first place, and how the dramatic intent of the two composers can help us to understand how music communicates meaning.

The passage adapted by Williams appears at the beginning of the second half of Igor Stravinsky's 1913 **ballet** *The Rite of Spring* (French: *Le sacre du printemps*). Like Williams, Stravinsky needed music that would create an atmosphere of mystery and suspense. Both dramas are set in an undefined, distant past: Williams's "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away," Stravinsky's amongst the pagan tribes of prehistoric Russia. The differences arise when we examine the scenes for which each composer is preparing the viewer. C3PO is about to be captured by traders, while Stravinsky's characters are about to choose their victim for a virgin sacrifice.

### Stravinsky and *The Rite of Spring*

Stravinsky wrote *The Rite of Spring* for a Paris audience (for whom Russia was indeed "far, far away"). Although Stravinsky was himself Russian, he had been living in Paris and writing ballets for three years. He was recruited for the job by Sergei Diaghilev, a wealthy Russian who had embarked on the quest of exporting Russian ballet to Paris. To do so, Diaghilev established a ballet troupe known as the *Ballets Russes* (that's "Russian Ballet" in French). His troupe specialized in flamboyant stage presentations that were meant to dazzle Parisian theatergoers with exotic stories, costumes, and music. When Stravinsky first agreed to join Diaghilev, he did so only because he had few other opportunities. He was unknown in Russia and had just begun his career in music. In accordance with Diaghilev's

scheme, he participated in the production of a series of ballets with Russian themes. The first was *The Firebird* (1910), which combined various Russian folk tales with a typically Russian musical language. The second, *Petrushka* (1911), was set at a fair in the Russian countryside. *Rite of Spring* carried on this trend to a degree, but it was also startlingly new in several ways.

Like all ballets, *The Rite of Spring* was developed by an artistic team. The idea for the ballet was conceived jointly by Stravinsky and the painter Nikolai Roerich. Roerich, who was an expert on pre-Christian Slavic history, also designed the ballet's **scenario** (how the story unfolds), costumes, and sets. The choreographer—that is, the person who planned and taught the actual dance steps—was Vaslav Nijinsky, a famous dancer who had been part of the *Ballets Russes* since its founding and first performances in 1909. Working together, these three men put together a show that they knew would turn heads. At the same time, their ideas weren't entirely new. Artists working in Paris and beyond had for



**Image 3.11:** Although Nikolai Roerich's original costumes have been lost, replicas such as this have been created based on sketches and photographs.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 3.12:** Nikolai Roerich created this sketch for scenery in 1912.

Source: Wikipedia

Attribution: Nikolai Roerich

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**Image 3.13:** Here we see Vaslav Nijinsky in an earlier role with the *Ballets Russes*.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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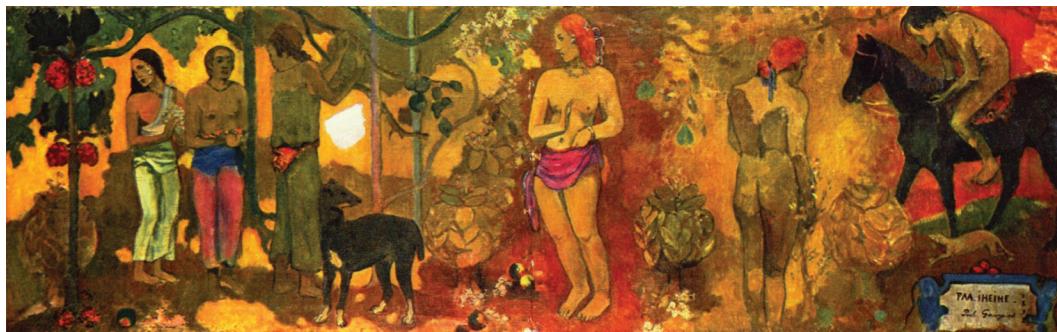
decades been preoccupied with so-called “primitive” cultures, which were believed to reveal fundamental truths about the human condition. At the same time, paintings of half-naked island dwellers, such as those produced by Paul Gauguin (1848–1903), were enticing and exotic. They allowed momentary escape from the constraints of Western society as they invited viewers to gaze upon supposedly innocent and uninhibited subjects.

Unlike most ballets, *The Rite of Spring* doesn’t tell a particularly coherent story. It is in two parts. Over the course of Part I, which is entitled “Adoration of the Earth,” members of Roerich and Stravinsky’s imagined pagan tribe engage in a variety of rituals and games. In Part II, “The Sacrifice,” a young girl is selected as the sacrificial victim. She dances herself to death in the final minutes of the ballet.

*The Rite of Spring* caused something of a stir at its premier. In what has since been described as a “riot” (although historical evidence indicates that this characterization is

overblown), audience members reacted with consternation to what they saw and heard. To fully understand this response, we need to examine context, precedent, and the musical and visual elements of the ballet.

To begin with, *The Rite of Spring* was not the evening’s sole entertainment. It was the second ballet on a double bill. The first ballet, entitled *The Sylphs* (French: *Les Sylphides*), was a classic from the Russian ballet repertoire. Diaghilev had included it in the first Paris season of the *Ballets Russes*, so the audience knew what to expect—and *The Sylphs*, which featured music by the 19th-century composer



**Image 3.14:** This 1898 painting by Gauguin captures Tahitian scenes.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Frederic Chopin, was just the kind of thing Parisians wanted to see. The action consisted of elegantly-clad dancers cavorting gracefully about the stage. Viewers admired the beauty and poise of the artists.

The most disturbing element of *The Rite of Spring*, therefore, was not the plot or music but the dancing. Nijinsky had abandoned the graceful gestures and acrobatic leaps of traditional ballet. Instead, he had the dancers stomping around the stage on flat feet,<sup>14</sup> with hunched backs and awkwardly protruding limbs. He did so in an attempt to capture the primitive and raw aesthetic of the subject matter, as he perceived it. Of course, all of this came out of Nijinsky's imagination. For him, the idea of ancient pagan tribes served as an inspiration to try something new and daring. He had no way of knowing how his subjects might have actually danced.

14.



This 1987 performance by the Joffrey Ballet attempted to recreate the original appearance of *Rite of Spring*, including the costumes and choreography.

Nijinsky's choreography was complimented by Roerich's costumes. Instead of delicate tutus revealing stocking-clad legs and pointe shoes, Roerich's dancers appeared in cumbersome, floor-length dresses and cloaks. The women wore flat shoes and had long braids instead of neat buns. Audiences were thereby denied the opportunity of admiring the female form—a luxury that was central to the enjoyment of ballet.



**Image 3.15:** This photograph captures the original costumes for *The Rite of Spring*.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Nijinsky was also responding to Stravinsky's music, which was unlike anything that had been heard in the theater before. The music did not contain lyrical melodies or compelling harmonic progressions. It did not express feelings of yearning, or heartbreak, or passion—the typical “human” emotions of the stage. Instead, it was alternately mechanistic, mysterious, threatening, and frenzied. Stravinsky's ostinatos and pounding rhythms inspired Nijinsky's similarly repetitive and rhythmic choreography. To understand how the music worked, we will look at two examples: the “Introduction” to Part II (later borrowed by Williams) and the “Sacrificial Dance” that concludes the ballet.

### Part II: Introduction<sup>15</sup>

15.



Part II: “Introduction” from *The Rite of Spring*

Composer: Igor Stravinsky

Performance: San Francisco Symphony, conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas (2004)

The “Introduction” opens with a dissonant cluster of notes. The oboes and horns hold their notes, while the flutes and clarinets oscillate between pitches. What we hear does not suggest any particular key, major or minor. Stravinsky achieves this by having the instruments play in a number of different keys at the same time, a technique known as **polytonality**. The result is that the listener has no sense of direction or grounding. This disorienting effect serves to introduce a dramatic world with mysterious and unfamiliar characteristics.

There is no discernable melody for a long time—just the ebb and flow of Stravinsky's unusual sound colors. When a recognizable tune finally appears in the violins, it is played using **harmonics**, a string technique that causes pitches to sound much higher than usual and gives them an eerie quality. The melody uses only four pitches (it is **quadratonic**), and was probably inspired by Russian folk music.

Near the middle of the movement, the music changes. Two trumpets introduce a new melodic idea, changing pitches in alternation with one another. Starting at this point, Stravinsky employs a compositional technique that is typical of *The Rite of Spring*: He begins to build up layers by bringing in the sections of the orchestra one by one, each with its own characteristic melodic motif. First the strings begin to play quick rhythmic figures with repeated notes. Then the clarinets and violins enter with upward melodic swoops. The musical texture slowly gets denser and busier, the swoops coming with gradually increasing frequency. This ends with the return of the quadratonic melody in the horns as Stravinsky transitions into the next movement.

The “Introduction” has a pulse throughout, but the pulse is unevenly grouped into measures and phrases. For this reason, it is impossible to predict when a melodic or harmonic change is going to come. The effect is to leave the listener on

edge, never certain what is going to happen next. Stravinsky uses this technique in every movement of *The Rite of Spring*, but to various ends. While uneven phrasing makes the “Introduction” seem vague and mysterious, it makes the “Sacrificial Dance,” which concludes the ballet, sound violent and threatening.

## Part II: Sacrificial Dance

		“Sacrificial Dance” from <i>The Rite of Spring</i> Composer: Igor Stravinsky Performance: The Chicago Symphony, conducted by Seiji Ozawa (1968)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	A	All parts of the orchestra engage in an unpredictable back-and-forth characterized by constant meter changes
0'25"	B	The texture is reduced to an uneven rhythm
0'37"		Brass interjections begin
0'52"		Strings enter to supplement the uneven rhythms and intensity builds
1'21"		Following a climactic point, the texture is reduced to a minimum and the process repeats
1'27"		Brass interjections begin again
1'35"		A whirling figure in the strings intensifies the music
1'43"	A'	Nearly identical to A
2'08"	C	The texture is dominated by brass and percussion
2'40"	A"	Brief return to A material
2'46"	C'	Return to C material
3'07"	A""	Rhythmically, this passage can be recognized as a version of A, although the range, harmonies, and instrumentation are different
3'54"	Coda	The dance ends with an ascending flute run and a final cacophonous chord

The “Sacrificial Dance” is in **rondo form**, in which a primary melody returns throughout. It might be summarized as A B A’ C A” C A” with a brief coda, although in reality it is somewhat more complicated. However, using these letters will allow us to briefly discuss each section.

The A section is the most rhythmically jarring. The strings and winds play accented, dissonant chords in alternation with one another, culminating each time in one of two melodic figures: a short series of descending pitches or a series of repeated pitches with one higher outlier. Both figures are loud, accented, and aggressive, and, due to the rhythmic irregularity, it is impossible to predict when they will be heard.

The B section is significantly more subdued, although no more predictable. The strings provide an underpinning of irregular chords, while brass instruments periodically interject with accented, descending melodic fragments. The music builds in intensity before reverting to its original character. It then builds once more before the return of the A material (labelled A’ to indicate the fact that the music is slightly different).

The C section features a wide variety of percussion instruments, including timpani and cymbals. Over these, various brass instruments enter with heavily accented melodies. Again, the music gets louder and more intense as it builds into yet another return of the A material. A”, however, is very brief, for it is almost immediately interrupted by the continuation of C—now with even greater intensity.

The final return of the opening material as A” sounds significantly different, for it employs different sets of pitches. However, the rhythmic character is the same. Once again Stravinsky builds the intensity of the music by alternating between his melodic ideas with increasing frequency, never establishing a pattern that will allow the listener to get comfortable. Finally, an ascending glissando in the flute, followed by a loud final chord, indicates that the dancing girl has collapsed.

## RAGTIME AND DIXIELAND JAZZ

We will consider one more of Williams’s borrowings. This time, however, we will be giving primary consideration to style, for Williams was influenced by a pair of musical traditions—specifically, those of ragtime and Dixieland jazz—rather than by a specific composition. Before we can examine the borrowing, however, we need to take a step back and consider the different ways in which music works in film.

### Underscoring vs. Source Music

Think back on the scene we used to introduce the borrowing from *The Rite of Spring*. Was C3Po able to hear that music? Did the eerie, discordant sounds tell him anything about what lay in store? Most viewers would agree that he heard nothing other than the wind across the desert sands. That music was only for us, the movie-watchers, not for the character in the scene. Indeed, most of the music in *Star Wars* seems to be only for the viewer. Darth Vader does not keep an orchestra on hand to

play his entrances, and Yoda certainly doesn't have one out in the swamp. When we hear music while watching the movie, we understand that its purpose is to amplify emotion and help tell the story. It is not actually a part of the story.

In the film industry, this technique is known as **underscoring**. It has been in use since the silent era, when theater organists and orchestras used to provide live music to accompany moving pictures that did not have dedicated soundtracks. Of course, this kind of music played a role in theatrical presentations long before movies came on the scene. Operas and ballets also include music that the characters on stage cannot hear, but that is nonetheless essential to the storytelling. In general terms, this is termed **non-diegetic music**.

If there is non-diegetic music, there must be **diegetic music**—music that the characters in the drama can in fact hear. In film, this is called **source music**, because the source of the sound is usually visible on screen. Almost every film and television show combines these two types of music. When a character is listening to the radio, or playing the guitar, or attending a concert, or dancing in a club, you are hearing source/diegetic music. When you can't see where the music is coming from and have good reason to doubt that it is audible to the onscreen characters (for example, when you hear an orchestra while watching someone walk down the street alone), you are hearing underscoring/non-diegetic music.

Often, it is not obvious whether the music we are hearing is diegetic or non-diegetic. In the case of the “Imperial March,” for example, it is reasonable to believe that the Imperial Army might in fact have a band present that might in fact play a march. Many militaries have such musical ensembles, and even though we never see a band, we cannot prove that one is not present. At the same time, we can doubt that such a band would contain the full range of winds and strings that we hear in the soundtrack. Perhaps the Imperial forces are indeed hearing music—just not the same music that we are hearing. (The opposite can also occur. In one famous scene from Alfred Hitchcock’s 1956 film *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a live concert performance also serves to underscore the unfolding drama, such that we cannot confidently label the music as either diegetic or non-diegetic.) These problems become much more frequent and difficult to solve in musical theater genres, as we will see later.

Both diegetic and non-diegetic music can be equally important to the telling of a story, although each type tends to serve a different purpose. The most striking use of diegetic music in *Star Wars* occurs forty-five minutes into the first film, when the protagonists arrive at a bar to meet with Han Solo. In this scene, known popularly as the “cantina scene,” we both hear and see a band playing a catchy tune. Because we see the performers, we can be quite certain that the onscreen characters are able to hear the music as well. At the same time, the music makes sense in this context. It is natural for a bar scene to contain a band playing lively music in a popular style.

The style itself speaks to us. Although Williams is not borrowing from a specific composition in this case, he is borrowing from a rich tradition of African

American dance music. Specifically, he is reinterpreting the rhythms and textures of two related dance music styles from the early twentieth century: ragtime and Dixieland jazz.

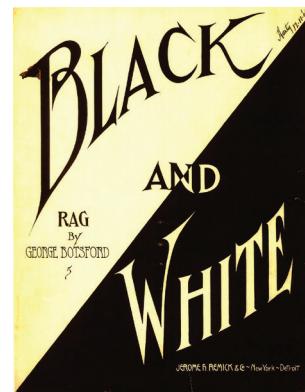
## Ragtime

Ragtime was developed in the 1890s by African American piano players working in Midwestern entertainment venues. These highly-skilled musicians began to take a new approach to performing well-known tunes. A ragtime pianist would keep a steady beat with his left hand, alternating between high and low pitches, while performing complex **syncopated** rhythms with the right hand. (A syncopated rhythm includes accented notes that do not line up with the underlying pulse, but instead seem to fight against it.) While any melody can be “ragged” (that is, performed in this manner), African American pianists soon began composing and publishing original pieces with “ragtime” in the title or description.

The style quickly caught on across the nation. Its syncopated rhythms were fresh and exciting, and they made the listener want to dance. By 1910, ragtime rhythms and references were common in all types of popular music. At the same time, white Americans exhibited a great deal of concern about the influence of ragtime, which was associated with establishments where alcohol was served and the opposite sexes mingled freely. It was believed that the music’s enticing rhythms were so powerful that they might lead young people to commit immoral acts. Most importantly, ragtime was the first in a long line of African American styles to have a major impact on mainstream popular music, and it was therefore perceived as a threat by white cultural powerbrokers.

### George Botsford/Winifred Atwell, *Black and White Rag*

We will take a closer look at *Black and White Rag* (1908), a composition by the Iowa pianist George Botsford (1874-1949). Like all rags, this piece is in a form derived from that of 19th-century marches. This approach to organizing music is based on the repetition of several distinct melodies, each of which is heard twice upon being introduced and then may or may not return later in the piece. The form of *Black and White Rag* can be summarized as follows: intro A A B B A C C B'. As you can see, the A melody returns after the introduction of B. The B melody then returns (in modified form) after we hear C. The result is a musical work that balances repetition with contrast. The listener is able to identify familiar melodies as they return, but is kept from becoming bored by the regular introduction of new melodies.



**Image 3.16:** *Black and White Rag* was published as sheet music in 1908.

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*Black and White Rag*  
Composer: George Botsford  
Performance: Winifred Atwell (1951)

Time	Form	Source for the passage
0'00"	Intro	Botsford
0'04"	A	Botsford
0'20"	B	Botsford
0'36"	A	Botsford
0'52"	Transition	Atwell
1'01"	D	Atwell
1'16"	E	Atwell
1'32"	F	Atwell
1'48"	Intro'	Botsford/Atwell
1'52"	B	Botsford
2'07"	A	Botsford
2'24"	Outro	Atwell

Ragtime piano compositions were never intended to be performed exactly as written. A published composition in this genre should be understood as a set of guidelines for performance. The composer supplies the basic material, but the performer is invited to reorganize and elaborate upon that material. The recording<sup>16</sup> selected for this text was made in 1951 by the Trinidadian pianist Winifred Atwell (1914-1983). It proved a hit, selling millions of copies in the UK and launching a craze for Atwell's style of ragtime piano playing. Atwell preferred the sound of an authentic "honky-tonk" piano, as heard in this recording. This is not a specific type of instrument, but rather a general aesthetic that is associated with the sound of early-20th century barroom pianos. Such instruments were generally cheap, damaged, and out of tune. The piano in this recording has a tinny quality, while the

multiple strings that are struck each time the player depresses a key are not in tune with one another.

Atwell takes a typically improvisatory approach to her performance of Botsford's composition. She plays his introduction and A section essentially as written, although she does not repeat the A after the first time through. Then she plays the B section, followed by a repeat of the A section. Atwell omits Botsford's C section, however, and instead interpolates her own material. The new music, which includes several contrasting phrases and transitional passages, fits well within the performance but bears no relation to what Botsford wrote. To conclude, she plays the B and A sections once more, adding a final tag of her own creation. Atwell's performance, therefore, can be diagrammed as follows, with her original contributions in brackets: intro A B A [trans D E F intro'] B A [outro]. In sum, therefore, this is a performance of a piece composed half by Botsford and half by Atwell.

The syncopated, danceable rhythms of ragtime are easy to hear in Williams's barroom music for *Star Wars*. The texture of ragtime—regular pulses in the low range, lively melody in the high range—is also evident. The instrumentation, however, echoes that of another African American dance music tradition, one that burst onto the scene just as ragtime was becoming passé: Dixieland jazz.

## Dixieland Jazz

The style that would come to be known as Dixieland jazz developed in New Orleans in the early years of the twentieth century. Like ragtime, Dixieland jazz was heavily influenced by marching band music. Street bands provided an important form of entertainment in the city, and formal ensembles regularly processed between the various neighborhoods. Less disciplined musicians, known as “second line” players, would tag along behind the bands, improvising syncopated melodies on top of those being played by the ensemble.



**Image 3.17: Pianist Winifred Atwell became a sensation in the 1950s.**

Source: Flickr

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**Image 3.18: In this photograph, Dixieland musicians march in a 2016 parade in Dresden.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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This practice resulted in a new performance style, and small groups of musicians began gathering together to play syncopated music on traditional band instruments—usually clarinet, trumpet, trombone, and tuba, with banjo to provide the rhythmic underpinning. Dixieland jazz is also sometimes referred to as polyphonic jazz, due to the fact that all of the musicians play independent melodies at the same time. The term **polyphonic** means “many sounds,” and is used to describe music in which all parts carry melodies of equal importance.

One of the first great Dixieland band leaders was the cornet player Joseph Nathan “King” Oliver (1881-1938). Despite having established a formidable reputation in New Orleans, King Oliver moved to Chicago in 1918, hoping to secure a better life for himself and his family. He was not alone: millions of other African Americans living in the post-bellum South made the same trip in what is now termed the Great Migration. In Chicago, King Oliver was able to recruit the finest players for his band. These included a young Louis Armstrong (1901-1971), who had also learned his craft growing up in New Orleans. Oliver played first cornet,



**Image 3.19: Dixieland jazz is still popular today. Here, we see a US Army band performing in Leipzig.**

Source: US Army Europe Band & Chorus

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**Image 3.20: Louis Armstrong was one of the most influential jazz musicians of the 20th century.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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while Armstrong played second cornet and slide trumpet. The other musicians in Oliver's band were clarinetist Johnny Dodds, Honoré Dutrey on trombone, Lil Hardin (later Armstrong) on piano, Bill Johnson on banjo and string bass (in place of tuba), and Baby Dodds on drums. King Oliver and his Creole Jazz Band quickly gained popularity, and the recordings that they began to release in 1923 sparked a national craze for jazz.

### King Oliver, *Dippermouth Blues*

		<i>Dippermouth Blues</i> Composer: Joseph Nathan "King" Oliver Performance: King Oliver and his Creole Jazz Band (1923)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Intro	All the melody instruments play a descending arpeggio
0'07"	Head	All of the melody instruments contribute different parts to the main theme
0'43"	Solo 1	The clarinet improvises a solo while the other instruments provide a <b>stop-time</b> accompaniment
1'19"	Solo 2	All of the instruments improvise at the same time
1'37"	Solo 3	The cornet player improvises with a plunger mute; other instruments are heard improvising in the background
2'29"	Solo 4	All of the instruments improvise at the same time

One of King Oliver's most influential compositions was *Dippermouth Blues*, which his group recorded twice in 1923 for two different record labels. We're going to examine the first recording, made in April for Gennett Records. The way this recording was made had a significant impact on how it sounds. Before the electric microphone was invented in 1925, music was recorded using acoustic technology. The musicians would gather around a horn that looked much like those you see on old gramophones. Those who played quiet instruments would stand close to the horn, while those who played loud instruments would stand further away, sometimes behind a barrier. The sound waves that entered the horn would cause a stylus to vibrate, which would in turn carve a groove into a rotating wax cylinder. The limitations of this technology meant that certain sounds could not be recorded.



**Image 3.21:** This photograph captures a recording session in the acoustic era.

Source: Library of Congress

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In particular, instruments and voices that were very high, very low, or very loud caused the stylus to skip and ruined the recording. This explains why we don't hear string bass or very much percussion in this recording of "Dippermouth Blues." A live performance would have been slightly different.

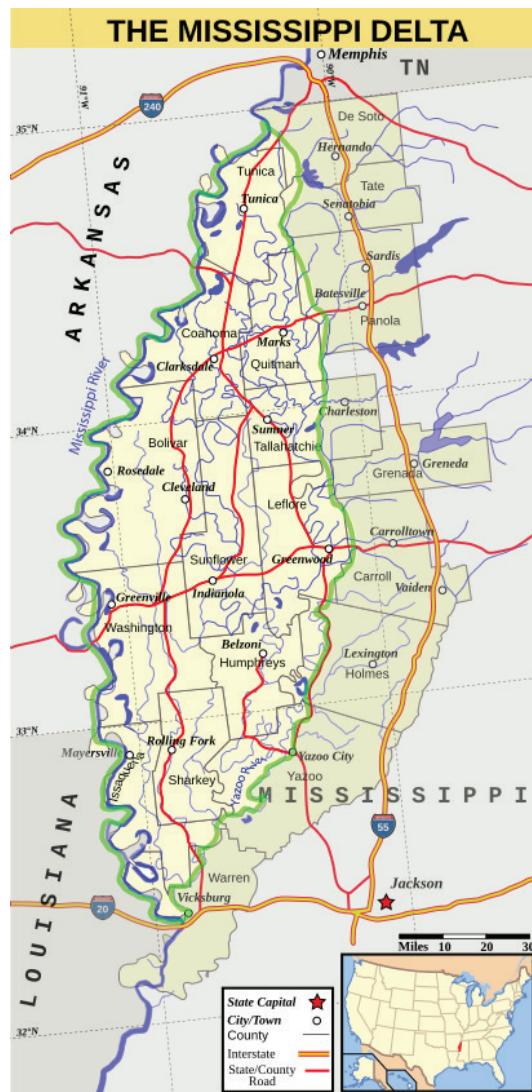
After a brief introduction, we hear an excellent example of the Dixieland style as both cornets, the clarinet, and the trombone all play unique melodies at the same time. It is impossible to say who has "the" melody, for the music being played by each instrument seems to be of equal importance. The various instruments also take turns emerging from the texture. At one moment the clarinet seems to stand out, while at another your attention is drawn to the trombone. After a while, the clarinet really does take the melody, while the other instruments play a repeated rhythm in the background. Later, the cornet similarly takes a lead role. Near the end of the recording, we once again hear the polyphonic texture that marks this style. This music is busy and complex, but in a way it is also simple. Its object, after all, is to make you want to dance. If you feel compelled to tap your foot or otherwise respond to its syncopated rhythms, then the players have accomplished their goal.

The title of this selection also provides us with valuable information. "Dippermouth" was simply a nickname for Louis Armstrong (a fact that has led

some to believe that Armstrong wrote this tune, not Oliver). The term “Blues,” however, describes several important characteristics of the music we are about to hear. The **blues** was an influential style of African American popular music that emerged on the vaudeville stage and later flourished among musicians of the Mississippi delta region. There is much to say about the blues style, but here we will focus on two elements that found their way into Oliver’s composition. The first has to do with harmonies. Upon listening to “Dippermouth Blues,” you might notice that you hear the same chords pattern again and again. This pattern repeats every forty-eight beats (listen to the percussion), or—if we group those beats into measures—every twelve measures. What you are hearing is called the twelve-bar blues, and it provides the structure for most blues compositions.

The other element from the blues that we hear in this example is the **blue note**. All of the harmonies used in the twelve-bar blues chord progression are in the major mode, and the melodies therefore ought to be in the major mode as well. In the blues tradition, however, performers sometimes lower certain melodic notes (an act known as “blueing” the note). These are usually the third, fifth, and seventh degrees of the scale, although other notes can also be blued. Because of this, the melody occasionally clashes with the harmony as the music pulls alternately towards the major and minor modes. This gives the music a particularly expressive dimension and encourages the listener to get physically involved. Whether or not you can identify the blue notes in this recording, you certainly feel their impact.

When we examine John Williams’s use of ragtime and Dixieland styles in *Star Wars*, we see how music intended for a purely practical purpose—in this case, dancing—can be used to tell a story. Ragtime and Dixieland jazz are not storytelling genres, but their sounds communicate many layers of information to



**Image 3.22:** This map indicates the region of Mississippi that is often referred to as the Mississippi delta.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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the modern listener. They suggest dancing, nightclubs, drinking, and excitement. They might also suggest the story of African American contributions to American popular music, or the historical eras from which these styles emerged. In this way, we might consider all music—not just film scores or theatrical works—to have storytelling potential.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Print

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The Leitmotifs of Wagner's Ring: <https://pj.b.com.au/mus/wagner/>

Not Another Music History Cliché!, “Did Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring incite a riot at its premiere?”: <https://notanothermusichistorycliche.blogspot.com/2018/06/did-stravinskys-rite-of-spring-incite.html>

# 4

## Sung and Danced Drama

*Esther M. Morgan-Ellis and Alexandra Dunbar*

### INTRODUCTION

The notion that characters in a staged drama might periodically break out into song or dance is fundamentally strange. All the same, sung and danced dramas permeate our lives, and they have for a long time. Even if you do not regularly visit the opera or ballet, you have likely seen *Frozen* or *The Little Mermaid*. Films such as these fit squarely into a tradition of musical theater that extends back for hundreds of years.

Musical drama, as the examples in this chapter will demonstrate, is highly diverse. It can be tragic or comic. It can be realistic or self-consciously artificial. It can be emotionally compelling or merely entertaining. It also encompasses endless variety in musical style, and it can be difficult to draw lines between genres. The examples in this chapter might variously be described as “musical theater,” “opera,” or “ballet” (a term that both European and Javanese performers use to describe their dance drama traditions). However, there are many overlaps between these categories. European ballet first developed as a part of opera, for example, and many operatic traditions include dancing. Dance dramas often include singing—something that is true of both examples in this chapter.

The most difficult categories to differentiate are “musical theater” and “opera.” For example, one does not hear *Frozen*—even in its live, staged version—referred to as an opera. But why not? Because it is in English? Lots of operas are in English. Because it has spoken dialogue? So does Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, discussed below. Because the music is written in a popular style? The Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi was responsible for the greatest hit tunes of his day. The most substantial difference between “musical theater” and “opera,” as those categories are understood today, has to do with the training of the performers on the one hand and the venues in which they perform on the other. However, these categories are already shaky, and they will continue to change as new styles of sung and danced drama are developed and popularized.

We encourage the reader of this chapter to approach each example on its own terms, without undue preconceptions about genre. Whether we are talking about New York City in 2015 or Mantua in 1608, it is always helpful to consider the

cultural context in which the work was created. Who was the audience, and how were they prepared to understand and appreciate what they saw onstage? Although our examples are diverse, each effectively uses music to enrich the storytelling.

## SUNG DRAMA

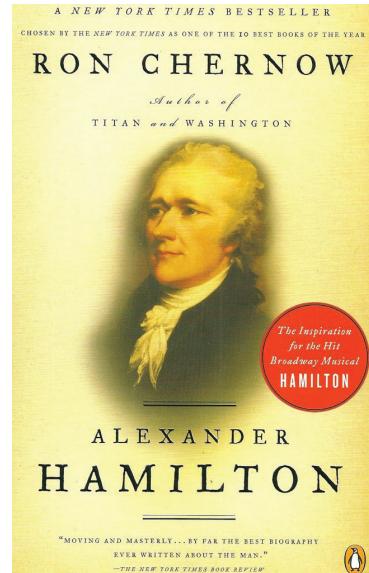
### LIN-MANUEL MIRANDA, HAMILTON

*Hamilton* is considered by many to be the greatest American musical theater production of the current era. The musical tells the story of Alexander Hamilton, an immigrant who travelled from the West Indies to the American colonies before the time of the American Revolution, and who came to be one of the founding fathers of the United States and the first Secretary of the Treasury under George Washington. The musical is based upon the biography by Ron Chernow (b. 1949), *Alexander Hamilton*, published in 2004.

### Miranda and Hamilton

*Hamilton* is the singular creation of the actor, writer, and musician Lin-Manuel Miranda (b. 1980), who, in addition to premiering the title role, wrote the music and lyrics. Miranda is one of the biggest musical theater celebrities of his generation, having won multiple Emmys, Grammys, and Tony Awards for his music, lyrics, and performances. Much of Miranda's work is influenced by his origins. As the child of parents of Puerto Rican descent, he grew up in a largely Latino neighborhood in Inwood, New York City, regularly visiting family in Puerto Rico. His musical preferences—Miranda grew up listening to salsa and American musicals (such as *West Side Story*)—reflected both an early interest in his musical heritage and a fascination with the stage. Miranda was gifted musically and academically, attending the highly competitive primary and secondary schools at Hunter College before enrolling at Wesleyan University.

In his theatrical work, Miranda foregrounds his multi-cultural upbringing and Latino identity. As a director, he has always made a conscious decision to cast actors from various cultural and racial



**Image 4.1: Ron Chernow published his biography of Hamilton in 2004.**

Source: Flickr

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**Image 4.2: Lin-Manuel Miranda in the title role of Hamilton.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Steve Jurvetson

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**Image 4.3:** This photograph, taken in 2015 by White House photographer Pete Souza, captures the diversity of the *Hamilton* cast.

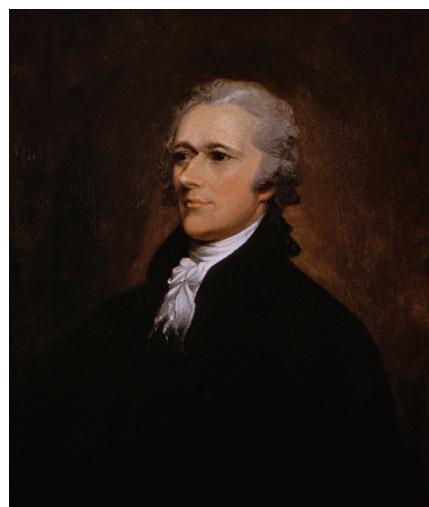
Source: Wikimedia Commons

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backgrounds. This feature of *Hamilton* has created some controversy, given the historical fact that the men and women represented in the musical were primarily white. Miranda, however, has defended this approach by drawing parallels between his casting and musical decisions. Just as he did not attempt to write music in the style of the 1770s, he did not attempt to create a visual image representative of the 1770s. Miranda's *Hamilton* was created to represent America in the current age. He makes the point that the United States was founded by immigrants. The founding fathers themselves—despite their skin color—were either immigrants or the children or grandchildren of immigrants. Hamilton himself was born in the West Indies, coming to America at a young age to make a name for himself. What is more American than that?

The musical numbers in *Hamilton* incorporate hip-hop beats and rap. The use of popular styles in a musical is not unique to



**Image 4.4:** Alexander Hamilton was the first US Secretary of the Treasury, serving from 1789 to 1795.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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*Hamilton*: *Hair* (1967) and *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1970) were the first modern-era musicals to incorporate rock styles, and Lin-Manuel Miranda had already used rap and hip-hop in his first musical, *In the Heights* (on Broadway from 2008 to 2011). In writing *Hamilton*, Miranda found that rap was not only musically exciting but also very useful, for he was able to fit more words into a shorter span of time. Hamilton the man was known for being poetically loquacious. In addition, rap allowed Miranda to incorporate a large amount of information from Chernow's biography, in addition to Hamilton's own words. The entire musical is 150 minutes long, but includes over 20,000 words.

Miranda also uses music to communicate with the *Hamilton* audience in ways that both complement and transcend the script and stage action. One of his favorite techniques for doing so is **allegory**, or the use of musical sounds to signify hidden meaning. We will address several ways in which Miranda employs instruments or musical styles in an allegorical manner.

## Allegory

Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Introduction "You say..."	King George III of England addresses America to a homophonic accompaniment of sustained piano chords in a four-chord descending pattern
0'33"	Verse 1 "You'll be back..."	The accompaniment switches to short harpsichord accents; the overall tone of the text becomes more sinister, which offers an unusual juxtaposition with happy music
1'15"	Hook "Da-da-da-da-da..."	This catchy passage is sung to nonsense words and is reminiscent of the outro of The Beatles' "Hey Jude," which is similar in terms of key and melodic arc
1'29"	Bridge "You say our love is draining..."	Stop-time accompaniment; double entendre on the word "subject" at 1'46"

2'12"	Verse 2 "You'll be back, like before..."	Same musical material as Verse 1; harpsichord returns to the front of the mix, one octave higher than before; tempo slows, emphasizing text, until the word "Love" at 2'36"
2'46"	Hook/Outro "Da-da-da-da-dad...."	The performer is joined in this catchy tune by the rest of the cast members on stage

There are several additional musical allegories in *Hamilton*. Let us consider, for example, the number "You'll Be Back," which is sung from the perspective of King George III. The music for this number is in the style of 1960s British Invasion pop. (Incidentally, The Beatles—the most famous and influential of the British Invasion bands—prominently featured harpsichord in their 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.) Again, Miranda makes a connection between a British musical style (an invasive one at that) and an imperialistic British character. But that's not all: Miranda further uses the pop genre to heighten the impact of his character's words. King George sings this number to a personified America. The music is relentlessly upbeat, as if expressing the emotional state of a delirious ex-boyfriend who cannot grasp that the relationship is over. The text, which is quite disturbing at times, is hilariously juxtaposed with the some of the happiest and tuneful music of the show.

Let us also consider Miranda's use of the harpsichord. Miranda writes for two keyboard instruments in his musical: the harpsichord and the piano. The two instruments really did not coexist in history. During the course of the 1700s, the harpsichord was gradually replaced by the fortepiano, which was itself an early predecessor to the piano. In *Hamilton*, however, we do not hear a fortepiano but rather a modern, 20th-century piano—an instrument historically separated from the harpsichord by over one hundred years. The harpsichord, therefore, represents an old way of life—and, more particularly, an old way of conducting politics. Specifically, Miranda uses the harpsichord to represent British rule before the revolution.

The sound of the harpsichord was, historically speaking, the sound of the



**Image 4.5: This French harpsichord was built in 1780.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 4.6:** This 1795 fortepiano looks like a harpsichord, but, like a modern piano, it creates sound by striking the strings with hammers. In a harpsichord, the strings are plucked.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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**Image 4.7:** A modern piano is considerably larger than the fortepiano and has a metal frame, which allows the string tension to be greater. As a result, the instrument is much louder.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Attribution: Carl Bechstein  
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18th-century British monarchy. In order to draw a historical comparison, we might consider the music of George Frederic Handel. Handel served as music director (German: *Kapellmeister*) to the German Prince George of Hanover, who later became King George I of England. While living in London, Handel composed many great works for the King, most notably his *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks*<sup>1</sup>. Handel was also one of the best-known and highly celebrated harpsichordists of his time. It is therefore fitting that the harpsichord should represent King George III, England, political oppression, and a deranged narcissistic ex-suitor.

We encounter this allegory in several musical examples. In “Farmer Refuted,”<sup>2</sup> Bishop Samuel Seabury, accompanied by harpsichord, defends his decision to remain loyal to England and begs Hamilton to do the same. “You’ll Be Back” begins with King George III singing to a subdued piano accompaniment. When his lyrics turn sinister, however, we hear the harpsichord enter. In both of these cases, therefore, the sound of the harpsichord is a symbol for the old-fashioned values of the British monarchy.

 1.	<p>G.F. Handel's <i>Music for the Royal Fireworks</i> incorporates the harpsichord in a way that is typical of 18th-century European music.</p>
 2.	<p>In "Farmer Refuted," Miranda uses the harpsichord to symbolize loyalty to England.</p>

## Cyclicism

Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Introduction "They say..."	Same introductory chords as the original introduction, despite plot changes
0'24"	"I'm perplexed..."	Unusual harmonies
0'42"		"John Adams..." is spoken in surprise.
0'45"	Verse 1 "I know him..."	Begins with the same tune and feel of Verse 1 from "You'll Be Back," but there is no harpsichord; instead, the texture consists of plucked strings, which recall the sound of the harpsichord but offer a warmer timbre; harpsichord returns to the mix in the background at 0'54" on the words, "Years ago"
1'18"	Hook	Only one iteration of this, unlike before, and there is no "everybody" joining in

King George later returns to perform "I Know Him." This song is a musical **reprise** of the first number he sang ("You'll Be Back"). At this point in the musical, the Revolution is long over and John Adams has been elected president. The harpsichord can still be heard, but it is less prominent than it was in "You'll Be Back." Instead, it is lurks behind a texture that consists primarily of strings played

pizzicato. This is significant: England (harpsichord) has lost the war and King George (harpsichord) no longer rules over the Americans.

“I Know Him” is not the only example of a musical reprise. Indeed, in crafting the score to *Hamilton*, Miranda sought to unify the various parts of the work using **cyclical techniques**. *Hamilton* contains many musical ideas that harken back to earlier points in the work. This approach to creating a narrative can be compared to Wagner’s use of leitmotifs. For example, the opening of the musical begins with a narrative rapped by Aaron Burr: “How does a bastard [...] grow up to be a hero and scholar?” Miranda treats this passage from Aaron Burr’s opening number, which is entitled “Alexander Hamilton,”<sup>3</sup> as a **leitmotif**, which later returns in “A Winter’s Ball,” “Guns and Ships,” “What’d I Miss,” “The Adams Administration,” and “Your Obedient Servant.” Despite the recurrence of musical material, however, each of these numbers has a distinct character. In “What’d I Miss,” the borrowing takes on a swinging feel as the once-straight sixteenths of the opening become dotted. In “Your Obedient Servant,” on the other hand, the tone is darkened by tremolo strings and the omission of the snaps that were previously heard on offbeats: Burr, now downright angry, is resentful of Alexander Hamilton.

3.



The opening phrases of “Alexander Hamilton” become a leitmotif and return throughout the work.

## Success

Upon its Broadway premiere in 2015, *Hamilton* immediately sold out. As of 2019, it continues to be nearly impossible to secure a ticket, the aftermarket prices of which have soared to record-breaking levels. The musical is currently on tour to cities across the globe, including Puerto Rico and London, England. It has won numerous awards, including ten Lortel Awards, three Outer Critic Circle Awards, eight Drama Desk Awards, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award for Best New Musical, and an Obie for Best New American Play.

## CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI, *ORPHEUS*

In Chapter 2, we examined a classic opera: Richard Wagner’s *The Valkyrie*. Wagner was contributing to a tradition of staged musical drama that had existed for about 250 years. Here, we will encounter one of the very first European operas ever created, Claudio Monteverdi’s *Orpheus*. First, however, we will consider the social structures and values that gave rise to opera in the first place, and we will address the new ways of writing music that made sung drama possible.

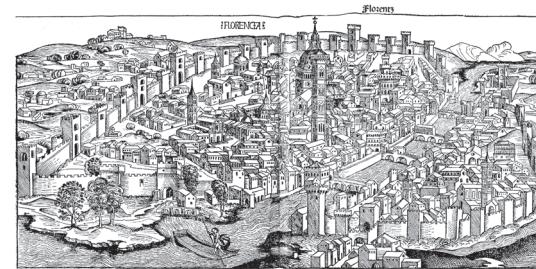
## The Origins of European Opera

European opera was born in the city of Florence in the late 16th century. Beginning in the 1570s, a group of intellectuals began meeting in the home of Count Giovanni de' Bardi to discuss artistic matters. They called themselves the Camerata (a name derived from the Italian term for "chamber"), and today are referred to as the **Florentine Camerata**. The members of the Camerata were courtiers, composers, poets, and scholars, and they were concerned with the modern development of artistic forms. In particular, they believed that the arts had become corrupted, and that artistic expression could only be revived by returning to the principles of ancient Greece. Where music was concerned, however, ancient Greece could offer only limited guidance. While many theoretical and philosophical treatises on music survive, very few compositions were preserved, and we don't really know what those would have sounded like. Resurrecting the musical practices of ancient Greece, therefore, is a tricky endeavor.



**Image 4.9: Music was very important in ancient Greece, both in the context of theater and as everyday entertainment.**

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**Image 4.8: This map shows the walled city of Florence about 100 years before opera was born there.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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The members of the Camerata drew much of their inspiration from the work of Girolamo Mei (1519-1594), a Roman scholar and the leading authority on ancient Greece. In his 1573 treatise *On the Musical Modes of the Ancients*, Mei argued that all ancient Greek poetry and drama had been sung, not spoken. He also wrote about the extraordinary power that music had over the listener. His descriptions fascinated the Florentine intellectuals, who felt compelled to develop a modern approach to sung drama. Their aim was to recapture the emotional impact that, according to Mei, sung plays had once had on audiences.

The leading music theorist of the Camerata was none other than Vincenzo Galilei (1520-1591), father of the famous astronomer Galileo Galilei. In order to facilitate sung drama, Galilei sought to develop a new approach to writing vocal music that imitated dramatic speech. It would be modelled on the way in which actors used variations in pacing and pitch to expressively declaim text from the stage. Such music would be free of repetition, of course, since every note would be uniquely tied to the word it illuminated. The rhythms would be derived from the text, while the melodies and harmonies would portray the emotional content.

Today, this style is termed **recitative**, for it more closely resembles dramatic recitation than typical singing.

Of course, a solo singer needs accompaniment. Although Galilei and his colleagues did not invent **basso continuo**, they did adopt it as the ideal vehicle for supporting sung text. The term “basso continuo” (which translates to “continuous bass”) refers to a style of accompaniment that came to be used in almost all music of the **Baroque** period (ca. 1600-1750). When a composer writes an accompaniment in the form of basso continuo, they indicate only the bass line and harmonies, which are usually to be played by at least two instruments. They do not usually specify instruments or exact pitches of each chord, which are chosen on the spot by the performers. An instrument that can play chords—harpsichord, organ, and lute were most common—is required, while an instrument that can play a bass line—cello or bassoon, perhaps—is usually included.

Members of the Camerata began experimenting with short sung dramas in 1589, while the first full-length opera—now lost—was composed by Jacopo Peri (1561-1633) in 1597. In 1600, Peri created *Euridice*, an operatic portrayal of the Orpheus myth. This work, which survives, consists almost entirely of recitative, as does a second version of *Euridice* produced by another member of the Camerata,

Giulio Caccini (1551-1618), in 1602. (The two men were colleagues and collaborators, but also saw themselves as being in competition with one another.)

All of these developments took place in Florence, and were supported by the Medici court. Peri’s *Euridice*, for example, was created and staged to celebrate the marriage between King Henry IV of France and Maria de Medici. From its inception, opera was understood to be aristocratic entertainment. It upheld noble values and catered to refined musical tastes. It also offered the opportunity for luxurious spectacle in the form of fantastical costumes and scenery. Musically, however, these early



**Image 4.11:** This photograph of the interior of the Medici Palace in Florence captures the splendor in which the family lived.

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**Image 4.10:** Here we see the cover of Galilei's 1581 treatise, *On Music Ancient and Modern*.

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operas were a bit boring, and the art form might have lived and died in Florence had not one of the great composers of the century developed an approach to sung drama that was truly compelling.

### **Orpheus**

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) was born in Cremona—an Italian city most famous for its legendary violin makers. He secured a position at the Mantuan court in 1590, where he served the Gonzaga family. Although Monteverdi flourished under the employment of Duke Vincenzo I, he was abruptly dismissed by the Duke's son and successor in 1612. The next year he won the prestigious post of music director at St. Mark's basilica in Venice, where he remained for the rest of his long life—despite a 1620 invitation to return to his post in Mantua, which he gleefully rejected. Although we will examine an opera that Monteverdi produced early in his life for the Gonzagas, he returned to the genre in his old age, creating three operas for the Venetian public in the 1640s.



**Image 4.12:** This portrait of Claudio Monteverdi was painted around 1640 by Bernardo Strozzi.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Attribution: Bernardo Strozzi  
License: Public Domain



**Image 4.13:** This portrait of Duke Vincenzo I was produced around 1600.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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The oldest opera still to be regularly performed and enjoyed is Monteverdi's *Orpheus* (Italian: *L'Orfeo*). We will begin with the occasion for which Monteverdi created this masterpiece. Then we will summarize the story before examining several musical excerpts.

Like the operas developed by the Florentine Camerata, *Orpheus* was intended for the private enjoyment of courtiers and their guests. This opera was among the festive entertainments on offer for the 1607 **Carnival** season. Carnival is celebrated in Catholic countries around the world during the days or weeks preceding Ash Wednesday, which marks the beginning of the liturgical season of **Lent**. During the forty days of Lent, Catholics are expected to give up earthly pleasures and demonstrate penitence for their sins. Lent culminates in Holy Week, when the story of Christ's crucifixion is told, and ends with Easter, which celebrates the resurrection. Carnival, therefore, marks the last opportunity for the faithful to enjoy food, drink, and entertainment. Although *Orpheus* was one of the first operas written for Carnival, the genre would be associated with the Carnival season for centuries to come. Opera would also come to be prohibited during Lent.

*Orpheus*, like other early operas, served a dual purpose. On the one hand, it provided dazzling entertainment to accompany a courtly celebration. On the other, it put the wealth and splendor of the court on display for the purpose of impressing those in attendance. Because he was tasked with exhibiting the affluence of the Gonzagas, Monteverdi did not need to worry about keeping his production within budget. For this reason he was able to write for an enormous orchestra and cast, and the original staging would have been extravagant.

It is not difficult to guess why Monteverdi chose the Orpheus myth as the subject for his opera. To begin with, by doing so he set himself up for favorable comparison with the Florentine composers who had already produced operas on this topic. Monteverdi's boss, Duke Vincenzo, had in fact seen the production of Jacopo Peri's opera *Euridice*, which had inspired him to commission a similar sung drama from his own court composer. The story itself is also particularly well-



**Image 4.14: Orpheus and his lyre have been the subject of countless paintings. In the work from the 1630s, we see him captivating woodland creatures with his musical ability.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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suites to an operatic telling. The Orpheus myth is, in essence, a story about the power of music to sway emotions. This, of course, was exactly what the architects of opera wanted to accomplish with their new art form.

Monteverdi set a **libretto** (the text for a sung drama) written by another member of the Mantuan court, Alessandro Striggio, who crafted a narrative in five acts. In the first part of the opera, Orpheus—a legendary musician fathered by the god Apollo—weds Euridice, a wood nymph. A raucous celebration follows, but the revelers are interrupted by Euridice’s friend Sylvia, who reports that she has died as the result of a bite from a venomous snake. Orpheus is at first devastated, but soon resolves to pursue her into the underworld and bring her back to life. Using the power of song, he convinces the boatman Caronte to carry him across the river Styx. He then persuades the rulers of the underworld to release his beloved. She is permitted to follow him back to the Earth’s surface, but Orpheus is warned that he must trust that she walks behind him, for he will lose her forever if he looks back. Unable to control himself, he looks—and she is once more taken away from him. Orpheus returns home distraught, but is comforted by his father, who carries him away to the heavens. (This is a relatively happy ending: In a more authentic telling, Orpheus is torn to pieces by the Furies.)



**Image 4.15: In this 1862 painting by Edward Poynter, we see Orpheus leading Euridice out of the underworld.**

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Perhaps because they were working in a different city, Monteverdi and Striggio departed from the dogmatic prescriptions of the Florentine Camerata. Instead of setting the entire story in recitative, they interspersed recitative with different types

of structured vocal music, including folk-like **strophic songs** (in which many verses are sung to the same melody), choral **refrains** (interjections by the choir), and a massive, ornate **aria** (a highly formalized song) for Orpheus. The resulting opera is full of variety, although it still relies on recitative to convey emotion at all of the key dramatic moments.

### Toccata

The first thing the audience heard at the premiere of *Orpheus* was not singing but instrumental music. This would become typical of opera and other types of sung theater, which always begin with an orchestral **overture**. Monteverdi described his overture as a “toccata”<sup>4</sup>, an Italian term that translates to “a thing that is touched” and was used at the time to indicate music for instruments. The toccata is very simple, for it served a simple purpose: It alerted the audience, with appropriate grandiosity, that the show was about to start. For his toccata, Monteverdi composed a repetitive melody in the style of a bugle call. It contains only the first six notes of a major scale, and consists primarily of ascending and descending stepwise motion. The melody is played three times using different sets of instruments. In our recording, it is heard first in the brass, second in the strings, and finally in the brass again.

4.



“Toccata” from *Orpheus*

Composer: Claudio Monteverdi

Performance: Le Concert des Nations and La Capella Reial de Catalunya, directed by Jordi Savall (2002)

This recording—and *Orpheus* in general—provides us with an excellent opportunity to encounter instruments of the Baroque era. As one can see and hear, they are similar to modern instruments, but not entirely familiar. The instrumentation in *Orpheus* is particularly interesting because, counter to common practice, Monteverdi specified it himself. Up until the Baroque era, it was typical for composers to write generic “instrumental” music that could be performed on any instrument. Monteverdi, however, took special concern with the sound qualities of his opera. In particular, he specified that the scenes on earth were to be accompanied by strings and flutes, while the scenes in the underworld were to be dramatized by the sounds of brass and the reed organ. The resulting timbres reinforce the darkness of Hades.

Most modern productions, including both referred to in this text, use what are termed **period instruments**. These are usually copies of instruments that were built in the Baroque era. In the first pass through the toccata, we see a drum, a trumpet that is a bit different in shape than the modern instrument, and two sackbuts—small predecessors of the modern trombone. During the repeat by the full orchestra, we see a variety of additional instruments: Baroque violins, which

can differ slightly in shape and are played with arched bows; cornetti, which sound somewhat like trumpets but look like oboes or clarinets; recorders (the predecessor to the modern flute); a Baroque harp; theorbos, which are lutes with long necks and additional bass strings; and bass viols, which look a bit like cellos but are different in shape and have frets. The ensemble sounds familiar, but has a timbre that is notably different than that of a modern orchestra.

We will continue to address instrumentation throughout the opera, for it plays an important role. The richest area for discussion, however, is not the orchestra but the basso continuo section. Monteverdi provides a diverse selection of continuo instruments, including harpsichord, theorbo, harp, pipe organ, reed organ, bass viol, and cello. These can be combined in a variety of ways to produce a nuanced palette of sound colors. As a result, even long passages of recitative are full of variety, as accompanying instruments enter and leave the texture.

## Act II

		Act II from <i>Orpheus</i> Composer: Claudio Monteverdi Performance: Das Monteverdi-Ensemble des Opernhauses Zürich, directed by Nikolaus Harnoncourt (1978)
Time	Form	What to listen for
22'27"	Ritornello & Aria A	Ritornello: strings and flutes Aria: Orpheus, one verse
23'10"	Ritornello & Aria B	Ritornello: violins Aria: a shepherd, two verses
23'50"	Ritornello & Aria C	Ritornello: violins Aria: a pair of shepherds, two verses
24'49"	Ritornello & Aria D with Chorus	Ritornello: flutes Aria: a pair of shepherds, one verse Chorus: one verse
25'44"	Orpheus's aria	Orpheus sings a four-verse aria; the ritornello is a lively dance tune played by the strings
28'20"	Recitative: Shepherd	Basso continuo: harp and cello

29'01"	Refrain: Messenger	The Messenger enters with a melodic refrain that will return throughout Act II Basso continuo: theorbo, organ, and cello
29'27"	Recitative: Shepherd	Basso continuo: harpsichord and cello
29'24"	Recitative: Messenger	Basso continuo: theorbo, organ, and cello
[...]	Recitative: various	Basso continuo: various
34'17	Refrain: Shepherd	One of the shepherds repeats the Messenger's refrain
35'29"	Recitative: Orpheus	Basso continuo: theorbo and cello
37'41"	Refrain: Chorus	The chorus repeats the Messenger's refrain, which is extended into a choral lament
38'47"	<i>End of listening guide</i>	

We will skip the wedding and start at the beginning of Act II with the party. In this scene, Orpheus is celebrating with the nymphs and shepherds who reside in an unnamed rural paradise. As might be expected on such an occasion, they sing and dance together. Monteverdi took the opportunity to abandon the solemn recitative of the previous act and compose a string of folk-like songs to be performed by Orpheus and his friends. Almost all of the songs are **strophic**, meaning that two or more verses of text are sung to the same melody. In between the songs, different assortments of orchestral instruments provide **ritornellos**, which are repeating instrumental themes. The performing forces slowly grow: first we hear a solo, then a duet, then the entire chorus. Finally, Orpheus himself sings the longest strophic song of all—containing four verses—on the topic of his extreme happiness.

All of this music can be heard in a **diegetic** framework. That is to say, we can understand the characters on stage to really be singing. This interpretation makes sense in the dramatic context. Orpheus in particular is a famed musician who would be likely to sing for his friends, while the setting—a wedding celebration—suggests the presence of music. The folk-like attributes of the songs also make them particularly appropriate for the characters to sing. However, we must also assume that the characters are not hearing *exactly* the same music that we are. Although shepherds might sing and dance, they would not have a large orchestra

at their disposal. Monteverdi treads the line between the realistic portrayal of a party and the fantastical world of opera, in which everything happens to musical accompaniment.

