

An Introduction to Classical Music

The Early Years

*Music is made up of three components: **rhythm, melody and harmony**. The simplest is **rhythm**, the regular 'beat' of music which any reggae fan will easily recognise. A **melody** is a **tune**, some like those in well known folk songs are easy to follow. The combination of notes that go to form a **chord** is called **harmony**. 'The art of combining sounds in **melodic or harmonic combination**, to express or stir emotion' is how one dictionary describes it. Our English word is derived from the Greek **mousike**, which covered all the arts presided over by the **Muses**, the nine sister goddesses in Greek mythology.*



Little is known about **ancient Greek** music today. We might suspect that the ancient Greeks danced and sang to music in the same way that our ancestors did. We might even suspect that music in the rest of Europe was even more rudimentary than theirs but we simply don't know. We do know however that some six thousand years ago a highly musical tribe called the **Sumerians** who lived in what is now Iraq were influencing others in Asia and North Africa with their ideas. Amongst those influenced were the highly civilised **ancient Egyptians** and some of their burial tombs or Pyramids of the time show pictures of musical instruments and musicians. The Egyptians also had orchestras containing hundreds of musicians playing instruments which are easily identifiable today as **flutes, harps, cymbals** and **drums**. We have no idea what their music sounded like however, if it was written down no trace has ever been found.

Although the Sumerians were our musical predecessors the history of Western music really began with the liturgical or formalised form of worship in the **early Christian church** known as the **Mass**. This was a ritualised re-enactment of the Last Supper designed to inspire people with the certainty of the spiritual world as opposed to the uncertainties of the world in which we live. It was primarily based on the singing voice which was after all the very first musical instrument.

The early church recognised that music could add much to its ritual but that not every singer taking part in worship had the same ability. As a result **plainchant** was invented. **Plainchant** or **plainsong** as it is sometimes called is simply that, religious music sung by a group (usually of monks) with a very limited pitch. Although there were some chants for a solo voice generally the singer with the best voice would lead the chanting by singing one line while the rest sang the next. Most chants were based on a simple scale so that changes of key were unknown. In the chants to which the **Psalms** are sung today the **response phrase** often starts on the same note with which the leader ends his phrase. Even the least talented singer could generally cope. This was especially helpful in those times as all music had to be learnt by heart, written music did not exist.

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As time passed and more and more **chants** were composed to fit in with the many festivals of the churches' calendar the religious leaders of the day realised that some method had to be found to record them. Few people at that time apart from the aristocracy or the clergy were able to read and write and some method of writing down the tunes that went with the words had to be devised.

Who exactly came up with the idea of writing music by using a series of dots, strokes and squiggles called **neumes** no one knows, though one of the earliest popes, **St Ambrose** has been given some of the credit. Most scholars believe that written music was based on the hand movements of the choir director or master. If he wanted his singers voices to go up he would raise his hand. The **neume** (another Greek based word meaning gesture) shows this upward movement of the tune in writing. Another pope, **St Gregory** who lived between 540 and 604 was the person who gets most credit for ensuring that **plainchants** were written down. His *Gregorian chants* as they are still known became the standard by which all were set.

Like the written word musical writing evolved slowly over the years. In the same way most people find it difficult to read old manuscripts today old plainchants are difficult to decipher.

The person who we really have to thank however for simplifying musical writing was another priest, **Guido of Arezzo**. His incredibly simple invention was to use two lines on which the pitches are shown as absolutes. Until **Guido** invented the forerunner of the five lines or **stave** on which music is now written some monks had placed little symbols (they used the letters of the alphabet as a key) next to the **neumes** to give some idea of how the words should be sung, slow, fast, high, low etc. Guido however changed all that and proved by his system that choirs were able to learn their chants far quicker.

Because so much **liturgical music** at the time was based on the voice, musical instruments did not develop to the same extent. Most instruments in the west were based on blown instruments or woodwinds like the **shawm**, the **bagpipes** and the **recorder** which were then very popular. Today we tend to associate the **bagpipes** with Highland music and the **recorder** with schools but then they were very popular instruments. The **recorder** was especially popular because it was uncomplicated to manufacture and easy to play. To modern ears most of these instruments with their high pitch and **droning** sounds seem nearer the **snake charmer's reed** than anything we would consider a musical instrument today - essentially for outdoor use only!

The religious wars known as the Crusades were to change all that

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The Renaissance Era

From 1096 the Christian world began a series of armed expeditions which lasted for nearly two centuries ostensibly to try and recover the Holy Land and in particular Jerusalem which had been conquered by the Moslems. While religious zeal was

certainly one of the reasons for the Crusades, territorial ambitions also featured; however, the great majority who undertook these adventures firmly intended to return home as soon as possible. Those who did brought back many things from their travels including early forms of the guitar and harp. The most interesting of all was the rebec, a stringed instrument from which the violin descended. It was played with a bow, a method of instrumentation unknown in Europe until then.



It was not however until the **Renaissance** or 'rebirth' that forms of music other than the purely religious began to play a major part in peoples' lives. Whilst there had long been a tradition of traveling musicians in Europe they meant little to most people. **Troubadours, gleemen, goliards, minstrels** (they came under many different guises) went mainly from court to court all over Europe entertaining with their love songs and stylised playing. The intellectual movement which originated in 14th century Italy started a series of evolutionary changes. This was the time when Italy had some of the greatest artists and intellects in the world. The era of **Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Titian and Raphael** whose influence was to spread across the rest of Western Europe. They and people like them, with their belief that education could produce the ability to master all the cultures of the age began a process whose end results have been even more far reaching than they could have believed possible. **They were helped by the discovery of printing, originally a Chinese invention, which was re-invented in Europe by Johann Gutenberg in 1477.**

Printed matter soon became quite commonplace in the wealthier and educated reaches of society. The invention of music printing in about 1500 set the seal and meant that much experimentation could be carried out in writing music. As composers discovered **counterpoint** or **polophony**, the use of several individual melodies together, and musical compositions became more and more complicated, **secular music** began to grow in popularity.

The word **counterpoint** comes from the medieval **Latin** expression 'punctus contra punctus' which literally means point against point or note against note. It has exactly the same meaning as **polophony** which comes from the Greek word meaning **music of many sounds**.

The **Renaissance** also brought about great changes and improvements in musical instruments. Apart from minstrels or troubadours who wandered the land playing music for dancing and singing, most music outside the church was performed in homes of the very few, the

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aristocracy. Church music was constrained not only by strict religious rules but by the emphasis placed on the human voice rather than on instruments. Early musicians had no formal tuning system nor did their instruments have any set pitch. Music was not written for specific instruments and to a great extent it was up to the individual to decide how it should be played. As a result when any of this pre-Renaissance music is played on early musical instruments it can sound strange, whiney and rather flat.

When printed music became available however and many more and elaborate tunes were on offer either for listening to or for dancing the instruments quickly began to develop to keep pace. Some instrument makers began making groups of instruments together so that even if the instruments used were by musicians of very mixed abilities, and may not always have been quite right for the music, at least they were all in tune when played together.

These were called **consorts** and at first they were all of the same instruments. But the name was later also used for groups which included different instruments. What they all achieve was a much smoother musical rendition.

The popularity of dancing had come about mainly because of **Tylman Susato**, a printer from Antwerp. He began there working as a calligrapher and trumpeter in the cathedral but realising that there was more money in printing switched to that trade. From printing words, **Susato** swiftly turned to printing music and his collections of music including the **Dansereye** or **Book of Dances** soon became famous. **Susato** had a wonderful way with dance music. He put together lively and catchy tunes which were often based on folk dances in such a way that they appealed to his more aristocratic listeners. **Susato** realised that the

richer and more important you were the less you wished to appear silly so he adapted the music of the more popular folk dances to make them sound more refined and elegant. Such refinements however needed more skillful musical interpretation and this meant better musical instruments were needed.

Renaissance instrument makers began to improve their techniques and to invent new ways of making instruments.

