

MUSIC APPRECIATION: A TOPICAL APPROACH TO MUSIC GENRE AND STYLE



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This text was compiled on 06/07/2025

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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1.1: What is Music?

What is Music?



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Though it might be somewhat odd to begin a text on music with the age-old question "what is music?" it's a good exercise for anyone to engage in. It also tends to be the one question that simultaneously stumps musicians, while also angering them! Ask a musician "what is music?" and you'll more than likely get an eye roll, and a response that sounds like "I don't want to do this right now."

How would *you* define music? Go ahead, and think about it for a few seconds. What does *all* music have? What does it *not* have? Where do we hear it?

Jot your responses down on a sheet of paper, or type them in your phone (I know you have it near you). When you're done, scroll down this page and let's figure out what you wrote down.

Don't cheat. Seriously. Jot down your response!

Ok. What does music have? Lyrics? Instruments? Voices? That's a good start! Much of what we consider music contains words, voices, and instruments.

But what about someone who walks through a forest, suggesting that the birds' and crickets' chirps along with the sound of a woodpecker is music to them? Or those that say that the ocean's roar is "music to their ears?" Or someone who love cars saying that the sound of an engine roaring is "music" to them? Or someone who loves walking down the street of a busy city, suggesting that the city sounds are music to them? Or a parent whose children are away at school exclaiming that the "silence is music to their ears?"

Are they wrong? If so, why?

More importantly, are they *right*?

All of these this leads us to ask some serious philosophical questions as to *what music is*.

Consider the example regarding the animal sounds. Does music *need* a human performer?

Consider the example regarding the ocean roaring or the car engine? Does music *need a live performer*?

How about the example of the city streets? Does music *need* to be organized?

Or how about the parent who is basking in the sweet sound of silence: does music *need sound at all*?

If these are all potential "musics," then perhaps we could arrive at a better, more broad definition of music:

"Music is a combination of sounds and silences that are either pre-composed, improvised or occur by random (or a combination thereof) that is used and perceived by humans for either artistic value, ceremonial purposes, or entertainment."

This definition accounts for *all* types of music, sounds and silences. While this may seem a bit extreme, within the last century, many artists have pushed the boundaries as to what we may consider to be music (we'll explore one of those composers, John Cage, in more detail in our chapter on 20th Century artistic movements).

This extreme definition notwithstanding, the *majority* of what people consider to be music contains the following attributes:

- 1) it is performed by people (either pre-composed, or improvised)
- 2) it contains singing and/or instruments (electric or acoustic)
- 3) it is used for artistic, ceremonial, or entertainment purposes

This more "user-friendly" definition accounts for music that we encounter in our everyday life. Pop songs on the radio, music we hear at religious ceremonies, music performed on a concert stage, and music we hear in the background of a film, video game, TV show, or commercial.

And while there is plenty of music out there, scholars often categorize music into 2 specific groups: "traditional repertoire" and "popular music."

"**Popular music**" typically refers to folk songs and popular songs -- the type we would hear on the radio.

"**classical music**" typically refers to the kind of music you'd expect to hear at a concert: played by acoustic instruments (a band, orchestra, or smaller group of musicians), sung by vocalists (a soloist, or group of singers, or a choir). You'll notice that the word "classical" uses a lower-case *c*. This is because the word "Classical" with an upper-case *C* refers to an actual time period from 1750-~1820. The lower-case *c* "classical" refers to any type of music in the "traditional" style.

This text covers the *traditional* repertoire in the Western world. It does not cover popular music --- that's typically a completely different class, course, and textbook!

Unlike other texts, this book does *not take a chronological approach to music*. Instead, as you'll read on the next page, this text approaches the repertoire *topically*. We will look at different types of music, while simultaneously comparing the music of different time periods.

As you read through, you'll hopefully draw connections from the past to the present in a unique way, and will hopefully leave the course not only understanding music more clearly, but will be able to understand where we came from, and how music has changed over the centuries.

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1.2: How this text is organized

Defining the Problem of Some Approaches to Music Appreciation

As mentioned in the previous page, this text is organized differently than most other Music Appreciation texts out there.

Most texts will approach the material from a chronological perspective. They begin in Ancient Rome, and they *very slowly* work their way through the ages to the present day.

While this approach makes sense, it does not provide students with a solid understanding as to how different time periods approach similar types of music.

For instance: in Week 4, students encounter a violin concerto for the first time in the Baroque period. Five weeks later, the encounter a piano concerto in the Classical period, and are expected to be able to compare two different concertos using two different ensembles from two different time periods that they learned about within several weeks' time. This large gap in time does not provide students to understand the differences in approaches between the two time periods -- nor does it address how *all of the different time periods differ in their approaches*.

Addressing the Problem: A Topical Approach to Music Appreciation

This text seeks to rectify this issue by approaching music *from a topical perspective*, by looking at different types of music in each unit, comparing different time periods from one to another within the same unit. Readers will gain an understanding of how different composers of different eras approached similar topics differently, and will gain a strong appreciation and understanding of the evolution of style, form, and genre.

The next page will provide readers with a brief understanding of how we organize Music History over the last 2000 years, which are broken up into six different time periods. These different time periods will be addressed throughout the various chapters of the text.

The following chapter provides a brief understanding of the **Elements of music**, providing basic terminology that will be utilized throughout this text. It will also cover **instruments** and **instrument families** that students will encounter in their text, and are likely to encounter in their own lives.

Following that, the text is split into **2 different units**.

Unit 1: Instrumental Music

Unit 1 covers **Instrumental Music** and spans **Chapters 4-8**.

Chapter 4 begins with the Classical Era (1750~1820), which provides much of the foundation for modern music (including much popular song!) It will cover the most common types of musical phrases and themes, which have influenced composers for multimedia (film, television, video game) to this day! The chapter discusses **form** within single-movement works, and **the 4-movement Symphony**.

Chapter 5 covers **Chamber Music** over the last five centuries. Beginning with a brief discussion of the Baroque Period (1600-1750), the chapter addresses different types of small instrumental ensembles over the last 400+ years as well as the different formal strategies that composers employed within the music.

Chapter 6 covers different **20th Century Artistic Movements**, including Impressionism, Early Modernism, Expressionism, Avant-garde, and Minimalism. Readers will come to understand just how much of an eclectic variety of styles and artistic visions are found within the last 100 years.

Chapter 7 addresses the history of **Keyboard Instruments**, and will conclude with the Piano. While the Piano was popular in the Classical era, it became synonymous with the rising Middle Class in the 19th century: because of the the Industrial Revolution, manufacturing cost far less than it had in previous decades, and many people could afford a piano in their homes as the primary means for musical entertainment. The chapter will address to the two most prominent pianists in the 19th Century: Frederic Chopin and Franz Liszt.

Chapter 8 addresses the Instrumental Concerto: a combination of soloist and orchestra. Readers will see how much larger the ensembles and music became over the course of the past centuries.

Unit 2: Music and Drama

Unit 2 addresses Music and Drama. It addresses program music, vocal music, opera, music in film, and music in video games.

Can music tell a story without words? Chapter 10 address this question by providing an overview of Program Music in the 19th century. After a brief discussion of the 19th century aesthetics and the rising popularity of program music, it addresses three very distinct and imaginative pieces of instrumental music that tells a story without words.

Chapter 11 addresses vocal music and the idea of the art song from Ancient Greece to the Present Day. Readers will come to understand how text and sound/music interacts with one another to enhance storytelling.

Chapter 12 addresses Music Dramas and Opera. It begins with the "pre-opera" of Hildegard von Bingen's *Play of Virtues*: a Medieval music drama that depicts an innocent soul armed with the Angels of Virtues pitted against Satan himself. It then covers opera in the Baroque, Classical, and 19th century. It concludes by looking at Richard Wagner's Music Drama *The Ring of Nibelung*, which introduces the concept of the **leitmotif**. Here, students will learn about how a single musical idea can develop *with the drama as it unfolds*, interacting directly with the unfolding narrative.

Chapter 13 addresses music in film, and discusses how Wagner's **leitmotif** influenced Hollywood composers like Max Steiner, John Williams, and Howard Shore.

Chapter 14 addresses music in video games, and continues the discussion of **leitmotif** in video game soundtracks. It discusses how composers for early video games sought to arrange their music for full orchestras, musically depicting a players' own memories of game play---and their own personal memories of play in general.

Supplemental Materials: Video Presentations

Remember: music includes *sound*. It is difficult to simply read about sound. Reading about sound is like listening to someone explain sports. It's easier to *listen* when trying to understand music!

This text is combined with many supplemental videos created by the author of this text. These videos provide readers with more in depth discussion of terms, topics, concepts, and musical works covered within this text. Readers are *expected* to watch the the video presentations in conjunction with the reading in this text. The text itself is purposely written on the shorter side because the videos, which range from 20-70 minutes, cover more difficult topics in more detail. Students who take notes reading this text and watching the videos should be expected to do well on any type of assessment.

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1.3: A Brief Overview of Historical Time Periods

The Different Time Periods in History.

As mentioned in the previous section of this text, one of the biggest problems with the traditional approach to teaching Music Appreciation has to do with the "chronological" approach to teaching the subject. However, it is important to understand the various time periods in recorded Western history. Especially because this text *doesn't* take a pure chronological approach, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with the most pertinent time periods from Ancient Greece to the modern day. After learning about the elements of music and instruments, this text begins with the "Classical Era," from 1700~1820.

The Age of Antiquity.



"Ancient Greece" by Adam Polselli is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

The "Age of Antiquity" refers to Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome to the Fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD. From the same time period as Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Homer, and the other Greek philosophers, not much music has survived from this period. Ancient philosophers wrote extensively about music and its purpose and function in society from political, religious, and vernacular perspectives, but not much actual music has survived to the present day. We will look at the oldest surviving piece the "Song of Seikilos" in the chapter on Vocal Music. Interestingly, recent music scholars have begun to focus more attention on learning more of music from this time period, seeking to give "authentic" performances of ancient music.

The Middle Ages.



"Kirchenfenster mit Hildegard von Bingen in Bad Sobernheim.jpg" by Ea17 is licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0.

The **Middle Ages** refers to the approximately 1000 years that covers the fall of the Roman Empire through the early 15th century. The Catholic Church dominated much of the cultural life during this time period; music that was written for the Church is called **sacred music**, and because of the Church's resources, much of the music that survives from the Middle Ages is sacred. This music is mostly in the **Latin** language, as it was the sacred language of the faith.

That is not to say that music was *only* written for the church -- **secular music** (i.e. music written for common everyday practices) also was written during this time period. Much music of the Middle Ages was **vocal (i.e. sung)**, though instruments certainly existed. The music of this time period sounds foreign to a modern ear because of the different types of instruments that were used, as well as the way in which harmony and melody were conceived.

Music in the first half of the Middle Ages was **monophonic**, a term you'll come across in the next unit: this refers to music that has a single melodic line with no accompanying layers added. The rise of **polyphony**, which included multiple competing-yet-harmonious melodic lines begins in the early 900s AD.

The Renaissance.



"Sistine Chapel Ceiling" by vgm8383 is licensed under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

This Renaissance covers approximately 1425-1600, and includes the rise of **humanism**, the cultural movement that explored human interests and reason, and began to move away from religious tradition and what people saw as superstition. Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation (1517) occurs during this time, which led to sacred music being sung in the **vernacular language**: that is, sacred music was sung in the *same language as the people* instead of Latin. Similar to the Middle Ages, the majority of music in the Renaissance was written for the voice, though instrumental music *did* exist. Much of the music in the Renaissance was **polyphonic**, which grew out of the latter half of the Middle Ages.

The Baroque Period.



Painting of the first public opera house, the Teatro San Cassiano (1637). Image is Fair Use under Creative Commons license [CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

The Baroque period covers the span of 1600-1750, and led to the rise of **instrumental music**, **homophonic texture**, and **opera**. This time period begins what is called the Common Practice Era (CPE). Beginning here, we hear music that sounds similar to what exists in the modern day. It is within this time period where we hear music with instrumental ensembles comprised of instruments that we're used to: violins, violas, cellos, basses, flutes, oboes, and trumpets. (It is important to note that these instruments were not

invented during this time, but many larger ensembles were comprised of these instruments). Keyboard instruments like the **organ** and the **harpsichord** were common in this time period, both of which fell out of favor in the Classical Era (although the organ continued to flourish in church settings).

The Classical Era.



Reading of Voltaire's tragedy of the Orphan of China in the salon of Marie Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin in 1755, by Lemonnier, c. 1812.
Image is in the Public Domain.

The Classical Era is a short time period, though its musical contributions are vast. Covering the years 1750~1820, the Classical Era introduces the modern symphony orchestra, string quartet, and is where the piano becomes more widespread. Composers in this time period are very much influenced by the artistic aesthetics of Ancient Greece, which held balance and symmetry in high regard. Our first chapter covers the Classical Era, beginning with its etymological roots, addressing the similarities in Classical musical style with Ancient Greek architecture and artistic aesthetics. The majority of the most prominent composers during this time period are German or Austrian -- a trend that is challenged in the 19th century with the rise of nationalism throughout Europe.

The 19th Century (The Romantic Era).



"The Raft of the Medusa," by Théodore Géricault. Image is in the Public Domain.

The 19th century sees many mini-revolutions spring up across Europe, giving rise to the nation-state. Independent nations governed by the people instead of larger empires gave rise to Nationalism in music - that is, the pride of one's country and culture, shown through their music. Although Germany and Austria continue to produce many famous musicians, we see composers of Polish, Hungarian, French, Italian, Slovenian, and Russian composers, all seeking to create their own unique musical and cultural identity. Here, we begin to see — rather *hear* — differences between different cultures' music in more stark ways than before. Within this era, thanks to the Industrial Revolution, instruments become less expensive to make, which allows for more members of Middle Class to be able to afford musical instruments and training. Orchestras get bigger, and composers experiment with new ways of writing purely instrumental music. The term "Romantic" refers to an artistic trend in the 19th century that sought to express human emotions through highly lyrical melodies and expressive harmonic progressions. As you can see from the above painting, artists sought to express realistic human emotions through their works.

The 20th Century.



"Vassily Kandinsky, Bild mit rotem Fleck" by [f_snarfel](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#).

The 20th century is truly an eclectic century. Within this century, we experience rag time, Tin Pan Alley, the birth of the blues, jazz, country, modern folk music, and the birth of rock 'n roll---all during the same century as Impressionism, Modernism, Expressionism, and the Avant-garde. We also see the birth of film, television, and video games -- all of which incorporate music to some degree. Throughout this time period, our very understanding and notion of "what music is" and "what music can be" is challenged in ways never before seen in the centuries prior.

Though this seems like a lot to take in, this text introduces these periods slowly over the chapters, and when a new time period is introduced, there is a "Brief Overview" to that time period that addresses more specifics—culturally and musically—of that time period.

For students who are interested in more details, they may [visit the Norman Rockwell Museums's Illustration History website](#).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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2.2: Instruments

2.3: Small Ensembles

2.4: The Orchestra

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2.1: Terminology

The Elements of Music.

Before diving into the various types of music this text covers, we first need to understand how to talk about music. No matter what type of music you're listening to—regardless as to the time period, style, or culture—there are certain elements we must consider when addressing music. This is true for *all types of music*. The following terms are the most important elements found in music. There are short definitions provided, but the various **VIDEO LINKS** have a very in-depth discussion that addresses these terms and the other terms that are found within them.

Melody and Harmony.

It is difficult to discuss melody without simultaneously discussing harmony, and there are many terms we need to establish when discussing them. Read this brief overview, then watch the video link at the bottom of this description before moving on.

Melody simply refers to the tune of a given piece of music. Think about your favorite song. Can you sing or hum the tune? *That's* the melody. Of course, we could be more "scientific" and say that a *melody is a series of different notes and pitches heard in order that we understand as a single phrase*. In other words, the *tune*.

Melodies are derived from collections of notes called **scales**, which establish a specific **key** (or "home" base).

Harmony refers to the phenomenon that occurs when more than one pitch are played simultaneously. Harmony can sound pleasant—this is called **consonant harmony**—or it can sound *unpleasant and incorrect*—this is called **dissonant harmony**. Modern music: that is, most music from the Baroque period through the present day *including popular music on the radio* is rooted in a very specific type of harmony called a **chord**.

As mentioned above, these terms are more difficult to discuss in paragraph form; watch the [VIDEO LINK that discusses melody, harmony, scales](#), and you'll have a better understanding of how all of this plays together.

Rhythm.

It is important to realize that *not all music has a melody!* Consider this drum solo by Led Zeppelin's John Bonham from 1973's performance of "Moby Dick:" there's no melody, so what is it that we're listening to? This is a perfect example of *music that only incorporates rhythm*. The term "rhythm" itself is difficult to define. Some people say it's the "beat," but this is a misnomer. In fact, we can't understand rhythm without addressing the terms **beat and meter**.

The **beat** is a pulse that you can tap your foot to. It stays the same speed; it doesn't slow down, nor does it speed up. The **meter** is how we *organize* that beat. We can organize the beat in groups of 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, etc. The **rhythm** therefore refers to how sounds and silences are ordered over the course of time, *placed within an underlying meter and beat*. Remember that music exists over a period of time: you can't listen to music without experiencing time going by. So, **rhythm** refers to the ordering of the sounds and silences over that time span. [These terms are defined and addressed more clearly and expounded on in the VIDEO LINK.](#)

Texture.

Texture refers to how many different layers of music are happening simultaneously. Generally speaking, there are 3 types of textures we experience in music: **monophonic**, **homophonic**, and **polyphonic** textures.

Monophonic texture refers to music that has a single melody played or sung without *any type of accompaniment*. Sing a melody to yourself out loud: you're singing in a **monophonic** texture.

Homophonic texture refers to a single melody, but with some form of accompaniment. The accompaniment is *subordinate* to the melody. That is, it *needs* the melody to be present, otherwise your music would be completely boring.

Polyphonic texture refers to multiple independent melodies playing at the same time. It's *very* difficult to write music with completely different and unrelated melodies played simultaneously, and *still having it sound good*. Being able to compose in this way takes a strong understanding of the rules of **counterpoint**, which refers to how notes sound when they're played against each other (in other words "counter" to one another).

[These terms are quite difficult to understand by simply reading a description, but the VIDEO LINK provides a brief description on Texture.](#)

Timbre.

What makes an electric guitar sound different from a violin? They're both string instruments, aren't they? What about a piano compared to an organ? They're both keyboard instruments? How about the difference between a children's choir and an adult choir? Why do they sound different from one another? These questions refer to the *color of sound*, or the **timbre**. As we go through the semesters, you'll find that combining instruments creates very unique blends of sound. The next chapter discusses instruments in much more detail and [provides a video link](#) that covers how the sound is made on orchestral instruments.

Form.

Form refers to how music is organized from from a macro and micro perspective. Think about your favorite song. How is the organized? Are there multiple sections? Is there an introduction? A verse? A chorus? Is there a pre-chorus in between the verse and chorus? How about a bridge, or a solo? The arrangements of these different sections make up the song's **form**. In traditional repertoire, a single movement of music can last 10 minutes or more---understanding how it's organized will help us understand the music on a deeper and more intellectually and artistically gratifying level. [Watch this VIDEO LINK that describes how we understand form on these different levels](#). As we cover much throughout this text, we will focus on the *larger formal organization* of a given work.

For those interested in downloading a PDF handout of this unit's PowerPoint file, [click here](#).

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2.2: Instruments

Musical Instruments.

This page briefly addresses the different types of instruments that one would find in a symphony orchestra. Traditionally speaking, the orchestra is broken into different families: the *string*, *woodwind*, *brass*, and *percussion* families. Admittedly, this classification creates some problems: why is the *flute* a member of the *woodwind* family, when they're made of gold, platinum, or silver? And if the French horn is a *brass* instrument, why is it combined with the *woodwind quintet*?

These questions clearly necessitate a new type of classification. Over the last several decades, scholars have opted to use different ways of categorizing instruments, using words like *membranophone* or *aerophone*—referring not to what the instrument is made of, but *how the sound is produced*. This allows for non-Western and modern instruments (like electronic instruments) to be classified more logically.

That being said, when discussing the orchestra, this text opts to use the traditional categories, which are still widely used. The following is a *brief* description of the instrument families. [Readers should consult the VIDEO LINK to see a more in-depth discussion of these different instrument families.](#)

The String Family.



"Violin, Figaro House, Vienna" by [cphoffman42](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

The string family consists of several different instruments: the **violin**, **viola**, **cello**, and **bass** are the most common in the traditional repertoire that we come across. Interestingly, all four of these instruments are essentially the same: the only significant difference between the four of them is the *size*. Because they all create sound the same way, they all blend together quite well, creating a *homogenous sound*. In the [VIDEO LINK](#), you'll be able to see how these instruments create sound.

Modern orchestras are defined by their string players. Without string players, there is no orchestra! The early orchestras of the Baroque period consisted of perhaps 12-20 string players, and *maybe* some woodwinds and a few brass players. They *might* have included a timpani player. But they *needed strings*, because strings define the orchestra.

The Woodwind Family.



The oldest known flute fragment (60,000 years old!) known as the "Neanderthal flute." [Picture by Petar Milošević](#) - Own work, [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

In the orchestra, the woodwind family includes a variety of instruments that produce sound, all of which create sound *differently*: the **flute**, **clarinet**, **oboe**, and **bassoon**. Of course, there are *many* others, which readers can learn about in the [VIDEO LINK](#). The above picture is a fragment of the *oldest known flute* in recorded history. Discovered in 1995, it is made from the femur of a young cave bear. [According to the National Museum of Slovenia](#), it is over 20,000 years *older* than other flutes that were made by "anatomically modern humans." Readers who are interested [may view a short 10 minute clip about humanity's oldest instrument in existence](#).

In the orchestra, woodwinds are treated as soloists. For example, unlike the violins (of which there are many within an orchestra), there may be only 1 or 2 flute players. Each of them plays their own thing, meaning they are *soloists* within the entire orchestra.

Additionally, woodwind players create their sound differently: **flute** players blow air over a hole (similar to blowing air over a soda bottle); **clarinet** players blow air through a mouthpiece that has a **wooden reed** attached to it—the vibration of the reed creates the unique sound of the clarinet. The **oboe and bassoon** use **two different reeds**, making it a "double reed" instrument.

A common ensemble comprised of woodwind instrumentalists is called the **woodwind quintet**, which uses a flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn. Because they all create sound differently, it is easier to discern which instrument is playing when listening to a woodwind quintet (unlike the string quartet, where all instruments create sound in a similar way). The next page will discuss this small ensemble.

The Brass Family.



US Army Band by SSG. Chris Branagan. [Public Domain](#).

The most common brass instruments in the orchestra are the **trumpet**, **trombone**, **French horn**, and **tuba**. Each of these instruments create sound the same way: players place their lips in a mouthpiece, and blow air through the horn as they "buzz," or vibrate their lips. Similar to the woodwind family, these instruments are typically acting as soloists within an orchestra, with each player playing their own part without anyone else playing the same thing. When brass players get together and play (as seen in the above picture), we have a **brass quintet**. Readers should watch the [VIDEO LINK](#) to see more about how these instruments create sound. The next page discusses the **brass quintet** in more detail.

The Percussion Family.



[Image from Oregon Symphony](#) Learning Center. Fair use under US law.

The percussion family consists of a wide variety of different types of instruments: all of them include hitting something with a stick or mallet (which is a stick with cushioning). Percussion instruments can be either **pitched** or **un-pitched**. Pitched instruments like the marimba, xylophone, vibraphone, timpani, or piano (you read that right!) have the ability to create melody because they produce pitches (like a piano). **Un-pitched** instruments like a snare drum, bass drum, cymbal, or triangle are unable to play a melody due to the fact that they don't actually produce a pitch in the traditional way.

Traditionally, percussion instruments were very scarce in the orchestra. The **timpani (or "kettle drum")** is the most traditional percussion instrument in the orchestra, and was usually the only percussion instrument in Baroque and Classical orchestras. As time went on, and the orchestra got larger, more and more percussion instruments were added to the orchestra. [View the VIDEO LINK](#) to learn about the specific instruments that are more traditional in the orchestra. For readers who are more interested in percussion instruments, they may view the website of the [Oregon Symphony Orchestra Percussion page](#).

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2.3: Small Ensembles

Small Instrumental Ensembles.

There are many types of small musical ensembles (groups), some of which are established in traditions of hundreds of years. The string quartet for instance was established as a common musical group in the 1700s, but string players had been performing as small groups for hundreds of years before that! We use the term **chamber music** to refer to music written for smaller groups. This page provides brief descriptions of different types of chamber ensembles that are commonly heard in concert settings.

Before we get into the ensembles, we need to discuss **range** quickly: we use the terms **soprano, alto, tenor, and bass** (also known as **SATB**) when discussing how high or low a sound is. These exact terms are used when discussing a **choir** (an ensemble of singers), but we also use the term when referring to the **high or low sounds** that instruments make.

The range of the SATB setting is:

Soprano (highest)

Alto (second highest)

Tenor (third highest)

Bass (lowest...or fourth highest)

It is important to note that we use the term **voice** when describing a single layer of music, *regardless as to whether a person is singing that line!* For instance, we may consider an ensemble of string players and say that the "highest voice plays a melody in the soprano," when referring to the highest violin player.

It's also important to understand that although these are ensembles with multiple players, each musician is considered a **soloist**, as they are the only person playing their line of music. That means that if they make a mistake, it's *very noticeable!*

These ensembles are discussed more thoroughly in the chapter on **Chamber Music**, but it's good to hear the instruments from the previous chapter play with their own family.

The String Quartet



"The Turtle Island String Quartet" by [anyjazz65](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#).

The string quartet was established in the Classical Era (1700~1820), and you may be surprised to learn that the **bass** is not part of this group. Instead, a string quartet is comprised of **2 violins, 1 viola, and 1 cello**. In terms of range, we hear:

Highest: Soprano: Violin 1

Alto: Violin 2

Lowest: Tenor: Viola

Bass: Cello

Notice how the word "bass" means *range* in this group, and does *not* refer to the instrument called the "string bass." Traditionally, both violins play melodic lines, though "Violin 1" is usually reserved for the more skilled of the two players.

[Listen to this brief recording of the Dover String Quartet performing a movement of Beethoven's op. 18 quartet.](#) Try to see if you can pick out which instrument is playing when they come in --- it's difficult! That's because each instrument blends together with the others so well that we get a **homogenous** sound—that is, a sound that blends together where it all sounds like the same sound. The only difference between the instruments is their *range* because they all produce sound the same way.

As we'll see, the opposite of a homogenous sound is a **heterogenous** sound, which consists of different timbres, which allows us to hear each instrument individually, even when they play together.

[The Woodwind Quintet.](#)



From left to right: flute, oboe, French horn, bassoon, clarinet. "2020 Woodwind Quintet Image" by [usarmyband](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

As the name suggests, the Woodwind Quintet consists of 5 instruments (1 performer for each): **the flute, clarinet, oboe, bassoon, and French horn**. You may ask "why is there a brass instrument here?" The answer is that because of its muffled nature (recall that the hand is placed in the bell), it blends really well with the others!

In terms of range, it's a little different than the string quartet, as the instruments have a wider range. Generally speaking, we hear:

Highest: Soprano 1: Oboe

Soprano 2: Flute

Alto: Clarinet

Lowest: Tenor: French horn

Bass: Bassoon

As you learned in the previous chapter, each instrument creates sound differently from the others -- this creates a **heterogenous** sound -- that is, you'll more easily be able to discern which instrument is playing at a given time. [Take a listen to the Carion Wind Quintet playing one of Dmitri Shostakovich's waltzes.](#) You'll be able to hear quite clearly the different players as they enter.

[Brass Quintet.](#)



From left to right: Tuba, French horn, trumpet, trombone, trumpet

"Master Class with the Atlantic Brass Quintet" by [University of Southern Maine School of Music](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

The brass quintet consists of 5 brass players: **2 trumpets, 1 trombone, 1 French horn, and 1 tuba**. As you learned in the previous chapter, they all create sound the same way with the same type of mouth piece, which is why they create a **homogenous** sound (like the string quartet). You'll also notice that the French horn plays in this ensemble as well. In terms of range, we hear:

Highest: Soprano 1: Trumpet 1 (sometimes a piccolo trumpet)

Soprano 2: Trumpet 2

Alto: French Horn

Lowest: Tenor: Trombone

Bass: Tuba

[Take a listen to the Canadian Brass performing an arrangement of the "Flight of the Bumblebee" composed by Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov](#). It's a very popular tune, heard in many cartoons, so you'll likely recognize it.

Percussion Ensemble.

The percussion ensemble is much more of a contemporary ensemble. Composers have been writing specifically for percussion groups more frequently since the mid 1900s, and the ensemble has become increasingly popular over the last few decades. There is *no set standard instrumentation* for a percussion ensemble, although many of them include the **marimba** because of its melodic capabilities. [Take a listen to this recording of "Ludic Mantra" performed by the VanderCook College of Music Percussion Ensemble](#). It begins with a wonderful **ostinato** (musical pattern) played in the marimbas with vibraphone. You'll then hear piano, drum kit, and a variety of other percussion instruments.

Often, music for percussion ensembles doesn't incorporate melodic writing in the same style as the other ensembles. You'll hear melodic fragments and short ideas, but long lyrical melodies as you'd hear in the String Quartet are usually absent. It's a very different feel, which emphasizes **rhythm** over the melody, creating a really cool groove for the listener.

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2.4: The Orchestra

The Orchestra.

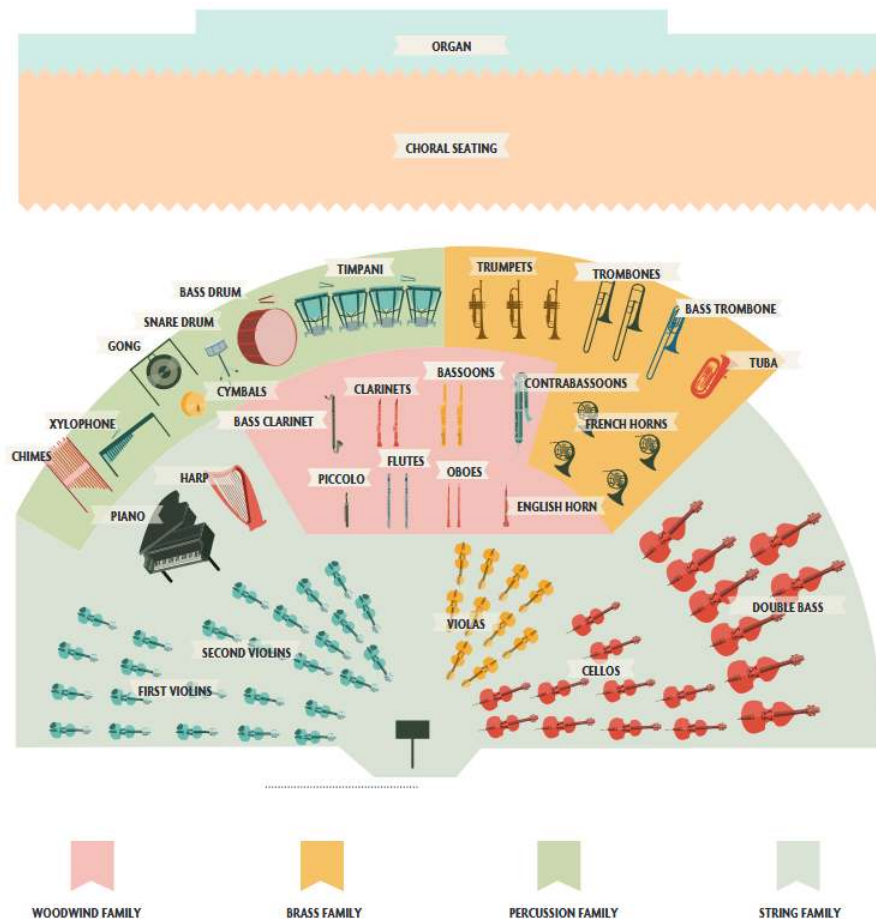


Image taken from [the Nashville Symphony Orchestra's Teacher resources page](#). Fair use under US law.

The orchestra is a collection of different instruments performing together. The above diagram shows a **modern orchestral setup** in the 20th century through today. It is important to note that early orchestras of the 17th and 18th century were *much smaller than this*. We'll see those in a moment.

As you can see in the above diagram, each family of instruments is placed strategically around the conductor (indicated with the little podium in the bottom-center of the image). Immediately surrounding the conductor is the **string family** -- remember that *there is no orchestra without strings!* Beginning in the Baroque Period, the string family was the primary instrument for the orchestra; only whether the composer wanted to include others would they be included! There are many string players playing the same part: "1st violins," "2nd" violins," "cello," and "double bass" (also just called "bass."). Because of this, these players are *not considered soloists*, as a single player could drop out and stop playing, and we would never know the difference (although the conductor would!) The leader of the first violin section is called the **concert master**, and is typically seated right next to the conductor. They are typically in charge of running string "sectional" rehearsals (rehearsals for just a small section of the orchestra) and also determine how the violins must bow their instrument for each piece (either moving up or down with their bow arm). This way, all of the players sound the same, and play in unison. If a composer writes a solo in the violin section, the concert master is often the one who performs it.

In the back of the strings, we see the **woodwind family**; this small group of winds is often called the "**woodwind choir**," and each player functions as a soloists, and there are often 2 players per part. You'll also notice instruments like "bass clarinet," and "English horn," which are 2 other woodwind instruments we didn't cover in the previous chapters. If you'd like to see the English horn in more detail, [view this video put out by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra](#).

To the right of the winds are the French horns (remember, the blend well with the wind section) -- behind them to the right, you'll see the brass instruments.

In the back on the left, you'll see percussion instruments, and the piano and/or harp. While the harp was an addition to the orchestra in the 19th century, the piano is a *much newer addition* to the orchestra -- it wasn't until the 20th century where composers began to write for the piano as a member of the orchestra. Again, because there is only a single performer on each of these instruments, all percussionists (and the harpist) are considered soloists.