At the conclusion of Orpheus's song, the music suddenly changes. The orchestra drops out, leaving only basso continuo in support of a solo singer (one of the shepherds). This is recitative. Suddenly, the scene is interrupted by Sylvia, who comes bearing the news of Euridice's death. In our production, her entrance is marked visually with the descent of a black cloth over the backdrop, but also musically with a change in basso continuo instrumentation. While the shepherd had sung with an accompaniment of harp and cello, Sylvia sings with theorbo and organ. The new timbres contrast with the pastoral scene, making her message all the more disruptive.

Following interjections from several of the other characters, each marked with a change in basso continuo, Sylvia tells her story. It might seem strange that one of the most dramatic scenes in the opera is not portrayed onstage, but rather described in a lengthy monologue. Compared with the party that opened the act, the next few minutes are a bit drab. Sylvia's recitative lacks variety in texture and instrumentation, and it contains no melodic repetition—indeed, it contains no memorable melodies whatsoever. However, it does allow Monteverdi to exhibit his skill at expressing emotion by means of harmonized text declamation.

We might see Monteverdi's technique at work by examining the emotional high point of the recitative, which arrives when Sylvia recounts Euridice's final words: "Orpheus, Orpheus!" These are the highest pitches that she sings, and her delivery of the text closely mimics Euridice's unsung cry, which the listener can easily imagine. The harmonies are stark and surprising. Throughout this passage, the listener is kept ill at ease as Monteverdi leads the singer through countless harmonic twists and turns. The devastating development of the story is paralleled by unpredictable, dark, and even ugly chords.

After a response from the shepherds, the first of whom repeats Sylvia's text and melody from her entrance ("Ah, bitter blow!), Orpheus finally speaks. His opening words are low, set to a murky, chromatic melody and accompanied by gut-wrenching harmonies. As he moves from disbelief to anguish, his melody becomes higher, louder, and faster. Soon, however, his mood changes again as he resolves to bring her back from the underworld. Orpheus engages in a bit of **text painting** as he sings the words "I will surely descend to the deepest abyss" to a melody that itself descends into his lowest range. His final passage, in which he bids farewell to the sun and sky, in turn ascends into his highest range.

**Act III**

		Act III from <i>Orpheus</i> Composer: Claudio Monteverdi Performance: Das Monteverdi-Ensemble des Opernhauses Zürich, directed by Nikolaus Harnoncourt (1978)
Time	Form	What to listen for
51'30"	Recitative: Caronte	Basso continuo: reed organ
53'13"	March	Played by cornetti, sackbuts, and harp
54'31"	Orpheus's aria - Verse 1	Basso continuo: theorbo and organ Accompanied by a pair of violins
56'31"	Orpheus's aria - Verse 2	Accompanied by a pair of cornetti
57'50"	Orpheus's aria - Verse 3	Accompanied by harp
1:00'38"	Orpheus's aria - Verse 4	Accompanied by orchestral strings
1:03'25"	<i>End of listening guide</i>	

We will briefly visit Act III to hear the sounds of the underworld. Caronte, the boatman who is responsible for transporting deceased souls across the river Styx, sings to the somewhat horrible accompaniment of reed organ. This instrument's aggressive timbre underscores Caronte's gloomy job and belligerent character, expressed in his refusal to transport to Orpheus. Next we hear the music of Caronte's world: a funereal march performed principally on sackbuts.

After the march, Orpheus sets about the task of convincing Caronte to carry him across the river. He does so, of course, using the power of music. Orpheus sings a magnificent aria, "Mighty spirit and formidable god," that lasts for nearly ten minutes. Unlike his joyful song from the wedding party, this aria is slow, grandiose, and expressive. As in recitative, his singing is mostly unmetered. There is a fixed melody, and although it varies between the first three verses, the bass line remains the same. The listener, however, would be forgiven for failing to observe the repetition, for the bass line is so long and complex that it is difficult to

recognize even upon repeated hearings. Recognition is made more difficult by the fact that the singer heavily ornaments the melody, and does so differently on each repetition. **Ornamentation** refers to the practice of adding notes according to accepted rules.

Orpheus's aria also provides us with one more opportunity to encounter some of Monteverdi's more interesting instruments. Each verse of the aria is decorated with instrumental interjections and completed by an instrumental refrain. First, we hear two violins: one playing from the stage or pit, and the other echoing from a distance. (Monteverdi was particularly fond of this echo effect, and used it in several dramatic contexts.) Next, we hear similar music from a pair of cornetti. This instrument—now almost extinct—employs a trumpet-like mouthpiece connected to a narrow tube, traditionally made from an animal horn and wrapped in leather. Finally, we hear from the double harp, a Baroque instrument with two rows of strings (modern harps have one row). The fourth verse of Orpheus's aria, which is accompanied by strings, is different—an indication that he is gaining control of the situation. He wins his argument with a concluding passage of comparatively simple and straightforward singing.

As with the dance songs that open Act II, we can understand this aria to be diegetic: Orpheus the character really *is* singing. Whether or not he has in fact conjured up cornetto and harps to accompany his singing, however, is up for debate. It is more reasonable to interpret these instruments as belonging only to the theater orchestra, not to the scene in the underworld. The double harp in particular can be heard as a symbolic stand-in for Orpheus's own instrument, the lyre, which is a type of small harp used in ancient Greece. This scene is expressly about the music, however, for it is Orpheus's hypnotic singing and playing, in combination with his eloquence, that wins over the reluctant Caronte.

## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART, *THE MAGIC FLUTE*

During his lifetime, Monteverdi saw opera become mainstream popular entertainment in Venice. Over the next few centuries, opera became the most prominent form of public entertainment across all of Europe. Although the practice was first developed in Italian-speaking cities, it soon spread to France, England, and Germany, where new forms of opera were developed that catered to local tastes and languages. Italian opera remained so dominant, however, that it was performed—most often in its original language—in every European country. Opera was not truly dethroned as the West's favorite form of entertainment until talking pictures became mainstream in the 1930s.

Although the variety and riches of the European opera tradition can reward a lifetime of study, we will examine only one more example here. This example was chosen for its historical significance, its intrinsic interest, and the many ways in which it contrasts with *Orpheus*. While *Orpheus* is a serious opera written for court performance in the early Baroque style, *The Magic Flute* (1791), composed

nearly two hundred years later, is a comic opera created for commercial, public performance, and it exemplifies the pinnacle of the **Classical** style. It is also the work of the most important opera composer of the era: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791).

## Mozart's Career

Mozart was born into a musical family in the city of Salzburg. His father Leopold was a composer and violinist at the court of the Archbishop of Salzburg. Leopold was successful in his career, but he soon realized that his children possessed greater talent than he did. He subsequently abandoned composing to focus on their education. Mozart had an older sister, Marianne, who was his equal as a child prodigy. Both children mastered the harpsichord and fortepiano (a predecessor to the modern piano), while Mozart also became an expert violinist. Beginning in 1762, Leopold took his children on extensive tours to perform for heads of state across Europe. Marianne, however, was forced to abandon public performance when she became old enough to marry. Although there is some evidence that she composed music later in life, she was never given the opportunity to pursue a career.

Mozart, on the other hand, was expected to follow in the footsteps of his father, and upon the conclusion of his final tour in 1773 he took a job at the Salzburg court. Mozart, however, was dissatisfied with the provincial life he led. His exposure as a child to the great cities and courts of Europe had whetted his appetite for cosmopolitan excitement. He also wanted greater personal freedom, and resented being subservient to an employer. In 1781, he quarrelled with the Archbishop of Salzburg and was released from his position. Although his father was disappointed and concerned, Mozart was elated. He immediately moved to Vienna, an important



**Image 4.16:** This portrait, titled *The Boy Mozart*, was painted in 1763 by Pietro Antonio Lorenzoni.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 4.17:** The Austrian city of Salzburg as it appears today.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Henry Vagrant

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**Image 4.18:** This 1764 painting captures Leopold Mozart performing with his two prodigious children.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Attribution: Jean-Baptiste Delafosse  
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**Image 4.19:** Although this 1819 painting by Barbara Krafft was produced some time after Mozart had died, his sister approved of it.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Attribution: Barbara Krafft  
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center of politics and culture in the German-speaking world, and set out to build an independent career for himself.

In the late 18th century, there were few opportunities for a freelance musician to make a living. Most composers were employed by a court or church. Mozart, however, was able to capitalize on his fame as a child prodigy, and he had many marketable skills. He taught private piano lessons—although only to the elite young ladies of the city, and for a high fee. He wrote music for publication and accepted commissions. And he put on regular concerts of his music, each of which featured an appearance by the composer himself at the piano in the performance of a new concerto.

Finally, Mozart wrote operas in every genre of his day. He was fluent in various operatic styles and experienced in the conventions of the musical stage: Mozart, after all, had composed and premiered his first opera at the age of 13. In Vienna of the late 18th century, there were audiences for both Italian and German opera. Italian opera was divided into the old-fashioned opera seria (“serious opera”), which told heroic stories of gods and kings, and the newer opera buffa (“comic opera”), which portrayed characters from various social classes in humorous situations. *The Magic Flute*, however, is an example of a **Singspiel** (“sing-play”): a German-language comic opera with spoken dialogue and catchy songs. Of the three genres, Singspiel was the least respectable and sophisticated.

Mozart poured most of his energy into opera buffa. In collaboration with the court librettist Lorenzo da Ponte, he created three works—*The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *All Women Do It* (Italian: *Così fan tutte*; 1790)—that have maintained a central place in the operatic repertoire ever since. Although all three of

these operas contain comical characters and situations, each conveys a moral and is essentially serious in its purpose. The same is true of Mozart's last opera, *The Magic Flute* (1791).

In the final years of his career, Mozart struggled to make a living. Despite early success, he found that his audiences had largely evaporated by 1787. This was due both to the vagaries of fashion and economic difficulties. Whatever the cause, he was no longer able to sell concert tickets, and was forced to abandon his rather lavish lifestyle. He and his wife moved to less expensive lodgings, gave up their carriage, and sold many of their belongings. At the time Mozart received the commission to write *The Magic Flute*, therefore, he was eager to increase his income. Although 1790 saw a general improvement in Mozart's fortunes, he became ill while in Prague for the premiere of his final opera seria, *The Clemency of Titus* (1791), and died on December 5, just a few weeks after the premiere of *The Magic Flute*.

### ***The Magic Flute***

*The Magic Flute* was largely conceived by the man who commissioned Mozart's participation in the project, Emanuel Schikaneder. Schikaneder was the head of a theatrical troupe that performed at the Theater auf der Wieden, which was located in the Wieden district of Vienna. He and Mozart had known each other for many years, and Mozart had contributed music to several of his collaborative productions.

Acting in his role as **impresario**, Schikaneder had a hand in every step of the opera's development: he came up with the idea of staging a series of fairy tale operas, wrote the libretto for *The Magic Flute*, assumed financial responsibility, acted as director, and played one of the leads. He is even reported to have made suggestions to Mozart that were incorporated into the score.

Although *The Magic Flute* can certainly be described as a fairy tale, it is a fairy tale with a political message. In particular, *The Magic Flute* embodies Enlightenment values, celebrating the triumph of reason over superstition and the moral equality of individuals from different social classes. It also contains multiple references to **Freemasonry**, which, in late-18th century Vienna, was committed to the furtherance of Enlightenment ideals. Both Mozart and Schikaneder were Freemasons. The Masonic elements include various symbols that featured in the original set design, references to the four

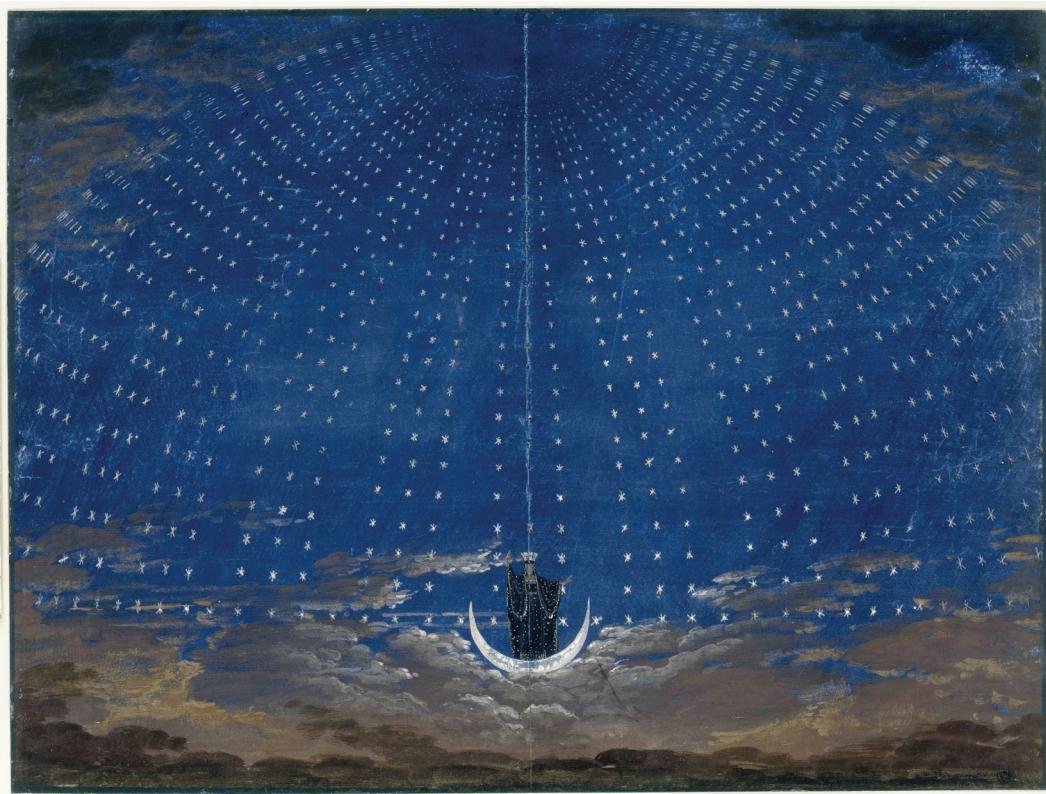


**Image 4.20:** This 1784 engraving captures Schikaneder in one of his theatrical roles.

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elements (earth, air, water, and fire), fixation on the number three, and the tale's setting in Egypt. Mozart also incorporated the rhythmic knock of the Masonic initiation ritual into his overture.

The plot, in a much simplified form, is as follows: The curtain rises on Prince Tamino fleeing from a serpent. Although he is rescued by three female attendants to the Queen of the Night, he awakens to find Papageno, a bird catcher, who takes credit for defeating the monster. When the women return, they chastise Papageno and show Tamino a portrait of Princess Pamina, the Queen's daughter. He immediately falls in love with her, but is told that she has been kidnapped by the evil sorcerer Sarastro. The Queen herself appears to tell Tamino that he can marry her daughter if he rescues her. The Queen's attendants give each of the men a magic instrument to help in their quest: a flute for Tamino and a set of bells for Papageno.



**Image 4.21:** This 1815 painting captures a stage set for an appearance by the Queen of the Night.

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At the end of Act I, Tamino finds his way to Sarastro's temple, but there he learns that the sorcerer is in fact benevolent, and that it is the Queen of the Night who has evil intentions. Sarastro had taken Pamina in order to protect her from her mother's influence. Tamino and Pamina finally meet, and Pamina

reciprocates his affection. Sarastro, however, refuses to permit the union before Tamino has completed a series of trials (based on Masonic ritual) to prove his spiritual worthiness.

Act II sees conflict between Pamina and her mother and suffering as Pamina awaits Tamino's successful passage through the trials. The magic flute and bells each serve their respective holders as they seek personal fulfillment. In the end, the two lovers reject the evil influence of the Queen of the Night and join Sarastro's enlightened brotherhood. And Papageno, who mourns his lonely existence, is rewarded for his faithfulness with a wife: Papagena.

*The Magic Flute* is rich with comedy, provided by Papageno (and, in a few scenes, the equally ridiculous Papagena), and the opera as a whole is highly entertaining. Most of the characters, however, are serious in purpose, and the story itself certainly carries a message.

The Queen of the Night represents forces that seek to suppress knowledge and clarity in favor of fear, insularity, and irrationality. Some scholars have identified her with the Roman Catholic Empress Maria Theresa, and have interpreted the opera as an attack on Catholicism. This is contentious, however: On the one hand, the Catholic Church was opposed to Freemasonry, but on the other, Mozart himself was a devout Catholic. Whatever the specifics, the Queen of the Night certainly embodies anti-Enlightenment values. Sarastro, on the other hand, is the wise, generous, and benevolent head of state. He exemplifies the political principle of rule by an Enlightened monarch, which many at the time believed to be the ideal form of government. He grants agency and freedom to his subjects, but demands that they hold themselves to high intellectual and moral standards. In the end, the protagonists—Tamino and Pamina—choose modern, Enlightened thinking over the beguiling superstitions of the past.

The opera conveys other messages as well—not all of which are so palatable. Women are certainly not portrayed in a positive light. The realm governed by the evil Queen is entirely female, while the light-filled court of Sarastro is predominantly male. Although Pamina eventually joins Tamino in his trials, her role is to support him: The couple's salvation relies primarily on his strength of character, and several musical numbers reinforce the idea that a wife must be subservient to her husband. The other female lead, Papagena, is literally a gift to a male character.

Likewise, the opera takes an ambivalent stance toward class distinctions. On the one hand, it portrays low-class characters in an essentially positive light. Papageno might be a buffoon, but he is on the side of good and capable of exhibiting strong moral character. This is an advance on previous operas, in which servants existed only to serve. At the same time, the low-class and high-class characters are kept at a distance from one another. Although Pamina and Papageno are friends and at one point sing a duet about the value of marriage, there is no question of them ending up together. A princess must marry a prince, while a bird catcher must marry within his own social class. Papageno is treated with the loving condescension that all members of his class supposedly deserve.

*The Magic Flute*, like many operas, also has a race problem. The synopsis above omitted the character of Monostatos, a black man who repeatedly threatens Pamina with sexual assault. Although he initially serves Sarastro as head of his slaves, he defects to the Queen's side in hopes of winning Pamina for himself. And of course, the fact that Sarastro keeps slaves should also raise eyebrows.

*The Magic Flute* was a product of its time and place, but all of these issues must be addressed in modern stagings. One of the strengths of live theater is that scripts can be reinterpreted by directors and actors. The challenges of doing so, however, have not been trivial. Many operatic narratives promote social values that are no longer widely accepted. Many also portray non-Western characters or societies in demeaning ways. The inclusion of non-white characters also provides interpretive challenges. While the practice of blackface performance, in which a white actor uses make-up to portray a character of African descent, has been condemned as racist in almost all spheres for the past half century, it is still sometimes used on the opera stage.

Opera companies continue to perform *The Magic Flute*, however, because the music is delightful. (A clever director can address most of its messaging problems—for example, Monostatos does not have to be black.) The arias that Mozart produced for this opera are unusually diverse and entertaining. This was the case for several reasons. To begin with, he was writing for a commercial theater that attracted a middle-class audience. Most of his listeners were looking for a fun night out, not a transcendent artistic experience. In addition, not all of the actors in Schikaneder's troupe had equivalent musical capabilities. Some were highly-trained opera singers, but others—including Schikaneder himself, who played Papageno—could barely carry a tune. Mozart, therefore, carefully tailored his writing to each individual singer.

### "I am a bird catcher"

With this in mind, we will examine four selections from *The Magic Flute*. We will begin with Papageno's first number, "I am a bird catcher."<sup>5</sup> This is the aria that Papageno sings to introduce himself to Tamino. In it, he sings about his simple life, wandering the countryside in search of birds, and expresses his wish to be equally adept at capturing the hearts of young women. The music created by Mozart effectively communicates Papageno's character, for he writes what is effectively a strophic folk song. It is in a cheerful major mode and contains only the simplest of harmonies, while the jaunty tempo establishes Papageno's carefree attitude. We hear Papageno's flute, which he uses to attract birds, in the second half of each of the two verses.

5.



"I am a bird catcher" from *The Magic Flute*

Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Performance: Hermann Prey with the Staatskapelle  
Dresden, conducted by Otmar Suitner (1967)

In addition to being dramatically appropriate, this music is also easy to sing. The orchestra begins by playing the entire melody, and the singer, upon entering, is doubled by the violins. Both of these features would have greatly helped Schikaneder give a successful performance. In addition, the vocal range is very small, spanning only a single octave, and positioned comfortably for an average male (not too high or low). Finally, the melody moves mostly by step, with few difficult leaps. Although the role of Papageno is always sung by a highly-trained professional in modern productions, his arias could easily be learned by almost anyone.

Other members of Schikaneder's troupe were more skilled. In fact, the unusual capabilities of the actors who played the Queen of the Night and Sarastro inspired Mozart to write arias that continue to challenge modern singers. At the same time, the music sung by these two characters accurately reflects their respective roles in the drama.

### **"O Isis and Osiris"**

The role of Sarastro was created for the bass singer Franz Xaver Gerl. Gerl had trained in Salzburg, and might have studied with Mozart's father. He had an unusually low voice, which Mozart took into consideration. Sarastro's introductory aria, "O Isis and Osiris,"<sup>6</sup> comes at the beginning of Act II, and its music and text both serve to establish his noble character. Sarastro calls upon the ancient Egyptian gods, Isis and Osiris (both prominent figures in Masonic lore), to guide and protect Tamino and Pamina in their pursuit of wisdom. The text exhibits his profound spiritual commitment to Enlightenment principles and his generous concern for others. The music is slow and deliberate, emphasizing Sarastro's stability and power. Although this is a strophic aria in two verses, like the one sung by Papageno, it is certainly not a folk song—the melody and harmonies are both too sophisticated. Finally, the extremely low range makes this aria inaccessible for any but a trained singer with unique capabilities.

6.



"O Isis and Osiris" from *The Magic Flute*

Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Performance: Kovács Kolos with the Orchestra of the Hungarian State Opera House, conducted by Pál Varga (1970)

### **"Hell's vengeance boils in my heart"**

The music that Mozart created for the Queen of the Night is different in every respect. Once again, we must start by considering the original singer, soprano Josepha Hofer (and Mozart's sister-in-law). Hofer was a singer of extraordinary skill, and she possessed an unusually high vocal range, of which Mozart took full advantage. We will examine the Queen of the Night's Act II aria, "Hell's vengeance boils in my heart,"<sup>7</sup> in which she threatens Pamina for refusing to kill Sarastro.

While Sarastro exhibits self-control with his singing, the Queen enacts her all-consuming rage. The most remarkable passages of her aria have no words at all, but rather require the singer to leap from pitch to pitch in the highest range using only repeated vowel sounds. Here we encounter a paradox: Although the Queen of the Night is the opera's villain, her dazzling displays are the highlight of the show. Sarastro's music is drab and forgettable in comparison.

7.



“Hell’s vengeance boils in my heart” from *The Magic Flute*  
Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
Performance: Sumi Jo with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Roberto Paternostro (2009)

### “Ah, I feel it, it is vanished”

Finally, we will hear from Pamina. This role was created for Anna Gottlieb, who was only 17 when *The Magic Flute* premiered. (Later in life, Gottlieb specialized in parody roles that required her to ridicule operatic sopranos.) Pamina’s major aria, “Ah, I feel it, it is vanished,”<sup>8</sup> comes in the middle of Act II. She has just been in the presence of Tamino. When she tried to speak with him, however, he refused to respond. She believes this to mean that he no longer loves her. In fact, Tamino is undergoing one of his trials, which requires a vow of silence. Pamina does not know this, and sings a mournful aria about her heartbreak and desolation.

8.



“Ah, I feel it, it is vanished” from *The Magic Flute*  
Composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
Performance: Dorothea Röschmann with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Claudio Abbado (2005)

A sparse orchestral accompaniment combines with the minor mode to convey her emotions. The soprano solo soars unaided into the heights, for Gottlieb certainly did not need to be doubled by an instrument. Unlike the Queen of the Night, however, Pamina keeps her emotions under control: She is despairing, but noble.

Speaking more broadly, we can hear the ideals of self-control and rationality in all of Mozart’s music. These are hallmarks of the **Classical** style. Composers working in this period preferred balanced phrases, sparse textures, predictable chord progressions, and elegant melodies. Just as the Enlightened individual placed a high value on rational discourse, the music of this period valued orderliness over emotional expression. Mozart certainly sought to convey a wide range of emotional states, but he never abandoned the rational parameters of his art.

## TIAN HAN, *THE TALE OF THE WHITE SNAKE*

Europe and the United States are, of course, not alone in developing sung drama traditions. Examples of musical drama can be found around the world. Here we will examine two, each of which has a unique set of characteristics and each of which—like European opera—requires years of dedicated training for those who desire careers as performers. Each of these traditions—also like European opera—is highly heterogeneous. Different styles and forms have dominated in different eras, and one can encounter a variety of contemporary practices.

### Beijing Opera

The form of musical theater known as **Beijing opera** is the most popular of the many forms of Chinese opera. Although the roots of Chinese opera extend back thousands of years, Beijing opera dates only to 1790—about when Mozart set to work on *The Magic Flute*. This particular form is said to have emerged when four regional opera troupes visited the Beijing court simultaneously to celebrate the 80th birthday of the Emperor. Although Beijing opera (like Italian opera) was available only as courtly entertainment for several decades, it soon found favor with the broader public, and by 1845 its conventions were both firmly established and widely enjoyed.



**Image 4.22: Beijing is located in the Northeast of China.**

Source: MapsWire

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**Image 4.23: Aristocratic female characters have ornate headdresses, fancy apparel, and complicated sleeves.**

Source: Flickr

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**Image 4.24: The Jing, or “painted face,” character is always powerful. This is the historical figure Xiang Yu, who was King of Western Chu in the second century BC. His final battle is the subject of the piece *Attack from All Sides* discussed in Chapter 6.**

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Beijing opera combines a variety of different art forms, and its practitioners must be well-versed not only in singing but also in gesture, dance, makeup application, and acrobatics. Traditionally, children were apprenticed to travelling troupes. They were offered little formal education, and were instead expected to learn through imitation. Today, this system has been replaced by formal schooling. Other changes have also shaped the tradition. Until the 1890s, all Beijing opera performers were men, many of whom specialized in female roles. When women first began to perform, they were confined to all-female troupes—some members of which, naturally enough, had to take on male roles. Troupes were integrated following the founding of the Republic of China in 1911, but men continue frequently to perform female roles, especially that of the beautiful young woman.

The roles in Beijing opera are highly standardized. There are four character types: Sheng (the lead male), Dan (any female), Jing (a forceful male), and Chou (the clown). Each character type has a variety of subtypes based on age and social status. An actor must specialize in playing a specific character type, for each has a distinct manner of speaking, singing, and moving. The Jing types also wear special face paint, the designs of which reveal facets of their character and mark them as being on the side of good or evil.

Many genres of Chinese music, including Beijing opera, are categorized into “civil” and “martial” works. Civil operas concern the court intrigues and love interests of the aristocracy, while

martial operas contain scenes of military conflict. Plots of both types are drawn from history, traditional stories, and novels, all of which are already familiar to the audience. A single opera will usually present only a few episodes from a much longer story, and it is typical to combine serious and comical elements.

Like the operas themselves, the orchestra that provides music for Beijing opera is divided into civil and martial instrument groups. The civil group contains string instruments. The most significant of these is the *jinghu*, a high-pitched bowed fiddle after which the genre itself is named. The other principal instrument is the *yueqin*, a moon-shaped lute with four strings. The martial group—which might also be described as the percussion section—contains gongs of different sizes, cymbals, and a pair of instruments known as *guban* that consists of a high-pitched drum and a wooden clapper. These last are the most important, as they are played by the ensemble director. This person has a challenging task, for the percussion section



**Image 4.25:** In a Beijing opera orchestra, only one person plays each type of instrument. The additional *jinghu* fiddles sitting at the feet of the performer are probably tuned to different modes.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 4.26:** The *jinghu* is held upright on the left knee.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 4.27:** The *yueqin* lute dates to the second century BC. Its name derives from its shape: "Yue" means "moon" in Chinese.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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must accompany action, punctuate speech, and provide sound effects—all of which requires precise timing. The orchestra might also contain additional lutes and wind instruments.

The division of the Beijing opera orchestra into string, wind, and percussion sections mirrors the European orchestra. However, there are significant differences both in the makeup of the ensemble and in its function. A Beijing opera orchestra usually contains only one player per instrument, and the music performed by the orchestra is **heterophonic** in texture, meaning that all of the instruments play the same melody, but not in perfect unison. Instead, each player interprets the melody in a way that is appropriate to the instrument, contributing ornaments or adding/removing pitches as considered suitable.

Beijing opera performances contain various types of orchestral and vocal music. None of this music, however, is composed for a specific opera. Instead, the melodies all belong to the tradition in general, and they are used by individual performers to characterize specific roles. Certain instrumental pieces, for example, are always played to accompany certain scenes, such as a banquet or the arrival of an important character. Onstage characters sing short arias in one of two modes: *xipi* for happy or energetic lyrics, and *erhuang* for serious or heroic lyrics. Each mode arranges the pitches of the pentatonic scale (degrees 1 2 3 5 and 6 of the major scale) in a different way, and the melodies in each tend to have different shapes.

For this reason, individual operas in this tradition do not have composers. The plots and dialogues are crafted by playwrights, but the music is drawn from a communal store. The same arias and instrumental numbers will be heard in a variety of different works. The singers themselves also have a great deal of control over the music, which will reflect their training, style, and vocal range. It is generally considered desirable to sing the arias as high as possible, so it is the onstage performers who determine what key the music will be in. While this level of flexibility will seem unusual to someone who is used to Western opera or musical theater, Beijing opera is in fact remarkably rigid when compared to other Chinese opera forms. The *Shenqu* opera of Shanghai, for example, can be completely improvised, with plots based on the news stories of the day.

The vocal timbre used in Beijing opera is one of its most remarkable features. Singers strive to produce a piercing, nasal sound with a slow, controlled vibrato. They will sometimes slide between pitches, each of which is carefully placed. The speech in Beijing opera is also highly stylized, and is often delivered in high range. To accomplish this, male actors frequently employ **falsetto** when singing and speaking. Actors employ an ancient dialect that is not always intelligible to modern listeners, but they communicate as much with their gestures and steps as with their voices. The Chou (clown) is the only character permitted by tradition to speak in modern Beijing dialect or to improvise onstage.

Finally, a word about the trappings of the stage. Costumes are often elaborate, and they always reflect the social status of the character. Sleeves are especially

important, and are carefully managed by the actors for expressive purposes. Stage sets, however, tend to be minimal or non-existent. Audiences are expected to imagine the scene, which is brought to life through the use of symbolic props. A table, for example, might serve as a wall, a mountain, or a bed, while a single oar is enough to suggest the presence of a boat.



**Image 4.28: Although the costumes used for Beijing opera are elaborate, the stage sets are minimal.**

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### ***The Tale of the White Snake***

We will see all of these elements at play in our example, Tian Han's dramatization of *The Tale of the White Snake*. The source of this opera is a legend concerning a white snake spirit that transforms into a young woman named Bai Suzhen after consuming a substance that grants immortality and wisdom. The legend contains many episodes, but Tian chose to focus on events that lead up to and follow Bai's marriage to Xu Xian, who through a twist of fate was originally responsible for her powers. Tian himself was a leading playwright in the first half of the 20th century, but he was condemned by Mao's government in 1966 for writing a play that was considered to undermine Communist values. He died in prison two years later.

We will examine two scenes from *The Tale of the White Snake*, which, as a typical martial opera, contains both civil and martial scenes. The first, a civil scene, comes from near the beginning of the opera. Bai Suzhen and her friend Xiao Qing (also previously a snake) have been caught in a downpour when they meet Xu Xian.

The three of them share a boat, and Bai and Xu proceed to fall in love. This excerpt will allow us to hear a variety of speech and song types, to hear the orchestra in its various roles, and to witness the conventions by which actors communicate their emotions and conjure up absent settings and props.

The second scene, which is martial in character, concludes the initial episode of the couple's romance. A few months after their marriage, Xu dies of fright after seeing his wife in her snake spirit form. Bai has journeyed to Mount Emei, home of the immortals, where she hopes to obtain a magical fungus that will bring Xu back to life. This scene contains almost no singing, but instead features acrobatics and martial arts as Bai battles the guardians of the sacred shrine.

Our first scene<sup>9</sup> begins with the entrance of Xu Xian, who sings an aria to explain his recent activities, describe the weather, and clarify that he has no interest in love. He sings in a high, falsetto range, as is typical of Sheng-type characters. The orchestra both accompanies and doubles him, following the contour of his melody and arriving at the same final pitches. The orchestra, however, does not play only what he sings, but also tacks on repeated motifs that add rhythmic and melodic interest. Although the aria has a regular pulse for the most part, it slows at the end as the singer adds ornaments to draw out the final notes.

9.



First excerpt from *The Tale of the White Snake*

Playwright: Tian Han

Performance: Chinese National Peking Opera Company

Xu's aria is followed by spoken dialogue between the characters, which is punctuated by percussive bursts. Soon, however, they are interrupted by singing from offstage. This aria, performed by a boatman, is quite different in character from Xu's lively aria. It is slower and the notes more connected to one another—a style that would be described in the West as *legato*. Also, the boatman's aria is accompanied by the *dizi*, a bamboo flute, in addition to the standard instruments. Finally, the heterophonic texture is more clear, since the orchestral instruments double the voice without adding any additional pitches.



**Image 4.29: The *dizi* is a Chinese bamboo flute.**

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Xu engages the boatman to take him and the two ladies to their destinations, and the boatman invites them to board. There is, of course, no boat. Instead, the actors help us to imagine it using carefully choreographed actions. After Bai and Xiao step into the boat, for example, they sway back and forth in perfect unison, as if being rocked by gentle waves. The journey of the boat is accompanied by appropriate music from the orchestra, to the melody of which the boatman sings a suitable Chinese proverb.

During the journey, all three characters engage in an extended accompanied musical number that combines singing and speaking. Again, the conclusion of the aria, sung by Bai, slows gradually to a stop as she makes the vital observation that Xu is a very nice young man. Pantomime and speech follow as the boat arrives at its first destination. The scene concludes with another musical sequence, in which Bai thanks Xu for his aid. Her final warning that he not break her heart is particularly effective: She draws the words out, singing unaccompanied for some time and concluding with a long series of ornaments. The phrase “gaze through autumn waters” is an idiom that indicates that one is waiting expectantly for another with tears in one’s eyes.

The scene ends with orchestral music to accompany Bai and Xiao’s departure from the stage. We now hear another instrument clearly: the *sheng*, or mouth organ. The *sheng* consists of a series of vertical reed pipes attached to a mouthpiece. The instrument is held with both hands, and the player positions their fingers over openings to sound the various pipes. The *sheng* will be heard during interludes such as this throughout the opera, although it seldom accompanies singing.

The scene we have just examined includes a typical mix of song, speech, and instrumental music, accompanied by symbolic movement and punctuated with percussive sound effects. As in European opera, speech (often cast as recitative in the Western tradition) moves the plot along, while song provides an opportunity for characters to express their emotions or reflect on what has happened.

Our next scene<sup>10</sup> is quite different. Because this scene is martial in character, the focus is not on speech or song but on action. Bai sings to mark her entrance onto the stage, but she then executes an extended martial display to percussion accompaniment. Next she sings an excited aria about her mission to save her husband. When the guardian of the shrine blocks Bai’s way, she begs his mercy using speech. He refuses to assist her, and they enter into a long physical battle accompanied only by the percussion section. The battle features remarkable



**Image 4.30: The *sheng*, or mouth organ, is a Chinese wind instrument.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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acrobatics from both of the guardians, who represent a Chou character type known as Wu Chou, or “military clown.”

10.



Second excerpt from *The Tale of the White Snake*

Playwright: Tian Han

Performance: Chinese National Peking Opera Company

Bai is ultimately defeated by the guardians, but the scene ends with an elder immortal gifting the magical fungus to Bai and sending her away to revive her husband. The two characters do not sing, but their dramatic and highly melodic speech is executed over orchestral accompaniment featuring both the *dizi* and *sheng*. After the long stretch of percussive music, the entrance of the full orchestra effectively underscores the emotion of the scene, communicating both the mercy of the immortal and the grateful joy of Bai.

## DANCED DRAMA

### PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY, *THE NUTCRACKER*

We've already encountered one **ballet** by a Russian composer: Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Now we will examine another. Stravinsky and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) are, after all, two of the best-known ballet composers. The most famous choreographers and dancers have been mostly Russian as well. Ballet, however, originated not in Russia but in France. We will begin, therefore, with the story of how this art form ended up thriving nearly two thousand miles away from its birthplace.

#### Ballet

Ballet's origins can be traced to European courts of the 15th and 16th centuries, where dance became increasingly formalized and dramatic. Early ballets, however, were quite different from the art form we might be familiar with: Dancers wore regular shoes and clothing, the steps were taken from



**Image 4.31:** This photograph of Tchaikovsky was taken near the end of his life.

Source: Wikipedia

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participatory court dances, and spectators usually joined in for the finale. Court ballet reached its pinnacle under Louis XIV, who ruled France from 1643 to 1715. He was an avid dancer, and frequently took leading roles in the productions. Louis XIV also sponsored the first professional ballet company, which was attached to the Paris Opera. The two genres—opera and ballet—were closely related in this period: French operas always contained extended dance numbers, while court ballets included singing.



**Image 4.32:** These students at Escuela Superior de Música y Danza are performing the **Dance of the Snowflakes** from *The Nutcracker* in 2010.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Ballet as we know it today emerged in the second half of the 18th century, when a series of reforms were enacted by ballet master Jean-Georges Noverre. Noverre sought to make ballet more expressive and realistic by replacing the heavy costumes with light, form-fitting apparel, doing away with masks, and introducing the use of pantomime and facial expressions to communicate dramatic elements. The early 19th century saw the invention of the pointe shoe, which allows female dancers to balance on their toes, and the tutu, which accentuates their graceful movements and reveals the legs.

Soon, however, ballet in France was faltering. In seeking to compete with opera, ballet promoters were not successful. Ballet's association with the aristocracy made it distasteful to French audiences of the late 19th century, and it was generally considered to be less expressive than opera—and therefore inferior. Ballet might have vanished completely were it not for Russian interest in the art

form. Beginning in the late 18th century, Russian courts sought to establish their cultural credentials by importing European art forms. First, they brought in Italian opera. In the mid-19th century, they turned to French ballet.

## Tchaikovsky's Career

At first, the Russian ballet establishment was managed by French choreographers, scenarists, dancers, and composers. Gradually, however, Russians took over, and ballet became a distinctively Russian art form. Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky was among the first Russian ballet composers, and his three masterpieces—*Swan Lake* (1877), *Sleeping Beauty* (1890), and *The Nutcracker* (1892)—are still frequently performed today.

Tchaikovsky, however, did not particularly care for his ballet scores, and he disdained their popularity. He would much prefer to have been remembered for his six symphonies, which he considered to be his greatest works. Tchaikovsky also wrote programmatic orchestral pieces, operas, and chamber music—in fact, he composed in all of the prominent European genres of the 19th century. Unlike Russian composers such as Modest Mussorgsky (discussed in Chapter 6), who rejected European influence, Tchaikovsky sought to follow in the European tradition.

Tchaikovsky was firmly entrenched in Russia's European-style musical establishment. As a young man, he was at first frustrated in his desire to pursue a career in music by the fact that there were no opportunities to study music in Russia. He instead embarked upon a career in the civil service, but in 1862 was able to enroll in the first class at the newly-opened St. Petersburg Conservatory. He impressed his teachers, and upon graduating was offered a teaching position at the Moscow Conservatory, which opened in 1866. Tchaikovsky went on to establish an international reputation as a composer, although he faced criticism at home for not being “Russian enough” in his musical expression.

It is no surprise that Tchaikovsky did not care for ballet work, for in the creation of a ballet, the composer found himself at the bottom of the hierarchy. Most of the creative work was completed by the **scenarist** (who outlined the dramatic contents of the ballet) and the **choreographer** (who designed the dance). *The Nutcracker* was conceived of by the renowned scenarist Marius Petipa, who chose and adapted the story, decided how it would be told through the ballet medium, and established a character for each of the dances. He went so far as to provide Tchaikovsky with the exact tempo and duration for each number, leaving the composer with little opportunity for creative expression. All the same, Tchaikovsky—who, while working on *The Nutcracker*, wrote to a friend that “I am daily becoming more and more attuned to my task”—was able to produce distinctive music that has charmed listeners for over a century.

## The Nutcracker

The short story on which *The Nutcracker* was based required a great deal of alteration to become appropriate for the ballet stage. Indeed, the plot of *The Nutcracker* bears little resemblance to E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King" (1816), which can be categorized as a horror story. In Hoffmann's account, a young girl, Marie (Clara in the ballet version), is subjected to terrifying nighttime encounters with the seven-headed Mouse King, who repeatedly threatens her. The tortuous plot hinges on a curse that transforms characters into hideous creatures with giant heads, gaping smiles, and long white beards. At the end of the story, Marie breaks the curse by pledging her love to the toy nutcracker that was given to her at Christmas by her godfather, the mysterious inventor Drosselmeyer.



**Image 4.33: This scene, taken from a 2014 production by the New Mexico Dance Theater, includes Drosselmeyer, Clara, and the Nutcracker Prince in his human form.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Petipa (following an earlier adaptation by Alexandre Dumas) stripped this narrative of its horror elements, thereby transforming it into a family-friendly story about Christmas magic. The first act takes place at the home of Clara Stahlbaum, where guests have assembled for a Christmas Eve celebration. Drosselmeyer provides wonderful gifts for all of the children, including a nutcracker, to which Clara immediately becomes attached. After the party, Clara returns to the parlor to visit her nutcracker, where she witnesses a ferocious battle between the nutcracker—grown to life size and revealed to be a prince—and the Mouse King. She intercedes on the nutcracker's behalf and he emerges victorious.

In the second act, the Nutcracker Prince takes Clara to his kingdom, the Land of the Sweets, where she is welcomed and celebrated. The courtiers put on a show for her to demonstrate their gratitude, presenting a series of dances while she and the Prince sit upon thrones. At the end of the ballet, Clara returns to her home—awakening, perhaps, from a fantastic dream.

*The Nutcracker* was premiered as part of a double-bill at the Imperial Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg. The other item on the program was Tchaikovsky's newest opera, *Iolanta*, making for a complete evening of entertainment lasting about three hours. The premiere was not a success. Critics lambasted the dancing, the choreography, the adaption of the story, the sharp contrast between the acts, the prominence of children onstage, and the neglect of the principal ballerina, who, as the Sugar Plum Fairy, does not dance until nearly the end.

The music, on the other hand, was well-received, and Tchaikovsky was quick to salvage his work by transforming it into an orchestral **suite** that could be performed

on concert programs. It was in this form that *The Nutcracker* first became popular. *The Nutcracker* was not staged again as a ballet until 1919, and did not enter the regular repertoire until 1934. A 1944 production by the San Francisco Ballet introduced it to American audiences. The New York City Ballet began offering annual performances in 1954, and the tradition of staging *The Nutcracker* during the Christmas season soon began to take hold across the United States. Today, *The Nutcracker* attracts millions of patrons every year, and is responsible for a large portion of the ticket sales by American ballet companies.

We will be taking a look at Act II of *The Nutcracker*. We will begin with the opening scene, in which Clara and the Prince arrive in the Land of the Sweets. Then we will examine part of the “Grand Divertissement” (that’s “grand entertainment” in English) that is staged for their amusement.

### Act II: Introduction

Time	Form	What to listen for
45'30"	Introduction to Act II	Clara and the Prince are welcomed to the Land of the Sweets
51'25"		The Prince tells the story of his victory over the Mouse King; we hear music from Act I
52'51"		The dancers for the “Grand Divertissement” are introduced to Clara and the Prince
53'38"	Chocolate (Spanish dance)	The melody is introduced by the trumpet, while castanets are heard throughout
55'04"	Coffee (Arabian dance)	A chromatic melody, heard first in the violins and later in the double reeds, floats above a droning rhythmic ostinato punctuated by tambourine strikes
59'00"	Tea (Chinese dance)	This dance pairs a flute/piccolo melody with pizzicato strings and a simple ostinato in the bassoon

1:00'16"	Russian Trepak	The fast-paced Trepak, which uses the entire orchestra, grows in intensity before culminating in a raucous final chord
1:01'31"		End of listening guide

Tchaikovsky opens Act II with harp arpeggios and a sweeping, romantic melody in the violins. Sustained pitches in the brass create a sense of calm and repose. When Clara and the Prince arrive onstage, they use pantomime and facial expressions to indicate their wonder at beholding the magical kingdom, while the music intensifies in excitement with the addition of ascending flourishes in the flutes and piccolo. Magical sounds are created by violin **harmonics** (a technique by which the player lightly touches the string to produce a high, wispy sound) and celesta, a keyboard instrument that produces bell-like sounds when hammers strike resonant metal bars. Tchaikovsky associated this instrument, invented in Paris in 1886, with the Sugar Plum Fairy, and he was the first to use it in a major work.

The entrance of the Sugar Plum Fairy, who has been ruling the Land of the Sweets in the Prince's absence, is marked by another special effect (flutter tongue) in the flutes. She proceeds to greet Clara and the Prince, as do the subjects of the court. Next, the Prince tells the story of his battle with the Mouse King. He cannot use words, of course, so he reenacts the conflict in pantomime. He is aided by the orchestra, which repeats music from the battle scene—music that the audience heard only twenty or thirty minutes before and will easily recognize.

There has been dancing throughout the procedures thus far, of course, but nothing that could be described as a formal dance number. One of the challenges faced by any scenarist in designing a ballet is coming up with excuses for carefully-choreographed dance numbers. Ballet audiences enjoy the drama, but they want to see some good solo and ensemble dancing, not just pantomime. Petipa solved this problem by crafting a “Grand Divertissement” in which a series of dances are performed for Clara and the Prince. This “show within a show” is ostensibly put on for the benefit of the couple, but is in fact directed at the audience in the theater.

The “Grand Divertissement” consists of a diverse collection of themed dances. The first three dances are named after foods appropriate to the Land of the Sweets: chocolate, coffee, and tea. For each of these, Tchaikovsky drew inspiration from the lands from which these foods came: Spain, Arabia, and China. These are followed by a Russian dance, the “Dance of the Reed Flutes,” and a dance known as “Mother Ginger and the Little Clowns.” We will focus our attention on the first four dances for the purpose of considering how Tchaikovsky approached the task of representing national identity in music.

## Act II: Chocolate

The Spanish dance is vibrant and exciting. The melody is first heard on the trumpet—an instrument that is not necessarily associated with Spanish music, but which introduces a bright timbre and sets the number apart from what has come before. The harmonies are simple and repetitive, suggesting a sort of generic “folk” style. What really marks the music as “Spanish” is the use of **castanets**, which are heard nowhere else in the ballet. Castanets are a simple percussion instrument that consists of two concave pieces of wood. These are held in one hand and clapped together. Castanets are particularly associated with the Spanish tradition of **flamenco**, which encompasses unique forms of guitar playing, singing, and dancing. By prominently featuring castanets, Tchaikovsky clearly signalled to his audience that the music and dancing were meant to be Spanish.

But how successful was he in replicating the sounds of flamenco music? We might compare Tchaikovsky’s music to a performance by flamenco musicians of the folk song “El Vito,”<sup>11</sup> which dates to the 16th century. This rendition is typical of Spanish music in several ways. It is in a minor mode, with the melody supported by characteristics harmonies. The guitar player executes dissonant strums. And the castanet player provides complex accompanying rhythms. The performance of flamenco most often incorporates dance<sup>12</sup> as well, and there is a rich vocabulary of movements and rhythmic steps that accompany and express the music. Next to these examples, Tchaikovsky’s Spanish dance sounds comically cheerful and simplistic.



**Image 4.34: The Spanish dance often features flamenco-inspired costumes.**

Source: Flickr

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11.



In this example, a guitarist and castanet player perform “El Vito.”

12.



In this example, the guitarist is accompanied by hand clapping, singing, and the rhythmic footwork of the dancer.

## Act II: Coffee

Next is the Arabian dance. This time, Tchaikovsky employs a variety of compositional techniques to signal to his listener that this is “Middle Eastern” music. The low strings play a repeating rhythmic **ostinato** that produces a hypnotic



**Image 4.35: The Arabian dance often emphasizes sensuality and mystery. These dimly-lit performers are wearing typical costumes.**

Source: Pexels

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from the clarinets and double reeds and punctuated by the jingle of a tambourine. Later, the melody is echoed in the oboe and the bassoon. A modal shift concludes the dance on a major harmony.

For an example of authentic Middle Eastern music, one can refer to the discussion of Turkish makam music in Chapter 8. Many of Tchaikovsky's strategies for representing the Middle East in sound are indeed rooted in genuine practice. The tambourine, for example, features prominently in Persian and Turkish music. Likewise, Middle Eastern compositions use modes other than major and minor, and their melodies often feature augmented seconds. The trill is not an uncommon ornament in some instruments, such as the flute, and an ostinato sometimes provides a musical backdrop for improvisation. Finally, double reed instruments such as the *sorna* are native to the Middle East.

In short, Tchaikovsky captures the sound of Middle Eastern music with considerable success. The main differences between the genuine article and Tchaikovsky's imitation are the different timbres of the instruments, the inauthentic complexity of Tchaikovsky's orchestration, and the Western intonation of the orchestral players, who do not tune their pitches in the same way as members of a *takht* ensemble.

All the same, Tchaikovsky contributes to a musical stereotype that casts Middle Eastern music as static and hypnotic. While it can have these characteristics, it usually does not. Unfortunately, these have become the hallmarks of Western imitations, with the result that a rich music tradition is reduced to a handful of clichés.

## Act II: Tea

Next up is the Chinese dance, representative of tea. Tchaikovsky again makes use of an ostinato—this time, a rapid oscillation between the first and fifth scale degrees by the bassoon player. Above this we hear a high melody in the flutes and piccolos, punctuated by pizzicato from the strings. As the music grows in intensity, clarinets provide an arpeggiated accompaniment while bells sparkle alongside the flutes.

For an example of authentic Chinese music, we need only look to the previous example in this chapter. Any listener will immediately note that the Tchaikovsky's dance has little to do with actual Chinese music. His choice of flutes for the melody might bring to mind the bright timbres often favored in Chinese music, but the similarity ends there. The steady rhythm, choice of scale, texture, and repetitive form all suggest that he had never actually heard Chinese music at all—or at least had no interest in creating a faithful reproduction.

Creating a faithful reproduction, of course, was never Tchaikovsky's goal in any of these cases. Whether or not he accurately reflected the music of the cultures he parodied was purely incidental. Tchaikovsky's only task was to entertain the Moscow audience members that purchased tickets to see the ballet. His audience was Russian, and he knew that they enjoyed exotic escapism as part of their theatrical entertainment. They were not alone.

**Exoticism**—the use of stereotypes to portray other cultures as exciting or mysterious—has a long history in European music, and especially in music for the opera stage. European audiences of the 18th and 19th centuries were intrigued by the cultural practices of distant lands, and they had a limitless appetite for their representation in the arts. The East held particular fascination, such that the term **orientalism** has been coined to describe the stereotyped representation of Eastern cultures. Such representations, however, are seldom accurate or flattering. Instead, exoticism dehumanizes its subject so as to provide an escapist experience to the consumer. Europeans often perceived exoticized subjects as sexually licentious, primitive, and driven by their emotions—or, to put it another way, free from the strictures of society. In this way, exoticized subjects became an object of both adoration and loathing. They could give in to temptations that were denied to European viewers, but only because they were less than human.

All of this might seem a bit tangential to *The Nutcracker*, which, after all, tells a charming story set in an imagined candy land, but it is not. The ballet's representations of exoticized others—whether Romani people of Spain, or Arabs, or Chinese—contributes to a centuries-long practice that can still dehumanize these people today. This is best exemplified by a current controversy surrounding the performance of Tchaikovsky's Chinese dance, which usually relies on stereotyped costumes, makeup, and choreography that many people find offensive.



**Image 4.36: These dancers, who appeared in a 2012 concert performance of the Chinese dance, are wearing typical costumes and making a hand gesture that is often incorporated into *Nutcracker* choreography. At what point do these common presentational tactics become offensive, or downright racist?**

Source: Marine Corps

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In 2017, yellowface.org was founded specifically to advocate for changes in how the Chinese dance is presented in productions of *The Nutcracker*. The organization encourages arts leaders to sign the “Final Bow for Yellowface” pledge, which is a commitment to end racist representations of the Chinese characters. It also provides resources for creating new costumes, makeup, and choreography for use in *Nutcracker* productions that reflect genuine Chinese cultural practices instead of racist stereotypes. The movement has gained support, but most productions—including that associated with this text—continue to present a stereotyped visual representation of Chinese culture alongside Tchaikovsky’s musical one.

### Act II: Trepak

The final selection from the “Grand Divertissement” that we will examine here is the Russian dance, or Trepak. This time, Tchaikovsky took a model closer to home, for this dance is based on local Russian and Ukrainian folk practices.<sup>13</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Russian dance is Tchaikovsky’s best imitation of the “real thing.” Both his Russian dance and the authentic trepak are fast-paced and in duple meter, with a driving rhythm suited to high-energy dancing. We again hear the tambourine—now a symbol not of the Middle East but of native folk culture.

13.



In this video, you can see the kind of folk dance that inspired Tchaikovsky’s Trepak.

## JAVANESE TRADITIONAL, *THE LOVE DANCE OF KLANA SEWANDANA*

Like sung drama, danced drama can be found around the world. Some of the richest traditions hail from Southeast Asia, where one can find dozens of distinct varieties of danced storytelling. Our example belongs to the *wayang wong*



**Image 4.37: The wayang wong dance tradition developed in the courts of Yogyakarta and Surakarta, now the major cities of central Java.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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tradition, which developed in the courts of central Java, an island that is now part of Indonesia. Although *wayang wong* is unique to this small region, many of its musical and dramatic elements can be found across Java and throughout Indonesia. The most important of these is ***gamelan*** music, which is played on pitched gongs and keyed metallophones (marimba and xylophone are Western examples of such instruments).

## Indonesia as Kingdom and Colony

Indonesia's performing arts traditions reflect its diverse cultural heritage. Civilization on the islands dates back thousands of years. Indonesia was at first ruled over by a series of Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms, but the arrival of Islam in the 15th century resulted in the gradual conversion of the population. Today, Indonesia is the largest Muslim nation in the world, although many inhabitants practice a form of the religion that contains traces of the region's Hindu and Buddhist heritage.

Javanese music is well known in the West due to the island's colonial history. Dutch traders began to visit the Indonesian islands in the 16th century. The profitability of trade led to an influx of Dutch settlers, who established a local government under the auspices of the United East India Company. When the company failed in 1800, the Dutch government formally annexed the Dutch East Indies—which included most of Java—as a colony. Under Dutch rule, indigenous courts were allowed to remain intact, but they were granted only ceremonial powers. While this denied Indonesians their political autonomy, it contributed to the flourishing of Indonesian art, which the Dutch encouraged. It also facilitated the spread of Javanese music and art to Europe.

During World War II, Indonesia was occupied by the Japanese, who drove out the Dutch in an attempt to claim the islands for themselves. At the conclusion of the war, the Indonesians proclaimed independence. The Netherlands attempted to reassert its claim to the territory by force, and a military conflict ensued. In 1949, however, facing intense pressure from other powers, the Dutch acknowledged Indonesia as an independent nation. The impact of Dutch colonialism on the spread of Javanese cultural products resonates into the present day, and *gamelan* music in particular can be heard throughout the world. Indeed, there are over one hundred *gamelan* ensembles in the United States alone.

