

History of music - an overview



The definition of music is defined in many ways; Webster's definition is as follows " an art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, or harmony."

There are many theories regarding when and where music formed. Many agree that music began even before man existed. Researchers point out that there are six periods of music and each period has a certain style of music that made what music is today. Here are some resources for you to better understand the history of music. (Estrella 2001)

Music is traced back as far as " ancient Israel" a thousand years before Christ; King David composed and sang hundreds of songs called psalms. A few of them are written in the old testament in the book of Psalms. But music as we know it now, as having structure and form, may have begun in the 10th century with the Gregorian chants. These songs were organized and detailed with soloists and small groups singing " distinctive parts". The music we are more in common with began around the year 1200 and soon after, troubadours singing " folk" music starting to appear in parts of Europe. The appearance of composers, made music, and the creation of the instruments such as the piano and lute. (Ezine Articles 2005)

The years 1750 to 1820 is known as the Classical period with the piano being a composer's instrument of choice. Mozart wrote his first symphony, Bach performed in London, and Beethoven was finally born. Many of the symphonies we enjoy today were written during this time. Music has truly evolved since this period though. In 1900, a man named Scott Joplin had composed and published the " Maple Leaf Rag," an event many see as the beginnings of the music we know today as popular music. " Soon after, new

musical forms were taking hold. Jazz in the 1930s (Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday), big band music in the 1940s (Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington), and rock-and-roll (Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry) in the 1950s. Other countries (most notably France and Spain) were creating their own popular music during this time". (Ezine 2005)

The three time periods I want to focus on is Medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary. This is all known to us to day as Opera, R&B, Rock, Hip Hop, Soul, etc. Music has been around for years and can be broken down into many stages or cycles. People everywhere all over the world make their own style of music. Every genre, sound, melody is different in some way.

When we look at the medieval music, we are dealing with the longest and most distant period of musical history. " Saint Gregory is credited with organizing the huge repertory of chant that developed during the first centuries of the Christian church, hence the term Gregorian chant". He was pope from 590 to 604, and the medieval era continued into the 1400s, so this period consists of music. One of the principal difficulties in studying medieval music is that a system for notating music developed only gradually. The first examples of musical notation date from around 900. For several centuries, notation only indicated what pitch to sing. The system for notating rhythm started in the 12th or 13th century. Gregorian chant is monophonic, meaning music that consists of only one melodic line without accompaniment. The beauty of chant lies in the serene, undulating shapes of its melody. We do not know who wrote the melodies of Gregorian chant. Like folk melodies, the music probably mutated as it was passed down through

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generations and eventually reached its notated form. Polyphony, music where two or more melodic lines are heard simultaneously, did not exist (or was not notated) until the 11th century. Unlike chant, polyphony required the participation of a composer to combine the melodic lines in a pleasing manner. Although most medieval polyphonic music is anonymous—the names of the composers were either lost or never written down at all—there are composers whose work was so important that their names were preserved along with their music. (Ezine 2005)

Renaissance is reflected by the changing role of the composer in society. Unlike most of their medieval times, the great masters of the Renaissance were created in their own lifetimes. The technique of printing music, while slow to evolve, helped in the “ preservation and distribution” of music and musical ideas. Sacred music was still predominant, though other music became more prevalent and more sophisticated. The repertory of instrumental music also began to expand significantly. New instruments were invented, including the clavichord and virginal and many existing instruments were improved. Masses and motets were the primary forms of sacred vocal polyphony. Other vocal forms included motets, madrigals and songs (generally accompanied by lute or a small instrumental ensemble or “ consort”). Instrumental pieces were usually short polyphonic works or music for dancing. (Ezine 2005)

Compared with the medieval style, Renaissance polyphony was lush and sonorous. The era between Josquin Desprez and Palestrina is known as “ the golden age of polyphony.” Imitation—where one melodic line shares, or imitates the same musical theme as a previous melodic line—became an

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important polyphonic technique. Imitation was one method composers used to make complex music more easily comprehensible and give the listener a sense of structure. Imitative polyphony can be heard in the masses and motets of composers from Josquin onward and is featured in instrumental music by Byrd, Gibbons, and the Gabriellis.