Trumpets which until then had been fairly simple bent metal tubes began to be made with slides and the **harpichord** previously a clumsy and heavy instrument became lighter with in some cases two keyboards to allow contrasts of tone. The **rebec** which originated in the Middle East was itself refined leading to the invention of the **viol**, a delicate and light instrument. The viol or '**viola da gamba**' (Italian for leg viol) was played with a bow held underhand, exactly the opposite to how a bow is held today. Even though some Renaissance instruments may seem strange to us today they were far superior to the instruments used by musicians of earlier periods.

The Renaissance was the period when music began to move from being associated solely with the church. Until then church music had been seen as the only cultured music there was. While it was true that the peasants had their folk music and dances, the aristocracy believed such music common. People like **Susato** changed all that by adapting folk music to make it socially acceptable. Dancing became all the rage and expert teachers, especially from Italy, were sought by noble families to teach them the very latest steps. Two of the most popular dances of the time were the **pavane**, stately and impressive and the **galliard** a dance considered to be more lively. The name comes from the Italian word **gagliardo** meaning vigorous.

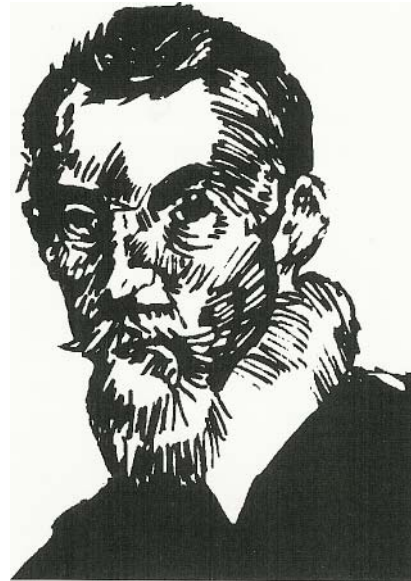
Renaissance

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Monteverdi

As the Renaissance period gradually came to an end, the music with which it is associated, was gradually replaced by an altogether different form called Baroque. Strangely enough the word baroque refers to the style of architecture which became very popular on the European continent during the 17th and 18th centuries. The name is believed to come from the Spanish word barrueco meaning an irregular shaped pearl. It describes very well the sort of buildings we associate with that period, beautiful with much elaborate and fantastic ornamentation. The same could be said to describe the music with which at an early stage it became associated and was also applied to one of the finest exponents of it, Claudio Monteverdi.



Monteverdi was the first major composer to write the sort of music which broke with the Renaissance style. Unlike many composers of the time he came from ordinary beginnings, his father was a doctor in Cremona, in those days a fairly humble profession. To begin with his 'modern' music attracted a flood of criticism particularly from another more well known music theorist, Giovanni Maria Artusi. Artusi even went to the length of writing a book attacking Monteverdi by name.

To get back at his critics, Monteverdi determined to write a piece of music which would silence them completely and the medium he chose was that of opera.

Although the idea of operas or musical dramas in which a story is told by music and singing had been around for some time nobody had done much about actually writing a full length one. A number of Italian noblemen had played at writing and producing them but it was Monteverdi who actually put the whole thing into practice. His opera *L'Orfeo* was not only the first such production but for the very first time it was written for named musical

instruments. Monteverdi indicated on his score just where each should play. This then was the beginnings of the breakthrough towards the foundation of the orchestra which the Renaissance consorts had never managed to achieve.

L'Orfeo which is based on the classical Greek myth of Orpheus was an instant success in 1608 and became so popular that many other operas quickly followed written by such musical giants of the day as Jean-Baptiste Lully who popularised opera at the court of Louis XIV and Alessandro Scarlatti who wrote many Italian operas. The first opera house opened in Venice in 1637 and before long not only were opera houses opening in all the major cities but opera singers were becoming famous stars as well. The greatest of all were the castrati, grown men whose sweet, childlike voices had been kept that way by surgery before their voices had a chance to break. The combination of a boy's voice and a man's lungs produced a sound of extraordinary beauty and flexibility. The process was thankfully outlawed in the early 18th century. Nowadays their roles are taken by a singer

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known as a **counter tenor** who can produce, quite naturally, notes as high as a female **contralto**.

When we look at the list of instruments detailed by **Monteverdi** for his opera, one particular instrument stands out, the **violin**. Amongst the **harpsichords**, **cornetts**, **trumpets** and **viols**, instruments associated with the **Renaissance** era the **violin** is featured for the first time.

The **viol**, descendant of the **rebec**, had been the first stringed instrument to transform **Renaissance** music. Its delicate quality was ideal for the refined dancing of that era. **Baroque** music however, especially when played by a large group or orchestra, needed something much fuller and louder. The **violin**, invented towards the middle of the 16th century and gradually improved over the years by the famous Italian **violin** makers of Cremona performed the task admirably. Basically it is nothing more than a resonating box with a neck across which four strings are attached by a system of pegs and bridges. The player is able to shorten the vibratory length of the strings by pressing down with the fingers of his left hand while moving the bow across with his right. Today the **violin** is the most popular stringed instrument, hardly surprising as it features in just about every musical **ensemble**. There are also more **violins** in an orchestra than any other instrument and the **principal violinist** is also the **leader** of the orchestra. Though a **violin** may look quite simple to make it requires great skill as it comprises over 70 pieces. The first well known **violin** maker was **Andrea Amati** but the most famous was **Antonio Stradivari**. So prized are his instruments that when a **Stradivarius violin** is sold today it makes headlines in the media as well as selling for a vast sum.

Many improvements were also being made to other musical instruments in the Baroque Age. Such early woodwind

instruments as the **shawm** and the **pommer** gradually evolved into the **oboe** and **bassoon**. Even the **trumpet**, which still had no valves, became able to perform much more spectacular feats as a result of the tubes being lengthened.

Trumpets are particularly associated with **baroque** music and even though they were pretty crude by today's standards the baroque musicians' playing certainly wasn't. The composers of the time, in keeping with the lavish **baroque** style, wrote music in which the trumpet had to be played very high up in its register known as the **clarino style**. For many people baroque trumpet music means the English composer **Henry Purcell**. His ability was such that Charles II appointed him composer to the Chapel Royal in 1677 when he was only 18. Twelve years later he left the king's service to write commissions for such playwrights as Dryden and Congreve, on the commercial stage. **Purcell** was a prolific composer and it was claimed this contributed to his untimely death at the age of 37.

In the light of his outstanding musical talent and output it is amazing to discover that so little is known about the man who many believe to be **England's** greatest composer and certainly composed the greatest **English trumpet** music.

As well as the trumpet there were also other blown instruments such as the horn but initially these seem not to have been as popular. Nevertheless some of the later baroque composers like **Bach** and **Handel** made as many demands on their players by writing just as difficult parts for these instruments as well.

It was the **German** composer, **Bach** who in the 1720's pushed his musicians and their instruments to their limit particularly when it came to the **trumpet** and the **violin**.

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He made much use of a technique called **double stopping** which features in his **suites** for **solo violin**. It exploits the instrument's capacity to play more than one note at the same time and is still considered to be one of the most difficult techniques to perform.

Johann Sebastian Bach was born during the period that Baroque music was at its height, the year 1685. He came from a musical family and two of his own sons, **Johann Christian** and **Carl Philipp Emmanuel** were also famous composers. Neither could however compare with their famous father considered by many musical experts to be the best composer ever. As so often happens however **Bach's** music was comparatively neglected while he lived, he was much better known at the time for his keyboard playing rather than his composing.

Today, **Bach's Brandenburg Concertos** are some of the most well known and popular pieces of **Baroque** music known. He wrote six altogether, dedicated to his employer after whom they were named, the Margrave of Brandenburg.

They have been described as "the foundation of any collection of classical music" especially because they used different combinations of instruments. Most are written in the form of the **concerto grosso** - an early form of **concerto** epitomised by another famous **Baroque** composer, **Vivaldi**, in which a small group of solo musicians are set against the rest of the orchestra, or **tutti**.

One of the best known of the six is the **Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major** which uses only stringed instruments. Two of these, the **violone** or **double bass** and the **harpichord** provided the harmonic bass sound known

*Johann
Sebastian
Bach*



as the **continuo**. In those days orchestras did not have conductors so it was the continuo players like the **harpichordist** who kept the musicians in time. It is highly likely that **Bach** would have been that person when it came to playing his own music.