## Wayang Wong

The dance form we will explore here, *wayang wong*, developed during the colonial era and resulted from the conflict between indigenous and colonial powers. *Wayang wong* was created at the court of Hamengkubuwono I, the first Sultan of Yogyakarta. Hamengkubuwono was to inherit the throne of the Mataram Sultanate from his brother, Pakubuwono II, but instead led his followers in a civil war after Pakubuwono agreed to cooperate with the United East India Company. The war

ended in 1755 with a treaty establishing courts at Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Although this was nominally a victory for Hamengkubuwono, the Dutch ultimately benefited by pitting the courts against one another over the next two centuries. All the same, Yogyakarta remained a stronghold of Javanese resistance, and today serves as the capital of an independent region of the same name.



**Image 4.38: These wayang wong dancers are portraying a scene from the Mahabharata.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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*Wayang wong* was initially conceived of as a decadent three-day spectacle celebrating and affirming the power of the newly-established Yogyakarta court. Although the first performance required dozens of dancers and lasted from dawn to dusk on each of the days, it has persisted in scaled-down forms. The term *wayang wong* literally means “human *wayang*.” This is in deference to the principal form of Indonesian theater, *wayang kulit*, which uses shadow puppets to act out traditional epics to the accompaniment of music.

All forms of *wayang* tell stories that have a long history in Indonesian culture. The principal sources are



**Image 4.39: This view from behind the screen shows a dhalang manipulating the shadow puppets in a wayang kulit performance. The dhalang, who must be highly trained, not only moves the puppets but narrates, provides dialogue, and sings. His performances usually exceed eight hours in length, lasting from sunset to sunrise.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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two Indian epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. *Wayang* performances also draw from the Panji stories, which concern the life of a legendary Javanese prince. Each of these epics is much too long and complex to be related in a single performance. Instead, *wayang* performers select individual stories, which they often elaborate in ways that add novelty without disrupting the traditional narrative. Indonesian audiences are already familiar with the stories, and they appreciate seeing the characters and events presented with originality.

## Gamelan

Our example presents an excerpt from the Panji stories, which we will consider in greater detail below. Before that, however, we owe some attention to the music that accompanies *wayang wong* dance. The instruments used in *gamelan* music date back to at least the 8th century, although they did not acquire their present form until the 15th or 16th century, when gamelan music became an important component of court life. Gamelan music is ubiquitous in traditional Indonesian culture. It can be performed on its own, but it is also used to accompany dance and theater. It is played for court celebrations and religious ceremonies, pursued by amateurs for their own enjoyment, and consumed by fans as entertainment.

A gamelan is a collection of bronze percussion instruments that are struck using a variety of mallets. The components of a gamelan include vertically-hung gongs of various sizes, smaller gongs suspended horizontally in wooden frames, and melodic instruments consisting of metal bars suspended over resonating chambers. The instruments of a gamelan are built together and they remain together. It is not possible for players to bring their own instruments, or for an instrument to be substituted. This is because there is no fixed pitch system in Indonesian music, so gamelan instruments



**Image 4.40:** Although it bears a superficial resemblance, the *saron* differs from the *gendèr* in many ways. The bronze keys rest directly on the instrument, and the resonating chamber is a space within the wooden body of the instrument. The keys are also struck differently.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 4.41:** The word “gong,” several examples of which we see here, comes from Indonesia.

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**Image 4.42: The *gendèr* is one of several gamelan instruments with bronze keys strung over bamboo resonators.**

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**Image 4.43: The *kenong* and *kethuk* are horizontally-suspended gongs used to mark the underlying rhythmic cycle in gamelan music.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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**Image 4.44: The gongs of the *bonang* resemble those of the *kenong* and *kethuk*, but are strung together and tuned to allow the rendition of melodies.**

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are tuned to one another by the original builder. Every gamelan therefore plays a distinct set of pitches.

In addition to being communally stored and maintained, gamelans are bestowed with names. This not only recognizes the gamelan's status as a complete ensemble but also signifies the traditional belief that a gamelan possesses a spirit. This spirit resides primarily in the largest suspended gong, the *gong ageng*, which might be provided offerings of food, flowers, and incense. The blacksmith who forges the bronze components of the gamelan instruments is traditionally understood to hold special powers, and he is expected to prepare for his task through fasting and self-purification. His carefully-tuned gongs and bars are then set in ornately-carved wooden frames.

Each instrument in a gamelan occupies a specific place in the musical texture. The vertically- and horizontally-suspended gongs are all used to mark the pulses of the rhythmic cycles that underlie gamelan music. These cycles, each of which is named, consist of patterns of timbres provided by the various gongs. The *gong ageng* always marks the end of the cycle, which repeats throughout a performance and provides the structure.

The other bronze instruments—which include two sizes of *bonang*, *gendèr*, *slenthem* (an instrument that resembles the *gendèr* but is pitched lower and has fewer keys), and two sizes of *saron*—play the same melody in heterophonic texture. However, each of these instruments interprets the melody in a markedly different way. Some play ornate versions, some play spare versions, and some play syncopated versions. The result is a complex texture woven out of the brilliant and resonant timbres of the many instruments.

Gamelan music also uses a few additional instruments, although these are not part of the main gamelan ensemble. Such instruments usually provide improvised melodies that follow the contour of the main melody but are otherwise independent. The instruments that might fill this

role include the *rebab* (a bowed fiddle related to the Chinese *jinghu*), the *gambang* (a wood-keyed xylophone), and the *suling* (a type of flute). Finally, a male choir or female soloist might sing, drawing their texts from a body of poems and riddles that belong to the gamelan tradition. These texts, however, are not associated with any particular musical composition. Instead, they might be heard in a variety of contexts.

A gamelan performance is led by the drummer, who plays three different sizes of a drum known as *kendhang*. The drummer starts and stops performances, but his most important task is to control the pace and to signal the dramatic shifts in tempo that are characteristic of gamelan music. During performance, the ensemble will periodically slow to half of its former tempo or accelerate to twice the tempo. This is accompanied by changes in how the melody is interpreted by each of the instruments, which will add notes at slow tempos in order to maintain a consistent texture.



**Image 4.45: A *kendhang* player.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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## The Love Dance of Klana Sewandana

Time	Form	What to listen for
32'14"	Sekartaji alone in the forest	A few of the metallophones play a slow, simple melody; the rebab and solo female singer improvise high melodies; a percussionist taps rhythms on a wooden box
35'12"	Klana Sewandana enters and attempts to seduce Sekartaji	The music at first becomes faster and more rhythmically intense; this is followed by fluctuations in tempo and dynamic
36'08		A male solo singer enters and the rhythm becomes more regular

	Prince Panji arrives and fights Klana Sewandana	The brighter/louder metallophones reenter the texture
37'52		
38'21"		The male choir enters and most of the instruments drop out
39'06"		The rebab enters
39'35"		The solo female singer joins the male choir
[...]		Instruments and singers continue to leave and reenter the texture as the music fluctuates in intensity
45'30	Prince Panji and Sekartaji are reunited	The music slows in tempo, then accelerates
48'19		The music slows in anticipation of the final note

We are now prepared to turn to our example: A *wayang wong* performance that presents an episode from the Panji legends. *Wayang wong* is practiced both in masked and unmasked versions. This is obviously an example of the former. The use of masks in Indonesian dance dates back thousands of years. The masks are symbolically significant, and their shape, color, and details carry information about the character.

Many episodes of the Panji legend concern his romantic relationship with Sekartaji, who often finds herself separated from the Prince due to the intervention of malevolent forces. To survive, she frequently disguises herself as a man, at one point becoming the King of Bali and meeting Prince Panji on the battlefield. (There is also a long history of cross dressing in *wayang* dance itself.) The scene we will examine opens on Sekartaji alone in the forest. She has fled from the unwanted affections of King Klana Sewandana, whose obsession with her has driven him insane. Klana Sewandana attempts to seduce Sekartaji, but she rebuffs his advances. Luckily, Prince Panji has been drawn to the scene by his great love for Sekartaji. He fights and defeats Klana Sewandana, and the lovers are reunited.

The three dancers in the scene move differently, for they represent the three character types of *wayang wong*. As a female type, Sekartaji keeps her feet close to the ground while executing refined movements with her hands, neck, and head. Klana Sewandana is a strong male, as betrayed by his wide stance, large steps, and

aggressive movements. Prince Panji, on the other hand, is a refined male. As such, he keeps his feet close to the ground and moves fluidly.

Throughout the episode, the gamelan provides a constant musical backdrop while accentuating the dramatic contour. Klana Sewandana's arrival in the forest, for example, is marked by an intensification of the music, which grows in volume and increases in tempo. Musical outbursts punctuate the fight scene, while a musical calm descends on the final scene between Panji and Sekartaji. From time to time we hear the *rebab*, the *suling*, and various singers, who can be seen seated behind the dancers. The words they are singing have nothing in particular to do with the drama unfolding onstage, but voices contribute an important aesthetic element to any performance.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Print

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# 5

## Song

*Esther M. Morgan-Ellis and Arielle P. Crumley*

### INTRODUCTION

Song is perhaps the most familiar and universal form of musical storytelling. Unlike opera, it does not require a large space, costumes, or staging. It can be collaborative, but is often performed by a single person. It is also compelling, for we generally get a great deal of pleasure out of using our imaginations to visualize the characters and events of a story. In many times and places, in fact, song and storytelling have been considered inseparable: The storyteller could not imagine communicating through any means other than music.

The purpose of song, of course, is not always to tell stories. Many songs present philosophical ideas, or describe scenes, or support worship, or encourage dancing. In this chapter, however, we will focus on songs—and collections of songs—that outline clear narratives, and we will examine ways in which the music helps to communicate the story. As we will see, it can do this in many ways.

### SONG CYCLES

We will begin by looking at collections of songs that work together to tell a story that is emotionally complex, if not heavy in plot detail. Such a collection can be called a **song cycle**. A song cycle usually consists of about eight to twenty songs that use carefully crafted texts and music to present a cohesive narrative. Each song is distinct from the others and the order cannot be changed. While the term song cycle is most often applied to works from the art music world, it is valid across many genres. When a popular artist releases an album of songs that accomplish the purpose of a song cycle, however, the product is referred to as a **concept album**.

The most important difference between a song cycle and concept album is that the former is most commonly conceived of with live performance in mind, whereas the latter is often developed in the studio and consumed as a recording. For this reason, a song cycle is more likely to have limited instrumentation, while producers of concept albums often have a wider variety of sound tools at their disposal. We will begin by considering a concept album that includes not only sounds but images and spoken poetry.

## BEYONCÉ, LEMONADE

On April 23, 2016, popular music star Beyoncé released her sixth album, *Lemonade*. The release was accompanied by a 65-minute film of the same name that premiered on the popular television network HBO. This album, which was influenced by a range of genres spanning from hip-hop to country, became critically acclaimed for its musical variety, while the accompanying film was admired for its astounding visual cinematography. The work as a whole has also been lauded for its unapologetic celebration of womanhood and black culture.

At its center, *Lemonade* is a concept album revolving around infidelity, seemingly sparked by the infamous accounts of Beyoncé and husband Jay-Z's marital struggles. The songs, which mirror Beyoncé's personal experiences with infidelity, touch on themes such as heartbreak, revenge, and forgiveness. The accompanying film follows the singer's journey from betrayal to healing by dividing the twelve songs into separate chapters: "Intuition," "Denial," "Anger," "Apathy," "Emptiness," "Accountability," "Reformation," "Forgiveness," "Resurrection," "Hope," and "Redemption." Though the album's focus is on Beyoncé's personal healing, there is also an underlying political theme, for the album recognizes the struggles of black Americans by addressing issues such as black womanhood and police brutality. Here, we will discuss several songs and consider their visual counterparts, exploring different stages of the story's development.

### "Hold Up"

One of the most noteworthy aspects of *Lemonade* is the poetry that Beyoncé recites between each song. These poems help to tie the story together and clarify dramatic details. Beyoncé's recitations include excerpts from the poems of Warsan Shire, a Somali-British poet known for writing about not only personal experiences but also the struggles of women, refugees, immigrants, and other marginalized groups of people. Throughout the recitation, listeners are confronted both with abstract images and with descriptions of the emotions that prevail in each chapter. Consider, for example, the poetry that precedes the song "Hold Up,"<sup>1</sup> which Beyoncé recites in eerie, whispering tones.



**Image 5.1: Here we see Beyoncé performing onstage in 2013.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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1.



“Hold Up” from *Lemonade*  
Performance: Beyoncé (2016)

Immediately following this passage, the song “Hold Up” begins. This upbeat single reflects the “Denial” chapter of Beyoncé’s journey. The song at first seems optimistic: its playful, Reggae-inspired beat and major key make the song sound like a laid-back summertime hit. The lyrics of the chorus seem to convey a positive attitude, repeating the phrase, “Hold up, they don’t love you like I love you/Slow down, they don’t love you like I love you.” However, the verses express more negative emotions. By considering the lyrics in their entirety and noticing the duality between the verses and the chorus, the listener gets the impression that Beyoncé is fighting with her emotions, bouncing back and forth between denial and anger.

The visual aspect of the song also reveals a dichotomous nature. Beyoncé herself seems to be a visual representation of lightheartedness, dressed in a long, flowing gown of bright yellow. However, her look is meant to be a representation of Oshun, a West-African goddess of fresh waters, love, and fertility (this characterization is further emphasized in the beginning of the scene where Beyoncé emerges from a building surrounded by cascading water). Although Oshun is viewed as a benevolent deity, folktales often discuss Oshun’s harsh temper when she has been wronged. Beyoncé embodies this character throughout the song, smiling playfully as she bashes windows, fire hydrants, and cars with a baseball bat.

### “Don’t Hurt Yourself”

In the following song, “Don’t Hurt Yourself,”<sup>2</sup> which is performed during the chapter titled “Anger,” Beyoncé leaves behind her playful nature for full-on vengeance. The song, which features rock musician Jack White (known mostly for his association with The White Stripes), has definite rock-and-roll characteristics, including heavy rhythms and distorted vocals. Beyoncé expresses her anger in the song’s opening lyric: “Who the f\*ck do you think I is? You ain’t married to no average b\*tch, boy.” The mood throughout the song remains the same: angry and vengeful. Beyoncé concludes with a final warning: “If you try this sh\*t again/ You gon’ lose your wife.”

2.



“Don’t Hurt Yourself” from *Lemonade*  
Performance: Beyoncé (2016)

With these lyrics, it becomes apparent that Beyoncé's anger is directed toward her cheating husband. However, this song also includes one of the first instances in which Beyoncé addresses the album's other theme: the struggles of being a black American, particularly a black American woman. In the middle of the first verse, Beyoncé interpolates an excerpt from Malcolm X's famous speech "Who Taught You to Hate Yourself:"

The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected woman in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.

Beyoncé's anger seems to be not only directed at her husband but also at the mistreatment of black women in America. This continues to be an underlying theme throughout the remainder of the album. For instance, in the following song, "Sorry" (one of the most popular singles from the album), the last lyric reads "you better call Becky with the good hair." The term "Becky" is a popular colloquialism for a white woman, and this lyric seems to imply that the other woman was white. This reflects the negative stereotype that black women are less desirable than other women, and it implies that Beyoncé was cheated on because of her blackness.

### "Sandcastles"

The next few songs on the album, which belong to the chapters "Apathy" and "Emptiness," exhibit various emotions, but it is with the song "Sandcastles"<sup>3</sup> that Beyoncé arrives at the most difficult and important point in her journey: "Forgiveness." The music itself presents raw emotions, with its simple, bare piano accompaniment and expressive vocals. Beyoncé's singing style is very different in this song, her voice at times sounding shaky or raspy, reflecting the hurt that is inevitable when confronting a cheating partner. She sings of her damaged marriage, of the fights and broken hearts, yet she reveals her reluctance to walk away from it all by singing, "Oh, and I know I promised that I couldn't stay, baby/ Every promise don't work out that way." Like the music itself, the visual portion of this song is very personal, including loving scenes of Beyoncé and husband Jay-Z laughing together and embracing.

3.



"Sandcastles" from *Lemonade*  
Performance: Beyoncé (2016)

The following short song, "Forward," features English singer James Blake, who sings a heartbreak melody. With the infidelity narrative reaching its conclusion in the previous song, this interlude pulls away from the story of Beyoncé's struggles



**Image 5.2: Beyoncé performing in 2007.**

Source: Wikipedia

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and introduces a new focus on the previously-mentioned underlying theme: the struggles of black Americans. The visual counterpart of the song features several important figures in the fight for equality and justice, including the mothers of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown (Sybrina Fulton, Gwen Carr, and Lezley McSpadden respectively). Each woman is shown holding a photograph of her son who was killed by unnecessary violence and brutality.

The final chapters of Beyoncé's journey, "Hope" and "Redemption," feature upbeat and inspirational songs such as "Freedom" and the hit single "Formation." The powerful lyrics and gospel style of "Freedom" convey an inspirational message about continuing on in the midst of adversity. This message is not only a reflection of Beyoncé's power to move beyond her personal struggles while dealing with her husband's

infidelity, it is also an anthem intended to uplift black Americans in their struggles against inequality. At the song's conclusion, there is an excerpt from a speech given by Hattie White, Jay-Z's grandmother, that elucidates the meaning of the album's title:

I had my ups and downs, but I always find the inner strength to pull myself up. I was served lemons, but I made lemonade.

## **FRANZ SCHUBERT, *THE LOVELY MAID OF THE MILL***

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) lived a quiet life in Vienna, where he wrote over 600 songs for performance at intimate domestic gatherings. Although he died young, and without achieving significant fame outside of Vienna, his work became widely-known in the mid-19th century and today he is considered to be one of the finest composers of the era.

### **Song and National Character**

Before we can look at Schubert's songs, we need to know something about the cultural context in which he was working. In the early 19th century, new ideas about national identity were in the air. Many of these ideas were rooted in the work of German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, who argued that spoken language influenced an individual's character. He suggested, for example, that Germans all thought in roughly the same way because they spoke the same language, which in turn guided and structured their intellectual activity. From here, the notion that people who spoke the same language should participate in bounded, self-governing communities—nations, in fact—was not far removed.

During Schubert's time, neither Germany nor Austria existed in anything resembling their present forms, but the idea that communities of people who spoke a common language should constitute autonomous nations was quickly taking hold.

Herder also believed that the most authentic form of national character was to be found among those least corrupted by cosmopolitan influences—the peasants who worked the land. Before the late 18th century, impoverished rural folk were treated with contempt. It was not believed that they had anything to offer the ruling classes other than labor. Following Herder, however, they became the one true source of authentic “folk” culture, and therefore key to a nation’s ability to understand itself.

Collectors began to scour the countryside for folk stories, folk poetry, folk dances, and folk songs. These were compiled and published for popular consumption. Perhaps the most famous of such collectors were the Brothers Grimm (Jacob Ludwig Karl and Wilhelm Carl), who were responsible for first recording many of the fairy tales—including Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel, Snow White, Rapunzel, and Sleeping Beauty—that have been ceaselessly told and retold around the world ever since.

All of this is important to our discussion of Schubert for two reasons. First, the elevation of the German language meant that German songs had the potential to become art. Before Schubert’s time, songs were regarded as trivial popular entertainment. Schubert’s songs, however, were taken seriously as cultural expression of the highest order.

Second, general fascination with folk culture and art influenced Schubert’s approach to writing songs. He often chose texts that imitated folk poetry, or at least dwelt on rural subject matter, and he frequently set these to music in a folk-like style. Although some of his music seems very simple,

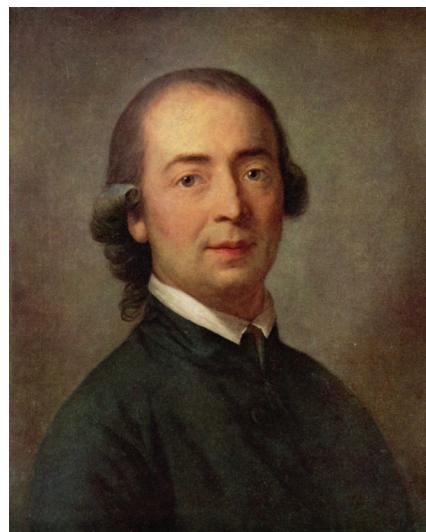


**Image 5.3: This posthumous portrait of Schubert was painted by Wilhelm August Rieder in 1875.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Wilhelm August Rieder

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**Image 5.4: The ideas of Johann Gottfried von Herder influenced the development of a German art song tradition.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Schubert did not resort to the folk idiom because he lacked ability or imagination. Instead, he imitated genuine folk song to augment his storytelling.

We will see all of this influence at work in Schubert's 1824 song cycle *The Lovely Maid of the Mill*. Before turning to the story and music, however, we need to consider the setting in which the music was meant to be experienced.

## Salon Culture

In the Vienna of Schubert's time, music lovers supported an economy of small, in-home concerts known as salons. A salon might be hosted by a wealthy family for the purpose of advertising their cultural and social capital. The performance would take place in the family's living room, where visitors could admire their furnishings and art. Hosting a salon was also considerably cheaper than maintaining a private orchestra, so it became the preferred means of cultural expression as Vienna's wealth slowly shifted from a small group of aristocrats to a larger middle class.

Naturally, certain types of music were preferable for salon entertainment. Only a few performers could fit in the venue at a time, and loud instruments were not welcome. A great demand arose, therefore, for solo piano music, chamber music (two to five individuals each playing their own part), and song, all of which Schubert produced in enormous quantities.



**Image 5.5:** This 1897 painting by Julius Schmid shows Vienna's upper classes garbed in their finest and crowded around the piano, at which Schubert himself is seated. All attention is clearly focused on the music, which is performed at intimate proximity. (Of course, Schmid was born much too late to attend a *Schubertiade*, and he was imagining the scene in question.)

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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All of Schubert's songs and chamber music were conceived of with this sort of environment in mind. In fact, he became so prominent in the salon scene that a special term, *Schubertiade*, was developed to describe a salon performance that featured only his music. Salons were comparatively informal, and listeners would gather around the performers in close proximity. Paintings of salon performances show listeners in rapt attention.

This type of engagement with music was typical more generally of Schubert's era, when the public held art in high regard and believed that artists were in a position to communicate profound truths. Schubert's listeners sought not only entertainment but also enlightenment, transformation, and catharsis. *The Lovely Maid of the Mill* offered all.

### ***The Lovely Maid of the Mill***

The poetry for this song cycle was written by Wilhelm Müller, a prolific author of song texts. Müller was one of many German poets who looked to folk models for inspiration, and the folk-like characteristics of his verse influenced Schubert's music. Müller's collection of twenty-five poems was first published in 1820, and Schubert began setting it to music just a few years later while he was recovering from a severe bout of illness. Schubert's spirits were low at the time he embarked on this project, for he feared that he would never fully regain his health. Indeed, he never did: Schubert succumbed to his illness five years later, just as he was on the brink of achieving success outside of Vienna.

In the poems, Müller tells the story of a young journeyman miller who has completed his initial apprenticeship and set out to find employment. He walks through the woods until he finds a stream, and then follows the stream to a mill, where he does indeed find a job waiting. He also finds the miller's daughter, and falls in love with her immediately. At first, she seems to reciprocate, and he is overjoyed to have won her affection. Slowly, however, the miller begins to suspect that the girl in fact loves the hunter, who has been hanging about the mill. As his suspicion turns to certainty, the miller experiences anger, grief, and finally resignation. Having lost his true love forever, he drowns himself in the brook.

It is worth noting that Schubert and Beyoncé's songs cycles have a great deal in common. Both address the suffering that can come with love, and both express the intense emotions of the wronged party. It seems that we have never told enough stories about the difficulty of navigating a romantic relationship. The nuances of each musical story, however, are unique to the time and place in which each was crafted. Beyoncé tells a tale of empowerment and reconciliation, while Schubert's protagonist seems to give up in the face of a romantic stymy.

The story told in *The Lovely Maid of the Mill*, however, exhibits a variety of 19th-century values. The period extending roughly from 1815 to 1900 is referred to in the arts as the Romantic era. In the realms of both literature and music, consumers expected insight into the inner emotional lives of individuals, whether they were fictional protagonists or the creators themselves. Two of the topics addressed in *The*

*Lovely Maid of the Mill*—love and suicide—were especially prevalent in the Romantic era, while the tale’s rural setting exemplifies the Romantic interest in nature. While the story is not particularly interesting in its own terms, the music allows us to experience every nuance the protagonist’s widely varying emotional states.

We will examine four songs: the first, the last, and two from intermediate points in the miller’s emotional journey. In each case, we will look at how Schubert’s musical decisions amplify and communicate the emotional and dramatic contents of the poetry.

### “Wandering”

The first song is entitled “Wandering.”<sup>4</sup> The poem reads as follows:

Wandering is the miller’s joy,  
Wandering!  
A man isn’t much of a miller,  
If he doesn’t think of wandering,  
Wandering!

We learned it from the stream,  
The stream!  
It doesn’t rest by day or night,  
And only thinks of wandering,  
The stream!

We also see it in the mill wheels,  
The mill wheels!  
They’d rather not stand still at all  
and don’t tire of turning all day,  
the mill wheels!

Even the millstones, as heavy as they are,  
The millstones!  
They take part in the merry dance  
And would go faster if they could,  
The millstones!

Oh wandering, wandering, my passion,  
Oh wandering!  
Master and Mistress Miller,  
Give me your leave to go in peace,  
And wander!

*translated by Celia Sgroi*

4.

*"Wandering"* from *The Lovely Maid of the Mill*

Composer: Franz Schubert

Performance: Ian Bostridge and Mitsuko Uchida (2005)

The textual contents, frequent word repetition, and generous use of exclamation points all paint a picture of an enthusiastic (if naive) young man. His outlook is positive and he sees nothing but joy in his future. He also indicates a clear preference for individual liberty. He is not, in other words, the type of young man who is eager to take on the responsibilities of marriage.

Schubert translates all of this enthusiasm and simplistic good nature into his music. He seems to imagine the miller's words as constituting a folk-type song, which the young man literally sings as he walks through the woods. To do so, Schubert keeps his setting (the music crafted to suit a set of words) very simple. To begin with, he creates a **strophic** song, in which each stanza of the text is set to the same music. As a result, we hear the same melody and accompaniment five times in a row. This is a standard form for European and American folk music, which is traditionally learned by ear and memorized. One can easily master the melody, which can then be used to sing a limitless amount of text. This form is also common in the Christian hymn tradition. In all of these cases, the focus is meant to be on the meaning of the words.

Schubert's strophic melody is simple and catchy. The opening melodic phrase is heard twice, as is the last, while the middle section presents an additional melody in **sequence** (that is to say, it is repeated at a different pitch level—lower, in this case). In total, therefore, this song contains three short melodic ideas, all of which are repeated either verbatim or with a minor alteration.

Schubert's melody, however, does not *quite* imitate a folk song. It is in fact fairly challenging to sing, as it contains a number of difficult leaps in the first and third sections. His piano accompaniment also walks the line between simple and sophisticated. It utilizes a straightforward pattern of arpeggiated harmonies (a technique by which the notes in a triad are played from lowest to highest and/or vice versa), none of which challenge the ear, but it is denser and more varied than one would expect in the folk tradition.

Over the course of the song cycle, however, the listener comes to realize that the piano does more than just support the singer. Schubert encourages us to hear the piano as a second storyteller. Perhaps its arpeggiated accompaniments, which are present in almost every song, represents the gurgling of the brook. When the arpeggiations are absent, it is always for a significant reason. The brook itself turns out to be a very important character. In addition to being present in many of the texts, it actually becomes the narrator for the final poem. We don't know any of this when we first hear the opening song, but in retrospect we must think twice about what the piano has to contribute.

**“Mine!”**

		“Mine” from <i>The Lovely Maid of the Mill</i> Composer: Franz Schubert Performance: Ian Bostridge and Mitsuko Uchida (2005)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Piano introduction	The arpeggios in the left hand of the accompaniment suggest the steady murmuring of the brook
0'10"	A “Brook, stop your murmuring!” . . .	A melodic motif is repeated at progressively higher pitch levels
0'28"	“Through the grove” . . .	Repetition of another motif culminates in the singer’s repetition of the word “mine” on a loud, high note
0'49"	Transition	The music shifts to a new key (B flat major)
0'53"	B “Spring, are these all your flowers?”	This section, which rests briefly on a minor-mode harmony, seems more disturbed than the A section
1'19"	Transition	The music returns to the original key (D major)
1'24"	A	The A text and music return
2'01"	Coda	The singer repeats the word “mine;” the pianist provides a concluding passage

The eleventh song in the cycle is entitled “Mine!” This song marks the moment when the miller wins the heart of the girl (or so he thinks). The poem expresses his exuberance:

Brook, stop your murmuring!  
Wheels, stop your thundering!  
All you merry woodland birds,

Large and small,  
 Stop your singing!  
 Through the grove,  
 In and out,  
 Only one phrase resounds:  
 The beloved miller's daughter is mine!  
 Mine!  
 Spring, are these all your flowers?  
 Sun, can't you shine any brighter?  
 Alas, then I must stand all alone,  
 With the blissful word mine,  
 Misunderstood in this vast universe.

*translated by Celia Sgroi*

Schubert brings this text to life with equally joyful music. He sets a brisk tempo, and the singer rushes through the words with a sense of youthful excitement. This is most certainly not a folk song. To begin with, it is not strophic, but **through-composed**—a term used to indicate a song that pairs a unique melody with each line of poetic text instead of repeating the same melody.

This song is also too complex to be perceived as a folk product. Schubert uses a ternary form (A B A), in which the first ten lines of poetry and their accompanying music constitute the A section and are therefore heard at the beginning and end of the song. The A section begins with another sequence. This time, a melodic fragment is heard at higher and higher pitch levels—an indication of the speaker's excitement. The A section ends with a rapid passage of notes that rocket to the highest pitch on the word “Mine!” The B section, apart from having a unique character, is in a different key than the A section (B-flat major instead of D major). This gives the song an added sense of wonder and delight. The piano accompaniment provides gurgling arpeggiated harmonies throughout.

### “Withered Flowers”

		<p>“Withered Flowers” from <i>The Lovely Maid of the Mill</i>            Composer: Franz Schubert            Performance: Ian Bostridge and Mitsuko Uchida            (2005)</p>
Time	Form	What to listen for
“oo”	A “All the flowers” . . .	The piano accompaniment is sparse and restrained

		A'	
1'08"		"Ah, but tears don't bring" . . .	The music in this passage is identical to that of the first A section
2'09"		B "And when she strolls"	The mode changes from minor to major and the piano accompaniment becomes more active
2'44"		B	The text and music of the B section are repeated
3'18"		B "Then all your flowers"	The closing passage of the B section is repeated yet again
3'34"	Coda		The piano accompaniment transitions back to minor as it moves into the lowest range of the instrument

Next we will visit the eighteenth song, entitled “Withered Flowers.” At this point, the miller has passed through various stages of suspicion and anger, and he has nearly resigned himself to his tragic fate:

All you flowers  
 That she gave to me,  
 They should put you  
 With me in my grave.

Why do you all look at me  
 So sorrowfully,  
 As if you knew,  
 What was happening to me?

All you flowers,  
 Why so limp, why so pale?  
 All you flowers,  
 What has drenched you so?

Ah, but tears don't bring  
 The green of May,  
 Don't cause dead love  
 To bloom again.

And spring will come,  
And winter will go,  
And flowers will  
Grow in the grass again.

And flowers are lying  
In my grave,  
All the flowers  
That she gave to me.

And when she strolls  
Past my burial place  
And thinks to herself:  
He was true to me!

Then all you flowers  
Come out, come out!  
May has come,  
And winter is gone.

*translated by Celia Sgroi*

The poem begins in a mournful, self-pitying vein, but the final stanzas introduce a glimmer of hope. The miller imagines a future time when his beloved, passing by his grave, will regret her cruelty. He will be dead, of course, but he will also be vindicated.

The form of this poem—a series of eight stanzas—suggests a strophic setting, but Schubert provides something quite different. He sets the first three stanzas to a slow, minor-mode melody that expresses their tragic sentiment. Then he repeats that melody for the next three stanzas. For the final two stanzas, however, he shifts to the relative major (that is to say, he moves from E minor to E major) and introduces a new melody, all of which is repeated for emphasis. At the climactic phrase “May has come,” the singer soars to the highest notes in his range, and the vocal music concludes on a definitively triumphant note.

Once again, however, we would be remiss to ignore the piano accompaniment, which is particularly striking in this example. After seventeen songs in which the piano has sparkled and bubbled, now it has suddenly gone dead. We hear only dry, sparse chords for most of the song. This accompaniment reinforces the sorrowful mood of the miller, who has given up hope. The piano comes back to life with the final two stanzas, and builds in strength as the miller gains confidence. However, the piano also foreshadows the conclusion to this story, which will not be a happy one. Although the singer ends on a triumphant, major-mode cadence, the closing passage into the piano returns to E minor as it fades away and moves into the lower ranges of the instrument. The careful listener knows that the miller’s hope is false.

**"The Brook's Lullaby"**

The final song in the cycle is entitled "The Brook's Lullaby."<sup>5</sup> The narrator is no longer the miller, who has drowned himself, but rather the brook, which promises to protect the disappointed lover and see that no more harm comes to him:

Rest well, rest well!  
Close your eyes.  
Wanderer, you weary one, you are at home.  
Fidelity is here,  
You'll lie with me  
Until the sea drains the brook dry.

I'll make you a cool bed  
On a soft cushion  
In your blue crystalline chamber.  
Come closer, come here,  
Whatever can soothe,  
Lull and rock my boy to sleep.

If a hunting horn sounds  
From the green forest,  
I'll rumble and thunder all around you.  
Don't look in here  
You blue flowers!  
You trouble my sleeper's dreams.

Go away, depart  
From the mill bridge,  
Wicked girl, so your shadow won't wake him!  
Throw in to me  
Your fine scarf,  
So I can cover his eyes.

Good night, good night,  
Until everything wakes.  
Sleep away your joy, sleep away your pain.  
The full moon rises,  
The mist departs,  
And the sky above, how vast it is!

*translated by Celia Sgroi*

5.



"The Brook's Lullaby" from *The Lovely Maid of the Mill*  
 Composer: Franz Schubert  
 Performance: Ian Bostridge and Mitsuko Uchida (2005)

For this final song, Schubert again provides a strophic setting, full of repeating melodic fragments. This time, however, he is imitating not a folk song but a lullaby. The melody is gentle and calming. It consists mostly of stepwise motion, and it is free of dramatic leaps and exciting runs. It *almost* sounds like a real lullaby, but not quite. Once again, Schubert makes things a bit too complicated by moving from E major to A major for the middle section, and by introducing a flatted pitch near the end that suggest E minor. The result is a particularly passionate lullaby with a hint of sadness.

## BALLADS

The term **ballad** has been around for a long time, but it has meant different things in different times and places. The term comes from the French word meaning “to dance,” for medieval French ballads were in fact dance songs. Today, we think of a ballad as being a slow, romantic song. That meaning of the term, however, dates only from the late 19th century. For most of history, a ballad has been some variety of lengthy song that tells a story. Ballad traditions of this sort are found across Europe and in North Africa, the United States, and Australia.

Here, we will examine three disparate musical examples that all, nonetheless, qualify as ballads in this sense. Our first example will be the most traditional, insofar as it has been passed down by means of oral tradition for many generations and exists in various versions on either side of the Atlantic. Our second example will be an adaptation of the folk ballad tradition by a 19th century European composer, and our third will be a recent ballad composed by an American singer. All three of these ballads tell stories, but each uses music in a different way.

## "PRETTY POLLY"

We will begin with a ballad from the tradition of the British Isles. Discussing ballads such as “Pretty Polly,” however, presents unique challenges. While each song from Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* or Schubert’s *The Lovely Maid of the Mill* is a specific musical object that can be identified and described, such is not the case with traditional ballads.



**Image 5.6:** This 18th-century painting by William Hogarth depicts a woman singing ballads in a crowded street.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: William Hogarth

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This is because they belong to an **oral tradition** in which songs are passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth without reliance on written sources.

Oral tradition often works like an enormous game of telephone. Each time a new person learns the song, they make small changes to the text and/or music. These changes might be intentional or accidental. Some singers consciously decide to “improve” a melody or alter a few words of text, while others simply forget what they had originally been taught. At first, a song will still be recognizable, but over centuries and great distances it can acquire a text and melody that bear little relation to the original. In some cases, only a line of poetry or the name of a character betrays the link between two ballads that otherwise seem to have no connection.

This is the case with “Pretty Polly.” We will be examining two versions of the ballad as it was recorded by American folk artists in the 20th century. Even these contemporary versions are significantly different, although a listener can easily recognize that each is a recording of the same song. These variations, however, only scratch the surface.

## British Antecedents

“Pretty Polly” is a modern descendent of a much older British ballad entitled “The Gosport Tragedy.” Like many ballads, “The Gosport Tragedy” narrated real-life happenings (although with a supernatural twist). Names and details



## The Gosport Tragedy; OR, THE Perjured Ship Carpenter.

**T**HIS Gosport town there a damsel did dwell,  
Who wised for beauty did always excel,  
A young man did court her to be her dearest,  
And he was O' Malley, a ship carpenter.  
She said, "I'll wed with you if you'll agree,  
And will now consent to marry with me;  
My love, you will ease me of sorrow and care,  
If you will but wed with a ship carpenter."

With that she did charm him so roses in June,  
She wised him so sweetly, saying, "I wed it too soon,  
Young men are so fickle, I see by your looks,  
If a maid is not coy, they will her disdain;  
They fester, and never their charms they adore,  
What would she do? She'll never be for no more,  
The handsomest creature that ever was seen in worn."  
When shee had enjoy'd he will hold her in worn,

My charming Molly what makes you say so,  
The beauty's the bairn to which you would go,  
So into that country I clauses to another,  
There I'll cast anchor and stay with my dear,  
I never shall be clo'd with the charms of my love,  
Nor ever shall be clo'd with the charms of my love,  
And all that I can do for you, my dear,  
And when thou art mine no danger I'll fear.

The life o' a virgin, sweet Willian, I prime,  
For marriage brings sorrow and trouble likewise,  
I left her sweet, and thenceforth forlorn,  
For I will not wed with a ship carpenter.  
For in time of war to sea you must go,  
And leave wife and children in sorrow and woe,  
Till the ship out of Port, and never shal go,  
For I will not wed with a ship carpenter.

But yet all is nol she his suit did deny,  
Though he did tell press her, and did her comply,  
At last he with his ship he did her betray,  
And to lewd desire he led her away.

But when with child this young woman were,  
That shee was instantly sent to her dearest,

And by the way her master to be true,

Saying, I will wed no other but you.

It passed on till at length as we hear,  
The king wanted sailors to sea he repairs,

Which grieved the damsel unto the heart,

To be left alone with her love and her gear,

She said, dear Willian, ever then go to sea,

Remember the vows that thou madst to me,

But if you forsake me I never shall rest,

If you do then leave me with sorrow oppressed.

Then with her master shee did parting thus,

Shee said, dear master, by the name of right,

Before we are wedded, a friend for to see;

He led her there, and when he did boat,

The captain said, some of my men I do fear,

Saying, Willian I fancy thou leadst me astray,

O pity the infant, and spare my life,

On purpose my innocent life to betray.

He said that is true and none can you save,

For I all this night have been digging your grave,

For I am bound, when shee heard him say so,

He led her like a fool to the scaffold;

O perjur'd creature, the worst of all men,

Heavy reward that when I am dead and gone,

O pity the infant, and spare my life,

Then late at nighte her body did throw.

For carpenter's mate he then enter'd at her,

On board the Belinda away he did steer,

But in the night he did sleep,

The voice of this wretched he heard to cry,

O perjur'd villain, awake now and hear,

The voice of your lover that levd you so dear,

The ship out of Port, and never shal go,

Till I am revenged for this overthrow.

She afterwards vanilid with shreks & with criss,  
Flash'd like lightning did dash into her eyes,  
With such a shriek as did make great feare,  
None saw the ghost, but the voice they did hear;

Charles-Stewart, a man of courage so bold,

One night he was going into a hold,

A hand did strike him in the eye,

And she in her arms had a daughter so fair,

The charms of this so comely a face,

Being weary in liquor, he goes to embrase,

But to his surpise it vanish'd away,

He told the crew, and when he did boat,

The captain said, some of my men I do fear,

Have done some murder, and if it be so,

Our ship in greatest danger to sea must go.

Out at a time, hit a very heavy fall,

Just his master, his mate, his boy did call,

And said, my lads, my lads, I do hear,

Both much surpise me with sorrow and fear;

The ghost that appear'd in the dead of the night,

Willian, Willian, I am thy fright,

I fear has been wrong'd by some of my crew,

And therefore the person I fain would know,

O tarry me, I'll tell the true cause,

Now for the murder confest'd out of hand,

And said before me my Melly didn stand,

Sweet injur'd ghost, the pardon I crave,

And soon I'll seek thee in the silent grave;

But when he did speak, the ghost did stand,

Therewere distractid he staid in the sight,

As soon as her parents these tidings did hear,

They sought for the body of their daughter so dear,

Near unto Southampton, in a valley so deep,

The body was found—and many did weep,

And here the body did lie in the quiet deer,

In Gosport church they buried were.

I hope this event may be a warning to all,

Young men, how innocent nature they are still,

We soone be revenged when we're in venge,

Then a blitting from there will stand each other.

**Image 5.7: This English broadside version of “The Gosport Tragedy” was printed in the early 19th century. A broadside is a single-sided sheet of paper that could contain the text of a ballad.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: J.Turner

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**Image 5.8: This 18th-century engraving depicts a ballad singer making use of a visual aid as he seeks to captivate the crowd.**

Source: PxHere

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included in some versions of the ballad tie it to documented events that took place in 1726. Ballads were often used to commemorate tragedies, celebrate victories, eviscerate politicians, or spread the news of notorious crimes.”The Gosport Tragedy” falls into this last category, for it tells the story of a ship’s carpenter who murdered his pregnant girlfriend before himself perishing at sea. In the final stanzas of early versions, the spectre of the betrayed girl appears on board the ship to exact her revenge.

As such, “The Gosport Tragedy”—as well as its New World derivative, “Pretty Polly”—can be specifically categorized as a **murder ballad**. Just as television viewers today like watching shows about crime, so also regular folks of previous centuries enjoyed hearing about the salacious misdeeds of condemned criminals. As a result, the activities of notorious murderers provided fodder for

countless ballads. Most murder ballads specifically tell of young women who lost their lives to deceitful lovers.

The purpose of these ballads was not only to thrill and horrify. They also served to instruct and warn. Mothers often sang ballads to their daughters, who received the message that they must withhold sexual favors from suitors until after marriage. The girls in the songs, after all, put their own lives at risk when they agreed to leave their homes for a young man who had not made a formal commitment. In this way, ballads provided entertainment while also enforcing social norms.

“The Gosport Tragedy” first appeared in print around 1760, but this should not be considered the “original” or “correct” version. One of the challenges facing those who wish to study the histories of traditional ballads is that there is never a preserved, authoritative work. While a particular ballad might have begun life as the creation of a specific individual, we almost never know the identity of that person. And, as described above, ballads begin to change immediately upon entering the oral tradition. Most scholars are more interested in examining the many versions of a ballad that proliferate throughout the repertoire than they are in identifying the most authentic version.

The story first told as “The Gosport Tragedy” has appeared under a variety of titles, including “The Cruel Ship’s Carpenter,” “Love and Murder,” “Polly’s Love,” “Molly the Betray’d” and “The Fog-bound Vessel.” Some versions have been published in print, while others have been collected by “ballad hunters,” who visit rural areas to record and preserve products of the oral tradition.

The version known as “Pretty Polly” emerged in the Appalachian region of the United States. Many immigrants from the British Isles—especially the impoverished Scotch-Irish, who came from a region on the border between England and Scotland—paid for their voyage to the New World by serving as indentured laborers in Pennsylvania. After repaying their debt, they headed into the mountainous regions where land could be obtained for little or no cost. These immigrants had few physical possessions, but they brought in their memories a rich tradition of song.

We will examine two versions of “Pretty Polly” as sung by the traditional Appalachian musicians Dock Boggs (1898-1971) and Jean Ritchie (1922-2015). Both grew up in the region, and both learned the song as children from older musicians in their families or communities. Although the two versions were recorded in the same year and share many elements in common, they also contain significant differences. These differences reveal the influence of oral tradition and provide insight into the values and practices of folk music culture.

## Dock Boggs

Dock Boggs was born in the small town of Norton, Virginia, the youngest of ten children. Boggs grew up in a musical household: His father sang and several of his older siblings played the banjo. However, none of the children received a formal music education. Instead, they taught each other or sought guidance from other musicians in the community. Boggs began playing on his oldest brother’s banjo, and he learned “Pretty Polly”<sup>6</sup> from his family. He developed a unique playing style based on his observation of African American banjo players at dances, and he sought out the guidance of other black musicians who worked in the area. As a child, however, he never imagined that he might pursue a career in music.

6.



“Pretty Polly”  
Performance: Dock Boggs (1963)



**Image 5.9: Dock Boggs often played a banjo very much like this one.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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This changed in the 1920s, when parallel technological developments—radio and **field recording**—fed a booming market for rural Southern music. Radio revealed the enormous demand for rural music, especially among those who had moved to northern cities in pursuit of

industrial jobs. Many stations began broadcasting regular “barn dance” programs, which eventually provided work to musicians. At the same time, record companies began sending field representatives into rural Southern communities in pursuit of marketable sounds. Before the 1920s, commercial recordings could only be made in studios, most of which were located in New York City. Beginning in 1923, however, Southern musicians were recorded on site using portable equipment.

Boggs had gone to work in the coal mines at the age of twelve, although he continued to play for dances—a source of conflict with his wife, who saw music as a sinful pursuit. During the 1920s, however, he began to see the possibility of a different life. Instead of waiting for a local opportunity, he travelled north to make his first recordings. In 1927 he recorded eight songs for Brunswick in New York City, and in 1929 he recorded a further four songs for Lonesome Ace in Chicago. Just as Boggs glimpsed a professional music career on the horizon, however, the stock market crash of 1929 inaugurated the Great Depression. Doors closed and he returned to the mines.

Although Boggs did not abandon music altogether, hard times lead him to pawn his banjo in the late 1930s, and he did not perform at all for the next quarter century. He had left the coal mines in 1954, ending a 44 year career during which he had miraculously escaped serious injury. Boggs settled down to a quiet retirement. In 1963, however, his fortunes shifted yet again. Beginning in the previous decade, an enthusiasm for Appalachian folk music had swept northern college campuses as part of what is known as the **folk revival**. One of the leading figures in the revival, Mike Seeger, had heard and appreciated Boggs’s early recordings, and he set out to find him. Within weeks of their first meeting, Seeger had booked appearances for Boggs at all of the major folk festivals and begun to record his repertoire of songs. By the time he passed away, Boggs was firmly ensconced as a major figure in American folk music history.

“Pretty Polly” was among the songs that Boggs recorded in 1927, but for the purpose of sound quality we will examine his 1963 recording for Folkways records. Even these two performances by the same musician are quite different. Boggs does not sing the same set of verses in 1963 that he had sung in his youth, and his timing and inflection have also changed. This is probably not intentional. Folk musicians do not seek to replicate a single ideal performance, and they are prone to forget, discard, alter, and create verses.

### Jean Ritchie<sup>7</sup>

Although she was a generation younger, Jean Ritchie’s childhood was very similar to that of Boggs. She was the youngest of fourteen children born to a farming couple in Perry County, Kentucky. Her family carried on a rich tradition of ballad singing, and two of her older sisters were in fact recorded by the most famous Appalachian ballad hunter, Cecil Sharp, in 1917. Ritchie’s family believed strongly in education, and she graduated from the University of Kentucky with a degree in social work in 1946. She took a job in her field, but also pursued music

seriously, making her first of many recordings in 1952. Ritchie benefited from the folk revival, which provided a large and interested audience for her music.

7.



“Pretty Polly”

Performance: Jean Ritchie (1963)

Ritchie was an accomplished ballad singer, but she is best remembered for her role in popularizing the instrument heard on this recording, the Appalachian dulcimer. The Appalachian dulcimer is a type of fretted **zither**, examples of which can be found in many traditions around the world. It is descended from a German instrument and was first built by immigrant craftspeople in Pennsylvania. The Appalachian dulcimer became popular in parts of the region because it is easy to build and play. The body is a simple box. Although the melody is only played on the highest string (or pair of strings), all of the strings are strummed at the same time. The dulcimer can be used to play simple tunes on its own or to accompany singing, although Ritchie in fact preferred to sing her ballads unaccompanied, as she had learned them.



**Image 5.10: Jean Ritchie was the principal proponent of the Appalachian dulcimer in the second half of the 20th century.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Ritchie's father played the Appalachian dulcimer, but because he valued the instrument so highly he forbade his children to touch it. Ritchie, however, could not resist, and she taught herself to play in secret. After she had demonstrated a gift for the instrument, her father conceded to teach her. This story is typical of instrumentalists in the Appalachian folk tradition. Children were almost never encouraged to begin playing an instrument or provided with formal instruction. Instead, those who were interested would figure out how to play independently by listening, watching, and experimenting.

### Comparing Two Renditions of "Pretty Polly"

The first difference between the Boggs and Ritchie recordings is the instrumental accompaniment: banjo for Boggs, dulcimer for Ritchie. Both singers, however, provide their own accompaniment, which is typical of ballad performances (when they are accompanied at all). Boggs uses the banjo to provide rhythms while at the same time picking out the melody as he sings it. The dulcimer also provides rhythm, but Ritchie does not play the melody while she sings. Instead, she plays various **countermelodies** on the dulcimer that are distinct from but compliment the sung melody. Both performers provide instrumental interludes between some of the verses.

The melodies sung by Boggs and Ritchie, however, are not quite the same. Each follows the same general shape, starting low, moving to a higher range, and returning to the low range, and the beginnings are almost identical. There are differences, however, in pitch, rhythm, and general timing. The two singers start at the same tempo, but Boggs gets considerably faster as he goes.

We might also compare Boggs and Ritchie as singers. Both sing in a plain, straightforward style, almost as if they are speaking. Neither uses **vibrato**. They also don't seem to put any particular effort into expressing the meaning of the text or creating an emotional effect. Instead, each simply sings the words, expecting the story to have an impact because of its dramatic contents, not because of the way in which those contents are communicated. All of this is typical of traditional Appalachian ballad singers.

The most obvious distinction between the recordings, perhaps, lies in the text. Boggs and Ritchie each start the song in quite a different way. Boggs begins with a first person recollection of courting Pretty Polly. This is reasonable, since he is a male singer, but also strange, since he reverts to the third person in the fourth verse. This is perhaps evidence that he learned several versions of the ballad over the years and combined verses from different sources. The first three verses in Ritchie's version are also in the first person, but this is because she is giving voice to the characters in turn. Her last four verses describe the conclusion of the scene in third person and offer a moralizing final thought. (Other singers, such as David Lindley, have been known to change the end of the story, allowing Polly to turn the knife on her assailant and walk away alive.)

Although the two recordings are obviously of the same song, they have only four verses in common—and even those are not identical. Boggs sings four verses that Ritchie does not, while Ritchie's final three verses were not sung by Boggs. This observation only applies to these specific recordings, of course. Both singers performed different sets of verses on different occasions, depending on either the setting or their ability to remember the words.

“Pretty Polly” as sung by Dock Boggs (1963)	“Pretty Polly” as sung by Jean Ritchie (1963)
Oh I used to be a rambler, I stayed around in town, I courted Pretty Polly, such beauty never been found.	
Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly, oh yonder she stands, With rings on her fingers and lily- white hands	
Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly come take a walk with me When we get married some pleasure to see	Polly, Pretty Polly, come go along with me, Before we get married some pleasure to see.
He led her over hills and valleys so deep At last Pretty Polly, she began to weep	
Oh Willie, oh Willie, I'm afraid of your way All minding to ramble and lead me astray	Oh Willie, Oh Willie, I'm ‘fraid of your ways. I'm afraid you will lead my poor body astray.
Pretty Polly, Pretty Polly, you guessin' 'bout right, I dug on your grave two-thirds of last night	Now Polly, Pretty Polly, you're guessin' about right. I dug on your grave the best part of last night.

<p>She went on a piece farther and what did she spy? A new-dug grave and a spade lying by</p> <p>She threw her arms around him and began for to weep At last Pretty Polly, sure fell asleep</p>	<p>Oh she stepped a few steps farther, and what did she spy, But a new dug-in grave, and the spade lyin' nigh.</p> <p>Oh he stabbed her through the heart and her heart's blood did flow, And into the grave Pretty Polly she did go.</p> <p>Now he threw a little dirt over her and started for home, Leaving no-one behind but the wild birds to mourn.</p> <p>It's a debt to the devil for Willie must pay For killing Pretty Polly and running away.</p>
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## FRANZ SCHUBERT, “ELF KING”

For our next example, we will return to the Viennese composer Franz Schubert. We have already examined his approach to musical storytelling using the song cycle as a vehicle. Now we will see how he tells a complex story within a single song. Our example will be perhaps his most famous song, “Elf King” (1815; German: “Erlkönig”). This ballad was inspired by centuries of folk tradition, but also exhibits Schubert’s thorough rejection of folk style.

Seeing as Schubert’s career was addressed in the previous section, we will start right in with the ballad itself. Before we can discuss the music, however, we must examine the text. And before we can examine the text, we must know something about the famous and influential poet who wrote it, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832).



**Image 5.11:** This lithograph by Josef Kriehuber was completed in 1846—nearly two decades after Schubert’s death.

Source: Wikipedia

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## Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

For not being a musician himself, Goethe had an enormous influence on German song composers of the era. To begin with, he wrote hundreds of poetic texts that were intended to be set to music—and indeed, countless composers set his texts thousands of times. However, Goethe also had very strong opinions about *how* his texts should be set to music. These were informed by his fascination with folk culture, which—following the ideas of Herder—he esteemed highly.

Goethe desired that composers setting his texts do their best to imitate folk style, which we have seen well represented in the ballad “Pretty Polly.” Specifically, he thought that all such songs should be strophic, that they should be simple and accessible, and that the composer should make no effort to interpret the text through music. The purpose of the musical setting, in Goethe’s mind, was simply to allow the text to be sung. The listener’s focus should be entirely on the words, which the singer would interpret through subtle variations from verse to verse.

Goethe studied folk poetry closely and imitated a number of folk forms in his own song texts. One of these was the ballad. Goethe was particularly influenced by the ballad forms of northern Europe, which had a unique set of characteristics. The stories told in such ballads were preoccupied with supernatural forces and often included dialogue between human and non-human characters. They also ended in disaster. (All of this is true of “The Gosport Tragedy,” which concludes with a ghost taking her revenge, although the supernatural element is absent in “Pretty Polly.”)

### “Elf King”

Goethe and other German poets who took their inspiration from European folk traditions often began by translating folk ballads into their own language. Such was the origin of “Elf King,” which began life as a Danish folk ballad and was first translated by Herder. (The German title of the ballad, “Erlkönig,” in fact represents a mistranslation from the Dutch original; “Erlkönig” means “King of the Alder Trees,” while the original title, “Ellerkonge,” means “King of the Elves.”) Goethe’s version of the ballad tells the same story as the Dutch original, but the specific words are entirely his own.

Here is the text to Goethe’s poem. This literal translation does not capture the meter or rhyme scheme of the original, but it tells the story as Goethe intended:



**Image 5.12: This portrait of Goethe was completed by Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein in 1786.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Who rides so late through night and wind?  
 It is the father with his child.  
 He has the little one well in the arm  
 He holds him secure, he holds him warm.

“My son, why hide your face in fear?”  
 “See you not, Father, the Elf King?  
 The Elf King with crown and flowing cloak?”  
 “My son, it is a wisp of fog.”