The Baroque Orchestra.



Screenshot of the Venice Baroque Orchestra.

As mentioned before, the Baroque (1600-1750) orchestra was fairly small, comprised of string players, a harpsichord or organ, and possibly a lute player (a lute is an older instrument that resembles a modern guitar.) The picture above contains both a harpsichordist *and* a lute player, seated to the right of the harpsichord player. ([Interested readers can view this video of David Tayler performing Bach's BWV 999 for solo lute](#)). With the harpsichord in the center, different string players are organized by section.

The picture above shows the Venice Baroque Orchestra playing a symphony in G minor by Antonio Vivaldi. [View the video, and you'll see just how small this ensemble is](#); as a result, the **loudness** isn't nearly as much as a symphony of the later time periods, which uses an orchestra that can be up to 5-6 times the size!

Composers *did* write for larger orchestras; a good example of this [is found in Bach's famous Mass in B minor](#), which incorporates a large string section, several brass, woodwind, and percussion instruments, a full choir, and solo vocalists (though this is the exception, not the rule!)

The Classical Orchestra.



Dima Slobodeniouk conducts the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia ([Screenshot taken from YouTube](#))

The Classical (1700~1820) orchestra is larger than the Baroque orchestra, and sometimes may rival the size found in Bach's B minor mass. A larger string family, and only a handful of woodwind and brass players are found in the Classical orchestra. The most common type of percussion instrument in the Baroque and Classical orchestra was the timpani, or "kettledrum," which is used to emphasize certain points in the music. [Watch this video of Dima Slobodeniouk from above, and you'll see how much larger of a](#)

[sound this is compared to the Vivaldi example from above](#). Though the orchestra still used some winds, brass, and percussion, it is not at all as large as we see in the 19th century!

The Romantic (19th century) Orchestra.



[Claudio Abbado conducts Mahler's 3rd Symphony](#). Screenshot taken from YouTube.

As we get to the 19th century, composers writing for orchestra go all-out. Especially with composers like Gustav Mahler, it is not uncommon to see composer including 4-8 French horns *alone* as well as 4 trumpets, 6 trombones, multiple tubas, huge percussion ensembles, 12 or more woodwind players, and twice as many string players as we're used to in the Classical Era. [Take a listen to this finale of Mahler's 3rd Symphony](#); you'll see just how large this orchestra can get, and what type of enormous sound can be produced!

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3: Unit 1- Instrumental Music and "Absolute" Music

Unit 1: Instrumental Music

What is "Absolute" Music?

In modern society and popular culture, we often associate music with "songs." Songs are what we hear on the radio, at the supermarket or mall, and many of us listen to our favorite songs on our iPods/iPhones/mp3 player/cassette player (if you're into retro technology).

But **songs** are only a certain *type* of music. Songs are **sung** by a person's voice, and include **text**. The text is often written in a **verse form**, and often times, **tells a story**.

Our society has the tendency to attach a **story** to *all* music because we're so inundated with songs in our everyday life.

But what about instrumental music? There's no words --- so is there a story to the music?

As we listen to the music in Unit 1, you may find yourself attaching a "story" to the music you're listening to. **TRY NOT TO ATTACH A STORY TO THE MUSIC AS YOU LISTEN!**

While *some* music is written in such a way that it "tells a story" (this is called "**program music**," and is discussed in Unit 2) the music we're studying here is **purely abstract**. There is no story to the music we're listening to, unless the composer provides it! Some scholars call this "**absolute music**." This term refers to music that is purely non-representational, and non-narratively based. The beauty and the art of the music that we're listening to is purely rooted in the *sounds and their organization*.

This of course does not mean that there's no emotion behind this music. Music can make us happy, sad, nostalgic, excited, angry, or may induce other emotions. We may attach our own memories, thoughts, personal experiences, and events as we listen to music, but the music itself is not telling a story.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: The Classical Era and Instrumental Music

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4.2: Most Prominent Composers

4.3: An Emphasis on Form

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4.5: Theme and Variation Form

4.6: The Symphony and String Quartet- Four Movement Cycles

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4.6.3: 4.6.3 Sonata Form (the first movement of a Symphony or String Quartet)

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4.1: An Overview of the Classical Era

The Classical Era (1750--1820)

The Classical era comes after the Baroque Period ([refer to Chapter 1 of this text](#)) and is one of the shortest time periods in Western music history, and yet it had one of the most significant impacts on modern music. The term **Classical** is a bit of a misnomer: the term *Classical* typically refers to Ancient Greece (the Classical philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, etc.), but the Classical era of music spans the mid- to late 1700s. We use the term to describe this music because the composers, writers, philosophers, and artists of this time period were greatly influenced by that of Ancient Greece. As you'll see in the video links and pages throughout this chapter, Greek aesthetics of logic, reasoning, balance, and symmetry all play a huge role in the organization of music throughout this time period.

The Classical era overlaps with the **Age of Enlightenment** (~1720-1790), which promoted logic, reasoning, science and individual liberty, and rebelled against the religious oligarchies of the previous centuries. It also promoted a rising middle class at the expense of the political and religious leaders. During this time period, we see the **American Revolution** as well as the **French Revolution**. The political philosophers of this time period were influenced by the writings of the Classical Greek philosophers.

Vienna (the capital of Austria) was the cultural hub during much of this time in Europe; composers who wanted to make it big would travel to Austria to get their music performed. Composers like **Joseph Haydn** and **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** were born in Austria, while **Ludwig van Beethoven** was born in Germany. These three composers are the most prominent and influential composers of Western European art music of this time period, and together are considered the "**First Viennese School**" of composition; they influenced composers across all of Western Europe.

The Classical Era sees the birth of the **Symphony**, a multi-movement work written for orchestra. It also sees the birth of the **String Quartet**, both as an ensemble of 4 string players, and as a multi-movement work for 4 string players (in other words, composers can write a multi-movement string quartet piece *for* a string quartet as an ensemble). Although the **Piano** was invented in the latter half of the Baroque period (which preceded the Classical Era), it gained prominence in the Classical Era. All of the most prominent composers wrote for piano. They wrote for **solo piano** and they also included it in their chamber works.

One of the greatest contributions to modern music that the Classical Era made was to **musical form**. As you read through this unit, you'll notice that the music is *highly logical* in its construction, both from a micro- and macro-level. Music is organized in well-balanced, logical, and sometimes symmetrical ways, from the larger 4-movement cycle all the way down to the 8-measure phrase. As we go through this unit, we'll spend a significant amount of time discussing how the music is organized.

For those interested in downloading a PDF handout of this unit's PowerPoint file, [click here](#).

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4.2: Most Prominent Composers

The First Viennese School: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven.

Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven are collectively referred to as the "First Viennese School." Not because they attended or created their own school, but because they were the most influential composers of their time, and Vienna was the cultural hub (especially for composers) during their lifetime. Of course, there were *many* other composers during this time period, both within and outside of Vienna. But when we look collectively at *just these three composers*, we have literally *thousands of different musical works*.

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809).



Born in 1732 in Austria, Franz Joseph Haydn is one of the most influential composers in all of Western music. He was instrumental in helping to establish the symphony and the string quartet as ensembles, and was also crucial in helping develop the larger musical form within instrumental music. Unlike other composers of his time, he was fortunate enough to have been employed for the better part of 30 years by a prince! He worked for Prince Nicholas Esterhazy as his sole composer. As a matter of fact, his contract of employment stated that Haydn was to see the prince every morning—in uniform—to ask him what his desires were for music performances! Haydn composed solely at the discretion of the Prince, but fortunately for him, the Prince loved music—he was even an amateur baryton player, and performed some of the music that Haydn had himself written for the prince! ([Readers who would like to see a Baryton in action may view a performance here](#)).

Haydn had the privilege of not only writing for the prince (and being paid well, living basically in a mansion), but he also had access to Europe's best performers as director of the Prince's orchestra. As a result, he could take risks that others wouldn't have been able to get away with. He is well-remembered for his instrumental music, which includes over 100 symphonies, over 50 piano sonatas, and more than 70 string quartets! He also wrote operas, oratorios, cantatas, and hundreds of other pieces. He was Mozart's friend and mentor, and he even taught Beethoven counterpoint. Both Mozart and Beethoven dedicated some of their own compositions to Haydn.

After the Prince died, his brother took over, who didn't have as much of a passion for music, and he was essentially "released" from his contract (though Haydn was financially set at this point). Haydn died two decades later in 1809.

[If you want to see just how much music Haydn composed, visit the Wikipedia list of his compositions!](#) Keep in mind that much of this music contains *several movements*, and can last between 10-30 minutes!

(above): portrait of Haydn by Thomas Hardy. [Public Domain](#).

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-91).

Mozart was born in 1756 in Austria. His father, Leopold Mozart, recognized an innate musical ability when he was young, and promoted him as quickly as he could, booking him on tours as a performer. As the legend goes, Mozart was composing music before he could even speak; his first composition was a Minuet and Trio in G Major, written when he was 5 years old (though there's some speculation that his father had *more* than a "hand" in writing this, to help promote the idea of his son's genius). Regardless as to his father's "help" as a child, Mozart was a true musical genius of his time, and could compose some of the most complicated music on the spot. He composed the orchestra's overture to his opera *Don Giovanni* the night before the opera's premiere --- which is not an easy task, to say the least!

Before he was 20 years old, Mozart had traveled all across Europe to promote his musical abilities. Over the course of his life, he made 1 trip to England, 3 trips to Italy, 3 trips to Paris, 4 trips to Prague, and 1 trip to Berlin! Unlike Haydn, Mozart's life was filled with lots of hardship and found it difficult to gain long-lasting employment from benefactors (this was likely a result of his personality, which was quite abrasive). Mozart sought full-time employment as the Royal Court Composer, but unfortunately never attained the full position that he desired. He was able to support



himself as a freelancer, providing lessons in piano and composition, performing publicly, and selling his compositions. Although he did well enough during these years, he died as a pauper in 1791, likely due to his compulsive gambling.

Mozart is well-known for his over 40 symphonies, string quartets, piano sonatas, instrumental concertos, and operas. For those interested in seeing just how much music he composed, [visit the Wikipedia list of his compositions](#).

(right): posthumous Portrait of Mozart by Barbara Kraft. [Public Domain](#).

[Ludwig van Beethoven \(1770-1827\)](#).



Born in 1770 in Germany, Beethoven is probably the best-known composer in the world of popular culture. He suffered many hardships beginning when he was younger; his father was an alcoholic, and at an early age, Beethoven was forced to work as the primary breadwinner for his family. He was known as a virtuosic pianist from an early age, and traveled to Vienna at an early age, where he studied with Haydn. Beethoven's first set of piano sonatas were dedicated to Haydn!

Beethoven began experiencing hearing loss in his later 20s, which caused a tremendous amount of pain for him. Eventually, he was unable to hear at all, and would rest his head against the piano in order to feel the vibrations. Although as a trained musician, he was able to **audiate** (that is, hear in one's own head), it wasn't the same. In 1802, he wrote a letter to his brothers, which explained his unhappiness and what he called a "wretched existence." [Although he contemplated suicide in an un-sent letter to his brothers](#), he decided against it, declaring that "it was only my art that held me back."

Beethoven composed a tremendous amount of music while completely deaf, including his 9th (and last) Symphony - the "Ode to Joy" symphony. His music was considered incredibly difficult during his time (and I would add as a

pianist, it's *still* difficult!) As a composer for the piano, he truly revolutionized the **piano sonata** as a full-fledged 20-30 minute work for solo piano. He is most known for his instrumental music including 32 piano sonatas, 9 symphonies, and 16 string quartets, though he wrote much more music than that. His most well-known music in the world of popular culture includes "Für Elise," "Ode to Joy," and his famous 5th Symphony, which has accompanied the opening to *Judge Judy* for decades. For those interested in seeing his list of compositions, [visit the Wikipedia list of works](#).

(above): portrait of Beethoven by [Joseph Karl Stieler](#), 1820. [Public Domain](#).

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4.3: An Emphasis on Form

An Emphasis on Form.

Music—especially instrumental music without words or a "story"—needs to be organized. This has been true for *as long as composers have been writing music*. Although the previous time periods (Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque) all organized their music logically, the Classical Era takes the attention to detail and heightens it to a whole new level.

From the micro-perspective, we'll see how a **musical phrase** is constructed. The most stable type of phrase, called **themes** are often composed in 8-measure lengths, and can be divided evenly into 2 halves. A single piece of music may contain several themes, or it may consist of a *single theme that is changed and developed over the entire length*. [The next chapter on phrases and themes](#) provides diagrams and a video discussion on how these themes are created in the Classical Era. As you read on, make sure you pay attention to the **balanced and symmetrical** approach to writing these ideas! [The following page will discuss "Theme and Variation" form](#), demonstrating how a composer can take a single theme and compose a set of variations on that theme, each more elaborate than the previous!

From a *macro* perspective, we see how composers organize their music, again in a very logical, balanced, and (sometimes) symmetrical way. The most common type of formal arrangement for a single movement of music is **sonata and rondo form**, as [we'll see in the following pages](#).

And from the *truly macro* perspective, we see composers writing multi-movement cycles like **Symphonies, String Quartets, Instrumental Concertos**, and **Instrumental Sonatas**. While concertos and sonatas were established as genres in the Baroque period, the Classical Era gives us **Symphonies and String Quartets**, each of which consists of 4 individual movements -- each with their own unique larger form --- each of which is comprised of their own smaller themes!

We'll look at [instrumental sonatas in chapter 5](#) and [instrumental concertos in chapter 8](#), which end up using many of the larger forms that we'll discuss in this unit. But in the meantime, this chapter will examine the Symphony and String Quartet as a larger multi-movement cycle, and how each movement is organized.

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4.4: Phrase Structure- What is a Theme?

Phrase Structure: What is a Theme?

A "theme" is the most important musical phrase within a given work. Some pieces contain *multiple* themes, each of which are treated with equal import.

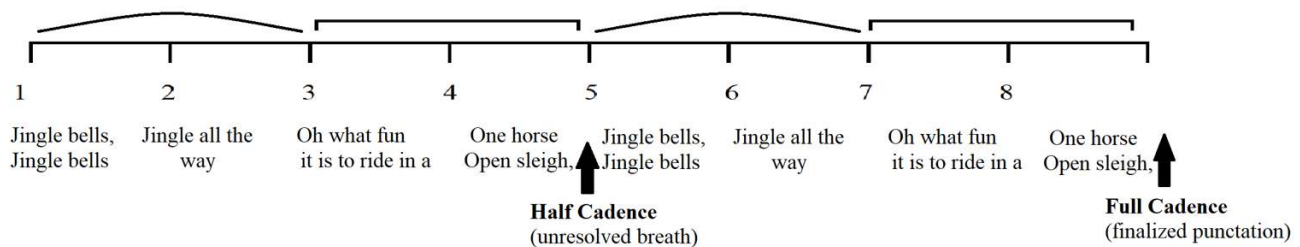
In the Classical Era, composers wrote themes in a very logically-constructed way, and can their formal organization is similar to the ways that Ancient Greek architecture is designed. [This video presentation discusses how composers wrote themes based off of the Ancient Greek principles of balance and symmetry.](#) The diagrams below are the same ones used in the video, but are reproduced here for your convenience. Make sure you make note of the use of **cadences** in these phrases; the video discusses them at length; understanding how a phrase **cadences** will help us understand where the music is going!

Understanding Musical Phrases with Phrase Diagrams

The model phrase structure in the Classical Era (1700~1820) consists of 8 measures*. The 2 most common phrase types are **parallel phrases** and **contrasting phrases**.

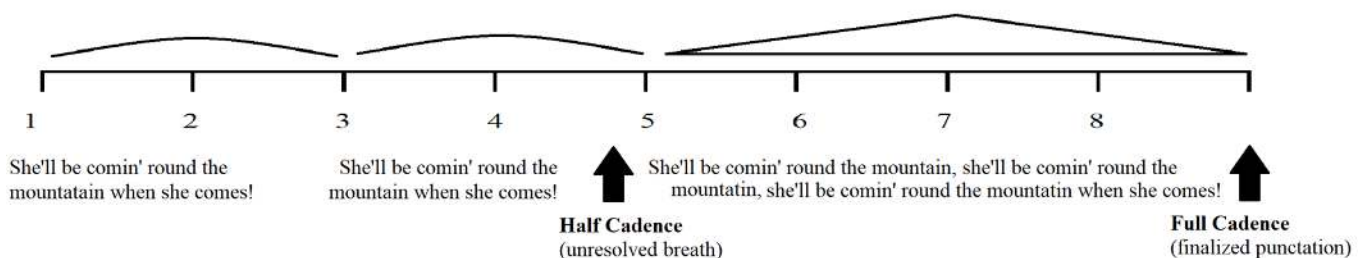
Parallel phrases contain a **half cadence** (an unresolved breath) in the 4th measure, followed by a repetition of the opening material, ultimately leading to a **full cadence** at the end of measure 8.

A perfect example of this is "Jingle Bells." After "Oh, what fun it is to ride in a 1-horse open sleigh!," we repeat the melody from the beginning. This can be demonstrated with the following diagram:

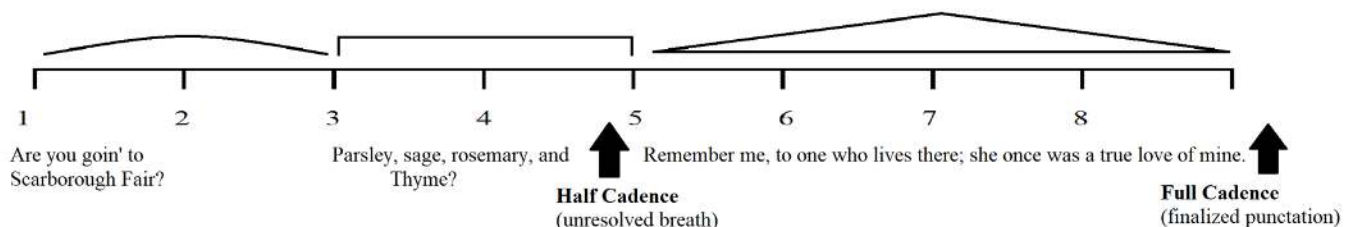


Contrasting phrases are quite different than this. If the second half of the melody begins **differently** than in which it began, it is known as a **contrasting phrase**.

A perfect example of this is "She'll be comin' round the mountain when she comes." After the first 4 measures, the melody does **not** repeat the opening material. Rather, it provides a longer phrase, which leads to a cadence. This is demonstrated below:



While the above example contains a repetition of the first two measures (notice the two curves!), some melodies will not contain repetition at all! An example of this is the folk song "Scarborough Fair," (made popular by Simon and Garfunkel). Note that **all 3 shapes** are used, as there is practically no literal repetition of the melody's tune.



4.4: Phrase Structure- What is a Theme? is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

4.5: Theme and Variation Form

Theme and Variation Form.

Theme and variation is a very common form for a single movement of music. Composers have been writing Theme and Variation for centuries --- it predates the Classical Era! It is often the first larger piece of music that a composition student composes. Its premise is simple: compose a single musical theme, and then write different variations that are based off that same theme. One can add more notes, embellish the melody, change the key, change the instrumentation (if possible), speed the music up, slow it down, make it silly, make it somber--- it really is all up to the composer. *But each variation should still resemble the original theme!* As a study in composition, **theme and variation form** is a great way for a student to learn just how many different and interesting ways they can manipulate a single melody.

Such was the case for myself -- my first big piano composition was a Theme and Variation on my own original theme. [Take a listen to the Theme](#). It's very short, and only lasts until 0:16 in the file. Then, follow along with the music and the time stamps; you'll be able to hear that exact same theme played a multitude of ways. Some of them are somber, some of them are comical, but they all have the same melody embedded within them.

Variation 1: 0:21

Variation 2: 1:38

Variation 3: 2:20

Variation 4: 3:13

Variation 5: 4:10

Variation 6: 5:26

Variation 7: 8:05

Variation 8: 9:29

Variation 9: 10:36

Variation 10: 11:29

Variation 11: 12:10

Variation 12: 14:10

Composers like Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and their contemporaries wrote hundreds of pieces in the Theme and Variation form. Why demonstrate Theme and Variation in the Classical Era if it predates the time period? For 2 reasons. First, it's helpful to understand a Classically written **musical phrase** from this perspective. Hearing a Classical phrase, and then several variations on it helps us understand the art of writing a phrase more clearly.

Second, although many composers in this time period wrote **Theme and Variation** as a single piece of music, they also included it as one movement of a *multi-movement cycle*: primarily the **Symphony** and **String Quartet** (though some instrumental sonata movements also used the form).

[Watch this video lecture on theme and variation form, looking at a movement by Mozart and Haydn](#). You'll first see how Mozart composes variations on the popular French folk tune that "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" is based on. This set of variations is a **single piece of music**. In other words, Mozart wrote this piece, and published it on its own.

Then, you'll watch how Haydn composes a set of variations on a famous melody of his titled the "Emperor's Melody." Here, the theme and variation is only 1 **movement** of a larger 4-movement string quartet. The next page will explore the 4-movement quartet and symphony in a little more detail, but the video explains all you need to know.

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4.6: The Symphony and String Quartet- Four Movement Cycles

String Quartets and the Symphony: Four Movement Cycles

The most significant musical genres that came out of the Classical Era were the **Symphony** and **String Quartet**. Both genres are constructed in similar ways, but the difference between them lies in how large the ensemble is. The **Symphony** is a 4-movement work (also called a 4-movement *cycle*) for an orchestra, while a **String Quartet** is a 4-movement work for a **string quartet**. In other words, the term *string quartet* refers to the actual 4-movement piece of music *and the name of the 4-person ensemble playing it!*

Remember that in a string quartet, each player is a soloist -- they're the only person playing their part. In an orchestra, string players play as a group, while the *wind players* and *brass* and *percussionists* are all soloists.

In the previous page, [you heard a movement from one of Haydn's more famous string quartets](#). Unlike Mozart's "Twinkle Twinkle" variations, Haydn's variations were a single movement of a larger 4-movement string quartet. This is because both the symphony and string quartet are both comprised of 4 different pieces of music, each called a *movement*.

The notion of compiling multiple movements together and unifying them within a single piece predates the Classical Era; composers had been doing it for centuries. Here, however, the organization of each movement is very rigid---there's certainly room for creative liberties, but composers essentially modeled their 4-movement work in similar formats.

Take a look at the handout below. You can see how there are 4 movements in a symphony or quartet. Each movement has their own **tempo** (or *speed*), and is organized in its own **form**.

While the 1st, 3rd, and 4th movement are typically in the same key (the **tonic** or *home* key), the 2nd movement is usually in a different key. It's also the only *slow* movement. Recall Haydn's "Emperor" variations---it was a slow movement, which should automatically tell you that it was the *second movement* of his quartet. Lastly, the 2nd movement does *not have a prescribed form for it!* The 2nd movement may be written in any type of form that the composer wants. As long as the movement is slow, 2nd movements may be in any form the composer desires!

Typical Structure of a 4-movement Symphony and String Quartet

	<u>Tempo</u>	<u>Form</u>	<u>Key</u>
Movement I	Fast	Sonata form	Tonic key
Movement II	Slow	Any form (as long as it's slow) Typically very lyrical	Different key
Movement III	Upbeat dance	ABA form (Ternary form or "minuet and trio" form) Minuets and Trios are both dances in 3/4 time (like a waltz) Minuet (A), then Trio (B), then repeat the Minuet (A)	Tonic Key
Movement IV	Fast	Sonata form or Rondo form	Tonic key

[Watch the first 6 minutes of this video](#). It describes in more detail the 4-movement structure of the *Symphony and Quartet*. The next three pages will discuss the other movements of the cycle. Rather than going in order of "Movements 1, 3, and 4," you'll read about Ternary Form of the 3rd movement, Rondo form of the 4th movement, and Sonata Form of the 1st movement. This is done because Ternary form is the easiest to understand --- Rondo is a little more complicated, and Sonata is by far, the most complex.

4.6: The Symphony and String Quartet- Four Movement Cycles is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

4.6.1: Minuet and Trio Form ("Ternary" form)

Minuet and Trio Form: The Third Movement of a Symphony and String Quartet

The third movement of a 4-movement cycle like a Symphony or String Quartet is known as the "dance" movement. That's because a minuet and trio are both two different stylized dances that were popular in the 1600s. Both dances are similar in style, speed, and meter. They both have 3 beats per measure (like a waltz), and so early symphonic composers like Johann Stamitz would often pair the two dances together. Thus, "minuet and trio" form was created!

The form of a minuet and trio is quite simple, and the [video here will explain how it's organized](#). You'll listen to the 3rd movement of his Symphony no. 102.

Each dance (the minuet *and* the trio) are organized in 2 parts. Because of this, we call them **binary** form.

After the minuet is done, the players immediately play the **trio**. Once the trio is done, the music goes *back to the beginning and repeats the minuet!*

In other words, the form looks like this: MINUET TRIO MINUET

If we were to assign a letter to each of these dances, the form would like this: A B A

This ABA form is referred to as **ternary** form, and is a popular form in instrumental music.

Although each dance is in the same key, tempo, and speed, the composer will likely treat them differently through the use of **instrumentation**. As you listen to the Haydn example in the video, pay close attention as to how the **minuet** is different from the **trio**.

When you're done with the video, move on to the next page where we discuss **rondo form**.

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4.6.2: Rondo Form- The Fourth Movement of a Symphony or Quartet

Rondo Form.

Composers would often reserve a rondo form for the 4th movement of their work (if the music only had 3 movements, they would often use it for the 3rd movement). This does not mean that rondos *only* exist within the 4-movement structure. Some composers wrote rondos as standalone works. *Fur Elise* is a great example of a standalone piece in rondo form.

Rondos are fairly simple: they consist of repeating **refrains** that are constantly interrupted by different **episodes**.

If we were to organize a rondo form using letters, the "A" would be used for the refrain, while "B," "C," and "D," etc. would be used for **episodes**.

A 5-part rondo is the most common type of rondo we see in the literature. It looks like this: A B A C A

You can see how the "A" sections are interrupted by the "B" and "C" section.

As mentioned above, Beethoven's famous *Fur Elise* is found in this "ABACA" form. [Take a listen to Lang Lang's performance of this famous piano work](#), and see if you can recognize when the refrain comes back. It's very easy to recognize, because the refrain is *very* catchy. As you listen, make sure you ask yourself what makes these A, B, and C sections sound *different*.

For your convenience, here are the time stamps for the different sections:

A: 0:00

B: 0:55

A: 1:23 (you'll hear him set the A up at 1:17, but he takes his time!)

C: 2:20 (this is a much darker and more angry sounding section)

A: 2:47

You'll notice that each section has their own character. The A section is quite somber, the B section is more lively and optimistic, and the C section is much more angry and almost violent. This is common! Different sections in music will likely be in different characters and will be in different keys.

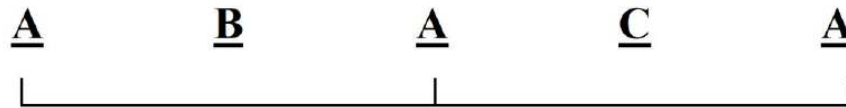
The beauty of the ABACA form is in its balance, which is a characteristic that the Ancient Greeks favored. With an "A" on either sides and the middle, we have a "B" and "C" as the 2nd and 4th sections. Balanced as it may be, it's not *symmetrical*. This is where we get the 7 part rondo:

The 7-part rondo: ABACABA form (pure symmetry)

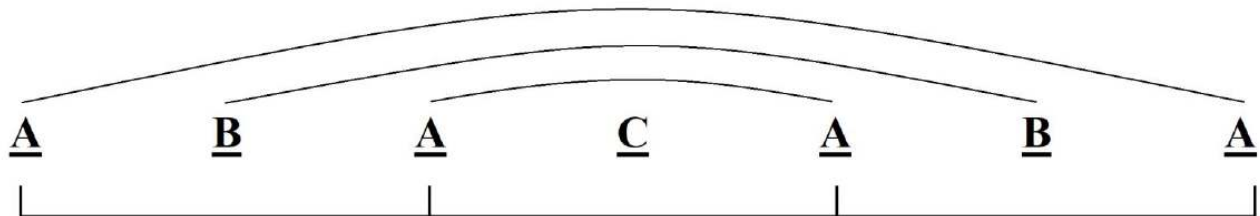
As you can see from ABACABA, we have a perfectly symmetrical form. Moreover, it can be arranged into a form that resembles ABA C ABA. This makes it look like we have an ABA (ternary) on either side of a contrasting "C" section. Composers enjoy this form because it provides them with the symmetry that isn't found in the 5-part rondo.

The handout below provides a clear depiction of these two different rondo forms.

The "5 Part Rondo"



The "7 Part Rondo"



The A sections are called "Refrains." Just like in pop music, the Refrain comes back (returns) throughout the piece.

The B and C sections are called "episodes."

Notice how balanced both of these forms are. While the 5-part rondo is balanced, it is NOT symmetrical.

The 7-Part rondo is a symmetrical form. It creates a Palindrome. Remember that Classical composers were interested in balance and symmetry. This goes back to Ancient Greek (the "Classical" era in Western history).

The piece you'll look at in the video for rondo is actually in *nine parts*! It goes by fast, and it's a lot of fun. When you're done, move onto the next page, where you'll read about the Sonata form.

4.6.2: Rondo Form- The Fourth Movement of a Symphony or Quartet is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

4.6.3: 4.6.3 Sonata Form (the first movement of a Symphony or String Quartet)

Sonata Form.

The term *sonata* comes from the Latin word *sonare* means sound, as in *to create sound*. It is contrasted from *cantare*, which means *sing*, or *to sing*.

This is important because the term *sonata* in the world of music first began to be used to describe any instrumental music. [Recall from Chapter 1.3](#) that the majority of music was *sung* in the time periods from Ancient Greece up to the Baroque period. Composers did not regularly compose purely instrumental music until the Baroque period (it happened, but it wasn't very common).

Through the Renaissance period into the early Baroque period, the term *sonata* was used to describe *any* type of purely instrumental music. This was in contrast with *cantatas*, which often referred to music that was sung.

Beginning in the Baroque period, composers began writing **Instrumental Sonatas**---that is, a multi-movement work for an instrument and (sometimes) a keyboard accompanying them. For example, Baroque composer JS Bach wrote many **sonatas for solo violin**, which all consist of multiple movements in different forms and styles.

In the following era, Classical Era composers continued to write instrumental sonatas ([you'll see more on instrumental sonatas as a musical genre in Chapter 5](#)).

As time went on within the Classical Era, composers developed a specific form called **Sonata Form**. This became the most common type of form used for single-movement works as well as the form used for the 1st movement of a multi-movement work. It was also sometimes used as the form of the *last* movement as well!

In other words, the term **sonata** can refer to a multi-movement **instrumental sonata**: "I'm playing Beethoven's first piano sonata in F minor tonight." This means "I'm playing one of Beethoven's multi-movement piano works tonight."

But **sonata FORM** is a specific *form*, usually reserved for the first movement of *any multi-movement work* --- including symphonies, string quartets, *and* instrumental sonatas.

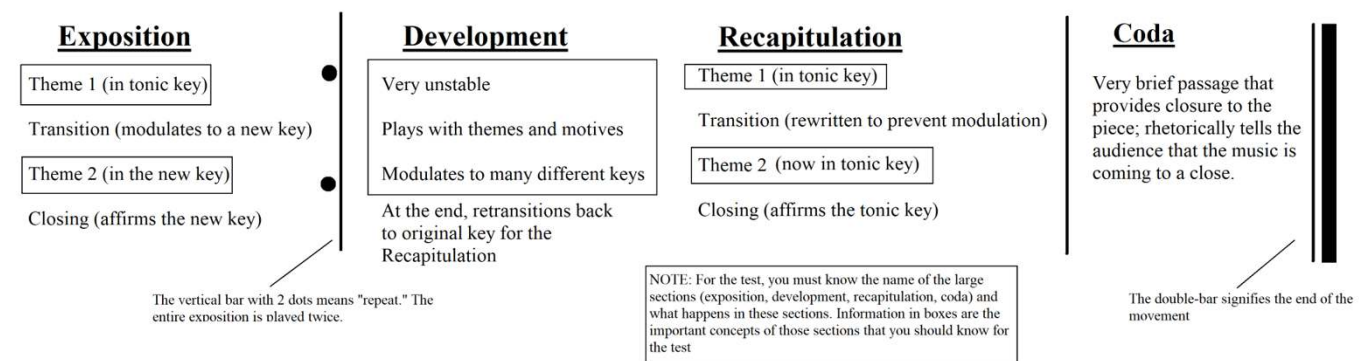
This means that the *first movement* of Beethoven's 4-movement piano sonata is in *sonata form*. The first movement of Mozart's symphonies are all in Sonata form. The same is true for the majority of every symphony, string quartet, and instrumental sonata:

"I'm playing Beethoven's first piano sonata in F minor tonight. The first movement is in sonata form!"

Annoying, right? Correct. But here in the music world, we reuse the same terminology for different things *all the time*.

This page explores **sonata form**, as the form found within the first movement of a multi-movement work. The handout below demonstrates how the music is organized. Don't be intimidated by its complexity --- [the video lecture will](#) describe this form using Mozart's famous G minor Symphony as an example.

Sonata form Template



The above template is the most basic “textbook” version of what we expect in Sonata form from the Classical Era. **Sonata Form** is the most important formal contribution to instrumental music from this era. Composers (myself included) still write music in this form (usually much more complicated to stay original, but we use this as a template).

The **Exposition** exposes us to a **Theme** --- the main musical idea ---- in the tonic (home) key. After the theme, the music **modulates (changes key)** through a transition, where we usually hear a **Second Theme**, but this time, in a different key. After the **second theme** is done, the music comes to a close before moving to the **Development** section.

The **Development** section is unstable---you’ll hear short **motives** (small fragments---sometimes 2 or 3 notes!) and the **themes** played in unstable ways. After the composer is done, we move to the **Recapitulation**, where the composer repeats everything from the Exposition, but this time, makes sure that everything stays in the tonic key.