Baroque music is often “ highly ornate, colorful and richly textured when compared with its predecessors”. Opera was born at what is considered to be the very beginning of the Baroque era, around 1600. This unique form combines poetry, theater, the visual arts and music. It came about because a group of Italian intellectuals wanted to recapture the spirit of ancient Greek drama in which music played a key role. The first great opera was “ Orfeo, by Claudio Monteverdi”, first performed in 1607. Music’s ability to express human emotions and depict natural phenomenon was explored throughout the Baroque period. Vivaldi’s famous set of concertos, The Four Seasons, is a famous example. Although imitative polyphony remained fundamental to musical composition, homophonic writing became increasingly important. Homophonic music features a clear distinction between the melody line and a subsidiary accompaniment part. This style was important in opera and other solo vocal music because it focused the listener’s attention on the expressive melody of the singer. The homophonic style gradually became prevalent in instrumental music as well. (Ezine 2005)

Many Baroque works include a continuo part in which a keyboard (harpsichord or organ) and bass instrument (cello or bassoon) provide the harmonic underpinning of chords that accompanies the melodic line. New polyphonic forms were developed, and as in the Renaissance, composers

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considered the art of counterpoint (the crafting of polyphony) to be essential to their art. Canons and fugues, two very strict forms of imitative polyphony, were extremely popular. Composers were even expected to be able to improvise complex fugues on a moment's notice to prove their skill. The orchestra evolved during the early Baroque, starting as an "accompanist" for operatic and vocal music. By the mid-1600s the orchestra had a life of its own. The concerto was a favorite Baroque form that featured a solo instrumentalist (or small ensemble of soloists) playing "against" the orchestra, creating interesting contrasts of volume and texture. Many Baroque composers were also virtuoso performers. For example, Archangelo Corelli was famous for his violin playing and Johann Sebastian Bach was famous for his keyboard skills. The highly ornamented quality of Baroque melody lent itself perfectly to such displays of musical "dexterity". (Grieg 2002)

The word Classical has strong meaning, mixed with the "art and Philosophy of Ancient Greece and Rome, along with their ideals of disciplined expression." The late Baroque was complex and melodically different. The composers of the early Classical period changed direction, writing music that was much simpler to understand. Homophony music, another part of classical music in which "melody and charm are distinct, and has dominated the Classical style is another form of classical music. New forms of composition were developed to accommodate the transformation." Sonata Form is the most important of these forms, and one that continued to evolve throughout the Classical period. Although Baroque composers also wrote pieces called sonatas, the Classical sonata was different. The essence of the <https://assignbuster.com/history-of-music-an-overview/>

Classical Sonata is difficult to understand. A highly simplified example of such a conflict might be between two themes of “ contrasting character”. (Grieg 2002)

This contrast would be found during the course of the sonata, and then resolved. Sonata form allowed composers to give pure instrumental music recognizable dramatic shape. Every major form of the Classical era, including the string quartet, symphony and concerto was molded on the dramatic structure of the sonata.

One of the most important developments of the Classical period is the growth of the public concert. Although the aristocracy would continue to play a significant role in musical life, it was now possible for composers to survive without being the employee of one person or family. This also meant that concerts were no longer limited to palace drawing rooms. Composers organized concerts featuring their own music, and attracted large audiences. The increasing popularity of the public concert had a strong impact on the growth of the orchestra. Although chamber music and solo works were played in the home or other intimate settings, orchestral concerts seemed to be naturally designed for big public spaces. As a result, symphonic music composers gradually expanded the size of the orchestra to accommodate this expanded musical vision. (Grieg 2002)

Just as the word “ Classical” “ conjures” up certain images, Romantic music also does the same. Whether we think of those romance novels with the Romanticism implies fantasy and sensuality. The Classical period focused on emotional restraint. Classical music was expressive, but not so passionate

that it could overwhelm the work “ Beethoven, who was in some ways responsible for igniting the flame of romanticism, always struggled (sometimes unsuccessfully) to maintain that balance.” (Greig 2002)

Many composers of the Romantic period followed Beethoven’s model and found their own balance between emotional intensity and Classical form. Others reveled in the new atmosphere of artistic freedom and created music whose structure was designed to support its emotional surges. Musical storytelling became important, and not just in opera, but in “ pure” instrumental music as well. The tone-poem is a particularly Romantic invention, as it was an orchestral work whose structure was entirely dependent on the scene being depicted or the story being told. Color was another important feature of Romantic music. A large palette of musical colors was necessary to depict the exotic scenes that became so popular. In addition to seeking out the sights and sounds of other places, composers began exploring the music of their native countries. Nationalism became a driving force in the late Romantic period and composers wanted their music to express their cultural identity. This desire was particularly intense in Russia and Eastern Europe, where elements of folk music were incorporated into symphonies, tone-poems and other “ Classical” forms. (Wagner 1999)

The Romantic period was the days of the “ virtuoso”. Gifted performers and particularly pianists, violinists, and singers became enormously popular. Liszt, the great Hungarian pianist/composer, reportedly played with such passion and intensity that woman in the audience would faint. Since, like Liszt, most composers were also virtuoso performers, it was inevitable that the music they wrote would be extremely challenging to play. The Romantic

period witnessed a glorification of the artist whether musician, poet or painter that has had a powerful impact on our own culture. (Wagner 1999) This style of music became known as being romantic.