“You sweet child, come along with me!  
 Such wonderful games I’ll play with you;  
 Many lovely flowers are at the shore,  
 My mother has many golden garments.”

“My father, my father, and do you not hear,  
 What the Elf King quietly promises to me?”  
 “Be calm, stay calm, my child;  
 The wind is rustling the dry leaves.”

“Won’t you come along with me, my fine boy?  
 My daughters shall attend to you so nicely;  
 My daughters do their nightly dance,  
 And they will rock you and dance you and sing you to sleep.”

“My father, my father, do you not see there,  
 Elf King’s daughters in that dark place?”  
 “My son, my son, I see it definitely  
 It is the willow trees looking so grey.”

“I love you; I’m charmed by your beautiful shape;  
 And if you are not willing, then I will use force.”  
 “My father, my father, now he has taken hold of me!  
 Elf King has hurt me!”

The father shudders, he rides swiftly,  
 He holds in arm the groaning child,  
 He reaches the farmhouse with effort and urgency;  
 In his arms, the child was dead.

*translation from CPDL*



**Image 5.13:** Moritz von Schwind painted this scene, entitled *Der Erlkönig* (*The Elf King*), in 1830.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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In writing his version of the ballad, Goethe used simple language that reflected the speech of ordinary Germans. The structure of his poem, however, is fairly sophisticated. The first and last stanzas are spoken in the voice of an unidentified narrator. The first sets the scene, while the last delivers the tragic conclusion. The internal stanzas consist entirely of speech from the three characters: father, son, and Elf King. The father and son converse in stanzas two, four, and six, the son expressing his fear and the father offering assurances that there is no real danger. The Elf King seeks to tempt the child away in stanzas three and five. In stanza seven, the Elf King changes strategies and takes the child by force, provoking a frenzied response. The poem can be read literally or as a metaphor for childhood illness and death.

Goethe first created his ballad for use in a play entitled *The Fisherwoman* (1782). In the first scene of the play, the title character is seen washing dishes and singing a simple folk song ("Elf King"), as befits her lowly social status. The music was composed by the actress herself, Corona Schröter. In setting the poem, Schröter adhered closely to Goethe's preferences. She created a strophic setting in which every verse of the ballad is sung to the same melody. That melody, in turn, is charming in its simplicity. Schröter makes no effort to capture the drama or terror of the text in her music. In short, it is easy to hear her version<sup>8</sup> as being a "real" folk song.

8.



This first setting of Goethe's poem is quite unlike Schubert's "Elf King."

		"Elf King"
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Introduction	The piano accompaniment seems to echo the beating of the horse's hooves and the blowing of the wind; use of the minor mode sets a serious tone
0'23"	Stanza 1	This stanza is delivered entirely in the narrator's voice, which is in the middle of the singer's range
0'56"	Stanza 2	This stanza is split between the father's voice (low range) and son's voice (high range)
1'29"	Stanza 3	This stanza is delivered in the Elf King's voice (high range); the music changes to the major mode and the volume decreases
1'52"	Stanza 4	This stanza begins in the son's voice and concludes in the father's voice; the music returns to the minor mode and the volume increases
2'14"	Stanza 5	This stanza is delivered in the Elf King's voice (high range); the music again changes to the major mode and the volume decreases
2'32"	Stanza 6	This stanza begins in the son's voice and concludes in the father's voice; the music returns to the minor mode and the volume increases
3'00"	Stanza 7	This stanza begins in the Elf King's voice and concludes in the son's voice; the music begins in the major mode but quickly returns to minor
3'24"	Stanza 8	This stanza is delivered in the narrator's voice

3'39"	The hoofbeats heard in the piano slow to a halt as the father arrives at his destination
3'47"	The final line is delivered without accompaniment; the piano provides a concluding cadence

By the time Schubert took on Goethe's ballad, the text was well known and had been set to music by many composers. Schubert was unknown at the time, but his innovative and compelling version of "Elf King" would attract a great deal of attention and establish him as an important composer of songs.

Schubert completely ignored Goethe's instructions. Instead of taking a folk-like approach, he went to great lengths to capture the characters and events depicted in the text. His setting begins with a turbulent piano introduction, in which we hear both the pounding hooves and raging storm. At the end of the song, we hear in the piano the gradual slowing of the horse as it comes to a clattering stop in front of the farmhouse. All of these are examples of **text painting**, a technique by which composers translate dramatic elements into sound. Text painting, of course, went against the folk tradition, as did using the piano to set a mood. In addition, Schubert's piano part is much too difficult to be genuine folk music. Only a highly accomplished player could ever hope to execute it well.

Schubert's disobedience does not stop there. His setting of the ballad is not strophic but through-composed, with each passage of music carefully designed to express the associated text. Schubert creates a sort of miniature, one-man opera with his setting. Although "Elf King" is performed by a solo singer, that singer assumes all four characters (narrator, father, son, and Elf King) and portrays each in their respective dramatic roles. This is done using a variety of means. To begin with, the voice of each character is heard in a unique range. The narrator sings in a neutral, middle range, while the father sings in the low range, with a deep, booming voice. The son sings in a high, childlike range, while the Elf King sings quietly in an even higher range.

Schubert also uses other techniques to distinguish his characters and bring the scene to life. While the father and son repeat the same melodies and rhythms, the Elf King constantly introduces new musical material as he tries various approaches to tempting the child away. The Elf King is also the only character who sings in the major mode—a musical embodiment of his charming speech. He does not shift to the minor mode until his final threatening words: "then I will use force."

The greatest musical disruption takes place with the final line of text. In order to maximize the impact of the story's tragic conclusion, Schubert silences the piano and has the singer deliver the news out of time and without accompaniment. Following the final two words, "was dead," the piano executes an abrupt cadence and the song is over.

## BOBBIE GENTRY, "ODE TO BILLIE JOE"

By rejecting the norms of folk song and making an effort to develop nuanced musical characteristics, Schubert created a compelling ballad that has remained a popular favorite in the intervening centuries. That is not to say, however, that his approach to setting a ballad text is in any way superior to that of the folk tradition, nor that it was destined to replace the folk-inspired approach. Many later song composers used simple, strophic settings to amplify the emotional power of ballad texts and communicate effectively with listeners.

Although there are many excellent examples of 20th-century ballads composed in a folk style, we will examine only one: Bobbie Gentry's 1967 hit "Ode to Billie Joe."<sup>9</sup> Gentry was born in rural Mississippi, and many of her songs describe the difficulties of life in the impoverished regions of the South. She taught herself to play a variety of instruments as a child and wrote her first song at the age of seven. Although she later performed at nightclubs, her ambition was always to be a songwriter, not a singer. When she first recorded "Ode to Billie Joe" as a demo for Capitol records, she only sang the song herself to avoid the cost of hiring a performer.



**Image 5.14: Although singer-songwriter Bobbie Gentry maintained a successful career into the 1980s, she never surpassed her early hit "Ode to Billie Joe."**

Source: Flickr

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9.



"Ode to Billie Joe"

Performance: Bobbie Gentry (1967)

The producers at Capitol records commissioned arranger Jimmie Haskell to add strings to Gentry's recording, for which she had accompanied herself on acoustic guitar. Haskell wrote parts for four violins and two cellos, which were then recorded and **dubbed** on to the existing demo. Gentry's song also needed to be shortened in length, for the original recording was eight minutes long, containing eleven verses of Billie Joe's story. The final product, at four minutes and fifteen seconds, was still long for a pop single, but the song struck a popular nerve: It spent four weeks at the top of the charts and finished the year in third place.

The song's power lies in its storytelling. The first four verses describe a farming family coming together over the dinner table. In between passing the dishes, they comment on the news that a local boy, Billie Joe MacAllister, had jumped to his death from the Tallahatchie Bridge earlier in the day. Over the course of various dispassionate reminiscences, we learn that the song's female narrator was friends with Billie Joe, and in the fourth verse we are presented with the information that she was seen with Billie Joe just the day before, throwing something off of the same bridge from which he was soon to jump. The final verse takes us one year into the future, at which point the narrator's brother has moved away and her father has died. She reports that she spends most of her time dropping flowers off of the bridge.

The ballad's narrative is bleak throughout, and its portrayal of the characters' stagnation and hopelessness is compelling. The song's greatest power, however, has always lain in its mystery. What did the narrator and Billie Joe throw off of the bridge? Despite being asked throughout her career, Gentry always refused to say. She has also never explained why Billie Joe committed suicide—indeed, she has claimed not to know herself. While the listener is allowed to glimpse the daily life of the song's characters, we are not offered any insight into their thoughts or motivations.

Like "Pretty Polly," "Ode to Billie Joe" uses a simple, repetitive melody as a vehicle for a long, complex, and ultimately tragic story. In fact, the melodies are strikingly similar: Each begins with an ascending melodic gesture, and each repeats its opening melodic phrase at a higher pitch level before returning to the original, lower range. Gentry's melody is just a bit more complex, insofar as it moves to the high range twice and ends with a unique melodic phrase. In both cases, however, the melody serves the same purpose. On the practical side, it provides a vehicle with which the singer can tell the story. On the affective side, it sets an appropriate mood that adds to the story's impact.

While the minor mode of "Pretty Polly" is generally appropriate to a tragic narrative, Gentry takes a different approach. Although her melody contains **blues**-inspired inflections (the third scale degree is sometimes lowered and the seventh scale degree is always lowered), it is accompanied by major-mode harmonies. That, in combination with a lively tempo, produces a sound world that is not necessarily depressing. At the same time, however, the cheerfulness of the tune throws the darkness of the lyrics into sharp relief. According to Gentry, "Ode to Billie Joe" was a study in "unconscious cruelty" that explored the inability of the characters to communicate and empathize with one another. Each is isolated by their own grief. The inexpressive music, therefore, seems to emphasize the repressed emotions hidden by the narrator and her mother.

The various sounds of "Ode to Billie Joe" also give depth to the story and contribute to the song's impact on the listener. We might start with Gentry's voice, which is natural and unaffected. A touch of roughness adds an expressive character to her singing, while also helping the listener to identify her as a regular person. The fact that she is not overly trained as a performer makes her story and emotions seem more authentic. Her guitar accompaniment is sparse and rhythmic,

propelling the music along with the minimum of effort. The strings were added to make the album commercially viable, but they also have a dramatic effect. The sliding harmonies emphasize the laziness of the scene, while the final spiraling descent illustrates the flowers falling from the bridge into the muddy water below.

## EPIC RECITATION

Civilizations around the world have long used song as a vehicle for telling lengthy stories, or **epics**, many of which concern the founding of an empire. Here, we will consider two examples: an epic of ancient Greece, *The Iliad*, and an epic of the Mali Empire, *The Sunjata Story*. These two epics have a great deal in common, for each details the episodic struggles and triumphs of a great hero. The traditions themselves also seem to have elements in common. However, we cannot directly compare the recitation practices associated with these two texts for a simple reason: While the practice of sung epic recitation is alive and well in West Africa, it has not been practiced in Greece for two millenia, and we therefore can only guess at the details.

### ANCIENT GREECE: THE ILIAD

In Chapter 4, we explored the origins of European opera and the influence of ancient Greek music on the genre. One of the aspects of ancient Greek music that directly inspired the creation of opera was the notion that ancient Greek poetry and drama were sung in their entirety, not spoken (like what is witnessed when attending a Shakespearean play). Although the lack of surviving musical notation from the period leaves us with little evidence as to how ancient Greek drama actually sounded, the few surviving musical fragments and our theoretical knowledge of both music and poetic recitation in ancient Greece provide us with a good idea as to how Greek poetry and drama might have been sung.

Greek drama grew out of a tradition of community gathering and singing, particularly during festivals and sacrifices in praise of gods such as Dionysus or Apollo. To accompany these celebrations, there would be songs of praise setting dramatic poetry pertaining to the celebrated figures or other mythical beings. Although the tradition began with the community singing these songs in a chorus setting, eventually solo singers would emerge from the chorus to act out the part of the god or hero, while the chorus acted as a narrator or took part in sung dialogue with the soloist. Thus, the beginnings of Greek theatre emerged, and the solo actor and chorus dynamic became a staple in the Greek theatre tradition.

#### Poetic Meter and Sung Recitation

Many Greek dramas have been preserved through their texts, and many have become well-known classics in today's world. However, through further study of some of the fragments of poetry from ancient Greece, it is now believed that

the poetry and dramas were meant to be performed in musical settings. In later Greek dramas, melodic notation has preserved the ancient sung melodies, but there has yet to be found any surviving form of rhythmic notation from this time. It is understood, however, that the rhythm of the sung words was based off the **prosody** or meter of the poetry. Poetic meter, similar to musical meter, structures the rhythm of spoken (or in this case, sung) prose. A common example of a poetic meter used in Greek drama is **dactylic hexameter**. In this type of meter, a poetic phrase is divided into six **feet** (similar to measures in musical notation). Each foot is divided by what is called a dactyl, a long syllable followed by two short syllables (in this type of meter, a dactyl can also be substituted by a spondee, or two long syllables). When recited, the spoken or sung phrase would follow this pattern of long and short syllables, producing a steady rhythm:

(long-short-short) (long-short-short) (long-short-short) (long-short-short)  
(long-short-short) (long-short-short)

One famous example of a Greek epic in dactylic hexameter is Homer's *Iliad*. The *Iliad* was written to be accompanied by a four-stringed lyre, and although there are no surviving fragments of actual melodic notation attached to the poetry, it is believed that this epic was meant to be sung in its entirety. In our example, an interpretation of a passage from the *Iliad*<sup>10</sup> by classicist Stefan Hagel, the consistent "long-short-short" rhythm of the dactylic hexameter is apparent. The sung melody is an improvisation based on the inflection of the text; for instance, if the approximate pitch goes up at the end of the word in natural speech, it likewise ascends to a higher note when sung. As in this example, the melodies of poetic recitations were probably folk-like in nature: that is to say, simple and repetitive. The tempo is set by the content of the text. In scenes of heightened tension the music may be fast, while the music used in describing a more solemn scene may be slow.

10.

*The Iliad*

Performance: Stefan Hagel (2017)

Although most of the musical elements of Homer's dramas are uncertain and therefore must be left up to the performer's interpretation, which is based on the nature of the text, there are several surviving fragments of poetry and drama written in stone or on papyrus that are accompanied by written musical notation. The ancient Greeks had a system of musical notation in which a pitch would be associated with a particular symbol, usually a symbol from the Greek alphabet. This pitch's symbol would be written above the syllable of the sung word. One of the few surviving fragments of music, written on papyrus, comes from Euripides's

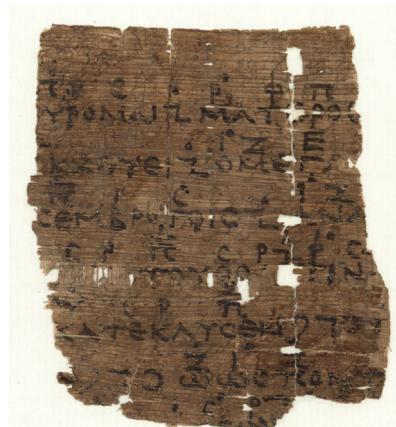


**Image 5.15:** This stone tablet found in Delphi contains musical notation for a hymn to Apollo. The consistent line of text represents the poetry. The symbols above the text represent musical notes.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: User "Ziggur"

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**Image 5.16:** This fragment of papyrus contains a chorus from Euripides's drama *Orestes*.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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*Orestes*. The play tells the story of Orestes, the son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, who kills his mother to seek revenge for his father's death. The fragment is of a song sung by the chorus in unison. They sing of Orestes being chased by his mother's furies, or spirits of revenge.

Unlike the simple, repetitive melody that Homer's words would have most likely been performed to, the melody of the *Orestes* chorus,<sup>11</sup> believed to be composed by Euripides himself, is through-composed. The melody also differs from the Homeric poetry in that it doesn't follow the natural inflection of the spoken Greek text, though there are instances in which important words are sounded at a higher pitch for emphasis. The rhythm follows the dochmiae poetic meter, a meter typically used to convey agitation, anxiety, or distress. This sense of distress can certainly be heard in our example. There, we also see the choir accompanied by an aulos, a double pipe instrument. This instrument was often used to accompany choruses in dramatic productions.



**Image 5.17:** This piece of pottery, which dates to about 480 BCE, depicts a woman playing the aulos.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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11.



Ancient Greek epic recitation can be contrasted with this surviving vocal composition, which does not follow the natural inflections of Greek text.

As is evident through this performance, with musical translation and a bit of reconstruction this ancient music is now able to be performed with near-perfect historical accuracy. The revival of the music alongside the poetry sheds a new light on the emotional impact of this drama on ancient audiences and allows modern audiences a glimpse of this once-forgotten art that inspired future forms of sung drama.

## WEST AFRICA: THE SUNJATA STORY

Perhaps the richest extant tradition of epic recitation is to be found among the Mandinka people of West Africa, and their most valued epic is certainly the story of Sunjata, the founder of the ancient Mali Empire. A complete recitation of the Sunjata story can take between six and eight hours. The telling of the story is therefore a remarkable feat in and of itself—all the more so because its words are maintained entirely in the memories of the storytellers. The epic is the property of the *jali* caste, members of which are responsible for passing it from generation to generation.

Founded in 1240, the Mali Empire occupied all or part of half a dozen modern West African countries. It flourished until 1645, when conflict over accession to the throne resulted in the collapse of the empire. Although the Mali Empire was large and powerful, its history has largely been told from outside perspectives. This is because its inhabitants did not cultivate written language, instead maintaining knowledge by means of oral transmission—a process that carries into the present day. The Mandinka, who currently number about 32 million, are the descendants of the Mali Empire, and they continue to celebrate their common heritage through story and song.

### Mandinkan Social Structure and the Jali

Before we can examine Mandinkan storytelling practices, we need to know something about the people who tell those stories. Traditionally, Mandinkan

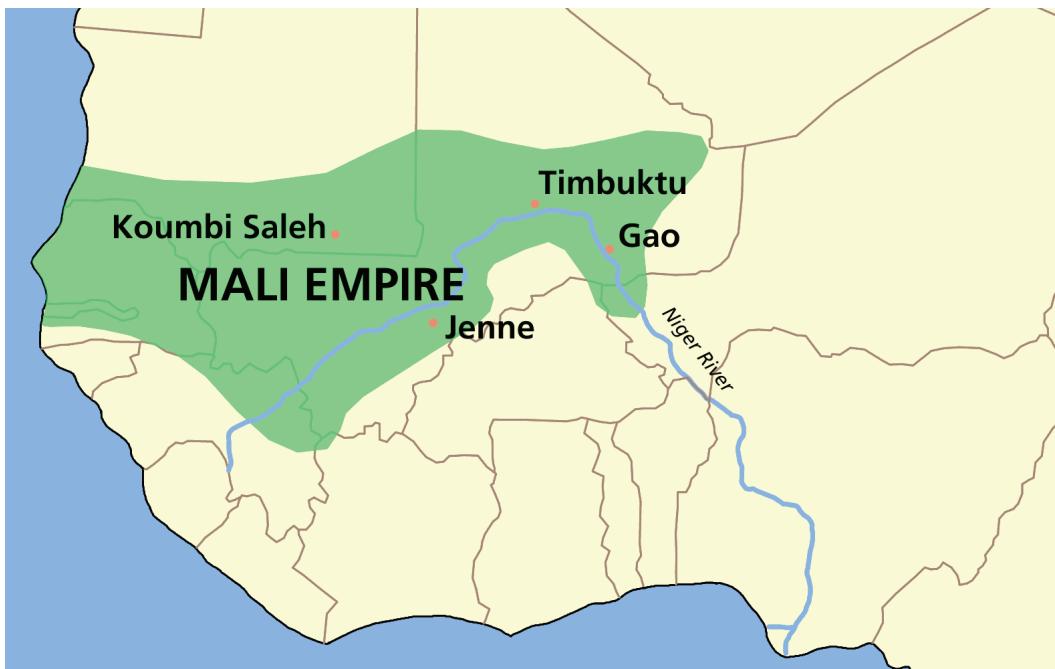


**Image 5.18:** Here, a jali in Burkina Faso plays a typical instrument, the *balafon*.

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**Image 5.19: This map indicates the territory governed by the Mali Empire between 1240 and 1645.**

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society was organized according to a **caste system**, meaning that social roles were determined by birth and were strictly defined. Members of the jali caste were musicians and storytellers, and their role was to serve the aristocratic caste. (You might be familiar with the French term “griot,” which is more widely used in the West, but members of the community generally prefer the term “jali.”) Although the caste system is officially defunct today, it still exerts an influence on modern society, and jali continue to pass their knowledge and skills down through family lines.

The jali caste was not high ranking, but its members were considered to have special powers and to occupy a unique place in the community. They were considered ritually impure, and were prohibited from wearing the clothes of the aristocracy or sitting on their beds. When they died, they were buried separately from other members of the community. Jali also could not hold political office. At the same time, jali served as advisors to aristocrats and could therefore be very powerful. If a jali was captured in battle, they could not be killed or enslaved, but were expected to serve their captor as they had served their previous master.

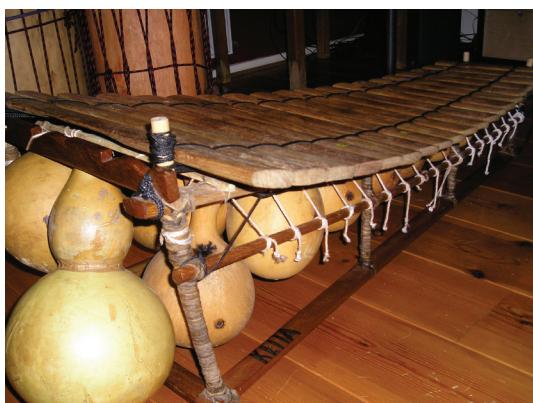
The responsibilities of the jali were many. They were musicians, and as such they provided ceremonial music for naming ceremonies, marriages, and agricultural celebrations. They also entertained at dances and wrestling matches and sang the praises of the aristocrats they served. However, the primary role of the jali was to maintain and transmit the knowledge and traditions of the community, including histories, genealogies, proverbs, and laws. If the jali did not fulfill

**Image 5.20: The *ngoni*.**

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**Image 5.21: The *balafon*.**

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**Image 5.22: The *kora*.**

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their function, therefore, society itself would disintegrate. Apart from these weighty tasks, the jali also served as moralists, counsellors, spokesmen, public announcers, mediators, messengers, buffoons, porters, tax collectors, and hairdressers.

The jali enjoyed dominion over specific musical instruments. These included the *ngoni* (a small lute made from wood and covered with goat skin), the *balafon* (a xylophone in which wood keys are strung over gourd resonators), and the *kora*. The last of these is certainly the most remarkable, and has retained the deepest connection with the jali tradition. The *kora* is a type of harp lute, the strings of which are suspended above a large resonator made out of a calabash gourd covered with cow skin. The strings are plucked with the thumb and index finger of each hand. All three of these instruments are used to play complex melodic patterns constructed out of complementary interlocking parts—parts that, at least on the *balafon* and *kora*, are each played with one of the two hands.

Traditionally, these instruments were only played by men. Boys would begin to learn from their fathers or uncles, and a jali's musical education would culminate in the building of his own instrument. A jali also needed to master the tuning systems, which are different for each instrument and quite unlike anything found in Europe. A result of this is that West African music can sound out of tune, although in fact each pitch is carefully positioned. Female jali were musicians

too, but they were only trained to sing and play a percussion instrument called the *neo*. Today, of course, many women excel as performers on all of these instruments.

## The Sunjata Story

The Sunjata story is well known, for it has been frequently published in both novel and verse form over the past century and is often included in world literature courses. It constitutes a mythologized retelling of how the historical figure Sunjata unified the Mali Empire and became its first ruler. According to the epic, Sunjata—whose glorious conquests had been foretold by a soothsayer—was the son of the Mandinkan king’s second wife. As a child, however, Sunjata could not walk, and when the king died it was his half brother who ascended to the throne. Sunjata and his mother were exiled and found a new home in the Mema kingdom, where Sunjata grew strong and gained such widespread support that he was designated heir to the throne. When the Mandinka kingdom was attacked by a malicious power, Sunjata came to the rescue while his half-brother fled in fear. Sunjata’s coalition of small kingdoms defeated the aggressor and resulted in the founding of the Mali Empire.

There are not many recordings of the Sunjata story in existence, for it is carefully guarded. The epic is often related as part of religious ceremonies, and it is believed to bring blessings to all who hear it. Listeners, however, are prohibited from recording these performances. The recordings that are available have been made at formal concerts or recording sessions, and therefore lack many of the elements that would characterize a more authentic performance. These recordings tend to be brief, both because they often omit episodes from the story and because they lack the participatory embellishments that bring the story to life when it is shared in a communal context. Listeners, for example, might join together in singing hymns at appropriate points, or jali might shout out praise songs dedicated to historical figures as they enter the narrative. Participants will also interrupt the story to donate money in return for blessings.

In considering our recordings, therefore, we must be aware that they offer only a glimpse of Sunjata epic recitation as a living practice. Apart from being brief, they are in no way definitive. There are variations in the words that are used to tell the story and even in the events that are related (sometimes, for example, Sunjata and his mother are exiled from the Mali kingdom, while other times they choose to leave for their own safety). The epic is also not always sung to the same melody, nor is the accompaniment stable. The underlying instrumental music might be supplied by kora, balafon, ngoni, or even guitar, and the pattern played by these instruments—known as the **kumbengo**—can vary in large and small ways.

## Comparing Two Renditions of *The Sunjata Story*

We will begin with a recording made of a 1987 performance in which jali Djelimady Sissoko recites the epic while Sidiki Diabaté accompanies him on the

kora.<sup>12</sup> Like all performances, this begins with an instrumental improvisation. At first there is no pulse, but gradually the player settles in to the *kumbengo*. In this case, we hear the most typical *kumbengo* for a Sunjata epic recitation, that associated with the Sunjata praise song.<sup>13</sup> The praise song is entirely separate from the epic, but it might be sung during a ritual performance of the epic and the two are closely connected.

<p>12.</p> 	<p><i>The Sunjata Story</i> Performance: Djelimady Sissoko, accompanied by Sidiki Diabaté (1987)</p>
<p>13.</p> 	<p>The Sunjata praise song is musically related to the recitation of the epic.</p>

The singer enters at the top of his range and then descends down the scale outlined in the accompaniment. This is the typical melodic shape for epic recitation, and it is influenced by the Mandinka language, which is tonal. This means that the inflection of vowel sounds changes the meaning of a word. Because most Mandinka words inflect in a downward direction, setting the words to music naturally produces a descending melody. The vocal ability of a singer is judged in terms of power and confidence. However, the most important quality for a singer to possess is truthfulness. A good singer, therefore, is one whose words are true, regardless of the sound of their voice. The truthfulness of Djelimady Sissoko's words is confirmed by Sidiki Diabaté, who fulfills the role of witness by chanting *naamu*, or "indeed," at the end of every sentence. (If the jali makes a mistake in telling the story, which frequently occurs, the witness must correct it.)

The "groove" is an important characteristic of this performance, as is the rhythmic interaction between the singer and kora player. However, these elements are not simple to perceive or explain. While the repetitiveness of the accompaniment makes it obvious that there is a regular pulse, that pulse is constantly shifting. Try tapping your foot along to the music, and you will soon find that you have lost the beat. This is the result of a concept of rhythm that is based on patterns, not European-style meter. West African musicians, for example, do not count beats in the way European musicians do, and they do not recognize a downbeat (the first and strongest pulse in a metrical grouping). Instead, they transform rhythmic patterns in the way that a kaleidoscope transforms images.

This concept of constant transformation is central to the practice of West African instrumentalists. In this recording, the kora player never repeats the *kumbengo* pattern unchanged for long. Instead, he makes constant alterations to the rhythmic and pitch content, adding syncopations and ornaments of unending

variety. He also interjects virtuosic flourishes in between the phrases of the story. Periodically, the singer pauses to allow for an extended kora solo.<sup>14</sup> While the basic musical contents of the *kumbengo* are quite simple, therefore, the work of the kora player is complex and sophisticated.

We will briefly examine a second performance of episodes from the Sunjata story for the sake of comparison.<sup>15</sup> This rendition, recorded in 2014, is accompanied by the balafon. Although the balafon, which is a percussion instrument, is quite different from the kora in terms of construction, playing technique, and sound, it executes exactly the same function. Again, the performance opens with an extended solo by the balafon player, Fodé Lassana Diabaté, who eventually settles into a *kumbengo* that is very similar to that played on the kora. Again, the balafon player constantly alters his accompaniment, adding rhythmic and melodic variations. And again, he occasionally takes the opportunity to improvise extended instrumental solos in between sections of the recited text.

14.		This is one of many kora solos that interrupt the jali's recitation.
15.		<i>The Sunjata Story</i> Performance: Hawa Kassé Mady Diabaté, accompanied by Fodé Lassana Diabaté (2014)

The work of the singer, Hawa Kassé Mady Diabaté, can also be compared to the previous recording. Most of her phrases begin high in her range and descend down the scale. She regularly enters during different parts of the *kumbengo* and does not align her phrases with the accompaniment. And her vocal production is powerful and commanding. She periodically plays a simple percussion instrument, known as a *shekere*, that consists of a gourd with a beaded cover.

Although this rendition is excellent, its context—amplified on a stage before a silent audience—is far removed from that in which the Sunjata story has thrived for eight hundred years. Jali storytelling is meant to be highly participatory, and this epic only lives when it is endorsed and enriched by the community.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Print

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Gustavson, Kent. *Blind But Now I See: The Biography of Music Legend Doc Watson*. Blooming Twig Books, 2012.

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## Online

KET Education, "Mountain Born: The Jean Ritchie Story": <https://www.ket.org/education/resources/mountain-born-jean-ritchie-story/>

# 6

## Stories without Words

*Esther M. Morgan-Ellis*

### INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past three chapters, we have examined a variety of musical forms and works that communicate narratives. These have included examples that rely on staged action, such as opera and ballet, and examples that incorporate a sung text. In this chapter, we will encounter music that tells a story without that aid of staged action or performed text. This music will use sound alone—perhaps supplemented by a written explanation—to communicate with the listener.

But how can sound tell a story? How can we know what music is about without seeing the story acted out or hearing the story told through words? In many ways, music is handicapped as a storytelling medium, for it cannot be specific. Sound cannot tell us the name of a character, or provide details about a dramatic setting, or convey dialogue, or even communicate a plot of any complexity. At the same time, sound can also be a particularly powerful storytelling medium. Because of its potential to provoke emotions in the listener, it can tell compelling stories on the emotional or psychological level. Music can also incorporate the sounds that would be heard in a specific setting or that might accompany a sequence of events, thereby recreating the aural experience of a story.

In general, music is able to communicate specific content using three techniques. While these have been primarily exploited in the European concert tradition, they are not unique to Western music. The three techniques are **mimesis**, **quotation**, and the use of **musical topics**. After an introduction to each in turn, we will see them at work in a variety of examples.

**Mimesis** is the simplest technique, and also the most common across traditions. In cases of mimesis, music imitates real-world sounds in order to call elements of the physical world to mind. These sounds might include birdsong, animal cries, trains, explosions, footsteps—anything that makes noise. Mimesis can be used to create a dramatic scene using sound alone.

In the case of **quotation**, one piece of music incorporates a passage from another. Quotation can be used in many different ways. Sometimes, the quoted music will have a text that the listener is expected to know. In this way, a composer can include specific dramatic content without employing text directly. Other times,

the quoted music can be understood as part of a scene. For example, the American composer Charles Ives quoted the music of Wagner in his piano composition *Concord Sonata*. His intent was to recreate the living room of the Alcott family, with Louisa May playing her favorite tunes at the piano.

When a composer employs **musical topics**, they refer to recognizable musical styles or clichés in order to communicate with the listener. Some musical topics are associated with specific genres or traditions, such as military marches, waltzes, or Christian hymns. Upon hearing one of these styles referenced in a musical work, the listener might think of an army, or a ball, or a church service. In this way, the composer can transport an audience to a specific place.

Other musical topics rely on the use of standardized techniques to portray specific scenes, such as a storm, or a romantic tryst, or shepherds tending their flocks. This approach builds on the tradition of music for the theater. An operatic love scene, for example, is usually accompanied by slow, sweeping gestures in the strings, while shepherds appear to the accompaniment of droning bagpipes (usually imitated by orchestral instruments), flute, and double reeds (usually oboe or English horn). Musical topics often incorporate mimesis, although the technique is more complex. Hunting scenes, for example, were long set to music that used mimetic techniques to imitate the sounds of horses galloping and hunting horns blasting. The imitation of hoofbeats is an example of mimesis, but the hunting topic is associated not only with the sounds of hunting but also with the tradition of writing hunting music. The storm topic provides a similar example. While rapid chromatic scales, dynamic swells, and sudden accents can imitate wind blowing through the trees and lightning striking the ground, we recognize storm music primarily because we are familiar with the long tradition of this type of music being used to accompany storm scenes in opera, films, and cartoons.

In the European tradition, instrumental music that claims to tell a specific story or to otherwise communicate **extramusical** information is termed **program music**. This term was first employed in the 19th century, at which point in history a fierce debate took place between various European composers and critics concerning the purpose of music. Some argued in favor of program music, even going so far as to suggest that music could (and should) convey complex philosophical ideas. Wagner belonged to this school of thought. Others advocated on behalf of **absolute music**, or “music for music’s sake”—that is, music that does not aspire to be more than sound, and that should be judged on the basis of its form and construction, not its power to communicate. Even in the 19th century, however, program music was not a new thing. As we shall see, earlier European composers had already established the various techniques with which music can communicate meaning. Similarly, composers and performers in other parts of the globe had long exploited sound as a storytelling vehicle.

We will begin, however, in 19th century Europe, with perhaps the most famous piece of program music to emerge from the concert tradition.

## HECTOR BERLIOZ, *FANTASTICAL SYMPHONY*

When the French composer Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) premiered what was to be his most famous and influential work, he was only 27 years old. 1830, however, was a big year for the young composer. Not only was his *Fantastical Symphony* (French: *Symphonie Fantastique*) premiered in December at the Paris Conservatory, but he also won the Rome Prize (French: *Prix de Rome*), the top honor for French composers.

However, Berlioz's training as a composer had been largely self-directed. His father had intended for him to become a physician, and it was to study medicine at the University of Paris that he had first moved to the city. Berlioz completed medical school, despite his disgust at the task of dissecting dead bodies, but he continued to pursue his musical interests throughout the course of his professional education. He gave up medicine upon graduating in 1824 and enrolled in the Paris Conservatory two years later.

During the **Romantic** era (roughly 1815 to 1900), audiences were fascinated by the personal lives of artists. They tended to understand artistic expression as autobiographical, and they perceived works through the lens of an artist's personal experience. In the case of *Fantastical Symphony* this was easy to do, for Berlioz was directly inspired by his own real-world experiences. Before discussing the symphony, therefore, we must dedicate some attention to Berlioz's love life.

### The Origins of Berlioz's Symphony

In 1827, Berlioz attended a series of Shakespearean performances put on in Paris by a company of Irish actors. Over the course of several plays, he became obsessed with the actress Harriet Smithson, whom he saw in the roles of Ophelia (*Hamlet*) and Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*). His subsequent behavior, which included moving into an apartment from which he could monitor her own dwelling and subjecting her to a deluge of correspondence, can only be described as stalking. She ignored his advances, however, and returned to London in 1829 without ever having met the composer.

Despite never so much as speaking to Harriet, Berlioz felt compelled to channel his passion into musical composition. He let it be widely known that *Fantastical Symphony*, which tells the story of a romantic obsession gone wrong (details later), was about Harriet Smithson.



**Image 6.1:** This photograph of Berlioz was taken in 1863, many decades after his success with *Fantastical Symphony*.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Pierre Petit

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**Image 6.2: Given her fame as an actress, Harriet Smithson was painted many times. This portrait is by George Clint.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: George Clint

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Berlioz's romantic interests were intense but fleeting. He soon recovered from his infatuation with Smithson and in 1830 became engaged to Marie Moke. His status as the winner of the Rome Prize required that he spend several years studying composition in Italy, and while he was abroad he received word from Marie's mother that she was going to marry the wealthy piano manufacturer Camille Pleyel instead. Berlioz flew into a rage. He purchased guns, poison, and a costume, and boarded a train for Paris with the intention of sneaking into the Moke home dressed as a woman and murdering mother, daughter, and fiance before taking his own life. During the course of the trip, however, his passion cooled, and he abandoned the plan before arriving in Paris. He returned to Italy to complete the terms of his award.

Then, in 1832, Harriet Smithson found herself back in Paris. Berlioz saw that she was provided with a ticket to the premiere of his second symphony, entitled *The Return to Life* and conceived of as a sequel to *Fantastical Symphony*. She wrote him a letter complimenting the symphony and the two finally met. They began an affair and married in 1833, although it is widely suspected that Smithson only agreed to the union because of her dire financial situation. The two were not happy, and formally separated in 1843.

In the case of another composer, the above personal details might be gratuitous. In the case of Berlioz, however, they are essential. Not only did his audiences know about his love life, but they relished the opportunity to perceive his music as a window into his most intimate passions. Of course, *Fantastical Symphony* was not altogether autobiographical. In fact, most of the story, to which we will turn now, was lifted from books that Berlioz was reading at the time.

Berlioz went to great trouble to create, revise, and publicize the story told by his music. He published several versions, the last of which accompanied the 1855 version of the **score**. It was important to Berlioz that audiences were familiar with the story. For the 1830 premiere, he saw that his narrative was published in Parisian newspapers and distributed to audience members at the performance. (At this time, it was unusual for concert patrons to be provided with a printed program.) In the 1845 version of the score, Berlioz explained the importance of his narrative: "The following programme must therefore be considered as the spoken text of an opera, which serves to introduce musical movements and to motivate their character and expression." In short, he did not seem to believe that the music could speak entirely for itself.

## The Structure and Story of *Fantastical Symphony*

Berlioz subtitled his *Fantastical Symphony* “An Episode in the Life of an Artist, in Five Parts.” The artist in question was, of course, himself. The five parts were five distinct movements—an unusual design for a symphony. While most symphonies have four movements, Berlioz was self-consciously following in the footsteps of Ludwig van Beethoven, whose only program symphony—his Symphony No. 6 “Pastoral”—also had five movements. Beethoven’s symphony told the story of a visit to the countryside, but it did so in very vague terms. The only texts were the five movement titles, which described the sensation of peace upon arriving in nature, a scene by a brook, a peasant festival, a thunderstorm, and feelings of relief after the storm had passed. To tell his story, Beethoven deployed musical topics associated with the countryside and incorporated mimetic gestures, including orchestral imitations of droning bagpipes and violent lightning strikes. Berlioz used the same techniques, but took the idea of writing a program symphony much further.

Berlioz’s five movements are entitled “Reveries—Passions,” “A Ball,” “Scene in the Fields,” “March to the Scaffold,” and “Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath.” In the first movement, a young musician catches sight of his ideal woman and immediately falls in love with her. We learn from Berlioz’s text that the musician always hears the same melody in his head when he sees or thinks of her—a melody “in which he recognizes a certain quality of passion, but endowed with the nobility and shyness which he credits to the object of his love.” Berlioz termed this melody the “obsession” (French: *idée fixe*).

The obsession melody returns in each of the five movements. In the second movement, we hear it when the protagonist glimpses the object of his affection at a ball. In the third movement, the protagonist sits alone in the countryside, listening to shepherds play their pipes. At first he feels hopeful about the future, but he is soon overwhelmed with suspicion and foreboding. The obsession melody reveals the subject of his disturbed brooding.

Because we will examine the fourth and fifth movement in detail, it is worth reading Berlioz’s original description of each in full. His text to accompany the fourth movement reads as follows:

Convinced that his love is spurned, the artist poisons himself with opium. The dose of narcotic, while too weak to cause his death, plunges him into



**Image 6.3: This French lithograph imagines the scene at a ball captured in the second movement of Berlioz’s symphony. The protagonist is clearly Berlioz himself.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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a heavy sleep accompanied by the strangest of visions. He dreams that he has killed his beloved, that he is condemned, led to the scaffold and is witnessing *his own execution*. The procession advances to the sound of a march that is sometimes sombre and wild, and sometimes brilliant and solemn, in which a dull sound of heavy footsteps follows without transition the loudest outbursts. At the end of the march, the first four bars of the *idée fixe* reappear like a final thought of love interrupted by the fatal blow.

It is here that we begin to depart notably from reality. Although Berlioz was indeed an opium user, as evidenced by letters that he wrote to his father in 1829 and 1830, it seems likely that his ideas for this movement came primarily from a book he was reading, Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821).

## **March to the Scaffold**

		"March to the Scaffold" from <i>Fantastical Symphony</i> Composer: Hector Berlioz Performance: London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Eugene Goossens (2013)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	"The procession advances to the sound of a march..."	A rhythmic pattern played on the timpani sets the scene for a procession
0'28"	"...that is sometimes sombre and wild, . . ." [March theme A]	This theme, on which we hear many variations, consists of a descending scale with a brief ascending motif at the end
1'40"	"...and sometimes brilliant and solemn" [March theme B]	This theme, which is considerably louder and more triumphant, features the brass playing dotted rhythms

2'11"	March theme A	The A theme returns briefly, played by the strings and woodwinds in an interlocking texture
2'22"	March theme B	The B theme returns, this time with an active string accompaniment
2'52"	March theme A	The A theme returns as it did before
3'00"		The low brass play the descending scale of the A theme repeatedly at successively higher pitch levels, thereby building intensity
3'14"		The entire orchestra plays the A theme, first in its natural form and then upside down (an ascending scale)
3'40"	Coda	We hear a new theme at a faster tempo
4'17"	"...the first four bars of the idée fixe reappear like a final thought of love..."	We hear the obsession melody in the solo clarinet
4'26"	". . . interrupted by the fatal blow."	The melody is cut off by a resounding chord, symbolizing the fall of the guillotine blade; triumphant chords from the brass represent the cheers of the crowd

“March to the Scaffold” exhibits all three of the communication techniques outlined above: mimesis, quotation, and the use of musical topics. For most of the movement, we hear two contrasting march themes, one (according to Berlioz’s description) “sombre and wild” and the other “brilliant and solemn.” These themes exemplify the use of musical topics. We are able to recognize them immediately as marches due to the tempo, the brisk character, and the instrumentation, which features percussion and brass. In the final passage of the movement, the tempo accelerates and the excitement builds. Then, out of nowhere, we hear the obsession melody played on a solo clarinet. This, of course, is an example of quotation. We are familiar with this melody and we know that it represents the protagonist’s beloved. We can easily hear it, therefore, as his final thought of her. Before the melody can

conclude, a great noise from the orchestra represents the guillotine blade crashing down. This is followed by two pizzicato “bounces” of the severed head and a series of raucous “cheers” from the crowd. All of this is mimesis, for Berlioz uses the orchestra to represent the sounds of the scene he is portraying.

“March to the Scaffold” was the most successful of the symphony’s five movements, and it was frequently programmed as a standalone work during Berlioz’s lifetime. However, the final movement, “Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath,” offers even better examples of our three communication strategies. It is also shows off Berlioz’s extraordinary skill at using the orchestra. The music of Berlioz is still studied today by students of **orchestration**, and his 1843 *Treatise on Instrumentation* is still in print. He was also responsible for growing the orchestra in size. Although he wanted 220 musicians for the premiere of *Fantastical Symphony*, he had to settle for a mere 130. In addition to increasing the size of the string sections, Berlioz increased the number of required wind parts. *Fantastical Symphony* calls for four different types of clarinets, four bassoons, four harps, and an enormous percussion section, in addition to two instruments—the ophicleide (part of the tuba family) and the cornet à pistons (part of the trumpet family)—that were not typically included in the symphony orchestra. The final movement of *Fantastical Symphony* makes the most dramatic use of this extensive orchestral palette.

### Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath

		<p>“Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath” from  <i>Fantastical Symphony</i>  Composer: Hector Berlioz  Performance: London Symphony Orchestra,  conducted by Sir Eugene Goossens (2013)</p>
Time	Form	What to listen for
o’oo”	“Strange sounds, . . .”	Tremolo in the violins and violas



**Image 6.4:** Berlioz’s large orchestras were also loud. This became a frequent subject for humor throughout his lifetime, as in this 1846 cartoon that portrays the composer in the midst of brass, string basses, and a cannon.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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0'03"	"...groans, . . ."	Upward sweeps in the cellos and basses
0'17"	"...outbursts of laughter; . . ."	Chromatic descent in the violins and violas
0'32"	"...distant shouts which seem to be answered by more shouts."	Call and response between woodwinds and a muted horn
0'53"		All of the preceding material is repeated, with some variations
1'37"	"The beloved melody appears once more, but has now lost its noble and shy character; it is now no more than a vulgar dance tune, trivial and grotesque"	We hear the opening of the obsession melody in the clarinet; it is played at a fast tempo with an uneven, dance-like rhythm
1'46"	"Roar of delight at her arrival"	The brass enter at top volume
1'58"	"She joins the diabolical orgy"	We hear the entire obsession melody in the high-pitched E-flat clarinet, accompanied primarily by double reeds
3'11	"The funeral knell tolls . . ."	The orchestra bells sound the tolling of the knell
3'39"	"...burlesque parody of the Dies irae . . ."	The opening phrase of the "Dies irae" melody is heard, first in the low brass, then in the trombones at twice the tempo, and finally in the woodwinds and pizzicato strings at twice the tempo again
4'18"		The second phrase of the "Dies irae" melody undergoes similar treatment

4'42"		The third phrase of the “Dies irae” melody undergoes similar treatment
5'20"	“... the dance of the witches. ..”	A new theme emerges in the strings
5'38"		The new theme, which we recognize as “the dance of the witches,” is presented first in the cellos, then the violins, then in the woodwinds
7'28"		A hint of the “Dies irae” melody return in the cellos and basses; the other strings play fragments of “the dance of the witches”
8'34"	“The dance of the witches combined with the Dies irae.”	We hear complete statements of both melodies layered atop one another, “Dies irae” in the brass and “the dance of the witches” in the strings

Berlioz explained the action in “Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath” as follows:

He sees himself at a witches’ sabbath, in the midst of a hideous gathering of shades, sorcerers and monsters of every kind who have come together for his funeral. Strange sounds, groans, outbursts of laughter; distant shouts which seem to be answered by more shouts. The beloved melody appears once more, but has now lost its noble and shy character; it is now no more than a vulgar dance tune, trivial and grotesque: it is she who is coming to the sabbath... Roar of delight at her arrival... She joins the diabolical orgy... The funeral knell tolls, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae*, the *dance of the witches*. The dance of the witches combined with the Dies irae.

The movement opens exactly as Berlioz describes, with “strange sounds, groans, outbursts of laughter.” Strange sounds are certainly heard in the violins. The players employ a technique known as **tremolo**, in which the bow is moved back and forth very quickly to produce a shaking effect. The cellos undeniably provide the groans, with their quick upward melodic sweeps. Both the violins and trombones can later be heard as laughing. Next we hear “distant shouts” in the high winds, echoed by “more shouts” from a muted horn. The opening passage, therefore, is constructed almost exclusively with the use of mimetic techniques.

When the obsession melody returns, it has indeed transformed in character. It is now a lively, impish dance tune played on the E-flat clarinet—an uncommon, high-pitched version of the instrument with a piercing sound quality. The tune is

at first interrupted by a mimetic “roar of delight” from the orchestra, after which it is heard in full. In this case, quotation is combined with the use of a musical topic. We recognize the melody and understand what it represents, but the fact that it is presented as a dance tune adds meaning to its appearance.

After the dance dies away we hear the funeral bells. This barely even counts as mimesis, since Berlioz calls for actual bells to be struck. (He uses the tubular orchestra bells that are included in a standard large percussion section.) Next he employs a second quotation. This time he quotes a melody from outside the symphony—indeed, it is a melody that was composed more than 500 years before Berlioz was even born!

The “Dies irae” comes from the body of medieval Catholic church music known as **Gregorian chant**. This particular chant was composed in the 13th century and was associated with the funeral **Mass**, or **Requiem**. It was sung at the graveside and contains a particularly ominous text. The first three lines read as follows:

A day of wrath; that day,  
it will dissolve the world into glowing ashes,  
as attested by David together with the Sibyl.

What trembling will there be,  
when the Judge shall come  
to examine everything in strict justice.

The trumpet’s wondrous call sounding abroad  
in tombs throughout the world  
shall drive everybody forward to the throne.

The long text continues on to describe the coming of Judgment Day, when sinners are cast into Hell to endure eternal torment. Berlioz’s audience in Catholic France would have recognized this melody immediately, and would likewise have known the associated text. For them, the “Dies irae” carried connotations of terror and hellishness. By using it in his symphony, therefore, Berlioz was able to take advantage of those connotations without incorporating text directly. The “Dies irae” provided the perfect backdrop for his triumphant witches.

Next Berlioz incorporates another dance topic, named in his synopsis as the “dance of the witches.” We don’t recognize the melody itself, but we have no trouble acknowledging that it is a dance, and Berlioz’s description helps us to understand exactly what it going on. Finally, before the raucous conclusion, we hear the “Dies irae” and the “dance of the witches” juxtaposed, each sounding at the same time in a different part of the orchestra. The concluding passage also includes more unusual string techniques, including **col legno** (with wood), for which players turn their bows over and bounce the stick on their strings. This creates an eerie tapping effect.

## Modest Mussorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition*

The Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) was just a generation younger than Berlioz, and their careers overlapped for several decades. The two composers, however, lived in different worlds. Berlioz was French and worked in Paris, a major European cultural center. He received a formal music education and was well-connected with leading figures across the arts. Mussorgsky, on the other hand, was not even a professional composer, and was excluded from his country's growing musical establishment. His status as an outsider, however, only inspired Mussorgsky to find a unique artistic voice, and he emerged as one of the most important Russian composers of the 19th century.

### Mussorgsky and Russian Identity

Mussorgsky's career was split between military and civil service. He enrolled in Cadet School at the age of 13 and subsequently accepted a commission in the Russian Imperial Guard. He resigned his commission in 1858 so as to be able to focus more energy on music, but it was not feasible for him to compose for a living, so he instead took a series of administrative posts with the government.

Mussorgsky's main interest, however, was music. He studied composition with Miliy Alexeyevich Balakirev, who had emerged as the ideological leader of the nationalist movement in Russian music. Mussorgsky also developed close personal relationships with the other young composers in Balakirev's circle, all of whom saw themselves as anti-establishment figures in search of authentic Russian musical expression. Together, these composers were known as "the mighty handful"—an evocative nickname that has been identified with the progressive strain of late 19th-century Russian music ever since.

Despite their interest in developing a uniquely Russian school of composition, Mussorgsky and his colleagues were primarily influenced by European concert music. They studied the scores of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt, and Berlioz, the last of whom they particularly admired. Because they were largely self-trained and valued experimental approaches, however, these composers succeeded in adapting European forms and techniques to their own creative ends.



**Image 6.5: This portrait of Modest Mussorgsky was painted by Ilya Repin in 1881.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

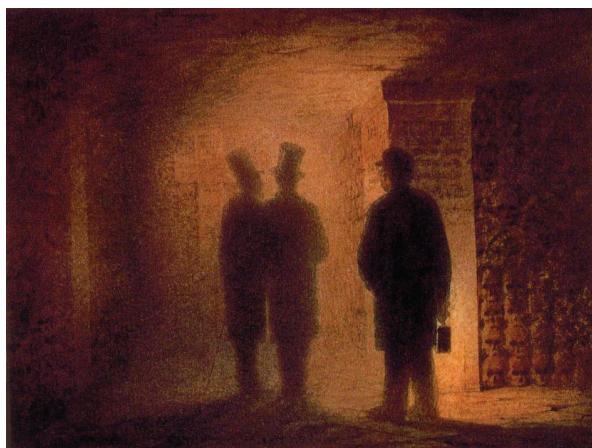
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## Capturing Visual Art in Music

Mussorgsky composed *Pictures at an Exhibition* after attending an art exhibit in commemoration of his friend Viktor Hartmann, who had died suddenly of an aneurism in 1873. Hartmann had belonged to the progressive school of Russian art, which sought to develop a uniquely Russian approach to the visual arts. It is natural enough, therefore, that Mussorgsky should have felt a kinship with Hartmann, for he and “the mighty handful” sought to accomplish the same thing in the realm of music. Mussorgsky had acquired a large number of Hartmann’s paintings, which he allowed to be displayed as part of the exhibit in St. Petersburg.

After walking through the galleries, Mussorgsky was inspired to compose a piece of music that captured the experience in sound. He completed the work in only twenty days. *Pictures at an Exhibition* was initially conceived of as a ten-movement **suite** for piano. Each movement represents a Hartmann work, while a “Promenade” interlude between many of the movements symbolizes the act

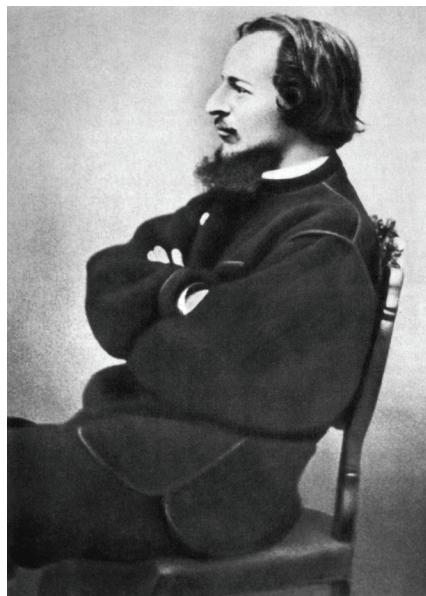


**Image 6.7:** Hartmann’s painting of the Paris catacombs inspired the eighth movement of Mussorgsky’s suite.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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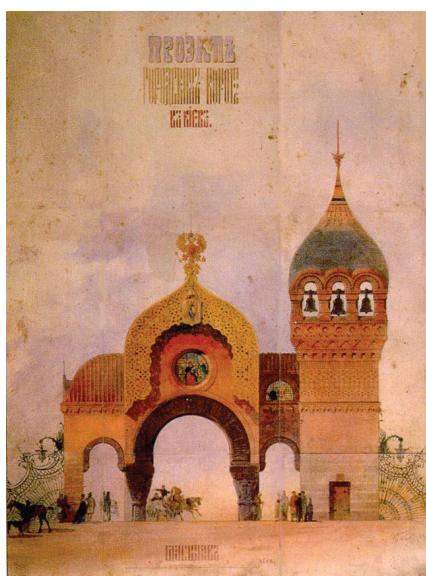


**Image 6.6:** A photograph of Russian architect and artist Viktor Hartmann.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 6.8:** Hartmann’s Plan for a City Gate inspired the grandiose final movement of Mussorgsky’s suite.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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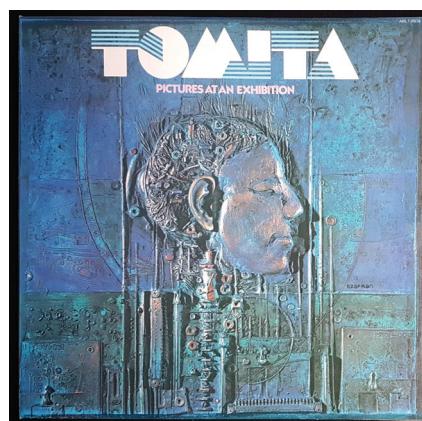
of walking from one painting to the next. Unfortunately, many of the paintings themselves have been lost, but Hartmann's work has lived on in this enormously popular musical composition.