The **Coda** is a brief passage the brings down the energy and final closes the music. It is usually brief and provides closure to the movement.

4.6.3: 4.6.3 Sonata Form (the first movement of a Symphony or String Quartet) is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Chamber Music

- [5.1: Overview of Chamber music](#)
- [5.2: Chamber Music in the Baroque Period \(1600-1750\)](#)
- [5.3: Chamber Music in the Classical Era \(1750~1820\)](#)
- [5.4: Chamber Music in the 19th and 20th Centuries](#)

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5.1: Overview of Chamber music

Chamber Music.

As described in [Chapter 2.3](#), **Chamber music** refers to smaller ensembles performing together. The word "chamber" is in contrast to the "concert hall," because chamber music was often performed traditionally in smaller venues (someone's private *chambers*). That doesn't mean that chamber groups do not perform in large venues--but that's where the term is derived from. Take a look at a few of these chamber ensembles below, and then go to the next page, where you'll learn more about Baroque Chamber Music.



You've already been exposed to the **string quartet**, which is a very popular and traditional chamber ensemble, firmly established as a musical genre in the Classical Era (1750~1820). Although the notion of 4 string players playing together was popular in the Baroque Era (1600-1750), they were usually accompanied by a harpsichord (you'll see this instrument more in [Chapter 7 on Keyboard music](#)). It wasn't until the Classical Era where the ensemble becomes a staple in instrumental music. Composer Joseph Haydn (you'll recall from the previous chapter) was very influential in helping to establish the string quartet within the Classical Era.

"Tokyo String Quartet at Samford University" by [ralph and jenny](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

which also was established in the Classical Era. Composers like Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven wrote many works for this group of instruments: a pianist, violinist and cellist. Similar to the string quartet, the term **piano trio** is used to refer to the ensemble of musicians, *as well as the multi-movement work that composers wrote!* "I'm a member of a piano trio, and our recital includes Beethoven's 3rd piano trio."



The **piano trio** is another common type of chamber ensemble.

(If you're interested in seeing an actual *trio of pianos*, I wrote a piece for 3 pianos years ago -- [the video is here](#). It was very hard to get 3 pianos on stage like this!)

"Upton Trio" at PGCC. [Screenshot taken from YouTube](#).

Chamber music was popular well before the Classical Era. In the **Baroque Period** (1600-1750), small ensembles were very popular, though the instrumental makeup and the form of the music was very different. Ensembles like the **string trio** consisted of 3 string players and a keyboardist (you'll see a picture of this to the left). These pieces often consisted of multiple movements as well, though the form was different than we see in the Classical Era.

Instrumental Sonatas were also popular; these usually consisted of a single soloist and a few other instruments accompanying them (you'll see an example in the following pages and the video lesson).

In the Baroque era, most all chamber ensembles included a harpsichord, a different and more delicate type of keyboard instrument (the second musician from the left in the picture to the left). You'll learn more about these ensembles in the following video lecture, and you'll learn about the harpsichord in more detail in [Chapter 7](#).

Croatian Baroque Ensemble. [Screenshot taken from YouTube](#).

Not all chamber music involves string players. As you saw briefly in the chapter on instruments, wind players often get together and perform as a woodwind quintet. Though some composers wrote solely for small groups of wind players in the Classical Era, the woodwind quintet didn't become well-established as a musical genre until the **19th century** (known as the "Romantic Era").



Modern composers often write for this group of instruments, as it provides more coloristic contrast in their writing. The picture to the right shows all five members of a woodwind quintet performing; you'll notice that each instrument is completely different, and produces sound differently from the others.

WindSync performance.
Screenshot taken from YouTube.



2016 Bang on a Can performance of George Crumb's "Ancient Voices of Children." Screenshot taken from YouTube.

And as we get into the modern day (20th century and beyond), composers begin to write for *any group of instruments they want*. This was actually done out of necessity; in the early 20th century, economic hardships partly due to the effects of World War I made it difficult to find larger ensembles to perform new works, so composers often wrote for whatever they could find. Composers like Schoenberg and Stravinsky are well-known for their eclectic ensembles consisting of instruments that traditionally

wouldn't play together in small settings. The above picture shows an ensemble consisting of a variety of different instruments, including a woman yelling *into a piano* to create a unique sound, composed by George Crumb in 1970 (you'll explore this piece in more detail in the coming pages).

For those interested in downloading a PDF handout of this unit's PowerPoint file, [click here](#).

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5.2: Chamber Music in the Baroque Period (1600-1750)

Chamber Music in the Baroque Era (1600-1750).



Croatian Baroque Ensemble. [Screenshot taken from YouTube](#). The harpsichord player is the 2nd from left.

Recall that the Baroque Period begins what we call the **Common Practice Era**. It is with the Baroque Period where music begins to sound more like modern-day music; music from the time periods that preceded the Baroque Period sound *very different* than our modern-day music. [Readers should re-familiarize themselves](#) with the chapter that briefly addresses musical time periods before moving on. After reading this page, [readers should view the Video Presentation](#) that discusses these concepts in more detail.

Popular Baroque Instruments.

The Harpsichord



"Ringling Museum - Harpsichord" by roger4336 is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

Music in the Baroque Era almost *always* included a **harpsichord** player. The harpsichord is a keyboard instrument, similar to the piano, but is very delicate (you'll hear how delicate it is in the video presentation). The harpsichord was a crucial member of the ensemble, and the keyboard player was required to provide the lowest notes with the left hand, while often improvising with their right hand, using chords that the composer instructed them to play. Even a piece of music that was written for a "solo" instrument often included the harpsichord. As you can see from the above picture, the physical appearance was just as important as the music it played! These instruments often had beautiful woodwork inlays around the instrument, and the lid was often painted with a beautiful mural. [Take a listen to Elaine Comparone performing a solo harpsichord piece](#) by Jean-Philippe Rameau called "Les Cyclopes."

Baroque Recorder.



Clara Guldberg performs on the Baroque recorder. [Screenshot taken from YouTube.](#)

One instrument that was very popular in the Baroque Period (and its preceding time periods) was the **recorder**. The Baroque recorder was typically made of wood, and it was similar to the flute, in that it had no reeds. It has a very airy and almost "breathy" sound when played. There are many sizes of the recorder: the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass recorder---this allowed for composers to write music for a "Recorder Ensemble," which similar to the String Quartet, combined four different sizes of the same type of sound. [Take a listen to the Flanders Recorder Quartet](#) performing Merula's "Canzona La Lusignuola" for four recorders, and you'll see what type of sound one can get with this type of instrumental group.

The recorder fell out of favor at the beginning of the Classical Era (1750~1820). If you find yourself listening to music on the radio and you hear a recorder, it is very likely that the music was written during the Baroque Period!

Popular Types of Chamber Music in the Baroque Period.

The most common types of chamber music of the Baroque Period consisted of the **Trio Sonata and the Instrumental Sonata**. In these instances, the term "sonata" simply means "instrumental" music, as opposed to "vocal" or "sung" music. (Remember that it wasn't until the Classical Era (1750~1820) where composers began to use the term "sonata" to refer to a single movement's form). Trio Sonatas and Instrumental Sonatas both contained several movements of music, and unlike the Classical Period's Symphony and String Quartet, which almost *always* had 4 movements, Trio Sonatas and Instrumental Sonatas often did not have a specific amount of movements that were expected. Some had 4 movements, some had 5 movements, others might only have 3.

Trio Sonatas actually have *four instruments!* This is because it is a "trio" of performers with an added harpsichord player! In other words, the harpsichord player was such a staple in chamber ensembles, that they didn't even feel that they needed to include it in the ensemble's name because it was expected that the group would have one!

Instrumental Sonatas often had 2 instruments: the soloist, and the harpsichord player. Sonatas that didn't have a harpsichord player accompanying them would often be called "unaccompanied instrumental sonatas." In other words, they needed to let the performer/audience know that the harpsichord player *wasn't* there---again, because its presence was always expected!

Many composers wrote for smaller ensembles, which as mentioned above, almost always included a harpsichord player. [The video presentation covers extensively both a Trio Sonata and an Instrumental Sonata](#) by two of the most well-known composers of the time period: Arcangelo Corelli and JS Bach.

Baroque Composers Covered in this Unit.

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) was a well-known Italian musician in the Baroque period. He was proficient as a violinist, composer, and was a highly respected teacher in his time period. He was very important in the development of instrumental music, especially as it pertains to the Instrumental Sonata and the Instrumental Concerto (concertos are pieces for a solo performer accompanied by a full orchestra; you'll learn more of the concerto in [Chapter 8](#)).



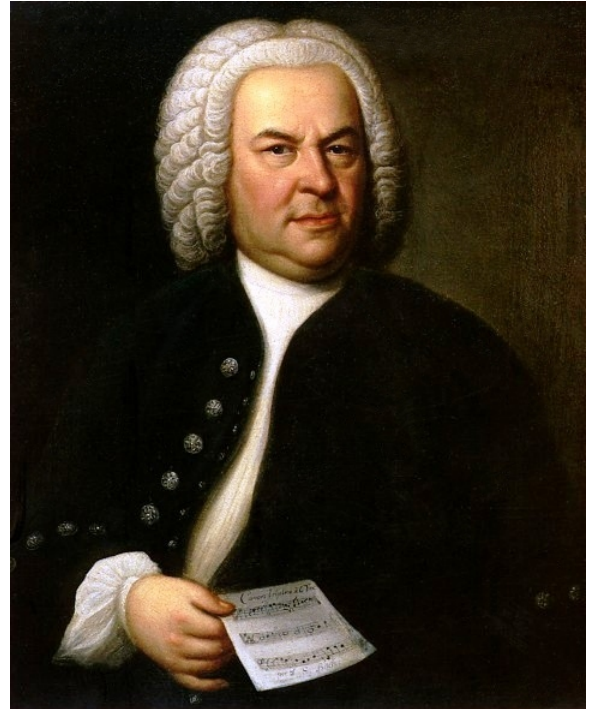
He composed 48 trio sonatas, 12 violin sonatas, and 12 concerto grossi (these are concertos for a *small group of soloists* with a full orchestra accompanying them). Though the Corelli is not as well-known as some of his contemporary composers like J.S. Bach, Vivaldi, or G. F. Handel (outside of music scholars, that is), his influence on instrumental chamber music cannot be understated. The video presentation will address one of his Trio Sonatas in D minor that contains 5 movements.

Portrait of Arcangelo Corelli by Hugh Howard. [Public Domain](#).

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Arguably the most well-known composer of the Baroque period, Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Germany in 1685. He composed over 1000 pieces

of music. This alone is an impressive number, but it's also important to remember that many of these pieces contained *multiple movements*, and might last over 2 hours! The man had many different jobs as a musician between the ages of 18-38, and depending on his job, he often composed different works. For instance, while working as a church organist in Weimar, he composed dozens of works for solo organ. While working as a concertmaster in Weimar, he composed orchestral music, and while working as a cantor at St. Thomas' Church in Leipzig, he composed many of his cantatas, which combined choir, solo singers, and orchestra. He was married twice, and between he and his two wives, he fathered 20 children, several of whom became well-known composers in their own right, including J.C. Bach, and C.P.E. Bach. Toward the end of his life, the Baroque Style began to fall out of favor due to the rising popularity of the early Classical style. We mark the end of the Baroque Era (1750) with his death, which coincides with what we refer to as the beginning of the "High" Classical Era that the previous chapter discussed.



Throughout this text, we'll hear a few pieces by J.S. Bach, especially when we cover the Organ in the chapter on Keyboard Music. This chapter covers one of his sonatas for solo recorder. The recording you'll watch consists of 3 musicians: a solo recorder, a cello, and a harpsichord.

Famous portrait of J.S. Bach by Elias Gottlob Haussmann. [Public Domain](#).

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5.3: Chamber Music in the Classical Era (1750--1820)

Chamber Music in the Classical Era.

The Classical Era that followed the Baroque Period was covered in-depth in the previous chapter. There, you learned about one of the most important chamber ensembles that came out of this time period: the **String Quartet**.

String Quartet.



Matthew Vera and Michael Rau, violins David Mason, viola Marza Wilks, cello. [Screenshot taken from YouTube.](#)

As a reminder, the string quartet contains four different string players and arranges them in the four ranges of music:

Violin 1: Soprano

Violin 2: Alto

Viola: Tenor

Cello: Bass

String quartets were among the most popular and "sophisticated" types of instrumental chamber music of the Classical Era. [Revisit Chapter 4 that covered the 4-movement cycle](#), in particular, the string quartet and symphony. Recall that the 1st and 4th movements were typically fast and in sonata and rondo form, respectively. The 2nd movement is typically a slow movement written in any form, and the 3rd movement is often an upbeat dance movement.

While the string quartet was the one of the most important genres to come out of the Classical Era, it was not the only one. Classical Era composers continued to write **Instrumental Sonatas** similar to the Baroque composers, but these sonatas were organized in a very strict manner. (Remember that Classical composers were very interested in how they approached **form**, so Instrumental Sonatas were often organized the same way.) Composers also wrote **Piano Trios**, which combined a pianist with a violinist and cellist. Some composers would even combine the piano with well-established genres like the string quartet, or would even combine a pianist with a group of wind players. Because of the piano's importance in chamber music of this time period, let us first address the piano in more detail.

The Piano.



Daniel Barenboim performs a solo piano sonata on stage. Screenshot taken YouTube.

The piano was invented in the early 1700s, and became one of the most popular instruments in the Classical Period. Although Chapter 7 covers keyboard instruments [including the piano in more detail](#), it is difficult to discuss chamber music in the Classical Era because almost all of it included the piano to some extent. As the harpsichord fell out of popularity toward the end of the Baroque Period, the piano essentially took over as the go-to keyboard instrument, especially when accompanying other instruments. All of the great prominent composers of this era wrote music that included piano. Because of its ability to play both high and low notes and its ability play chords and melodies simultaneously, the piano made a great partner for instrumental chamber music of the Classical Era. The piano was featured as the accompanist in many **Instrumental Sonatas**, similar to how the harpsichord was featured in instrumental sonatas of the Baroque Period that came before. [Take a look at this video here that shows how a piano works before moving on.](#)

The Instrumental Sonata.



Julian Rachlin (violin) and Johannes Piirto (piano) perform a violin sonata live on stage. Screenshot taken from YouTube.

The **instrumental sonata** was a popular genre in the Baroque period, and this tradition carried through the Classical Era, and even until today. However, modern sonatas are based off of the type of instrumental sonatas that came out of the Classical Era: they often contained three movements, the first of which was typically in "sonata form," and the last often begin in "rondo" form—both of which were often fast. The second movement, which was typically slow, would often be written in any type of form that the composer chose. This is similar to the 4-movement instrumental cycle that you read about last chapter: the outer movements are fast, and in sonata or rondo form, and the slow movement can be written in any form desired. The only thing missing from the instrumental sonata was the "dance" movement.

Composers wrote many sonatas for many different instruments, all of which included a piano as its accompanist, violin sonatas, flute sonatas, clarinet sonatas, cello sonatas, etc. Among these combinations, however, composers favored the Violin Sonata and Cello Sonata more than others. [Take a listen to this recording of Beethoven's "Spring" Violin Sonata](#); you'll notice how well the piano blends with the violin during this performance. When we get to [Chapter 7.2](#), we'll examine a piano sonata and its form.

The Piano Trio.



Henry Kramer (piano), Arianna Warsaw-Fan Rauch (Violin), and Meta Weiss (cello) perform Ravel's Piano Trio. [Screenshot taken from YouTube.](#)

One of the most popular genres to emerge out of the Classical Era was the **piano trio**. Continuing with our "annoying use of terminology" found in music, the **piano trio** can refer to both the ensemble of performers, as well as the musical work itself. "I'm a member of a piano trio, and our recital will feature Beethoven's ninth piano trio, among other works."

Piano Trios were often written in the same form as the Symphony and String Quartet: they often contain four movements. The first and fourth movements are typically fast, and in sonata and rondo form, respectively. Movement 2 is often slow and written in any form the composer chooses, and the third movement is often a lively dance.

The piece in the Video Presentation addresses one of Beethoven's well-known piano trios, referred to as the "Archduke Trio" because Beethoven had dedicated the music to Archduke Rudolph of Austria, who was an amateur musician, and a friend and composition student of Beethoven. You might notice that the *second* movement is a dance, instead of being slow! As the Classical Era progressed, it became quite common for composers to switch the 2nd and 3rd movements within larger 4-movement works.

Now that you've read through these different types of instruments and genres found in Classical Era chamber music, [watch the Video Presentation](#), which discusses this in more detail, and covers Beethoven's famous work.

5.3: Chamber Music in the Classical Era (1750--1820) is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

5.4: Chamber Music in the 19th and 20th Centuries

Chamber Music in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

This page covers chamber music in both the 19th and 20th centuries. When you're done reading through, [watch the Video Presentation](#) that covers some of these pieces and forms in more detail.

Romantic Era (19th century: ~1820-1900).

The term "Romantic" is often used to describe an artistic movement within the 19th century that emphasized individual expression, emotion, and storytelling within their instrumental music. Although it doesn't refer to *all* types of music in the 19th century, it was an important movement *within* the 19th century.

One of the most important characteristics of *all* music in the 19th century, *regardless as to whether composers were considered 'Romantic' in style*, was that the musical form got larger, longer, and more complex. Composers continued to write string quartets, piano trio, instrumental sonatas, and other types of "traditional" chamber music, but the music got longer and more complicated.

Other musical traits of the 19th century is that the music became more **chromatic** and composers embraced **dissonance** more freely. In simple terms, the music became in many ways, more intense for the listener -- possibly in an attempt to express emotions more effectively!

We will come across these traits of romanticism in much more detail in our unit on [Piano Music](#) and [Programmatic Music](#). In the meantime, this unit will discuss in more detail the **Woodwind Quintet**, which was not truly established as a "sophisticated ensemble" until the 19th century thanks to two important composers: Franz Danzi and Anton Reicha.

Franz Danzi: The "Father of the Woodwind Quintet."



Although some composers in the Classical Era had combined wind instruments together in chamber music settings, the woodwind quintet did not fully become established as a "legitimate" ensemble for artistic purposes until the 19th century. German-born composer Franz Danzi (1763-1826) was one of the most important figures in helping establish the genre to the status of "high-art." Little has been written about the composer, and as his birth dates indicate, he died right at the beginning of the "Romantic Era," two and a half decades into the 19th century.

Traditionally speaking, woodwind instruments did not enjoy the same "high status" as string instruments. The reason for this is still debated to this day, but the odd reality is that woodwind music was not seen as "legitimate" art music compared to the string quartet. Danzi helped to challenge this notion, composing many works for winds throughout his entire career. All told, he wrote 9 woodwind quintets, each of which consisted either 3 or 4 movements. He also wrote several pieces called "Quintet for winds and Piano," which combined four wind players and a piano. He also wrote a woodwind sextet, as well as a large piece for wind quintet and orchestra.

He is perhaps best known for his **woodwind quintets**, however, which were just as sophisticated in terms of form as some of Beethoven's string quartets. The video presentation goes into extensive detail surrounding the last movement of his Quintet in G minor, op. 56. As you listen, you should notice that you're able to hear each and every instrument *very* clearly, because each instrument produces sound in a different way! Readers may want to [re-familiarize themselves](#) with the chapter on Small Ensembles before watching this unit's video.

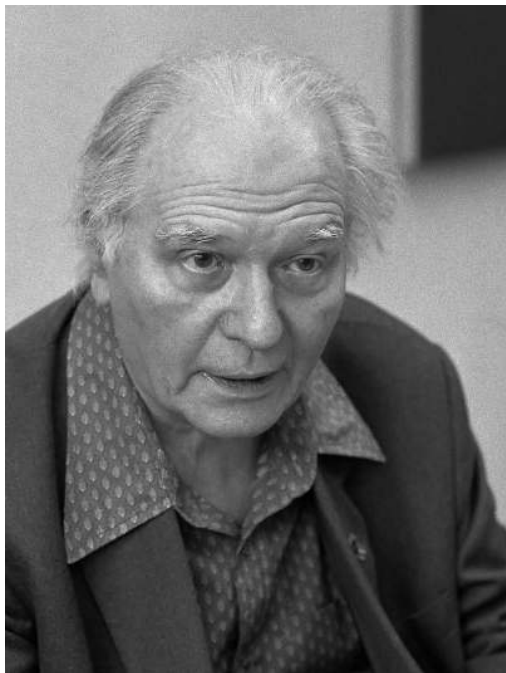
Portrait of Franz Danzi by Heinrich Eduard Winter. [Public Domain](#).

Chamber Music in the 20th Century.

Music of the 20th century sounds *very* different from music in the Classical and 19th Century. Next chapter, you'll be exposed to many of the different artistic movements of the 20th century, and will learn what makes the music sound so different. Until then, we will look at a few chamber pieces from the 20th century, focusing our attention on **musical style** and **instrumentation**. Some composers of the 20th century continued to write for the traditional instrumental ensembles. Russian composers like Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev composed many string quartets, instrumental sonatas, piano trio, and other "traditional" works. Their music sounded different from the periods that came before it because of the ways that they wrote melodies as well as their use of harmony, especially as it pertained to dissonance. Composers like Arnold Schoenberg, who you'll read about next chapter, also wrote many string quartets and piano trios. He also combined instruments that weren't typically combined; you'll see his piece *Pierrot Lunaire* next chapter.

In this unit, we'll compare two very different types of 20th century chamber music: a traditional ensemble by French composer, Olivier Messiaen, and a very non-traditional example by American composer George Crumb who had just passed away in 2022. As you listen to some of this music, you should be asking yourself what makes this music sound so unique, and what sets it apart from the other music you've been studying these past few units? Music of the 20th century often sounds foreign to us because it manipulates the melodic and harmonic idioms that we're used to in ways that sometimes confuse us!

Olivier Messiaen and *Quartet for the End of Time*.



Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was an innovator. His music is known for its complex style: it contains radically dissonant sound, focusing primarily on *color* rather than the "rules" of harmony that had been established centuries ago in the Baroque Period. His music is incredibly challenging to perform, and sometimes difficult to listen to, especially for non-musicians (but even musicians find his music difficult to listen to!) He was very interested in bird calls, and would often try to imitate bird songs in his music. He even wrote an extensive piece of music for solo piano titled *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, or *Catalogue of Birds*. He transcribed the bird calls as best he could, and incorporated them into his music! [Take a listen to this video](#) --- you'll hear actual bird songs, immediately followed by his own piano transcription of them. Not only did he write an entire 2-hour piano work that used these bird calls, but he would often insert these calls into his other music.

One of his most celebrated works of chamber music is called *Quartet for the End of Time*, which he wrote while being held as a Prisoner of War in a German prison camp. Messiaen was drafted into the French army in World War II, and was sent to a Nazi prison camp in 1940. While imprisoned, he met several other musicians, for whom he would write his 50-minute work *Quartet for the End of Time* for an ensemble consisting of piano, violin, cello, and clarinet. Though this is a somewhat "odd" group of instruments to compose for (meaning non-traditional), these were the only instruments that were available to him during these circumstances, and so this is who he wrote for. A sympathetic prison guard was able to get him materials necessary to write the music down and get it to his performers. Upon completion, the musicians performed in front of about 400 prisoners and guards.

As a devout Catholic, Messiaen gathered inspiration from the *Book of Revelation*, the last book of the New Testament that depicts the End Times when Jesus returns to Earth. As prophesied in the Scriptures, he and God will judge the Living and the Dead where the righteous will be saved, and the others will be damned. According to his program notes (prose that are included with the music so that the audience understands the music better), the text "Quartet for the End of Time" is taken from Revelation, 10:1-2, 5-7 from the King James Version:

"And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire ... and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever ... that there should be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished..."

Years later, Messiaen would recall the performance at the prison camp:

"The Stalag was buried in snow. We were 30,000 prisoners (French for the most part, with a few Poles and Belgians). The four musicians played on broken instruments ... the keys on my upright piano remained lowered when depressed ... it's on this piano, with my three fellow musicians, dressed in the oddest way ... completely tattered, and wooden clogs large enough for the blood to circulate despite the snow underfoot ... that I played my quartet ... the most diverse classes of society were mingled: farmers, factory workers, intellectuals, professional servicemen, doctors and priests. " ([Source](#))



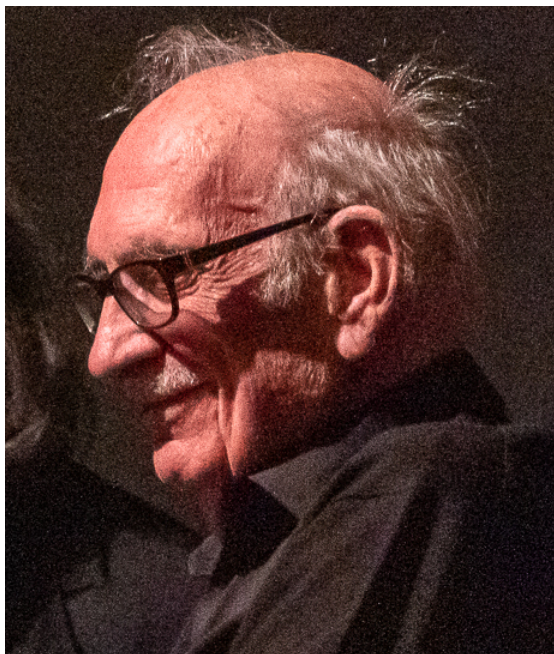
Considering the time period and conditions in which this piece was written, it would make sense to draw inspiration from the End of Days. As a piece of purely instrumental music being inspired by text, this is an example of **program music**, or "instrumental music based off a non-musical idea."

[Watch the video presentation on 20th century chamber music](#) and you'll learn more and will hear the first movement that incorporates bird calls by the clarinet.

(above): photo of Olivier Messiaen by Rob C. Croes. [Public Domain under Creative Commons](#).

(right): Richard Nunemaker and the Trio Oriens performs Quartet for the End of Time. [Screenshot from YouTube](#).

[George Crumb and *Ancient Voices of Children*](#)



George Crumb's (1929-2022) music was even more dissonant and difficult to perform and listen to than those that came before him. He was an American composer who believed that the actual sheet music that performers played should be considered beautiful works of art. [In the the video presentation](#) on this unit, you'll actually see a page from his music that could easily be hung on the wall. It's also, as a result, *incredibly* difficult to learn!

His music is considered "Avant-garde," which is a musical style that you'll read about next chapter. His music often incorporates theatrics -- performers move, act, shout, and sing while they perform. He often incorporated **extended techniques** in his music, which is a term that refers to the act of playing one's instrument in non-traditional ways. For an example of extended techniques, [watch the first minute or so of this performance of E. Berrido's "Through the Path of Light"](#). You'll see the pianist standing over the instrument, strumming the strings with the finger, then playing the keys while muting one of the strings to create a "plunk!" sound.

George Crumb often incorporated nonsensical words in his text---he would have singers shout or sing or combine shouting/talking and singing at the

same time, yelling random syllables for effect.

One of his more celebrated works is titled *Ancient Voices of Children*, which contains several different movements. The instrumental ensemble is highly eclectic: female soprano, boy soprano, oboe, mandolin, harp, amplified piano, toy piano, and percussion! These instruments combined are highly unusual, but is par for the course in the 20th century.

Watch the video presentation on the movement titled "Dance of the Sacred Life Cycle." When you're done, interested readers may [watch the full 30-minute performance](#) of this piece performed by the Bang on a Can fellows and faculty.

Photo of George Crumb by Peter Matthews. [Creative Commons](#).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

6: The 20th Centry- Artistic Movements

- 6.1: Overview of the Time Period
- 6.2: Impressionism
- 6.3: Early 20th Century Modernism
- 6.4: Expressionism
- 6.5: Avant-Garde
- 6.6: Minimalism

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6.1: Overview of the Time Period

The 20th Century: A collection of smaller artistic movements.

We have now looked briefly at the Baroque Period (1600-1750), the Classical Era (1750~1820), and a small amount of the 19th and 20th century. This unit covers the various artistic movements within the 20th century through the lens of some of the types of orchestral and chamber music that were introduced in the previous two chapters.

The 20th century is a fascinating time in Western music. The increased globalization allowed for different countries peoples to share their cultures and to exchange their ideas with one another (we'll see this with both Bela Bartok and Claude Debussy). The rise of the electronic medium like the phonograph allowed widespread dissemination of new music. Different styles of music were being explored, and from the early 20th century through the 1950s, one could listen to ragtime, blues, popular song, country, folk jazz, traditional, modernist, or atonal music! It was truly an eclectic century of music. Though this is not an exhaustive list of different types of music, it certainly represents the more common and well-known types of music of the time period.

The 20th century also saw the birth of film and film music. Early film and cinema of the late 1800s through the 1920s were completely devoid of sound; live musicians would often accompany the film on organ or piano to provide music for the audience. Different techniques that we know today in film, video games, and other forms of multimedia like the use of recurring main themes and character themes owe a great amount of debt to early 20th century composers writing for film---who in turn, owe their lineage in part to 19th century composer Richard Wagner. These topics will be explored further in Unit 2 when we discuss music and drama.

The different types of artistic movements that we'll cover in this chapter include **Impressionism, Early 20th century Modernism, Expressionism, Avant-garde, and Minimalism**. As mentioned above, these are not the *only* types of movements in the 20th century, but they're certainly those that had the longest and most significant influence on their contemporary society, as well as our own modern society.

For each artistic movement, you'll examine a composer who exemplified that movement, as well as one of their compositions. As you read and listen, make sure you really begin to focus on what makes the music sound so *different* from other music we've come across.

Lastly, it is important to understand that each of these artistic movements does not refer solely to the musical arts --- it refers to arts in general. As we look at these different movements, we'll also look at a piece of visual art and discuss its attributes. By doing this, we'll be able to understand more clearly what the composers are trying to do and what they're trying to say.

For those interested in downloading a PDF handout of this unit's PowerPoint file, [click here](#).

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6.2: Impressionism

Impressionism: A French Artistic Movement



(above) "Impression, Sunrise," by Claude Monet - [Public Domain](#)

Take a look to the painting above. This is a famous work by Claude Monet, the father of Impressionism, an artistic movement that grew out of the 1870s in France. Along with his contemporaries like Pierre Renoir and Edgar Degas, Claude Monet painted in this particular style that emphasized the idea of **blurriness**. Notice how the lines are blurred together, the colors are blurred, and we really can't make out many details of what the painting is. If you were to examine this painting up close in real life, you'd actually be able to see globules of oil protruding from the canvas!

What do you think this is a painting of? Odds are, you can see that there's water, perhaps a boat or two (or three?!) and a sky with a setting sun in the background. But there's also a lack of detail that leaves the viewer with only an **impression** of what the image is perhaps supposed to be.

The term **impressionist** was originally used as a pejorative. Art critics of Monet's time thought that these paintings weren't all that good -- to them, this style was a fad, and not worth time or money.

Truth be told, these paintings are more beautiful when you see them in person. Regardless as to the painter, these works have several things in common:

1. they focus on blurred lines and colors
2. they often use many different shades of the *same color* (known as monochromaticism).
3. they're interested in how light affects the same landscape over a period of time. Imagine taking 10 different pictures of the same scene from different times in the day, and trying to depict all of them in a single painting.

This last point is worth exploring further. Let's look at two other works by Monet to illustrate this idea. We'll look at two of his works titled *Houses of Parliament* (1903) and *Houses of Parliament* (1904). Notice how each one of them uses many shades of the same colors, and blurs them together? We know we're looking at buildings, we see a reflection in the bottom, so we know there's probably water. Monet painted [13 different versions of this scene!](#) Each one of them approaches the scene by combining light and color in unique ways, almost as if to combine multiple scenes together into one.



Impressionism in Music: Claude Debussy.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) composed in the Impressionist style and is known as the Father of Impressionist music. Similar to the Impressionist style in visual media, the term was seen as a pejorative in music. While impressionism in visual arts came out of the 1870s, the movement in music didn't occur until around 1890 (as mentioned before, it was common for music to lag behind the visual arts by about 20 years or so).

Debussy was born in France, where he also died. He wrote plenty of music for orchestra, piano, voice, and chamber ensembles, and he was known for his Impressionist techniques in music.

How does one create an Impressionist *musical* style? Think about it: Impressionism is about **blurred lines** and **blurred colors**.

In music, *line* often refers to melody and rhythm. *Color* refers to the scales, keys, and chords that the composer uses.

Blurred lines in music can refer to combining or merging melodies together, or by using different types of scales than traditionally used. The Video Presentation will outline the various scales including the **pentatonic** and **whole tone** scale that Debussy liked to use. It can also refer to blurred rhythms: creating a sense of uneasiness with rhythm, rather than grounding it to an easy-to-feel beat.



Blurred colors can refer to the combination of different chords with other chords. For instance, combining a C minor chord with a D major chord will result in a very dissonant and colorful sound (musicians might recognize it as a Cm9, #11, 13).

The video presentation discusses one of his most famous pieces, *Voiles* for solo piano. The piece's name translates to "sails," as in "sails on a boat." As you listen to the music, you may feel that it simply *doesn't go anywhere*. And that's the point! Imagine if you're sitting in a boat in an ocean with no breeze. You'll feel like you're simply floating, stagnant in the water. Debussy creates this new effect by combining chords together, and using 2 different scales than traditionally used: the **pentatonic** and **whole tone** scales.

As you listen, ask yourself how Debussy musically embodies the **Impressionist** style in his prelude.

(above) Picture of Claude Debussy by Atelier Nadar, Paris. [Public Domain-US](#).

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6.3: Early 20th Century Modernism

Early 20th Century Modernism.



Henri Matisse, *la danse* (1910). State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia, [Public Domain-US](#).