Because **harpichords** look somewhat similar to **pianos** it is easy to think they are very similar instruments. They aren't. **Harpichord strings are plucked mechanically by a plectrum operated by pressing a key** rather than hit with a hammer as the **piano**. Unlike the **piano**, the sound of which

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Picture -
Antonio
Vivaldi

will continue as long as the vibrations from the strings do, the **harpsichord** cannot sustain its sound. As soon as the player removes his finger from the key, the sound stops. The sound of the **harpsichord** also remains the same no matter how hard or softly the keys are played. The only way to increase the sound volume is to activate a series of stops rather like that in an **organ**, which brings into play additional sets of strings.

As **harpsichords** became more sophisticated with the addition of more strings a second keyboard was added, designed in such a way that when the key from one manual was pressed the corresponding string from the second was activated a fraction of a second later. This added interest and depth to the music's tone giving the impression of a continuing sound.

The *Concerto No. 3 in G* is a complex and exciting piece of music based on a fragment of three notes. This group of three notes is combined and recombined. It is also written for three stringed instruments, **violins**, **violas** and **cellos** as well as the **harpsichord** and **double bass**. Each of the three groups of instruments has a chance to shine.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the *Concerto No. 3* however is Bach's use of counterpoint. This is the way by which two or more tunes (both different and separate in their own right) can be combined or woven together in one piece of music.

Bach was a past master at this perhaps because he was a superb player not only of the **violin** but of the **harpsichord** as well. Keyboard music in particular was extremely good at showing off **counterpoint**. It does seem strange therefore that even though the **piano** was invented in **Bach's** lifetime he failed to appreciate just how superior that keyboard instrument was.

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Another composer who lived around the same time as Bach was **Antonio Vivaldi** who was born in 1678. His

'Spring' concerto, one of four entitled *The Four Seasons* is probably one of the most popular pieces of **Baroque** music ever written. Just as some music today immediately gets to the top of the charts from the moment it is released so to did Spring in its day. It made **Vivaldi** an immense success overnight.

Like **Bach**, **Vivaldi** was much better known for his **virtuoso** playing than his composing. He was taught to play the violin by his father, a professional violinist. Though he originally trained as a priest he managed at the age of 25 to become the teacher of string music at a orphanage in Venice, the Ospedale della Pietà. Doubtless

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his religious background helped him to get what was considered to be a plum job at this establishment. The Ospedale specialised in providing musical tuition for the orphans and the job suited **Vivaldi** very well as it allowed him plenty of time for composing as well as performing.

When his four concertos, *The Four Seasons* were published in 1725 they were included in a larger collection called *The Contest between Harmony and Invention*. The significance of the title is in pointing out the disciplines composers face in combining their ideas or inventions together with the musical rules of harmony.

What is however most interesting as far as **Vivaldi's** entire musical repertoire is concerned (he wrote over 500 concertos) is that in spite of the title he was not all that good at invention. The modern composer **Stravinsky** went so far as to dismiss him with the comment that he had written the "same concerto four hundred times". While there is much repetition of ideas throughout his music **Vivaldi** made such skilful reuse of them they always appeared new and fresh.

Each of the pieces in *The Four Seasons*, (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) is based on the fourteen line rhyming poem or sonnet. **Vivaldi** is thought to have written the poems first and then based his music on them. Each concerto contains three movements with both the first and the last in ritornello form. This is a method of composing in which the same theme or bits of it are used over and over again in a piece, interspersed with passages of different music known as episodes in which there are often large passages to allow a soloist to shine. **Vivaldi** was a master at this method of composition.

The publication of *The Four Seasons* was undoubtedly the highpoint of **Vivaldi's** career and today is perhaps the best known piece of music he wrote. Many of his other compositions were also widely acclaimed by his contemporaries including **Bach**. His *Guitar Concerto* (which he actually wrote for the lute) is a fine example.

The lute is a stringed instrument which like the guitar is plucked. Guitar, or guitar like musical instruments had been around for many centuries. Even though we tend to associate it today with Spain and the flamenco, guitars have been traced back to many other and more ancient civilisations such as Greece and Egypt. It was in the 15th century though that it became really popular and the shape we now associate with it became standard. The original guitar had only four strings or courses as they are known, it was in the Baroque era that the other pair of strings were added. The instrument's popularity arose because it proved fairly simple to play and provided a good musical accompaniment for singers. Nevertheless this simplicity proved its undoing as far as most musical snobs were concerned and few composers who tended to play the more complicated and prestigious stringed instruments bothered to write for it. Though **Vivaldi's** concerto was actually written for the lute it could just as easily have been written for the guitar and today is associated mainly with that instrument. For this we must be grateful, his *guitar concerto* is a splendid piece.

It would seem that apart from those late Renaissance, early Baroque English composers like **William Byrd** and **Thomas Tallis**, it was primarily the Italians who enabled Baroque music to really take off.

Both **Byrd** (who was called the father of English music) and **Tallis** had studied together and went on to share the job

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Picture -
George
Frideric
Handel

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of organist to the Chapel Royal. They were - though **Byrd** more so - prolific composers of church music and while they did also compose **secular music** this was not so well known. The great **English** composer, **Henry Purcell** wrote more **secular music** including the first **English opera**. Even he cannot compare with the most famous **English** composer who was actually born in Germany, **George Frideric Handel**. Though **Handel** was born in **Germany** he spent so much of his life in England that most people consider him to be an English composer. His work was to have a far reaching effect on English music as well as throughout Europe.

Handel is best remembered for his writing of **oratorios**, a sort of opera with a religious theme performed without costumes or scenery. As such it can just as easily be performed in a church as in a theatre and enabled performers to be kept gainfully employed during the period of Lent when theatres had to be kept shut because of church rules.

The word **oratorio** comes from the **Latin oratio** which means prayer. The **oratorio** was invented by a Roman monk, **Philip Neri** almost two hundred years before **Handel** was born. **Neri** was the equivalent of today's evangelists who at the time held a series of prayer meetings at his church. Such meetings could perhaps be compared with those held by Billy Graham today.

As well as more simplified and less formal prayers the congregation also sang much catchier and simpler songs in **Italian** instead of **Latin** called **laude**. While the words were religious the style was far more like opera, then the popular music of the time. This gospel singing proved so popular that before long a much larger building had to be provided and this came to be known as the **Oratory**. Over time the became more complex professional singers took over the main performing role from the general congregation.



word also came to describe the music as well as the building in which it was sung and as the words and music. **Handel** probably knew little of this however when he was a boy living in Halle his home town in Germany. He was keen amateur musician but was persuaded by his father to study law. But after leaving university and when his father died he gave up law and became the organist at Halle Cathedral. He then joined Keiser's **opera** house in Hamburg as a **violinist** and in his spare time turned his hand to composing. Even though he had some success

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with his first two operas, *Almira* and *Nero*, **Handel** swiftly realised that if he wanted to get on in opera, Italy was the place to be. He had struck up a friendship with a rich Italian prince who invited him to Florence and helped launch him there as a composer. His first Italian opera, *Rodrigo* was an instant success and before long he found himself being inundated with commissions by the rich and famous. Amongst these were some for oratorios and as the style was so similar to that of opera he was able to produce these with comparative ease.

In 1710, word having spread of his talent, **Handel** found himself being invited back to Germany to take over as Kapellmeister at the royal court of Hanover. At the same time however he had been planning to go to London as he had been writing an Italian opera specially for London audiences and wished to see it performed. So highly was he thought of that **Handel** persuaded his new royal master to give him leave of absence for a year. His master even paid him into the bargain to produce his opera, *Rinaldo*. It created a sensation and **Handel** was lionised by his English audiences.

In 1711 **Handel** returned to Hanover for a short while to plead at court for an extension and his employer, the Elector of Hanover agreed **"provided he returned within a reasonable time."** **Handel** never did return. Ironically it was his employer who instead came to England. In 1714 the Elector of Hanover was offered the throne of England following the death of Queen Anne. George 1, as he became began the Hanoverian period of Britain's monarchy which has lasted until the present day (although the present name of the dynasty is now Mountbatten-Windsor).