Mussorgsky wrote for piano in part because he was not a skilled orchestrator. However, a large number of later composers took on that task, and as a result many different versions of *Picture at an Exhibition* have been performed over the past century. *Pictures* is heard most frequently as an orchestral work, and the most successful orchestration was created by the French composer Maurice Ravel in 1922. There are also versions for chamber orchestra, band, brass ensemble, and solo guitar. However, the popularity of *Pictures* has resulted in additional adaptations that live outside the concert hall. It has been performed by numerous rock bands—including Emerson, Lake, and Palmer, who recorded it live in 1971—and even formed the basis for early experiments in the world of electronic music.

For this reason, *Pictures at an Exhibition* presents a wonderful opportunity to consider the significance of **timbre**. We will examine two movements in depth, and for each we will compare four different versions: Mussorgsky's 1874 composition for piano, Ravel's 1922 orchestration, Japanese synthesizer artist Isao Tomita's 1975 interpretation, and German thrash metal band Mekong Delta's 1996 recording. All four versions contain exactly the same pitches and rhythms, but they sound quite different from one another due to the divergent sound qualities available from piano, orchestra, synthesizer, and rock band. It is impossible to argue that one version is the “best.” Instead, each brings unique strengths to the task of sounding Mussorgsky's composition and each connects with different listeners.

## The Gnome

		<p>“The Gnome” from <i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i>          Composer: Modest Mussorgsky          Performance: Sergei Oskolkov (2003)</p>
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	A	This theme is loud, accented, and angular; it includes many descending and ascending leaps



**Image 6.9:** Here we see the album cover for Tomita's 1975 *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Source: Flickr

Attribution: Jacob Whittaker

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0'18"	B	In this theme, the right hand repeats a descending figure that outlines an unusual scale
0'40"	A	
0'54"	C	This slow, ominous theme is played quietly in the low range of the piano; it is periodically interrupted by loud fragments of A
1'47"	D	The left hand descends chromatically while the right hand executes descending leaps; then the parts switch
2'11"	B	The B theme returns, but the left hand part is reminiscent of the C theme
2'37"	Coda	The movement concludes with a rapid passage in which the left hand descends and the right hand ascends

The first movement of *Pictures at an Exhibition* is entitled “The Gnome.” Although the original Hartmann painting has been lost, it is known to have depicted a grotesque nutcracker with large teeth. It was undoubtedly disturbing. Mussorgsky captured the image in sound using a variety of techniques. “The Gnome” begins with a sequence of abrupt, angular melodic fragments. They are unpredictable and unpleasing, lurching about in a way that mimetically capture the motions of the creature they portray. A second, contrasting section contains an uneven descending melody with a dissonant, oscillating accompaniment. A third section vacillates ominously between low and high pitches, while a final section is loud and threatening. Fragments of the first section interrupt when least expected. Throughout, “The Gnome” is characterized by contrast and surprise, and it concludes with a frightening rush to the final cadence. The listener never knows what is going to happen next and is not given the opportunity to relax.

The piano version contains the unpredictable rhythms and rapid mood changes that are central to Mussorgsky’s vision, but the instrument imposes several limitations. To begin with, striking the keys of a piano always produces essentially the same type of sound. While a piano can execute a large range of pitch and dynamic levels, its ability to do so does not compare to an orchestra, which can play higher, lower, louder, and softer. An orchestra, however, lacks the spontaneity and responsiveness of a solo pianist, who only has to coordinate with herself.

Ravel’s orchestration<sup>1</sup> has emerged as the most common because, like Berlioz, he knew how to take full advantage of the ensemble’s potential. He puts the opening melodic gesture in the low strings with an echo in the low brass, thereby

creating a darker and more ominous sound quality than is available from the piano. Punctuations from the percussion section further heighten the tension. The next passage features the warm sounds of flute and celeste, with an accompaniment by the string section using **pizzicato** (a technique for which players pluck the strings instead of bowing them) and **glissando** (a technique for which players slide their fingers down the length of the string). Just as Berlioz used the low brass to make his “Dies irae” quotation sound threatening, Ravel uses them to increase the sense of danger and violence in his orchestration. Throughout, he never uses the same combination of instruments twice, thereby introducing an element of variety and surprise that was not available to Mussorgsky.

In his synthesizer version,<sup>2</sup> Tomita takes a similar approach, although of course he has a completely different set of sonic tools at his disposal. Like Ravel, Tomita explores a wide variety of sound qualities—some dark and muted, some percussive, some bright and zingy. He also applies modulatory techniques that transform those sounds, including **low-frequency oscillation**, glissandi, and **panning**. The end result is yet another gloomy sound world, full of contrast and surprise.

Mekong Delta<sup>3</sup> have a more limited sound palette with which to work, but it is well-suited to the task. They differentiate the sections of the piece primarily by changing the role of the drum set. In the first and second sections, the drummer mirrors the rhythms of the melody. In the third and fourth sections, however, the drummer sets up a steady rock beat, which lends the arrangement a sense of growing strength and determination. Other minor variations in instrumentation keep this version interesting throughout.

1. 	"The Gnome" from <i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i> Composer: Modest Mussorgsky, orchestrated by Maurice Ravel Performance: Wiener Philharmoniker, conducted by Valery Gergiev (2002)
2. 	"The Gnome" from <i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i> Composer: Modest Mussorgsky Performance: Isao Tomita (1975)
3. 	"The Gnome" from <i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i> Composer: Modest Mussorgsky Performance: Mekong Delta (1996)

## Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks

Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	A	Discordant sounds are produced when the pianist plays two keys that are next to one another; this humorous effect calls to mind the chirping of chicks
0'15"	A	
0'30"	B	In this section, almost every note has a trill, meaning that the player oscillates quickly between two adjacent keys
0'41"	B'	Although the right hand plays a new melody, the left hand remains stable, indicating that this is a variation of B; this time, quick passages of notes resemble clucking
0'52"	A	
1'08"	Coda	The very brief coda provides a final cadence

The fifth movement of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks,” is quite different. In this case, we still have the artwork that inspired the music. It is not a finished painting, but rather a sketch for a costume that Hartmann had designed for an 1871 production of the ballet *Trilby* at the Bolshoi Theater. The cast members were to portray unhatched baby chickens dancing in their shells.

Mussorgsky clearly saw the humor in this image, as well as in the dancing that one might imagine to have been performed in such a costume. His brief musical depiction, therefore, is highly comical. He employs a simple **ternary form** (A B A). Although the A and B sections of the form feature different melodies, we hear the chicks chirping and hopping throughout. While Mussorgsky used **dissonance** to



**Image 6.10: Viktor Hartmann's costume design for the 1871 ballet *Trilby*.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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signal fear and danger in “The Gnome,” here he uses it to indicate the ridiculous nature of the scene. Occasionally, a lone, sustained note interrupts the dance—the voice of the mother hen, perhaps? An abrupt ending completes the comic effect.

For his orchestrated version,<sup>4</sup> Ravel chose to feature the high-pitched instruments whose voices most closely match those of the chicks being portrayed: violin, flute, clarinet, oboe, and bassoon. While he used percussion in “The Gnome” to accentuate the moments of greatest terror, here he uses percussion—cymbals in the A section, snare in the B section—to add comic touches.

Tomita<sup>5</sup> takes the idea of comedy the furthest. The same can be said concerning the idea of chickens, for—in an extreme case of mimesis—he uses a variety of simulated clucks and chirps to perform the melody. In the middle section of the form, he pans his chickens between audio channels and fades their voices in and out. Additional comic noises round out the scene.

The members of Mekong Delta<sup>6</sup> use rounded timbres in place of distorted ones to create a sound world for “Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks” that is surprisingly far removed from that of “The Gnome.” The regular, energetic rhythmic underpinning from the drummer provides a sense of liveliness. Mekong Delta does not attempt to imitate the sounds of chickens in any way, but instead captures the lighthearted enthusiasm of the Mussorgsky composition.

4.	<p>“Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks” from <i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i></p> <p>Composer: Modest Mussorgsky, orchestrated by Maurice Ravel</p> <p>Performance: Wiener Philharmoniker, conducted by Gustavo Dudamel (2016)</p>
5.	<p>“Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks” from <i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i></p> <p>Composer: Modest Mussorgsky</p> <p>Performance: Isao Tomita (1975)</p>
6.	<p>“Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks” from <i>Pictures at an Exhibition</i></p> <p>Composer: Modest Mussorgsky</p> <p>Performance: Mekong Delta (1996)</p>

## ANTONIO VIVALDI, *THE FOUR SEASONS*, “SPRING”

Composers were writing program music long before Berlioz or Mussorgsky. In earlier periods, however, such compositions were generally perceived as entertaining novelties, not the future of concert art. The Italian violinist and composer Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) was particularly fond of program music, and he produced a great deal. His set of violin **concertos** known as *The Four*

*Seasons* (Italian: *Le quattro stagioni*, 1725) are the most famous. Indeed, they rank among the best known pieces of music from the European concert tradition.

### Vivaldi's Career

Vivaldi spent his life in the city of Venice, which at the time was a wealthy and independent Republic. He initially trained as a Catholic priest, but ill health prevented him from performing many of his duties. However, he became highly skilled as a violinist and composer, and in 1703 he took the position of violin master at a local orphanage, the Devout Hospital of Mercy (Italian: Ospedale della Pietà; note that Hospital at this time does not indicate a center for medical care).

Venetian orphanages were not the squalid workhouses we know from Victorian literature. Indeed, quite the opposite. It was common—even acceptable—for Venetian aristocrats to keep mistresses, but the children of these relationships could not be brought up in the marital home. Instead, unwanted infants were deposited at orphanages via the *scaffetta*, which was an opening just large enough to fit a newborn. While not all of the surrendered infants were of high birth, the city's noblemen took an interest in the welfare of their illegitimate children, which meant that the orphanages were always well-funded. The children



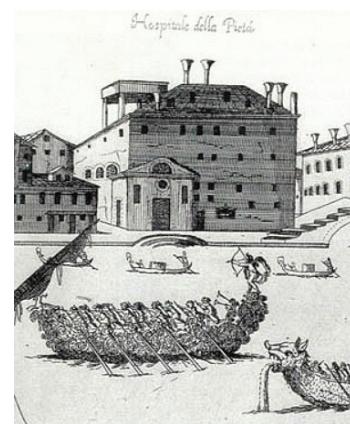
**Image 6.12:** This painting captures Venice in the time of Vivaldi. The coastal city is interwoven with canals and therefore largely navigable by boat.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Attribution: Canaletto  
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**Image 6.11:** This portrait of Antonio Vivaldi was completed by Pier Leone Ghezzi in 1723. The text refers to Vivaldi as "The Red Priest," a nickname he was given due to his curly red hair.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
Attribution: Pier Leone Ghezzi  
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**Image 6.13:** This 19th-century engraving depicts the orphanage at which Vivaldi was employed. The building no longer stands.

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were brought up with all of the advantages (except parents), and were prepared for comfortable lives.

The Devout Hospital of Mercy, at which Vivaldi took a position, was an orphanage for girls. His job was to teach them the musical skills that would allow them to secure desirable husbands. Vivaldi was exceptionally good at his job, and soon the girls at the orphanage became the best musicians in the city. He not only taught them how to play their instruments but wrote music for them to play. His primary vehicle was the concerto, which is a work for an instrumental soloist accompanied by an orchestra. Over the course of his career, Vivaldi wrote 500 concertos. About half were for violin, including 37 for his most successful protege, a virtuoso known as Anna Maria dal Violin. The other were mostly for bassoon, flute, oboe, and cello—all instruments played by girls at the Hospital.

Naturally enough, the citizens of Venice wanted to hear the girls perform. This, however, presented a serious problem. Women in Venetian society were generally prohibited from performing publicly. Some women took to the opera stage, but in doing so they were confirming their sexual availability and precluding the possibility of marriage. Most of the girls at the orphanage were destined for either husbands or a lifetime of service to the church, so they could not become soiled in this way. Those who did desire a career in music were likely to stay at the orphanage into adulthood, where they were provided with an opportunity to teach and perform. At least two girls who studied at the orphanage, Anna Bon and Vincenta Da Ponte, went on to become composers.

The orphanage developed a clever means by which to facilitate public performances without upsetting social convention. Each Sunday night, a public Vespers service was held for which the orchestra and choir provided music. Although this weekly church service was, for all intents and purposes, a public concert, the simple act of retitling protected the girls' honor. Members of high society came from across the region to hear the girls, who were physically isolated from the visitors to further ensure their chastity.

Vivaldi was promoted to music director in 1716, and he continued to teach at the orphanage even as he became quite famous outside of Venice. In addition to writing instrumental music, he wrote operas that were staged across Europe and provided choral music for Catholic church services. His long tenure at the orphanage was noteworthy, for male teachers at girls' orphanages usually got into trouble with one of their charges and eventually had to be dismissed. Vivaldi, on the other hand, developed a reputation for his ethical behavior.

For Vivaldi, the concerto was a relatively new genre. The first concertos had been written by Italian composers in the middle of the 17th century. At first, soloists were used primarily to add variation in volume to an orchestral performance—after all, a few players make less noise than many, and individual string instruments of the time did not have a large dynamic range. Vivaldi still valued the potential for concertos to include a great deal of variety, but he also used them as a vehicle for



**Image 6.14: This 1720 depiction of a concert at the Devout Hospital of Mercy shows how the girls performed from high balconies, out of reach from visitors. Not well represented are the ornate grates that hid the girls from view.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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virtuosic display. The solo parts, therefore, were often quite difficult, and allowed the player to show off her capabilities.

An early 18th-century concerto always followed the same basic form. It would contain three movements in the order fast-slow-fast. The outer movements would both be in **ritornello form**. “Ritornello” is an Italian term that roughly translates to “the little thing that returns,” and it refers to a passage of music that is heard repeatedly. In a concerto, the ritornello is played by the orchestra. It is heard at the beginning and at the end of a movement, but also frequently throughout, although often not in its entirety. In between statements of the ritornello, the soloist plays. Although the ritornello always remains basically the same, the material played by the soloist can vary widely. The slow movement of a concerto would consist of an expressive melody in the solo instrument backed up by a repetitive accompaniment in the orchestra.

## Spring

We will see an example of these forms in Vivaldi’s “Spring” concerto. However, form is certainly not what makes this composition interesting. Vivaldi published his



**Image 6.15: This 1723 portrait shows Vivaldi with his violin.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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*Four Seasons* concertos in a 1725 collection entitled *The Contest Between Harmony and Invention*. This evocative title was supposed to draw attention to novel aspects of Vivaldi's latest work. While eight of the twelve concertos contained in the collection were adventurous in purely musical terms, the first four were unusual for programmatic reasons.

Each of the *Four Seasons* concertos—one each for Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter—was accompanied by a sonnet. The poetry described the dramatic content of the music, and Vivaldi went to great trouble to indicate exactly how the music reflected the text. To do so, he inserted letter names beside each line of poetry and then placed the same letter at the appropriate place in the score.

The correlation between musical and poetic passages, however, is easy to hear. This, in combination with the fact that no author is indicated, has led most scholars to believe that Vivaldi wrote the sonnets himself.

The sonnet for the “Spring” concerto reads as follows. The lines of poetry are broken up between the three movements, each of which is titled with an Italian tempo marking:

*I. Allegro*

Springtime is upon us.  
The birds celebrate her return with festive song,  
and murmuring streams are  
softly caressed by the breezes.  
Thunderstorms, those heralds of Spring, roar,  
casting their dark mantle over heaven,  
Then they die away to silence,  
and the birds take up their charming songs once more.

*II. Largo*

On the flower-strewn meadow, with leafy branches  
rustling overhead, the goat-herd sleeps,  
his faithful dog beside him.

*III. Allegro*

Led by the festive sound of rustic bagpipes,  
nymphs and shepherds lightly dance  
beneath the brilliant canopy of spring.

		"Spring," Movement I Composer: Antonio Vivaldi Performance: Anne-Sophie Mutter with the Wiener Philharmoniker, conducted by Herbert Von Karajan (2003)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Ritornello - "Springtime is upon us."	The ritornello has an internal form of aabb; its simplicity and repetition suggest a folk dance
0'29"	A - "The birds celebrate her return with festive song, . . ."	The solo violinist and two violinists from the orchestra join together in imitation of birdsong
1'03"	Ritornello	The ritornello is slightly abbreviated in this and all future appearances
1'10"	B - ". . .and murmuring streams are softly caressed by the breezes."	The entire orchestra plays repetitive figures that rise and fall, imitating the murmur of the stream
1'33"	Ritornello	
1'40"	C - "Thunderstorms, those heralds of Spring, roar, casting their dark mantle over heaven, . . ."	The orchestra imitates thunder with low-range tremolo and lightning with quick ascending scales; the solo violinist shows off their virtuosity with rapid arpeggios
2'08"	Ritornello	This ritornello is in the minor mode
2'16"	D - "Then they die away to silence, and the birds take up their charming songs once more."	The solo violinist slowly ascends using repeated notes, suggesting calmness; the section ends with trills in the violins, another imitation of birdsong

2'32"	Ritornello	This ritornello is the least stable, as it moves from one key to another
2'42"	E	This solo does not correspond with a passage of poetry; its sole function is to prepare the final ritornello
2'56"	Ritornello	The last thing we hear is the bb section of the ritornello

The opening ritornello in the first movement captures the spirit of the first line of poetry. It is joyful and exuberant. It is also simple and repetitive, giving the impression that it might really be folk music—the kind of tune one might hear at a country dance. The birds appear with the first solo episode, which requires two violinists from the orchestra to join with the soloist in imitating avian calls. After an orchestral ritornello, we hear some new music from the orchestra that captures the sounds of murmuring streams and caressing breezes. Another ritornello is followed by the thunderstorm. Rapid notes, sudden accents, and violent ascending scales in the orchestra are interrupted by energetic **arpeggios** in the solo violin, while shifts to the minor mode darken the mood of the passage. After another ritornello, the bird songs gradually reemerge, gaining strength as the storm clears for good. One more solo passage and a final ritornello close out the movement.

The second movement<sup>7</sup> is considerably simpler. The solo violin plays a beautiful, calm melody—suitable for the portrayal of a sleeping goat-herd. Underneath, the leafy branches rustle in the violins, who play undulating, uneven rhythms throughout, while the faithful dog barks in the violas. (This last touch is a little strange, for a barking dog would certainly wake the sleeper, but Vivaldi did not have any other tools with which to represent the animal.) The fact that no low strings or harpsichord are present in this movement gives it an ethereal feeling.

7.



“Spring,” Movement II

Composer: Antonio Vivaldi

Performance: Takako Nishizaki with the Shanghai

Conservatory Symphony Orchestra, conducted by

Cheng-wu Fan (2000)

The last movement<sup>8</sup> has the same form as the first, although the storytelling is considerably less intricate. In the opening ritornello, Vivaldi imitates a bagpipe by having the violas, cellos, and basses sustain long notes outlining the interval of a fifth. The sound is meant to remind the listener of a bagpipe’s drone. The rhythms of the melody are appropriate for dancing, while the lively mood sets the scene for a celebration of spring. The soloist—other than momentarily imitating a bagpipe

herself—does not contribute anything in particular to the storytelling. She seems content to interject lively, virtuosic passagework at the appropriate points.

8.



“Spring,” Movement III

Composer: Antonio Vivaldi

Performance: David Nolan with the London Philharmonic Orchestra (2014)

## **CHINESE SOLO REPERTOIRE, ATTACK ON ALL SIDES AND SPRING RIVER IN THE FLOWER MOON NIGHT**

At the same time that European composers were producing vivid programmatic works, a parallel tradition of program music was flourishing in China. We will consider two examples from the literature for solo instruments, which is predominantly programmatic. One piece will portray a historical battle, while the other will reflect on the contents of a famous poem. Although Chinese music follows different rules than European music, is it not difficult for a Western listener to understand what this music is about. This is due both to the use of mimesis and to a cross-cultural agreement about the representation of calm and energetic moods in sound.



**Image 6.16: Music has long been important in Chinese culture. Here, we see musicians in a 6th-century tomb painting.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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When we discuss this music, however, we will have to do so in slightly different terms than we have so far. Although Chinese musicians have developed a variety of notational systems that have allowed musical compositions to be preserved, they have not always prioritized notation or valued the authority of the composer. Individual pieces are usually passed down directly from performer to performer by means of **oral tradition**, while the names of composers are seldom recorded. As a result, we are not always able to identify the authors of this repertoire or determine when the pieces were written.

The history of music in China extends back for thousands of years, and some of the instruments date to antiquity. This is not to say, however, that the music has remained unchanged, or that all of the repertoire items are old. As we saw in Chapter 4, Beijing opera dates only to the late 18th century, and alternative opera traditions have continued to emerge and change. In the sphere of instrumental music, the use of individual instruments—as well as their physical structure—transformed with the passage of time. We will encounter two instruments, the pipa and the guzheng. In doing so, we will consider their history, construction, and use in the performance of program music.

### Pipa: *Attack on All Sides*

The pipa is a type of **lute** used in a variety of Chinese musical traditions. It dates back to at least the 3rd century, although it did not acquire its modern form until the 20th century. Like most of the instruments commonly used in Chinese music, the pipa was probably imported from Central Asia or India along the Silk Road trade route. At first, it was used only to accompany singing and dancing, but during the Tang dynasty (618–907) a repertoire of solo pipa music emerged. As such, the pipa repertoire is among the oldest in the Chinese tradition. The instrument was historically favored by both aristocrats and working musicians, and was long associated with women—specifically, courtesans.

The pipa has a distinctive, pear-shaped body and is played in an upright position. Modern instruments have twenty-four **frets** spaced according to the Western chromatic scale. The frets on the neck have a unique wedge shape, such that a player's finger does not in fact touch the neck when the string is depressed. The pipa's four strings can be tuned to a variety of pitches. Although they used to be silk, the fact that pipa strings have



**Image 6.17:** This 897 painting portrays the planet Venus, embodied as an elegant lady, playing the pipa.

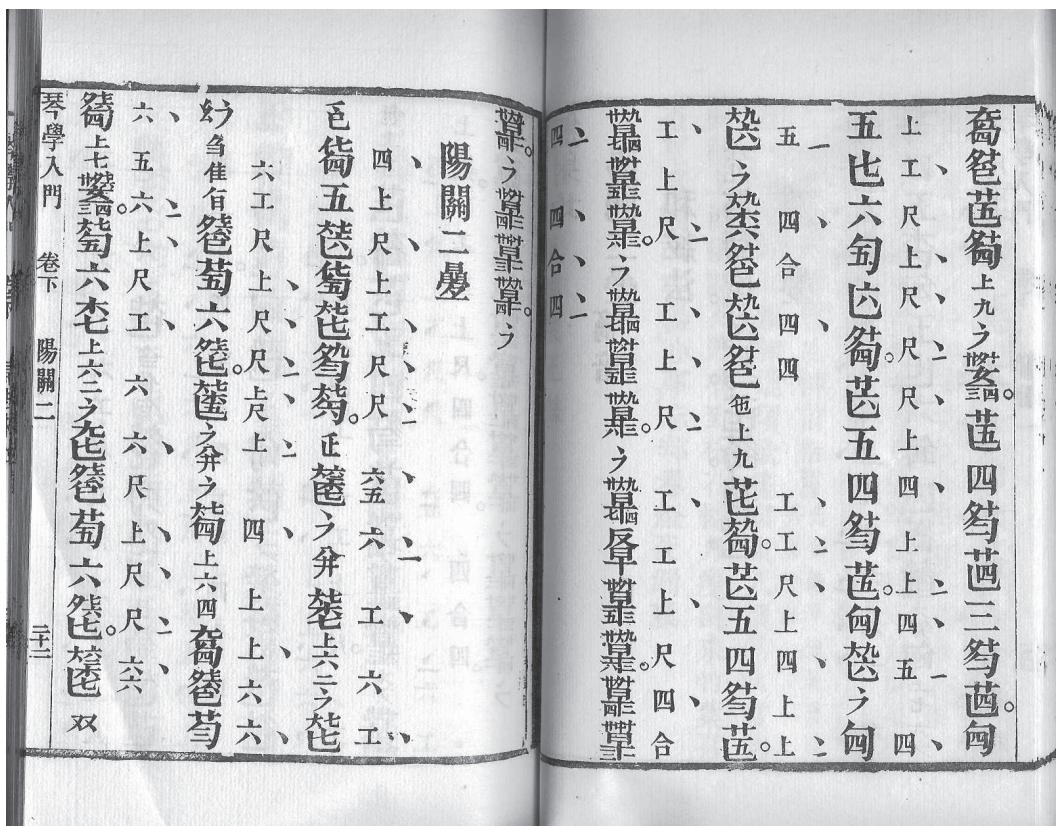
Source: Wikimedia Commons

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been manufactured out of steel since the 1950s gives the modern instrument a powerful sound. This is further accentuated by the fact that the player wears picks on the fingers of her right hand.

A great deal of the traditional pipa repertoire has survived into the present day due to the publication of four collections in the 19th century. The notation used in these collections, known as *gongche*, is completely unrelated to Western **staff notation**. Instead of mapping pitches and rhythms onto a graph, as staff notation does, it represents pitches with numbers and rhythms with dots and lines. In the context of a tradition that is primarily aural, however, such notation was used only to document music for preservation or reference. It was not used to learn unfamiliar music or in performance.



**Image 6.18: An example of gongche notation from an 1864 collection.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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*Attack on All Sides*<sup>9</sup> is the most popular piece in the pipa repertoire. It is also very difficult, however, and is usually only performed by the most accomplished players. The earliest notated version appears in an 1818 collection, but it is impossible to say when (or by whom) it was in fact composed. *Attack on All Sides* is an example of a “large” composition, containing many distinct sections. (The pipa repertoire also includes “small” compositions, which are shorter and have a single section.) While *Attack on All Sides* can always be recognized and identified, some

published versions omit sections that are included elsewhere. Therefore, not every performance is identical. No single version can be identified as “correct.” This can be contrasted with most music in the European concert tradition, for which there is generally understood to exist a single authoritative version.

9. 

*Attack on All Sides*  
Performance: Jiaju Shen

As with Beijing opera, pipa solos are divided into “civil” and “martial,” the latter having to do with military themes. *Attack on All Sides* is most certainly a martial composition. It portrays a famous battle that took place in 202 BC between the armies of two Chinese provinces, Western Chu and Han, who were fighting for dominion over China. The conflict ended with the Battle of Gaixia, in which the Han troops kidnapped the Chu general’s wife and used her to lure the enemy troops into a canyon. There, they fell victim to the “ambush from ten sides”—another common title for this piece. The battle itself hinged on musical warfare, for the Han sought to defeat their enemy by psychological means. To this end, they sang Chu folk songs throughout the night, with the effect of making the demoralized enemy homesick and inspiring soldiers to desert. The Chu general, Xiang Yu, is said to have composed a song of his own that same night. His lament, *The Song of Gaixia*, is still performed today. Tradition holds that he first sang the verses in alternation with his wife, who, feeling that she was at fault for the defeat, subsequently killed herself with his sword. The battle ended with Xiang Yu’s suicide on the banks of the Wu river.

All of this is captured in *Attack on All Sides*. The fact that this composition is made up of many sections allows the performer to explore the various emotions and activities of the battle scene. In the first sections, we bear witness to the assembling Han troops. The energy of the music communicates their vitality and resolution, but we also hear the drums and bugles of battle. The battle itself is captured by a variety of virtuosic pipa techniques that produce rapid sequences of notes. After the battle, however, the music becomes mournful—a reflection of Xiang Yu’s sorrow at his loss. The final word goes to the victor, however, and the piece concludes with a representation of the Han general’s triumph.

### **Guzheng: Peng Xiuwen, *Spring River in the Flower Moon Night***

The oldest extant guzheng dates to about 500 BC. The guzheng is a type of **zither**, and its plucked strings run along the face of a resonant wood box. Each string passes over an individual wooden bridge, which can be moved to adjust the pitch. Players use picks on the fingers of the right hand to pluck the strings to



**Image 6.19: A player uses finger picks to pluck the strings of the guzheng.**

Source: Hanscom Air Force Base

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one side of the bridges, while using the left hand either to pluck strings on the right-hand side or to press or pull the strings on the other side. This causes pitch fluxuations, which are carefully controlled and used to ornament the melody. As with the pipa, the strings of the guzheng, once silk, have been made of steel since the 1950s. They increased in number from thirteen to twenty-one around the same time. The strings are tuned to the pitches of the **pentatonic scale**, which is common in Chinese music. We might think of these as the first, second, third, fifth, and sixth notes of the major scale.

Because the modern guzheng is so different from the ancient instrument, performers tend to favor recently-composed pieces that make use of its full range. Such is the case with our example, *Spring River in the Flower Moon Night*, which is the work of Peng Xiuwen (1931-1996). Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Peng became a leading figure in the development of post-revolution Chinese music. In particular, he contributed to the development of the Chinese orchestra—an ensemble type that dates only to the 1930s. In most traditional forms of Chinese ensemble music, only one of each instrument is included, and the performers are granted the freedom to embellish their individual parts. In a Chinese orchestra, on the other hand, instruments of the same type are gathered into sections, and they use notated music to play in unison under the leadership of a **conductor**. This approach is obviously modelled on the European orchestra, and its popularity at first reflected Chinese admiration for Western technological achievements.

Peng became director of the China Broadcasting Chinese Orchestra, one of the most important ensembles of its type, in 1956, when he was only twenty-four years old. In addition to improving the tuning and balance of the orchestra, he arranged a large number of pieces from the European repertoire for Chinese orchestra and composed original pieces. One of these was *Spring River in the Flower Moon Night*,<sup>10</sup> which soon became even more popular with solo guzheng players. As we will see, its pentatonic pitch content and meditative mood suit the instrument well.

10.



*Spring River in a Flower Moon Night*

Composer: Peng Xiuwen

Performance: Bei Bei He (2016)

The title *Spring River in the Flower Moon Night* refers to a famous poem written by Zhang Ruoxu around the turn of the 8th century. The poem has inspired countless artistic interpretations over the centuries, including paintings and musical compositions. As the title might suggest, Zhang's poem describes the moonlit Yangtze river. After several evocative passages that conjure the beauty of the scene, however, he turns to themes of longing and loss, meditating on the ephemerality of life and the sorrows of travellers who leave their loved ones behind.

In his composition, Peng strives to evoke the full range of emotions contained in the poem. The guzheng version of *Spring River in the Flower Moon Night* requires a variety of techniques, including rapid tremolo picking on a single string, strums (both delicate and energetic), left-hand bends that add notes to the melody, and left-hand bends that are merely ornamental. Peng's ultimate goal is to leave the listener in the same state of sorrowful tranquility that they would experience upon reading the poem.

## CATHERINE LIKHUTA, LESIONS

Although program music in the European tradition flourished most notably in the 19th century, many composers still conceive of their instrumental music in narrative terms. Composers continue to be inspired by stories and images from the physical world, and they continue to communicate those stories through sound. One such composer is Catherine Likhuta (b. 1981), who exclusively writes program music. We will examine a recent composition



**Image 6.20: Catherine Likhuta was born in Ukraine. She currently lives in Australia.**

Source: Catherine Likhuta

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of hers that tells a deeply personal story—that of her mother’s struggle with the symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis.

### Likhuta's Inspiration

Likhuta was born in Ukraine, where she studied music at the Kyiv Glière Music College and the Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine. She then moved to Australia to pursue a doctoral degree at the University of Queensland. Likhuta is also an accomplished pianist, and she frequently premieres and records her own works, which are heard all over the world.

Like Berlioz, Likhuta chose to provide the listener with a description of her music. We will therefore allow her to explain its contents and purpose in her own words:

*Lesions* was commissioned by Paul Dean for Ensemble Q and was written for Paul Dean, Trish O'Brien and Peter Luff.

The term “lesions” refers to regions in organs and tissue which have suffered damage through injury or disease, such as a wound, ulcer, abscess or tumour. I first heard this term in 2004, when my mother (age 42 at that time) was diagnosed with an aggressive form of Multiple Sclerosis. While she had suffered from many disturbing, unexplainable and painful symptoms for sixteen years prior to that, the diagnosis of MS did not bring us any relief or closure.

Virtually every family has a loved one who is suffering or suffered from an incurable illness. While this is a very heavy subject, I believe it is definitely worth talking about, for two simple reasons:

1. To show those who are affected that they are not alone and that there are millions of people in the world who are going through similar struggles;
2. To remind those lucky few who have not been affected that we have to keep looking for cures every day.

*Lesions* is written in four parts that represent four most common stages of dealing with incurable illness: Sadness, Anxiety, Denial and finally Acceptance. The absence of a pause between the last two movements has an extra-musical meaning: though denial and acceptance are antithetical states of mind, many patients find themselves stuck between these two for a long time, sometimes for the rest of their lives. The new reality is too difficult to accept, yet the symptoms are just as difficult to deny.

As Likhuta explains, *Lesions* is more than just a piece of music. It also fulfills both therapeutic and advocacy roles. Writing this piece provided relief for Likhuta, as she was able to translate her difficult experience into expressive sound. At the same time, she hopes that it will bring comfort to others in a similar situation. *Lesions*, however, is not meant only to provide solace: Likhuta hopes that it will also inspire action on behalf of those who suffer from currently incurable illnesses.

It might seem odd that such a personal creation should result from a **commission**—the process by which a performer, producer, or organization hires a composer to create a new musical work. When a work is commissioned, the composer is often provided with specific guidelines concerning instrumentation, length, and level of difficulty. Sometimes these requirements impede creativity, but the best composers have always been able to suit their style and ambitions to the performers and situation at hand. In this case, the commissioning musicians were longtime collaborators of Likhuta’s, and they were able to work together to bring her vision to life.

Likhuta has told us which emotions her music expresses, but she does not provide any details about how she captures feelings in sound. She presumes—correctly—that most listeners will easily perceive and understand the emotional states. Here, however, we will explicitly consider how these abstract emotions can be represented in musical terms.

### Capturing the Stages of Grief in Music

		<i>Lesions</i> Composer: Catherine Likhuta Performance: Paul Dean, Peter Luff, and Trish O'Brien (2017)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Sadness	This section at first seems calm and resigned, but grows in volume and intensity; the motif introduced at the beginning will return throughout the work



**Image 6.21:** This photograph of Likhuta and her mother was taken just before the latter was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

Source: Catherine Likhuta

Attribution: Catherine Likhuta

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2'38"	Anxiety	The tempo immediately accelerates at the beginning of this section, which is generally unstable and unpredictable
5'17"	Anger and Denial	The energy of the work peaks in this section, which contains dissonant harmonies and aggressive rhythms
7'43"	Acceptance	This is the only section that is not preceded by a pause; the motif from "Sadness," now with a new character, transforms into a waltz before finally fading away

The first section, "Sadness," is characterized by a repeated **motif** in the clarinet and cello. Over the top of this, the horn enters with a mournful melody. At first, the music is calm and stately. The melody, however, becomes increasingly agitated as it is passed from the horn to the clarinet. The volume increases and the rhythm loses its stability, until eventually we hear cries of anguish from the clarinet. When the opening motif returns, it is with a sense of resignation.

The second section, "Anxiety," opens with a related motif, but the tempo is faster and the rhythm more agitated. This section is characterized by frequent change, as if the protagonist cannot get settled into place. Background motifs continually emerge, only to disintegrate and transform. There is no sense of key or tonal center. Instead, the pitches float uncomfortably in space.

"Anger and Denial," the third section, opens with a series of dissonant chords, after which an aggressive motif in the cello establishes a frenetic tempo. The energy continues to build, and the music is frequently interrupted by pauses and rhythmic shifts. When the motif from the opening of the piece returns, marking the beginning of the "Acceptance" section, it has been transformed: It is now loud, strong, and insistent. This statement is followed by a new, waltz-like melody in the clarinet that returns us to the opening motif, now restored to its original character. Following the emotional journey of the piece, however, the motif means something new. It communicates sadness, yes, but the self-conscious sadness of one who has come to terms with loss.

This is the first textbook ever to include the music of Likhuta—and it may be the last. She is still near the beginning of her career, and although she has been very successful, it is difficult to predict which composers or works will enter the permanent concert repertoire and which will not. There is no doubt that *Lesions* is an excellent piece of music that deserves to be heard for a long time. However, countless such pieces have flashed into existence over the centuries, only to disappear when they fail to attract the attention of an influential performer or publisher. Permanency is largely a matter of chance. This visit with Likhuta,

therefore, is a valuable reminder that, for every “famous” composer or work of the past, there are thousands of wonderful compositions and creators awaiting (re)discovery.

## ANOUSHKA SHANKAR, RAGA MADHUVANTI

We will conclude this chapter with a consideration of how cultural context can facilitate musical storytelling even in the absence of a specific text. Every example that we have considered thus far has been accompanied at some level by a description. In the case of Berlioz, we had a long prose explanation from the composer himself. In the case of Mussorgsky, references to the titles of paintings. In the case of Vivaldi, a poem. The titles of the two Chinese examples refer us to a historical event on the one hand and a poem on the other, while Likhuta explains how her composition connects with lived experience. This final example also has specific meaning, but it is only available to those initiated into the musical tradition from which it comes. While anyone can enjoy the sounds of “Raga Madhuvanti,” its meaning is unveiled only when one positions it correctly within the web of North Indian musical and artistic practice.

Before we can approach our example, we need to know something about North Indian classical music. It is important to note that this text can provide only a shallow and perfunctory glimpse of a tradition that requires a lifetime of dedication to master. Like their Western counterparts, North Indian classical musicians immerse themselves in their tradition for decades before claiming any sort of authority. But as with European classical music, a listener does not need to master the theoretical nuances in order to enjoy a performance.

### Raga Theory

The North Indian classical music of today combines relatively modern instruments and practices with a theoretical system that dates to the 9th century. Here, we will focus on the concept of **raga**, which is roughly analogous to the scale. Unlike the scale, however, which provides a composer or performer only with a set of pitches and some information about their hierarchy (the first note of the scale, for example, is the most important), a raga carries a great weight of information, both musical and extramusical (having to do with non-sounding elements). Ragas are sometimes used as the basis for fixed compositions, but more often they are explored in an **improvised** performance—a practice that we will explore below. It is impossible to determine the precise number of ragas in existence. About five hundred seem to be in use at any given time, while an individual musician might master a few dozen.

We will use Raga Madhuvanti<sup>11</sup> as an example. Raga Madhuvanti contains seven distinct pitches, just like the Western scale. However, the pitches found in Raga Madhuvanti are not found in any Western mode. If we were to imagine starting from a major scale, the third pitch would be flat but the fourth would be sharp,

creating a large gap between them. In addition, the pitches contained in a raga vary depending on whether one is ascending or descending. The most important scale degree in Raga Madhuvanti is 1, while the second most important is 5.

11.



This video begins by demonstrating the ascending and descending forms of Raga Madhuvanti. It then demonstrates some of the typical melodic fragments before concluding with a sample song.

This is already more information about performance practice than one can derive from a Western scale, but we have only begun. Each of the pitches indicated above must be precisely tuned, for North Indian music employs **microtones**, or pitches that fall between the keys on the piano. These must be learned by ear—and are unique to a given raga. Each pitch must also be approached and ornamented in the correct manner, for this is a rich vocabulary of slides, **vibratos**, and **trills**. Raga Madhuvanti also contains prescribed resting places for the melody as it develops. Any melody played in Raga Madhuvanti will be further shaped by a vocabulary of typical phrases that identify the raga. Finally, one cannot incorporate any additional pitches without destroying the raga.

But we have still only begun. It is now time to move on to the extramusical characteristics of Raga Madhuvanti. To begin with, Raga Madhuvanti is used to express gentle, loving, and romantic sentiments. In particular, it communicates the emotion that one feels for one's beloved. It is also considered sweet and playful. The root of the name, "madhu," translates to "honey." The character of the raga is captured in poetry and paintings known as **ragamalas**. The practice of personifying musical ragas through verse began in the 14th century, which in turn inspired the miniature paintings of the 16th and 17th centuries. There are no classical representations of Raga Madhuvanti, which was developed in the 1930s, but we can still link it to art. Ragas are organized into families, known as *thaat*, and Madhuvanti belongs to the Todi *thaat*. Ragas in a family share a variety of musical and



**Image 6.22: A ragamala portraying Raga Todi, dating from 1591. In this image, she holds a rudra vina, which was the most important melody instrument from the 16th through the 19th centuries but which has now been replaced by the sitar. The presence of the instrument suggests the sound of the raga, even though it is unheard.**

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extramusical characteristics. Raga Todi is portrayed as a beautiful woman, the wife of Raga Hindol, who is separated from her lover. She is always surrounded by deer, and focuses her attention on the buck, who represents masculine virility.

At this point we've wandered a bit far from our topic—but all of this is relevant to the understanding of Raga Madhuvanti, which is traditionally considered to possess a spiritual existence independent of any performance or description. When we say that Raga Madhuvanti was “developed” in the 1930s, that is not quite correct. It might be better to say that it was “discovered,” for most musicians would agree that ragas exist whether or not they are named and performed. When a musician begins to perform a raga, they embark upon the lifelong task of becoming acquainted with it, as if it were another human being. Every encounter reveals new facets of the raga, which cannot be fully captured in any single performance.

Finally, Raga Madhuvanti, like all ragas, is associated with a specific season and time of day. Raga Madhuvanti is an evening raga that should be performed during the fourth quarter of the day—or, roughly, between 4 and 8 pm. It is also considered appropriate for the summer season. At one time, these associations were taken very seriously. The North Indian classical tradition developed in the courts, where musicians played ragas that were suited to the moment. A morning raga for the monsoon season, for example, would be heard only on a monsoon morning. In the courts, musicians played constantly, and were therefore able to maintain correlations between ragas and time markers. With the rise of concert life in the 20th century, however, this became impossible, and North Indian classical musicians today generally perform ragas without concern for time or season. Nevertheless, these associations linger.

## Tala Theory

This has been an overview of raga theory, which concerns the melodic and extramusical contents of a performance. Tala theory, which concerns rhythmic content, is equally complex, but we will largely pass over it here due to the fact that it is difficult for untrained listeners to perceive the rhythmic nuances of North Indian classical music. We will note only that a **tala** is a pattern of beats used in the performance of a raga. The number of beats in a tala can range from three to 128, although most contain between six and sixteen beats. Beats can be strong or weak, and each is characterized by a specific percussive sound. A tala, therefore, is best thought of as a cycle of timbres. This is simple enough, but a drummer will almost never play the cycle unadorned. Instead, they will improvise complex rhythms over the tala, which exists only in the imagination of the performers and listeners.

Ragas and talas are not paired up one-to-one, but only specific talas may be used with a given raga. We will be hearing a performance of Raga Madhuvanti paired with Rupak Tala, which contains seven beats divided into three groups containing three, two, and two beats respectively. North Indian classical musicians learn talas by reciting the syllables associated with each beat, which in turn represent that sound of the drum and indicate how it is to be struck to create that sound. The

syllables for the seven beats of Rupak Tala<sup>12</sup> are Tin Tin Na Dhin Na Dhin Na. The most common percussion instrument in North Indian classical music is the tabla, which is a pair of small drums—one a bit larger than the other—that are played with the hands. “Tin” indicates a resonant stroke with the right hand, while “Na” is a damped stroke with the right hand and “Dhin” is a resonant stroke with both hands. An accomplished player will be careful to use the correct fingers with the appropriate force in exactly the right spot on the drum head.

12.



This video includes a demonstration of Rupak Tala. The tabla player only performs the basic 7-beat tala once. He then begins to introduce variations. However, you can track beats of the tala by tapping or clapping.

## Instruments and Transmission

We are finally ready to consider a modern performance of Raga Madhuvanti. We will begin with the instruments, one of which—the tabla—has already been introduced. All North Indian classical music is performed over a drone, which usually consists of the two most important notes in the raga. In the case of Raga Madhuvanti, as noted above, those are the first and fifth scale degrees. The drone is most often performed on a tanpura. This long-necked lute is almost completely hollow and therefore extremely resonant. It has no frets and cannot be used to play melodies. Instead, the performer lightly plucks each of the four strings in turn to create a sustained drone. The tanpura is most often played by an apprentice of the soloist.



**Image 6.23: The tanpura is held vertically by the player, who plucks the strings one at a time.**

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The sitar is capable of producing its own drone, but it is a much more complicated instrument and is used primarily to perform the raga. Today, the sitar is the most common North Indian melodic instrument. It was made famous in the second half of the 20th century by the virtuoso Ravi Shankar, who influenced The Beatles (see Chapter 8) and frequently performed at popular music festivals (including Woodstock, discussed in Chapter 7). The sitar, however, is not a particularly ancient instrument, dating only to the 18th century.

Like the tanpura, the sitar has a hollow neck and is highly resonant. Both instruments also produce a light, metallic buzzing sound that is essential to the timbre. Unlike the tanpura, the sitar has large, arched frets.

Melodies are played on the strings that run across them. These strings can either be pressed down, shortening the length of the string, or pulled to the side, increasing the tension on the string. Both actions change the note produced when the string is plucked, and they can be combined to produce the effect of sliding between pitches.

Sitars in fact have three different types of strings. The top three are used to play the melody. Below these are three or four strings that are used to produce the drone. Most interesting, however, are the twelve to fourteen **sympathetic strings** that run down the neck behind the frets. These strings are tuned to the pitches of the raga and resonate when the same pitches are played on the melody strings, thereby contributing to the vibrancy of the instrument's sound. They can also be strummed.

Mastering the sitar is comparable in difficulty to mastering the nuances of the raga and tala systems. Traditionally, aspiring musicians committed themselves



**Image 6.24: Anoushka Shankar is one of the most famous living sitar players.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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to a **guru**, or teacher, at a young age. The student would move in with the guru and become part of the family, completing household tasks in return for musical guidance. Although this system has largely been replaced by private lessons and music schools in the European model, both of the musicians we will discuss here learned their craft immersively in the traditional way. One is Ravi Shankar, who was apprenticed to sarod player Allauddin Khan, and the other is Anoushka Shankar, who learned from her father.

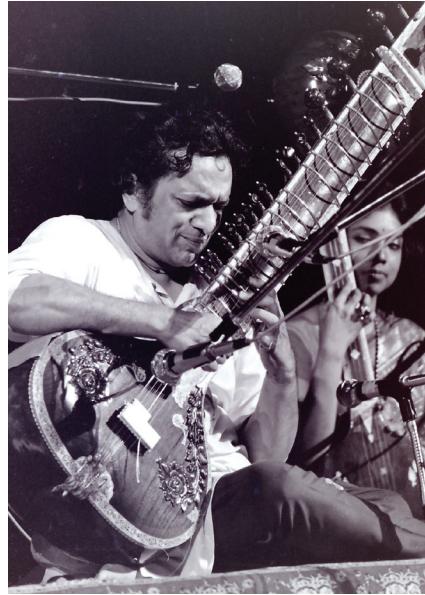
## The Shankars

Ravi Shankar (1920-2012) is remembered as the performer who popularized North Indian music in the West. He began his regular tours of Europe and the United States in 1956. At concerts, he focused on educating audiences about his instrument—the sitar—and the North Indian classical tradition, winning fans in the process. In the 1960s he began to form relationships with popular musicians, including George Harrison of The Beatles. He was invited to participate in both of the major popular music festivals of the 1960s: the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival and the 1969 Aquarian Exposition, better known as Woodstock (see Chapter 7). His influence can be heard on a number of rock albums from the era, including The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (see Chapter 8).

Ravi's daughter Anoushka was born in London in 1981, when Ravi was sixty-one years old. She began training with him at the age of seven, and was soon appearing beside him onstage playing the tanpura. Anoushka gave her first solo performance at the age of thirteen, making her first studio recording shortly thereafter. Although she is certainly a master of the North Indian classical tradition, Anoushka has been primarily interested in cross-cultural collaborations, and has released a series of albums that explore the connections between different musical traditions. Like her father, she has also maintained connection with the world of popular music. Her most frequent collaborator is singer Norah Jones—who also happens to be her half-sister.

## Raga Madhuvanti

We will focus on Anoushka's rendition of Raga Madhuvanti, made live at a Carnegie Hall concert in 2000. Ravi's recording will serve for comparison, for



**Image 6.25:** This photograph captures Ravi Shankar performing at the Woodstock festival in 1969.

Source: Wikipedia

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although both are performances of Raga Madhuvanti, they are quite different and cannot be considered to represent “the same piece.” In the North Indian tradition, the roles of composer and performer are essentially indistinguishable. A player “composes” in the process of performing a raga, improvising melodic motifs and shapes. At the same time, the identity of the raga is paramount, and two performances of the same raga are therefore expected to communicate similar emotional and expressive content.

Both recordings are considerably shorter than a traditional performance, which might extend to an hour or more. This is typical of the modern era, for audiences desire variety and expect to hear several ragas on a concert. Both recordings, however, exhibit the traditional structure of a raga performance, which is in two large parts.

In the first part of a performance, termed the *alap*, Anoushka introduces the notes of Raga Madhuvanti.<sup>13</sup> This is done slowly and deliberately over the course of nearly ten minutes. She establishes the notes in order, ornamenting them with characteristic slides and melodic fragments. Because the notes of the raga must be presented from lowest to highest, her playing begins in the low range and gradually extends into the high. Once Anoushka has established all of the notes, she gradually introduces a regular pulse into the music. This pulse quickens, and she begins to play with increased rhythmic activity. As a result, the *alap*, which begins in a meditative mood, concludes with breathtaking excitement.

13.



*Alap of Raga Madhuvanti*  
Performance: Anoushka Shankar (2001)

Our recording of the *alap* closes with applause from the audience, but this is not the end of the performance. However, musicians in the North Indian classical tradition don’t think of “performance” in the same way as Western classical musicians. There is seldom a clear beginning to the rendition of a raga, which instead emerges gradually from a process of strumming and tuning (activities that a Western player might describe as “warming up”). A performer will often continue to adjust their tuning throughout the *alap*. These habits reflect the continuity between “practice” and “performance” that is characteristic of the North Indian classical tradition. Every rendition of a raga—whether executed in privacy or before an audience—brings the performer and listener one step closer to really “knowing” it.

The second part of the performance is called the *jhala*.<sup>14</sup> Its beginning is marked by the entrance of the tabla, which establishes the tala (rhythmic cycle). In this case, we are hearing the seven-beat Rupak Tala, as described above. The role of the sitar also changes at this point. While Anoushka has been freely improvising thus far, now she plays a fixed melody called a *gat*. Such melodies are usually traditional, and they can be heard in many different performances of the same raga. For the

remainder of the *jhala*, Anoushka improvises using fragments of the *gat* according to the rules associated with Raga Madhuvanti. One can recognize the *gat* from time to time as Anoushka works it into the fabric of her playing. As in the *alap*, she increases the rhythmic complexity and virtuosity of her improvisations as she builds to the exciting conclusion.

14.



*Jhala* of Raga Madhuvanti  
Performance: Anoushka Shankar (2001)

## Comparing Performances

A brief consideration of Ravi's performance of Raga Madhuvanti<sup>15</sup> reveals the flexibility that characterizes the North Indian classical tradition. His *alap* is very brief: less than two minutes, in comparison with Anoushka's ten. He establishes the pitches of the raga much more quickly, and his playing is lively from the start. At the beginning of the *jhala*, he plays a completely different *gat*, which then leads into an extremely long improvisation—twenty minutes—that, because it is founded on a different *gat*, sounds nothing like Anoushka's. In short, the two recordings of Raga Madhuvanti have very little in common. They are not, in a Western sense, recordings of the same piece of music.

15.



This performance of Raga Madhuvanti by Ravi Shankar offers an excellent opportunity to determine what constitutes the essential character of a raga. As the listener will easily observe, it is quite different from Anoushka's performance.

They are, however, recordings of the same raga, which brings us back to the question that opened this chapter: How can sound tell a story? An experienced listener will hear these two performances as both communicating aspects of the essential character of Raga Madhuvanti. Neither of these performances tells a specific story, containing a narrative, events, or characters (like we encountered in Berlioz's *Fantastical Symphony*). However, each is decidedly dramatic, insofar as it engages with and elucidates the extramusical character of the raga. A listener will know that Raga Madhuvanti is associated with the evening and that it expresses romantic love. They might also be familiar with the poetry or paintings that have captured and contributed to the raga's character. Each performance, therefore, adds to the grander narrative of Raga Madhuvanti—a narrative that stretches across generations and continents.

This example also presents an opportunity to discuss the non-universality of programmatic musical expression. Do you hear these performances as expressing

the sentiment of romantic love? Do you hear them as playful? Do you connect them with the evening, or the summer? Do you even hear them as communicating the same emotional content as one another? The answer may very well be no. Most music communicates meaning within a cultural context. In this case, that meaning is determined by the listener's familiarity with North Indian classical music, with the raga system in general, and with Raga Madhuvanti in particular. A lifetime of exposure to this music will lead one to make the correct emotional connections. Those emotions, however, are not inherent in the music and not obvious to every listener. This is true of every musical tradition.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Print

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### Online

Catherine Likhuta's website: <http://www.catherinelikhuta.com/>

# **Unit 3**

**MUSIC FOR ENTERTAINMENT**

# 7

## Listening at Public Concerts

*Esther M. Morgan-Ellis and Louis Hajosy*

### INTRODUCTION

Most of us know what a concert is, even if we've never been to one. They are common across categories of music and always follow the same basic formula: members of the public assemble at a given time and place to hear a soloist or ensemble present a prepared program of music. Concerts always tend to be **presentational** in nature (that is to say, there is a clear divide between performer and audience member), although behavioral norms vary across genres. Attendees at a Christian rock concert might get involved with worship, while hip-hop fans might dance, country fans might sing along, and audience members at an orchestral concert might sit in quiet contemplation or follow along with the printed score (a book of music that contains all of the orchestral parts). For the most part, concerts are intended to entertain ticket holders and to turn a profit for the artists and producers who present them.

In this chapter, we will examine four specific concerts that were staged in Europe and the United States between 1808 and 1969. We will consider the purpose for each concert, learn about the composers and producers involved in its presentation, and listen closely to a single musical work or performance. Each of these concerts was unique, and they span the gamut in terms of venue, audience, and repertoire. In order to set the stage for our encounter with concert culture, however, a brief overview of music as public entertainment is in order.

Despite the ubiquity of concerts today, musical performance as a major commercial venture has a relatively short history. In Europe, professional music first thrived in courts and churches. The wealthy staged elaborate musical presentations—such as the opera *Orpheus* (1607) at the court in Mantua, discussed in Chapter 4—for their own private consumption, but tickets were not put on sale. The Catholic church employed professional singers—such as Giovanni da Palestrina (1525-1594) at the Sistine chapel, discussed in Chapter 11—to provide music for worship services, but the music they produced was not intended to have entertainment value.

The first musical presentations for which members of the public could buy tickets were operas, which became available when the St. Cassiano Theater opened

in Venice in 1637. Opera quickly became big business. Large crowds flocked to theaters to see the glamorous singers, fabulous costumes, and astonishing stage sets. However, there was one problem: In most places, the church authorities prohibited the performance of opera during the season of Lent. Lent, which constitutes the forty days preceding Easter, is the most solemn period in the church calendar. Members of most European Christian communities—most importantly, Catholics—were expected to abstain from frivolity and pass their time in spiritual contemplation. Opera was simply too exciting and fun.

Concerts, therefore, were first introduced as a solemn alternative to opera. The most successful early concert series was launched in Paris in 1725. It was titled the Concert Spirituel, and—as the name suggests—offered uplifting entertainment that would not offend the Catholic Church. These early concerts included a great deal of variety. In addition to choral works with a sacred message, the program was likely to include concertos, arias, and improvisations. Most of the music would have been recently composed and, despite the advertising, was not explicitly sacred. In order to replicate the thrills of opera as closely as possible, each concert began the same way as an operatic performance: The first thing on the program was always a *sinfonia* for orchestra in three parts, or movements, ordered fast-slow-fast. Over time, this became the **symphony**, perhaps the most important genre of composition for orchestra.