The term "modernism" is a term that typically refers to the artistic movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries where artists pushed the boundaries of tradition, seeking innovative and new ways of expression through their medium. This could be done in a number of different ways, and there are many different "types" of modernism. The above painting by Henri Matisse shows an interesting approach, and depicts the artist's fascination with primitivism. The lack of depth and detail almost look like an amateur's painting, but this was a significant departure in the realistic paintings that saturated the 19th century.

Now look at the painting to the right, Pablo Picasso's *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* from 1910—the same year as Matisse's painting. It's quite different, and embodies the artistic style known as *cubism*, which depicts an image through a variety of distorted-looking cubes. If you look closely, you'll be able to see a person's face in the upper center of the painting; their hands are folded on the bottom of the canvas.



Both of these paintings are but a small glimpse into what *modernism* can look like.

While these paintings are both radically different from one another, *and from the realistic paintings from the 19th century*, they do have something else in common: they both hold onto *some form* of the tradition that came before it. In other words, the paintings are innovative, new, and maybe even "offensive" to the sensibilities of the traditionalists, but they still employ traditional compositional techniques.

For instance, although Picasso's painting is radically different, its subject matter is *still a person's portrait*. Moreover, you can still make out a person within the painting, distorted as it may be.

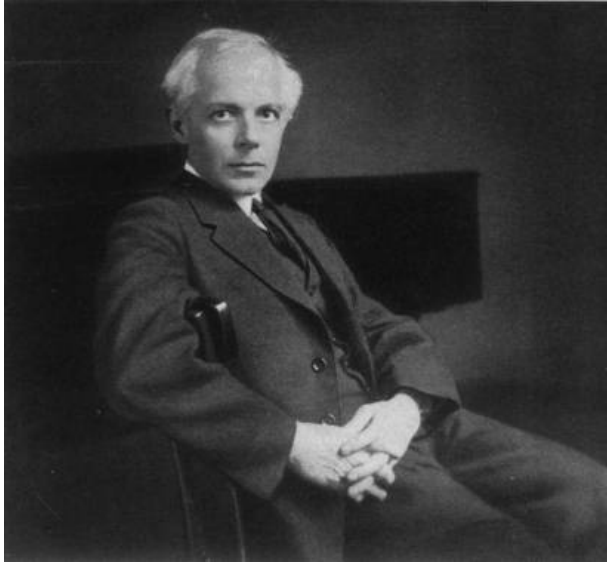
This is a key difference between *modernists* and *post-modernists*.

Modernists tend to be innovative, new, and radically different, while still holding on to *some form* of traditional techniques. The **post-modernists** or **Avant-garde** takes a different approach, often acting as revolutionaries while thumbing their nose at tradition.

We see modernism in music as well. Many composers of the early 20th century can be considered modernists if they pushed the boundaries through radically different and "progressive" techniques, while still holding on to some traditional techniques. The composer we'll look at in this unit is Bela Bartok.

(above): *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler* by Pablo Picasso - Website of the Art Institute of Chicago, [Public Domain-US](#).

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)



Béla Bartók was an Hungarian composer whose compositional output included many modernist techniques. He was a very talented and skilled pianist of his day, and from an early age was interested in **folk music** of different cultures. Often, he would insert well-known folk melodies from Hungary and other Eastern-European countries into his own instrumental music. This is known as **quotation**--inserting something that one didn't write themselves into their own music. Sometimes, his *own music* sounded like folk tunes, because he would write melodies in the same style of much of the music he liked!

Bartók was so interested in folk music that prior to World War I, Bartók traveled to different regions within Eastern Europe, and collected different melodies from the townspeople. He traveled with an Edison Phonograph, and would have different people come up to the machine to sing their melodies while he recorded them. He collected traditional Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak, Bulgarian, and Algerian folk tunes, and would then **transcribe** the music that he recorded onto sheet music. In some instances, he arranged the music

for beginning pianists to learn, and in other cases, he would incorporate some of the melodies into his own compositions.

As one of the first people to travel to other countries and collect their music, Bartók is known as one of the founders of **comparative ethnomusicology** - that is, the *cross-cultural study of music*. This is subset of **ethnomusicology**, which studies music from a cultural perspective.

(above): picture of Béla Bartók, [Public Domain](#).

The picture on the right shows Bartók during his travels before World War I erupted. Here, Bartók has a woman singing a folk tune that she grew up with into his phonograph machine, which records the melodies onto a wax cylinder recording machine invented by Thomas Edison.

Even in Bartók's most modernist compositions, he would often sneak some quotations of folk melodies into his music; this was a subtle way of paying homage to different cultures and heritages, while simultaneously helping those who might find his music difficult to listen to more easily appreciate and latch onto his music.

The [video presentation on Bartók and his approach to Modernism](#) discusses the music *Out of Doors*, which is a short collection of 5 different piano pieces composed in 1926. As the name suggests, it's named after things that one might hear if they were outside.

There is a PDF handout for this particular piece that is also found in the presentation. For readers who would like a copy of the handout, [they may download it on this page](#).

(right): Bartók (fourth from left) records a woman singing a folk tune in modern-day upper Hungary. [Public Domain](#).



Bartók's Piano Suite: *Out of Doors*

Composed in 1926, Bartók's *Out of Doors* contains 5 short movements, each with a title that makes one think of being outside:

- I. "With Pipes and Drums"
- II. "Musettes"
- III. "Barcarolla"
- IV. "The Night's Music"
- V. "The Chase"

The piece *Out of Doors* is a perfect example of **20th century modernism**. Bartok explores the many different ways of making sound on piano, sometimes treating it like a drum kit! [Take a listen to the opening of the 1st movement here](#), and you'll see that the pianist is "banging" the lowest two notes on the piano, creating a drum effect. This is immediately followed by a melody that's loosely based off of a pre-existing folk melody that was popular during his time. It therefore combines a radically dissonant "drumming" effect with traditional melodic writing -- a great example of the modernist technique in action.

[Listen to the 4th movement, "The Night's Music," which](#) is a great example of Bartok's fascination with *insect sounds*. He actually tried to imitate the sounds of bugs and other insects in much of his music (similar to Messiaen's fascination with bird calls, but Bartok predates Messiaen by several decades!) The "Night's Music" contains a bunch of random fragments of piano sounds that imitate cicadas, bull frogs, owls, mice scampering, and other sounds you might hear at night. These insect sounds are interrupted by melodic fragments that almost sounds like folk music and dances. Formally, the music is broken into a "rondo" form, creating an ABACABA structure. Again, it's a great representative of the modernist style, combining radically dissonant and innovative writing techniques with traditional melodies and form.

[The last movement, "The Chase," is quick, fast, violent, and fun.](#) It resembles two animals chasing one another in the woods, until finally one is eventually caught!

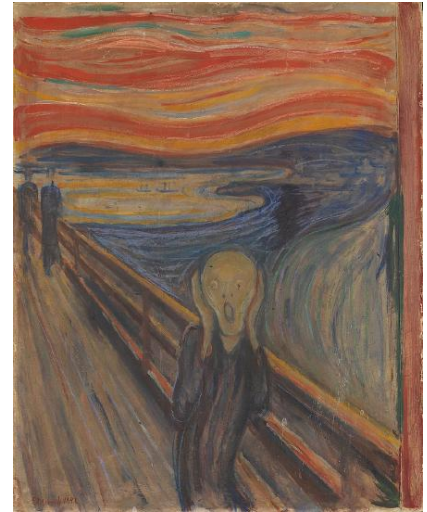
▮ [The handout provided in this page](#) includes more information on all 5 movements of this piece, and is covered in the video presentation.

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6.4: Expressionism

Expressionism.

The Expressionist movement originated in the early 20th century in Germany. From the visual-arts perspective, Expressionism sought to express the inner-most thoughts and emotions; to represent the human psyche, which was quite dark, depressing, and full of anxiety in early 20th century Germany. The artistic movement thus reflected much of the socio-economic-political atmosphere that the people experienced. Two paintings help demonstrate this artistic movement: Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893) to the right, and [Otto Dix's *The Nun*](#) (1916). You can see how both paintings distort reality, though in different ways from the Impressionist era. These types of distortions create anxiety, and possibly fear in the viewer; the subject matter of the paintings are often dark, confusing, or both. With *The Scream*, we see a person-like creature without any defining features in the center, with almost child-like attention to details (note the two dots for the nose, and the pear-shaped head). This character is being pursued by two shadowy figures in the background. The distortions make it seem almost nightmare-like. View the short website regarding *The Nun* and you'll see even more distortions in a painting of a nun, the Virgin Mary, and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in the upper-left hand corner: most paintings in preceding centuries depicting the crucifixion and the Virgin Mary would at least seem realistic --- by distorting reality, using unconventional coloring, and further distortions with lines and proportionality, we see a truly Expressionistic technique depicting an otherwise Holy image.



Edvard Munch's "The Scream" (1893). US-[Public Domain](#).

Expressionism in Music.



Like many of the artistic movements, Expressionism trailed behind the artistic medium by a few decades. German-born composer Arnold Schoenberg was known for embracing the musical aesthetic by incorporating new types of compositional techniques in his music. He is known as the "father of musical Expressionism" along with his two students Anton Webern and Alban Berg. He fled Germany prior to World War II in order to escape Nazism, and immigrated to America, where he lived the rest of his life in LA, California. He was known as a composer, an educator (he was a Professor of Music Theory at UCLA), and his essays on music and musical thought. He developed a completely new way of organizing sound, which is known in music circles as the **12-tone system**. It's incredibly complex and difficult to explain in a Music Appreciation text, but the best way to explain it is that it completely embraces **atonality**.

The word **atonality** refers to music that has *no tonal center*. Sing "Mary had a Little Lamb" to yourself and stop on the 2nd to last note ("her fleece was bright as -----"). The fact that your mind is *demanding* that you sing the last note demonstrates **tonality** -- in other words, there is a "home pitch" established by rules and principles of Western musical tradition.

Atonality, on the other hand, embraces **pure dissonance**. It lacks the sense of a "home note," and the music does *not* sound pleasant. Many music students can't stand the music because it lacks beauty in a conventional or traditional sense. You'll learn more and will hear what we're talking about in the [Video](#)

[Presentation on this unit.](#)

Schoenberg also created his own unique way for singers to perform his music, called ***Sprechstimme***, which translates to "speech-voice" or "speech-sing." It's an interesting combination of talking and singing that sounds incredibly haunting and eerie. The

performer essentially speaks, but sustains the vowels to make a hybrid of singing with her speech. You'll hear this technique in the video presentation.

One of Schoenberg's most famous works is titled *Pierrot Lunaire*, which is a set of 21 poems of the same name by Albert Giraud set to music. Schoenberg wrote this collection for a small ensemble that consisted of a singer, flute, piano, violin, and cello. The combination of instruments became so popular that composers continue to write for *Pierrot ensemble* to this day. You'll learn more about this ensemble and this piece in the [Video Presentation](#).

Arnold Schoenberg, published in 1903. [PD-US](#).

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6.5: Avant-Garde

The Avant-garde

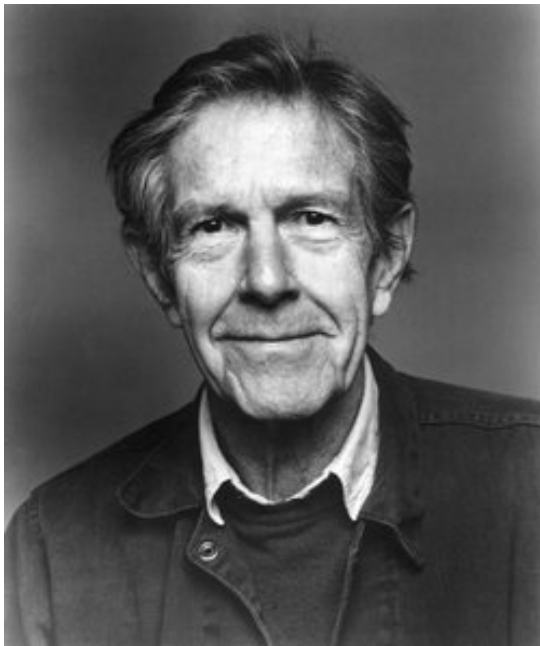
The term *Avant-garde* is a difficult concept to define, mainly because there are so many conflicting views about its origins in the arts. Put broadly, the Avant-garde pushes the boundaries of what is accepted by the mainstream, and is often known for its shock value. Some refer to the Avant-garde as synonymous with the *postmodernist* movement. Unlike the modernists of the early 20th century, which still held onto some semblance of tradition, the *post-modernists* often rebelled against all forms of tradition. The Avant-garde makes us reconsider our own artistic values, while often simultaneously mocking us and our sensibilities. Its roots lie in the 20th century Dada movement, which often sought to create satirical, comical, and slightly offensive art. [Visit this website on the Dada movement](#), and scroll through some of the paintings and sculptures, and you'll probably find yourself chuckling to yourself (the Mona Lisa with a mustache is particularly amusing).



By Marcel Duchamp - NPR arthistory.about.com, [Public Domain](#)

A great example of this can be seen above: Marcel Duchamp's famous photograph titled *Fountain* (1917), which depicts a urinal as a water fountain. There's so many things wrong with this picture, which is rooted in sarcasm and satire. Clearly, one wouldn't drink water from a urinal, but again, the effect is comical, offensive, satirical, and sarcastic.

John Cage and the Avant-garde in Music.



You may recall from the first page of this text, the question "What is music?" was proposed to you. Up until now, the music we've looked at is mostly conventional --- though you may not like some of the Expressionist, Modernist, or even Impressionist works, it still *sounded* like music. But the 1950s and 60s Avant-garde movement really makes us ask *what music really is*. As you watch some of these pieces listed below, keep in mind that the composers are trying to be funny, satirical, philosophic, or *even a combination of all three!*

The Avant-garde in music was popular in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in New York. A small group of like-minded Avant-garde musicians often wrote short pieces that questioned our very understanding of what music is, what it isn't, and what it *should* be. This group of composers became known as the "New York School." Among them was John Cage (1912-22, pictured left), who is known for his famous saying that "Everything we do is music." [With that being said, take a listen to his piece 4'33" and see if you agree with this saying!](#) (He used the name 4'33" because that was the length of the first performance of this piece.) If this is music, then what *can't* be music?

Cage was known for his innovative approach to piano music, especially with his music for **prepared piano**. [Take a listen to this short piano work](#),

and you'll notice that it sounds *nothing like a real piano*. That's because you'll see that the performer has inserted nuts, screws, bolts, and rubber stoppers in between many of the string. Sometimes, they place bicycle chains *on top of the piano strings* to make a tinny effect. **Prepared piano** pieces take hours to set up, as the performer needs to follow a chart that tells them what type of hardware to place in between the strings!

One of his other famous works is his sonata for *Toy Piano*. [Take a listen to this performance of his sonata for toy piano](#). Part of the Avant-garde nature of this piece is that it's a "serious" work for a toy!

Arguably one of his most Avant-garde works is called *Water Walk*. [Watch this short video of him performing this piece on the TV show I've got a Secret, live in 1960](#). If this can be considered music, then what *isn't* music?

You'll find in the Video Presentation to this page a longer discussion on Cage's philosophy on music and art in general, and will see a short discussion of his work *Child of Tree*. Before watching the video presentation, [watch this performance of Rosie Bergoniz perform Child of Tree](#), which is short improvisatory work for a variety of percussion instruments and things found in nature: leaves, beans, acorns -- it's truly an innovative work, and it continues to raise the question of "what is music?"

When you're done reading and listening to these pieces above, [watch the Video Presentation on this composer and time period](#).

(above): Photograph of John Cage from [Percussive Arts Society](#). Fair use under US law.

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6.6: Minimalism

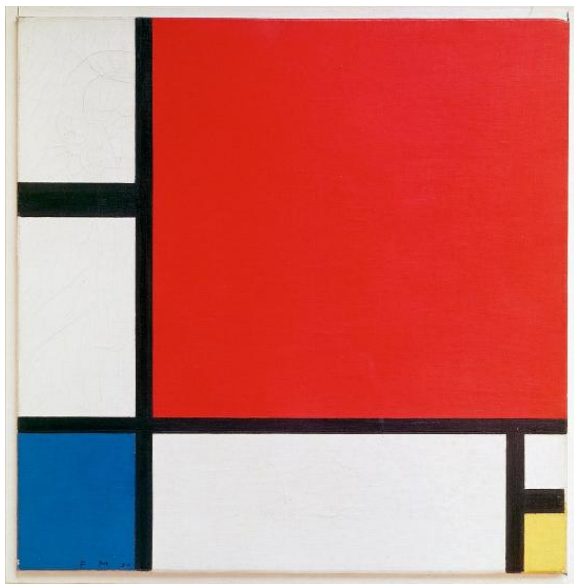
Minimalism.

Although the minimalist was a popular movement that emerged after World War II, and was most popular in the 1960s and 70s. The painting to the right is a perfect example of minimalist aesthetic: it rejected the complexity of the expressionists and to some extent, the Avant-garde (though some may consider the minimalist approach itself to be an Avant-garde rejection of the past!)

The painting to the right is titled *IKB 191* (1962), which stands for "International Klein Blue," a specific shade of blue! The painter Yves Klein painted several monochromatic works using this shade of blue, which perfectly represents the aesthetic that the minimalists embraced.

Minimalism in architecture often embraced simple shapes; paintings would include minimal material, and writers would often use as little words as necessary.

(right): *IKB 191* (1962) by Yves Klein. [Public Domain](#).



The painting to the left is a great example of minimalism that isn't a single shade of color (let's face it-

--how many of us would spend thousands of dollars for a "blue on canvas" painting?) Piet Mondrain's *Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue* (1930) pictured to the right shows a painter who chooses only 3 colors and 1 shape, and tries to get as much out of that idea as possible.

The three colors, red, yellow, and blue, are the *primary* colors, which are used to create all secondary colors. White and black are both the presence and absence of light, and the shape of the "rectangle" is found everywhere: the color shapes are rectangular, and even the black lines are technically rectangles!

Piet Mondrain painted several of these types of paintings, each titled *Composition for Red, Yellow, and Blue* followed by the date in which he

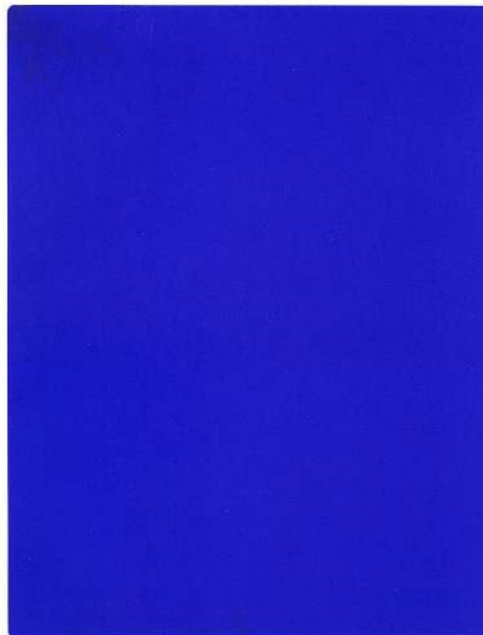
Painted it. Each of them approach the concept differently. For instance, here, the red square is enormous, and the yellow is very small; others minimize *all* of the colors, and really highlight the white squares and black lines.

By Piet Mondrian - [1], [Public Domain](#).

Minimalism in Music.

Like the paintings above, minimalist composers often choose a single idea and try to get as much music as they can out of it. Similar to the visual arts, musical minimalism was popular in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in New York. Composers like Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Phillip Glass, and John Adams were known for their different approaches to minimalism. The characteristics of minimalist music include:

1. **the music is usually very repetitive.** Composers will often come up with a single idea, and repeat it over and over again
2. **the music changes gradually.** Of course, if the music was repetitive without any change, the music would be boring. So, composers often repeat things over and over, and *slowly introduce change* as the music progresses. The music might last longer than an hour, but is only comprised of a single idea!



3. **the music is often very long.** Because the music repeats, and changes gradually, the music is often a lot longer than you would expect a "minimal" piece to be.

4. **the music often incorporates phasing.** Phasing is a technique where 2 or more lines playing the same thing at the same time begin to go out of sync with one another. Imagine the windshield wipers on a bus --- they typically begin at the same time, but slowly get out of sync with each other. This is called **phasing**, and often occurs in minimalist music.

5. **the music is often hypnotic.** All of the above helps create an interesting hypnotic effect.

As you watch the video presentation for this page on [minimalism](#), you'll come across a variety of different works by Steve Reich, all of which incorporate these types of techniques to some degree, although some of them are simply shorter works that simply explore a single technique.

That changes with his piece 2x5, which was written for 2 live 5-piece rock bands! The work, which is in 3 movements, incorporates all of these different techniques at the same time in a truly moving and energetic composition.

Photograph of Steve Reich (b. 1936) taken by Bernard Gotfryd. [Public Domain](#).



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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

7: Keyboard Music

[7.1: Early Keyboard Instruments through the Baroque Period](#)

[7.2: The Piano in the Classical Era and the Piano Sonata](#)

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7.1: Early Keyboard Instruments through the Baroque Period

Keyboard Instruments.

After reading through page learning about early keyboard instruments, view the [video presentation for this section](#).



Part of the Zilten Mosaic from the 2nd century AD discovered in Libya, depicting the hydraulis, a water-powered organ. [CC BY-SA 1.0](#)

The Hydraulis.



The oldest-known hydraulis housed in the Archeological Museum of Dion, Greece. Picture by I. QuartierLatin1968, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

When we think of keyboard instruments, we often think that they're much more modern than they really are. The piano, which is the most common acoustic keyboard instrument of the modern day was only invented around 1710. But organs -- a type of keyboard instrument --- have been around for over 2 millennia. The above picture depicts a person playing a *hydraulis*, which is a water-powered keyboard organ from the Ancient world. The **hydraulis** is the oldest-known keyboard instrument in recorded human history from around the 3rd century B.C., and is pre-cursor to the modern-day organ. The picture to the left is the oldest-discovered hydraulis from the 1st century B.C., and is housed in the Archeological Museum of Dion, Greece.

This instrument is very different from the keyboard instruments that we use today like the piano, harpsichord, clavichord, and virginal. These instruments all use strings in some capacity, as you'll read below. For the hydraulis, water pressure was used to create pressure for air to escape the pipes. Depending on the size and girth of the pipe, the sound would either be low or high (larger pipes created low pitches, while smaller pipes created higher pitches).

Watch this video of Justus Willberg performing a short piece on the hydraulis; you'll hear a very soft and almost flute-like sound escaping the various pipes that are pointing upward. This sound is very similar to some of the "flute" sounds heard on modern-day organs often heard in church music. You'll read more about the pipe organ below.

The Robertsbridge Codex.



While music notation is centuries old, modern Western musical notation dates back to around 650 A.D. If you look at early notation from this time period, you'll notice that there are *some* similarities to modern notation: there's a few horizontal lines (called the staff), and many dots placed on them. These dots don't look like modern notes (they're called *neumes*), but they function in a similar way. Benedictine monk Guido d'Arezzo helped to establish the 5-line staff that we use today in the 10th and 11th centuries AD. The notation was still different than what we have today, but it was the beginning of what we consider *modern* notation.

The **Robertsbridge Codex** (pictured left) is an early manuscript that dates back to around 1360 (toward the end of the Medieval period) and contains the oldest music ever *written* solely for the keyboard. While we're not sure exactly what instrument it was written for, it's likely that it was some type of organ (we'll see the organ below).

Look at the manuscript to the left, and you'll see that it looks like modern music notation, but it also looks very different! Look closely, and you'll see the five lines that we still use today; notes all have stems, although they look like they're written backwards by today's standards. Scholars who study early music of the Medieval Period know how to translate the notation you see to the left into modern notation so that modern performers can play it. [Take a listen to this modern recording of this performance](#) of Daniel

Mantey performing this piece on a **clavichord**, an early keyboard instrument.

Picture of the Robertsbridge Codex, [taken from ClassicFM](#).

The Clavichord and the Virginal.



(left): Picture of a Virginal by Gérard Janot - Own work, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

(right): Picture of a Clavichord by Gérard Janot - Own work, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Both the clavichord and virginal are similar keyboard instruments. While the clavichord was invented in the late Middle Ages (around 1300), the virginal was invented around the Renaissance period (around 1500s). Both instruments are played by pressing a key, which in turn, moves a plectrum up, which plucks a string. The instruments therefore have a "twangy" effect, because you can actually hear the string being plucked (imagine plucking a guitar string with your finger nail, and that's the sound you get). [Watch this video of Ernst Stolz performing a piece titled "Rowland"](#) by John Dowland (1563-1626) an English Renaissance. [Then, watch this video of Steven Devine demonstrating the sound of the Clavichord](#), creating a very different and more unique keyboard sound. As you listen to these pieces, you may think to yourself that these pieces sound "old." Almost a "ye-olde" type of old. There is a reason for this: the music written in the Medieval Period (5th century-15th century) and the Renaissance 1400s-1600s treated melody and harmony very differently than our modern music. And so not only do the timbres sound different, but the music itself is written using almost a different type of language than modern music!

You'll notice that the instruments are visually very stunning -- we saw the **harpsichord** in [Chapter 5.2](#) on chamber music in the Baroque period (1600-1750). These instruments were treated not only as musical instruments, but also as beautiful works of visual art, hence the murals painted on the inside of the shells.

The Harpsichord.

The virginal from above is a member of the **harpsichord family**. The most common type of plucked keyboard instrument that we still see today is simply called the **harpsichord** (mostly because the other instruments like the virginal are no longer in widespread



use). It was likely invented in the late Middle Ages (around 1300s) and was used prominently in the Baroque Era (1600-1750). It sounds similar to the virginal, but it produces a more powerful, richer, and fuller sound. The "twang" of the plucked strings are still present, which is common feature of all of these different keyboard instruments. Similar to the other instruments, the harpsichord is also highly ornamented with paintings and beautiful woodwork.

Unlike the clavichord from above, the harpsichord does not have "touch sensitivity." In other words, no matter how hard or soft you hit the key, the sound will always be the same loudness. To allow performers to get loud and soft sounds on their instrument, some harpsichords have two rows of keyboards on this instrument (similar to an organ). These keyboards are called **manuals** and it allows for performers to play loud and soft. [Watch this video of Jean Rondeau performing J.P. Rameau's *Les Sauvages*](#) (you'll need to mind the artsy camerawork; this is phenomenal performance, but the videography is a bit much!)

Pictured left: harpsichord, by Gérard Janot - Own work, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The Pipe Organ.



Pipe organ at St. Germain cathedral in Paris, taken by Gérard Janot - Own work, [Public Domain](#).

The modern pipe organ is many centuries old, and dates back to the 8th century. Rather than water pressure being used to create air pressure, a bellows was used instead. For smaller instruments, the performer would pump with their feet or knees to create a vacuum to collect air, and push it through the pipes as they played ([you can see a short video of a performer doing there here](#)). For larger instruments, performers would actually need someone to pump a bellows to do it for them!

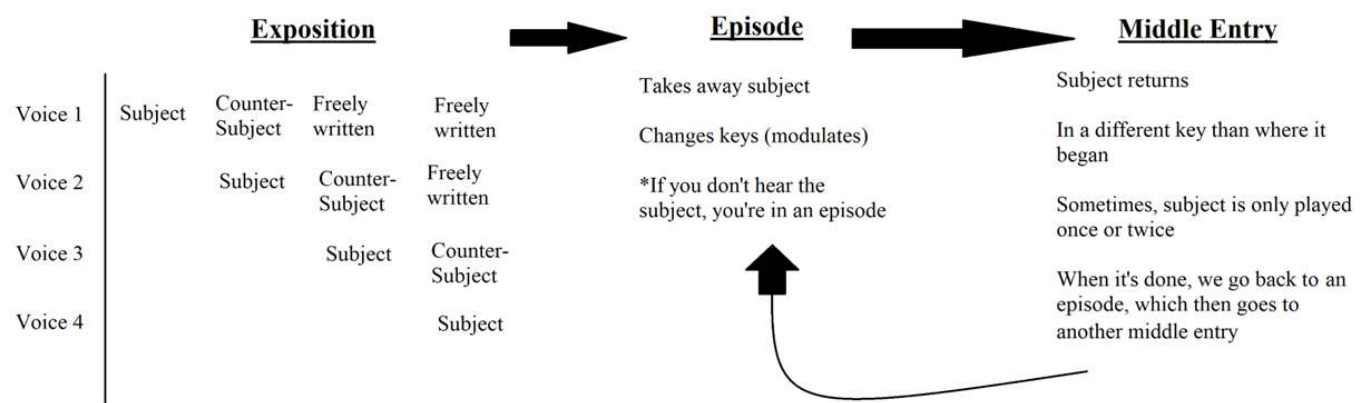
Most organs have at least 2 manuals, though some of them have up to 7 different manuals! In addition to the manuals, organs also have a keyboard for the feet; performers thus perform on up to 7 different manuals with their hands, as well as a single manual with their feet.

The modern pipe organ is capable of playing literally hundreds of different sounds, each of which resemble real instruments. They can create reed sounds, string sounds, woodwind sounds, the typical "organ" sound, or combine them in dozens of ways. Depending on what the pipe is made of, its size and even shape, the sound will be completely different. This allows the performer to change sound, and combine a variety of different colors with one another. We often associate the organ with "church sound," at least from the Catholic perspective -- that's because up until the early 1960s, the Vatican wouldn't allow *any other instrument* in the Catholic church (with *very little* exception).

The beauty of the organ is that a single performer is able to perform multiple "instruments" at the same time -- a single performer can actually play a *symphony by themselves!*

Many composers of the Baroque Period (1600-1750) composed music solely for the organ. Some of the most famous organ works were composed by J.S. Bach (whom you read about in the earlier chapter 5.2). Arguably his most famous work for the organ is titled *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor*. [Take a listen to organist Hans-Andre Stamm performing this famous work that's often associated with Halloween](#) before moving on to the "Fugue." When you're done, [watch this video presentation for the Organ](#), and you'll see just how complicated this instrument really is.

The Fugue.



The form of a 4-voice fugue.

Bach and his contemporaries wrote hundreds of fugues. Not all fugues are written for the organ, but Bach did write dozens of them for a solo organist.

Fugues are both a genre of music, and they also contain their form (called "fugue form"). All fugues are **polyphonic in texture**, and employ a compositional technique known as **imitation**. Think "row row row your boat," being sung as a round. This is **imitation**. All fugues contain at least 3 different layers called "voices" (even if it's an instrument and not being sung, it's still called a voice). Some fugues contain up to 7 voices -- that means that at any given time, the ear and brain can hear up to 7 distinct melodic layers happening at the same time! The fugue we're listening to in this unit is called the "Little Fugue in G Minor," which has 4 distinct voices.

Fugues have several sections: their first section is called the **Exposition**. Here, **voice 1** plays a melody, that we call the **subject**. When it's done, **voice 2** enters with the same melody through **imitation**, while **voice 1** plays a **counter-melody** called the **counter subject**. When voice 2 finishes the subject, **voice 3** then enters with the subject; when it's done, **voice 4** then plays the subject while all the other voices continue to play their own thing. When all of the voices have finished playing the subject, the exposition is over and the music moves into the **episode**.

During the episode, the composer takes away the subject (we've heard it too much, and want a rest!) The composer will **modulate**, which means to change key to a new area, at which point the subject returns. When the subject returns, we call this a **middle entry** - in other words, the subject enters again, in the middle of the piece. After the middle entry, we move to another episode---then another middle entry, over and over until the composer decides to finish.

The diagram above demonstrates the entire form of Bach's "Little Fugue." [The video presentation discusses this complex form in more detail, going through it section by section.](#)

For those interested in downloading a PDF handout of this unit's PowerPoint slides, [click here](#).

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7.2: The Piano in the Classical Era and the Piano Sonata

The Piano.



(left): A grand piano; (right): and an upright piano. Uploaded to Creative Commons by Gryffindor and Megodenas. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The modern piano was invented around 1700 by Italian keyboard maker Bartolomeo Cristofori, originally called the "gravicembalo col piano e forte," which translates to "keyboard instrument that can play soft or loud." This was significant because the various predecessors to the piano were not capable of creating such a wide palette of louds and softs. The piano underwent many evolutions through the next centuries, and although it was around during the Baroque period, its popularity gained steam in the early Classical Era (around 1730-1750). By the time the Classical Era was in full swing (1750~1820), the piano was well-established.

Unlike the harpsichord family and the clavichord, the piano's strings are *not* plucked, but rather, they're struck with a felt-tipped hammer. [The video presentation for this unit describes in further detail the intricate ways in which the piano creates sound.](#)

Pianos in the Classical Era (1750~1820) were quite different than modern-era pianos, and are often referred to as *pianofortes*. Though they were essentially created the same, there were significant differences in the specifics of its design. Because of this, *pianofortes* have a thinner and lighter sound. For music lovers who want a more "authentic" sound—that is, a sound that was more accurate to the time period in which it was written—listening to recordings of earlier piano works by Classical Era composers like Haydn and Mozart on the pianoforte is more satisfying. The video presentation for this unit demonstrates the difference in sound between a pianoforte and a modern era piano.

Composers in the Classical Era (1700~1820) wrote many pieces for the solo piano. Some pieces were written as single movements -- we looked at a few single-movement pieces in [Chapter 4.5](#) (a single-movement "Theme and Variation") and [Chapter 4.6.2](#) (*Fur Elise*, which was a single-movement work in Rondo Form). However, many composers wrote **piano sonatas**, which were instrumental sonatas written for a single solo pianist. These are similar to the instrumental sonatas we briefly mentioned in [Chapter 5.3](#), but instead of including another instrument, these pieces are written for a single performer.

The Piano Sonata: a 3-movement cycle

The 3-movement Instrumental Sonata Cycle

<u>Movement Number</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Speed</u>	<u>Form</u>	<u>Other Info</u>
1	tonic	fast	'sonata form'	most expansive movement
2	not tonic	slow	any form	lyrical and expressive
3	tonic	fast	rondo	light, technically demanding

*There is usually very little thematic connection between the movements, but short musical motives are often reused throughout the entire 3-movement cycle to strengthen the connection between the movements

(above): a diagram depicting the 3 movements of an instrumental sonata

Composers of the Classical Era like Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven all wrote many piano sonatas, exploring the capabilities of the solo pianist. Some of these pieces are incredibly difficult even by today's standards!