For the remainder of his life in England, nearly fifty years, **Handel** proved a prolific composer. He was able to write at tremendous speed, one opera *Faramondo* was composed in just nine days. Like most of his contemporaries **Handel** was extremely good at reusing some of his own music and sometimes others as well but his talent was such that no one objected. One commentator described **Handel's** ability as being able to "polish other men's pebbles into diamonds."

With the help of some aristocratic and very rich friends, **Handel** also set about founding a permanent opera company in England at the King's Theatre, Haymarket. It was somewhat grandly named the Royal Academy of Music and enabled **Handel** to visit the rest of Europe on a frequent basis and sign up the most talented performers to appear there. It also gave him the chance to keep in touch with his many friends and all the latest musical trends on the continent.

His amazingly productive composing career continued unabated for another twenty years with **Handel** writing opera after opera. Towards the end of 1728 though the first opera written in English, *The Beggar's Opera* appeared.

Handel began to realise his audiences were beginning to desert him for something new and fresher. Even though revivals of some of his more grand music like the *Water Music* and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* as well as his anthems like that entitled *Zadok The High Priest* and odes which were generally written for great royal occasions were still very popular he realised he needed to change direction.

He turned his attention to the oratorio but decided to approach it in a quite different style from that of Italian opera. Instead he looked at what he believed the English most liked, large choruses, good instrumental music, the pomp and majesty of the anthem, wonderful solo arias and combined them all together. The two first oratorios he wrote, *Saul* followed by *Israel in Egypt* were highly regarded but were a disaster commercially. The English words for the music based on the Bible were written by Charles Jennens a poet friend of **Handel**.

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In spite of this setback **Handel** persevered with his next **oratorio** which he had been invited to produce in Dublin.

The ***Messiah***, with text by Charles Jennens was first performed there on the 13th April, 1742 and was received with rapture by the audience of 700. Over £400 was raised for charity at the performance.

Handel was a worthy supporter of many charities and during his lifetime raised nearly £6,000 for the various charities he supported from performances of the ***Messiah*** alone. That amount was a prodigious sum at the time and the musical historian, Charles Burney writing some fifty years later commented that "from that time to the present, this great work has been heard in all parts of the kingdom with increasing reverence and delight; it has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, fostered the orphan, more than any single production in this or any other country".

Messiah tells the story of Christ, from the prophesy of his coming to his death and resurrection. In spite of this very religious theme it created a storm when it was first performed in London. A number of influential Christians campaigned against music which was based on the Bible, being performed in theatres. Charles Jennens did not help either, he declared ***Messiah*** to be an "entertainment" and it took several years for this prejudice to be overcome. This in spite of the London premiere at Covent Garden which was attended by the King George II. He was so impressed by the **oratorio** and in particular the **Hallelujah chorus** that he stood in sheer admiration. That mark of respect became a tradition over the years and today audiences all over the world still stand when it is being played.

Handel's musical career began to thrive again and he started work on another oratorio, ***Samson***. Though it never became as popular as ***Messiah*** it is considered just as good.

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His use of choruses and in particular the way he used voices rather than tunes in **counterpoint**, layered on top of each other before finally reaching a whole evoked special excitement.

Sadly, however **Handel's** eyesight began to fade. By 1753 he was almost blind and although he was able to continue playing for quite some time, his composing days were coming to an end. When he died in 1759, this well loved Anglo German genius was given a state funeral in Westminster Abbey. More than 3,000 mourners from all over England attended.

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The Classical Period

As the great Baroque composers, Vivaldi, Bach and Handel's lives were drawing to a close halfway through the eighteenth century so too was the era of Baroque music as tastes began to change. The development of science and industry were creating new ideas and work methods but in spite of this there was growing disparity between the very rich and the very poor. Even the Church's teachings were being doubted as people began to question their very beliefs. This was the start of what came to be known as 'The Age of Enlightenment' as people began to look back to what they believed were the good old days. In this case the good old days meant that period of European civilisation when the ancient Greeks and Romans were at their height.



Baroque architecture with its emphasis on elaborate and ostentatious decoration began to be replaced by a much cleaner and simpler, classical style. So too with music, it became more melodic and natural sounding with more easily remembered tunes.

Previously most musical performances had been held in church or in fairly small select groups in the homes of the nobility. Apart from the great state occasions such as coronations when orchestras performed in the open for all to hear, most formal music was never played elsewhere. The advent of opera and the oratorio had begun to change all that and it was not long before concerts began to be held which were open to anyone who could afford to pay.

As public concerts became popular composers began to see them as the beginning of the way to independence i.e. not having to depend solely as they had in the past on their patron or employer. Purcell, for example had never been considered anything more than a minor servant when he had been employed by Charles 11. Handel had a more honored status with George I but each was overly dependent on his patron.

Unlike today when top musicians and composers earn large sums and are treated with great respect, musicians of the time were not. To ensure a living for themselves, most musicians had to seek employment with either a rich nobleman or prince. Apart from the church, these were the only patrons of music. While this gave composers some financial security it could also be very restrictive; few employers were as generous as the Elector of Hanover had been to Handel especially when it came to letting their musicians go off traveling round Europe. But artists need inspiration and new ideas and the only way to achieve this was through frequent meetings and work with their peers.

The dawn of the concert also proved beneficial in another way as well. As musicians gained more freedom to travel and compare notes with each other, the quality of the music they played benefited as well. Not only were best practice and techniques exchanged but so too were improved instruments and new ones such as the clarinet.

The royal court at Mannheim was one place where much innovation took place and where musicians were keen to

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visit. The Elector of that court, Prince Carl Theodor was not only a lover of music but wanted his orchestra to give only the best musical performances. The person he chose to ensure this was a violinist from Bohemia, **Johan Stamitz** who as concert master of the Mannheim orchestra between 1742 and 1778 made it one of the most renowned in Europe. One of the techniques invented at Mannheim was a system of uniform bowing by the violinists. Until then, string players had been allowed to decide for themselves how to produce what effects the score asked for and if this meant one bowed up while the other bowed down so be it. Not only must this have looked unsightly but could well have proved dangerous as well for other players sitting nearby. They were likely to find a bow sticking unexpectedly into them. In describing the Mannheim orchestra, historian Charles Burney wrote in his General History of Music **"There are more solo players and good composers in this than any other orchestra in Europe; it is an army of generals, equally fit to plan a battle as to fight it."**

As the style of music began to change so too did the popularity of various instruments. The principal violinist was beginning to take over the lead role in the orchestra from the **continuo** player.

Under the new classical style the **continuo part becomes less important and is gradually replaced by richer parts for wind instruments.**

Despite the development of the orchestra wind section it is still the chief violinist who remains the **"Leader"** of the orchestra. That role has continued to the present day.

This was a change from the **Baroque** era during which, the **harpsichord** had provided the rhythmic bass line or **continuo** to fill in harmony and also keep the musicians together. It had also been used as the **solo keyboard**

instrument. But the **harpsichord** had a major drawback which was described by the great harpsichord composer, **Francois Couperin** in 1713. **Couperin** wrote of the instrument: **"The harpsichord is perfect as to its compass and brilliant in itself, but as one can neither swell or diminish its sounds, I will be forever grateful to those who with infinite pains guided by taste succeed in rendering this instrument capable of expression"**. Such an improvement was never achieved; instead, the **piano** was the instrument which took the stage.

The piano, was another Italian invention, by Bartolomeo Cristofori of Florence in 1709. To look at, it was much the same shape as the **harpsichord**, triangular with a keyboard in the front. The shape was determined by the length of the strings on which the keys were struck (the long or bass strings on one side narrowing to the short or treble strings on the other). Unlike the **harpsichord** it was capable of 'expression'. **The strings were not plucked mechanically but struck with a hammer**. The hammer could move freely, dropping back without blocking the sounds of the strings so the musician was able to affect the speed at which it was played. The hammer also included a sound damper which rose as the key was depressed and fell as the key was released to stop string vibrations.

The **piano's** design has changed little over the years. The only major alterations have been the replacement of the original wooden frame by cast iron which prevented the structure from eventually collapsing and the invention of the **upright piano** by turning the strings from horizontal to vertical. This meant that while the **'grand' piano** as it came to be known, was still available for larger rooms and concert halls, the much smaller upright could be fitted into the home, and into many more informal and smaller venues.