**Image 7.1: This poster advertises a 1754 performance in the Concert Spirituel series. The program included a symphony, sacred Catholic music for choir, two violin concertos (one performed by an 11-year-old girl), and Italian songs. This type of variety was typical of early public concerts.**

Source: Wikipedia

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During the 18th and 19th centuries, concerts became more and more important in European life. At the same time, orchestral music grew in prominence, and came to be understood as being more dignified and serious than opera. The idea of a concert as commercial entertainment, however, was never confined to the orchestra. In the 1830s, for example, the Hungarian pianist Franz Liszt began to give solo piano recitals across Europe (his career and music are discussed in Chapter 9). In the last 150 years, the concert model has been increasingly adopted by traditions outside of Europe. The first Chinese orchestra, the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, was formed in 1879, while Indian classical musicians, who had formerly been employed by courts, began to stage public concerts near the turn of the century. These developments reflected a growing reliance on capitalistic economic models throughout the world, as musicians began to rely on ticket sales rather than aristocratic patronage.

The modern concert economy works in tandem with the recording industry, which has helped performing artists to gain international fame since the early 20th century. When you choose to buy tickets to a concert, it is usually because you already know and enjoy the music you are going to hear. This is a change from the earliest concerts, which were understood as an opportunity to introduce new music to the public. Such was the case with our first example.

## 1808: A CONCERT BY LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

### The Composer

In 1808, the German composer and pianist Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was at the height of his career. He was living and working in the city of Vienna, which at the time was emerging as the musical capital of Europe. He had moved there in 1792 at the age of 21 to study with the famous composer Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809). Unfortunately, Haydn had just departed to present a concert series in London, so the two composers ended up having very little contact. By the time Haydn returned, Beethoven was already well established as a virtuoso pianist and composer of piano music.

In 1798, however, an unforeseen health concern threatened to end Beethoven's career: He began to go deaf. While loss of hearing would be a hardship for anyone, for Beethoven it was catastrophic. As a pianist, he relied on his hearing to play with orchestras. And as a musician, hearing was the sense that he valued most. Growing deafness



**Image 7.2: The portrait of Beethoven was completed by Josef Willibord Mähler when the composer was about 25 years old.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Joseph Willibord Mähler

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**Image 7.3: This Viennese vista was painted by Bernardo Bellotto shortly before Beethoven was born.**

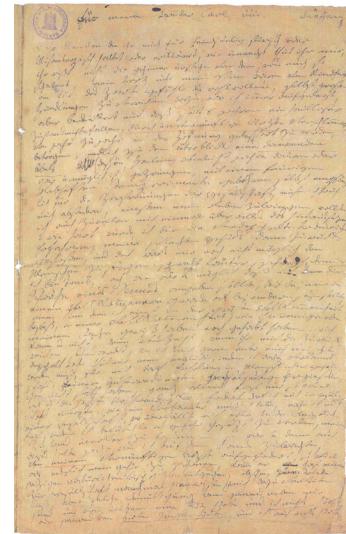
Source: Wikimedia Commons

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took its toll not only on Beethoven's professional life but on his social life as well, and he began to avoid gatherings of people out of fear that his disability would be detected. In an 1802 letter to his brothers, Carl and Johann, Beethoven wrote about the shame he felt related to his hearing loss: "How could I possibly admit such an infirmity in the one sense which should have been more perfect in me than in others, a sense which I once possessed in highest perfection, a perfection such as few surely in my profession enjoy or have enjoyed - O I cannot do it."

This letter is known today as the Heiligenstadt Testament, due to the fact that it was written while Beethoven lived in the town of Heiligenstadt and was meant to serve as a last will and testament. It contains a great deal of insight into the composer's state of mind during these difficult years, including the fact that he considered ending his life out of despair at his deafness. However, as Beethoven wrote, "only art it was that withheld me," for "it seemed impossible to leave the world until I had produced all that I felt called upon me to produce."



**Image 7.4: Although the Heiligenstadt Testament remained private during Beethoven's lifetime, its posthumous discovery revealed his tormented state of mind following his diagnosis.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Ludwig van Beethoven

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It would seem that his intense need to compose music compelled him to carry on, in spite of his enormous loss.

The Heiligenstadt Testament remained unknown until it was found among Beethoven's papers following his death, for he never dispatched it to his brothers. However, it has since played an important role in cementing the public perception of Beethoven as an archetypical **Romantic** artist who became great through personal suffering. Before the 19th century, composers were seen as craftspeople. They created a product that was useful in everyday life, but they were not held in particularly high regard. Haydn, for example, although considered a great composer today, held the status of a servant for most of his lifetime (see Chapter 8).

In the early 19th century, however, things changed. The European public began to perceive prominent composers as “geniuses,” and they treated them with heightened respect. Where Haydn had been a servant, Beethoven was invited to dine with wealthy aristocrats and treated as their equal, or even superior. This change was brought about by economic and social transformations. A growing middle class meant that more people had the leisure time and financial means to consume art music, while a new set of Romantic values prioritized individual emotional expression. The public became particularly interested in portrayals of heartbreak, illness, and personal struggle—the same experiences that were understood to inform great artistic expression.

Beethoven suited the new requirements to a tee. He not only suffered deafness, but also endured repeated rejection from women (he never married) and a tempestuous family life. One of his tragic love affairs was captured in another letter, written in 1812 and addressed to a lady identified only as the “Immortal Beloved.” A few years later he lost his brother Karl to tuberculosis, despite his efforts to provide the best medical treatment. Following Karl’s death, Beethoven embarked on a bitter court battle to win custody of his brother’s son. After many years he prevailed, but the pressure he put on the child to follow in his own footsteps was so great that the boy attempted suicide. This is not the only example of Beethoven’s bad behavior. He was generally rude and inconsiderate of others, and was frequently evicted from his various lodgings for noise violations. He also practiced poor hygiene and frequently appeared disheveled in public. All of this, however, was not only



**Image 7.5:** This 1820 portrait by Karl Joseph Stieler captures the Romantic view of Beethoven. The composer looks annoyed to have been interrupted at his solitary work. His hair is messy and his dress is informal. His surroundings reflect the high value placed on nature in this era.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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forgiven but praised. Beethoven's antisocial behavior contributed to his reputation as a genius.

Scholars have long described Beethoven's career and output in terms of three periods: an early period, during which he primarily composed for the piano; a middle period, during which he focused on triumphant, large-scale works for public performance; and a late period, during which he became very experimental (indeed, some critics theorized that he had lost his mind). The 1808 concert that we about to explore marks the climax of Beethoven's middle period. At this time, his struggle with hearing loss was known to the public, and he had become famous across Europe for his dramatic and ambitious symphonic works.

## The Concert

Beethoven's most famous concert took place on December 22, 1808, at the Theater an der Wien (Theater on the Banks of the Vienna River). For Beethoven, this concert was an invaluable opportunity to make some money and to premiere some of his recent compositions. However, circumstances in Vienna at the time made putting on a concert very difficult, and Beethoven faced a number of challenges in staging this event, which in the end was not particularly successful.

To begin with, competition from opera meant that a concert could only succeed if the opera houses were closed. That explains the date of this concert,



**Image 7.6: This painting of the Theater an der Wien was completed in the early 20th century by Carl Wenzel Zajicek.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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which Beethoven scheduled to take place during the Catholic season of **Advent** (the four weeks leading up to Christmas). Unfortunately, the timing also had two undesirable consequences. Because there was a rush to present concerts during Advent, Beethoven found himself in competition with a much more prominent event taking place on the same night, and as a result he was not able to hire the top Viennese musicians. (Others simply refused to work with him due to his corrosive personality.) Another challenge came with the weather, for the hall was freezing cold on the night of the performance.

Even during Advent, it was difficult to put together a public concert. To begin with, there were no permanent orchestras in Vienna, so the concert organizer would have to recruit each individual musician, organize the rehearsal schedule, and arrange for payment. Booking a hall was also difficult. Beethoven was only able to do so because he happened to have a personal relationship with the director of the Theater an der Wien, for whom he had done various favors over the course of the year. Finally, putting on a concert required special permits from the government, which exercised tight control over public gatherings.

Under these adverse circumstances, it comes as no surprise that the December 22 concert did not go off without a hitch. Beethoven had to settle for second-rate performers, including an inexperienced soprano who struggled to overcome her nerves. However, most of the difficulties were of his own doing. To begin with, the concert was four hours long, which even in 1808 was considered trying. Beethoven saw the concert as an opportunity to share as many of his new works with the public as possible, so he did not restrain himself in assembling the program. In fact, Beethoven completed the final piece on the program only a few days before the concert, which created a further problem: His orchestra did not have time to learn it properly, and the performance fell apart so badly that Beethoven (who also served as **conductor**) had to stop and restart the work.

In keeping with the common practice of the time, Beethoven brought together works from a variety of genres for his concert. He also met expectations by starting with a symphony and including sacred vocal music. The most unusual aspect of his concert was that it featured music by only a single composer.

The evening began with his Symphony No. 6, also known as the “Pastoral” Symphony. This programmatic five-movement work portrays a visit to the countryside and takes about 40 minutes to perform. Next was *Ah! Deceiver*, the concert aria with which the young soprano struggled. This was followed by the Gloria from his Mass in C major and his Piano Concerto No. 4, with Beethoven as soloist.

The second half of the concert began with Symphony No. 5. After the Sanctus from the same Mass, Beethoven performed an improvised fantasy at the piano. Due to his progressing deafness, this was to be his last public performance as a pianist. The concert concluded with his new *Choral Fantasy*, an ambitious work for orchestra, choir, and vocal soloists.

The concert did not elicit positive reviews. In general, patrons thought that it was too long, too loud, and a bit overwhelming. As one of Beethoven’s supporters,

the composer and critic J.F Reichardt, put it: “There we sat, in the most bitter cold, from half past six until half past ten, and confirmed for ourselves the maxim that one may easily have too much of a good thing, still more of a powerful one.”

## Symphony No. 5

Despite its many shortcomings, Beethoven’s 1808 concert is remembered as one of the most remarkable of its era. December 22 marked both Beethoven’s last performance as a pianist and the premiere of many influential works. Symphony No. 6 later inspired Berlioz when he wrote his own programmatic symphony, the *Fantastical Symphony* (discussed in Chapter 6). The *Choral Fantasy* foreshadowed Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, which transformed the genre with the addition of choir and vocal soloists. And Symphony No. 5, which we will examine in some detail, has become perhaps Beethoven’s most famous composition.

Symphonies developed along with concert life. Due to their role as concert openers (and sometimes closers), 18th-century symphonies were usually lively and cheerful. They were almost always in the major mode. They were also fairly short, and composers tended to write a lot of them (Haydn composed 106). By the end of the 18th century, symphonies had four movements: a brisk opening movement, a slow second movement, a third movement inspired by dance, and an exciting finale.

While Symphony No. 5 is in many respects typical of the genre, it has a number of remarkable characteristics. Like other symphonies, it has four movements as outlined above. Unusually, however, these movements are linked by a single musical **motif** that is introduced at the beginning of the work: an ominous four-note pattern that was described by Beethoven’s first biographer as fate knocking at the door. This “fate motif” returns throughout the first movement and then in the subsequent movements as well—an unusual characteristic, since the movements of a symphony were usually kept independent from one another.

The technique by which a composer develops a large-scale work out of a single musical motif is known as **organicism**. While Beethoven was not the first composer to work in this way, he took the technique further than any had before him. Organicism was highly regarded in the Romantic era, when listeners wanted art to mirror nature. Just as a tree might grow from a tiny seed, Beethoven’s symphony grows from the opening “fate motif.”



**Image 7.7: This engraving captures the premiere of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 in 1824.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Symphony No. 5 is also notable for its drama and serious tone. Beethoven was responsible for elevating the symphonic genre, transforming symphonies from entertainment into the loftiest artistic expression. This is evidenced by his output: Beethoven wrote only nine symphonies, but each took years to complete and set new standards for length and complexity. Symphony No. 5 is in the key of C minor, which sets it apart from the cheerful curtain raisers of earlier composers, and the opening “fate motif” makes it clear that this is not just light entertainment. From the start, listeners felt as if the symphony was trying to communicate something. It seemed rife with conflict and action. To understand what it might communicate, however, we will have to look at the music.

### Sonata Form

The first movement, like that of all symphonies (and most other instrumental works) of the time, is in what is known as **sonata form**. Sonata form developed gradually during the course of the 18th century. Nobody invented it: Instead, a variety of composers experimented with formal design until a consensus emerged. By the 19th century, the components of the form were firmly in place, and listeners knew what to expect from a first movement. This gave the composer a lot of power, for Beethoven was able to tell a story by satisfying or frustrating the expectations of the audience.

A movement in sonata form has at least three parts: an Exposition (heard twice), in which contrasting themes are introduced; a Development, in which those themes are explored and transformed; and a Recapitulation, in which the themes from the Exposition are heard for a second time. The form also includes two optional parts. Some sonata-form movements open with an introduction, which is usually slow and stately. And many sonata-form movements conclude with a Coda, in which anything can happen. (The term “**coda**” is derived from the Latin word for “tail.”) Key areas are very important in sonata form. The Exposition starts with a Primary Theme in the home key, but moves to a different key for a Secondary Theme and Closing Theme. The Recapitulation, on the other hand, is entirely in the home key. The Development can move through a variety of key areas.

Minor-mode sonata form movements—such as the first movement of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5—are particularly interesting, because the composer has options for the key of the Secondary Theme. While the Primary Theme in the Exposition must be in minor, the Secondary Theme can be in minor or major. In other words, the Secondary Theme can have a sad/serious character or it can be cheerful/relaxing. If the Secondary Theme is presented in major in the Exposition, it can also be major in the Recapitulation—but the listener can’t be sure until they hear it!

**Movement I**

		Symphony No. 5, Movement I Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven Performance: Dallas Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jaap van Zweden (2012)
Time	Form	What to listen for
<b>Exposition</b>		
0'00"	Primary Theme	The first thing we hear is the four-note “fate” motif, which will return throughout the movements
0'43"	Secondary Theme	This major-mode theme starts with the same motif, but its character is at first calm and restful
1'05"	Closing Theme	This theme is jubilant—it seems to have recovered from the angst of the Primary Theme
1'23"	Repetition of Exposition	We hear all of the preceding music for a second time
<b>Development</b>		
2'45"		This section is dominated by the four-note “fate” motif, which we hear countless times
<b>Recapitulation</b>		
4'01"	Primary Theme	The Recapitulation opens with the “fate” motif, which comes crashing back in the full orchestra
4'17		The Primary Theme is mostly identical to that heard in the Exposition, with the exception of this dramatic oboe solo
4'49"	Secondary Theme	This theme is still in the major mode, suggesting that the movement might have a happy ending
5'15"	Closing Theme	This theme is also in the major mode, suggesting that the movement will conclude in major

**Coda**

5'31"

The Coda turns almost immediately to minor; like the Development, it is dominated by the “fate” motif

6'01"

This entirely new theme suggests labor and struggle

6'33"

The movement ends almost exactly as it began

Beethoven used all of the sonata form tricks in the first movement of Symphony No. 5. The Primary Theme is stormy and anxious, not only because it is in C minor. The initial sounding of the fate motif by unison strings is obviously threatening, while the quick tempo and violent changes in dynamic that follow do nothing to calm the mood. The Secondary Theme, however, is in E-flat major, and it offers a moment of peace. Perhaps there is a chance to escape the storm.

In the Development, Beethoven was free to use any of the themes from the Exposition. However, he only explores the fate motif, which is heard dozens of times in all ranges and at all dynamic levels. Finally, he uses the fate motif to crash back into the Recapitulation. Following the Primary Theme, however, this is a plaintive, unmetered oboe solo that was not heard in the Exposition. This comes as a startling surprise, for the Recapitulation should not include any new musical material. What does it mean? Beethoven’s audience must have wondered. The Secondary Theme, which could return in major or minor, is in C major, and the Recapitulation concludes in C major. This seems to suggest a “happy ending” for the movement.

However, Beethoven is not finished. A massive Coda—which listeners would not necessarily have expected—immediately returns us to C minor. A new, pounding theme is introduced. After about a minute, we hear the fate motif one last time, followed by the first measures of the Primary Theme and a final cadence. The happy ending has escaped us, and we find ourselves back in the terrifying sonic world of the opening measures.

The story told by the first movement of Symphony No. 5 is certainly not a happy one. Despite moments of respite (the Secondary Theme), the listener is haunted throughout by the fate motif, and the devastating conclusion to the Coda reveals that we have not escaped it. Indeed, we are left right where we started. However, the symphony as a whole tells a more uplifting story. The second movement—a theme and variations—is calm and beautiful. It offers repose after the stormy opening. The third movement uses the fate motif as the basis for an aggressive march. The movement concludes, however, with a mysterious passage that ultimately transitions triumphantly into the fourth movement, which is in a resounding C major.

**Movement IV**

		Symphony No. 5, Movement IV Composer: Ludwig van Beethoven Performance: Dallas Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Jaap van Zweden (2012)
Time	Form	What to listen for
<b>Exposition</b>		
0'00"	Primary Theme	This theme opens with a triumphant statement in the brass that ascends through the pitches of a major triad before returning to the tonic; next, the violins repeatedly play an ascending major scale
0'30"	Transition Theme	Although transition themes are not always memorable, this one features a powerful motif in the low brass
0'53"	Secondary Theme	This theme is more relaxed than the Primary Theme; it has a dance-like lilt
1'17"	Closing Theme	The energy builds again with this theme
<b>Development</b>		
3'27"		This section is dominated by the Secondary Theme
4'51"		This passage quotes Movement III; in it, we hear the short-short-short-long rhythmic motif that dominated Movement I
<b>Recapitulation</b>		
5'20"	Primary Theme	This presentation is nearly identical to that in the Exposition
5'50"	Transition Theme	This presentation is similar to that in the Exposition, but it does not change key
6'16"	Secondary Theme	This presentation is nearly identical to that in the Exposition

6'40"	Closing Theme	This presentation is similar to that in the Exposition, but it is extended and builds into the Coda
<b>Coda</b>		
7'06"		The Coda begins with material from the Secondary Theme
7'33"		This passage contains new thematic material
8'12"		At this point, the tempo greatly accelerates
8'35"		We hear a fast-paced version of the motif that opened the movement; the Coda ends with a series of accented chords

To see how the story ends, we will take a close look at the fourth movement, which opens with a brilliant trumpet fanfare. The Exposition maintains a sense of joy and excitement throughout, but the Development introduces conflict as sections of the orchestra wrestle the themes through minor keys. The Development concludes with a repetition of the minor-mode march theme from the third movement. This was highly unusual for the time, and must have shocked Beethoven's audience. Once a movement was over, they didn't expect to hear its themes again. The march theme, which is presented in a quiet **pizzicato** by the strings, introduces a sense of uncertainty and discomfort, but it once again transitions into a triumphant Recapitulation. This time, the Coda—which accelerates to a breakneck tempo—provides the joyful ending that we were denied in the first movement.

Listeners in 1808 did not just hear Symphony No. 5 as a piece of music for orchestra. They heard it as an autobiographical account of Beethoven's personal struggle with hearing loss. The opening motif represented his own tragic fate, and the first movement expressed his suffering. The final movement, however, portrayed his victory over fate. He had struggled with his disability and had emerged triumphant. This narrative trajectory from darkness to light would later be imitated by other composers, including Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (Symphony No. 4) and Dmitri Shostakovich (Symphony No. 5, discussed in Chapter 10), each of whom also sought to tell a musical story about overcoming adversity.

## 1924: AN EXPERIMENT IN MODERN MUSIC

When bandleader Paul Whiteman put together his 1924 concert entitled *An Experiment in Modern Music*, he was trying to do much more than make money.

He was on a mission to legitimize his field of music: jazz. However, he wasn't concerned with promoting the interests of jazz's African American originators. Instead, he sought to convince white audiences that jazz—a suspect genre, due to its origins in the black community and associations with drinking and dancing—could be transformed into legitimate art by white composers and musicians such as himself. His concert, although profoundly racist in intent, is remembered for introducing one of the most beloved concert pieces of the 20th century: George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.

### Paul Whiteman and George Gershwin

Although few recognize his name today, Paul Whiteman was the most famous and successful bandleader of the 1920s. He specialized in what was known as “**sweet jazz**,”<sup>1</sup> a kind of lively dance music intended for white consumers. Most modern listeners would have a hard time identifying his music as jazz. Instead, we tend to reserve that term for the more rhythmically interesting performances put on by African American dance bands of the era—a type of music known at the time as “**hot jazz**.<sup>2</sup> To hear the contrast, one might compare Whiteman’s biggest hit, “Whispering” (1920), with “East St. Louis Toodle-Oo” (1927) as recorded by Duke Ellington and his Washingtonians. Whiteman’s recording is notable for its lively tempo, square rhythms, precise pitches, and instrumentation (his band included a violin section). “Whispering” is suitable dance music, to be sure, but it lacks the spontaneity and excitement of “East St. Louis Toodle-Oo.”



**Image 7.8:** This 1934 photograph depicts Paul Whiteman with his characteristic mustache and extra-long baton.

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1.



Whiteman’s biggest hit, “Whispering” (1920), exemplifies his “sweet jazz” sound.

2.



Duke Ellington’s 1927 recording of “East St. Louis Toodle-Oo” provides a good example of “hot jazz.”

Despite his massive success, Whiteman still faced considerable opposition as a jazz musician in the 1920s. Many white people were deeply worried about the dangerous effects that jazz might have on society. The rhythms of jazz prompted dancers to do things with their bodies that were not considered appropriate, while its association with nightclubs meant that it encouraged other immoral behaviors as well. However, the biggest concern—if often unspoken—was with the increasing influence of African American music on mainstream culture. To make jazz acceptable, therefore, Whiteman understood that he needed to make it white.

The purpose of Whiteman's concert was to illustrate the evolution of jazz from a rough and untutored product of African American culture into a sophisticated form of concert music. In order to tell this story, however, he needed a special piece with which to end his program—a piece that would combine elements of jazz with the European concert tradition, thereby synthesizing the two traditions and proving the potential for jazz to become art. He decided to approach one of the leading popular song composers of the day, George Gershwin, and requested that he write and perform a jazz-inspired piano **concerto**.



**Image 7.9:** This undated photograph depicts George Gershwin around the time that he composed *Rhapsody in Blue*.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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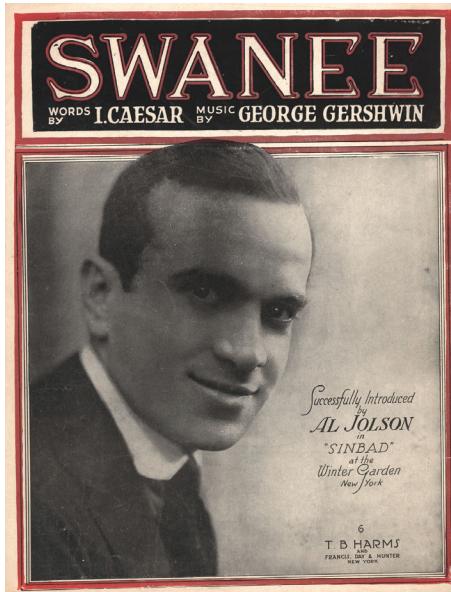
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In 1924, George Gershwin (1898-1937) was still a young man, but he had already made a name for himself as a Broadway songwriter. Gershwin was born into a family of Russian Jewish immigrants who had settled in Brooklyn. He revealed a talent for music when his parents bought a piano for his older brother, Ira. While Ira had little interest in playing, George was fascinated with the instrument and demonstrated an uncanny ability to pick out familiar tunes on the keys. He subsequently took lessons in piano and composition.

In 1913, Gershwin left school to take a job as a **song plugger** with the music publisher Jerome H. Remick. At the time, the principle product of the popular music industry was sheet music, which allowed Americans to perform songs with piano accompaniment in their own homes. (Phonograph records were just beginning to sell in large numbers.) Music

publishers, therefore, did whatever they could to build public interest in their products. Consumers were most likely to buy the sheet music for a song that they had heard and enjoyed at a theater or in a nightclub. The role of a song plugger, therefore, was to ensure that the songs published by a given company were heard as frequently as possible. Gershwin's job was to promote Remick songs to professional singers. Each day, performers would visit the publishing house to try

out the latest products, and Gershwin would play new songs for them on the piano. If he was lucky, the performer would add a Remick song to their act, thereby providing valuable advertising for the sheet music.



**Image 7.10: The cover of the sheet music for Gershwin's 1919 hit "Swanee." A photograph of Al Jolson, the singer who made it famous, appears on the cover.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: George Gershwin and Irving Caesar

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Although Gershwin was good at his job, he was not content to play songs written by other people. He began composing his own songs, and had his first big hit in 1919 with "Swanee." As was always the case, "Swanee" began to sell when it was picked up by a star performer—in this case, the hottest singer of the decade, Al Jolson. The song was perfect for Jolson, for he specialized in blackface performances of numbers written from an imagined African American perspective. "Swanee" joined a long tradition of songs that expressed a nostalgic longing for the South. Indeed, Gershwin took the name "Swanee" from the famous Stephen Foster song "Old Folks at Home" (1851)—an early **"plantation song"** that used dialect to indicate the race of the narrator. Although the text to Gershwin's song is not in dialect, its stereotyped references to banjos, Dixie, and "Mammy" made it clear that the narrator was black. None of this proves that Gershwin harbored any racial animosity or

his own. Instead, it exemplifies how common racist stereotypes were in mainstream entertainment of the era.

Following the success of "Swanee," Gershwin quickly made a name for himself as a leading composer of Broadway musicals. He worked primarily with his brother Ira, who wrote lyrics. Gershwin moved to Hollywood in 1936 to write music for film musicals, but died suddenly due to a brain tumor in July of 1937, when he was only 38 years old.

## The Concert

Whiteman's *Experiment in Modern Music* took place on February 12 at Aeolian Hall in New York City. He intended for the concert to be a significant social and cultural event, so all of the prominent performers, conductors, and critics of classical music were invited. This was not Whiteman's regular audience of enthusiastic young dancers, but rather an audience of skeptical highbrows whom he hoped to win over. The afternoon began, therefore, with a lecture, in which Whiteman explained how his project would benefit the art music community and bring more listeners to the opera house and concert hall.

The program itself was divided into two parts. The first ostensibly illustrated the evolution of jazz, while the second presented various syntheses of jazz and classical music, culminating in the premiere of *Rhapsody in Blue*. The concert opened with a section entitled “The True Form of Jazz.” Unsurprisingly, however, Whiteman’s idea about what constituted “real jazz” was poorly informed.

The first number on the program was “Livery Stable Blues,”<sup>3</sup> a piece that has gone down in history as the first ever to be recorded and marketed as jazz. The record, made in 1917 by the Original Dixieland Jass Band (the spelling of “jazz” was inconsistent in early years), had been enormously successful, thereby launching the jazz craze in Northern cities. However, there was nothing particularly “original” about the band or the record. To begin with, all of the members of the band were white, while the style in which they played had most certainly originated in the black communities of New Orleans. (The band leader, Nick LaRocca, created controversy in the 1950s when he continued to aggressively push the ridiculous claim that he had personally invented jazz.) Although the members of the band came from New Orleans, they had settled in Chicago and made a living playing music for dances, and they made their first records in New York City—environments far removed from the birthplace of jazz. Finally, the song itself was a particularly hokey example of Dixieland jazz. In it, the instrumentalists imitate various barnyard animals, thereby perpetuating stereotypes of black music as primitive and ridiculous.

3.



“Livery Stable Blues” appeared on the B side of the Original Dixieland Jass Band’s first record, recorded in New York City in 1917.



**Image 7.11: The exterior of Aeolian Hall in 1916.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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We will not examine the entire program in similar depth. Whiteman did not offer a particularly insightful survey of jazz history, and his concert was clearly designed to showcase the various capabilities of Whiteman’s band above all else. It also served, as we have seen, to erase the black origins of the style that Whiteman was trying to legitimize.

The second part of the concert began with Victor Herbert’s *A Suite of Serenades*—another piece that had been commissioned by Whiteman for the concert. Although



**Image 7.12: The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, right around the time they released their first record.**

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not particularly jazzy, the suite allowed the band to show off their ability to play highbrow music. The suite's four movements—Spanish, Chinese, Cuban, and Oriental—reveal that the fascination with exoticism in music that we saw at work in Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* had not died away. This was followed by *Rhapsody in Blue*, while Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1*—a piece that we all recognize from high school and college graduations—ended the program.

### ***Rhapsody in Blue***

Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* almost never came to be. The composer's initial response to Whiteman's request that he write a jazz-inspired concerto had been quite sensible: He said no. After all, Gershwin was a popular song composer, and a busy and successful one at that. He knew that he didn't have the time to take on the project, and he wasn't sure that he would be able to do it well. However, just five weeks before the concert was to take place, Ira read an announcement in the *New York Tribune* that his brother was hard at work on a piece to be premiered as part of the program. After that, Whiteman was able to convince Gershwin to join his project, for he would have been publicly embarrassed if he did not produce the concerto that had already been advertised.

## The Compositional Process

Luckily, Gershwin got some help from collaborators. Most importantly, while he composed a version of the concerto for two pianos (solo and accompaniment), he did not have to orchestrate it. That work was done by Ferde Grofé, a composer who was employed by Whiteman to produce arrangements for the band. Grofé was intimately familiar with the ensemble, so he was able to create parts that showed Whiteman's players to their best advantage. Because he had to use the musicians at hand, Grofé's initial **orchestration** was a little strange: He created parts for clarinet, various saxophones, trumpet, horn, trombone, tuba, string bass, percussion, piano, banjo, and eight violins. After the work proved successful, Grofé reorchestrated it, first for a small theater orchestra (1926) and then for full symphony orchestra (1942). When you hear *Rhapsody in Blue* today, you might be hearing any of these versions, although the last is the most common.

Grofé's contribution was the most important—especially since the young Gershwin did not yet have the skills necessary to write for a 23-part ensemble like Whiteman's. However, he was not the only collaborator to leave his mark on the concerto. The famous opening clarinet **glissando** was in fact the idea of the man who first played it, Ross Gorman. Although Gorman first added the glissando in rehearsal as a joke, Gershwin liked it and asked him to keep it for the performance. Finally, the concerto was given its name by Gershwin's brother Ira, who had recently seen an exhibition of paintings by James McNeill Whistler and was inspired by his color-centric titles (e.g. *Nocturne: Blue and Silver*).

The process by which *Rhapsody in Blue* came into being is interesting because



**Image 7.13: Ferde Grofé had a long and successful career as a composer and arranger.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 7.14: Clarinet player Ross Gorman is responsible for the glissando that opens Rhapsody in Blue.**

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it sheds light on the collaborative nature of artistic production. We like to think of the composer as a puppet master, controlling all elements of the creation of a new work, but that is almost never the case. It is much more common for musical works to develop through a process of give and take between various creative personalities. This is particularly true in the world of musical theater and opera, where Gershwin himself felt most at home.

All the same, it was Gershwin who came up with the melodies and decided how to use them. In 1931, Gershwin described how the idea for the concerto came to him:

It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattle-ty bang, that is so often so stimulating to a composer – I frequently hear music in the very heart of the noise. [...] And there I suddenly heard, and even saw on paper – the complete construction of the rhapsody, from beginning to end. No new themes came to me, but I worked on the thematic material already in my mind and tried to conceive the composition as a whole. I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our metropolitan madness.

To create the concerto, it seems that Gershwin turned to his store of tune ideas left over from previous projects. This was a typical way for popular song writers to work. As Gershwin was developing songs for the musical theater stage, he would write dozens of melodies, although only some would end up in the final compositions. He never discarded a melody, however. Instead, he set it aside for future inspiration. This approach would have helped him to put together his concerto relatively quickly, since he wasn't starting from scratch: He already had the five themes that were to constitute the new work.

### The Themes

For the sake of facilitating discussion of the music, analysts have named Gershwin's five themes, and they are known today as the "ritornello,"<sup>4</sup> "train,"<sup>5</sup> "stride,"<sup>6</sup> "shuffle,"<sup>7</sup> and "love"<sup>8</sup> themes. A **ritornello**, as you might recall from Chapter 4, is a theme that returns frequently throughout a work. The other themes are named after associations: the train theme has the propulsive rhythms of a train, the stride theme has the characteristics of stride-style piano playing (a descendent of ragtime piano playing), the shuffle theme would have been suitable for the contemporary dance of that name, and the love theme is slow and romantic.

4.



The "ritornello" theme.

5.		The “train” theme.
6.		The “stride” theme.
7.		The “shuffle” theme.
8.		The “love” theme.

		<i>Rhapsody in Blue</i> Composer: George Gershwin, orchestrated by Ferde Grofé Performance: Michael Tilson Thomas with the Columbia Jazz Band (1976)
Time	Form	What to listen for
<b>Part 1</b>		
0'00"	Introduction	Clarinet solo featuring the famous ascending glissando
0'09"	Ritornello theme	Played by the clarinet
0'40"	Stride theme	Heard in the muted horns
0'54"	Ritornello theme	Played first by a muted trumpet, then the entire ensemble
1'10"	“The Man I Love” tag	This melodic fragment comes from Gershwin’s hit song “The Man I Love”; it is heard throughout the concerto

1'24"	Piano solo	In these passages, the soloist demonstrates their virtuosity
1'46"	Ritornello theme	Heard in the solo piano
2'18"	Piano solo	
2'45"	Ritornello theme	This fast-paced version features various sections in turn
<b>Part 2</b>		
3'09"	Train theme	Heard first in the muted trumpets, then saxophone
3'29"	Stride theme	Heard first in the clarinet, then the full ensemble
4'12"	Shuffle theme	Heard first in the saxophones, then the trombones, then the full ensemble
4'55"	Piano solo	
5'10"	Stride theme	Heard in the solo piano
6'24"	Ritornello theme	Heard first in the piano, then in the ensemble with virtuosic piano accompaniment
7'14"	Shuffle theme	Heard in the solo piano
<b>Part 3</b>		
8'12"		At this point, the tempo greatly accelerates
8'27"	Love theme	Heard first in the strings, then in the full ensemble, then in the solo piano
<b>Part 4</b>		
11'02"	Piano solo	The virtuosic passage builds energy and transitions into the finale

11'54"	Love theme	The brass play a fast version of the theme, which is at first in the minor mode
12'50"	Stride theme	Following a dramatic build-up, the full ensemble plays this theme
13'16"	Ritornello theme	Heard in the full ensemble
12'28"	"The Man I Love" tag	Heard in the solo piano

All five themes are in major, but feature the added scale degrees—a flat third and seventh and a raised fourth—that are often heard in jazz. (This set of pitches is referred to as the **blues scale**.) The themes also contain **syncopated** rhythms, unexpected accents, and surprising shifts between duple and triple subdivisions. All of this, combined with the orchestration of the accompaniment, brings the sound of “jazz” to the concerto. What draws *Rhapsody* into the “classical” world is its length, internal variation, and formal complexity, for Gershwin used these themes to craft a 16-minute work that explores a variety of emotional states.

Although it is performed without any pauses, *Rhapsody in Blue* is in four distinct parts. The opening section features the ritornello theme. A second section brings in the train, stride, and shuffle themes. A third, slow section focuses on the love theme, and an exciting finale revisits the stride and love themes before concluding with the ritornello theme.

## Reception

Following its premier, many critics accused *Rhapsody in Blue* of not having form. What they meant, however, was that it didn’t meet their expectations for concert music. Writing in 1955, the composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein suggested that *Rhapsody* was not a real composition because it lacked the sense of inevitability that is communicated by Beethoven’s music. While a work like Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 seems to move inexorably forward from beginning to end, Bernstein argued, the sections of *Rhapsody* could be reordered, rearranged, or even eliminated without damaging the overall work. Indeed, *Rhapsody* has been published, performed, and recorded in many different versions of various lengths, while Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 is a fixed work for a specific cast of players. Gershwin, however, was coming from a different musical world, and his values were not those of Beethoven (although he certainly knew much about the classical tradition).

Despite some pushback from critics, Whiteman’s *Experiment in Modern Music* was a hit. After repeating the concert in various upscale New York venues,

Whiteman took it on a national tour. (*Pomp and Circumstance*, which reviewers found anticlimactic and gratuitous, was eliminated from the program.) The recording of *Rhapsody in Blue* sold millions of copies, and the work soon became a concert standard for piano soloists. In 1980, United Airlines negotiated for the use of *Rhapsody* in advertisements, and in 1999 the work was featured in the Disney film *Fantasia 2000*. Although *Rhapsody*'s enormous popular success caused early critics to be suspicious of its status as art, it is recognized today as one of the masterpieces of the 20th century. However, we should not forget the disturbing racism of the concert project that brought this piece into existence.

## 1933: A CENTURY OF PROGRESS

Just a few years later, race became the focal point of another important concert. This time, however, the object was to celebrate the accomplishments of African American composers and performers in the overwhelmingly white world of European-inspired orchestral music. The concert in question took place as part of the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair, titled "A Century of Progress," and it is remembered for the first performance of a symphony composed by an African American woman, Florence Beatrice Price.

### The Composer

Florence Price (1887-1953) was born to upper-class parents in Little Rock, Arkansas. At the time, the population of Little Rock was one-third African American and the city had a thriving and self-sufficient black community. Her father was the city's only black dentist, while her mother was a successful real estate investor. Both of Price's parents had been born free, and both had enjoyed the advantages of a good education. As such, they considered themselves responsible for furthering the uplift of the black community in Little Rock by promoting education and the arts.

In 1903, Price left Little Rock to study music at the New England Conservatory, where she quickly rose to the top of her class. She was invited to study with the most exclusive composition teacher, and graduated in just three years with diplomas in piano teaching and organ performance. Upon completing her education, she returned home to carry on the uplift mission of her parents. She taught music at black colleges near Little Rock until 1910, when her father died. After a further



**Image 7.15:** The poster for the 1933-34 Chicago World's Fair, "A Century of Progress."

Source: Wikipedia

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two years teaching at Clark University in Atlanta, Price returned to Little Rock to marry the city's leading black lawyer. In keeping with social expectations, she gave up her college teaching career to raise children, but she also took the opportunity to return to composition.

The Prices settled in Little Rock, despite the fact that life was becoming increasingly difficult for the black community there. **Jim Crow** laws instituted in the 1890s had greatly reduced the opportunities for African Americans, and lynching became increasingly common. In 1927, the Prices determined that they could no longer tolerate the oppressive social climate and moved to Chicago, joining the wave of black Americans who left the South during the Jim Crow era.

In Chicago, Price quickly became involved with various organizations concerned with the advancement of African Americans and women in music. These included the Chicago Music Association (the local branch of the National Association of Negro Musicians) and the Chicago Club of Women Organists, of which she was the first black member. As her husband's career floundered, Price became the primary breadwinner. In addition to her serious concert music, Price composed popular songs, church music, and educational pieces for piano students, and during the Great Depression she took a job as a theater organist, accompanying silent films. Her husband did not adapt to his change in fortunes well, and soon became abusive. Price secured a divorce and custody of their two children in 1931.

Despite financial and personal struggles, the 1930s would see Price emerge as a composer of national significance. In addition to Symphony No. 1, Price composed other large-scale symphonic works, including her Piano Concerto in One Movement (1934) and her Symphony No. 3 (1938-40), both of which were premiered by major orchestras and praised by critics. In 1935 she returned in triumph to Little Rock, where she gave a concert of her piano music to benefit the underfunded black high school from which she had graduated. And in 1939, the renowned soprano Marian Anderson closed another famous concert, given from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, with Price's arrangement of the African American spiritual "My Soul's been Anchored in de Lord." (Anderson sang at the Lincoln Memorial after the Daughters of the Revolution refused her permission to rent Constitution Hall on the basis of her race.) Anderson became a great admirer of Price and sang many of her songs, thereby further raising Price's visibility at the national level.

All the same, Price never broke into the very highest echelons of American concert life—those guarded by the elite institutions of New England. For a full decade, she wrote regular letters to the director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, asking that he consider programming her music. In the most famous of these, written in 1943, she opened by directly addressing the two nearly insurmountable challenges that had impeded her career throughout her life: "To begin with I have two handicaps – those of sex and race. I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins." Price went on to clarify that she was not expecting special consideration, but asked only that her work be judged on its own merits. Despite her efforts, however, Price's orchestral music was not heard on the East Coast in her lifetime.

## The Concert

In 1932, Frederick Stock, conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, was appointed music advisor for the upcoming Chicago World's Fair, "A Century of Progress." Stock had already made a name for himself as a champion of American music. Although the American concert establishment of the early 20th century was dominated by German-speaking emigres (Stock himself was born in Prussia), Stock broke new ground in 1917 by committing to include music by at least one American composer in each of his concerts. He was often ridiculed for doing so, as many critics still believed that European music was inherently superior. Stock doubled down with his vision for the World's Fair, however, promising to showcase "Chicago talent first and American talent second" while keeping European representation "drastically limited."

Stock became aware of Price that same year after her Symphony No. 1 took first prize in the orchestral division of the Rodman Wanamaker Competition, which since 1927 had offered recognition to the best African American composers. Price also earned an honorable mention in the same division and won prizes with two of her piano pieces, while the song prize was secured by her friend and student Margaret Bonds. In the end, these two Chicago women walked away with all of the top honors.

Stock immediately approached Price about premiering her Symphony No. 1 in connection with "A Century of Progress." He imagined it as part of a program celebrating the accomplishments of black composers and performers, with an emphasis on those with ties to Chicago. It seems that Stock was also interested in emphasizing the legacy of African American music, for he specifically programmed works that drew from black traditions such as jazz and spirituals.



**Image 7.16: Frederick Stock, conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra from 1905 to 1942.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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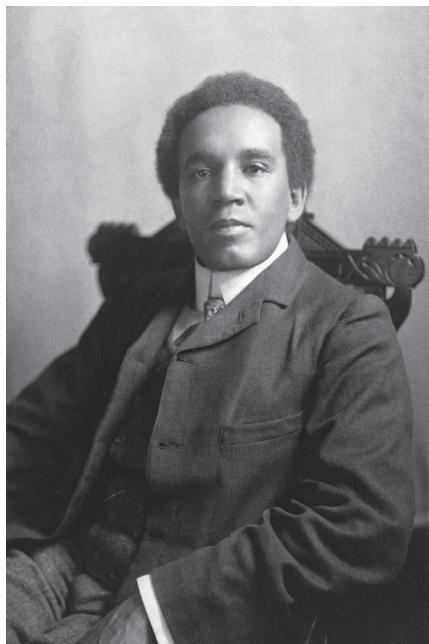


**Image 7.17: Composer and pianist Margaret Bonds in 1956.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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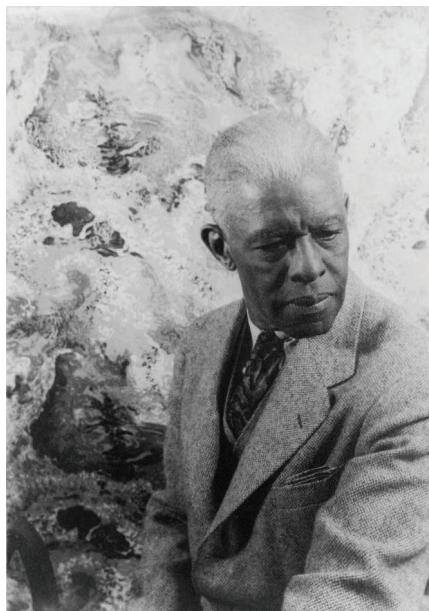


**Image 7.18: Composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor around 1905.**

Source: Wikipedia

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**Image 7.19: Tenor Roland Hayes in 1954.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Before we examine Price's symphony, we must address the other components of the program. We will begin with the composers. Perhaps the best known in 1933 was Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912), an English composer of mixed race. Coleridge-Taylor had visited the United States several times and was interested in the use of African American folk music in concert works. The program included an aria from his cantata *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*—a decidedly American topic—and *Bamboula*, a piece inspired by African dance rhythms.

The other featured composer was John Alden Carpenter (1876-1951), whose jazz-influenced *Concertino for Piano and Orchestra* occupied the central position in the program. Carpenter was a white composer, but Stock clearly considered his work to display black musical influence. He was also a Chicago resident. Carpenter's *Concertino* was in the tradition of George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, which had been performed the night before as part of an American program. In fact, Carpenter even brought Gershwin with him to the premiere!

The piano soloist was none other than Margaret Bonds, who had recently won composition prizes alongside Price. Performing Carpenter's *Concertino* was not Bonds's only contribution to the concert, however. She also spent many long nights helping Price to copy out the parts to her symphony. Price had a particularly busy year, and was not able to abandon her work as a pianist, lecturer, choir director, and radio arranger in order to focus on the premiere of Symphony No. 1. As a result, many members of the black musical community rallied to her aid.

At the top of the bill was Roland Hayes, a well-known tenor who would later become the first African American to record music from the European concert tradition. Hayes sung one such piece on the Chicago concert: an aria by the French composer Hector

Berlioz. By doing so, he demonstrated that he was the artistic equal to any white singer. His other selections, however, were all linked with black culture. Near the end of the program, Hayes sang two **spirituals**, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and “Bye and Bye.” The first had been arranged by the great African American singer and composer Henry T. Burleigh, while the second was Hayes’s own arrangement. He also sang the Coleridge-Taylor aria.

There was one other piece on the program: John Powell’s **concert overture** *In Old Virginia*. Powell (1882-1963) was another white composer, although he was known for incorporating Southern folk melodies—often of African American origin—into his music. Powell was also an outspoken white supremacist and advocate of eugenics. As an active contributor to Virginian political life, he helped to imagine and author the Racial Integrity Act of 1924, which set out to define and separate the “white” and “colored” races. According to the Act, even a single drop of non-white blood in an individual’s ancestry qualified that person as “colored,” meaning that they were subject to Jim Crow segregation and could not enter into marriage with a “white” person. This is but one item among many in Powell’s anti-black legacy, and his inclusion on the “Century of Progress” emphasizes the great deal of progress that was still left to be made.

Price’s symphony was well-received by both the public and the critics. Wearing an elegant, floor-length white gown, she was repeatedly called to the stage by a rapturous audience to take bows following the premiere. The black press generally praised her symphony as a great achievement on behalf of the African American community. Writing for the *Chicago Defender*, a black newspaper, Robert Abbott described what the premiere meant to his readers: “First there was a feeling of awe as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, an aggregation of master musicians of the white race, and directed by Frederick Stock, internationally known conductor, swung in to the beautiful, harmonious strains of a composition by a Race woman.” White critics tended to praise the music as a fine contribution to the European concert tradition. Eugene Stinson of the *Chicago Daily News*, for example, described Symphony No. 1 as a “faultless work” that “is worthy of a place in the repertory.”

## Symphony No. 1

Florence Price belonged to the cultural movement now known as the **Harlem Renaissance**, and much of her music exemplified its values. The Harlem Renaissance was driven by African American artists and intellectuals living and working in the Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan, although its influence spread across the nation. These cultural leaders took pride in their ancestry and encouraged the celebration of black heritage in literary and artistic works. By contributing to and elevating a rich tradition of African American culture, they hoped to improve life for the entire black community.

Symphony No. 1 provides a characteristic example of Price’s engagement with her musical heritage. It was not her tendency to directly quote African American

music in her compositions. However, she was deeply influenced by the tonal, rhythmic, and textural characteristics of such music, and she wove these elements into traditional European forms to create sophisticated concert works from a uniquely black perspective.

Because she was working in the European tradition, the overall form of Price's symphony is the same as Beethoven's. It begins with a long movement in sonata form. Next is a slow movement, followed by a dance movement, while the finale is fast-paced and exciting. We looked at the first and last movements of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5, so we will examine the two internal movements of Price's Symphony No. 1.

### Movement II

		Symphony No. 1, Movement II Composer: Florence Price Performance: Fort Smith Symphony, conducted by John Jeter (2019)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	A	This hymn-like theme is played in the brass and accompanied by an African drum; clarinets and flutes echo each phrase in a call-and-response texture
1'57"	B	The strings play a mournful, descending theme that outlines a pentatonic scale and includes bluesy elements, including a slide and unusual harmonies
3'37"	A	
4'52"	Development	A phrase of the A theme leads into an extended development-like passage in which the A and B themes are explored and transformed
6'48"		The B theme returns, first in the oboe
9'31"	A'	This time, an active clarinet line accompanies the hymn-like theme, the phrases of which are interspersed with bells
11'22"	Coda	The entire orchestra plays the A theme; clarinet and cello solos lead into the final chord

The second movement begins with a theme that sounds like it might be a hymn. Several characteristics of the music combine to create this impression. To begin with, the melody is slow and stately. It is played on brass instruments, which have a long association with the church. Finally, the texture is that of a Christian hymn. The melody is clearly in the top voice, but all of the voices move in coordination, executing the same rhythmic patterns. This is called **homophonic texture**. Despite all of these clear indicators, however, what we are hearing is not a real hymn, but rather a hymn-like theme composed by Price.

Price had several good reasons to base her slow movement on such a theme. There was a long tradition of including hymn themes in symphonies, especially among composers who wished to demonstrate national pride. Ever since the early 19th century, music of the Christian church has been used to signify national identity by European composers. In addition, Price herself was deeply committed to her religious beliefs and would have been inclined to express herself in the musical language of the church. Finally, her orchestration in this movement reveals the influence of the church organ—an instrument that Price performed on and wrote for.

Price's hymn theme has several characteristics that betray African American influence. The first is the irregular length of its opening two phrases, each of which is five measures long. Similar phrasing can be found in African American spirituals, which seem to have provided Price with a model. Each of these phrases is followed by a short echo from the winds—an example of the **call-and-response** technique prevalent in black music. Finally, the hymn is accompanied by an African drum, one of several instruments that Price added to the standard orchestral percussion section. Another is the orchestral bells, which are heard later in the movement.

To complement the hymn theme, Price introduces a contrasting second theme in the violins, which play a descending melody that outlines a **pentatonic scale**. A pentatonic scale is a five-pitch subset of a major or minor scale; this one includes scale degrees 1 3 4 5 and 7 of a minor scale. Pentatonic scales are typical of indigenous music traditions found around the world, so the missing scale degrees give this theme a folk-like feel. At the same time, bluesy elements identify its character as uniquely African American. A descending slide is reminiscent of blues guitar playing. This is followed immediately by some blues-inspired harmonies, which include extended chords not often heard in European-style concert music and clashes between minor-mode melody and major-mode accompaniment.

The hymn theme returns, but this time it transitions into a lengthy development-like passage that explores the movement's two themes. First we hear the hymn motif move throughout the orchestra, acquiring various characters and expressions on its journey. Then the second theme returns in the oboe, although a re-harmonization means that it does not sound nearly as mournful. The movement concludes with a dignified return of the hymn theme, which resolves into a peaceful and satisfying final chord.

**Movement III**

Symphony No. 1, Movement III “Juba Dance”  
 Composer: Florence Price  
 Performance: Fort Smith Symphony, conducted by John Jeter (2019)

Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Rondo theme A	The violins play a syncopated pentatonic melody accompanied by minor-mode harmonies
0'18"	Rondo theme B	The trumpets play a contrasting major-mode melody
0'35"	C	The violins play a minor-mode melody accompanied by slide whistle
0'53"	Rondo theme A	The A theme returns in the winds, now with major-mode harmonies
1'01"	Rondo themes A & B	The trumpets enter with the B theme while the cellos continue to play the A theme
1'10"	Rondo theme B	The whole orchestra plays the B theme
1'27"	D	A new melody is heard in the horns
1'51"		The violins enter with a fragment of the B theme before picking up the D theme
2'08"	Rondo theme A	The whole orchestra plays the A theme, which is accompanied by major-mode harmonies
2'25"	Rondo theme B	The whole orchestra plays the B theme
2'40"	Coda	A surprising harmony begins the transition into a final triumphant statement of the B theme; the tempo decreases leading into the final cadence, which is underscored by rolls on the snare drum

The third movement is more explicitly African American in character. Price titled it “Juba Dance,” in reference to a traditional dance performed by enslaved people that had roots in African culture. The specific steps of the Juba varied, but it usually contained elements of hand clapping, foot stomping, and body percussion (such as thigh slapping) that became known as “patting juba.” Body percussion played an important role in 19th-century African American music, for it facilitated dancing even in the absence of other instruments. It also replaced traditional percussion instruments, which were outlawed in most of the South; slave holders feared that enslaved people might use drums to communicate between plantations for the purpose of coordinating revolts.

Although other composers had previously used Juba rhythms in their music, Price was the first composer to incorporate Juba influence into a symphony. She considered the rhythmic element in African American music to be of “preeminent importance.” The third movement of Symphony No. 1 opens with a syncopated pentatonic melody in the violins, heard over a steady rhythmic pattern in the lower strings and percussion (we hear African drums again in this movement). The choice of violin for this melody calls to mind an enslaved fiddler, providing dance music on the plantation. The melody itself is intriguing, for it alternates between modes, first seeming to be in the minor mode but later resolving in the relative major. This characteristic is frequently encountered in folk music. Finally, “Juba Dance” requires yet another literal folk instrument: the wind whistle, which has roots in indigenous cultures.

“Juba Dance” is in **rondo form**, meaning that the opening pair of melodies return throughout. Each time, however, they undergo some sort of change. Different instruments perform the melodies, and they are accompanied by various countermelodies. In between, contrasting melodic material explores the diverse rhythmic possibilities of African American dance music.

## 1969: AN AQUARIAN EXPOSITION

### Popular Music as Concert Art

All of the concerts we have examined so far have been relatively formal affairs. They have taken place in concert halls, and the audience members have been expected to sit quietly and give all of their attention to the music. This final aspect is the hallmark of concerts: They are primarily for listening—especially in the world of art music, wherein composers and performers generally expect to have the undivided attention of the audience.

There is a long history of concert presentation in popular music traditions as well. We will focus on those of the United States. In the mid-19th century, for example, the Hutchinson Family Singers became famous for their concerts of songs promoting abolition and women’s rights. Their music was aimed at an educated, middle-class audience; those who wanted more lively entertainment would attend theatrical productions. Although most concerts featured singers, one could also

hear brass band concerts in local parks—or, by the end of the 19th century, even attend one of the lavish concerts put on by the showman John Philip Sousa (see Chapter 12).

For the most part, however, American popular music has historically been found outside of the concert hall. In the early 20th century, one expected to hear the latest hit songs not in concert but as part of musical theater productions, variety shows, and motion picture programs. Likewise, the music played by ragtime pianists and jazz bands was mostly heard in drinking establishments and dance halls. This is one of the reasons that Paul Whiteman's *An Experiment in Modern Music* was such a noteworthy event: He expected his audience to sit and listen critically to music that had been consumed primarily in the context of social dancing. Whiteman also sought to blur the lines between popular and art music during a time when the two were considered to be fundamentally different.

Over the subsequent decades, however, this paradigm began to dissolve. Improvements in recording and broadcasting technology increased the flow of popular music into homes across the nation, and a powerful recording industry soon emerged. In the 1950s, a craze for rock 'n' roll swept the youth market. Television played an important role in building enthusiasm for the new musical style, but young people also wanted to see their favorite bands in person. At first, rock 'n' roll was primarily dance music. In the 1960s, however, the songs released by popular music labels became increasingly complex and sophisticated. (See, for example, the album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, addressed in Chapter 7.) This music—termed rock—was, like classical music, meant primarily for listening.

Rock concerts grew in size and frequency during the 1960s for several reasons. One was technological. A symphony orchestra can be made louder by adding more instruments; that's how Hector Berlioz and Richard Wagner overwhelmed audiences in the 19th century. A rock band, however, gets louder by using amplification equipment that can produce sound at a higher wattage. The early 1960s saw significant developments in amplification technology that allowed bands to play louder than ever before. This in turn made it possible for rock bands to perform in larger venues, including stadiums and outdoor amphitheaters.