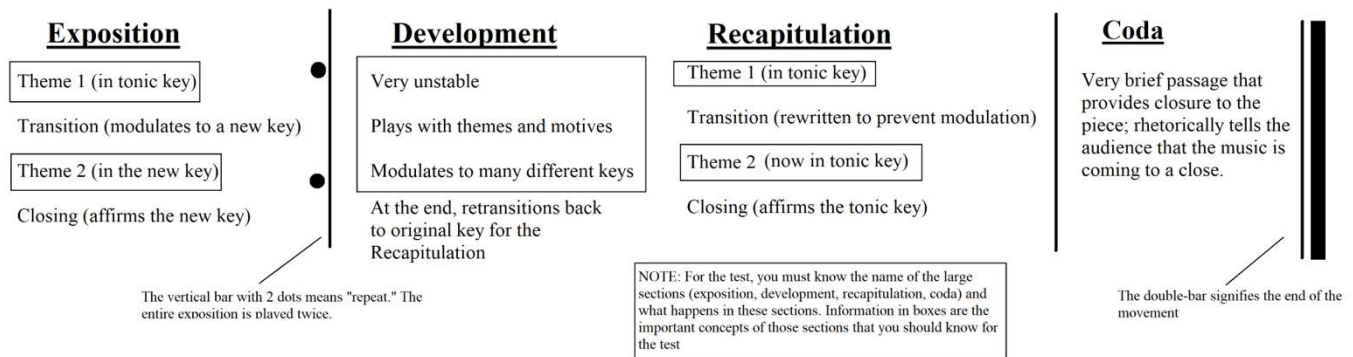
The piano sonata, similar to other instrumental sonatas in the Classical Era, typically contain 3 movements. The diagram below depicts the 3-movements of an instrumental sonata. Movements 1 and 3 are usually fast, and in the "tonic" or home key, while the 2nd movement is slow, and often in a different key. Similar to a 4-movement Classical Symphony or String Quartet, the first movement of an instrumental sonata is often in sonata form, while the last movement is typically in rondo form. The 2nd movement can be found in any movement --- as long as it's slow.

Although the first movement of the sonata is often fast, one of Beethoven's most famous piano sonatas, the "Moonlight" sonata subverts our expectations by using a *slow* movement for the 1st movement, a light-hearted dance for the second movement, and an incredibly expansive and technically challenging and demanding 3rd movement in sonata form! [Watch this video of Daniel Barenboim perform this famous work](#); the first movement is incredibly peaceful, and is found in many "Classical Music to Relax To" playlists --- that third movement would never make that playlist, as it's violent, explosive, and exciting!

The First Movement of an Instrumental Sonata: Sonata Form

As mentioned above, the first movement of the instrumental sonata is in "sonata form," which you may recall from [Chapter 4.6.3](#) when we looked at the first movement of Mozart's Symphony in G minor. For your benefit, the diagram from that chapter is reproduced here. As you can see, the music begins with an Exposition, and consists of 4 distinct sections: "theme 1," "transition," "theme 2," and "closing." After these sections, composers often repeat everything before moving into the "development" section, where the composer plays with small ideas that they introduced in the Exposition. After the development, the music moves into the "Recapitulation," which restates everything from the Exposition. [The video presentation](#) on this unit explores the first movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in B flat Major, K. 333 in detail, which is what we call a "textbook example" of sonata form - that is, it follows this template to the T. Many other sonata movements deviate from this in some way or another.

Sonata form Template



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7.3: 19th-Century Piano Composers

The Piano in the 19th Century: Frederic Chopin

By the 19th century, the piano became a common fixture in middle class homes. It was essentially the television of the middle class. Instruments were much cheaper to produce because of the advances in manufacturing during the Industrial Revolution, and many people used the piano for at-home entertainment. It was common for children and adults alike to learn how to read music and play at the piano. Some composers like Hungarian composer Franz Liszt arranged orchestral music for piano so that those who could not attend orchestra performances to hear famous works could at least perform piano arrangements of them.



In the 19th century, composers wrote an incredible amount of music for solo piano, chamber groups with piano, and songs for voice and piano. We also see the rise of the piano composer in this era. Composers like Frederic Chopin (1810-49) earned his living by composing, performing, and teaching piano -- he wrote over 230 works for solo piano, and only a handful of pieces for other instruments. Everything that he wrote included the piano in some way. Many of the pieces that he wrote were single movements, each of which had their own unique form and style.

Chopin was born in Poland, though moved to Paris when he was 21, never to return due to political strife involving Poland and Russia. His love of Poland never died, however. He, along with many other composers of the 19th century, were ardent **nationalists**: Nationalism in the 19th century was a political and cultural movement that sought to break away from the larger empires in favor of self-autonomy. Artists and composers from different countries in Europe had sought to establish their own musical and artistic style that separated them from other countries. Composers of French, Italian, Russian, Slovakian, Hungarian, Spanish and other countries all sought to establish their own musical style.

As a Polish nationalist at heart, Chopin wrote piano music based off of Polish dances, including **mazurkas** and **Polonaises**. [Watch this video of Marjan Kiepora perform an exciting Mazurka in B flat major.](#) You may notice that as the performer plays, it's a bit difficult to keep a beat. You might ask "how can I dance to this, if he keeps slowing down and speeding up?" This is because the performer is playing with **rubato**, which is term that refers to the slowing and speeding of the tempo. The term literally translates to "robbed time," which is part of the interesting character of the music. [Other mazurkas are a bit more somber like this one in A minor.](#)

Chopin was also a **Romantic** in style. As mentioned earlier, the Romantic era was a movement in the 19th century where composers really sought to be emotionally expressive with their music. One of the ways they could do this was by creating incredibly lyrical melodies in their instrumental music --- the idea was to "make the instrument sing." This is perfectly embodied in Chopin's **Nocturnes** -- short pieces that evoke a calming atmosphere. [These two nocturnes are contrasting in character](#): one is bit more somber and dark, while the second is a little more on the bright side. Both of them, however, have incredibly lyrical melodies, which are perfect examples of the Romantic style.

Chopin also wrote **Etudes**, which are short concert pieces that test the limits of the performer. The word "etude" translates to "study," or a "piece that students study to get better." Chopin, being a professional pianist, took the etude and turned it into a concert piece that *only professionals* could even attempt to perform. True to its name, each etude focuses on a single aspect of the pianists' abilities. [Watch this video of Evengy Kissin playing Chopins' "Wave" Etude](#), which focuses on the pianists' ability to move up and down the keyboard with both hands simultaneously.

Chopin wrote other works as well: waltzes, preludes, concertos, songs for soprano and piano, piano sonatas---you name it, he wrote it! But these pieces listed above give a good taste of what type of music Chopin was writing during the 19th century.

[When you watch the video presentation on this unit](#), you'll also come across another etude by a 20th century composer named Gyorgi Ligeti. Again, it challenges the performer's abilities, but like much music of the 20th century, it's incredibly dissonant and chaotic.

(above): photograph of Chopin, by Louis-Auguste. [Public Domain.](#)

7.3: 19th-Century Piano Composers is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

8: The Instrumental Concerto

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8.1: Instrumental Concertos

The Concerto.



Martha Argerich performs Franz Liszt's *Piano Concerto No. 1*. Pianist is in the center, stage-down ([Screenshot from YouTube](#))

The term *concerto* (pronounced "cun-CHAIR-toe") refers to a multi-movement work performed by a soloist or small group of soloists accompanied by a larger ensemble (usually an orchestra). The earliest known concertos were written in the late 1600s (during the Baroque Period) -- and recall that the orchestra back in the Baroque Period was typically a small ensemble comprised of strings. The picture you see above is a concerto written in the 1800s, which is why it's much larger than the Baroque orchestra.

There are primarily two types of concertos: the **solo concerto** and the **concerto grosso**. While the **solo concerto** is comprised of a single performer acting as the soloist, the **concerto grosso** is comprised of multiple soloists, each interacting with one another, accompanied by the larger ensemble. The concerto grosso fell out of popularity in the Classical Era and the 19th Century era, but enjoyed somewhat of a revival in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Concertos are traditionally comprised of 3 movements, the outer movements of which are fast, and the middle of which is slow. In this regard, it resembles the instrumental sonata of the Classical Era, which often comprises the same 3-movement "fast-slow-fast" structure. As you would expect, we see different types of concertos in the Baroque Period compared to the Classical Era, in terms of instrumentation and the overall form of each movement. Concertos in the 19th century (and the "Romantic" style within the 19th century) as well as the 20th century mostly built upon the foundation of the Classical Era. In this chapter, we'll look at four different concertos: 2 from the Baroque and 1 from the Classical Era.

For those interested in downloading a PDF handout of this unit's PowerPoint slides, [click here](#).

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8.2: Concertos in the Baroque Period

The Solo Concerto.



André Rebacz performs a solo concerto by Anrtonio Vivaldi with the French Chamber Orchestra ([Screenshot from YouTube](#))

In the Baroque Period, the solo concerto consisted of a single soloist and a very small orchestra -- by today's standards, the orchestra would be considered a "chamber orchestra" because there are usually no more than 15 string players within. As we should expect in the Baroque Period, there is a harpsichordist in addition to the string family, and sometimes we see a lute player (recall that the lute is similar to a guitar). As you can see in the picture above, there are only a handful of string performers in the background. The soloist will stand (or sit) in the very front of the orchestra and will perform typically very challenging and demanding music. The soloist is often a **virtuoso** - or a performer who is incredibly skilled (the "rock star," so to speak). Early students and amateurs are usually not able to perform these types of pieces because of how difficult they are. After reading through this description of the **ritornello form** below and listening to Vivaldi's "Four Seasons," [watch the video presentation for this chapter](#), and you'll have more of an understanding as to how the music is organized.

Ritornello Form.

The Ritornello Form

Ritornello	Solo	(Partial Ritornello)	Solo	(Partial Ritornello)	Solo	(Partial Ritornello)	Solo	(Partial Ritornello)
Tonic Key	Other Key							Tonic Key

Most solo concerto and concerto grossi feature movements in Ritornello Form. The term "**ritornello**" is Italian for "**little return**." This is because the musical material is the same, thus the same melody **returns** throughout the entire piece in the ritonello section (similar to a chorus in a pop song). The ritornello is typically played by the full orchestra; while the soloists may play with them, the **focus of the attention** is on the orchestra, and **not** the soloists. When the full orchestra plays at the same time, we call this the **tutti** section, which is Italian for "all."

After the opening ritornello, the music typically **modulates** (changes key) for the solo section. Here, the full orchestra backs off and lets the soloists play. Here, the soloists play technically demanding or very expressive music; these are the more impressive sections of the entire movement.

The music will continue to modulate, alternating back and forth between ritornello statements, and solo statements, until the composer returns to the **tonic key**, which will ultimately bring the movement to a close.

Vivaldi's "Spring Concerto" from *The Four Seasons*

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) was a well-known violinist, composer, performer, and teacher. He was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest, and was known as the "Red Priest" due to his notorious red hair. He spent a significant portion of his life serving as the music director at an orphanage for girls. During his career, he composed almost 350 solo concertos, 2/3 of which were solo violin. His most famous output was a set of 4 violin concertos titled *The Four Seasons*, each of which is based off of a poem that he wrote himself that describes each season.

Recall that when composers write instrumental music about something non-musical like a story, a poem, a geographic location--- literally any non-musical element, we call this **program music**.

We'll look at his most famous work, the "Spring" concerto. The poetry that accompanies this movement is as follows:

"Festive spring has arrived.



The birds salute it with their happy song.
And the brooks, caressed by gentle breezes
flow with a sweet murmur.
The sky is covered with a black mantle,
and thunder and lightning announce a storm.
When they are silent, the birds
return to sing their lovely song."

(above): portrait of Vivaldi by Unidentified painter, [Public Domain](#).

[Now watch a video of this performance](#). Pay attention to the ritornello section (the main melody played by the orchestra). This continues to come back throughout the movement, as it is constantly interrupted by the soloist. If you follow along with the diagram above, you'll be able to hear the "dialogue" between the soloist and the orchestra.

As you listen to the music, pay attention to the time stamps below; you'll actually hear these different sections of the poem within the music. The "joyful spring" is depicted in the music's major mode and upbeat tempo; the bird songs can be heard in the two violins playing in dialogue with one another; the brooks and breezes can be heard in the soft and fast passagework of the string, and the thunderstorm can be heard in the rumbling of the cellos. It's very creative, and very unique for the time!

- 0:00: Joyful spring (in the major mode, and upbeat)
- 0:30: Birds' happy song
- 1:11: Brooks and gentle breezes
- 1:40: sky covered with black mantle, announcing the storm
- 2:18: birds come back after the storm

Remember that this is simply the first movement of the "Spring" concerto, which consists of 3 movements, each with more poetry! He wrote 3 more full concertos, each based off another set of poetry that depicted another season!

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8.3: The Concerto Grosso

The Concerto Grosso.



A picture of the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra performing Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no. 2. [Screenshot from YouTube.](#)

The word *grosso* refers to "big." In the world of manufacturing, a *gross* refers to a dozen dozen units, or 144 units ($12 \times 12 = 144$). In music, a concerto *grosso* therefore refers to a *group* of soloists accompanied by an orchestra, rather than a single soloist. These different soloists all interact with one another as individuals, while simultaneously interacting with the entire orchestra as a single *unit*. The concerto grosso was popular in the Baroque Period, and as mentioned earlier, fell out of popularity in the next few centuries. Early 20th century composers revived it to some degree, but it never attained that popularity it once held in the Baroque Period.

The piece we'll look at here is one of J.S. Bach's more famous concerto grosso, his second of six *Brandenburg Concertos*. In 1721, Bach compiled these six concertos and presented them to Christian Ludwig, who was at the time the Margrave of Brandenburg-Schwedt (a German royal of a territory of the Holy Roman Empire). This piece is most famous for its interesting blend of two different forms and its eclectic ensemble comprised of trumpet, oboe, recorder, and violin. [Take a listen to the opening of this piece](#), and you'll hear each solo instrument entering into the mix one by one. You may also see that these instruments look a little different from our modern instruments. The trumpet has *holes* instead of valves, and the oboe looks different too. This is because the performers are playing on **period instruments**, which means they're playing on instruments that are as close to what Bach would have used as possible. This helps to create more of an "authentic" sound -- audiences can hear timbres that more accurately reflect what Bach would have written for in the 1600s and 1700s.

In this piece, Bach treats the form in a very innovative manner by blending the ritornello form with the fugue's form! He treats each soloist as a single "voice" from a fugue -- every time you hear the soloists performing, they're playing the fugue's exposition, or a middle entry. He then treats the orchestra's "return" in the ritornello as a fugue's episode. This highly unique blend of two unrelated forms is not uncommon for Bach, as he was a master of the fugue, and loved to insert fugues into his music whenever possible. The form's blend thus resembles the following formal structure:

Bach's Blending of Ritornello and Fugue Form

Solo	Ritornello	Solo	(Partial Ritornello)	Solo	(Partial Ritornello)	Solo
Fugue Exposition	Episode	Middle Entry	Episode	Middle Entry	Episode	Final Entry

Although this may be a bit difficult to unfold here, [the video presentation for this unit explains this blending of form in much more detail.](#)

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8.4: Concertos in the Classical Era

The Classical Concerto.

When we compare the concerto in the Classical Era (1750~1820) to the Baroque Period (1600-1750), we see a similar evolution of size and form that we see when we compare the instrumental sonata in the two periods. The Classical Era concerto keeps the 3-movement "fast-slow-fast" structure that we see in the Baroque period, but the form of each individual movement is treated similarly to the instrumental sonata: the first movement is often in sonata form, the final movement is often in rondo form, and the middle movement is written in any form, as long as it's slow. As one would expect, the *size* of the orchestra is larger than it was in the Baroque Period. You'll notice that the harpsichord is no longer used, and the orchestra combines strings with woodwinds, brass, and some percussion as well.

All of the well-known composers of the Classical Era (Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven) composed concertos for a variety of instruments: flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano---you name it, they wrote it! These pieces were not for amateurs, as mentioned in the previous pages. As a matter of fact, as the time periods progressed into the 19th and then 20th centuries, the music became more and more challenging for the performers. Composers often sought to push the limits of the performers. Often, composers would write their music with a specific soloist in mind, so they already knew what their soloist would be capable of.

The Expanded Sonata Form.

In addition to a larger orchestra, Classical Era composers treated the first movement's sonata form more expansively. [Readers should re-familiarize themselves with sonata form before reading on.](#)

In the concerto's first movement's expanded sonata form, the entire orchestra typically plays the entire exposition without the soloist at all as an introduction. Then, the entire exposition is repeated, this time played primarily by the soloist. The exposition with the soloist is then repeated! This is referred to as the *double* exposition: Exposition 1 is played by the orchestra, and it is then repeated with the soloist performing the themes instead of the orchestra. [Listen to the first 3 minutes of Mozart's flute concerto performed by Emmanuel Pahud.](#) You'll hear the orchestra introduce the flute by playing all of the exposition before the flute soloist even plays a single note. The flute will then enter and play all of the themes with the orchestra accompanying them.

After the 2nd exposition, the music moves into the development, as we would expect before returning to the Recapitulation. Instead of concluding the music, however, the recapitulation always leads to a **cadenza**: here, the entire orchestra drops out, and the soloist plays their own unaccompanied music, almost improvisationally --- sometimes up to 2 or 3 minutes before the orchestra joins back in, and brings the movement to a close.

Traditionally speaking, the soloist would actually write their own cadenza, but composers would write out a cadenza themselves when they published the music because not all performers are capable of writing their own music! [Take a listen to the cadenza in Mozart's flute concerto:](#) here, you'll hear the orchestra drop out entirely, while the flute player plays their own solo for over a minute before the orchestra joins back in.

The diagram below demonstrates the entire form of this 1st movement. As you listen to the entire piece, follow along with the diagram below and see if you can follow where you are in the in music. The time stamps below show where the large sections occur in the movement.

<u>Exposition 1</u>	<u>Exposition 2</u>	<u>Development</u>	<u>Recapitulation</u>	<u>Cadenza</u>	<u>Coda</u>
orchestra alone	flute and orch	flute and orch	return of themes from exposition 2	solo passage	conclusion flute and orch
0:53	1:50 2:20	4:16	5:50 6:19	8:05	9:16

When you're finished, [watch the video presentation on this piece](#), and you'll have a strong understanding of the music's overall form.

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9: Unit 2- Music and Drama

Music and Drama.

So far, we've looked primarily at instrumental music this unit: although we looked at *some* of music's relationship with stories and text, the majority of the music was purely "abstract," especially the music from the Baroque and Classical era. These abstract or "absolute" musics had no story attached to them -- the beauty was in the sound and its organization.

And yet, we did look at *some* music that had a dramatic connection. Some of the music was *purely instrumental*, without any words attached. This is **program music**: purely instrumental music that depicts some non-musical narrative or element. Recall Debussy's *Voiles*: a short piano piece that depicts the atmosphere of floating on a boat in the middle of a breezeless ocean. Or Bartok's *Out of Doors*, which was purely instrumental music that depicted insect sounds, or the imagery of two animals fighting in the woods. Even Vivaldi's *Spring* violin concerto, which had its own poetry attached to it, was purely instrumental (recall that it was *based* on the text, but the text wasn't spoken or sung during the music). The only music that we really looked at that was sung was Schoenberg's "Moondrunk" from *Pierrot Lunaire*, and it was mostly for the purpose of the eerie timbre created through Schoenberg's *sprechstimme* technique (the "speech sing" sound).

This unit will address more directly Music and its relationship to drama and narrative text. We will first look at two pieces of Romantic-style 19th century **program** music. These pieces very vividly tell a story with their music. After this, we will look at a substantial amount of song and other types of sung vocal music, addressing music's relationship with the voice and the text. We will then address music and staged or filmed drama: Opera, Film, and Video Games.

Throughout this unit, make sure you're asking yourself how the music, text, and narrative interact with one another. Do they confirm each other? Do they contradict each other? Is there any element of foreshadowing? Does the music accurately reflect the text? Understanding these questions will help us understand music from the *literary* perspective, rather than simply its formal makeup.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

10: Program Music

[10.1: Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet](#)

[10.2: Smetana's "The Moldau"](#)

The term "Program Music" refers to **purely instrumental music (without any voices singing) that is based off of an extra-musical narrative**. (We saw an example of program music already when we examined Vivaldi's "Spring" concerto).

Program music can tell a story, or it can be simply inspired by some non-musical idea. If we composed a piece of music that told the story of the *Lord of the Rings*, that would be one type of program music. If we decided to then compose a single piece of music that depicted Superman as a character in the D.C. universe, that would be another type of program music. It might not tell a story of Superman's adventures, but it might simply "musically depict" him---that would be an example of program music as well.

If we wrote a piece of music that depicted the Grand Canyon --- that would be another example of program music!

Anything unrelated to music that serves as the inspiration of the music itself is considered program music.

Very often, composers who write program music will write **program notes** that accompany the music. These notes are typically given to the performers and the audience before playing or listening to the music. This way, everyone knows what type of story the composer is trying to depict with his or her music.

This chapter addresses 2 important pieces of program music in the 19th century: Tchaikovsky's musical telling of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Smetana's instrumental work that depicts a national landmark from his home country. As you listen to these pieces, pay close attention to how the music interacts with the pre-existing drama. Even without any words, you'll be able to hear certain elements of the story within the music!

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10.1: Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet

Tchaikovsky: *Romeo and Juliet*.



Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-93) was a Russian-born composer who is best known for his overtures, ballets, and symphonies. Perhaps his best-known work is his ballet *The Nutcracker*, which depicts a Russian folk tale centered around the Christmas holiday. His music combined Russian sounds with the musical tradition of the Western European composers, which helped him gain much more popularity than his Russian contemporaries. He is most known for his treatment of melody and orchestration: his melodies are long, lush, and lyrical -- the embodiment of the Romantic style. His orchestration was full of huge swells of dynamics. As you listen to his orchestral music, you'll notice that it sounds better with the volume up! His softs are almost imperceptible, but his louds can almost blow out your speakers!

This unit looks at his piece *Romeo and Juliet*, which is purely instrumental music that tells the story of Shakespeare's play of the same name. The piece is written as a single-movement for orchestra. As such, it can't be called a *symphony*, because these pieces have more than 1 movement. We thus call this piece an **overture**. **Overtures** grow out of the Classical Era that came before him as a single-movement work, often in **sonata form**.

The question becomes: "How can we tell the story of Romeo and Juliet using only music?"

Tchaikovsky does this by providing the most important characters their own musical **theme**. If you [re-familiarize yourself with the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*](#), you'll recall that there are several important **characters** and several important **plot points**. Tchaikovsky provides **musical themes** to all of these different elements of Shakespeare's play, and organizes it around a very expanded sonata form.

As one might expect, because this is the 19th century Romantic style, the sonata form is *much more expansive* than the Classical Era. This single-movement piece is about 20 minutes long, and depicts the entire story of *Romeo and Juliet* through the themes, and the way they interact with the sonata form.

Photo of Tchaikovsky by Émile Reutlinger - NYPL Digital Gallery — Image ID: 1158492, [Public Domain](#).

Musical Themes.

Tchaikovsky provides three important themes in this overture. The themes all represent important characters and plot points in the story. Listen to these themes by clicking the link and see what they sound like:

Theme 1: Friar Lawrence (the man who weds Romeo and Juliet, and who also warned them against marrying in the first place). The theme has a religious sound to it, as it's supposed to resemble the Friar, who is a man of the Church and of God. It's written in the style of a Christian hymn.

Theme 2: the feud/fight/hate theme. This theme represents the hatred that the Capulets and Montagues have for one another. It's in the minor mode, it's fast, exciting, and dark. Specifically, this music represents the scene where Mercutio and Tybalt duel in the street, and Mercutio is stabbed and killed. More broadly, it represents the hatred that the families have for each other.

Theme 3: the love theme. This is one of the most famous themes he ever wrote, and represents Romeo and Juliet's love. It's been used in cartoons ever since the Golden Age of cartoons including Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck shorts.

These three themes dominate the entire 20-minute work, and interact with one another and the piece's form itself to tell the story.

Musical Form depicts the story of *Romeo and Juliet*

As a concert **overture**, Tchaikovsky's music is in sonata form. As a Romantic-era sonata, it's much larger than its Classical predecessors. It contains a huge introduction before moving into the exposition, development, and recapitulation. There's also a substantial coda that winds down the music. Over the course of the piece, Tchaikovsky orders and combines these themes in such a

way that the listener can vividly put together the entire story of *Romeo and Juliet*. The following picture is a diagram that depicts the entire piece's form:

Sonata Form in Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* Concert Overture

Introduction

Theme 1: Friar Lawrence's theme
Played 3 times
Played in the style of a hymn (he's a Friar, after all)
Remember: Friar Lawrence warned Romeo!
When you hear this theme played later, it refers to his warning!

Exposition

Theme 2: Fight Theme
Fight between Mercutio and Tybalt (Mercutio dies)
Theme 3: Love Theme
Love between Romeo and Juliet

Development

All 3 themes played with each other
Friar Lawrence played in horn
Strings play "Fight theme" in background
Interrupted by winds playing motives from "Love" theme
Friar's theme is blarney loud in trumpet
Almost saying: "I warned you about this, Romeo!"

Recapitulation

Fight theme returns
Love theme returns
Played over and over, louder and louder and more passionately
Romeo and Juliet think they'll get away with it
Fight theme interrupts
Friar's theme once more (very loud)
"I told you this would happen!"
Their death is heard in strings and timpani

Coda

Funeral march with Love theme
Friar's theme (delivering his eulogy)
Love theme played in Major mode
The families have finally reconciled

As you can see, the **introduction** is quite long: it lasts over 5 minutes in this recording, as Friar Lawrence's theme plays three times in a very somber way.

The **Exposition** contains Theme 2 and Theme 3: you'll hear an exciting and almost violent melody interrupt the Friar's theme, which begins the exposition---it then moves into the Theme of Love (theme 3) before closing out. This then moves into the **development**, where Tchaikovsky combines all of the themes together in brilliant counterpoint. The music then moves into the **Recapitulation**, where Tchaikovsky brings back the fight and love theme.

One of the most incredible and moving parts of the movement takes place in the recapitulation, where the **Love Theme returns in its loudest, and most luscious presentation**. In the above diagram, this is under "Recapitulation," under "love theme returns, played over and over, louder and louder, and more passionately---Romeo and Juliet think they'll get away with it." Here, the love theme reaches its ultimate climax before being interrupted by the fight theme! It then moves into one last statement of Friar Lawrence's theme, as if it remind us all that he warned Romeo and Juliet that nothing good would come from their premature marriage. **This leads into one last statement of the fight theme**, which ultimately moves into the booming drum hit---depicting both Romeo and Juliet's death.

The music's coda at the end combines a funeral march with the love theme. We hear Friar Lawrence's theme as he eulogizes the two lovers' passing before the music finally playing their theme one last time.

The music finally ends triumphantly in the major mode. You may ask "why such a happy ending for a tragedy?" But recall that the end of *Romeo and Juliet* concludes with the families reconciling! Though it took a tragedy, the families finally put aside their differences and reconcile: the silver lining of the story.

When you're done listening to these shorter excerpts, **listen to the entire piece, paying close attention to where the different themes come in**. Ask yourself how they represent the story being told, focusing on instrumentation, key (bright or dark harmonies), and especially the dynamics (loud vs. soft).

This piece is a wonderful example of a Romantic-era composer using traditional sonata form to musically tell a story. Our next example will demonstrate a composer who creates his own unique form for his own unique story.

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10.2: Smetana's "The Moldau"

Smetana and *The Moldau*.

Bedřich Smetana (1824-84) was a Romantic-style Bohemian composer (now modern-day Czech Republic). During the 19th century, as we discussed in previous chapters, there was a significant political movement in Europe with the rise of **nationalism** in the arts. Nationalist artists and composers sought to artistically depict their love for the culture and homeland in their works, while simultaneously trying to create their own unique artistic identity. This ideal is perfectly embodied in Smetana's Romantic-style orchestral music titled *Ma Vlast*, or *My Country*. This was a set of 6 different single-movement works that depicted a specific landmark in his country. These unrelated single-movement works are known as **tone poems** or **symphonic poems**: single-movement **programmatic** works that try to depict poetry or other types of imagery, *without using traditional forms like sonata form!*

These pieces are usually more freely written, and are in what we sometimes call **sectional form**. This term refers to the fact that the music does *not* follow any traditional form like sonata, rondo, fugue, or ABA form. Instead, the composers organize their music in different sections the way *they want to* in order to best tell their story. Thus, one movement in **sectional form** may be completely different than another work in sectional form!

Smetana's best-known work, *Má Vlast*, is thus a collection of 6 tone poems, each in their own unique form, that depict his love for his homeland. Each poem is named after a different cultural artefact:

1. Vyšehrad (The High Castle)
2. Vltava (The Moldau)
3. Šárka (named after the female warrior of the Czech legend *The Maiden's War*)
4. Z českých luhů a hájů (*From Bohemia's Woods and Fields*)
5. Tábor (named after a town in South Bohemia)
6. Blaník (a mountain that according to legend, says the army of knights led by St. Wenceslaus sleep, who will aid the country in their darkest hour).

(above): painting of Smetana by Geskel Saloman - [Public Domain](#).

"Vltava" ("The Moldau")



"Moldau" by [@felixtriller](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).



The 2nd tone poem of *Má Vlast* is his most famous work, translated to "The Moldau," which is the name given to a mighty river that runs through his homeland. The tone poem depicts what different sights one might see if they traveled down the river. As is common in **program music**, Smetana provided his own description of his musical ideas with the music itself. According to Smetana:

"Two springs pour forth in the shade of the Bohemian forest, one warm and gushing, the other cold and peaceful. Their waves joyously rush down over their rocky beds, then unite and glisten in the rays of the morning sun. Coming through Bohemia's valleys, they grow into a mighty river. Through the thick woods it flows as the joyous sounds of a hunt and the hunter's horn are heard ever closer. It flows through grass-grown pastures and lowlands where a wedding feast is being celebrated with song and dance. At night, wood and water nymphs revel in its sparkling waves. Reflected on its surface are fortresses and castles—witnesses of past days of knightly splendor and the vanished glory of bygone ages. The Moldau swirls through the St. John Rapids, finally flowing on in majestic peace toward Prague to be welcomed by historic Vyšehrad [a legendary royal castle]. Then it vanishes far beyond the poet's gaze."

The description above provides vivid imagery of many different sights. Each of these sights and sounds are musically depicted in the music. Take a listen to each of these different sections so you know what you're listening for:

"[Source of the River](#)" (you'll eventually hear 2 melodies in 2 instruments playing against each other representing the 2 different streams he mentions above)

"[The Moldau](#)" (this is the main River theme)

"[The Hunt](#)" (you'll hear a French horn outlining the "hunter's call")

"[Peasant Dance](#)" (this sounds like folk music, and is in a different meter than the River theme)

"[Nymphs at Night](#)" (you'll hear a very peaceful melody that shimmers through its high pitches. You can even hear the "River Theme" in the background!)

"[St. John Rapids](#)" (you'll hear loud and exciting music)

"[Castle Theme](#)" (you'll hear lots of horns)

Throughout the music, the "River Theme" (the A section) comes back a few times, creating a form that looks like "Intro, ABCDAEAF, Outro."

After you've listened to the themes from above, [take a listen to the entire piece](#). As you listen, pay close attention to how the composer shifts from section to section. Sometimes, the transitions are very smooth, and other times, they're almost too abrupt. These are good ways for the composer to signal to the audience that he's moving to a different section.

Sectional Form in "The Moldau" from Smetana's *Ma Vlast (My Country)*

(Intro)	A	B	C	D	A	E	A	F	(Outro)
Source of the River	River Theme	The Hunt	The Peasant Dance	Nymphs in Moonlight	River Theme	St. John Rapids	River Theme	Castle Theme	River dies away
Stepwise motion Clarinet and flute (two streams)	Lyrical and smooth (like water) Recurring theme	Horn call in French Horns and trumpet Tempo and meter stay the same from River theme	Dance in the strings Meter changes for the dance (Feels like the music is slower)	Key changes! Tempo and Meter change "mysterious" sounding (Nymphs are "other worldly")		Loud! Lots of percussion (Rough water?)	Played in Major key Much brighter!	Majestic melody Sounds like Church hymn Brass, strings, percussion	

Compare the way that this composer approaches musical form with Tchaikovsky's approach with *Romeo and Juliet*. You'll notice that Tchaikovsky used a traditional sonata form and expanded and manipulated it, while Smetana's music is almost "formless" in its approach. While Smetana's tone poems are a beautiful collection of individual movements, some "formalists" (those who find beauty in formal musical organization) might criticize this kind of music because its form almost seems haphazard. In other words, although it depicts the artists' visions and imagery, some might argue that it's really just a bunch of random unrelated themes played after another---and that there is no musical *cohesion* within it. In other words, the music simply moves from theme to theme, *without connecting the themes*. The themes aren't related to each other, and because of that, musical cohesion is lost.

These types of debates and criticisms are even found in critiques of Wagner's Operas, film music, and even music in video games. We'll see these arguments and criticisms in more detail when we get into Chapters 12-14.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

11: Vocal Music Through the Ages

These next two chapters address vocal music from Ancient Greece to the late 19th century. As these works all have singers and therefore include a written text, they all depict some type of story.

This chapter addresses smaller individual works that tell individual stories, covering music from ancient Greece through the 19th century.

The following chapter addresses vocal works that are part of a larger staged dramatic work—opera—and will address music from the Baroque, Classical, mid- and late-19th century.

You'll notice that the Classical Era is not represented in *this* chapter—that is because the following chapter will cover Classical vocal music, using opera as its demonstration.