The **piano** suited extremely well the new composers of the **Classical** period. The most famous and who is perhaps most associated with its use in his many compositions was **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** who lived from 1756 to 1791. Many people will remember the

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Wolfgang
Amadeus
Mozart

excellent film made about him a few years ago entitled *Amadeus*. It gave the impression of a brilliant young genius producing music quite effortlessly. The reality was probably quite different. As **Mozart** himself once wrote to his father "**It is a mistake to think that the practice of my art has become easy to me - no one has given so much care to the study of composition as I have**". While it is true that **Mozart** was undoubtedly a genius and came from an extremely talented musical background, he knew that if he was to excel at his art, hard work was also needed.



Mozart's father, Leopold was also a composer and a violinist and musical theorist as well. He was musician to the court of Thurn and Taxis in Salzburg which enabled him to show off in the right quarters the child prodigy he had as a son.

By the age of three **Mozart** was able to play the **harpsichord**, by five he was composing and by the age of six showed enough talent to be able to give a solo performance before the Austrian Empress and the Elector of Bavaria.

Leopold Mozart determined that the world should be made to see what a musical genius the young **Wolfgang** was and arranged for the boy to tour Europe to show off his ability. He composed for and performed before most of the crowned heads of Europe visiting England, the Netherlands, France, Italy and Germany and was received with much acclaim. Unfortunately it didn't do **Mozart** much good. In spite of his father's aristocratic connections, he was still considered to be socially not much better than a servant and was treated accordingly. Eventually the best that he was able to achieve after so much of his short life had already passed was a job at the court of the Archbishop of Salzburg at the age of 24. Here

in spite of his undoubted talent, (he had just published his **opera *Idomeneo*** to rave reviews), he found himself still very much looked down on.

Much against his father's wishes, **Mozart** decided to quit the Archbishop's employ and set up on his own as a composer and soloist in Vienna. His father believed that without noble patronage **Mozart** would have no future but his son was unconvinced. Luckily for **Mozart** he was proved right and within only a few weeks had become one of the best paid soloists in the city.

To show off his performing talent to the Viennese public, **Mozart** decided to concentrate on the now fashionable **piano**. During his travels he had visited Mannheim and had been both impressed and influenced by the orchestra there. He used all that he had learnt to the full in his compositions which comprised no less than 17 **piano concertos**, all of which he performed. **Mozart** had learnt that in writing **opera**, drama was vital to success. He set about doing the same with his concertos ensuring that the audience were dazzled by every note the soloist plays. His technique worked brilliantly.

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Mozart's genius could not be better displayed than in one of his finest **concertos** for **piano**, *No. 23 in A*, which he wrote in 1786, at the same time that he was completing his finest opera *'The Marriage of Figaro'*.

Apart from the **piano**, the star of the **concerto**, he stipulated that **clarinets** should be used in place of **oboes**.

The **clarinet** was at that time a fairly new instrument. It is believed to have been a German invention and was given its name after the very high register playing of the **trumpet** known as **clarino style**. As a woodwind instrument the clarinet is extremely versatile being equally at home in a large orchestra as in a small chamber ensemble. It did however have one great drawback. While its unique construction allowed it to produce a distinctive tone it also restricted the number of keys in which the instrument can play. As a result clarinetists needed at least two instruments, the Bb model for playing music in flat keys, the A model for music in sharp keys. This problem has to a great extent been overcome as a result of technical improvements but even today most clarinet players in orchestras still use two instruments.

Nevertheless **Mozart** was enchanted with the wonderful clarity of the **clarinet** and determined that it would feature in his compositions. He was doubtless influenced again by the Mannheim orchestra who had already succumbed to the instrument's charms. After seeing it in action when he visited Mannheim in 1778 and listening to it being played by his friend, **Anton Stadler** who was a member of the Viennese Imperial Court Orchestra **Mozart** developed a passion for the instrument. Three particular pieces he wrote *The Trio for Clarinet, Viola and Piano*, *The Clarinet Quintet* (which **Mozart** called Stadler's Quintet) and the *Clarinet Concerto* certainly persuaded several of his

contemporaries to include the **clarinet** in their compositions as well.

Apart from the **concerto** another form of music was beginning to become popular. This was the **symphony**. **Alessandro Scarlatti** had come up with the original concept producing a three **movement sinfonia** based on the short introductory passages or **overtures** which were used to introduce **operas**. As public concerts became ever more popular, composers had constantly to experiment with new musical ideas to ensure their listeners were kept happy. **Overtures** had proved popular with **opera** going audiences and the new form of music which was written for a full orchestra proved just the same. Originally the **symphony** had three **movements** in a fast-slow-fast or slow-fast-slow pattern. A **minuet** (a dignified dance music section) was then added in the middle to produce the full four **movement symphony**.

Mozart, like other composers took to composing **symphonies** with much enthusiasm and his last and greatest is the *No. 41 in C major* known as *Jupiter*. It was written in the space of six weeks along with two other **symphonies** Nos. 39 and 40. All are totally different, *No. 39* is a sunny and happy work, *No. 40* tragic and bleak but *No. 41* written in the most basic **key C major**, is filled with grandeur and rejoicing. From the moment one hears the imperial march like opening with its forceful **trumpet** and **Timpani**, the name it was given '*Jupiter*' becomes apparent. It has an amazing **finale** in which no less than five distinct tunes are combined in **counterpoint** but in the much cleaner classical style into a superb and complex whole.

When one looks back on **Mozart's** short and in some ways tragic life it does seem amazing that he was able to write such truly glorious music. He grew up a precocious child in regal surroundings but always having to remember his 'station in life' was not much better than a servant. When he broke free from patronage it was not to a life of financial stability. His wife, Constanze was looked down on by his father (she was after all only the daughter of his landlady) and was just as bad at managing their financial affairs as

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her husband. Yet in spite of all his problems he was able to devote himself so completely to his composing that in 1785 alone he produced some thirty compositions.

His death at the early age of 35 from, it is believed, some form of consumption robbed the world of even more. It is amazing to think that in the short period he lived Mozart was able to write enough music to fill almost 200 of today's CDs.

One year after **Mozart's** death another musical star was beginning to rise. Though **Franz Joseph Haydn** was born 24 years before **Mozart** and both knew and worked with him in Vienna, fame had eluded him until then. Unlike **Mozart**, **Haydn** was naturally modest and did not trumpet his skills as loudly as his young friend. **Mozart** did however have a great respect for **Haydn** of whom he said: **"There is no one who can do it all - to joke and to terrify, to evoke laughter and profound sentiment - and all equally well - except Joseph Haydn"**.

Haydn had come from a very humble background. He was born in Rohrau, a small town on the Danube. His father was a wainwright (a maker of wagon wheels) and his mother a cook. He managed to get a musical education by winning a scholarship to a choir school but was expelled when his voice broke. Without any money the best he was able to achieve in the way of a job with some musical connections was working as a valet for a minor Italian composer. To add to his problems he married on the rebound a woman, Anna Maria Keller, who wasted what little he managed to earn by trying to curry favour with the church to which she was completely devoted.

Eventually **Haydn** managed to land a job in 1761 as Kapellmeister to Prince Nikolaus Esterhazy of Hungary at his country palace, Esterhaza. The Esterhazys were not as

grand as they would have liked but they had aspirations and plenty of money. The prince spent a lot of time entertaining and **Haydn** was expected constantly to produce new pieces. The prince normally stayed at Esterhaza for about thirty weeks each year and every week he was in residence **Haydn** was expected to compose music for at least two concerts and operas, three church services as well as the occasional piece of chamber music. The prince certainly believed in getting value for money from his Kapellmeister.

Amazingly **Haydn** managed to cope. He was apparently so very good natured and willing to please, he was given the nickname 'Papa Joe'. During the 29 years he worked for the prince (he wrote no less than 80 symphonies between 1761 and 1785) he was able to escape only occasionally to write the odd commission. Even then he was not allowed to do so without the Prince's express permission and this was not always forthcoming. Three of his symphonies for example, (Nos. 76, 77 and 78) were written especially for a visit to London but he never did get there at the time to see them performed. While his life at the Esterhazy court must have sometimes seemed like sheer drudgery it did have a beneficial effect on **Haydn's** music. It meant that he had to rely on himself when it came to musical inspiration. **"I was away from the world"** he wrote later **"there was no one nearby to confuse or disturb me, and I was forced to become original"**.