Americans also turned increasingly to popular music as they sought to understand and cope with the turbulent times in which they lived. The 1960s saw domestic upheaval on a level unprecedented since the Civil War of the 1860s. A series of high-profile political figures were assassinated, one after another: President John F. Kennedy in 1963, Malcolm X in 1965, and, in 1968, both Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. The Vietnam War provoked increasingly violent protests, which were to culminate in the Kent State massacre of 1970. The Stonewall riots of 1969 marked the start of the LGBTQ rights movement, while the decade also brought the women's liberation movement to the forefront of America's consciousness. The civil rights movement saw victories, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but black Americans continued to face discrimination and hate.

The “classical” music establishment of the 1960s was not well equipped to provide solace or emotional relief to listeners. After World War II, most serious composers abandoned audience-friendly styles in favor of experimental music. They did so for a variety of reasons: the fear that beautiful music could be turned to evil purposes (see, for example, Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana* in Chapter 10), the conviction that human beings were inherently corrupt and should not use music to express their emotions at all, an intense desire to break completely with the past after the horrors of the war, and sheer fascination with the mathematical and acoustic potentialities of sound. Some composers continued to write beautiful and expressive music that helped listeners to grapple with feelings of loss and disillusionment: Benjamin Britten’s 1962 *War Requiem* is an excellent example. For the most part, however, listeners embraced popular performers whose music captured their hopes and frustrations.

As a result of all this, rock artists gained prestige and influence, and the rock concert became a mainstream cultural activity. Economically, 1960s rock concerts served the same purpose as Beethoven’s 1808 concert: They made money for the band and its agents while winning new fans and developing interest in the music. People also attended for the same reasons (love of music and affirmation of social status), even if they behaved a bit differently. Near the end of the 1960s, concert promoters began to see the possibility of turning even bigger profits by organizing not just concerts but music festivals—multi-day celebrations that would bring together popular bands and attract tens of thousands of patrons.

The first major music festival was the 1967 Monterey International Pop Festival in Monterey, CA. This three-day event attracted 50,000 people and was immediately regarded as one of the great cultural landmarks of the decade. Its success inspired a slew of imitations. In 1968, the Newport Pop Festival and the Miami Pop Festival each attracted around 100,000 people, while the next year the Atlanta Pop Festival and the Atlantic City Pop Festival brought in closer to 110,000. However, all of these paled in comparison with the music festival that would go down in history as a watershed not only in the history of popular music but in the history of American culture: the 1969 Aquarian Exposition, better known as Woodstock.

## The Festival

Woodstock began as a promotional idea for a new music recording business. Early in 1969, Michael Lang and Artie Kornfeld contacted New York City entrepreneurs Joel Rosenman and John P. Roberts for help financing a small recording studio in the town of Woodstock, NY. Rosenmann and Roberts were skeptical about the studio’s potential for success, but their attention was captured by a passage in the business plan that sketched out a small-scale music festival intended to celebrate the studio opening. They encouraged Lang and Kornfeld to abandon their idea for a studio and instead focus on putting together a festival to

take place in Woodstock. The four young men agreed that the idea was good, and they founded a company, Woodstock Ventures, to facilitate the project.

Lang already had some experience with the business end of music festivals, having co-organized the Miami Pop Festival in 1968. The Miami Pop Festival was small, attracting about 25,000, but it prepared Lang to anticipate the many logistical concerns that the team would face. And the festival at Woodstock wasn't supposed to be that much larger: The organizers hoped to attract 50,000 people at the most.

Things went wrong from the start. First, the organizers needed to find a location. It was important to them that the setting for the festival be attractive and bucolic, far away from the noise and pollution of the city. They wanted to sell the idea of an escape to nature, where participants could enjoy "3 days of peace & music." Lang and Kornfeld initially planned to hold the festival in Wallkill, NY, but local residents balked at the idea of a hippie invasion and were able to prevent them from securing the site. Next, they tried to book a venue in Saugerties, NY, but again the deal fell through,

Rosenman and Roberts, growing impatient with the other pair's failure to confirm a location, leased a 300-acre industrial park in Wallkill for the festival. The town's residents, however, launched a fierce attack against the project, and in July the Town Board passed a law requiring a permit for gatherings of more than 5,000. Later in the month, the Wallkill Zoning Board of Appeals banned the concert altogether on the grounds of sanitation concerns.

Finally, Rosenman and Roberts were introduced to dairy farmer Max Yasgur, who agreed to lease his 600-acre farm outside of Bethel, NY. Again, however, the organizers were met with local resistance, and they were unable to secure building permits from the Town Board until August 2—less than two weeks before the advertised start of the festival.

This left the organizers in a very difficult situation, for they simply did not have time to erect all of the infrastructure that is necessary for a large outdoor festival. However, people were coming: The conflict between the festival organizers and the authorities in Wallkill had been widely reported, with the result that far more people knew about the festival than might have otherwise. About 186,000 advance tickets had already been sold, and the organizers had reason to believe that a far greater number of people were planning to attend.



70 RAMPARTS

**Image 7.20: This early advertisement lists the wrong location—Wallkill, NY—and omits many of the bands that eventually signed on to play.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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The organizers decided to focus their resources on the most important piece of infrastructure, the stage—for what is a music festival, after all, without a stage for the performers. This meant that fencing (to keep out unticketed patrons) and ticket booths (to sell those tickets) were left unbuilt, and Woodstock became, practically speaking, a free festival. (Woodstock Ventures did eventually turn a profit, but most of this came from a documentary made at the festival and released in 1970.)

Although the organizers expected crowds, nobody could have imagined that people would flock to the festival in the numbers that they did. The morning of Friday, August 15, saw traffic jams that extended all the way back to New York City. Many people abandoned their cars and walked the final miles to the festival site, while the performers and sound crew had to be brought in by helicopter. Eventually, a state of emergency was declared in Sullivan County to deal with the unprecedented influx of people. The Governor of New York even threatened to call in the National Guard, but Roberts convinced him not to. All told, nearly 500,000 people attended the festival: ten times more than the organizers had anticipated.

It is on these half a million people that we will now focus. Why did they come? And why did so many of them come? It is certain that visitors to Woodstock made the pilgrimage for many different reasons. Some were attracted by the rural setting (previous festivals had mostly been in cities). Some were intrigued by rumors about the legal wranglings that had kept the festival out of Wallkill. Some were excited by the lineup of star performers. Whatever their individual reasons for attending, however, almost all of the visitors to Woodstock were seeking some kind of relief in the midst of growing social unrest. Many were disillusioned by President Richard Nixon's foreign policy, which had so far failed to bring the violence in Vietnam to an end. Others still grieved for Kennedy and King, whose murders came as a devastating blow to the civil rights movement. Woodstock, however, was not about politics—it was about music and community.

Naturally enough, the festival organizers and local government officials were worried about what might happen when nearly 500,000 people came together on a mere 600 acres. Similar gatherings had been marred by violence, and festivals were likely to attract troublemakers. Astonishingly, there were no violent outbreaks of any kind. This is even more remarkable when one considers the fact that the festival's troubles did not end with traffic. Because of the rush to construct the stage, other facilities were inadequate or non-existent. Camping was crowded, and few visitors were well-prepared. At first there was no food available on site at all; later, festivalgoers waited in line for hours to buy hot dogs.

In addition, it rained. Wind and rain on Sunday afternoon brought the festival to a halt for several hours. Stage hands rushed to cover expensive sound equipment, while audience members huddled under plastic sheets. The fields turned to mud. All of this could easily have led to discontent and rioting—but instead, the visitors peacefully waited out the storm until the musicians could return to the stage.

The Sunday storm also had a significant impact on Woodstock's musical legacy. The festival headliner, Jimi Hendrix, was supposed to close out the program on



**Image 7.21: This photograph of the opening ceremony at Woodstock gives an idea of how enormous the crowds were.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Sunday night. Because of storm delays, however, he did not take to the stage until 9 am on Monday morning. His set is remembered as the highlight of the festival. In particular, his rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner” has become an iconic cultural artifact representing not only Woodstock but the entire 1960s. However, by Monday morning, only about 30,000 people remained in the audience—everyone else had gone home.

We will consider Hendrix and his performance in detail, but first it is necessary to survey the musical program in general. The first band to sign a contract was Creedence Clearwater Revival, whose fame quickly attracted other major artists to the festival. Other big names included Santana, Janice Joplin, The Grateful Dead, The Who, Jefferson Airplane, Sly and the Family Stone, and Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. Also on the program was the North Indian musician Ravi Shankar (discussed in Chapter 6), who had also played for enthusiastic crowds at the Monterey Pop Festival.

Just as interesting is the list of musicians who did *not* appear at Woodstock—especially those who are discussed in this book. Bob Dylan actually lived in Woodstock, but had planned a trip overseas to perform at the Isle of Wight Festival. Simon and Garfunkel were working on a new album. And The Beatles had already given up live performance for good.

## Jimi Hendrix's Set: "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "Purple Haze"

Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970) was the most accomplished and influential guitar player of the 1960s. He entranced audiences with his virtuosic feats and inspired a new generation of performers to treat their instruments as tools not only for the production of melodies and harmonies but for the sculpting of sound. His influence was particularly strong on Jeff Beck, Eric Clapton, and Jimmy Page, all of whom responded to his unique ability to combine incredible musicianship with an innovative use of amplifier distortion and other effects to create sounds hitherto unheard. He experimented with a range of timbres that often crossed over into the world of pure noise, but which defined his playing and enlivened his studio albums—all five of which reached the Top 10 in the Billboard charts.



**Image 7.22: This photograph of Jimi Hendrix was taken during a 1967 performance in Helsinki.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Henrix was born in Seattle, WA, where he began playing the guitar at the age of 15. He was particularly influenced by Elvis Presley and blues musicians such as Muddy Waters, and he spent his spare time learning their tunes by ear. Hendrix had a difficult childhood. His father was serving in the US Army at the time of his birth. Following his discharge at the conclusion of World War II, the family struggled financially and both parents took to abusing alcohol, resulting in Hendrix's mother's death at the age of 33. Hendrix himself joined the Army after

getting into trouble with the law as a teenager. He trained as a paratrooper, but his unprofessional behavior (he played guitar constantly, slept at his post, and failed to report for inspections) led to an honorable discharge on June 29, 1962, just over a year after he had enlisted.

Freed from his military obligations, Hendrix took to music as a full-time pursuit. He first moved to Clarksville and then to Nashville, TN, where he had access to a variety of performance opportunities. Hendrix found work playing with bands that toured the Chitlin' Circuit, which was a collection of Southern and Midwestern music venues that were friendly to African American performers during the Jim Crow era.

All the same, Hendrix found his career opportunities limited by his race. In addition to the fact that he faced discrimination at performance venues, he also found that mainstream ideas about black musicians prevented him from playing the music he really loved. In Tennessee, Hendrix mostly played rhythm 'n' blues, the most prominent genre of popular music associated with the black community. However, he felt an affinity for rock music and considered himself to be a rock guitarist. It was therefore difficult for him to fit into the American music scene.



**Image 7.23: Hendrix became known for his flamboyant stage antics, including playing the guitar with his teeth.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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In 1966, Hendrix solved this problem by moving to London. There, he put together a rock trio with bassist Noel Redding and drummer Mitch Mitchell. They called themselves the Jimi Hendrix Experience and immediately made a splash on stage and in the recording studio. We have already seen how 1960s music was dominated by British bands in what has been termed the British Invasion. In a

way, Hendrix himself became a British Invasion artist. His fame in the UK allowed Hendrix to remake his image and return to the United States under his own terms.

The Jimi Hendrix Experience made their US debut at the 1967 Monterey International Pop Festival, where Hendrix astonished music fans and performers alike with his ability as a guitarist (and his stage antics: he set his guitar on fire). He was therefore a natural choice for Woodstock, where he was paid the top fee of \$18,000. Hendrix came to the festival with his new band, Gypsy Sun and Rainbows, although they were famously mis-introduced by the announcer as the Jimi Hendrix Experience. The band included several of Hendrix's associates from Tennessee, including bassist Billy Cox and second guitarist Larry Lee. Additional percussion was provided by Juma Sultan and Gerardo "Jerry" Velez.

However, Hendrix almost didn't go on stage. He was upset by media reports suggesting that the festival was in shambles, and discouraged by the number of attendees: Hendrix didn't like playing for large crowds. As of Saturday afternoon, he was still refusing to perform, but his manager finally talked him into fulfilling his contract. It took the band hours to make their way to the festival by car, where they found that no dressing rooms had been constructed. The newly-formed band was also under-rehearsed. According to Sultan, "We did not have a plan, we didn't know what he was gonna play." Although the set was recorded, two of Hendrix's numbers from Woodstock have never been released—his estate has declared that they do not meet the required performance standard and has persistently refused to allow publication.

Despite shortcomings, the two-hour performance has been described in transcendent terms by those who were there. Sultan provides the perspective of a band member: "It felt like three minutes, I walked out there, the sun was coming up and there was a sea of people, all this good energy, they were coming with the sun and light, it was overpowering. We could have played for hours more. . ." We will consider an eight-minute segment from near the end of Hendrix's set containing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "Purple Haze."

### "The Star-Spangled Banner"

Hendrix's performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner"<sup>9</sup> has been remembered as the culmination of Woodstock—a seemingly **improvised** expression conjured in the moment to express the hopes and fears of the crowds that had gathered there. In reality, Hendrix's "Star-Spangled Banner" was neither an improvisation—a rendition created in the act of performance—nor was it original to the festival. In fact, he had performed the national anthem more than thirty-five times in the month prior Woodstock, and would continue to include it in his concert appearances for the remainder of his career, making for a total of over sixty performances. What the audience heard was his carefully-considered **arrangement** of the national anthem for solo electric guitar.

9.



“The Star-Spangled Banner”

Composer: John Stafford Smith/Francis Scott Key

Performance: Jimi Hendrix (1969)

Before we can address his arrangement, however, we need to consider the equipment that Hendrix used to create his sounds. At Woodstock, Hendrix played a white 1968 Fender Stratocaster (serial no. 240981) that collectors call the “White One,” owing to its Olympic White finish. Though he ate and wrote right-handed, Hendrix usually played guitar left-handed, strumming with his left hand. As seen in the documentary *Woodstock*, he played the “White One” (and most of his other guitars) upside down, restrung with light-gauge Fender “Rock ‘n’ Roll” strings for left-handed playing. Hendrix’s Woodstock amplifier was a UK-built, 100-watt Marshall Super Lead, model 1959, known as the “Plexi” amp, which drove four 4-12 Marshall speaker cabinets that had been specially constructed for the festival.

Between his guitar and amplifier, Hendrix used a series of three effects devices. First came a Vox wah-wah pedal, his use of which is particularly audible in the “Voodoo Child (Slight Return)” introduction. The “small Fasel inductor coils in the Italian-made original were an important part of Jimi’s distinctive tone,” explains Paul Balmer. Next, there was a red Arbiter Fuzz Face,

a primitive but effective mini amp, acting as a preamp stage [to overload the Marshall’s front end,] generating a rich harmonic distortion. [Its] germanium transistors were either two NKT275s or [two] AC128s. This detail was important, as was the matching of these wayward early transistors: a good, well-matched pair sounded terrific, but if poorly matched, they sounded like a mistake. . . .

The other [effect] on the Woodstock stage [was] a Uni-Vibe (an early four-stage phaser effect first developed in Japan by the Shin-Ei company): the second “volume pedal”-like device seen in the film footage at Woodstock is part of this Uni-Vibe rig.

Hendrix positioned “The Star-Spangled Banner” at the climax of his set. He began the anthem’s four minute and thirty-eight second-long performance in a relatively subdued manner, with minimal **ornamentation** of the melody in the course of its first two phrases (that is, through the word “gleaming”). The first instance of what could be described as **text painting** occurs at the end of phrase 3, on the word “fight,” at which point the undulating melodic motion in his descending run can be heard as a Vietnam-era representation of the conflict that Francis Scott Key had witnessed more than 150 years earlier. From this point, the performance intensifies, and Key’s text provides ample opportunity for Hendrix to dazzle the crowd. At the beginning of phrase 5 (on the word “rockets”), he employs the wah-wah pedal for the first time, launching into a programmatic depiction of a

fierce battle. Here, too, he first uses the Strat's whammy bar, to great effect. (This “**tremolo arm**” is attached to the guitar's bridge, allowing the player to produce **vibrato**. Because he typically played a right-handed guitar upside down, Hendrix, as clearly shown in *Woodstock*, developed a unique technique.) As the battle rages on, an even longer programmatic passage can be heard at the end of the fifth phrase, following the words “bombs bursting in air.” By the end of the sixth phrase (with the words “flag was still there”), the battle has drawn to a close, and the time has come to bury the dead.

At this point, Hendrix interpolates the first half of “Taps.”<sup>10</sup> “Taps” is a solo **bugle call** that, in its official version, is performed by members of the US military at military funerals and on a few other occasions. For older audience members, this quotation might also have been reminiscent of the first two lines in the **refrain** of the well-known patriotic song “Over There,”<sup>11</sup> by George M. Cohan (1878–1942). Cohen wrote “Over There” in 1917 to inspire military enlistment after the US entered the First World War. (The song enjoyed renewed popularity in the early 1940s, with the country’s entrance into WWII.) Quoted below are Cohan’s original lyrics for the refrain:

Over there, over there,  
Send the word, send the word over there  
That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming  
The drums rum-tumming ev’rywhere.  
So prepare, say a prayer,  
Send the word, send the word to beware  
We’ll be over, we’re coming over,  
And we won’t come back till it’s over over there.

10.



This moving performance of “Taps” appears on the official YouTube channel of the U.S. Navy Band.

11.



This early recording of “Over There” was made by soprano Nora Bayes on July 13, 1917.

Paired with their **arpeggio**-laden melody, the first two lines of this refrain comprise an obvious example of word painting: Cohan’s melody resembles a military bugle or trumpet call.

Following Taps, Hendrix concluded his rendition of the national anthem with a rousing performance of its refrain. (Textually, as shown in Chapter 9, the final two lines of each of its four stanzas are very similar.) Here, in a vivid example of

text painting on the word “wave,” he uses the guitar’s whammy bar to produce a steadily widening vibrato that clearly depicts a flag waving in the breeze.

Almost immediately, Hendrix’s performance of “The Star-Spangled Banner” was widely criticized. Negative commentators focused on its non-traditional aspects, and some accused the guitarist of disrespecting our national anthem. In late August 1969, less than two weeks after Woodstock, Hendrix addressed the issue during a press conference promoting his upcoming benefit concert for the United Block Association (UBA) of Harlem (New York). Having been asked why he had chosen to perform “The Star-Spangled Banner” at the festival, Hendrix responded, comparing his interpretation to earlier, more traditional ones:

Oh, because we’re all Americans. We’re all Americans, aren’t we? It was written and played in a very beautiful, what they call a beautiful state. Nice, inspiring, your heart throbs, and you say, “Great. I’m American.” But nowadays when we play it, we don’t play it to take away all this greatness that America is supposed to have. We play it the way the air is in America today. The air is slightly static, isn’t it?

This response is consistent with his others to similar questions about his decision, and taken together, they tend to reveal his iconic performance to be less about partisan politics and more about a longing for peace, a desire that all Americans can embrace. In his September 1969 appearance on *The Dick Cavett Show*,<sup>12</sup> Hendrix denied that the rendition was “unorthodox,” adding, “I thought it was beautiful.” Looking back twenty years later, Hendrix scholar Charles Shaar Murray praised the performance as “probably the most complex and powerful work of American art to deal with the Vietnam War and its corrupting, distorting effect on successive generations of the American psyche.”

12.



Hendrix appeared on *The Dick Cavett Show* on September 9, 1969.

### “Purple Haze”

After finishing his rendition of “The Star-Spangled Banner” at Woodstock, Hendrix transitioned directly into one of his biggest hits, “Purple Haze.”<sup>13</sup> This song will serve as a good example of the **psychedelic rock** sound developed by Hendrix and his UK bandmates. It will also allow us glimpses of Hendrix the songwriter, the recording artist, and the live performer.

13.



“Purple Haze”

Composer: Jimi Hendrix

Performance: The Jimi Hendrix Experience (1970)

Like many popular songs, “Purple Haze” emerged out of a collaborative experimental process. In late 1966, Hendrix was still seeking to develop his signature sound. The Jimi Hendrix Experience had landed their first hit on the UK charts in December, but Hendrix didn’t think that the song, “Hey Joe,” accurately reflected the band’s character, and he promised fans that the next single would be something special. “Purple Haze” began as a guitar **riff**—a brief melodic fragment that eventually came to be repeated throughout the final song. Hendrix’s producer, Chas Chandler, thought that the riff had potential and encouraged Hendrix to develop it into a song. According to Chandler, Hendrix finished writing “Purple Haze” in a backstage dressing room on December 26.

On January 11, 1967, Hendrix taught the song to his bandmates and they made the initial recording in just three takes. The process, however, was far from finished. Chandler and Hendrix continued to discuss the track over the coming month, returning to the studio to record additional elements whenever they had an idea. Chandler then applied various effects to the recording. The final song, therefore, was the product of an extended period of studio experimentation, not a single recording session. This method of creating music had only recently become available with the advent of **multitrack recording**, which allows sounds recorded at different times to be combined.

Although the process by which “Purple Haze” came into the world is complicated, at least it can be explained. The same is not true of the song’s lyrics. When asked what “Purple Haze” was about, Hendrix never gave the same answer twice. Once he said that the song was inspired by “a dream I had that I was walking under the sea.” Another time he claimed that it captured a mythical scene, perhaps “the history of the wars on Neptune.” Yet another time he said that it was a love song. Some have connected it with an episode from Hendrix’s life, who claimed to have been the victim of a voodoo spell cast by a girl he met while living in New York City. Music scholar Harry Shapiro has argued that the song was inspired by a book Hendrix was reading at the time, Frank Waters’ *Book of the Hopi* (1963),



**Image 7.24: The Jimi Hendrix Experience consisted of Hendrix, drummer Mitch Mitchell, and bassist Noel Redding.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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which describes Hopi rituals and legends. Finally, listeners have usually assumed that the song describes the experience of taking hallucinogenic drugs—something that Hendrix and other musicians certainly did, but which they could not explicitly reference in songs for fear of being banned from the airwaves.

To further complicate matters, Hendrix once claimed that “Purple Haze” originally had “a thousand” words, but that Chandler had forced him to reduce the length of the song by cutting verses. (Chandler did in fact help Hendrix to trim his lengthy tracks so that they would be suitable for radio play—a process that they both agreed made the songs better.) However, no additional verses to the song have ever surfaced.

The meaning of the lyrics probably doesn’t matter all that much. Hendrix, after all, was a guitarist, and his songs were primarily vehicles for his virtuosic playing. It is certainly the guitar part that made this song a hit. The guitar introduction to “Purple Haze” features a sequence of dissonant harmonies (better heard on the studio recording than in our performance) followed by an angular melody that rises and falls. Next, Hendrix lays out the harmonic progression that will be heard under the verses—the first chord of which has in fact come to be known as the “Hendrix chord,” due to its scarcity in the playing of others. The guitar is heavily distorted throughout, and Hendrix uses feedback as a musical device.

For reasons of video quality, we will consider Hendrix’s performance of “Purple Haze” not at Woodstock but at the 1970 Atlanta Pop Festival. In some respects, a live performance of “Purple Haze” might be considered inferior to the studio recording: The overdubbed vocals are lost, as are the various post-production effects. What we gain, however, is Hendrix’s extraordinary showmanship. To begin with, he doesn’t play the guitar like other people. In addition to holding the instrument backwards, he employs a variety of unorthodox techniques, including playing passages without the use of his left hand. Even more striking is Hendrix’s sexualized handling of the instrument, which he regularly positions between his legs.

The context of a stage performance also gives Hendrix the opportunity to improvise a long, unaccompanied guitar solo at the end of the song. The studio recording likewise ends with a guitar solo, but it is accompanied by drums and bass throughout and characterized by the use of an Octavia effects unit, which produces high, ringing overtones. In this performance, Hendrix appears to have relied on his guitar’s inbuilt sound production capabilities. Although limited in his access to effects, Hendrix was no longer confined to the limited time frame of a pop single. He takes exactly the same amount of time—two minutes and ten seconds—in both the studio recording and stage performance to get through the scripted parts of the song: introductory riff, verse 1, guitar interlude, verse 2, guitar solo, verse 3. We can assume, however, that Hendrix conceived of the remainder of the song as a space for improvisatory exploration. In the Atlanta performance, he takes another minute and forty seconds to wow the audience with his bombastic playing.

His appearance at the Atlanta Pop Festival turned out to be one of Hendrix’s final live performances. Just over two months later, he was found unresponsive

in a London apartment. His death was attributed to asphyxiation following an overdose on barbiturates. The loss of Hendrix at the age of 27 is considered one of the greatest tragedies in the history of rock music. He was still at the beginning of what promised to be a dazzling career. In fact, he had just opened Electric Lady Studio in New York City and was looking forward to having greater creative autonomy as a recording artist. Hendrix, of course, was not the only victim of the drug-fueled popular music scene. His death reminds us that fame and success do not make life easy.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

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# 8

## Listening at Home and at Court

*Esther M. Morgan-Ellis and Louis Hajosy*

### INTRODUCTION

Today, you can enjoy almost any kind of music in the privacy of your home. In fact, it seems likely that every kind of music is heard through headphones and stereo speakers more often than it is heard live. However, it is important to address the contexts for which music is created, and only certain types of music have traditionally been available for home consumption. In the previous chapter, we examined a series of public concerts and considered musical works that were created for the concert stage. In this chapter, we will focus on musical genres and works that were created explicitly for performance and enjoyment in domestic environments.

We've already encountered a few such pieces—Franz Schubert's "Elf King," for example (see Chapter 5), which was intended for performance at a living room concert before a small audience. The environment for which this song was created determined many of its characteristics. Because he knew the performance space would be small, Schubert wrote for just two performers. Much later, composers following in Schubert's footsteps would provide full orchestral accompaniment for their songs, but Schubert used only a piano. At the same time, Schubert's goals for this song could only be achieved by means of an intimate performance. He sought to communicate an intense drama to a rapt audience. This is not music for a noisy bar or a cavernous hall. Schubert wanted the singer and listener to be physically close and to share an emotional experience.

While we can enjoy public music in private or make private music public (baritone Dietrich Fischer-Diskau's most famous performance of "The Elf King" was broadcast on television), the experience is enriched by remembering how the music was meant to be consumed. Knowing about the original performance environment also helps us to understand why certain musical decisions were made. Such considerations will apply to all of the diverse examples in this chapter.

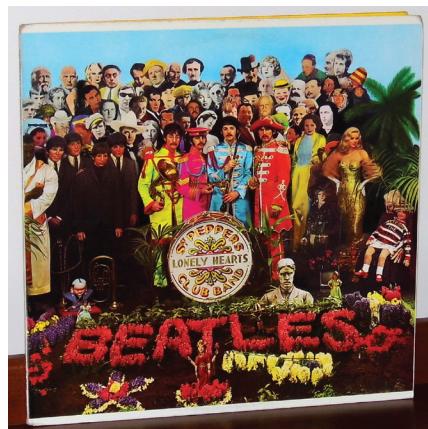
## THE BEATLES, *SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND*

It might seem odd to start with an album by a famous rock ‘n’ roll band who once performed in front of 55,000 fans at Shea Stadium in Queens and appeared frequently on national television. No performers of the era were more public. However, this album represented a deliberate and explicit break with the concert model, and it was intended to be heard through headphones by attentive, isolated listeners.

### Background

Frequently hailed as the greatest album ever recorded, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) epitomizes a musical work intended for domestic consumption. In fact, before even recording the album, The Beatles themselves knew that its contents would never be performed publicly. From the outset, according to producer George Martin, *Sgt. Pepper's* was intended to contain songs that “couldn’t be performed live: they were designed to be studio productions.” With their previous two albums, *Rubber Soul* (1965) and *Revolver* (1966), The Beatles had matured beyond the rock ‘n’ roll of their early period. (Chronologically and stylistically, *Revolver* marks the center of the band’s career, and discussions of their discography tend to place it near the middle of a transitional period from *Rubber Soul* to *Sgt. Pepper's*.) The Beatles had become a rock band, and *Sgt. Pepper's* represents a continuation and acceleration of their progression away from Beatlemania and the British Invasion era.

By the time *Sgt. Pepper's* was released, The Beatles were well on their way to becoming the most influential band of all time. Along with *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*, it is remembered as one of the first albums of the album era, a period from the mid-1960s to the mid-2000s during which the album, in various formats (LP, 8-track, cassette, CD), was the dominant medium for recorded music. Increasingly,



**Image 8.1:** The famous album cover for *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* shows The Beatles dressed as the fictitious band members in flamboyant, military-style outfits. The crowd behind them includes influential political and cultural figures.

Source: Flickr

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**Image 8.2:** This press photo shows The Beatles in 1965.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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albums came to be seen as more than just cost-effective vehicles for the distribution of hit-single compilations or collections of random songs. Artists had come to view their albums as extended works of art, in which each song was part of a unified whole, and The Beatles were at the forefront of this trend. With *Rubber Soul*, *Revolver*, and *Sgt. Pepper's*, the band, producer George Martin, and engineer Geoff Emerick succeeded in creating albums that were truly greater than the sum of their parts. (At Martin's request, Emerick was named The Beatles' engineer in April 1966, just before the *Revolver* sessions began.) Each album features songwriting that is more sophisticated and explores a wider variety of styles than its predecessor, and each reveals the band's ever-growing desire to experiment with the latest technological innovations. The impressive production and engineering skills of Martin and Emerick proved invaluable in this latter regard. By approaching the recording studio as another sort of musical instrument, they greatly facilitated The Beatles' attempts to realize their grand musical ideas. Although it took several hundred hours to record (an exorbitant amount of time by 1960s standards), *Sgt. Pepper's* was a huge hit in the Summer of Love, praised not only for bridging the cultural divide between popular music and high art but also for providing a musical representation of its generation and the contemporary counterculture.

The Beatles began recording *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* on November 24, 1966, in Studio Two at EMI Recording Studios (now Abbey Road Studios), London. Still fresh in their minds were the previous summer's momentous



**Image 8.3:** This photo shows George Martin working with The Beatles in the recording studio sometime in the mid-1960s.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Capitol Records

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events. On June 24, 1966, two days after completing their seventh album, *Revolver*, The Beatles had begun a tour of West Germany, Japan, the Philippines, and North America. The tour was relatively unsuccessful and plagued by weaker-than-expected ticket sales and run-ins with local authorities and protest groups. It ended with what became the group's final commercial concert, an eleven-song set at Candlestick Park in San Francisco on August 29. By then, each band member had agreed (probably in St. Louis, on August 21) that The Beatles would never again perform publicly. (They did, however, give one last public performance, from the rooftop of the London headquarters of Apple Corps, Ltd., their multimedia corporation, on January 30, 1969.) Many Beatles scholars consider the band's August 1966 decision to stop touring to be the most important one of their career. Within days of their August 31 return to London, they parted ways to begin a three-month break.

On November 19, 1966, five days before the *Sgt. Pepper's* recording sessions began, Paul McCartney conceived and began developing the idea of an Edwardian-era military band, namely, Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, whose members would be The Beatles' alter egos. The inspiration occurred "suddenly," during his return flight to London from a short safari vacation to Kenya with his then-girlfriend Jane Asher and Beatles assistant Mal Evans. In the following, McCartney recounts the episode:

I got this idea. I thought, let's not be ourselves. Let's develop alter egos. [Let's] actually take on the personas of this different band. We could say, "How would somebody else sing this? He might approach it a bit more sarcastically, perhaps." . . . It would be a freeing element. I thought we [could] run this philosophy through the whole album: with this alter-ego band, it won't be us making all that sound, it won't be The Beatles, it'll be this other band, so we'll be able to lose our identities in this.

[Mal and I] were having our [in-flight] meal, and they had those little packets marked "S" and "P." Mal said, "What's that mean? Oh, salt and pepper." We had a joke about that. So I said, "Sergeant Pepper," just to vary it, "Sergeant Pepper, salt and pepper," an aural pun, not mishearing him but just playing with the words.

Then, "Lonely Hearts Club," that's a good one. [At the time, there were a] lot of those about, the equivalent of a dating agency now. I just strung those [words] together rather in the way that you might string together Dr. Hook and the Medicine Show. All that culture of the Sixties going back to those traveling medicine men, Gypsies. It echoed back to the previous century, really. I just fantasized, well, "Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band." That'd be crazy enough, because why would a Lonely Hearts Club have a band? If it had been Sergeant Pepper's British Legion Band, that's more understandable. The idea was to be a little more funky. That's what everybody was doing. That was the fashion. The idea was just [to] take any words that would flow.

In late November 1966, when The Beatles began work on their eighth studio album, they had yet to choose its title. During the earliest sessions for what became *Sgt. Pepper's*, the band recorded “Strawberry Fields Forever” and “Penny Lane.” When composing these songs, Lennon and McCartney drew inspiration from their memories of Liverpool, the band’s hometown in Northwest England. For instance, Lennon, as a child, had played in the garden of Strawberry Field, a Salvation Army children’s home (now closed) in Woolton, a Liverpool suburb. And Penny Lane is an actual street in south Liverpool: The song’s lyrics vividly describe its associated characters. Also recorded during these early sessions was “When I’m Sixty-Four,” a song from The Beatles’ formative years and the only one of these three that appears on *Sgt. Pepper's*. Succumbing to management and record-company pressure, the band and producer George Martin agreed to release “Strawberry Fields Forever” and “Penny Lane” as a double A-side single on February 13, 1967. In his *Summer of Love: The Making of Sgt. Pepper*, Martin calls his agreement to leave these two songs off the album “the biggest mistake of my professional life.”

Despite their exclusion from *Sgt. Pepper's*, “Strawberry Fields Forever” and “Penny Lane” were crucial in setting its overarching theme, one involving the band members’ childhood experiences in Liverpool. (“Strawberry Fields Forever,” as Martin recalls in *Summer of Love*, “set the agenda for the whole album.”) In the first week of February 1967, The Beatles recorded what became the album’s title track, “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band,” yet another song evoking nostalgia for earlier times. More importantly, it was also the earliest realization of McCartney’s alter-ego idea from the previous November 19, and he soon proposed that the entire album should represent a performance by the fictional band.

This qualifies *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* as one of the first examples of a **concept album**—an approach to album design that would become increasingly important over the next few years and that persists into the present day. A concept album, like a song cycle (see Chapter 4), brings together a unified collection of songs to tell a story or capture an experience. Although *Sgt. Pepper's* does not present a specific narrative, it encourages the listener to imagine that they are present at a live concert—a concert, however, that they soon realize could never take place, due to the diversity of instruments and pervasiveness of studio editing.

### “*Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*”

The scene is set by the opening track, “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band,”<sup>1</sup> which opens with ambient noises intended to create the illusion that a show is about to begin. Martin combined crowd noises he had recorded at a theatrical performance with the sounds of an orchestra warming up, which he captured in the studio while recording tracks for use in the album’s final song. Of course, the ambient instrumentals aren’t quite right: We seem to hear strings at the outset, but they are absent from the song itself, which features typical rock band instruments (electric guitars, electric bass, and drums). Our expectations are soon disrupted, however, when an ensemble of French horns joins the soundscape at the conclusion

of the first verse. These are hardly at home in a rock lineup, and it is hard to imagine them being played onstage. The entrance of the horns is greeted by a cheer from the crowd, and crowd sounds punctuate the performance, reminding that listener that they are “present” at a live event.

1. 

“Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” from *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*  
Composers: John Lennon and Paul McCartney  
Performance: The Beatles (1967)



**Image 8.4: In imagining The Beatles’s alter egos for the album, McCartney was inspired by traditional British brass bands. Here we see a horn player in the US Air Force Band.**

Source: US Air Force  
Attribution: Christina Brownlow  
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McCartney’s lyrics—belted in a rock style—also reinforce the setting. He begins by providing a brief history of the band, after which he introduces it by name. Later, with lines like “we hope that you enjoy the show,” “it’s wonderful to be here,” and “you’re such a lovely audience,” he clearly establishes the premise for the album. To further solidify the idea that we are hearing a live concert, McCartney concludes “Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band” by transitioning directly into the second song. McCartney introduces a fictional singer, “the one and only Billy Shears” (voiced by Ringo Starr), who then launches into “With A Little Help From My Friends” to the sound of applause.

At this point, the concert conceit begins to evaporate. We no longer hear the sounds of the crowd, and we are gradually invited to forget the surroundings made real in the opening seconds of the album. While Starr's song is fairly conventional in terms of instrumentation and form, the third song begins the journey that will take the listener far away the concert stage.

### **“Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds”**

Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Introduction	Triple meter (through 0'47"); key of A major (through 0'31"); Paul's famous Lowrey organ part
0'06"	Verse 1	"Picture . . ."; George enters on tambura at about 0'17"
0'19"		"Somebody . . ."
0'32"	Bridge 1	"Cellophane . . ."; key of B-flat major (through 0'50")
0'43"		"Look . . ."
0'48"		"Gone"; quadruple meter (through 1'08")
0'51"	Chorus 1	"Lucy . . ." (3 times); key of G major (through 1'08")
1'07"		"Ahh"
1'09"	Verse 2	"Follow . . ."; triple meter (through 1'49"); key of A major (through 1'34")
1'22"		"Everyone . . ."
1'35"	Bridge 2	"Newspaper . . ."; key of B-flat major (through 1'52")

1'45"		"Climb . . ."
1'50"		"Gone"; quadruple meter (through 2'10")
1'53"	Chorus 2	"Lucy . . ." (3 times); key of G major (through 2'10")
2'09"		"Ahh"
2'11"	Verse 3	"Picture . . ."; triple meter (through 2'33"); key of A major (through 2'33")
2'24"		"Suddenly . . ."
2'34"		Quadruple meter (through fade-out); key of G major (through fade-out)
2'37"	Chorus 3	"Lucy . . ." (3 times)
2'52"		"Ahh"
2'57"	Chorus 3 (repeated)	"Lucy . . ." (3 times); fade-out begins at about 3'02"
3'12"		"Ahh"
3'17"	Chorus 3 (repeated; partial)	"Lucy . . ." (2 times); fades to silence

By the time they wrote and recorded *Sgt. Pepper's*, The Beatles had experimented with both cannabis and LSD, and the extent to which the band's use of these psychoactive drugs influenced its creation has long been debated. Of all the album's tracks, the third, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," is the one most discussed in this regard. Many believe that the first letters of the nouns in the song's title, L, S, and D, are a reference to lysergic acid diethylamide, LSD. Lennon repeatedly denied this, maintaining that the title was derived from that of a pastel drawing by his three-year-old son, Julian, that depicted the boy's nursery-school classmate Lucy O'Donnell. During an episode of *The Dick Cavett Show* airing on September 21, 1971, Lennon recalled Julian's presentation of the drawing to him, which Starr witnessed:

This is the truth. My son came home with a drawing, and showed me this strange-looking woman flying around. I said, “What is it?” He said, “It’s Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,” and I thought, “That’s beautiful.” I immediately wrote a song about it.

Whatever the case, the song itself is a masterpiece of **psychedelic rock**, due in no small part to its imaginative lyrics, with their “marmalade skies,” “cellophane flowers,” “rocking horse people,” and “newspaper taxis.” In writing them, Lennon was directly influenced by the literary style of Lewis Carroll’s novels *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and its sequel, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), especially the latter’s final chapter (chapter 12), “Which Dreamed It?”



**Image 8.5: The Beatles embraced psychedelia not only in their music but in their image. Here we see a press photo from their Magical Mystery Tour.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Musically, “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” exemplifies The Beatles’ artistic maturation over the period 1965–67. Its three main sections, the verse, the bridge, and the chorus, are in different keys: A major, B-flat major, and G major, respectively. Following a short introduction, this verse–bridge–chorus structure is heard for the first time, and is then repeated. A second repetition begins, but this time,

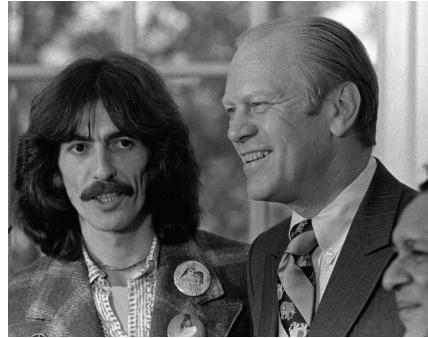
the bridge is absent: verse 3 leads directly to chorus 3, which is then repeated through the fade-out. Moreover, the song employs **mixed meter**. The introduction, the verse, and the bridge (except its last measure) are in triple meter, while the bridge's last measure and the chorus are in quadruple meter, also known as common time. The technique of shifting from triple to quadruple meter one measure before the chorus is also used to connect verse 3 to chorus 3. Each meter-change is accompanied by a noticeable tempo shift.

“Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” also reflects The Beatles’ increasing tendency to utilize sounds and instruments infrequently heard in contemporary rock. The song’s introduction, for instance, features a memorable keyboard part, brilliant in its simplicity, played by McCartney on a Lowrey DSO-1 Heritage Deluxe electronic organ. The ear-catching harpsichord- or celeste-like sound used for this part is (probably) a combination of the organ’s harpsichord, vibraphone, guitar, and music-box stops. Then, about halfway through the first verse, Harrison enters on the tambura (tanpura), a long-necked, unfretted lute commonly associated with Indian music. Typically, as heard here, the player plucks the instrument’s strings (usually four or five) in a continuously repeating pattern, producing a buzzing, overtone-rich drone. (In Western art music, the repetition of a musical pattern numerous times in succession is called **ostinato**.)

Indian music’s influence is again evident at the start of the first bridge. Here, as author Peter Lavezzoli explains, Harrison “mirrors Lennon’s [lead] vocal with electric guitar, as if he were playing a sarangi behind a khyal singer.” The Beatles’ guitarist is known to have “liked ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ a lot.” In discussing his contributions to its arrangement, Harrison highlights the song’s integration of non-Western elements:

I particularly liked the sounds on it where I managed to superimpose some Indian instruments onto the Western music. . . . I like the way the drone of the tambura could be fitted in there.

There was another thing: during vocals in Indian music, they have an instrument called a sarangi, which sounds like the human voice, and the vocalist and [the] sarangi player are more or less in unison in a performance. For “Lucy,” I thought of trying that idea, but because I’m not a sarangi player, I played it on guitar. . . . I was trying to copy Indian classical music.



**Image 8.6: Harrison became interested in North Indian music after encountering sitar master Ravi Shankar (discussed in Chapter 6). Here, they are pictured with President Gerald Ford during a 1974 White House visit.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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## "She's Leaving Home"

We will pass over the next two songs, although of course they have many points of interest: "Getting Better" includes the Indian tambura and an unusual early electric keyboard instrument called the pianette, while "Fixing a Hole" opens with the sounds of a harpsichord. "She's Leaving Home,"<sup>2</sup> however, marks the first wholesale departure from the rock-band sound, for the accompaniment is provided exclusively by strings. The arrangement for four violins, two violas, two cellos, string bass and harp was created by Mike Leander, although George Martin was never happy with it. **Double tracking** on the chorus—a technique by which a melodic line is recorded twice—causes the voices of Lennon and McCartney to multiply, thereby providing a marked contrast with the more subdued singing in the verses.

2. 

"She's Leaving Home" from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*  
 Composers: John Lennon and Paul McCartney  
 Performance: The Beatles (1967)

## "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite"<sup>3</sup>

More extraordinary sounds await the listener in the next song, the lyrics of which describe the activities of circus performers. In seeking to evoke a carnival atmosphere, Martin naturally turned to the instrument most closely associated with fairgrounds: the calliope, or steam organ. To bring an actual calliope into the studio, however, would have been impossible, so he instead combined recordings of instruments made on-site with the reedy sounds of the studio organ. The timbral palette is filled out by harmonium and four harmonicas.

These instruments—and others—are heard at the beginning of the track and in two extended interludes, each of which transports the listener to the scene being described. The first interlude is in triple time—an unusual feature, since the rest of the song is in quadruple time. The change is explained by the line preceding the interlude: "And of course Henry the horse dances the waltz." We are hearing the music to which he is dancing (and perhaps seeing Henry in our minds). The second interlude has been described by Michael Hannan as having been designed "to conjure up the giddy experience of a hallucinogenic carousel ride." Any listener is likely to confirm this view, for Martin has overlaid a dense tapestry of recorded calliope sounds that fail to line up to the pulse in a meaningful way. The effect is dizzying.



**Image 8.7: This British poster from 1874 depicts a horse-drawn calliope.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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3.



"Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite" from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*  
 Composers: John Lennon and Paul McCartney  
 Performance: The Beatles (1967)

### "Within You Without You"

We must consider, for a moment, the nature of the medium for which *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club* was intended. So far, all of the songs we have encountered appeared on the first side of the LP. "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite" closed out that side with its "hallucinogenic carousel ride." Next, the listener would have to take a brief break from listening in order to turn the record over. What they encountered next would represent the most distant point on their sonic journey.

The North Indian instruments heard in "Within You Without You"<sup>4</sup> are not new to the listener, but Harrison goes further in his efforts to absorb and reflect Indian musical influence, such that this song represents The Beatles' deepest foray into the world of Indian music. The Beatles' fascination (especially Harrison's and Lennon's) with Indian music and philosophy began in 1965. Like "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," the songs "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)," from *Rubber Soul*, and "Tomorrow Never Knows," from *Revolver*, contain obvious examples of Indian musical influence. Written primarily by Lennon, all three are firmly rooted in the Western popular music tradition. Their "Indian" elements, though innovative, are essentially superficial, a sort of sonic flavoring, mainly involving the use of non-Western instruments (e.g., sitar, tambura).

4.



"Within You Without You" from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*  
 Composer: George Harrison  
 Performance: The Beatles (1967)

"Within You Without You" features a veritable orchestra of Indian and Western instruments, including three tamburas, two dilrubas (a bowed lute), a sitar, eight violins, three cellos, and tabla (a pair of hand drums). The unusual scales on which the melodies are based reflect Indian influence, as does the fact that the entire song is rooted in a persistent drone. Other Indian-derived elements include the slides we hear between pitches and the use of **call and response** between solo and grouped instruments. The lyrics convey Lennon's understanding of Eastern philosophy.



**Image 8.8: The dilruba is a bowed lute.**

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The inclusion, at Harrison's request, of the images of four Indian gurus on the album's iconic cover further attests to the culture's profound impact on the band at this time. The gurus appear there in a collage of several dozen celebrities and historical figures, before which The Beatles stand, posed as the fictional Lonely Hearts Club Band, in their brightly colored Edwardian-era military uniforms.

### **"A Day in the Life"**

Near the end of the second side, "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" returns as a reprise. It seems to the listener that this is the end of the concert—a message reinforced by the lines "we hope you have enjoyed the show" and "we're sorry, but it's time to go." The song sounds a little bit different than it did the first time: it's faster, shorter, and at a lower pitch level. The crowd sounds are back, however, and cheers at the end suggest that the concert has indeed concluded.

Instead, the music transitions directly into a final song—the longest and most complicated song on the entire album. "A Day in the Life"<sup>5</sup> begins with the spare texture of guitar and piano, but upon the words "I'd love to turn you on" the listener is gradually overwhelmed by a sound that grows in volume, pitch, and intensity with inevitable force. Although it is hard to identify, what we are actually hearing is forty orchestral musicians each recorded four times, for a total of 160 tracks. (It was during this recording session that Martin captured the ambient "warming up" noises heard at the beginning of the album.)

5.



"A Day in the Life" from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*

Composers: John Lennon and Paul McCartney

Performance: The Beatles (1967)

Following the climax of the crescendo, we are returned to what seems to be a totally different song. It certainly bears little relation to what preceded the orchestral noise. This time, the words "I went into a dream" cue the return of orchestral instruments, which now underpin McCartney's floating vocals. The next section brings back the opening material, which again spills into a cacophonous orchestral crescendo. This time, however, it is followed up with a piano chord—in fact, a thrice overdubbed recording of three musicians playing three pianos—that slowly fades away over the course of forty-three seconds. The last thing we hear is some incidental studio chatter, which was originally cut into the outer groove so that it would loop indefinitely until the listener lifted the tonearm off of the disc.

## Legacy

Few musical works in history have enjoyed the success of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. After reaching number one on the UK's "Official Albums Chart" on June 10, 1967, it remained there for twenty-three consecutive weeks. In the U.S., *Sgt. Pepper's* began a fifteen-week run atop the "Billboard 200" album chart on July 1, 1967. Since that time, it has spent hundreds of weeks on both charts. Meanwhile, critical assessments of the album have remained almost universally positive for more than five decades. (To this day, its few negative critics are attacked as heretical pariahs, often publicly shamed by their colleagues.) As author Jonathan Gould explains, the critics' seemingly endless heaping of praise on *Sgt. Pepper's* began immediately after its release:

The overwhelming consensus was that The Beatles had created a popular masterpiece: a rich, sustained, and overflowing work of collaborative genius whose bold ambition and startling originality dramatically enlarged the possibilities and raised the expectations of what the experience of listening to popular music on record could be. On the basis of this perception, *Sgt. Pepper's*] became the catalyst for an explosion of mass enthusiasm for album-formatted Rock that would revolutionize both the aesthetics and the economics of the record business in ways that far outstripped the earlier Pop explosions triggered by the Elvis phenomenon of 1956 and the Beatlemania phenomenon of 1963.

*Sgt. Pepper's* has garnered a vast multitude of accolades. At the 10th Annual Grammy Awards ceremony (in February 1968, honoring 1967 releases), for example, it became the first rock album to be named Album of the Year (for The Beatles and producer George Martin). *Sgt. Pepper's* also received three other Grammys that night: Best Contemporary Album (again for The Beatles and producer George Martin), Best Engineered Recording—Non-Classical (for engineer Geoff Emerick), and Best Album Cover, Graphic Arts (for art directors Peter Blake and Jann Haworth). The Library of Congress added the album to the National Recording Registry in 2003, in recognition of its cultural, historic, and aesthetic significance, and in 2012, *Rolling Stone* ranked *Sgt. Pepper's* number one in its list of the "500 Greatest Albums of All Time." As of today, it has sold more than thirty-two million copies worldwide, making it one of the best-selling albums ever released.

## COUNTESS OF DIA, "I MUST SING"

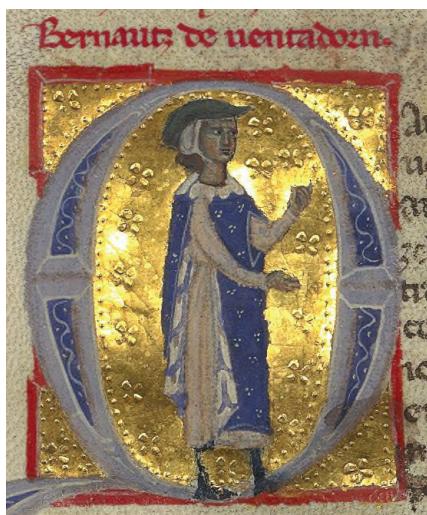
For most of history, of course, intimate music making has required live performers. As a result, various traditions of song accompanied by one or a few acoustic instruments have arisen in various times and places. We will examine several of these, beginning with the first secular song repertoire ever to be

written down: that of the medieval troubadours, who wrote songs in what is now southern France.

## Troubadours

In historical terms, troubadours were not professional musicians. They were noblemen and noblewomen who wrote and performed courtly songs for their own entertainment. The term “troubadour” comes from the Provençal language, which was spoken in the Duchy of Aquitaine. It literally means “one who finds,” and was used to describe the work of poets, who were understood not to create their works but to discover them. Troubadours certainly dedicated most of their energy to crafting elaborate verses, but these were always set to music and sung, not recited.

Although troubadours wrote in dozens of distinct genres, they were primarily preoccupied with romantic concerns. The most significant genre of troubadour song was the **canso**, which expressed the courtly sentiment of *fin'amors* (“refined love”). Typically speaking, *fin'amors* was the passion that a knight felt for the lady he served. This passion was romantic and all-consuming, but it could never be satisfied, for the knight was pledged to serve his master and mistress—an obligation that precluded the possibility of intruding upon their marriage. Instead, the knight would suffer in song, lamenting the impossibility of winning the woman he desired but finding solace in dedicating his life to her service.



**Image 8.9: The 12th-century troubadour Bernart of Ventadorn, as depicted in his vida.**

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This ideal of unrequited passion was at the center of Aquitainian courtly life, as we see when we examine the biographies, or **vidas**, of the troubadours. These short narratives, which were only loosely grounded in historical truth, include few details about the troubadour’s work or life. Instead, they focus entirely on the noble personages whom the troubadour loved and on behalf of whom the troubadour suffered. Take, for example, the *vida* of Bernart of Ventadorn, the most famous of all the troubadours. His rather long *vida* is dedicated entirely to his romantic life. It tells us how he first loved the wife of the Viscount of Ventadorn, about whom he wrote all of his songs. Upon the discovery of his passion, however, Bernart was dismissed and joined the court of the Duchess of Normandy—with whom he fell in love, of course, and about

whom he wrote many more songs. Upon her departure for England, Bernart reportedly entered an order of monks and died of a broken heart.

Although troubadours are best remembered for their celebrations of idealized romantic suffering, they also sang about more earthly love affairs. The *alba* was a

song about lovers interrupted by the dawn (and the return of the woman's husband), while the *serena* concerned a lover impatiently awaiting his partner's arrival in the evening. In a *pastorela*, a knight suggested to a peasant girl that they make love; sometimes she acceded, sometimes she did not. In sum, the repertoire makes it clear that troubadours didn't spend *all* of their time yearning for unobtainable aristocrats.

The troubadours were active throughout the 12th century, while the Duchy of Aquitaine flourished. During this period, their tradition was primarily **oral**. They wrote songs in their heads and performed them from memory, and those songs were then carried from place to place by **minstrels** who learned them by ear. In the early 13th century, however, an effort was made to preserve the songs of the troubadours. This is when the *vidas* were recorded. In addition, hundreds of poems and a smaller number of melodies were collected in richly-embellished manuscripts.

However, the need to preserve a fading tradition is not the only reason that the songs of the troubadours became the first secular music ever to be recorded. The troubadours and their supporters were also in the unique position of having access to the wealth and education necessary to write music down. In the medieval era, books were difficult and expensive to produce and were therefore enormously valuable. The pages were usually **velum** (dried sheep skin), and few people had the skills necessary to read or write. Music literacy in particular was largely restricted to clerics. While the troubadour repertoire is prized, we must remember that it offers only a glimpse into the rich traditions of song and dance music that flourished in medieval oral culture.

Although the songs of the troubadours were indeed preserved, we still have only shadowy ideas about what this music sounded like. This is because only the melodies were recorded, using a primitive form of notation that did not indicate



**Image 8.10:**  
Illuminations in medieval manuscripts shed light on performance practice. Here, we see musicians playing the rebec and cithar.

Source: Picryl  
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**Image 8.11:** The citole, portrayed here ca. 1310, was a type of lute, and therefore related to the modern guitar.

Source: Wikimedia Commons  
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**Image 8.12:** This illumination from ca. 1300 portrays a musician playing the vielle.

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rhythmic values. The extant manuscripts seem to suggest, therefore, that troubadours sang without accompaniment, but we know from illustrations that this was not the case. Manuscript illuminations depict troubadours and minstrels playing a variety of instruments, including the lute, citole, vielle, rebec, psaltery, harp, shawm, and bagpipes. It is clear that these instruments were used to accompany both dancing and singing. Today, therefore, performers use their imaginations when they approach the troubadour repertoire, creating appropriate accompaniments based on what we know about the instruments, styles, and practices of the time.