[11.1: Vocal Music in Ancient Greece](#)

[11.2: Vocal Music in the Medieval Ages](#)

[11.3: Vocal Music in the Renaissance](#)

[11.4: Vocal Music in the Baroque- The Cantata](#)

[11.5: Vocal Music in the 19th Century](#)

[11.6: Vocal Music in the 20th Century- Meredith Monk](#)

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11.1: Vocal Music in Ancient Greece

Vocal Music in Ancient Greece.

From Ancient Antiquity through the Renaissance, vocal music was the preferred type of music by scholars and philosophers. The majority of music that was written and orally transmuted among the centuries was written specifically to be sung. This doesn't mean that instruments didn't exist throughout this time, but that sung music was preferred. And of course, the human voice singing necessitates *text*: words that are sung by an individual, or a group of individuals singing as a unit.

The Ancient Greeks had a word for the mystical power that music had on transmuting and even manipulating human emotions: **ethos**. Words attached to melodies, they believed, have the power to move people, and even rulers of nations. The philosopher Plato wrote about how important vocal music was, arguing that music should be attached to poetry to reach its true value. Arguing that music in society should serve the state, he warned against the use of purely instrumental music, saying that it had little value!

Plato's student Aristotle believed that music could imitate and affect human character, writing:

“[melodies] contain in themselves imitation of ethoses; and this is manifest, for even in the nature of the harmoniai there are differences, so that people when hearing them are affected differently and have not the same feelings in regard to each of them, but listen to some in more mournful and restrained state... the same holds good about the rhythms also, for some have a more stable and other a more emotional ethos, and of the latter some are more vulgar in their emotional effects and others more liberal.”
[Aristotle, *Politics* 8.5, quoted from Burkholder, *A History of Western Music*, 9th edition pg. 14)

Clearly, these philosophers felt that music had a mystical power to move and change human emotions. To this day, there are many writings *about* music that have survived, and there are even many mosaics, and sculptures that depict people playing music. Unfortunately, not much **manuscript**—that is, written music—has survived to this day. Much of the music was transmitted orally, and not written down. About 45 pieces or fragments of Ancient Greek music survives today, ranging from the 5th century BC to the 4th century AD.

In Ancient Greece, music served many different purposes, like today. There were **hymns** (sacred music sung to a god), funeral songs, wedding songs—even Epic Poetry (the *Odyssey*) was set to music. And while not much music has survived, the music that *has* survived is mostly **monophonic** -- that is, it consists of a single melodic line without any accompaniment. We are not sure if this is how music was actually performed, as many pictures depict instruments being played while others sang. However, we do not know *how* the instrumental music interacted with the performers.

Song of Seikilos



The oldest surviving *complete* piece of music is titled the 'Song of Seikilos,' and **epitaph**, a short, poignant/humorous poem that typically is inscribed on tombstones. It was discovered in southern Turkey, and it's from approximately the 1st century AD. What's truly remarkable is that there seems to be actual musical notation inscribed over the Greek text!

The poem translates to English as follows:

"As long as you live,
be lighthearted.
Let nothing trouble you.
Life is only too short,
and time takes its toll."

[Take a listen to this performance of the Song of Seikilos](#) and you'll hear a stringed instrument that doesn't sound like what we're used to. This is a Kithara, which is an ancient Greek stringed instrument. It will likely sound distant and foreign to your 21st century ear. When you're done listening to this song, [watch the video presentation on this unit](#), and you'll learn more about what makes this piece sound so unique.

(left): Seikilos' tombstone. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

For those interested in downloading the handouts of the PDFs for this unit, [click here](#) for early vocal music and [here](#) for later vocal music.

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11.2: Vocal Music in the Medieval Ages

Vocal Music in the Medieval Era (476-1400)

The Medieval Period covers the time in Western Europe from the Fall of the Roman Empire (476 AD) to about 1400 AD. Following the Fall of the Roman Empire, the Catholic Church gained significant power over both religion and politics over all of Europe. Because of its huge influence, much of the music that survives to this day from this time period is **sacred music**. This is not to say that all music written during this period was religious, but because the Catholic Church had so much money and resources, they were able to pay for scribes to write down their music, which is why so much of it has survived to the modern day.

Common genres of music in the Medieval Era are **chant**, **the Catholic mass**, and **secular song**.

Read through this unit, and when you're done, [watch the video presentation](#), which will provide more clarity on some of the more difficult concepts.

Catholic Chant.

The Catholic church services followed the religious traditions of prior times, and included **chant**. Chant is unaccompanied liturgical song used in religious services; throughout all of the Medieval Era, everything done during a Catholic mass (the religious ceremony) was sung in chant-style. This eventually became known as **plainchant**, or **Gregorian Chant** (named after Pope Gregory II who codified the structure of the Catholic mass during the 8th century AD).

Chant is **monophonic** (a single melodic line with no accompaniment), **sacred** (sung in religious services), and is **melismatic**—that is, it contains many melismata (the plural of *melisma*). Melismata occur when you sing a single syllable of text on many long-held notes. [Listen to this "Alleluia" and you'll hear the word sung](#) over about 20 seconds of "ahhhhh"—this is a single melisma, and is a defining characteristic of chant. As you listen, try to keep a steady beat, and you'll notice that you're unable to keep one! This is another defining characteristic of the chant -- they are completely rhythmically free. The chant is part of the prayer and dialogue between the priest and the congregation; the music is just as important as the words to which they are attached.

In the Medieval era, even up until the 1960s, the entire mass during the Catholic service was chanted. [This video shows a historical re-enactment of a Catholic Mass](#). Notice how everything is chanted by either the Priest or the rest of the congregation.

You'll likely notice that there is great reverberation in the sound -- remember that these chants were traditionally sung in large cathedrals, which create a very live and vibrant sound.

Dies Irae: The Catholic Hymn.



Within the church service, the congregation and the priest would often sing a hymn together. This is a tradition that continues to this day, and predates that Catholic church. A **hymn** is a religious song of praise to God, and is very different when compared to the chant. They are rhythmically much more stable; you'll be able to keep a beat very easily. They are often written in a strophic (or verse) form. There is often a rhyme-scheme to them like modern songs.

Dies Irae is a Medieval-Era poem about the Day of Wrath, or the Day of Judgement, which depicts the time where God comes down to Earth to judge all of creation. The image to the left is a famous depiction of this day: a painting attributed to Flemish painter Hans Memling.

The hymn *Dies Irae* is one of the most famous and melodies in the Western canon, and was composed around the 13th century AD, likely by some Benedictine Monk employed by the church. Like much of the music that was written for the church, we do not know who composed it, because the monks who wrote the music did not sign their names to the music (they were not seeking fame for their work). The text for the poem is provided below ([taken from the Wikipedia page](#)). The original Latin text is on the left, and as you can see, it follows a specific rhyme scheme as one would expect to hear in a song. The "Approved adaptation" is an English translation that tries to keep the same

amount of syllables per line, while maintaining the rhyme scheme. The "Fomal Equivalence" is a more literal translation, but as you can see, it doesn't conform to any specific rhythm or rhythm.

[Take a listen to this famous hymn](#), and follow along with the text provided below and follow along with the "Original" text on the left side of the column. Though it is sung by a choir, notice that they are all singing the same exact melody -- this is a **monophonic** texture -- a single melody with no accompaniment. When you're done, [view the video presentation for this piece for more discussion on this famous melody](#).

"Day of Judgement," by Hans Memling. [Public Domain](#).

	Original	Approved adaptation	Formal equivalence
I	Dies iræ, dies illa, Solvat sæclum in favilla: Teste David cum Sibylla.	Day of wrath and doom impending! David's word with Sibyl's blending, Heaven and earth in ashes ending!	The day of wrath, that day, will dissolve the world in ashes: (this is) the testimony of <i>David</i> along with the <i>Sibyl</i> .
II	Quantus tremor est futurus, Quando iudex est venturus, Cuncta stricte discussurus!	Oh, what fear man's bosom rendeth, When from heaven the Judge descendeth, On whose sentence all dependeth.	How great will be the quaking, when the Judge is about to come, strictly investigating all things!
III	Tuba, mirum spargens sonum Per sepulchra regionum, Coget omnes ante thronum.	Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth; Through earth's sepulchres it ringeth; All before the throne it bringeth.	The <i>trumpet</i> , scattering a wondrous sound through the sepulchres of the regions, will summon all before the <i>throne</i> .

Text of "Dies Irae." (left): original Latin; (middle): adaptation; (right): literal translation. [Screenshot taken from Wikipedia](#).

Medieval Polyphony: Guillaume de Machaut and the Secular Song.



Picture of a Parisian manuscript from the 1350s depicting Machaut (right). [Public Domain](#)

Over time, composers and monks who wrote music in the church began to experiment with playing multiple notes at the same time in an independent manner. You may be thinking to yourself "why are we spending so much time looking at early Catholic music?" The answer is because *modern harmony and polyphony developed within the Catholic church*. Up until around 900 AD, music was mostly **monophonic**. If instruments accompanied a singer, it often would play the same melody that the singer would sing, or provide some single "drone" note. But again, *most music in the Medieval Period was purely sung*.

Around 900 AD, composers within the Catholic church (mostly monks and other religious people working for the church) began experimenting with combining independent lines and layers of music. This developed into a **polyphonic** texture. Both Sacred and Secular music embraced this style: combining multiple independent melodies at once. In some instances, composers would combine 3, 4, 5, or more *independent melodies* at the same time.

Keep in mind, that this is very difficult to do. Not only do the melodies need to sound good on their own, but they need to sound good when they're played together!

Composer Guillaume de Machaut (~1300~1377) was a French poet and composer, who wrote both sacred and secular music. He was the first composer to ever set the Catholic Mass -- the part of the service that celebrates Communion and the Eucharist that was always chanted in a monophonic setting --- to a **polyphonic** setting. This was incredibly important in the development of Western polyphony and the development of the musical settings of the Catholic mass.

Take a [listen to this recording](#) of "Je puis trop bien ma dame comparer," which translates to "I can all too well compare my lady..." You'll notice that there are multiple melodic lines happening at the same time, which all line up to create harmony. This **polypohonic texture** is something that Machaut was well-known for. In this song, he compares his love of a woman to the the Greek myth of Pygmalion, who as legend had it, sculpted a statue and loved it so deeply, that the goddess Aphrodite took pity on him and turned the statue into a real person. When you're done listening to this, [watch the video presentation on this piece](#) for a more thorough discussion of how to listen to the independent melodies within this piece.

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11.3: Vocal Music in the Renaissance

Vocal Music in The Renaissance (1400-1600).



"The Concert" by Dutch painter Gerard van Honthorst (1623), [Public Domain](#).

The word *Renaissance* literally translates to "rebirth," and marks the transition that Europe experienced between the Middle Ages and modernity (beginning in 1600 in the Baroque Period, musically speaking). Originating in Italy, and spreading across Europe, Europeans began to "rediscover" ancient Greek texts. We see the rise of humanism in the Renaissance, which sought to revive ancient learning like grammar, rhetoric, poetry, and history. Throughout this period, we don't see a rejection of Christianity, but the Protestant Reformation led by Martin Luther challenges the Catholic church's reign of supremacy across both politics and religion. Considering how much music was based in Catholic tradition, Martin Luther's reformation bears significant consequences in the world of sacred music. Similar to the music in the Medieval Period, music in the Renaissance was mostly vocal, much of which was a **capella**, meaning there was no instrumental accompaniment. When instruments *were* used, they typically accompanied the vocal line by playing the same thing (with possible embellishment). Much of the music in the Renaissance was **polyphonic**, leaving the monophonic texture of the Middle Ages behind.

Martin Luther and the Protestant Anthem.

Martin Luther's famous 1517 act of nailing his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg began the Protestant Reformation (the word *Protestant* being rooted in the word *protest*). Among his grievances was the corruption that he saw within the Vatican and the Catholic Church in general. One of the biggest reformations within the movement affected the way that church services were conducted: throughout all of the Middle Ages, the *entire Catholic service was conducted in the Latin text*--Latin, being the religious language of the Christian faith. Of course, the biggest problem with this is that the average churchgoer likely did not understand anything that was chanted or spoken!

Now, with the Protestant Reformation in full swing, churches that were not aligned with the Catholic tradition could hold their services in the language of the people's locale, which meant that composers could write sacred music in their own language!

One of the most significant musical changes we see in the Protestant sacred music tradition is the rise of the **Protestant anthem**. These types of songs are still written today, and are found in many different denominations of the Protestant tradition. These are the English version of the Catholic **motet**, which is a sacred piece of choral music, but sung in Latin.

Anthems (and motets) are a **capella**, which means that they have no instrumental accompaniment. They are also **polyphonic** in texture, similar to the piece from the previous unit by Machaut.

[Listen to VOICES8 perform William Byrd's "Sing Joyfully,"](#) a popular Protestant anthem that is sung in English, based off of Psalm 81. The anthem uses **imitation**, which is a type of compositional technique where one voice begins a melody, and is responded with the *same melody* by another voice (similar to "row row row your boat" sung as a round). In this anthem, William Byrd uses 6 different melodies sung at the same time!

By setting the entire psalm to song, the music's form is another example of **sectional form**. Each phrase of the psalm is a different melodic idea, and therefore a different section of the music. The chart below shows the psalm and how we organize the music by section:



A Sing joyfully to God our strength;
 B sing loud unto the God of Jacob!
 C Take the song, bring forth the timbrel,
 D the pleasant harp, and the viol.
 E Blow the trumpet in the new moon,
 F even in the time appointed, and at our feast day.
 G For this is a statute for Israel,
 H and a law of the God of Jacob

When you're done listening to this short anthem, [view the video presentation for this piece](#) for a more thorough discussion of the nuances within this anthem.

(above): painting of Martin Luther by German Renaissance painter Lucas Cranach the Elder. [Public Domain](#).

Josquin des Prez and the Secular Frottola



A 1611 woodcut of Josquin des Prez by Unknown author. [Public Domain](#).

Josquin des Prez (~1450-1521) was a Franco-Flemish composer who is known as the first Western composer whose fame continued after his death. He wrote much sacred music like Catholic masses and motets, as well as **secular music**, which had no religious meaning. Although he wrote a lot of different kinds of music, his most well-known piece is titled "El Grillo," which translates to "The Cricket." This is an example of a **frottola**, a mostly comical polyphonic setting of a poem. Josquin wrote this silly poem about a cricket, which is translated below. The music is in ABA form, which is represented below.

In this piece, Josquin demonstrates a clever and humorous approach to writing for voice. In this piece, we see many instances of **word painting**: these are instances where the music accurately reflects the words being sung. There are instances where the vocalists actually sound like crickets, and other instances where the singers hold a humorously long line on the words "long line." [Watch this performance of the a capella group Cantus perform this fun frottola](#). As you listen, pay close attention to timestamp 0:31 -- they sound like crickets chirping (this text translates to "give him a drink so he can go on singing"). At 1:18, they hold out "longo verso" (or "long line") for an exceedingly long time. Finally, at 1:30, the group makes "buzzing" to sound like crickets! When you're done listening to the piece and following along, watch the video presentation for this piece that discusses the polyphony and the music's form in more detail.

Section Original Italian Text English Translation

A El grillo è buon cantore The cricket is a good singer
 che tiene longo verso. Who can hold a long line
 Dale beve grillo canta. Give him a drink so he can go on singing

B Ma non fa come gli altri uccelli, But he doesn't do what birds do
 come li han cantato un poco who after singing a while,
 van' de fatto in altro loco, just go elsewhere.
 sempre el grillo sta pur saldo The cricket is always steadfast
 Quando la maggior è [l'] caldo when it is hottest,
 alhor canta sol per amore. Then, he sings solely for love.

A El grillo è buon cantore The cricket is a good singer
che tiene longo verso. Who can hold a long line
Dale beve grillo canta. Give him a drink so he can go on singing

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11.4: Vocal Music in the Baroque- The Cantata

Vocal Music in the Baroque Period (1600-1750)

You've already been exposed to some music in the Baroque Period, though most of it was instrumental music. The Baroque Period, which followed the Renaissance, marks beginning of the "Common Practice Era," as mentioned previously. You may have thought to yourself that vocal music from ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance all sound "foreign" or "distant" to our modern ear. As was mentioned in previous chapters, that is because the music from these time periods---*before* the "Common Practice Era"---treated harmony, rhythm, melody, form, and texture *very differently* than modern music. Western music beginning in the Baroque Period began to treat musical elements more closely to that which resembles modern music.

Recall the last few pieces in this chapter: Machatu's "I can all too well compare my lady..." from the Middle Ages, and both "El grillo" and "Sing joyfully" from the Renaissance were *all highly polyphonic*. That is, they all employed multiple independent melodies *simultaneously*. You may have also realized that it was *very difficult* to latch onto the words at times, because so many different words were being sung at the same time. It's like going to a party where you hear 6 different conversations at the same time---it's hard to latch onto a single idea.

The Baroque Period sees the rise of **homophonic** texture, which was discussed back in [Chapter 2.1](#). This texture is rooted in a single melody with simple accompaniment. The melody, which is purely independent, is supported by an instrumental accompaniment, which is purely *dependent* on the melody. Try listening to a simple accompaniment without a melody, and before long, you'll think to yourself "this is nice background music, but where's the melody?" That's because the accompaniment is *not* independent---it *needs* the melody (hence, its dependency on the melody). **Homophonic** texture is useful for composers especially those who write music with a sung text, because it's easy for the audience to understand the words clearly. As you would expect, the harpsichord and strings are among the most common instruments to accompany vocal music in the Baroque Period.

Baroque Music also contains many ornamentations; you'll hear many examples of these ornaments in the [video presentation for this unit](#).

The Baroque Period also favored vocal music over instrumental music like the Medieval and Renaissance periods, but as mentioned before, the "rise of instrumental music" begins in the Baroque Period. That said, there are three common types of vocal music in the Baroque Period: the **opera** and the **cantata**. Because opera is attached to actual *drama* (with characters, staging, acting, etc.), we'll look at Baroque opera in the next unit. Here, we'll look at the **cantata**.

Cantata in the Baroque Period.



Netherlands Bach Society performs Bach's BWV 147. [Screenshot taken from YouTube](#).

The word *cantata* is rooted in the word *cantare*, which is Latin for "sing." Thus, music titled *cantatas* are simply pieces that are sung. A cantata is a collection of several pieces of music written for solo singers, a choir, and an accompanying orchestra. Similar to the symphony, we have a different collection of "songs," which are also called "movements." Depending on who is singing, and *how* they are singing, we use different words to describe them. These types of vocal movements are *also* found in operas and oratorios, so the terms you see here will return in the following chapter on opera. Typically, there are 4 different types of movements in a cantata (and opera/oratorios):

Aria: very lyrical melody, for 1 or a few soloists with the accompanying orchestra. These have many melismata for the vocalist to shine. The word translates to "air," which makes sense because a lot of air is necessary to sing these long, lyrical, and melodious

lines!

Recitative: the word translates to *recite*, as in to *speak your lines* (in a play). These are typically for 1 solo singer and the accompanying orchestra, and it sounds much more speaking and is much less "lyrical" than the aria.

Chorus/chorale: these are pieces for the full choir and orchestra.

Interlude: these are pieces that have no singers, and are purely for the orchestra.

Composer J.S. Bach, who you'll recognize from the previous chapters, wrote over 200 different cantatas, most of which contain at least 6 different movements. Some of his cantatas are **sacred**, and were meant to be performed *within a church service*, while other cantatas were completely secular. He even wrote one satirically comedic cantata nicknamed the "coffee cantata," where the solo singer discusses their addiction to coffee! Each of these cantatas is considered a single independent piece of music, even though they contain anywhere between 6-10 *individual movements*! A typical cantata can last between 20-30 minutes. For now, we'll look at a the **chorale movement** from Bach's church cantata BWV 147, which is one of his more popular surviving works titled "Jesu, joy of man's desiring. This popular melody is heard at many weddings and during Christmas season. [Take a listen to this movement](#), and as you do, pay attention to the way that the orchestra and the chorus exchange musical phrases -- it's almost like a dialogue between singers and instruments. The music will also feel like it never stops --- this is a common trait of Baroque music. We call this the *motor rhythm*, and it refers to the fact that the music sounds like it never wants to end! When you're done listening, watch the video presentation for this section for a more in-depth discussion on the phrasing, harmonies, instrumentation, and rhythms within this movement.

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11.5: Vocal Music in the 19th Century

Schubert and the German Lied.



Though Austrian composer Franz Schubert was a 19th century composer, he is considered by many music historians and scholars alike as a "bridge" between the Classical and the Romantic era. Born in 1797, he died in 1828—only 8 years into what many consider the beginning of the Romantic Era. He composed many pieces in the Classical tradition: instrumental sonatas, chamber music like string quartets, and symphonies. However, he is probably most well-known for his songs for voice and piano, of which he wrote over 600! These pieces called **Lieder** (plural of **Lied**, or a German song) were typically a few minutes long, similar to today's pop song. Some of his best known Lieder are based off of poems written by German poet Johann Wolfgang Goethe (known for his epic tragedy *Faust*).

As a Classical composer, Schubert wrote in many traditional forms and settings like the symphony, quartet, and sonata, as mentioned above. As a **Romantic**, however, Schubert was interested in exploring new ways to express human emotion. His melodies--both instrumental and vocal--are highly lyrical, and he explored new ways of modulating to keys that sound very distant to the ear. He was also interested in folklores and eerie subject matter, which we'll look at here.

Written when he was only 18 years old, Schubert set one of Goethe's poems titled "Der Erlkönig" to music. This poem is called a **ballad**, which is a poem that tells a narrative story. This famous story is rooted in old Danish folklore that tells of a demon who kills children in the woods by a single touch. Schubert took this poem and set it to music for a single vocalist and pianist.

Portrait of Franz Schubert by Wilhelm August Rieder, [Public Domain](#).

Der Erlkönig ("The Elfking")



Painting of the Erlkönig by Moritz von Schwind. [Public Domain](#).

This poem written by Goethe in 1782 depicts the "Elf King," or "King of the Fairies"—that stalks children in the woods. The painting above depicts such an incident: the child and his father are riding on horseback, the Erlkönig floats above, and his three fairie daughters are on the right. This eerie topic was the perfect subject matter for writers and musicians, alike. As you can see by the text, Goethe's poem has 4 different characters: the narrator, the child, his father, and the Erlkönig. Schubert's song only has a single vocalist, which means that the singer needs to do some voice acting to make it sound like he's 4 different characters! A successful performance of this piece depends on the singer's ability to portray different characters, without the aid of any type of setting or props.

Schubert helps out the singer by putting each character's voice in a different range. As one would suspect, the child has a higher range, and the narrator and father both have a lower range. Schubert puts the Erlkönig in a higher range as well, because as you can see from the lyrics, the Erlkönig is trying to lure the child to go with him. Read through this short poem before moving on:

German Text

Translation

Narrator:	Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind? Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind; Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm, Er faßt ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.	Who rides, so late, through night and wind? It is the father with his child. He has the boy well in his arm He holds him safely, he keeps him warm.
Father:	Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht? –	My son, why do you hide your face in fear? –
Son:	Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht? Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif? –	Father, do you not see the Elf-king? The Elf-king with crown and cape? –
Father:	Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif.	My son, it is a streak of fog. –
Erlkönig:	"Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir! Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir; Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand, Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand." –	"You dear child, come, go with me! (Very) beautiful games I play with you; Many colorful flowers are on the beach, My mother has many a golden robe." –
Son:	Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht, Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht? –	My father, my father, and do you not hear What the Elf-king quietly promises me? –
Father:	Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind; In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind. –	Be calm, stay calm, my child; Through dry leaves the wind is sighing. –
Erlkönig:	"Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn? Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön; Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reihn, Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein." –	"Do you, fine boy, want to go with me? My daughters shall wait on you finely; My daughters lead the nightly dance, And rock and dance and sing to bring you in." –
Son:	Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort? –	My father, my father, and don't you see there The Elf-king's daughters in the gloomy place? –
Father:	Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh' es genau: Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau. –	My son, my son, I see it clearly: There shimmer the old willows so grey. –
Erlkönig:	"Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt; Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich Gewalt." –	"I love you, your beautiful form excites me; And if you're not willing, then I will use force." –
Son:	Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt faßt er mich an! Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan! –	My father, my father, he's touching me now! The Elf-king has done me harm! –
Narrator:	Dem Vater grauset's; er reitet geschwind, Er hält in Armen das ächzende Kind, Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe und Not; In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.	It horrifies the father; he swiftly rides on, He holds the moaning child in his arms, Reaches the farm with great difficulty; In his arms, the child was dead.

Text-Music Relationship in Der Erlkönig

There are many instances of word painting and text-painting in this piece. At the onset, you'll hear the pianist hammering away the same note over and over, imitating a horse's gallop. You'll also hear the child lashing out "My Father, my father!" after each time that the Erlkönig speaks to him trying to lure him. You'll also notice that the Erlkönig sounds very innocent and sweet the first two times that he tries to lure the child, but during the third attempt, the harmonies underneath his words are very dissonant and, for lack of a better term, creepy sounding. [Listen to this short song and follow along with the lyrics and translations below](#), and as you do, make sure sure you listen for these different ways that the music and text enhance one another. When you're finished, [watch the video presentation that covers this piece for a more in-depth discussion on Schubert's compositional techniques](#).

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11.6: Vocal Music in the 20th Century- Meredith Monk

Contemporary Vocal Music: Meredith Monk.



Meredith Monk was born in 1942 in New York City, and is contemporary composer who is well-known for her vocal music that requires the use of **extended techniques**. You may recall this term from the unit on the 20th century. This term refers to musicians using their instrument or voice in non-traditional ways. Her music often utilizes **minimalist techniques**. Recall that the minimalist movement was popular in New York City in the 1960s, and included highly repetitive music with slow and gradual change.

Monk's music is highly innovative, and demands much of the performer (herself, on much of her produced albums). Some pieces like "Little Breath" or "Sigh" don't include a single spoken word---instead, as the titles suggest, it has the performer breath or sigh in specific rhythms or pitch. Take a listen to "[Sigh](#)," and ask yourself what—if anything—Monk is trying to say with this music? Is her voice being treated like a non-vocal instrument, or is there something more meaningful about the way in which her voice is used here?

This piece "Sigh" is one song from her larger album, most of which is nonsensical sounds produced by the human voice in non-traditional ways.

Moreover, the high pitched sound you hear in the background is actually her own voice. If you're interested, listen to the entire album from beginning to end; it's very unique and interesting to see just what the human voice is capable of.

Of course, Monk is only one style of 20th century vocal music --- there's much more that we're unable to cover here. However, much of the newer 20th/21st century vocal music employs these new ways of singing, extended techniques, and radically dissonant sound effects. When you're done listening to "Sigh," [watch the video presentation that discusses her](#) vocal techniques in more detail. (The musical excerpt in the video of "Little Breath" has been removed, but the rest of the video works fine).

Picture of Meredith Monk. [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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12.1: Pre-Opera- Hildegard von Bingen's "Play of Virtues"

Music and Drama in the Middle Ages: St. Hildegard von Bingen and *The Play of Virtues*



St. Hildegard von Bingen is one of the most important composers from the Medieval period; we can attribute more music to her than to any other composer from before the 14th century. The name “von Bingen” simply means “of Bingen,” *Bingen* being a town in Germany. She entered the Catholic convent when she was 7 years old, and she committed her life to the church when she was 16. When she was in her 30s, she began experiencing visions that she attributed to the Holy Spirit; as a result, she wrote poetry and prose about these visions, setting some of this text to music (though she did not consider herself a musician). She was the first female to ever be given explicit permission from the Pope to write on theology; she wrote about the Saints’ lives, as well as criticisms of the Catholic institution. She also wrote about herbal medicine. She eventually ended up as a German Benedictine Abbess (or “director”) of an abbey of nuns.

St. Hildegard wrote *Ordo Virtutum* (trans. *Play of Virtues*) as a play depicting an innocent soul, the 16 different virtues, and their confrontation with the Devil. Each character is played by a different woman singer, which was perfect for the abbey, which was comprised solely of nuns. The only character played by a male was the Devil, traditionally played by the priest!

In the Middle Ages, music was seen as a gift from God; as a result every character in this play chants their part musically except for the Devil: because the Devil is completely separated from God and God’s Love, the Devil was seen as being *incapable* of even performing music!

Being composed around 1150 in the Middle Ages in a traditional Catholic setting, the music is **monophonic**: each character sings their melody in the style of **plainchant** (or “Gregorian Chant”—revisit [Chapter 11.2](#)). The music is rhythmically free—it’s almost impossible to keep a beat to it, just as it would be impossible to keep a beat to someone’s speech.

This piece is *not an opera*, but it is an early example of composers setting drama to music. It can thus be considered a “pre-opera” composition. The next page will discuss opera in detail, which began in the Baroque period.

By Unknown author - Miniature from the Rupertsberg Codex of Liber Scivias., [Public Domain](#).

Play of Virtues

The scene we’ll cover here depicts the Devil (played by a priest clad in a red cape) yelling at the innocent soul, demanding that she returns to her sinful ways. The soul refuses the Devil, and calls on the Virtues to aid her in banishing the Devil. The different virtues gather rope and bind him, preventing him from further tempting the Soul.

[Watch this short scene from this fantastic amateur performance](#). Because this is traditional Catholic chant, the entire language is set in Latin, so you’ll need to follow along with the translation provided below. As you listen, pay close attention to the rhythmic freedom heard in this type of plainchant, which is one of characteristics of this style of music. When you’re done, [watch the video presentation](#) that discusses these traits in further detail.

Devil:

Who are you? Where are you coming from? You were in my embrace, I led you out. Yet now you are going back, defying me – but I shall fight you and bring you down!

Soul, penitent:

I recognized that all my ways were wicked, so I fled you. But now, you deceiver, I will fight you face-to-face. Queen Humility, come with your medicine, and give me aid!

Humility:

Victory, you who once conquered this creature in the heavens, run now, with all your soldiery, and all of you bind this fiend!

Victory:

Bravest and most glorious warriors, come, help me to vanquish this deceitful one!

Virtues:

Oh sweetest warrior, in the scorching fountain that swallowed up the voracious wolf glorious, crowned one, how gladly we'll fight against that deceiver, at your side!

Humility:

Bind him then, you shining Virtues!

Virtues:

Queen of us all, we obey you – we shall carry out your orders to the full.

Victory:

Comrades, rejoice; the ancient serpent snake is bound!

Virtues:

Praise be to you, Christ, King of the angels!

For those interested in a handout PDF for this unit, [click here](#).

12.1: Pre-Opera- Hildegard von Bingen's "Play of Virtues" is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

12.2: Opera in the Baroque Period

Baroque Opera.



Probably the most important contribution to music and drama from the Baroque era (1600-1750) is the opera. **Operas** are staged dramas that are sung from beginning to end. Traditionally, they are on a very serious subject matter, very often a Greek tragedy. Operas are *incredibly* expensive to put together: singers, orchestras, set designers, costumes designers, lighting, music directors, and acting coaches all come together to put on a giant spectacle for an audience interested in music and drama. There are typically two different aspects of the opera: the **libretto**, which is the text (like a screenplay), is often written by someone *other than the composer*. Librettists often work with the composer, who sets the text to different types of music. The earliest opera that has survived comes from 1607: Monteverdi's *Orpheus*, which depicts the Greek tragedy of the Orpheus, a Greek poet and musician, whose wife Eurydice was killed by vipers. Orpheus sang the most mournful songs, which affected many of the Greek gods who took pity on him; they advised him to travel to the Underworld and retrieve her soul. Monteverdi's opera depicting Orpheus's journey helped set the stage for operas to come.

Similar to the **cantata** (recall Chapter 11.4) operas contain a number of different types of music:

Overture: a purely instrumental introduction to the entire opera. Because operas were seen as "social events," many people gathered and mingled before the performance. Overtures were typically a way to get people to take their seats to let them know that the performance was about to start. Unlike overtures in musical theater, overtures in the Baroque period did *not* play a "medley" of the important themes; it was typically just instrumental music that was unrelated to the music yet to come.

Arias. These are the more lyrical and more expressive type of song sung in an opera. It is with an aria where the characters often express their deepest emotions, similar to the **soliloquy** in a play, where a character takes center stage and gives a "speech" to the audience. Arias typically repeat the same text over and over, because the real focus of our attention is the *music*. The word *aria* translates to *air*, much of which is needed in order to sing these long lyrical melodies! Often, arias are **homophonic** in texture: that is, a single melody with instrumental accompaniment. This is done so that audiences can understand the text being sung.

Recitative. These songs are usually much shorter than arias, and are used to move the dialogue forward. Characters will converse with one another using recitatives, which translates to "recite" (as in, to recite one's lines). Because of this, the orchestra is used only sparingly, playing a few chords here and there, and the singers sound more like they're speaking than singing. Similar to arias, recitatives are typically **homophonic** in texture.

Choruses. In ancient Greek tragedies, there was often a Chorus, who would provide narration or commentary on the events unfolding. Unlike the aria and recitative, choruses often include **polyphonic** textures, allowing the composer to demonstrate their counterpoint skills.

(above): 18th-century painting of the Royal Theatre of Turin (before its destruction and rebuilding), by Pietro Domenico Oliviero.
Public Domain

Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*.



Portrait of Henry Purcell by John Closterman - [1], [Public Domain](#).

Many operas in the Baroque Period were written in Italian, German, or French. The English public was fairly hostile toward opera in the 1600s because England had such a strong tradition in spoken theater (much in part due to Shakespeare). The opera we'll cover here is therefore an anomaly: Henry Purcell (1659-95) was an English composer who wrote only a single opera—*Dido and Aeneas*—but it is still considered one of the greatest Baroque operas to have survived. The story is rooted in Greek tragedy about Dido, the Queen of Carthage, Aeneas, a Trojan prince, and Belinda, Dido's maidservant. A very brief summary of the plot reads like this: following the events of the Trojan war, Aeneas fulfills a promise to the gods to travel to Italy to establish the city of Rome. They land in Carthage (the northern tip of Africa), where he meets and falls in love with Dido. Aeneas decides to abandon his plans of establishing Rome so he can marry Dido. A witch disguised as the messenger god Mercury, tricks Aeneas into leaving, which he does. In response to his abrupt departure, Dido commits suicide by drinking poison, but not before singing one of the most famous recitatives and arias of the Baroque literature, which as been referred to as "Dido's Lament."