After the Prince's death in 1790, **Haydn** was able to get away at last and moved to Vienna. The new prince had decided to disband the orchestra and **Haydn** was out of a job, though with a good pension. His former employers had, in spite of their peculiarities always treated **Haydn** generously. He didn't stay very long in Vienna however. In spite of the tight control that had been kept over his music, many people were only too well aware of **Haydn's** genius, even though **Haydn** himself did not always recognise it. He once described his reason for writing music **"so that the weary and worn, or the man burdened with affairs, may enjoy a few moments of solace and refreshment"**.

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One person who did recognise **Haydn's** abilities was the famous violinist and impresario Peter Salomon who arrived with an invitation for **Haydn** to visit London and compose several new works including an *opera* to be performed there. It was an offer that **Haydn** couldn't refuse particularly as London had by then gained a reputation as an international city of musical excellence. The decision proved right and when the first performance of the '*Surprise*', his *symphony No. 94* was held not only was it received with much acclaim but **Haydn** found himself at the age of 60 with a large sum of money as a result.

During the time he worked with Salomon, **Haydn** wrote 12 *symphonies*. They included not only the '*Surprise*' (his 94th) but *No. 104 in D*, the last he ever wrote. They came to be known as the *London Symphonies*.

In spite of that name the *symphonies* often used as *themes* music based on *folk songs* from **Haydn's** early childhood. *No. 104* for example uses a tune based on a *Croatian* folk song called '*Oj Jelena*'. The *symphony* shows not only **Haydn's** mastery of *counterpoint*, especially in the *finale* but also his command of the *sonata form*. This reached its heyday during the classical period and is generally used for the first *movements* of big instrumental works such as *symphonies*. The form presents two musical ideas or *subjects* in an *exposition*, the first in the main *key* (in this case D) of the piece, the second in a related or different *key*. These 'ideas' are then explored in different *keys* and *variations* in the *development*. Finally comes a section in which the 'ideas' are again revisited, but this time in the same main *key* in the *recapitulation*. Sometimes composers would add an extra introduction at the start and a tail piece at the end known as a *coda*.

One of **Haydn's** favourite instruments was the *bassoon* and it is used to good effect in *No. 94* to show off the second *subject* or idea. It is a gentle and sentimental tune which the *bassoon* excels at as it has a smooth, rich, low sound. The *bassoon* is a woodwind bass instrument with a pitched sound below that of the *clarinet*. It had been mostly used to play military and theatre music but **Mozart** again saw its possibilities and encouraged its use. So too did **Haydn**.

Haydn's Symphony No. 104 is reckoned to be the crowning point of his career and its performance, which as part of his arrangement with Salomon was given for his benefit, made him a lot of money. By the time it was first played however he was aged 63, almost near retirement age today. For someone to have reached that age in the late 18th century was considered quite rare. As he was now quite well off it is possible he felt it would be rather nice not to have to work quite so hard or perhaps he just missed the life he had been used to at Esterhaza. Whatever the reason he returned to live permanently at Eisenstadt near Vienna where the new Prince Nikolaus, grandson of his original employer had decided to restart the family orchestra. He asked **Haydn** for help and the composer agreed. Eisenstadt was close enough to Vienna to allow **Haydn** plenty of time to enjoy musical life there as well. Although he often described the time he spent in London as the happiest in his life, perhaps now he felt was the time to return home.

After his first visit to London in 1790, **Haydn** had travelled in other parts of Europe as well. He even returned to Vienna in 1793 for a while to compose some of the twelve *symphonies* that had been commissioned by Salomon. Whilst there he was introduced to and agreed to give lessons to another budding musical genius - not quite as precocious as **Mozart** perhaps - but a musician whose talents were already being recognised at the age of 23.

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The Romantic Era

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in 1770 in Bonn. Musical myth was later to describe him as an otherworldly genius, scornful of society and the trivial things of life. As so often happens reality is somewhat different. The facts of his life do not paint quite such an attractive picture. Beethoven did not believe in practising what he preached.

He claimed, for example that *Don Giovanni*, the subject of a **Mozart** opera, was immoral and should not have been written yet openly conducted several affairs during his life with married women. He conducted a legal fight with his dead brother's wife for custody of their son Karl as he had no children of his own. When he eventually triumphed and was made the boy's guardian he treated him so badly that the boy tried to commit suicide. His principles, or lack of them can best be summed up in a letter in which he wrote "I don't want to know anything about your system of ethics. Strength is the morality of the man who stands out from the rest, and it is mine". By virtue of his music alone, **Beethoven** did.

Beethoven undoubtedly possessed great talent. He was also very radical in his outlook particularly when it came to music. If a musical rule was accepted practice, **Beethoven** immediately felt he had to challenge it. One of his musical notebooks shows this to good effect. In it he tries to disprove an accepted rule of **harmony** no less than 17 times. To someone like **Haydn** who was rather conventional this must have seemed like heresy. Unlike his relationship with **Mozart** which was always most cordial **Haydn** found it difficult to get on with **Beethoven**.

Beethoven was ahead of his time musically. He above all the composers of that time was probably the key figure in forming the link between the **Classical** music period and the **Romantic** one. During the **Baroque** age composers had begun to use music not just as a series of pleasant sounds but as an alternative to words as description. This became known as **programme music**. For music to be truly



Ludwig Van Beethoven

programmatic the composer has to make clear exactly what it describes. **Vivaldi** did this in the *Four Seasons*, the four **movements** are each given a title, *Spring, Summer, Autumn* and *Winter* and the music certainly gives an impression of each. The **Classical** age of music had refined and simplified this method of expression.

To begin with **Beethoven** had followed a fairly traditional path in his musical compositions. His first *symphony in C major*, which was not performed until 1800 in Vienna (he was already 30) still appears a conservative work more influenced by the **Classical** era than the later **Romantic** one. Yet it was apparent that changes in his style were beginning to take place. Normally classical **symphonies** begin in the **key** of the piece in which it is played but **Beethoven** began instead in **F major** only moving to C some eight bars later. It may well have been that **Beethoven** was already beginning to enter by then the second phase of his musical career in which the more dominant and emotional romantic music with which he was to enthrall the world took

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precedence. He had taken musical descriptions in the way of programme music to even greater length than many of his contemporaries as can be seen in his *Pastoral Symphony* (No. 6) where he wrote into the score just what each movement represents. While **Vivaldi's** *Four Seasons* consists simply of *Spring, Summer, Autumn* and *Winter*, the *Pastoral's* first movement is described as "*Awakening of joyful feelings on arrival in the countryside.*"

In what was to be the most productive part of his career **Beethoven** wrote such incredible works as his third symphony, (the *Eroica*) which is considered by some musical experts to be his best, the *Violin Concerto*, his only opera *Fidelio*, the *fourth* and *fifth piano concertos*, and his symphonies numbers *four to eight*. The *Fifth Concerto* beginning with the four note musical motif which provides the impetus for the first movement was to become even more famous during the second world war when it came to symbolise the Morse code's V for Victory used as a signal on the BBC. The four note motif that **Beethoven** used and from which every theme in the symphony is derived shocked many composers of the time. Once again he had defied musical convention. Yet not that many years later the famous German composer **Richard Wagner** was to use **Beethoven's** idea over and over again in his own compositions. A leitmotif, German for leading motif, is used repeatedly in a musical work to represent an idea or character. **Wagner** became so keen on the leitmotif that he even composed whole operas around them.

What made Beethoven's achievement so amazing at this time however was his deafness. He had begun having problems hearing in 1801 and by 1803 was completely deaf. It made no difference to his ability; if anything it probably heightened it.

Over the years **Beethoven** had amazed his audiences by his powerful piano technique. He regularly broke the strings on instruments when he played as if he were having difficulty being able to reproduce the music he could hear in his own head. Now that he was stone deaf this problem would trouble him no more.