Mystery surrounds not only the songs but their creators. Most of the troubadours are known only by their brief *vidas*, which are highly unreliable. This is certainly the case of the Countess of Dia, who authored the *canso* that we will examine. Her *vida* reads as follows: “The Countess of Dia was the wife of Lord Guillem of Peitieu, a beautiful and good lady. And she fell in love with Lord Raimbaut of Orange and composed many good songs about him.” This *vida* certainly tells us all that the author felt we needed to know: The Countess was beautiful and good (attributes commonly assigned to noblewomen), she loved a man who was not her husband, and she wrote songs about him. Unfortunately, scholars have been unable to identify the Countess, although competing theories thrive.

## “I Must Sing”

The Countess of Dia’s “I Must Sing” is the only song by a **trobairitz** (the female counterpart to a troubadour) to survive with music. However, it is clear that trobairitz thrived in the courts of Aquitaine, where men and women enjoyed relative equality. Although trobairitz were highly regarded for their poetic skill, they were discouraged from performing their songs in public—an activity considered unseemly for a woman. Instead, male performers would learn and share their music.



**Image 8.13: The angels in this ca. 1320 illumination play nearly a full compliment of medieval instruments, including the guitar-shaped citole, violin-shaped vielle, psaltery, and trumpet .**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 8.14: The musicians in this ca. 1310 illumination play harp, rebec, citole, psaltery, and perhaps a tambourine.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 8.15: This is the *vida* of the Countess of Dia, accompanied by her image.**

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Trobairitz also had to be a bit more circumspect regarding their declarations of courtly love. While troubadours could be fairly explicit, trobairitz sang in more general terms about the suffering that unrequited love caused them to endure.

“I Must Sing” follows the standard form for a canson. It is in five complete stanzas, the first of which clearly states the lover’s complaint. A partial sixth stanza bids the listener farewell via an imagined messenger and offers a closing moral (“many people suffer for having too much pride”). In the intervening stanzas, the speaker reminds her errant lover of her many fine qualities and washes her hands of any blame for the separation:

I must sing of what I do not want,  
I am so angry with the one whom I love,  
Because I love him more than anything:  
Mercy nor courtesy moves him,  
Neither does my beauty, nor my worthiness,  
nor my good sense,  
For I am deceived and betrayed  
As much as I should be, if I were ugly.

I take comfort because I never did anything wrong,  
Friend, towards you in anything,  
Rather I love you more than Seguin did Valensa,  
And I am greatly pleased that I conquered you in love,  
My friend, because you are the most worthy;  
You are arrogant to me in words and appearance,  
And yet you are so friendly towards everyone else.

I wonder at how you have become so proud,  
Friend, towards me, and I have reason to lament;  
It is not right that another love take you away from me  
No matter what is said or granted to you.  
And remember how it was at the beginning  
Of our love! May Lord God never wish  
That it was my fault for our separation.

The great prowess that dwells in you  
And your noble worth retain me,  
For I do not know of any woman, far or near,  
Who, if she wants to love, would not incline to you;  
But you, friend, have such understanding  
That you can tell the best,  
And I remind you of our sharing.

My worth and my nobility should help me,  
My beauty and my fine heart;  
Therefore, I send this song down to you  
So that it would be my messenger.  
I want to know, my fair and noble friend,  
Why you are so cruel and savage to me;  
I don't know if it is arrogance or ill will.

But I especially want you, messenger, to tell him  
That many people suffer for having too much pride.

*Translated by Craig E. Bertolet. Used with permission.*

As was always the case among troubadours, the Countess of Dia set her poem as a **strophic song**, meaning that each stanza is sung to the same melody. Although this means that there can be no direct correlation between text and music (since the music repeats), her melody is nonetheless expressive. She uses a standard troubadour form known as **bar form**, which follows an A A B pattern. The A section starts in the medium range and then descends—perhaps emblematic of the singer's sorrow. The B section ascends to the song's highest note by means of a series of leaps, creating a climactic moment before returning to the low range. The song is in the Dorian mode, which is very similar to the minor mode; only a single pitch in “I Must Sing” does not come from the minor scale.

In order to demonstrate the variety that characterizes modern performances of troubadour songs, we will consider two recordings of “I Must Sing.” The first is very simple.<sup>6</sup> The female singer begins without accompaniment, but she is joined by a harp in the second A phrase of the first verse. The harp continues to play for the remainder of the performance. It provides simple harmonies, alternating between two chords derived from the pitches on which the phrases of the melody end. The singer chooses her rhythms based on the meaning of the text and sound of the words, while the harp follows her phrasing. This rendition could easily be performed by a single musician accompanying her own singing—just as we know these songs were often performed in the troubadour era.

6.



“I Must Sing”

Composer: Countess of Dia

Performance: New York’s Ensemble for Early Music (2003)

The second recording is more complex.<sup>7</sup> First, we hear fragments of the melody played on a variety of stringed instruments, including lute, harp, and bass viol. When the singer enters, she interprets the melody with rhythmic freedom while the instruments add flourishes. In between verses, instrumental interludes

feature a percussive pulse and the sounds of the *ney* flute and *kanun* zither, which perform a metered version of Dia's melody. Both the *ney* and the *kanun*—along with several other instruments heard on this recording—will be discussed in the next section, which addresses court music of the Ottoman Empire. The music director who created this recording, Jordi Savall, is renowned for his recreations of medieval European song using the instruments and performance techniques associated with Middle Eastern music of the same era. It is likely that the two musical traditions had many common elements in the 12th century. While troubadour practices were eradicated, however, those of Middle Eastern courts have persisted into the present.

7.



"I Must Sing"

Composer: Countess of Dia

Performance: Montserrat Figueras with Hespèrion XXI,  
conducted by Jordi Savall (2010)

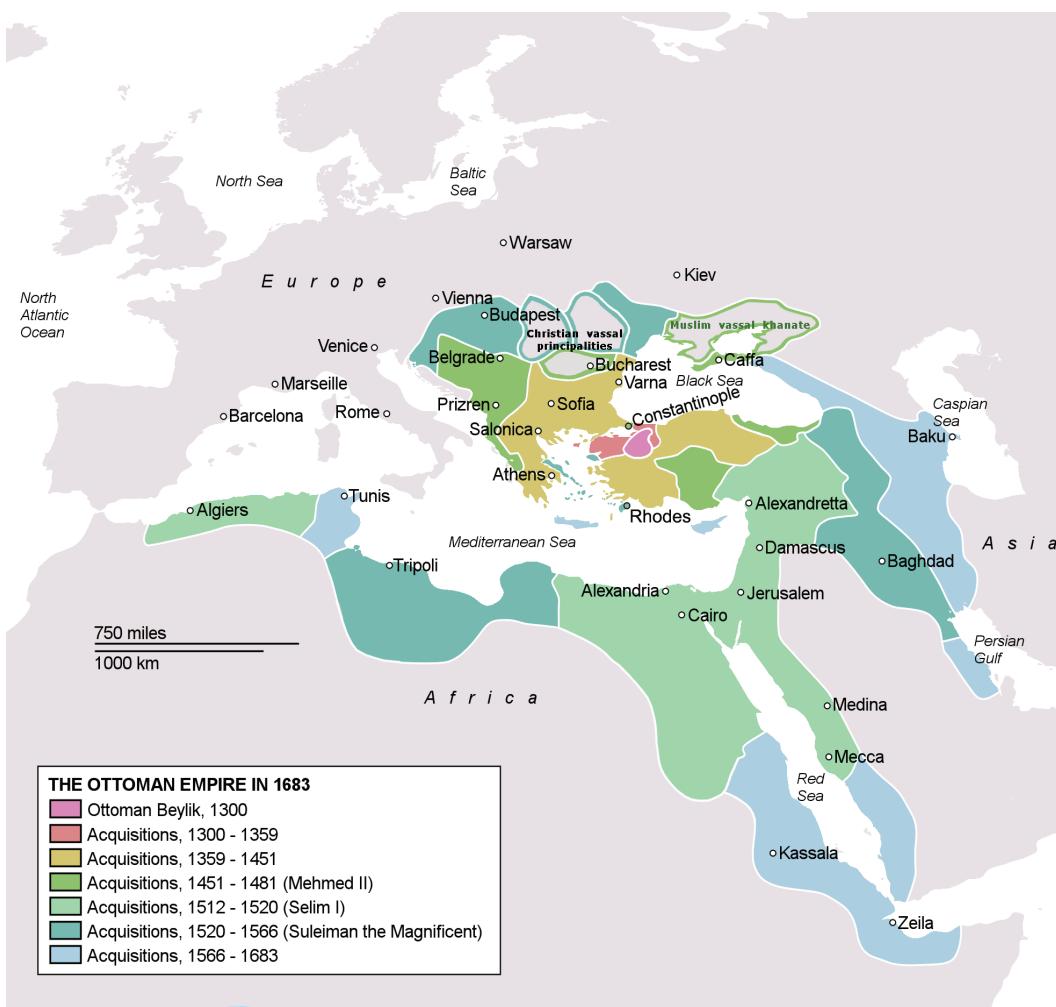
## TANBURI CEMIL BEY, "SAMÂI SHAD ARABAN"

Where there are powerful rulers, there is music. We might select examples of court music from any of the great empires of history, for all have used music to advertise power, signify elite status, invest ceremonies with dignity, ornament daily life, and entertain guests. Many relevant instances are discussed elsewhere in this book: Claudio Monteverdi's *Orpheus* (Chapter 4), for example, was designed for the Gonzaga court at Mantua, while the *jali* of West Africa (Chapter 5) were principally occupied with serving the Mandinkan aristocracy.

Here, however, in keeping with the focus of this chapter on unstaged chamber music intended for small spaces and private audiences, we will consider a tradition that developed in the courts of the Ottoman Empire. This example will also help us to understand how troubadour songs (discussed in the previous section) are interpreted by performers today, for they often incorporate the instruments, textures, and ornamentation of Middle Eastern court music. Finally, this example will provide a point of reference for evaluating Pyotr Illyich Tchaikovsky's exoticized "Arabian" music in *The Nutcracker* (Chapter 4).

### Music in the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire was founded in 1299 by the Turkish tribal leader Osman I. In 1453, the Ottomans captured the Christian city of Constantinople, which had until that point been the capital of the Byzantine Empire. That city, known today as Istanbul, became the capital of the Ottoman Empire: a centralized seat from which the sultan (Arabic for "supreme authority") could expand his reach. The Ottoman Empire achieved the height of its power in the late 16th century, at which point it extended from Central Europe across North Africa and well into the Middle East.



**Image 8.16: This map details the growth of the Ottoman Empire from its founding in 1300 until 1683, at which point it occupied a vast territory.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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The 19th century, however, saw the Empire's gradual decline as it ceded power and territory to its neighbors. Following the Great War (later renamed World War I), the Empire was formally dissolved and ultimately replaced by the Republic of Turkey in 1923.

For several centuries, however, the Ottoman Empire mediated between European powers and the Far East. The Western border of the Empire came very near Vienna, which was a major European political and cultural center in the 18th and 19th centuries. As a result, Ottoman music had a significant impact in Europe. The Ottoman military band tradition, in particular, can be identified as the precursor to Western marching bands, while composers like Mozart and Beethoven frequently referenced Ottoman instruments and styles in their music.

The Ottoman Empire certainly cultivated rich musical traditions. Here, we will examine the most elite of those traditions: **makam music**, which was performed for (and sometimes even created by) the sultan and members of his court. As in

most great empires, the Ottoman rulers sought to manage cultural diversity, not eradicate it. As the Empire absorbed citizens from three continents, it simultaneously assimilated their cultural traditions. Ottoman musical practices, therefore, reflected Byzantine, Armenian, Arabic, Persian, and even European influence.

The term ***makam*** is itself derived from the Arabic *maqam*, which describes a system of musical **modes**. In European music, modes are scales, the most prominent of which in use today are major and minor. A *makam*, however, is more than just a scale. To begin with, there are many more *makams* than there are European modes—between 60 and 120. They are difficult to count because *makams* are always coming and going. An individual *makam* might fall out of use, or a new one might be developed.

The number of *makams* is so high because each contains a great deal of information about how music associated with it is expected to sound. A *makam* determines not only pitches but characteristic melodic motifs, ascending and descending melodic patterns, phrase endings, and the specific tuning of individual notes. This last element can be particularly striking, for the Turkish system divides each whole step into nine possible microtones (the European system divides it into only two). A note that is meant to be just slightly flat or slightly sharp, therefore, will sound out of tune to a Western ear, even though the performer has in fact placed it with perfect precision.

*Makam* music is performed using instruments that can be found across the



**Image 8.17:** This engraving captures Ottoman musicians of the mid-18th century.

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Mediterranean region. These include the *oud* (a type of lute), the *kanun* (a plucked zither), the *ney* (an end-blown reed flute), and the *rebab* and *kemençe* (both bowed fiddles), although these last instruments have been almost completely replaced by the violin. Percussion instruments are also important, for they mark the rhythmic cycle, known as the *usul*. These instruments include the pair of pot-shaped *kudüm* drums, the *bendir* (a circular frame drum), and the *def*, which is related to the tambourine. In the performance of *makam* music, only one of each instrument is typically present, and their unique timbres are easy to discern in the texture.

Ottoman musicians organized their court performances into suites of individual pieces. Such a suite is known as a *fasıl*, and it might contain six or eight pieces, all in the same *makam*, totalling about thirty minutes of music. A traditional *fasıl* is full of variety: It contains different types of songs and several vocal and instrumental improvisations. Although most of the pieces feature a singer, the *fasıl* starts and ends with lengthy selections for the instrumental ensemble. The introductory *peşrev* is slow and stately, while the concluding ***saz semâisi*** contains passages in a lively dance tempo.

### Samî Shad Araban

We will consider a famous *saz semâisi* composed by Tanburi Cemil Bey (1843–1916). Cemil Bey was famous for his virtuosity as a performer. Although he began his training on the violin and kanun, he soon gained renown for his skill on the *tanbur*—a long-necked lute that developed in the Ottoman Empire—and *kemençe*. Cemil Bey lived late enough that he was able to leave behind recordings, made on 78 rpm discs. These attest to his ability and continue to influence performers today, who still employ techniques that he developed and popularized.

In addition to revolutionizing performance techniques, Cemil Bey left behind a large number



**Image 8.18: The fretless oud is related to the European lute and guitar.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: User "Tdrivas"

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**Image 8.19: The kanun is plucked using metal finger picks.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 8.20: The Turkish kemençe is a small, pear-shaped fiddle. Like the rebab, it is held vertically.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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of compositions, many of which are among the most frequently performed in the Turkish classical tradition. Although Cemil Bey did not personally serve in the court of the sultan (the Ottoman Empire, after all, was well into its decline during his lifetime), he worked in the forms that had been developed for court entertainment. His “Samâi Shad Araban,” therefore, has the typical characteristics of a *saz semâisi*, and by examining it we will be able to understand how this type of composition has functioned for hundreds of years. We will also have an opportunity to hear the typical Turkish instruments and consider how they are used in performance.

		“Samâi Shad Araban” Performance: Omar Sarmini and Hames Bitar with the Ensemble Al-Ruzafa (2007)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	A (Hane 1)	The violin, ney, oud, and kanun all play unique versions of the same melody
0'36"	Teslim	
1'12"	B (Hane 2)	
1'54"	Teslim	
2'30"	C (Hane 3)	Near the beginning of this passage we hear a “half-flat” pitch that some might perceive as out-of-tune
3'18"	Teslim	
3'54"	D (Hane 4)	In this passage, the meter changes to triple and short melodic passages are repeated
5'54"	Teslim	Played by the solo oud
6'31"	Teslim	Played by the entire ensemble

To begin with, we must consider the nature of composition in the Ottoman tradition. Like medieval Europeans (consider, for example, the Countess of Dia), Ottoman performers learned, composed, and taught music without the aid of notation. Although Ottoman music was notated as early as the 17th century, the purpose of notation has always been primarily to record compositions for future

reference, and it is seldom used for teaching or performance. Even today, Turkish classical musicians rely on aural and oral processes—that is, listening, imitating, and correcting—to acquire techniques and repertoire.

A typical characteristic of music in oral traditions is variation. When a performer learns a tune by ear, they are likely to introduce minor alterations by accident. However, in the Ottoman tradition, variation is not only accepted but encouraged. The composer expects individual performers to interpret the melody in a way that reflects the characteristics of their instrument, their training, and their own personal preference. As a result, while a performance of “Samâi Shad Araban” is always recognizable, no two musicians will play exactly the same notes.

Another type of variation emerges due to the norms of Ottoman performance practice. A piece of music such as Clara Schumann’s Piano Trio in G minor, discussed at the end of this chapter, is intended for a specific assortment of instruments: one piano, one violin, and one cello. Schumann also used notation to indicate exactly what each performer is supposed to do. Compositions in the Ottoman tradition, however, can be realized using any permutation of the classical ensemble. “Samâi Shad Araban,” therefore, can be performed as a solo or by an ensemble. A typical performance will feature about six performers, with only one playing each of the instruments described above. However, a rendition by a smaller or larger ensemble is perfectly viable.

This flexibility is a characteristic of the **heterophonic** texture of Ottoman classical music, in which all pitched instruments play essentially the same melody. “Samâi Shad Araban,” for example, can be **transcribed** (written down using staff notation) as a single melodic line. However, no two instruments play exactly the same pitches. Sometimes the variations have to do with the technical limitations of the instrument: a *rebab* player, for example, can slide between pitches, while a *kanun* player cannot. Other variations have to do with training or personal preference, as described above. The result is a complex musical texture in which the listener can easily perceive a core melody, even as the performers constantly alter that melody with diverse shadings and ornaments.

We will hear all of this in our recording of “Samâi Shad Araban.” First, however, we must consider the typical characteristics of a *saz semâisi*. In terms of form, a *saz semâisi* always features a repeated melodic refrain (known as a *teslim*) that follows upon a series of disparate melodic passages (each of which is termed a *hane*, or “house”). The form of “Samâi Shad Araban” can be summarized as A T B T C T D T, in which T (for *teslim*) is the refrain.

While each of the *hane* are melodically distinct, the D *hane* is markedly different from the others. To begin with, it contains a great deal of internal repetition—each of the first three melodic phrases is repeated at least once. Most striking, however, is that it is in a different meter. While the predominant *usul* (meter) of a *saz semâisi* consists of a cycle of ten beats in a moderate tempo, the *usul* of the D *hane* has six beats and is performed at a significantly faster tempo. As a result,

the penultimate passage of “Samâi Shad Araban” is more energetic and exciting than those that preceded it. This makes the *saz semâisi* a good piece of music with which to conclude a suite, for it always comes to a rollicking finish.

The melodic instruments in our recording are the violin, *ney*, *oud*, and *kanun*. Because the timbre of each is so different, it is fairly easy to pick the various instruments out of the texture. In addition, each adds unique, **improvised** ornaments. The *kanun* player periodically contributes melodic flourishes and rhythmic elements that are not played by the other instruments, while the violin player emphasizes their ability to slide between pitches. The *oud* is foregrounded near the end of the performance, when it renders a solo version of the *teslim* before we hear it one last time from the entire ensemble.

The percussion accompaniment to “Samâi Shad Araban”—and, indeed, to any *saz semâisi*—is not specified by the composer. Instead, the performers use their knowledge of the *usul* and the melody to improvise an accompaniment that demarcates the rhythmic cycle while also reflecting the character of the melodic phrases. In this recording, we can clearly hear the jingling sounds of the *def* above the regular beats of the various drums.

Finally, a word about mode. The *makam* of “Samâi Shad Araban” is indicated by its title, which tells us the type of piece that this is—a *saz semâisi*—and its mode, Shad Araban. (This is similar to the European convention of naming a piece of music something like *Symphony in E Minor*.) The pitches of Shad Araban<sup>8</sup> are not particularly similar to those of the major or minor scale. This *makam* features two intervals of an augmented second: a large interval that is not present in any European scale. It also contains a large number of half steps, the smallest European interval. As a result, melodies in Shad Araban move by intervals that seem alternately cramped and spacious.

8.



This video demonstrates the pitches of Shad Araban.

## JOHN DOWLAND, “FLOW, MY TEARS”

John Dowland (1563–1626) was indisputably one of the finest lute players of his day. Although he was best known for his skill as a performer, he also wrote a great deal of music, both for his own instrument and for **viol consort** (an ensemble of string instruments that predated the modern violin family). He gained a reputation for writing exceptionally sad songs that celebrated melancholy.

### Dowland’s Career

Despite his widely-recognized skill, Dowland was repeatedly frustrated in his attempts to secure a position at the court of Queen Elizabeth I. This might have

been due to the fact that he had converted to Catholicism, although Elizabeth, who was tolerant of religious diversity, employed other Catholic musicians. Whatever the case, he spent decades working on the European continent while continuing to publish his music in England. In 1594 he accepted a position at the court of the Duke of Brunswick-Lüneburg. Then, in 1598, he became lutenist at the court of Christian IV, King of Denmark, where he was held in high esteem and paid an astronomical sum.

Dowland returned to England in 1606, but it was not until 1612 that he was finally able to secure a position at the English court. By this time, he not only had an international reputation but had published a wealth of compositions. Writing music served Dowland's interests in several ways. By producing new music for his own instrument, the lute, Dowland increased his value as a court employee. By publishing music for the lute and other instruments, he created an additional source of income and strengthened his reputation. Finally, by dedicating his publications to wealthy aristocrats, he won their professional and financial support.

### "Flow, My Tears"

The lute song "Flow, My Tears"<sup>9</sup> provides an excellent example of Dowland's professional savvy. The composition began life as a **pavan**<sup>10</sup> for solo lute entitled "Lachrimae" (a Latin term meaning "tears"). A pavan is a type of slow, stately court dance that was popular in Europe at the time. Although Dowland's music was not intended to accompany dancing, he was often influenced by the characters and styles of dance music. When "Lachrimae" became Dowland's most popular work, he took the opportunity to capitalize on his success by transforming it into a song.

9.	 "Flow, My Tears" Composer: John Dowland Performance: Elin Manahan Thomas and David Miller (2007)
10.	 Dowland's lute song "Flow, My Tears" was adapted from this earlier composition for solo lute, entitled "Lachrimae."

"Flow, My Tears" was first published in Dowland's 1600 collection *The Second Booke of Songs or Ayres* (an "**ayre**" is a solo song with lute accompaniment). Dowland had previously developed a novel approach to typesetting his lute songs, many of which had more than one vocal part. Before Dowland, it was common practice to publish each vocal and instrumental part to a piece of music in a separate book, known as a "part book." Each performer therefore needed to possess the correct book, and could only see their own part. Dowland began printing all of the

parts in a single book, which could be laid out on a table before the performers. In this way they could all read from the same page.

This tells us something important about how Dowland's music was used: He was writing for groups of friends or family members, who would perform his music gathered around a table in the home. Although today you are more likely to hear Dowland performed by professionals in a concert setting, that was never what he had in mind. He was producing music for the domestic entertainment market—music to fill the long evening hours when there was little else to do.

The layout of “Flow, My Tears” can help us to visualize a home performance, even if one cannot read the music. The lute and primary vocal part are paired together, since they might be performed by the same person. The lute part, as was typical of the era, is printed using **tablature** instead of staff notation. Lute tablature, much like guitar tab today, indicates where the fingers of the left hand go on each string of the instrument. It also includes rhythms. The extra vocal part is printed on the second page, and it faces in a different direction. This was for convenience: The additional singer would sit to the right of the lutenist, along the adjoining edge of the table.

*Lacrima.*

*T.*

*CANTO.*

Low my tears fall from your spring,  
Down vain lights flume you no more,  
Exide for e-ter- Let mee  
No nighte are dark e-ough for

more where nighte black bird her  
that in the darknesse left forms departs, light doth but flame diff.  
Nere may my woes be re-  
For the highest pice of com-  
luted, since pit-  
tament, my for-  
tune is fled,  
and rears, and fishes, and groves  
is thrownne,  
and feare, and gracie, and pane

my wearie-  
for my de-  
dres, hi-  
fets, hi-  
of all yea-  
r-e, pri-  
-ued.  
are my hopefull hope as  
groe-

Hark ye shadows that in darkenesse dwell, come to consume light, Happy lippie they

*LACRIMA.*

*T.*

*CANTO.*

Low tears from your spring, Ex. id for e-ter- Let me remember  
Downe lighntine no more, no nighte is darknesse enough for thode : that  
blacks blind his eye, in- fa, my longe light doth but flame diff.  
put ther formes de hore, light doth but flame diff.

Ne- uer may my woes be re-  
From the highest pice of com-  
luted, since pit-  
tament, my for-  
tune is fled,  
and rears, and fishes, and groves  
is thrownne,  
and feare, and gracie, and pane

my wearie-  
for my de-  
dres, hi-  
fets, hi-  
of all yea-  
r-e, pri-  
-ued.  
are my hopefull hope as  
groe-

Hark ye shadows that in darkenesse dwell, come to consume light, Happy lippie they

*LACRIMA.*

*T.*

*CANTO.*

Low tears from your spring, Ex. id for e-ter- Let me remember  
Downe lighntine no more, no nighte is darknesse enough for thode : that  
blacks blind his eye, in- fa, my longe light doth but flame diff.  
put ther formes de hore, light doth but flame diff.

Ne- uer may my woes be re-  
From the highest pice of com-  
luted, since pit-  
tament, my for-  
tune is fled,  
and rears, and fishes, and groves  
is thrownne,  
and feare, and gracie, and pane

my wearie-  
for my de-  
dres, hi-  
fets, hi-  
of all yea-  
r-e, pri-  
-ued.  
are my hopefull hope as  
groe-

Hark ye shadows that in darkenesse dwell, come to consume light, Happy lippie they

**Image 8.21:** As you can see, the additional vocal part in the original edition of Dowland's ayre faces a different direction than the lute and principal vocal parts. This facilitates an in-home performance for which the optional extra singer sits on the adjacent edge of a table.

Source: First Edition Scanned Image

Attribution: John Dowland

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“Flow, My Tears” is a prime example of Dowland’s work in terms of affect, form, and style. To begin with, the text is characteristically gloomy:

Flow, my tears, fall from your springs!  
Exiled for ever, let me mourn;  
Where night’s black bird her sad infamy sings,  
There let me live forlorn.

Down vain lights, shine you no more!  
No nights are dark enough for those  
That in despair their lost fortunes deplore.  
Light doth but shame disclose.

Never may my woes be relieved,  
Since pity is fled;  
And tears and sighs and groans my weary days  
Of all joys have deprived.

From the highest spire of contentment  
My fortune is thrown;  
And fear and grief and pain for my deserts  
Are my hopes, since hope is gone.

Hark! you shadows that in darkness dwell,  
Learn to condemn light  
Happy, happy they that in hell  
Feel not the world’s despite.

Dowland—who wrote his own words—expresses the most profound hopelessness. The final stanza, in which he argues that even those who are in hell should be glad they are not in his position, takes this sentiment to the extreme. We do not, however, need to take this text too seriously. Melancholy was in fashion at the time. When people sang “Flow, My Tears,” they indulged in emotional role-playing that probably had a cathartic effect.

Dowland’s ayre is in three parts. The first two stanzas are sung to the same music, while the next two are sung to a new tune. The final stanza has its own music, which provides a satisfying conclusion. The resulting form, therefore, is A A B B C. Although the song can be performed by a solo singer with lute accompaniment, Dowland also provided an additional vocal part in the bass range, which would allow another performer to join in.<sup>11</sup> The vocal and instrumental parts are highly independent: Each is equally difficult and has its own rhythms and melodies.

11.



In this rendition, we hear Dowland's song with both the primary soprano melody and the option bass melody.

The music, which is in the minor mode, is highly expressive. The opening melody descends, providing a musical portrayal of falling tears. In the B section, Dowland sets his list of sorrowful expressions (in the third stanza: “and tears, and sighs, and groans”) to a melody that ascends by leap, accompanied by echoes from the lute. This technique communicates the passion and suffering behind these complaints. The highest pitch of the melody arrives in the C section with the word “happy”—but Dowland’s descending melody indicates that he does not feel happiness himself.

In 1604, Dowland capitalized on the success of “Lachrimae” and “Flow, My Tears” yet again by publishing a further version of the work for viol consort. It appeared in a volume dedicated to Anne, the new Queen of England—an effort by Dowland to secure that elusive court position. This time, the composition became the first of a set of pavans entitled *Lachrimae, or Seven Tears*, all of which begin with the descending “tears” motif that we heard in the lute solo and song. The first pavan in the collection, “Lachrimae Antiquae” (“Ancient Tears”),<sup>12</sup> is essentially identical to “Lachrimae” and “Flow, My Tears.” The additional six pavans explore different musical possibilities that are introduced by the “tears” motif. All are profoundly mournful in character. As if feeling the need to cement his reputation for melancholy, Dowland followed the set of *Lachrimae* pavans with a composition entitled *Semper Dowland semper Dolens*: Latin for “Always Dowland always mournful.”

12.



“Ancient Tears”

Composer: John Dowland

Performance: Hespèrion XXI, conducted by Jordi Savall  
(1987)

## BARBARA STROZZI, *MY TEARS*

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677), like Dowland, was a gifted performer who wrote music for her own use. Also like Dowland, she favored sorrowful laments that showcased her gifts, as a performer and composer, for extravagant emotional expression. Most of her vocal works concerned suffering caused by unrequited love. Strozzi’s unique social position, however, meant that her artistic motivations were quite unlike Dowland’s, while her geographic and temporal distance from him—Strozzi lived in Venice, and her career began shortly after Dowland’s death—meant that her style was significantly different.

## Strozzi's Career

Strozzi was the adopted daughter of the renowned poet and cultural luminary Giulio Strozzi. Her mother was a servant in Giulio's household. Although Strozzi's birth certificate indicates that her father was unknown, it was almost certainly Giulio himself. This sort of arrangement was not unusual in 17th-century Venice. Giulio himself was the illegitimate son of an illegitimate son, while Strozzi would in turn have four children out of wedlock. Whatever the case, Giulio took an active interest in his daughter's career as a singer and composer, writing texts for her to sing and facilitating her private performances before the city's artistic elite.

In 1637, Giulio established a formal **academy** dedicated to music over which his daughter presided. Academies were an important facet of intellectual life in Venice and other Italian-speaking cities of the era.

They were not formal schools but, rather, gatherings of educated citizens who came together for discussion and debate. Giulio's named his association the *Accademia degli Unisoni*. This translates to "Academy of the Like-Minded," but also incorporates a music-themed pun on the word "unisoni," which can mean "unison" in the sense of multiple voices singing the same notes. At the academy meetings, Barbara Strozzi suggested topics for debate, judged the forensic skill of participants, awarded prizes, and performed as a singer (probably accompanying herself on the lute).

Although Strozzi embarked on a singing career just as opera was becoming big business in Venice, she never appeared on the opera stage. This is important. Although opera offered roles for women, taking to the stage meant social exclusion. A woman who performed in public was assumed to be a prostitute—and indeed, Strozzi herself faced such accusations as her fame grew. By confining her activities to the private sphere, she retained greater social capital. Her decision to perform only in domestic settings also influenced Strozzi's work as a composer, which focused on the chamber genres of **aria** (a strophic song) and **cantata** (an extended semi-dramatic work for soloist with accompaniment).

While it was typical for 17th-century Italian singers to write their own music, Strozzi pursued the task with unusual resolve. In fact, she published more solo vocal music than any other Venetian composer of her era. In total, she completed and published an astonishing eight single-author volumes of vocal music. Most of this was secular music with Italian texts (some of which she might have written



**Image 8.22:** This portrait by Bernardo Strozzi is entitled *Female Musician with Viola da Gamba*, but is believed to be of Barbara Strozzi.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Bernardo Strozzi

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**Image 8.23: This view of Venice's main plaza, named after the extravagant St. Mark's Basilica, was painted in the 1730s.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Canaletto

License: Public Domain

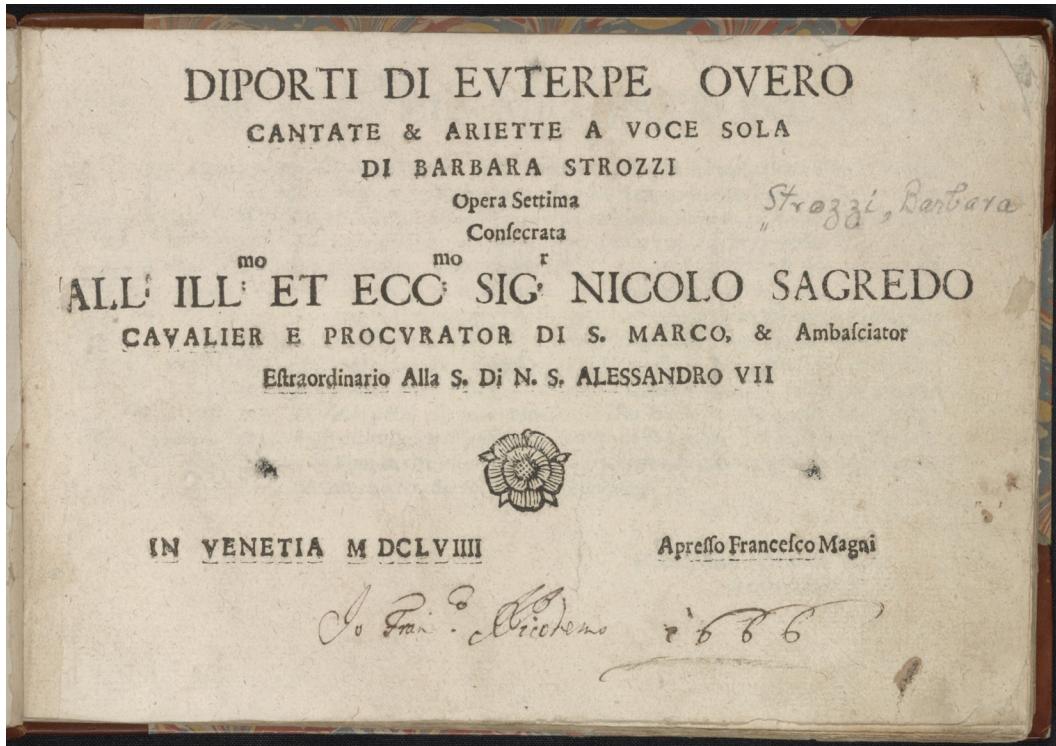
herself), although she also produced one collection of sacred works with Latin texts. Her volumes, which were published between 1644 and 1664, were highly regarded and widely consumed, and many of her most successful compositions were included in collections alongside the work of other great composers. While Strozzi performed before small groups of connoisseurs in a domestic setting, therefore, her music was also available for others to perform at home for their own entertainment, or for gatherings of family and friends.

### ***My Tears***

		<i>My Tears</i> Composer: Barbara Strozzi Performance: Emanuela Galli with Ensemble Galilei, conducted by Paul Beier (1998)
Time	Form	What to listen for
0'00"	Refrain - “My tears. . .”	The melody starts high and descends via an unusual, tortured scale in a representation of falling tears; the singer embellishes the line with a variety of ornaments

	Recitative - “Why do you not let burst forth. . .”	The recitative passages are characterized by frequent changes in tempo and mood; there is no steady pulse; painful harmonies communicate the speaker’s suffering
0'39"	Arioso - “And you, sorrowful eyes. . .”	The music settles into a triple meter
3'01"	Refrain	
3'30"	Aria - Verse 1: “Alas, I yearn for Lidia. . .”	The Aria is in quadruple meter
4'03"	Verse 2: “Because I welcome death. . .”	The Aria music repeats with new text
4'46"	Recitative - “But well I realize. . .”	
5'31"	Instrumental interlude	This interlude was not composed by Strozzi, but it is not inappropriate in a performance of her cantata, the accompaniment to which is largely improvised
5'55"	Arioso	Again, the music settles into a triple meter; the accompaniment centers on a four-note descending pattern
6'45"	Refrain	The singer repeats the entire opening passage of the cantata (Strozzi herself indicated only that the refrain should be repeated)
7'56"		

*My Tears* (Italian: *Lagrime mie*) appeared in Strozzi’s seventh volume of music, which was published in 1659 and bore the title *The Pleasures of Euterpe* (in the mythology of ancient Greece, Euterpe was the Muse of Music). Pietro Dolfino’s text is a lament for a beloved—Lidia—who has been imprisoned by her disapproving father:



**Image 8.24:** Here we see the title page of Strozzi's collection *The Pleasures of Euterpe*. The largest type sets the name of the dedicatee, from whom Strozzi might have expected payment in gratitude.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Attribution: Barbara Strozzi

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My tears, why do you hold back?  
Why do you not let burst forth the fierce pain  
that takes my breath and oppresses my heart?

Lidia, whom I so much adore,  
Because she looked on me with a pitiable glance  
is imprisoned by her strict father.  
Between two walls  
the beautiful innocent one is confined,  
where the sun's ray can't reach her;  
and what grieves me most,  
and adds torment and pain to my agony,  
is that my beloved  
suffers on my account.

And you, sorrowful eyes, you don't cry?  
My tears, why do you hold back?

Alas, I yearn for Lidia,  
my idol whom I so much adore;

she's captured in hard marble,  
she for whom I sigh and yet do not die.

Because I welcome death,  
now that I'm deprived of hope;  
Ah, take away my life,  
I pray to you, my bitter pain.

But well I realize that to torment me  
even more  
Fate denies me even death.  
Since it's true, oh God,  
that vicious Destiny  
thirsts only for my wailing,  
My tears, why do you hold back?

*Translation by Jennifer Gliere. Used with permission.*

Like many secular cantata texts, this one features a **refrain**—"My tears, why do you hold back?"—that appears three times: once at the beginning, once in the middle, and once at the end. The melody to which the words "my tears" is sung descends from the top of the singer's range, dripping down in a vivid impression of falling tears. It is full of tortuous intervals and sigh-like ornaments that communicate the singer's distressed emotional state.

After the opening refrain, the singer carries on in the **recitative** style, allowing the rhythm and meaning of the text to determine her phrasing. Strozzi continues to employ text painting, such as with the drawn-out, descending chromatic line on the word "pain" (Italian: "dolore") and the gasping pause in the middle of the word "breath" (Italian: "respiro"). Strozzi finally settles in to a metered rhythm with the passage on the text, "And you, sorrowful eyes, you don't cry?" This type of music—more structured than recitative but less formal than an aria—is termed **arioso**. Again, Strozzi employs text painting in the form of repeated, descending sighs.

This is followed by the refrain, which leads into the aria. This is the most formal part of the cantata and the only passage of music in which two stanzas of text are sung to the same melody. The text concerned begins with "Alas, I yearn for Lidia" and concludes with "I pray to you, my bitter pain." The final passage of the text is set to music that continues to shift and bend in accordance to the singer's baleful emotions. The last thing we hear is the refrain—evidence that the singer's suffering has not lessened.

## FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN, STRING QUARTET, OP. 33, NO. 2 “THE JOKE”

Over the course of the 18th century, the demand for domestic music continued to grow. Instrumental music, in particular, saw a rise in popularity as entertainment for the concert hall, the court, and the home. New genres of instrumental **chamber music** came into existence, the most important of which was the string quartet. Chamber music differs from orchestral music in three important ways. First, it requires only a few players—usually between two and eight. Second, each of those players has their own part, while in an orchestra whole sections of string players are assigned the same part. Finally, chamber music does not require a conductor. Chamber music, therefore, is suitable for small spaces and emphasizes communication between the individual performers.

A **string quartet** is a type of chamber ensemble composed of two violins, a viola, and a cello. (The term “string quartet” can refer either to a group of players



**Image 8.25:** This 18th-century painting portrays Haydn himself (on the far right) playing viola in a string quartet. The players are intensely focused on the music making: Two of them look up while Haydn quickly turns a page. Others are listening, but their attitude is informal: Three women lean in from the right, while two additional admirers listen from beyond the door.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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or to a composition.) Although today professional string quartets give concerts and make recordings, the genre was at first oriented primarily toward amateurs, who purchased sheet music and played at home for their own entertainment. Quartets also provided background music for dinners and social gatherings. The most important early composer of string quartets was Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), whose creative contributions to the genre set the standard for generations to follow.

## Haydn's Career



**Image 8.26:** This portrait of Haydn was painted by Thomas Hardy in 1791, when the composer was visiting London to put on a series of concerts.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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Haydn was born to working-class parents in a remote Austrian village. Neither his father (a wheelwright) nor his mother (a cook) had any musical training, but they recognized their son's talent and arranged for him to live with a relative who could provide educational opportunities. Then, in 1739, the music director at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna—Georg von Reutter—heard Haydn sing and offered him a position in the Cathedral choir. For the next nine years, Haydn lived with Reutter, during which time he studied and performed music.

When Haydn's voice broke in 1749, however, he was suddenly out of a job, and he spent several difficult years trying to scrape together a living as a freelance musician. In mid-18th century Vienna, there were few opportunities for a musical career outside of church or court employment. In 1757, Haydn finally obtained the latter when he became

music director for Count Morzin. His fine work with the Count's private orchestra won him a similar position four years later with the Esterházy family, whom he served for the remainder of his life.

The position of music director for the Esterházys was among the most desirable in the German-speaking world. (Although Haydn served informally as music director from 1761, he was not officially awarded the title until his predecessor passed away in 1766.) The Esterházy family was both wealthy and powerful, exercising great influence within the Habsburg Empire. In addition, Prince Nikolaus I, who headed the family from 1762 until 1790, was a great music lover and ardent support of Haydn. For this reason, Haydn was granted an unusual amount of creative freedom, and his work was met with appreciation. All the same, Haydn was a servant. As such, he was obliged to perform a variety of duties and occupied a low social rung.

Haydn did not just compose music. He was responsible for all musical entertainment, large and small, that took place in the Esterházy household. This included the weekly staging of an opera and two concerts, special performances in honor of guests, and the provision of chamber music for domestic entertainment. Prince Nikolaus was a musician himself: He played an unusual instrument called the baryton, which resembled a bass viol with extra strings that could be plucked. Although the baryton was never popular and soon disappeared altogether, the fact that it was favored by the Prince meant that Haydn had not only to compose music for the instrument but to accompany the Prince when he played. In total, he produced about 200 chamber works for baryton, most of which are trios for baryton, cello, and viola (Haydn's instrument). The baryton part is always prominent, but never too difficult—as suited the Prince's abilities and desires. These pieces are seldom performed today, and it is easy to look on them as a wasted effort. They remind us, however, that Haydn often composed on command, and that his own artistic inclinations were secondary to the requirements of his employer.

As a servant in the Esterházy household, Haydn followed the Prince as he moved between the various Esterházy estates. Principal among these were the ancestral palace in Eisenstadt (now in Eastern Hungary) and a new summer palace, Eszterháza, built by Prince Nikolaus in 1766. Although both palaces were well-equipped for musical performances, they were far from the urban center of Vienna, and Haydn's duties therefore meant that he was isolated from musical trends. As a result, he developed a unique approach to composition, innovating in terms of form and style. His fame slowly grew, and in 1779 he found himself in a position to renegotiate his contract with the Esterházys. Under the new terms, he was free to take outside commissions and to publish his music, which had previously been the property of his employers.



**Image 8.27:** This baryton is on display at the Esterházy palace. The extra strings are not visible because they run down the back side of the instrument, behind the panel that runs alongside the fretboard.

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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**Image 8.28: This view of the courtyard of Eszterháza Palace gives a sense of its enormous size.**

Source: Wikimedia Commons

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### String Quartet, Op. 33, No. 2 “The Joke”

Among the first of Haydn’s publications were a set of string quartets, labelled as his Opus 33 (“opus” is the Latin word for “work,” and it is often used to indicate the order in which published compositions appear). The label indicates that this was Haydn’s thirty-third publication, but of course he had composed a great deal more music than that. Most of his works, however, were intended for the private use of his employer and were therefore never published. But when it came to the world of commerce, it made sense for Haydn to publish chamber works: There was a thriving market for sheet music intended for use in domestic entertainment.

Haydn’s Opus 33 string quartets were dedicated to the Grand Duke Paul of Russia, and they were first performed in the Viennese home of his wife. In the dedication, Haydn explained that these quartets were composed in a “new and special manner.” While this is exactly the sort of thing that a composer might say for the purpose of improving sales, it is true that Haydn’s Opus 33 quartets are different from those that came before. Early quartets were essentially violin solos with accompaniment; in many cases, a professional was hired to take the first violin part, while amateurs filled in the others. The first violin is still prominent in Opus 33, but all of the parts are important and interesting, and they pass motifs from one to another. The resulting texture resembles a civilized conversation between intellectual equals—a musical representation of the rational discourse that was so valued during the Enlightenment era.

We will see all of this at work in the second quartet from Haydn’s Opus 33 collection, which bears the subtitle “The Joke.” This subtitle did not come from the composer himself, but rather from the Viennese publishing firm Artaria. Publishers

often gave nicknames to instrumental works in this period, which otherwise were designated only by number. A nickname drew attention to a composition and gave the consumer an idea about its characteristics. Nicknames still help listeners today, for they tell us what a piece of otherwise abstract instrumental music is “about.” We should always, however, take them with a grain of salt.

Haydn’s Opus 33, No. 2 quartet was subtitled “The Joke” because of its fourth movement, which concludes with a bit of unmistakable musical comedy. The joke here is so obvious, in fact, that even listeners with no particular knowledge of music will get it. We should take a moment to marvel at the capacity of pure sound to be humorous. The quartet, of course, contains no words. It communicates purely through musical syntax, and the joke works by playing on our expectations regarding form, pulse, and phrasing.

### Movement IV

The fourth movement is in **rondo form**, meaning that a refrain returns throughout.<sup>13</sup> In Haydn’s time, this was a typical form for a final movement, and his listeners (and players) would have quickly recognized it. This would establish certain expectations—in particular, the expectation that the movement would end with a complete statement of the refrain.

13.



String Quartet, Op. 33, No. 2 “The Joke,” Movement IV  
Composer: Franz Joseph Haydn  
Performance: Borodin Quartet (2010)

For the most part, the movement unfolds as anticipated. After a complete statement of the refrain (A), we hear a new passage (B), followed by the refrain (A), followed by another new passage (C), followed once more by the refrain (A). The refrain is lighthearted and dancelike, and the movement in general is fast-paced and jocular. At this point, however, something strange happens. There is a pause, followed by a halting passage in a slow tempo. Two loud entrances fade away into uneven rhythms. This strange interruption is followed once more by the refrain, but this time the two-bar sub-phrases are broken up by long pauses. The last thing we hear is a final statement of the opening two measures. At this point, however, the sequence of pauses has completely disrupted our ability to predict what is going to happen next, and a listener who is not looking at the music has no way of knowing that the piece is over. The comedy, then, comes from the weirdness of the final moments and the shock of realizing that the movement has in fact concluded.

In sum, our expectation regarding form is disappointed when we encounter the slow passage after the third A. Our expectation regarding pulse is disappointed by the frequent pauses near the end of the movement. And our expectation regarding

phrasing is disappointed when the piece concludes one quarter of the way through the principal phrase of the refrain.

This last disappointment is particularly significant, for Enlightenment-era composers placed a high value on stable, symmetrical musical phrases. For composers such as Haydn, symmetry and balance—along with predictable harmonic progressions and clear textures—were signs of rational thinking. They also reflected the architecture of ancient Greece, which provided a model across the arts of the **Classical** era (1750-1815). We hear such phrases in the first movement of the quartet, which also contains humorous elements—although they are not quite so obvious to the average listener.

### Movement I

		String Quartet Op. 33 No. 2 “The Joke,” Movement I Composer: Franz Joseph Haydn Performance: The Coull Quartet (1995)
Time	Form	What to listen for
<b>Exposition</b>		
0'00"	Primary Theme	This theme, which is elegant and restrained, is in a balanced “a b a” form
0'28"	Transition	
0'46"	Secondary Theme	This theme is scattered and unfocused; it culminates in an explosive violin solo
1'05"	Closing Theme	The opening motif returns in this theme
1'15"	Repetition of the Exposition	
<b>Development</b>		
2'29"		Motifs in this passage are drawn from the a and b phrases of the Primary Theme
3'25"		The first violin again bursts into an inexplicable frenzy, which is curtailed by a rapid cadential progression

3'31"		The Primary Theme returns, but in a minor key
<b>Recapitulation</b>		
3'41"	Primary Theme	
3'58"	Transition	The transition unexpectedly interrupts the b phrase of the Primary Theme
4'16"	Secondary Theme	Again, this theme concludes with a wild violin solo
4'38"	Closing Theme	This time the Closing Theme is heard twice; the second time, the familiar motif is turned upside down
4'47"	Repetition of the Development and Recapitulation	It was common in this era to repeat the entire second half of a sonata-form movement

The first movement of the Opus 33, No. 2 quartet is in **sonata form**, which was described and discussed in Chapter 7. The Primary Theme is in ternary (aba) form, and each of the phrases is four measures in length. The B phrase contains call and response between the parts: The first violin plays a **motif** that is echoed by the second violin and viola. The first sign of disruption—and humor—comes near the end of the Exposition, when the first violin launches into an uncharacteristically virtuosic and excited passage that momentarily spoils the mood of elegance and restraint.

More humor comes in the Development. After a particularly serious passage that explores the motifs of the Primary Theme, a return of the virtuosic and excited passage leads to an abrupt and unsatisfying cadence. This is followed by what seems to be the return of the Primary Theme and, therefore, the Recapitulation within the sonata form—but the theme is in minor, not major. As if realizing its mistake, the theme peters out and relaunches in the correct key, thereby inaugurating the Recapitulation.

These minor details would only be appreciated by those steeped in the musical traditions of the era. That, however, is exactly the kind of person for whom Haydn was writing. His consumers were the amateurs who played this music for their own amusement (and who therefore were intimately familiar with its conventions) and

the aristocrats who enjoyed the chamber music that was performed in their homes on command. Today, aristocrats have been replaced by avid concertgoers, but amateurs still enjoy playing string quartets for no audience but themselves. The existence of organizations like the Associated Chamber Music Players, which serves to connect amateur chamber musicians and facilitate reading sessions and workshops, attests to the continued popularity of chamber music as domestic entertainment.

## CLARA SCHUMANN, PIANO TRIO IN G MINOR

Clara Schumann (1819–1896) was the leading piano **virtuoso** of her day. Her legacy as a solo performer still impacts pianists, who learn selections from a repertoire that she established and give recitals according to her standards (Schumann was the first pianist to regularly perform from memory). Schumann also profoundly influenced the development of piano technique through her work as a teacher. As a composer, Schumann primarily created music for her own use, including a piano concerto, solo piano works, chamber music, and songs with imaginative piano accompaniments. Although her compositions were well received, Schumann always harbored misgivings about her abilities in that arena. Her self-doubt reflected a societal bias against female composers that was prevalent in the 19th century.



**Image 8.29:** This 1838 engraving by August Kneisel captures Schumann as a young woman.

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### Schumann's Career

Schumann (born Clara Wieck) was the daughter of renowned piano pedagogue Friederich Wieck. From the moment of her birth, Wieck planned to mold Schumann into a brilliant piano virtuoso. He provided her with daily instruction in all facets of music and required diligent practice. She was soon eliciting praise with her public performances, and was touring Europe to give concerts as a teenager.

At the age of nine, her performance in the home of one of Wieck's friends inspired a listener—Robert Schumann—to abandon the study of law and enroll as a student of Wieck. Robert, who was eighteen, moved into the Wieck household and set about the task of becoming a piano virtuoso himself. He never succeeded, but he and Clara developed a close relationship. When she turned eighteen, Robert proposed and Clara accepted. Wieck, however, was furious, and refused to permit the union. The couple took their case to court and were finally able to wed in 1840.

Schumann's marriage was happy, but also difficult. Over the course of the next fourteen years, she became pregnant ten times and bore eight children. She also supported the household financially by performing and teaching. Robert made a name for himself as a music critic and composer, but he suffered from an unidentified mental illness that produced bouts of depression, exaltation, and delusion. He attempted suicide in 1854 by leaping from a bridge into the Rhine river. He survived but insisted on being committed to an asylum, where he died two years later.

Throughout this period, Schumann continued to manage the household and support her husband. She composed little, although not because Robert discouraged her. Indeed, he thought she was a particularly gifted composer and lamented the fact that she was unable to commit more time and effort to the task. Schumann herself expressed doubts founded on her sex. In 1839, she famously wrote in her diary, "I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose—there has never yet been one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?" Of course, there had been many successful female composers before Schumann, as we have seen in this chapter. She just didn't know about them, for they were ignored by the historians and audiences of the era.

After Robert's death, Schumann took responsibility for cementing his legacy as a composer, and it is due to her that Robert's music is still heard today. She toured extensively, often in partnership with the leading young performers of the day, and took a teaching position at the Hoch Conservatory. Schumann also mentored and supported the young composer Johannes Brahms, who would go on to become an influential figure himself. In addition to all of this, she raised two sets of grandchildren following the deaths of a daughter and son in the 1870s. Schumann continued to perform until 1891, despite increasing trouble with her arm, and taught up until her death at the age of 76.



**Image 8.30: Here we see Schumann in 1857, after her husband's death.**

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## Piano Trio in G minor

Schumann composed her piano trio during a particularly difficult period in her life. In 1846, the Schumanns were living in Dresden. They had left Leipzig due to concerns about Robert's physical and mental health, which was increasingly poor. Because Schumann was forced to accept fewer performance engagements while caring for Robert, she focused more of her creative energy on composition.



**Image 8.31: Schumann frequently performed chamber music. This 1854 pastel by Adolph von Menzel portrays her in concert with one of her frequent collaborators, violinist Joseph Joachim.**

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Nevertheless, the task was not simple: Schumann gave birth to children in 1845 and 1846, suffered a further miscarriage, and lived in cramped quarters that contributed to conflict between her and her husband's creative endeavors. Despite challenges, Schumann's piano trio has been considered by many commentators to be her finest work, and it subsequently influenced Robert's first piano trio, which he composed in 1847.

Schumann performed both piano trios in public recitals throughout the remainder of her career, and her trio frequently appeared on programs given by other artists as well. However, it would have been heard most often in middle- and upper-class homes. The market for piano music, including both solo and chamber compositions, was largely driven by young women, who were expected to master the instrument as part of a respectable upbringing. A wife who could play the piano well was a considerable asset, for she could entertain family and friends within the domestic sphere. Chamber music also provided an opportunity for young couples to court. While unmarried couples were often kept under the watchful eye of a chaperone, playing music together allowed them to sit in close proximity.

In this context, we can witness Schumann's piano trio as a testament to her personal suffering, a reflection of her musical training and interests, and an example of domestic music. Her piano trio follows the standards of the day, and each of the four movements contains the expected characteristics. At the same time, she experiments with novel stylistic approaches and expresses herself with compelling sincerity.

### Movement III

We will examine the third movement, which is the slowest in tempo.<sup>14</sup> This movement is in **ternary form** (A B A), allowing Schumann to explore contrasting emotions. The movement begins with a gracious, major-mode theme in the piano. A brief turn to minor suggests a hint of sorrow. After the theme has been introduced, it is repeated by the violin, with piano accompaniment. The cello enters with new material, further heightening the intensity of emotional expression with dynamic swells and an ascending **sequence** (a motif that is repeated at different pitch levels). The A section concludes with all three instruments cadencing together.

14.



Piano Trio in G minor, Movement III  
Composer: Clara Schumann  
Performance: Storioni Trio, 2014

This cadence, however, is immediately destabilized by a new, faster tempo and turn to the minor mode. The B section exhibits anxiety and unrest. It features uneven, halting rhythms, accents, and frequent contrasts in dynamic level, texture, and mood.

When the A material returns, it is in the cello, with an accompaniment provided by the piano and **pizzicato** violin (a technique whereby the player plucks the strings instead of bowing them). After the violin and cello repeat their joint material from before, a **coda** containing new melodic material brings the movement to a peaceful conclusion.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Print

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# **Unit 4**

**MUSIC FOR POLITICAL EXPRESSION**