[Watch this video of Malena Erlman's phenomenal performance](#) of "Dido's lament." You'll notice that the orchestra is very small: mostly strings and a harpsichord is all that accompanies the singers here.

The text is provided below (it is also sung in English). She begins with a recitative (seen below): notice how quickly she sings through this passage, as she tells Belinda that she is dying. The orchestra plays very little in this passage, and her speech is very syllabic. As soon as she's done with the recitative, she begins to sing the aria "When I am laid in earth." You'll notice how much more expressive this song is: she sings much more lyrically here, and she repeats the same line many times. After she dies, the chorus begins to sing a chorus, weeping that their Queen has died. When you're finished watching this scene, [watch the video presentation](#) that further highlights the various musical differences between the different types of songs in the opera.

Recitative (sung by Dido): Thy hand, Belinda... darkness shades me;

on thy bosom let me rest;

more I would, but Death invades me:

death is now a welcome guest!

Aria (sung by Dido) "When I am laid, am laid in earth,

may my wrongs create no trouble,

no trouble in thy breast

Remember me, but ah! Forget my fate"

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12.3: Opera in the Classical Era

Opera in the Classical Era: Mozart's *Don Giovanni*

Because much opera in the Baroque Period (1600-1750) was mostly written on a serious subject matter like Greek tragedies, they tended to depict royalty and more political problems that they might encounter. These types of operas would eventually pave the way for the Italian *opera seria*, or "serious opera" in the Classical Era (1750~1820) that would depict current events from the perspective of royalty and nobility, and were usually written *for this specific audience*. As a result, the common folk did not relate all that well to the subject matter at hand. A response to this *opera seria* was the *opera buffa*, or "comic opera," which was typically written on a subject matter that was more aligned with the common folk and things that they might experience. These operas weren't always funny, but their subject matter was a bit more relatable (and they did depict more comical aspects of life, though it still might not have a happy ending).

One of the best examples of an *opera buffa* that combines comical and serious elements is Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. As a Classical-Era opera, *Don Giovanni* includes a much larger orchestra than *Dido and Aeneas*: strings, winds, brass, and percussion all come together to create a larger and more colorful musical palette. The plot of *Don Giovanni* is a simple story of a terrible womanizing playboy named Don Giovanni, who in an attempt to pursue a woman named Donna Anna, ends up killing her father, the Commendatore, who was trying to protect her. Anna and her fiancé Ottavio swear vengeance upon Giovanni, who flees the scene wearing a disguise. He soon encounters a woman named Elvira—a woman whom he had scorned in the past—before once again fleeing the scene after realizing who she is. Giovanni's endless womanizing eventually lands him in Hell, which is depicted in the final scene. [Read through this synopsis](#) that provides many different pictures from the spectacle from a recent staging of this opera.

The scene we'll see here is a famous scene of Elvira, who sings an aria about finding the man who scorned him (Giovanni), as Giovanni and his servant Leporello watch from afar in a very mocking tone (saying "I should console her," and commenting on how he'd like to try to "win" her). The aria is somewhat comical: Elvira's anger is depicted not only in her acting and facial expressions, but in the music itself. Mozart's melody here includes many melodic skips in her melody. Elvira sings this melody a few times, but pay special attention to the last line in this aria, the "Gli vo' cavare il cor," which translates to "I will rip his heart out." She sings this line several times, but at 2:56, you'll hear a very long, technically impressive melisma, on this one line. It is very clear that Elvira wants nothing to do with Giovanni. Read the translation below before [watching Cecelia Bartoli's](#) astounding performance of this aria. When you're done, [watch the video presentation that discusses these musical traits](#) in more detail.

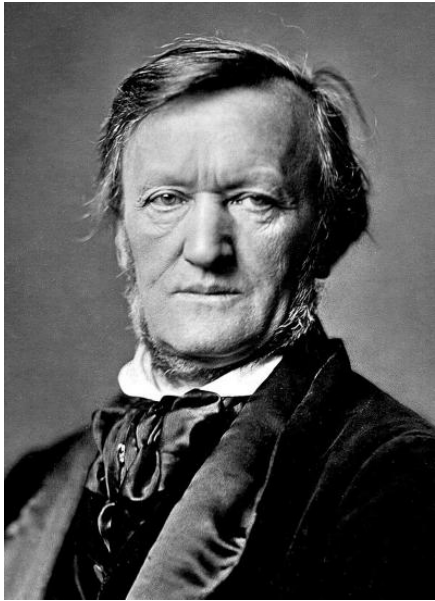
Italian text English Translation

Ah, chi mi dice mai Who will ever tell me
Quel barbaro dov'e' Where that barbarian/scoundrel is
Che per mio scorno amai For whom I loved and disgraced myself
Che mi manco' di fe? And to me was unfaithful
Ah, se ritrovo l'empio Ah, if I find again that evil man
E a me non torna ancor And he still will not come back to me,
Vo' farne orrendo scempio I will destroy him
Gli vo' cavare il cor. I will rip his heart out.

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12.4: Richard Wagner and the 19th Century Music Drama

Richard Wagner and *The Ring*.



Perhaps no other figure is as influential and polarizing as German-born composer Richard Wagner (1813-83). Known primarily as an opera composer, Wagner's musical influence is still felt today: his compositional approach to harmony and form greatly influenced the next generation of neo-Romantic composers. His theories on music and drama influenced early 20th century film music, which is still being felt today. Composers for movies and video games alike continue to employ much of the Wagner's compositional practices, mainly the use of "character themes" and other **leitmotifs** (more on that below).

Wagner was an apologetic German nationalist: unlike many other composers, he wrote his own libretti, which were often full of fantastical plots and scenes rooted in German folklore, German epics, and the supernatural (i.e. Gods, magic, mysticism). His works often glorified the German land and the German people. He took part in the political Revolutions of 1848, and exiled himself to Switzerland to avoid arrest. While in exile, he wrote many essays on his own theories of music and its link to drama. Many of his essays have severe anti-Semitic undertones, which is still the topic of polemics in today's academic circles.

Wagner shared German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's views that Western art had been debased since the era of the Greek Drama; he argued that music, poetry, and

dance were harmonized beautifully in ancient Greek drama, and that these different types of art were deprived of their full expressive potential when they were divorced from one another.

In 1851, Wagner wrote a book-length essay titled *Oper und Drama* (Opera and Drama), which discussed the aesthetics of drama *through* music. These ideas led to the **Music Drama**, a unique type of opera that incorporates music and theater. In these music dramas, there are no separate musical numbers: no arias, recitatives, choruses, or duets. Instead, there is constant music: melodies bleed into each other, creating a sense of **endless melody**. With the exception of scene changes, the *music does not stop at all!* Moreover, the orchestra plays just as an important role as the singers—some would argue that the orchestra's music plays a *more significant* role, as there are some instances where no words are sung for over a minute at a time! Instead, music is played by the orchestra, and the singer/actors on stage move through their choreography.

One of Wagner's most influential creations in his music dramas is the **leitmotif** or "leading motive". Leitmotifs are associative musical themes or short ideas that symbolize a person, object, place, state of mind, etc. Although there had been associative themes in the prior centuries, the leitmotif is much more complex than simply playing a melody whenever a character comes on stage: a *true Wagnerian leitmotif* evolves with the drama, and *interacts with it* at the same time. Wagner's use of leitmotifs influenced Hollywood composers of the early 20th century like Max Steiner and Erich Korngold, as well as modern film composers like John Williams, James Horner, and Howard Shore. Many composers for video games also use leitmotifs like Nobuo Uematsu, Hitoshi Sakimoto, Koji Kondo, and Wil Roget II (more on these in the following chapters).

(above) Photograph of Wanger by Franz Hanfstaengl. [Public Domain](#).

The Ring Cycle.



A live performance of Seattle Opera's Ring Cycle. [Screenshot taken from the Wagnerian Website.](#)

The *Ring Cycle* is an exemplary example of Wagner's theories on Music Dramas in action. His ideas of combining poetry, music, drama, visuals, dancing, staging, costumes, and everything you see above represents his idea of **Gesamtkunstwerk**: that is, the "operatic total work of art." All different arts coming together to create a single work. This, he believed, returned the artistic aesthetic back to the ancient Greek Drama. In modern days, Wagner's Ring Cycle is performed with spectacular staging, as you can see from above. Every year in Bayreuth, Germany, the "Ring Festival" performs all four operas back-to-back in 4 days. Good seats for each opera is around \$400---after taxes, it would cost a single person about \$2000 to see the entire festival!

The Ring Cycle consists of 4 3-hour operas that tell the mythical story of gods, trolls, and other supernatural beings. The first opera is titled *Das Rheingold*, which tells the story of an evil troll named Alberich, who steals the Rhine Maidens' gold after denouncing love. He forges the gold into a ring that gives the bearer power: this ring becomes the focus of greed over the course of all four operas (though you may see resemblance to Tolkien's *Fellowship of the Ring*, there is actually very little similarity outside of the ring itself).

In this chapter, we'll look at the finale from the 2nd opera of the cycle, *The Valkyrie*. In this scene, Wotan (one of the many gods) puts one of his Valkyries to "endless slumber" because she disobeyed him. Though he doesn't want to (she's one of his favorites), he needs to make sure the rules are followed. As a final gesture of love, he puts a ring of fire around her to ensure that only the bravest of souls will be able to awaken her (which occurs in the 3rd opera, *Siegfried*).

In this scene, we hear six different leitmotifs, each representing a different element in the opera, interacting with one another. These leitmotifs represent Wotan's spear (his weapon), Loge (the god of fire), Fire, "Eternal Sleep," "Endless Slumber," Siegfried's sword (foreshadowing the next opera), and Fate. It's very difficult to describe each of these leitmotifs in text; [watch the video presentation](#), and you'll be able to hear each of these leitmotifs played on their own before viewing the opera's final scene, where you can hear all of these themes interact with each other and the unfolding drama.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

13: Music in Film

[13.1: Thematic Traditions in Silent Film](#)

[13.2: Early Hollywood Scoring- Max Steiner and the Leitmotivic Score](#)

[13.3: Modern Leitmotivic Scoring for Film- John Williams' Star Wars](#)

[13.4: Howard Shore's Score to Lord of the Rings](#)

When you're done reading through these chapters above, watch these two video presentations on the leitmotivic scores to *Titanic* and *Groundhog Day*. These two films surprisingly utilize a leitmotivic soundtrack. These video presentations were presented at the annual conference of Music and the Moving Image in 2021.

[View the video on James Horner's leitmotivic score to *Titanic*](#)

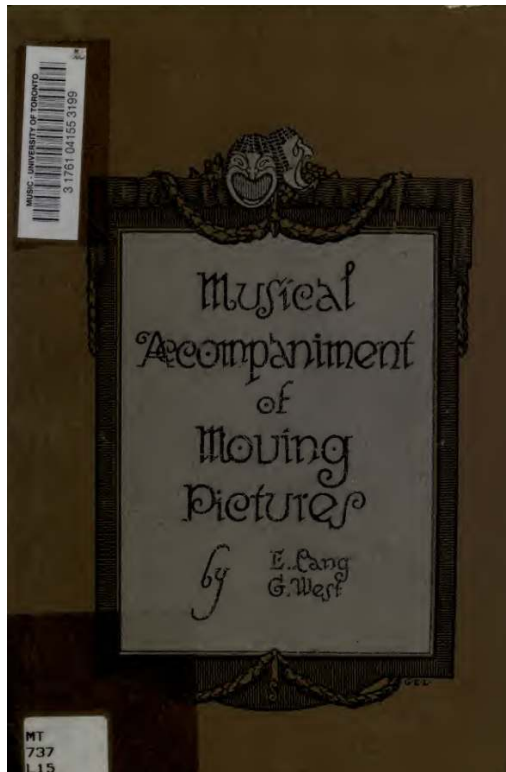
[View the video on James Horner's leitmotivic score to *Groundhog Day*](#)

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13.1: Thematic Traditions in Silent Film

Music in Film: the Main Theme and Character Themes

Most of us can't imagine watching a movie or television show without any kind of music or sound to accompany it. Indeed, even the "silent film era," which predates modern cinema, spanning 1894-1929 included *some* type of music. Even though early silent film was incapable of producing sound (outside of the noise from the projectors!), early silent film typically had a pianist or organist playing music to accompany the movies. Performers would either improvise (make up on the spot), or they would play from a book that they kept with music for specific scenes. For instance, during a chase scene, the performer would play fast and suspenseful music. In love scenes, they would perform more lyrical and slow music. In a murder scene, they would play dissonant and "scary" sounding music. With the rising popularity in film during the silent era, there became an increasing demand for performers to accompany silent film.



Edith Lang and George West's 1920 book "Musical accompaniment for moving pictures: a practical guide for pianists and organists" (pictured left) was written to provide musicians who accompanied silent films strategies for their performances. The book is such an important part of history that it is not only in the public domain, but it has been deemed "selected by scholars as being culturally important, and is part of the knowledge base of civilization as we know it" ([Source](#)). Drawing from compositional practices from the 19th century Romantic composers like Brahms, Berlioz, and Liszt, this book provides strategies on how to successfully enhance the dramas that musicians accompanied. The book, now in the Public Domain, is still a source for performers, composers, and scholars alike.

[Read through the 1 page introduction](#) in this book; you'll get a glimpse into what movie theorists believed about film and its musical accompaniment over a century ago. Hardly anything has changed since then!

One of the most interesting things that the book discusses appears on the 8th page, regarding the "**Main Theme**" and **character themes**:

"The kernel of the musical illustration of a picture is the **main theme**. This should be typical in mood or character of the hero or heroine. It should have emotional appeal, it should be easily recognizable and admit of such treatment as mentioned above. This theme should be announced in the introduction, it should be emphasized at the first appearance of the person with whom it is linked, and it should receive its ultimate glorification, by means of tonal

volume, etc., in the finale of the film. Added to this, there will be as many subsidiary themes as there are secondary characters in the film. This does not mean that every face that appears on the screen must be labelled (sic) with a musical motive. This procedure applies only to the characters that are really concerned in the progress of the action. The villain will be characterized by a sinister or sombre (sic) theme, the comedian by a light and frivolous one, and so on."

According to Lang and West, the main theme of a film should be attached to the main hero, and should come back throughout the film in different variations to reflect the mood or atmosphere that the character finds themselves in. They also suggest that other characters like the **villain** or **comedian** should have their own character themes. These theories on film music are still used today, as we'll see in the next page. Before we do so however, let's examine some of the different ways in which composers may alter a theme for the sake of mood.

(above): Cover of Edith and West's famous book, [now in the Public Domain](#).

Thematic Development of a Main Theme in Early Silent Film

Understanding how a single theme can be developed is important; a single theme can be changed through a variety of different methods, each creating a different atmosphere or mood. The following pages have been reproduced from the book above that describes a "hypothetical theme" that represents a heroine in a hypothetical film. Read through these descriptions of how a single

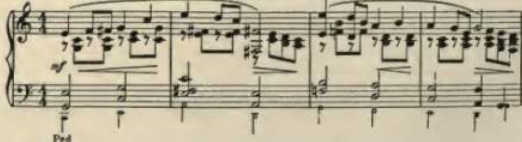
theme may be developed over the course of a drama. As you read, click the links to an audio file that plays these different transformations of this hypothetical theme. As you do, pay attention to *how* the theme has changed to reflect a specific mood.

c. Thematic Development

The treatment and development of these musical themes, for purposes of picture accompaniment, is very much in the nature of the treatment given to a musical idea in the course of a composition such as a sonata or symphony. But, while the player cannot be urged too strongly to study such works, the aim of this book will probably be best served by freeing the subject of its more intricate technicalities and by plainly stating a few methods through which this musical alteration or variation of a theme may be accomplished.

Let us take for instance an emotional theme such as:

Ex. A
Andante
Str. 8; Fl. 8; Saxophone Solo - light string and flute accompaniment



If this theme were to represent the heroine in ordinary circumstances, her appearance under emotional stress or afflicted with sorrow might be characterized by playing the theme in the minor mode, as follows:

- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. A."](#) (the heroine's theme)
- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. B."](#) (the main theme played sorrowfully)
- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. C."](#) (the main theme suggesting the character's hesitation)
- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. D."](#) (the main theme expressing pleasant excitement)
- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. E."](#) (the main theme expressing fear and anxiety)
- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. F."](#) (the main theme played subtly---you'll hear it in the inner voice of the organ, but the main attention is on the fast passages in the upper register).
- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. G."](#) (the main theme presented lightly, almost like waltz)
- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. H."](#) (the main theme expressed happily)

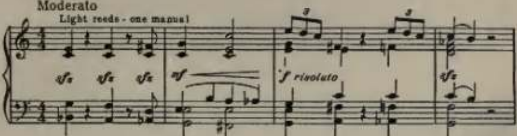
THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT 9

Ex. B
Poco lento
Glor.



At a moment of hesitation, of doubt, or when placed in the necessity of making a decision, the heroine might be characterized by a "breaking" of the theme in the following manner:

Ex. C
Moderato
Light reeds - one manual



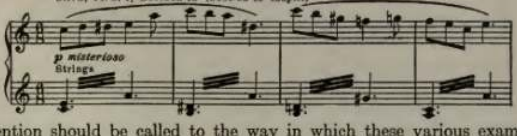
Her anxiety might be expressed by taking the theme in a rhythmically quicker form, and if this anxiety was caused by pleasant anticipation, the theme would naturally be given in major:

Ex. D
Allegretto
Flutes 8, 4'



while it would be given in minor, if her anxiety was caused by apprehension or fear, as follows:

Ex. E
Agitato
Str. 8; Fl. 8, 4'; Bassoon 16' (Choe on 16' couplet)



Attention should be called to the way in which these various examples are treated with respect to registration and accompaniment. They will offer an outlook on the great variety that may be accomplished by judicious

- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. I."](#) (the main theme given much more "weight" to it)
- [CLICK HERE to listen to "Ex. J."](#) (the main theme with more emotional intensity)

The following pages will discuss Max Steiner, the "father of the modern Hollywood sound," John Williams, and Howard Shore's approaches to film music.

10 MUSICAL ACCOMPANIMENT OF MOVING PICTURES

manipulation. Only a few basic emotions have here been illustrated. A wider range of psychological insight will suggest to the player a greater number of possibilities in such manipulation. The player should always seek to differentiate in each return of the theme, during the film, so that new interest will enhance its appeal. An effective means of variation is offered by placing the melody in a lower register and ornamenting it in the treble with appropriate figure work, as given here:

Ex. F



This treatment might suggest itself if the hero were pictured in a meditation of which the heroine is the subject, or if he were reading a letter received from her, in other words, if the heroine did not actually enter into the picture but if the thought of her was implied by the action of others. The "mood" of a theme can be totally changed by altering the rhythm. For instance, our theme, originally played in common time, gains in "lightness" and airiness if presented in three-four time.

Ex. G



THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT

11

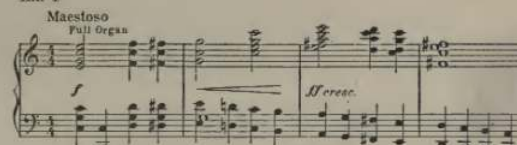
Such treatment will be appropriate for a scene in which the heroine is pictured in particularly pleasant and happy circumstances or actually dancing. On the other hand, a theme that was originally presented in three-four time:

Ex. H



might be given "weight" by lengthening the measure into one of four-four, as follows:

Ex. I



Greater emotional intensity will be suggested by playing the original theme to an accompaniment of nine-eighths.

Ex. J



13.2: Early Hollywood Scoring- Max Steiner and the Leitmotivic Score

Max Steiner: The "Father" of the Modern Hollywood Sound.

"Every character needs a theme," proclaimed Austrian composer Max Steiner (1888-1971). After fleeing Germany during World War I, he eventually found himself in America in 1914. Considered a child prodigy, it is no wonder that he became quickly sought after as a composer for theater (including Broadway) and film. He composed over 300 film scores including *King Kong* (1933), *Casablanca* (1942), and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) -- among many others, of course.

Much of early film scoring resembled 19th century Romantic music like that of Brahms. When Steiner was hired in 1929 by RKO films, his main job was to create the music that accompanied the title scene and ending credits --- only rarely did they use him for the "on-screen" type of incidental background music that we're used to today. According to Steiner himself, the opinion of the filmmakers during the 20s was that the music essentially bogged down the film; it was seen as almost a necessary evil.

1933's *King Kong* changed all of this. Because the film was essentially a mix of the fantasy/horror genre, the studio allowed Steiner to enhance the movie with his music because they didn't like the cinematography -- the special effects in those days were pretty contrived, and the studio executives felt that the music could somehow "save" the film! The film's producer asked him to write orchestral music for the film, and Steiner (at the producer's own expense!) hired an 80-person orchestra for his music. Steiner recalls that the film's fantasy/horror blend allowed for him to experiment, saying that, "it was the kind of film that allowed you to do anything and everything, from weird chords and dissonances to pretty melodies." The film's scoring had everything from lyrical melodies for the heroine, tribal music for the scene where she was almost sacrificed, to loud dissonant chords to create a sense of urgency and suspense. The film also used **leitmotifs** in a more generic way: characters had their own themes and were used to manipulate human emotions throughout the entire film.



[Listen to King Kong's own leitmotif](#): the opening 3 notes that descend are Kong's leitmotif. The bombastic, almost violent presentation of the melody perfectly depicts the fantasy/horror element of the film.

[At 1:25 in the timestamp](#), you'll hear the same 3-note leitmotif, but you'll notice that the entire aesthetic has changed from a violent and suspenseful sentiment to something more lyrical, and quasi-romantic. This is to represent the sentimental feelings that Kong had for the heroine, Ann Darrow (played by Fay Wray).

[In the famous scene King Kong is killed by the airplanes](#), we see Carl Denham (the character who captured Kong in the first place) tell the police officer that "planes didn't kill him...it was Beauty that killed the beast." As he utters these lines, you'll hear Kong's leitmotif in the "sentimental" presentation; even though Kong's not alive, his musical presence stays with us, a very common **leitmotivic** technique.

This is just a single example of Steiner's leitmotivic techniques, drawing inspiration from Wagner's operas. We can also see how Edith Lang and George West's ideas of thematic transformation and development discussed in the previous page are implemented here: Kong's aggressive and dissonant theme is transformed to a sentimental setting by the end of the film, helping to create an emotional sympathy between the audience and Kong.

By the 1950s, this type of orchestral scoring began to fall out of favor in Hollywood, being replaced with popular songs and electronic music. John Williams' score to the first *Star Wars* ("Episode IV: A New Hope") in 1977 helped to revive the leitmotivic techniques that Steiner had helped usher into film. The next pages will explore more modern leitmotivic scoring techniques in film music.

(above): Photograph of Max Steiner comopsing at the piano. By Filmmusicnotes.com, Fair use, <https://en.Wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40771800>

Leitmotifs in Film.

Before moving on to the next page, view these short videos that discuss in more detail the world of film music. The first video discusses film sound in more detail, while the second and third videos discuss film leitmotifs in more detail.

"The Fundamentals of Film Composition"

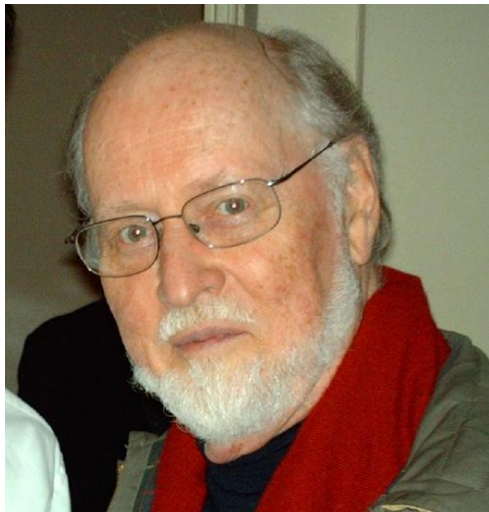
"What is a Leitmotif?"

"Understanding the Leitmotif"

13.2: Early Hollywood Scoring- Max Steiner and the Leitmotivic Score is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.3: Modern Leitmotivic Scoring for Film- John Williams' Star Wars

John Williams and the Modern Hollywood Sound.



John Williams (b. 1932) is perhaps America's most famous composer. A quick scour of his [Wikipedia page](#) will demonstrate just how successful his 7+ decade career has been, including 25 Grammy Awards, 5 Academy Awards, and 4 Golden Globes (to name a few). He has composed for the entire *Star Wars* "trilogy of trilogies," the first 3 *Harry Potter* films, the *Indiana Jones* films, *Jurassic Park*, the first two *Home Alone* movies, *Jaws*, *Superman*, and countless others (see his [discography here](#)). In addition to composing for film, he has also composed concert works for orchestra.

John Williams is recognized as the composer who helped to usher in a new era of Hollywood leitmotivic scoring: many of his films include **main themes** that represent the main character (or the entire cast of protagonists), and individual **character themes**, all of which experience some form of **thematic transformation** over the course of the drama.

His most famous examples of leitmotivic transformation occurs within the *Star Wars* franchise. Music theorist [Frank Lehman](#) has cataloged all of the different [types of leitmotifs](#) within the entire *Star Wars* franchise, demonstrating a wide network of interrelated music themes that interact with one another, in addition to enduring their own musical transformation. We'll take a look at a few examples here.

(above): photograph of John Williams by Nationalparks, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2699194>

Leitmotivic Transformation Leitmotifs in *Star Wars*.

The Main Theme.

Star Wars (originally released in 1977) begins with perhaps the [most iconic title sequence in film](#). This "main theme" represents not only Luke Skywalker, but also his allies in the Rebellion. The theme bears all of the markers of "heroism" through its use of various musical topics (these are elaborated on in the following chapter on video game music). Throughout the franchise, this theme often accompanies battle sequences where the heroic rebellion takes on the Imperial Army, and is heard in all 9 films of the saga. When audiences hear this theme, they are mostly reminded of Luke and his heroic allies, and is mostly played in the "heroic" style.

However, in the last film (spoiler alert), where C-3PO says good-bye to his allies, [we hear the same theme in the background](#), *completely devoid* of the heroic aesthetic: no more heroic sentiment, no bombastic brass and percussion—a single French horn plays the melody while C-3PO speaks to his friends. This hero's theme is played in much more of a somber and sentimental setting, perfectly befitting the bittersweet situation that the heroes find themselves in. Moreover, although Luke Skywalker is nowhere to be found on screen or in the film, fans will recognize the theme and will likely draw connections between Luke's heroic actions from decades prior with the heroic actions that C-3PO commits in his selfless act of bravery.



C-3PO says goobye to his friends in *The Rise of Skywalker*. [Screenshot taken from YouTube](#).

The Imperial March.

Another instance of leitmotivic transformation may be found in the "Imperial March." The theme's association with Darth Vader has earned it a nickname of "Darth Vader's Theme," although the is is also used to refer to the Imperial Army itself throughout all of the franchise). The theme first appears in the 2nd film, "Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back." [Watch this scene while listening to the theme](#): although it sounds like a march, it evokes a more negative reaction from audiences than positive—this does not mean that audiences don't like it, but the music itself is clearly associated with *villainy* instead of heroism. This is because of the the theme's use of dark harmonies, and dissonances within its writing.



Darth Vader says goodbye to Luke. Screenshot taken from [YouTube](#).

When fans hear this theme, they immediately understand that Darth Vader is either on screen, or is being talked about. In the last movie of the original trilogy *Return of the Jedi*, the theme returns as Darth Vader dies and says good-bye to Luke. Here, the "Imperial March" is played very weakly, almost as if it is withering away and dying. [Watch this famous scene of Vader's death](#), paying specific attention to the music at 0:45.

These are just two examples of Williams' approach to leitmotivic scoring, but they demonstrate just how a single musical attribute's replacement may completely change the musical and dramatic context of a given drama. The following page will show Howard Shore's approach to leitmotivic writing in his scoring to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which connects various themes on the smallest musical level, creating a thematic family of different, yet interrelated musical themes!

Additional Resources.

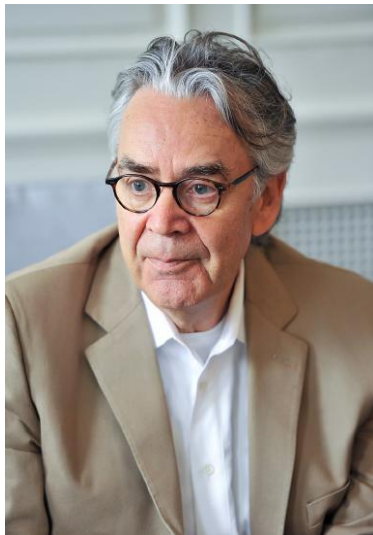
For readers more interested in the musical soundscape of *Star Wars*, [watch this short video on leitmotifs within the film](#).

[There's also a great article from the New Yorker](#) by musicologist Alex Ross that discusses the music in more detail.

13.3: Modern Leitmotivic Scoring for Film- John Williams' *Star Wars* is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

13.4: Howard Shore's Score to Lord of the Rings

Howard Shore's Leitmotifs in *Lord of the Rings*.



Howard Shore (b. 1946) is a Canadian-born composer who has scored more than 80 films. He is most-known for his scores to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy as well as the *Hobbit* trilogy, the former for which he received 3 Academy Awards. Shore's approach to leitmotivic scoring in the *Lord of the Rings* is truly a work of meticulous planning, creating a large network of different themes for characters and places, all connected musically at the smallest level. By connecting these different themes together, Shore creates a **thematic network** of interrelated themes, that all still retain their own unique identity. Though these techniques are present in some of John Williams' works, Shore's music is of special interest, because *every single important musical theme may be traced back to the main theme!* In this way, Shore is able to tell the entire story of the protagonists's fellowship through his compositional techniques!

The *Lord of the Rings*, as written by J.R.R. Tolkien in 1954-55, takes place in a high-fantasy setting. In its fictional history, we learn that eons ago, a dark sorcerer named Sauron along with some Elves had forged 19 "rings of power" to be dispersed among the different races of Middle Earth: 3 were given to Elves, 7 were given to Dwarves, and 9 were given to Humans. Sauron then created his own "One Ring" in the fires of Mount Doom to control all of the others, and those who wore them. The *Lord of the Rings* tells the story of Elves, Dwarves, Humans, and Hobbits forming a Fellowship to destroy the One Ring. Shore's music not only enhances the unfolding drama, but also foreshadows dramatic events through his network of related musical themes!

(above): picture of Howard Shore by Sam Santos. [CC BY 2.0](#).

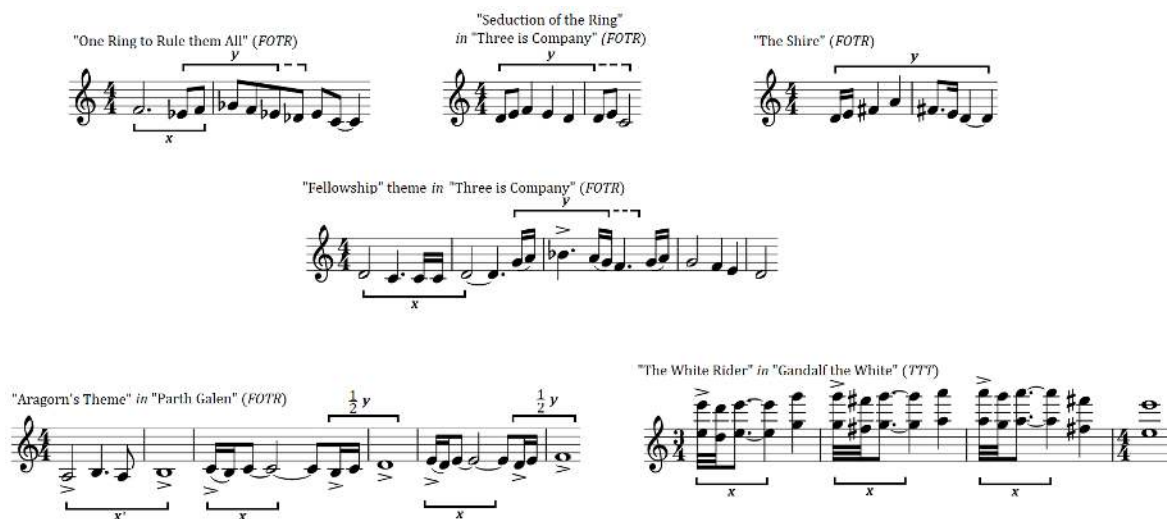
Connecting Different Themes through Small Gestures.



Picture of the One Ring forged by Sauron in the Fires of Mount Doom ([screenshot taken from YouTube](#)).

As one would expect, Howard Shore provides the main characters their own musical themes, and provides **two recurring main themes**. The first main theme accompanies the opening title of the first movie *Fellowship of the Ring* with a theme called "The One Ring." [Watch the opening cinematic from the first film](#) *The Fellowship of the Rings*, which describes the story's fictional history. The ominous music you hear in the background at the beginning is a variant of the movie's **first main theme**, which musicologist Doug Adams refers to the opening statement as "One Ring to the Rule them All" (see below).

After watching the opening cinematic, [listen to the opening few seconds](#) of the theme without any narration. This ominous melody ("One Ring to the Rule them All") involves a very short two-measure melody that consists of a falling and ascending melodic gesture, both labeled x and y (see the example below). Later in the film, we hear another ominous piece of music called "Seduction of the Ring," which sounds when protagonists hold the Ring of Power, which slowly corrupts even the most well-intentioned being. This theme (seen below) consists of a rising and falling gesture labeled y: this gesture grows out of the *same gesture* that was heard in the opening title track "One Ring to Rule Them All."



Opening phrases of various themes in Howard Shore's *Lord of the Rings* score. (FOTR: *Fellowship of the Rings*; TTT: *The Two Towers*).