Apart from symphonies and concertos written for full orchestras some of **Beethoven's** most beguiling music was written for much smaller groups or ensembles in particular the string quartet. The string quartet had come to prominence under both **Haydn** and **Mozart**, it fitted well their disciplined, clean classical style. When **Beethoven's** quartets were first performed however, audiences still unused to these first forays into the new Romantic style were unable to cope. They couldn't understand what **Beethoven** was trying to achieve and thought he'd gone mad. Today **Beethoven's** string quartet's are thought to be amongst the best ever written.

By the end of **Beethoven's** life in 1827 the Romantic period was already well underway. Just as we now tend to associate classical music with everything written in the past so too do most people think of the Romantic composers as only being associated with romance in the form of love. But romance can mean more than just that and to the 19th century composers it also meant emotion and vision. In the same way that composers had turned from the flamboyance of the baroque style to the cleaner classical style so too did the composers of the Romantic age adopt emotion. This was the time of **Mendelssohn** and **Schubert, Chopin** and **Liszt, Tchaikovsky** and **Wagner** when composers turned away from the concept of pure music of the classical era and looked to some of the great works of art and literature for extra musical inspiration.

Music became much louder and stormier and compositions far longer than they had been in the past. Orchestras became larger as musical instruments improved in quality as a result of new technology. The horn for example had long been associated with the supernatural - a perfect subject on which to allow emotion to run riot - but had been constrained in its

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output until the invention of valves in about 1815. This had been made possible by new metal alloys and methods of manufacture which were starting to appear.

These changes encouraged other ones, in particular the arrival of superb musicians who became the stars of their age and also of the conductor. Although many great composers of the past like **Mozart** and **Beethoven** were admired not only for their musical compositions but for their playing as well, it does not always follow that every great composer is also a great musician. Now as composers were able to indulge their every emotion in their writing so too were they free to indulge it in their playing. Some like **Chopin** confined himself to the **piano**, mainly composing for that instrument but allowing himself to shine as well by his ability to play.

But not every composer was like **Chopin** and this created an opportunity for the **virtuosi** (musicians with great technical ability).

Some of these like the violin player **Paganini** did write the odd piece but like the **castrati** of old was far better known for his interpretation of music rather than his ability to write it.

So too it was with conductors, who until then had played a somewhat peripheral part in things. All musical performances needed someone to take charge but until then the job had been carried on either by the composer himself or the person who led the orchestra. In the **Baroque** age that person had been the **harpsichordist**, in the **Classical** era, the **leader** of the first violins. As orchestras grew in size and music became more complicated it became apparent that something more was needed. In the same way that **soloists** became stars so too did **conductors**, especially because they were beginning to be seen not just as orchestra directors but interpreters of the composer's music as well.



*The Great
Virtuoso
Paganini*

Composers also began to break away from the standardised forms of music like the **concertos** and **symphonies**. Just as **Mozart**, **Haydn** and **Beethoven** had experimented with different and more intimate pieces of **chamber** music, so too did the **Romantic** composers. **Programmatic music** was evolved into **symphonic** or **tone poems**, allowing composers far more latitude when it came to describing the sort of dramatic tales which had been turned into great literature in the past.

An excellent example was the musical overture written for the Shakespearean drama, *Romeo and Juliet* by **Ptyor II'yich Tchaikovsky**, one of the great **Russian Romantic** composers.

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Tchaikovsky was born in Votkinsk in **Russia** in 1840 where his father was a mining engineer. His family had no particular musical ability but both his mother and father encouraged their children to learn. When the family moved to St. Petersburg, the young boy continued his musical studies but only as a hobby. He graduated as a lawyer and looked set for a safe career in the Ministry of Justice.

Because **Tchaikovsky** enjoyed his music he began taking part time lessons at the St Petersburg Conservatory, then the only musical school in Russia and quickly came under the influence of the famous **Anton Rubinstein**. **Rubinstein** must have realised the young man's potential and persuaded him at the age of 22 to give up his career as a civil servant and study full time with him. When **Tchaikovsky** graduated from the conservatory he almost immediately found a teaching job with the Moscow Music Conservatory which had by then opened. It did perhaps help that the head of the Moscow school was **Anton Rubinstein's** brother Nikolai.

Tchaikovsky was able to find time to compose in spite of his teaching, and one of the first major works he was to write was *Romeo and Juliet*. It was written as an **overture** to the play itself but portrays in the best romantic sense, the **themes**, characters and action of the play by music alone. When it was first performed in 1870 it was not a success. This may well have been because Nikolai Rubinstein the **conductor**, had been involved in a dispute with a student at the college and pro and anti factions from both parties disrupted the performance. Nevertheless **Tchaikovsky** was most upset by the reaction and proceeded to rewrite the entire piece. When it was performed for the second time in 1872 it was an immediate hit.

Tchaikovsky went on to write other beautiful music which has remained well known and loved throughout the world such as the operas *Eugene Onegin*, *The Queen of Spades* and his **symphony No. 6 The Pathétique**. He also wrote for the **ballet** and his dance scores for *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* are still the most frequently performed.

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Sadly though, **Tchaikovsky** had another side to him which few people knew at the time. He was a homosexual, at the time a practice punishable by death in Russia. To give the impression of heterosexuality, **Tchaikovsky** was persuaded into marriage with one of his students who was besotted by him.

It proved a disaster and lasted for a mere nine weeks leaving the composer in a fit of almost suicidal depression. He was saved by a wealthy widow Nadezha von Meck

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Frederic Chopin

who was so impressed by his music that she agreed to provide him with an annuity to allow him time to compose. The only stipulation he had to agree with was to correspond with Nadezha and write music for her on a regular basis.

The annuity lasted for some 14 years until the two quarrelled by letter and her support ended. Not that long after and shortly after the first performance of *Pathetique*, **Tchaikovsky** found himself once again in serious trouble. He was summoned to appear before a 'court' made up of friends from his old law school for bringing it into disrepute. He had been caught having an affair with a young nobleman and death they determined was the only way out of his dishonour. He was ordered by the 'court' to

take poison and promptly did. On the 6th of November, 1893 he died at the age of 53.

As **Romantic** music became more and more popular, composers looked constantly at ways to improve the sound quality. Over the years huge improvements had been made to instrument quality and composers swiftly began to realise that quantity as well as quality made a vast difference. Orchestras began to grow in size. Where in the **Classical** period two brass instruments and two woodwinds would do, the Romantics insisted on three, sometimes four of each. Sometimes as was the case with **Wagner** who believed that his music should be a **Gesamtkunstwerk** or "total art work" they went even better. In one of his **operas** *Das Rheingold* first performed in 1854 he stipulated eight **horns**, thirteen extra brass instruments and six harps.

Richard Wagner was appropriated a hundred years later by Hitler and the Nazis as their personification of the German master race. It is strange to realise therefore that he was actually born in Poland, near Warsaw in 1810.

Wagner went one step further than his colleagues in evolving **programme music**. In the past, music had been used to illustrate the seasons as **Vivaldi** did, or tell a story as in **Tchaikovsky's** *Romeo and Juliet*. **Wagner** however combined it with singing.

He used the orchestra as well as the singers to tell the story in his operas. Each character is given his or her special theme in the musical score.

As a result once you know which **theme** relates to which character the storyline can be followed almost in the orchestral part alone. This is particularly helpful when the **opera** is sung in a language the listener does not understand.

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Richard Wagner has gained the reputation of being a serious composer dedicated to producing music of epic proportions with grand and sweeping **themes**. He doubtless encouraged this belief which has helped to turn him into the cult figure he still is today. It was he after all who inaugurated the music festival at Bayreuth - to celebrate his own music - which thousands of visitors attend each year. Yet one of his best known **operas** '*The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*' is based on a comic tale about a group of musicians. One of the 'villains' in the **opera** was modeled on a music critic called Eduard Hanslick that **Wagner** detested. In the **opera** **Wagner** made such fun of him that Hanslick stormed out of the premiere performance at the end of the first act. As could be expected he wrote a devastating critique of the **opera** which in the end had no effect. *The Mastersingers* is still performed all over the world and is one of **Wagner's** most popular **operas**.

