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The history of western music is long and varied. Even within the last 1500 years, we find music ranging from plainchant to jazz, from madrigals to movie soundtracks, the sheer diversity of music is staggering. This period can be roughly divided up into the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Baroque Era, the Classical Era, the Romantic Era, and Modernity.

Beginning with the Middle Ages and Renaissance, this was the period ranging from the year 500, shortly after the fall of the Roman Empire, all the way through 1600, right around the end of the Renaissance and Shakespeare's first plays. This period saw massive changes in European society, including the Protestant Reformation, the arrival of the first Europeans explorers and conquerors in America, and the Renaissance with artists like Michelangelo and da Vinci. Music during this time was largely religious in nature, focussing on the church and Christian ideas. This was because the Church played an immense role in the lives of people during the Middle Ages, being the only authority higher than the monarch, the center of many people's life, and the institution that held the largest amount of political power. Musicians were often granted patronage or employment by wealthy people, the state, or the church. However, my favorite piece from the listening guides is actually an exception to these ideas. It is a madrigal, which is a short song, written in the vernacular language based on a poem. Specifically, I liked Fair Phyllis, by John Farmer. It is based off of a traditional English pastoral poem, and is set to a regular, dance-like tempo, standing in stark contrast to the more rigid choral religious music common throughout this era. Composers from this period include Claudio Monteverdi, who wrote several madrigals and greatly developed the idea of lyrical music, saying "the text should be the master of the music, not the servant".

Another important composer is Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, an Italian composer who is best known for the Pope Marcellus Mass, which sought to support the Catholic Church by adopting their recommendations following the Council of Trent.

Following the Renaissance Era, there was the Baroque Era, which spanned from 1600, after the end of the Renaissance, up through the late 1700s. Crucially, this period saw growth of the power of French monarchy, notably resulting in the construction of Versailles, but also the English Civil War and subsequent Glorious Revolution, and the beginnings of the Scientific Revolution with Newton's publication of the Theory of Gravitation (Spielvogel). The most prominent composer from the Baroque era is Johann Sebastian Bach, who is best known for his fugues. The most notable feature of the fugues is polyphony, the idea that music should consist of multiple independent voices to create a more complex texture. Indeed, polyphony is one of the most notable characteristics of the Baroque era. It, along with figured bass and the growth of tonality, characterize Baroque music as an era of experimentation and new ideas in music. Another extremely influential composer during the Baroque era is Vivaldi, whose *Spring*, from "The Four Seasons", is instantly recognizable today, and perhaps my favorite piece from the Era. Featuring beautiful musical imagery through a solo violin with rapid scales and brief ostinatos, *Spring* lets the listener imagine the bird calls and thunder and lightning, almost as if they were right in front of you. However, eventually, the Baroque Era's experimentation with polyphony and imagery gave way to the Classical Era's crisp melodies and rational philosophy.

Partially as a reaction to the Baroque Era, and partially due to the growth of the Enlightenment, the Classical Era spanned from the Early 1700s up through the crowning of Napoleon and the Industrial and Market Revolutions in the early 1800s (Spielvogel). Classical Era, which is best embodied in the work of the Viennese School, saw an explosion in the number of musical forms and structures, including chamber music, concertos, symphonies, and sonatas. Spurred on by the rationality and desire to categorize from the Enlightenment, Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn worked within these forms and structures, and their instruments sing

clear melodies and long, arching phrases. Perhaps the two most well known composers from this era were Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven. Mozart wrote not only concertos and sonatas, but operas including the Marriage of Figaro and Don Giovanni. Beethoven, on the other hand, represented a bridge from the Classical era into the romantic era, as his work began to see more strong dynamic contrasts and explosive accents. My favorite piece from this era is Mozart's Eine Klein Natchmusik, with an instantly recognizable and aggressive opening, followed by a softer, wandering theme, which is slowly developed over the course of the work.

The 19th century saw a massive upheaval in European society, including the industrial revolution, Napoleon's reign in France, and the invention of electricity, and with this came the Romantic Era in music. The Romantic era was characterized by a reaction to the rigid scales and arpeggios of Classical Era, instead preferring to replace them with large dynamic shifts, dramatic chords, and a greater experimentation with ideas of dissonance and different structures for music. While the 1800s had a greater variety composers than ever before due to the increased accessibility of instruments, one of the most important was Wagner. Wagner greatly developed the idea of musical theater, adapted from the previous opera structure, which featured an "endless melody" creating a single overarching musical drama. Perhaps Wagner's most influential contribution is the idea of a leitmotif, a short musical phrase that represents a person, place, or idea in the drama that the composer can use over and over again and slowly build upon over the course of the drama. Leitmotifs have been extensively used in Hollywood today, especially in large productions like the Lord of the Rings films or the Marvel Cinematic Universe. Yet another incredibly famous composer from the Romantic Era was Frederic Chopin. Chopin wrote several different pieces from piano, ranging from sonatas, structured like the Classical composers before him, to mazurkas and polonaises inspired by his Polish heritage. My favorite piece from this era is Chopin's Polonaise in A Major, which features a dramatic opening and stately chords throughout, while still experimenting with Romantic ideas of rubato and shifting tonality.

Finally, we arrive at the 20th century, with the world thrown into chaos by two World Wars, economic depression, and the growth of a consumer economy. The modern era in music really refers to only the first half of the 20th century, up to 1950 – after 1950 should really be considered postmodernity. The modern era in music saw even greater experimentation with rhythmic complexity, dissonance, and even the instruments used. Modern composers experimented with atonality, polyrhythms, changing meters, but also had to appeal to the broader public with the growth of vaudeville and greater accessibility to the radio. One of the most unique works of the modernist era was Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. The Rite of Spring experimented with polytonality, dissonance, and disjunct notes in a way no composer had before, and thus scandalized 20th century Paris. Nonetheless, Stravinsky's unpredictable melodies and free-shifting meter represent an important break from the previous musical establishment and are an important part of modernist music. Yet another extremely feature of modern music was the growth of jazz. Black people in America, who were still treated as second-class citizens, grew significantly in influence, and brought their own musical traditions with them. One such singer was Billie Holiday, who grew up in Baltimore and became one of the first black singers to sing in public with a white orchestra. However, perhaps my favorite piece from this era is Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, which is a gentle, polychordal work that paints a serene soundscape seeking to embody American ideas. How well those American ideals were realized can be debated, considering that Copland was investigated by the government for his leftist political beliefs, but nonetheless, Copland's work is extremely influential.

Altogether, the western music tradition, ranging from Medieval religious music through Copland's soundscapes is extremely diverse and contains musicians of all stripes and colors. By appreciating the different tendencies within music, we can not only play it better, being more cognizant of the social, cultural, and musical context surrounding the work, but can also better understand our society and how music shapes it, and it shapes music back.