The “ evolution” of music is at least partly shaped by the influence one composer has on another. These influences are not always positive, however. Sometimes composers react against the music of their recent past (even though they might admire it) and move in what seems to be the opposite direction. For example, the simplified style of the early Classical period was almost certainly a reaction to the extreme intricacies of the late Baroque. The late Romantic period featured its own extremes: sprawling symphonies and tone-poems overflowing with music that seemed to stretch harmony and melody to their limits. It is certainly possible to view some early 20th century music as an extension of the late Romantic style, but a great deal of it can also be interpreted as a reaction against that style. 20th century music is a series of “ isms” and “ neo-isms.” The primal energy of Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring has been called “ neo-Primitivism”. “ The intensely emotional tone of Schönberg’s early music has been labeled Expressionism”. The return to clearly structured forms and textures has been “ dubbed neo-Classicism”. (R. Strauss)

These terms have been employed in an attempt to organize the diversity of styles running through the 20th century. Nationalism continued to be a strong musical influence in the first half of the century. The study of folk songs enriched the music of numerous composers, such as Ralph Vaughan Williams (England), Bela Bartok (Hungary), Heitor Villa Lobos (Brazil) and Aaron Copland (USA). Jazz and popular musical styles have also been

tremendously influential on “ classical” composers from both the United States and Europe. Technology has played an increasingly important role in the development of 20th century music. Composers have used recording tape as a compositional tool (such as Steve Reich’s Violin Phase).

Electronically generated sounds have been used both on their own and in combination with traditional instruments. More recently, computer technology has been used in a variety of ways, including manipulating the performance of instruments in real time. (R. Strauss)

So as you can see, music has been around for centuries. Many people have helped music evolve over the years. The six long periods of music that were discussed above really helped music become what is today. Although each individual listens to various types of music they all started the same, with either a rhythm or beat. Music was originated long before humans even existed and grew from there. Music in general has made the world a better place. It gives people a way to express themselves. Music has been called ‘ The International Language; a very simple thought with much meaning behind it. Even if you can’t speak the language of a country, you can move, sway, dance and most of all enjoy the music of the country. We may not understand the words of a musical selection but we do understand the beauty. (Ruth 2008)

Music’s interconnection with society can be seen throughout history. Every known culture on the earth has music. Music seems to be one of the basic actions of humans. However, early music was not handed down from generation to generation or recorded. Hence, there is no official record of “

prehistoric” music. Even so, there is evidence of prehistoric music from the findings of flutes carved from bones.

The influence of music on society can be clearly seen from modern history. Music helped Thomas Jefferson write the Declaration of Independence. When he could not figure out the right wording for a certain part, he would play his violin to help him. The music helped him get the words from his brain onto the paper. In general, responses to music are able to be observed. It has been proven that music influences humans both in good and bad ways. These effects are instant and long lasting. Music is thought to link all of the emotional, spiritual, and physical elements of the universe. Music can also be used to change a person’s mood, and has been found to cause like physical responses in many people simultaneously. Music also has the ability to strengthen or weaken emotions from a particular event such as a funeral.

People perceive and respond to music in different ways. The level of musicianship of the performer and the listener as well as the manner in which a piece is performed affects the “ experience” of music. An experienced and accomplished musician might hear and feel a piece of music in a totally different way than a non-musician or beginner. This is why two accounts of the same piece of music can contradict themselves.

(O’Donnell 2001)

“ According to The Center for New Discoveries in Learning, learning potential can be increased a minimum of five times by using this 60 beats per minute music. For example, the ancient Greeks sang their dramas because they understood how music could help them remember more easily). A renowned

Bulgarian psychologist, Dr. George Lozanov, designed a way to teach foreign languages in a fraction of the normal learning time. Using his system, students could learn up to one half of the vocabulary and phrases for the whole school term (which amounts to almost 1, 000 words or phrases) in one day. Along with this, the average retention rate of his students was 92%. Dr. Lozanov's system involved using certain classical music pieces from the baroque period which have around a 60 beats per minute pattern. He has proven that foreign languages can be learned with 85-100% efficiency in only thirty days by using these baroque pieces. His students had a recall accuracy rate of almost 100% even after not reviewing the material for four years." The article above discusses how the history of music not only helped human beings but impacted their lives greatly to where we learn better and think better. (O'Donnell 2001)