Apart from increasingly enlarged orchestras and powerful sounds the **Romantic** Age also fostered in total contrast the development of a more intimate style. This was the time when individuals could shine not only like **Paganini** as a soloist in an orchestra but also on his own or as part of a small group of chamber musicians.

This style was personified by **Chopin**, another **Polish** born composer and also born near Warsaw in 1810. Much of **Chopin's** music was influenced by his Polish roots and most of it was written almost exclusively for the **piano** in the form of **preludes** (short works of music written primarily for the piano).

Another exponent was **Schubert** who arranged **German** songs or **lieder** which were written for one singer and various instruments but which he redeveloped into **quintets**, his most famous being '*The Trout*'.

To a great extent this more intimate musical style was encouraged by the invention of the **upright piano** which was small enough to fit into growing numbers of middleclass homes. These were the days when home entertainment had to rely exclusively on the gifted amateur able to sing or play a musical instrument. The arrival of the **upright** or **cottage piano** as it came to be known made a significant contribution. Not only was the production of sheet music the equivalent of the production of CD's today but many composers found a wonderful way of supplementing their income by writing piano versions of orchestral pieces simple enough for the amateur musician to play.



Romantic

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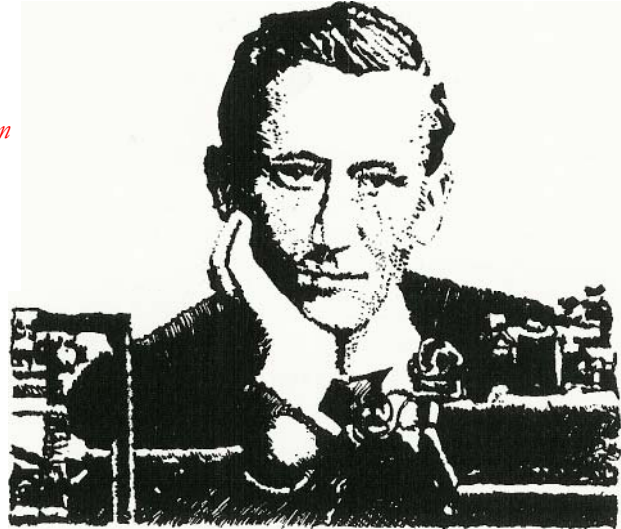
The 20th Century

As the nineteenth century began to draw to a close however many more musical changes were also happening. What undoubtedly brought about the most dramatic change was the invention of radio and recording devices. The phonograph or gramophone was invented by an American, Thomas Edison in 1877. It was an instrument for translating recorded sound waves which had been impressed onto discs into actual sound.

While the concept of transmission and reception of radio waves had been around for longer it was not until 1896 that an Italian, **Guglielmo Marconi** first succeeded in putting the concept into practice in England between Penarth and Weston-super-Mare. Though both methods of communication took several more years to become widely used it became apparent that the opportunity would soon arise for music performances to be recorded and be able to reach far wider audiences. The real communication age was about to begin.

At the same time that radio and recording was in its infancy so too was another form of music, **ragtime**. Perhaps as might be expected it originated in the **United States of America**, still thought of as the 'New World'. Immigration from all over the globe had been encouraged by the USA and many diverse peoples with many diverse cultures had arrived bringing not only their traditions but their music as well.

Ragtime, with its delightful **syncopated** rhythms was immediately popular. It derived from a mix of nineteenth century dances like the **quadrille**, popular **marches** of the time and music from the black minstrel shows. One of its greatest composers was **Scott Joplin** who became known as the **King of Ragtime**. It flourished during the years between 1890 and 1915, leading to the creation of dances like the **Charleston** and the **Blackbottom** and **Jazz** and **Negro Spirituals** which then finally superseded ragtime in popularity.



Marcon

Poor **Joplin** was to die, almost a pauper, in a mental home never realising that his **ragtime** would be revived in the late 1960's. When some of his 'rags' were used in the award winning film 'The Sting' in 1973, **Joplin's** work once again received its due reward.

As communications continued to improve with constant developments in radio and recording so too did the speed of travel and more particularly the numbers of those traveling. The age of the train, the motor car, the steamship and eventually the airplane allowed more and frequent interchange of music. Music was no longer as confined to its own area or country. Musicians from China, India, the West Indies, the Americas and Europe could share music and influence each other's music as well.

At the same time Europe was going through turbulent times which would impact on the world as a whole. The first

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Picture -
Jean
Sibelius

World war which lasted from 1914 to 1918 had resulted in a rise in international tension and in no less than three dictatorships in Russia, Germany and Italy. The second world war would come about as a result just over twenty years later.

Composers like everyone else were affected. Their music began to enter a period of rebellion and experimentation, questioning just as **Beethoven** had done many years before the accepted rules of music as other people began to question the accepted rules of society.

The years between 1910 and 1930 became known in musical terms as the **age of 'New Music'** and some composers almost totally rejected accepted principles regarding **tonality**, **rhythm** and **form**. The invention of **electronic** and **synthesised** music encouraged this.

Composers also began to experiment not only by using **electronic synthesisers** to create new variations in sounds but with new sounds as well. It was possible however to shock even with a conventional romantic orchestra. A famous example was the music by the **Russian** composer **Igor Stravinsky**, who had been so scathing about **Vivaldi's** 400 **concertos**.

Stravinsky who was born in 1882 moved completely away from conventional ideas of **tone** and **harmony** in his music for the **ballet 'The Rite of Spring'**. It is full of **dissonant harmonics**, **irregular rhythms** and extraordinary violence. When it was first performed in Paris in 1913 it almost caused a riot as nearly all the audience stormed out.

Other composers, like **Jean Sibelius**, the **Finnish** composer born in 1865 approached 'New Music' in a different way. He moved away from the dramatic emotional style of **Tchaikovsky** to make his music far more aesthetically spare



and lean to get to what he believed was the actual core. (When he developed throat cancer in 1908 apparently this made him pare down his music even more).

Sibelius was also deeply influenced by nationalistic sentiments as well and wrote his *Karelia Suite* and *Finlandia* in 1899 specifically to encourage anti-Russian sentiment in anger at the annexation of his homeland. So well did this work that the Russian authorities actually banned people from even whistling the melodies in the street.

Music in the **20th century** has continued to develop on all fronts and in many different ways. The ability to use **electronic keyboards** and **tapes** to put music together has enabled many more people to 'play' music far more easily and with less practice.

Nevertheless it has also encouraged many more actually to take up playing a real instrument or to sing as the increase in the number of amateur groups has shown. The emergence of radio stations dedicated entirely to so called 'classical music' like Classic FM in Britain and abroad shows too that more and more people are interested in all forms of music both old and new.

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Igor

Professional musical groups, both large and small are also thriving and increasing in number. There has also been an upsurge in 'authentic' music with musicians who use the instruments of the past and play in the way they believe the composer intended.

Where then will music go from here? It's always difficult to make predictions about something as intangible as musical tastes. If however one looks back into musical history one or two things do stand out. First is the size of the orchestra.

The modern orchestra does now appear to have stopped expanding. It seems to have stabilised in size and pattern largely to follow that of the late Romantic Age with a great number of string players and star conductors.

While there was some pressure to expand, which didn't just come from the late Romantic composers but from keen

exponents of 'New Music' like [Arnold Schoenberg](#); it is unlikely that today orchestras will be asked to expand any further to compete with those featured on the ancient Pyramids. Instead orchestras will develop in other ways by pursuing an even higher standard of performance of the music of the great composers of the past and present.

The age of instant communication and faster travel which began at the beginning of the 20th century, encouraged the use of many other sorts of [folk music](#) as the basis for new musical compositions. It also encouraged the revival in popularity of some past forms of music as different from each other as [plainchant](#) and [ragtime](#); these and many other specialist areas will also continue to expand.

And what of musical composition? It has in some ways moved back to the controlled improvisation that was common in the early Middle Ages; the first musical age we really know about. Some modern scores no longer always have a definitive set of instructions to be followed. The performer has therefore almost become the composer just as he was in pre-Renaissance times. Only the art of [polyphony](#) or [counterpoint](#) remains a constant. Will it eventually be replaced with something new? Only time will tell.