This same *y* gesture begins the Hobbits theme called "The Shire" (seen above). The ominous nature of the Ring themes is gone, and we hear a peaceful almost quasi-folk style to this beautiful melody to depict the simple-natured Hobbits. [Listen to this beautiful "Hobbit" theme](#), paying attention to the first few notes, then [watch this scene where Gandalf visits the Hobbits in the shire](#). At 4:28, you'll hear a recorder playing this peaceful melody as Gandalf rides into town. By beginning the Hobbits' theme with the same musical gesture as the "One Ring" and the "Seduction of the Ring," Shore musically depicting the Hobbits' corruption when they get a hold of the ring!



The Fellowship of the Rings, the Shire (where the Hobbits live). The "Shire" theme plays here at 4:28 ([screenshot taken from YouTube](#)).

The diagram above displays 3 rows: the top row shows the three aforementioned musical themes, all using the same *y* gesture, depicting the Hobbits and the Rings' themes. However, the story is more than just the Hobbits: the story focuses on a Fellowship—a pact among different races—to come together and destroy evil! This Fellowship is musically represented by the "Fellowship Theme," shown in the middle row of the diagram above. The "Fellowship Theme" acts as the movie's **second main theme**. As you can see, this theme begins with the same *x* gesture from "One Ring to Rule Them All," and moves directly into the *y* gesture from the Ring and Hobbit themes! [Listen to this very brief statement of the "Fellowship Theme,"](#) paying close attention to how these two different *x* and *y* gestures join together to create a unified heroic melody.

Shore brilliantly ties the "Shire" theme to the "Fellowship" theme in the beginning of the first film. Here, the two Hobbits Frodo and Sam leave the Shire for the first time in their lives, on a quest to destroy the One Ring. The Fellowship has not yet been fully created, but with these two Hobbits, its beginnings have been formed. [Watch this scene where Gandalf send the Hobbits on their way](#): at 1:26, you'll hear the "Shire Theme" as Sam explains that he's never left the Shire before. Then, at 1:40, the music bleeds into the "Fellowship Theme" very subtly as Frodo says, "Remember what Bilbo used to say." This subtle statement only *suggests* the formation of the Fellowship, but we don't yet hear it in all of its glory.



The Fellowship of the Rings: Frodo and Sam leave the Shire. Here, we hear the "Shire/Hobbit" theme immediately followed by a subtle statement of the "Fellowship" theme at 1:26. This musically foreshadows the scene at the Council of Elrond where the entire Fellowship is created. (Screenshot from [YouTube](#)).

Later in the film, representatives from all of the races have a meeting at the "Council of Elrond" to discuss how best to destroy the Ring of Power. Here, Bilbo volunteers to destroy the Ring, confessing that he doesn't know the way. In response, 8 others volunteer to accompany him including 3 other Hobbits (Sam, Merry, and Pippin), Gandalf the Wizard, Gimli the Dwarf, Legolas the Elf, and the Humans Aragorn and Boromir. At this point in the film, we finally hear the entire "Fellowship" theme in all of its glory. [Watch this scene of the Council of Elrond](#), paying attention to timestamp 2:56, where you'll hear this iconic "Fellowship" theme. Shore's foreshadowing techniques connect not only the Ring and the Hobbits, but out of these themes, he creates a unique theme that represents the entire cast of protagonists, unified in defeating Sauron's nefarious deeds!



The Fellowship of the Rings, Council of Elrond scene ([screenshot from YouTube](#)). Here, we hear the "Fellowship" theme stated in full for the first time at 2:56.

As if this wasn't enough, Shore *continues* to connect the "Fellowship" theme (which itself is derived from the "One Ring to Rule them All" theme) to *other characters with their own character themes*! For instance, the Human Aragorn is musically depicted with his own self-named theme (seen above). This theme is mostly comprised of 2-note rising gestures (inversions of the *descending* gesture of the "One Ring to Rule them All" theme), and a rising 3-note gesture heard in all of the "Ring" and "Hobbit" themes. Moreover, because these themes are all connected through these gestures, we can see and hear a connection between Aragorn's theme and the Fellowship theme itself! [Watch this scene from Fellowship of the Rings](#) where Aragorn heroically staves off the enemies while Frodo runs to safety. At 1:43, you'll hear "Aragorn's Theme" as he fends off the enemies. Gandalf the Wizard's theme is also connected to these themes: in the second film *The Two Towers*, Gandalf (now a White Wizard) calls his horse Shadowfax to his aid. As he rides his faithful steed into the distance, we hear "The White Rider," (seen above), which is comprised almost *solely* of the descending x gesture from the "Fellowship" theme. [Watch this scene from The Two Towers](#), paying special attention to 0:58. At this moment, you'll hear a triumphant statement of the "White Rider," representing the White Wizard and his horse.



(left): *Fellowship of the Rings*, Aragorn defends Frodo ([screenshot from YouTube](#)). During this scene, we hear "Aragorn's Theme" at 1:43.

(right): Gandalf rides his horse into the distance ([screenshot from YouTube](#)). During this scene, we hear "The White Rider" at 0:58.

These are just a *few* of the leitmotivic connections between all of the themes in Howard Shore's scoring to the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. As you can see, there are many subtle connections that connect various themes together---and we haven't even discussed singular transformational techniques! These types of techniques are found in many epic franchises, but are also found in some movies that you might never expect. Movies like *Titanic* and *Groundhog Day* and even *How to Train Your Dragon* also use leitmotivic techniques in their soundtracks in ways to enhance the dramatic and emotional connection between the film and its audience (though perhaps not as sophisticated as found here!)

13.4: Howard Shore's Score to Lord of the Rings is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

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14.2: 8-bit fun! Music and Sound in 1980s video games

14.3: Now, with real instruments! 16-bit video games and beyond

14.4: Cinematic Storytelling in the Role-Playing Game (RPG)

14.5: Nobuo Uematsu and Final Fantasy VI

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14.1: Early Video Games and Sound- 1958-1970s

Sound and Music in Video Games.

Similar to movies, most of us can't imagine playing a video game without any type of sound or music to accompany our fictional adventures. But the story of how video games came to be as we understand them today is similar to film's history: early games, much like early film, did not include music or sound due to technological constraints. Much like film, early video games either included no sound and music at all, or *very limited* sound effects.

Pictured to the right is an image of what is widely regarded as the "first video game ever created," called *Tennis for Two*. This was created in 1958 almost as a joke, without any intention of ever pursuing the creation of a video game industry. The game was created by American physicist William Higinbotham after learning that the US government's newly created computers could simulate wind resistance. The game is similar to *Pong*: two players use a controller to simulate a game of tennis, and the game's programming takes into consideration trajectory, force, and even the notion of wind resistance. Like early movies, this game had literally no sound played in the background. If you're interested in seeing this game in action, [watch this short video of the game being played](#), and you'll see a glimpse into the earliest stages of video games in our history. This game predates the game *Spacewar!* by four years, and the infamous *Pong* by about 15 years!



You may be asking yourself what this "silent era" game has to do with video game music and sound? Well, before we can even address that, we need to first address the unique characteristic of video games: their **interactive** nature.

When we watch movies or television, we are what is considered a **passive** audience. We have no control over the story, nor do we contribute to the story. We are simply passive audience members witnessing the drama unfold. The music and sound effects certainly enhances our enjoyment of the drama, and may even cause us to draw different conclusions about characters and certain plot points, but at the end of the day, we have no control over how the story progresses or unfolds.

When we play video games, however, we are **active** members of the game. Whether we're playing a sports game like *Tennis for Two*, or running through imaginary lands trying to escape enemies like a *Super Mario Bros.* game, or putting together puzzle pieces like *Tetris*, or playing an RPG that tells an elaborate story like *Final Fantasy* or *The Legend of Zelda*, we're *active participants* in the game itself. The music and the sound not only enhances our enjoyment of the games we play, but it can actually influence our decisions in our gameplay!

A classic example of this phenomenon is found in the 1978 arcade game *Space Invaders*. As aliens begin to descend down on the player, we hear a four-note pattern playing repeatedly. As the aliens descend more quickly, the music's speed also increases --- this causes heightened tension and anxiety in players, which may cause them to act irrationally. Though a simple trick, it works every time. [Watch this clip of Space Invaders gameplay](#), and see just how much the music affects you as you imagine yourself playing this game.

A more intricate example of how music affects our gameplay may be seen in 1997's release of *Final Fantasy VII*. Within the early stages of the game, the protagonists chase the villain Sephiroth across the globe. As in film, Sephiroth has his very own character theme—one of many **leitmotifs** in the game's soundtrack. In one chapter of the game, players find themselves on an enemy's ship, when Sephiroth's leitmotif begins to play in the background. This subtle musical cue signals to players that they need to make sure they're ready for an upcoming "boss battle" with him.

Of course, the example of 1997's *Final Fantasy VII* is a much more involved example than our 1978 example of *Space Invaders*. By 1997, video games became much more involved and elaborate than their arcade predecessors, able to tell full epic stories that can take anywhere between 50-100 hours to experience. *Space Invaders* is a wonderful example of early arcade games that lived by a single rule: "games should be easy to play, but near impossible to master." Because these games were mostly played at pizza

parlors, bowling alleys, or pubs, the games typically had a single premise to them: get the highest score possible before the game becomes too difficult, causing the game to end. As a result, the music was mostly short and not too complicated. Often, the music to these games were simply programmed by sound engineers, and *not hired composers* like we see today. Think about it: does someone really need to be a highly-skilled composer to program a single 4-note pattern in their game? Moreover, many early arcade games utilized sound effects *more* than music. Watch some of these classic arcade games from the 70s and early 80s: you'll notice that the music is *limited* and mostly accompanied title screens. Most of the sound heard when actually playing the games were sound effects—mostly created by sound engineers, *not* classically trained composers:

[Pong \(1972\)](#)

[Asteroids \(1979\)](#)

[Monkey Magic \(1979\)](#)

[Defender \(1980\)](#)

[Pacman \(1980\)](#)

[Galaga \(1981\)](#)

Our example of *Space Invaders* is an important historical example because it was one of the first games that incorporated "music"—simple as it may have been. As arcade games in the late 70s and early 80s became more technologically advanced, capable of producing more colors and incorporating higher quality sound, they began to incorporate more music that *sounded like music*, with melodies and harmonies akin to modern popular music. [Watch this clip of the 1982 arcade game Moon Patrol](#), and you'll hear what sounds like several instruments including a drum kit playing a basic 12-bar blues tunes. And while this is more elaborate than the *Space Invaders* example, the melody still could have been programmed by someone other than a "skilled composer."

With the advent of home consoles in the 1970s like the Magnavox Odyssey, various *Pong* machines, and *Atari 2600* (among others), these arcade games were able to be brought into the home (though the graphic and audio quality were much less sophisticated than the actual arcade games due to technological constraints). Regardless as to the medium in which these games were played—arcade machines or home consoles—the music and sound was much more limited than it is today.

These simple melodies were pretty much par for the course when it came to video game music in the 1980s. That is, of course, until the advent of 8-bit consoles released in the early-mid 1980s. Systems like the NEC PC-8801 (released only in Japan in 1981), the Nintendo Entertainment System (released in 1983), and the Sega Master System (released in 1985) provided game developers the opportunity to create games that would take much longer to play, allowing for more elaborate and sophisticated stories to be attached to the games. Before we move onto the 1980s, [watch the video presentation for this unit, where you'll learn more about these interactive games](#) and more about the ways in which sound and music were incorporated into these games.

For those interested in downloading a PDF handout of this unit's PowerPoint file, [click here](#).

(above): "Tennis for Two," taken by Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) - Screenshot, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27864450>

14.1: Early Video Games and Sound- 1958-1970s is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

14.2: 8-bit fun! Music and Sound in 1980s video games

8-bit Video Games in the 1980s.



(left): the Nintendo's NES system by Evan-Amos [Public Domain](#); (right): Sega's SG-1000 system by Evan-Amos - Own work, [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The early 1980s initiated what is commonly referred to as the "third generation" of video games with 8-bit technology, which allowed for much more elaborate gameplay as well as more sophisticated graphics and sound. It was within this era where games like *Final Fantasy*, *Dragon Quest*, and *The Legend of Zelda* made first made their debut. The 8-bit technology even allowed for players to save their progress as they played their games, a *must* for games that take 20 or more hours to complete.

The 8-bit era was ushered in with Nintendo's *Famicom* (or *NES* as it is known in the West) and Sega's *Sega SG-1000*, a much [lesser-known system to game](#) aficionados. Other 8-bit systems included the *Sega Master System*, *Atari 7800*, Nintendo's *Game Boy*, and the *Commodore 64* (among many others). These systems each used their own **sound chip** (called a PSG or *programmable sound generator*) to create their music and sound. Compared to the earlier era of the 1970s, these chips allowed for a much more diverse musical palette, and much longer musical accompaniment. As a result, these companies hired trained composers to write music for these games; the music from this era has become known as **chiptunes**, or "music created by sound chips." This unit will cover music from the Nintendo's *NES* system, though there are many other systems from this era, each with their own unique soundchips and musical style.

Music in Nintendo's *NES* system.



Gameplay of Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros.* ([Screenshot from YouTube](#)).

The NES sound chip (called the Ricoh 2A03) allowed for 5 different channels, each with its own unique timbre. These channels create different types of electronically generated sounds, each with their own unique timbre. Combining these sounds together created electronic music that resemble what we often hear in rock music: 2 "lead" or "melodic" channels (called **square waves**), 1 bass channel (called a **triangle wave**), and one "percussion" channel (called the **noise channel**). The last channel was for actual live sampling—real instruments or even recordings of the human voice could be recorded, and compressed over and over to make them fit on the cartridge! ([You'll see an example of this in the video presentation for this unit](#)). [Watch this short video on the Nintendo's sound chips](#): you'll be able to hear each channel with its own timbre coming together to create music heard in some of

the more classic video games of this era. In addition to the music accompanying the gameplay, composers and sound engineers also created different sound effects to accompany the games.

Watch this video of playthrough in *Super Mario Bros.* released in 1985, paying close attention to the sounds you can hear in the background music. It may be difficult to hear because of the sound effects, but if you listen closely, you'll be able to hear 2 "melody" channels (playing in harmony with one another), a bass channel, and a percussion channel. Don't worry if you can't hear the instruments too easily --- the video presentation for this unit will cover this with more scrutiny. This tune composed by Koji Kondo, is in a very elaborate musical form, resembling an "Intro, A B B C A D D C D" structure, before repeating. Listen to this iconic melody and see if you can follow along with the different sections in this song's form. Remember: although you're not listening to live or acoustic instruments, you're still able to hear what sounds like a pop or rock band due to the number of instruments and type of sounds created.

In an interview, Koji Kondo stated that the music from World 1-1 was written to "create music for the *experience* that the player is having," as opposed to simply providing background music. Each track from *Super Mario Bros.* doesn't simply accompany the fictional character, rather it reflects the player's gaming experience. This philosophy is incredibly important for composers who write for video games, as it helps with the overall sense of **immersion**, or the sensation of letting go of reality, and being submerged in the fictional world. (For those interested in this concept of immersion, consult this article from *Frontiers in Psychology* that addresses immersion in video games).



Gameplay of World 5 in Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros. 3* (Screenshot from YouTube).

Super Mario Bros. was such a hit that it spanned two more titles for the *Nintendo*; Mario became the de facto mascot for Nintendo, appearing in dozens of games over the next 4 decades. The last *Mario* title for the NES called *Super Mario Bros. 3* was released only 3 years after the first game was released; comparing the original 1985 release of *Super Mario Bros.* to 1988's release of *Super Mario Bros. 3* demonstrates how much more sophisticated the technology became in such a short period of time. While the console itself didn't change, the *cartridges* that contained the games evolved and became more capable of higher quality graphics and sound. The screenshot above shows gameplay from *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Compare the two games in question, and you'll see that *Mario 3* has much more variety in its colors and is more detailed. When you listen to the music, you'll even hear the introduction sound like "steel drums," which is a real recording of a timpani that has been compressed. In only 3 years, games were able to incorporate higher quality graphics and audio. For those interested in just how much more sophisticated the soundtrack to *Super Mario Bros. 3* was to its predecessor, read this article by Andrew Head that discusses all of the new compositional techniques found within one of Koji Kondo's most famous soundtracks.

Song form and style in Nintendo Music.



Screenshot of 1983's *Mappy Land* ([Screenshot taken from YouTube](#)).

Different games create different atmospheres. Some games are much more "kid friendly," and rarely involve any type of killing or violence. A great example of this game is Namco's 1986 release of *Mappy Land*, based on a 1983 arcade game called *Mappy*. This game involves a Mouse who needs to avoid cats to collect cheese and other presents for his girlfriend before proposing to her. Because of the cute-natured style of the game, the music resembles what is commonly referred to as "bubblegum pop" music—that is, pop music in a much brighter tone, similar to early *Beatles* songs like "I wanna hold your hand" and "She loves you" (as opposed to say, heavy metal of blues-based rock music). The music is mostly in the major mode, uses very little drum kit sounds, and the timbres are much brighter, focusing prominently on the two melodic square waves. [Watch a playthrough of this game](#), and you'll hear much "happier" sounding music accompanying this kid-friendly game.



(left): 1986's *Castlevania* gameplay (Screenshot from [YouTube](#)); (right): 1988's *Mega Man 2* (Screenshot from [YouTube](#))

Other games that involved more violence tended to incorporate more rock and heavy metal elements. 1986's *Castlevania*, which depicts a vampire hunter infiltrating Dracula's castle, and the *Mega Man* series, which involves a robot who has to blast his way through different stages full of enemy robots, though still targeting the youth, is a bit more on the violent side, and targeted more mature players. It should not be surprising that these games' soundtracks incorporate more heavy metal and rock music styles. [Watch this video](#) of gameplay from one of the levels in *Castlevania*: you'll notice that the music is much faster, using darker harmonies, and is even in a rock-style form of "Intro, Verse, Pre-chorus, Chorus." Then, [watch this video](#) of the rock-style within one of *Mega Man 2*'s levels, focusing again on the darker harmonies, faster tempo, and rock form of "Verse1, Verse2, Bridge, Verse3." These songs have become so iconic among video game music fans that musicians have covered them in their own rock style! Take a listen to FamilyJules' heavy metal cover of "Wicked Child" from *Castlevania* (the same tune you just listened to), and then [take a listen to Gregg Rosetti's rock cover](#) of the music from *Mega Man*'s. You'll notice that these tracks lend themselves very well to rock bands, complete with their own guitar solos. When you're done, [watch the video presentation for this unit](#), where you'll learn about rock form and style in early Nintendo music (and by extension, other 8-bit systems).

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14.3: Now, with real instruments! 16-bit video games and beyond

Music in 16-bit video games: the Super Nintendo and sound sampling.



(left): Super Nintendo, by Evan-Amos, Public Domain; (right): Sega Genesis, by Evan-Amos, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The "fourth generation" of video games began in 1987 with the TurboGraphix-16, though the most popular systems were again created by Nintendo and Sega. 16-bit games ushered in a new era: higher quality graphics that provided for a quasi 3-dimensional visual aesthetic, and higher quality sound allowed for composers to write music that sounded like—or at least *resembled*—real instruments. Systems like the *Super Nintendo*, *Sega Genesis*, and the *Neo-Geo* provided more realistic gameplay and music to accompany the games. Musically, each system had their own unique soundchips that allowed for instrument sampling (similar to the 5th channel in the NES sound chip). Composers now had an "electronic orchestra" at their fingertips: they could use orchestral instruments, rock band sounds, and everything in between, to create a more colorful musical soundtrack. [This short video](#) provides a more elaborate discussion on the intricacies of the soundchips in the Super Nintendo: you'll learn how composers were able to create a vast soundscape for each of their games. With the new technology capacity for longer, and more colorful music, composers began to employ compositional techniques found in traditional repertoire (this is not to say that traditional techniques were not found in earlier games, but they were arguably fully exploited in these games).

Thematic Development in Koji Kondo's *Super Mario World*.



Screenshot of Nintendo's 1990 release of *Super Mario World* for the Super Nintendo ([Screenshot taken from YouTube](#)).

The 16-bit game *Super Mario World* was truly a landmark in both gameplay and compositional style within video games. The game's graphics allowed for a "3D/2D" aesthetic: 2-dimensional characters moving in what appears to be a 3-dimensional environment. Composer Koji Kondo (who had composed the music for all of the *Mario* games to this point) created a soundtrack that was based off of a single recurring theme that endures different transformational procedures, which all depended on the different level's environment. Take a listen to this opening track, known as the "Overworld" music. This theme is the recurring theme (sometimes called a **cyclic theme**, because the theme comes back "round and round" like a cycle). [Watch this gameplay with the "Overworld" music](#) in the background. See if you can make out the instruments being used. You should be able to hear what sounds like ukelele, tuba or bass, and a steel drum—which never would have been possible in the 8-bit era!

As mentioned above, this **cyclic theme** accompanies every single level, but depending on its environment, the music is played differently. For instance, [when Mario is underwater](#), we hear the melody played like a waltz, using lots of glockenspiel and bass; [when Mario goes underground](#), we hear the melody played by an upright bass with lots of marimba and other percussion. [When Mario's stage has no ground](#), we hear the melody in the style of ragtime (as an homage to famous ragtime composer Scott Joplin);

when Mario enters a Haunted House, we hear the melody played in the minor mode with lots of dissonance and eerie sound effects accompanying the melody, and when he enters Bowser's Castles, we hear the melody again played in the minor mode with more strange sound effects.

This technique is known as **thematic transformation**: while the melody remains largely unchanged, the surrounding musical *elements* are varied throughout the game. Instruments change, the register of the melody is changed, the key (major or minor) may change, the tempo (speed) or meter (time signature) can also change—everything that *affects* the theme can change, but the theme itself remains the same! This allows composers to unify the soundtrack while also affecting the players' immersion. Players may see the musical theme as a musical representation—a **leitmotif**—of the character, and by extension, *of themselves as well!* By changing the theme's musical surroundings, players may fully immerse themselves into the game through the music! A handout on this game is attached to this page; view this as you watch the video presentation for this unit. It covers in more detail Koji Kondo's compositional techniques in *Super Mario World*.

When you're done listening to these different transformations of Mario's theme, watch the video presentation for this unit; it covers the different transformations in further detail. Then, move to the next page that discusses cinematic storytelling in video games.

14.3: Now, with real instruments! 16-bit video games and beyond is shared under a not declared license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

14.4: Cinematic Storytelling in the Role-Playing Game (RPG)

Music and the Role-Playing Game (RPG).

You may have heard of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Released in 1974, *D&D* as a role-playing game, or RPG. These "tabletop" RPGs are played around a table, and involve a fictional universe created by a "Dungeon Master" (a DM), typically in a high-fantasy/Medieval setting similar to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. These universes have castles, kings, queens, dragons, monsters, orcs, dwarves, elves, ogres—you name it. People play the game by creating a character with their own history/backstory, and take that role in a fictional universe. They adopt these roles, and converse with other characters in the game, which takes place purely in the imagination of the players. (Some like to "Live-Action Role Play, or LARP, which involves the same thing, but they actually create costumes, fake weapons, and actually act their parts in a physical location).

Dungeons and Dragons' influence on video games was immense: from the early days of the 1980s (the earliest console RPG being [Atari's *Dragonstomper*](#)) to modern games like *Final Fantasy*, *Undertale*, *The Legend of Zelda*, and *Triangle Strategy*, RPGs immerse players in a fantasy-like environment, and provide them with elaborate tales that take hours and hours to unfold. These games typically include a cast of protagonists and antagonists alike, and involves much narration and dialogue. In the early days of RPGs, players needed to read through the dialogue and narration, as voice acting was not technologically possible in the 80s and 90s. One of the earliest RPGs released by Nintendo was *Dragon Quest* released in Japan on the Nintendo NES in 1986. Watch this short clip of *Dragon Quest* (ported in the West as *Dragon Warrior*): the game begins with the main hero talking to the king providing the player with information about their fictional world and their first quest. Players then embark on their journey, meeting new characters along the way, battling their way through different quests and adventures before finally "beating the game."

As video games became more sophisticated with the advent of 16-bit technology, RPGs became much more involved: games often would take 40 or more hours to complete. They included a cast of many heroes and villains, and similar to film, these characters often would be musically represented by their own **leitmotifs**. These different leitmotifs would use different **musical topics**, including the **march topic**, **fanfare topic**, **hero topic**, **villain topic**, and **religious topic**. These different topics each have their own characteristics: they often use a specific set of instruments, rhythms, harmonies, and melodies, have been traditionally associated with certain aspects of human society (like heroism, tragedy, religious or political ceremony, etc.).

[Watch this video that explains different musical topics in video games](#). You will learn how these topics are used in different themes used in video games and film, and will likely recognize many of these characteristics from your own favorite games, movies, and TV shows.

When you've finished watching this video, move on to the last page of this text that addresses Nobuo Uematsu's soundtrack to the Super Nintendo's 1994 release of *Final Fantasy VI*.

14.4: Cinematic Storytelling in the Role-Playing Game (RPG) is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

14.5: Nobuo Uematsu and Final Fantasy VI

Nobuo Uematsu and *Final Fantasy VI*.



Born in 1959 in Kouchi City, Japan, Nobuo Uematsu is one of the most celebrated composers in video game music. Though he had no formal musical training, he has enjoyed an incredibly successful career as a composer for video games. He has been compared to Beethoven, John Williams, and Richard Wagner alike—and with good reason! His developmental techniques are similar to Beethoven, and his use of the leitmotif is similar to that of Wagner and Williams.

Uematsu began working as a composer for game developer Square in 1986, though it was mostly a side job for him. Square's first games are relatively unknown in the West, as the majority of them have never been ported to the West. Soundtracks to games like *Cruise Chaser Blassty*, *Alpha*, *King's Knight*, *GEnesis: Beyond the Revelation*, and *Cleopatra no Maho* were all composed within 1986-1987. His "big break" came with the game *Final Fantasy*, released in Japan in 1987 and created by Hironobu Sakaguchi. The game's popularity was so successful that the title is now on the 16th installment for the PlayStation 5. The game has also spawned dozens of spinoffs, remasters, reboots, and remakes.

Uematsu's soundtrack to the original 8-bit *Final Fantasy* was fairly complex, simple as it may have sounded. He composed different types of music for different scenes: peaceful music accompanied players as they visited towns, rock music accompanied their battles, heroic music accompanied players'

traversing of the world map, and tense music accompanied them as they traveled through dungeons. Though the music was short and limited, it provided the foundation for what would come next in the 16-bit era.

Beginning with Super Nintendo's 1991 release of *Final Fantasy IV* (originally released in the West as *Final Fantasy II*), Uematsu's soundtracks became much more involved. Similar to film, he began incorporating recurring **main themes** that mostly represented the cast of protagonists (or the leading protagonist) that would change according to the setting. (This is similar to Koji Kondo's technique in *Super Mario World*). He also provided the majority of main characters their own **character themes**, as one would expect in film. These themes **leitmotivically** interact with one another, as well as the unfolding drama—as one would expect—while also interacting with the player's decision-making, as was discussed a few pages ago. In other words, these leitmotifs act both **cinematically** and **ludically** (*ludic* being the Latin word for "play.")

(above): picture of Nobuo Uematsu. Taken from [Hafabramusic.com](https://www.hafabramusic.com/), fair use under US law.

Final Fantasy VI.



Box art to *Final Fantasy VI*. From Wikipedia; [fair use under US law](#).

Final Fantasy VI was released in 1994 and was the last *FF* game to be released for the Super Nintendo. The game consists of 14 heroes and several villains, each represented by their own character themes. This soundtrack demonstrates Uematsu's subtle approach to composition and leitmotivic scoring. Characters' outward personalities are mostly represented in their character themes, while some of them have different transformations that tell their complex backstory, all of which are rooted in some type of tragedy or trauma. Moreover, many themes are all connected through small motivic gestures. This subtle way of connecting different themes is similar to Howard Shore's approach to *Fellowship of the Rings* soundtrack, though Uematsu's soundtrack predates Shore's soundtrack by almost a decade!

The game's plot resembles a *Star Wars* story: an evil empire hellbent on world domination is resisted by a small group of rebels called the Returners. Players meet 14 characters, each with their own personal backstory involving tragedy induced by the Empire in some way; this bond of tragedy strengthens their cause to defeat the Empire. As in film, each of these characters have their own leitmotifs that sound when they're on screen, or when they're referred to. Here, we'll look at the musical representation surrounding Locke Cole, one of the many heroes of the story.

Heroism and Tragedy in Locke Cole's Leitmotif.



(left): Locke's first appearance, accompanied by his heroic "Locke's Theme" (screenshot from [YouTube](#))

(right): Locke recalls his past that depicts his fiancé's tragedy, accompanied by the mournful transformation of his theme called "Forever Rachel" (screenshot from [YouTube](#))

Locke Cole is a treasure hunter with a charming and optimistic outward personality. As a result, his character theme bears all of the markers of heroism, using many characteristics of the **march topics** and **fanfare topic** (recall from the earlier video presentation that when composers combine the march with the fanfare, we get a **hero topic**). When we first meet Locke, he comes to the aid of the rebellion to help rescue one of their newest allies. Snare drums, brass fanfares, bright harmonies, and large melodic skips all impart the sense of optimism and hear his theme plays proudly, confirming his identity as one of many heroes within the game. [Watch this video of Locke's](#) introduction into the game: his character theme (named "Locke's Theme") plays heroically in the background. Locke's theme follows a very specific musical form of |:A, A, [transition] B:|. The symbols " |:|" means "repeat." In other words, as you listen to "Locke's Theme," you'll hear an A section played twice, followed by a short transition (or "bridge"), and then a B section before the entire track loops back and repeats. Pay attention to the form as you listen to Locke's theme, and especially pay attention to the "B section." (If it's difficult to follow, don't worry, because the video presentation for this track covers these sections in more detail).

We later find out in the game that Locke has a tragic history that he cannot escape: years earlier, while adventuring through caves with his fiancé Rachel, she fell off a bridge and slipped into a coma; when she recovered, she had lost her memory, causing her family to disown him. While he searched the world trying to find a cure for her amnesia, her village was torched by the Empire. As Locke recalls his tragic history, we hear "Forever Rachel," the same melody as "Locke's Theme," but played in more of a melancholic tone. The march topic and fanfares are gone, and the melody is played mournfully in the minor mode by an oboe. [Watch this video of Locke](#) as he recalls the traumatic event that caused all of his hardship. Pay close attention to the emotional affect imparted by this transformation of an otherwise heroic and optimistic melody.

What's more is that Locke's tragedy is musically foreshadowed in his own heroic theme: a short melodic passage within the music's B section foreshadows the introduction of "Forever Rachel," though we only hear it briefly and subtly: as the diagram below demonstrates, the A section to Locke's Theme moves into a brief transition, which is the exact material used as the *introduction* to "Forever Rachel," which then moves into the A section of Locke's Theme, only played in a mournful tone!

What's even more astounding is that the B section of "Locke's Theme" is found in *multiple character themes and other music within the soundtrack*. Considering that every character in the game has a tragic backstory, it's like Uematsu tells us that each character is indeed linked by tragedy, using the "B section" as the musical link.

Watch the [video presentation](#) that covers the character themes of Locke, the Figaro brothers, and Cyan. Each character's theme endures the same type of transformation as Locke's theme does, and each theme does indeed contain the same "B section" material from Locke's theme!

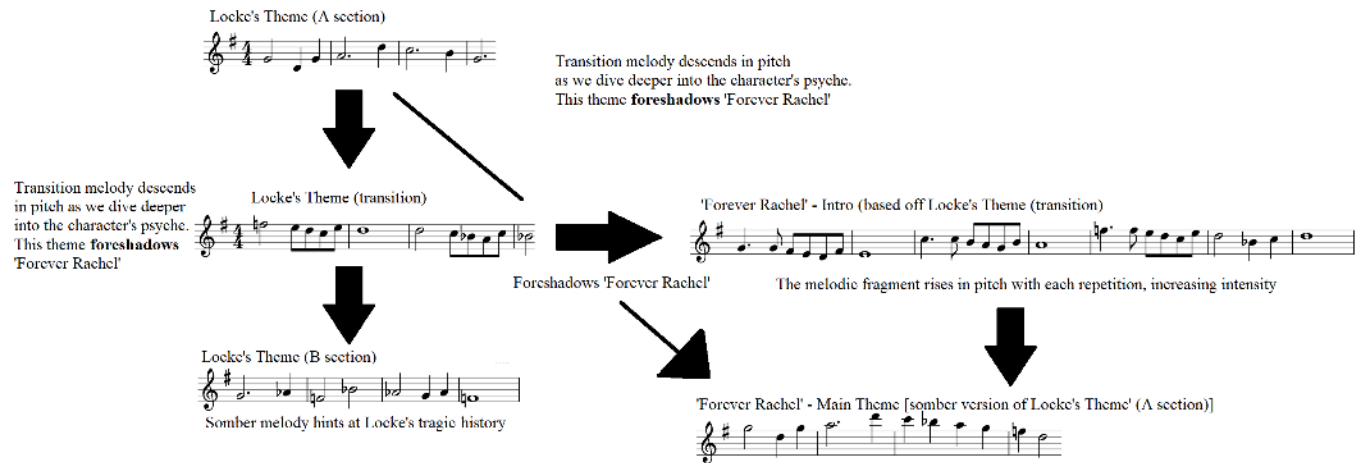


Diagram showing the musical anatomy of "Locke's Theme."

Musical Topics in the Villain's Theme: Kefka Palazzo



Kefka's introduction in *Final Fantasy VI*, accompanied by his own theme, "Kefka." ([Screenshot taken from YouTube](#)).

Although *Final Fantasy VI* begins as a "Star Wars Story," the plot develops outside of that fairly quickly. Emperor Gestahl is initially set up to be the main villain of the game; his second-in-command, Kefka Palazzo, although initially set up to be almost a comic relief villain: he's dressed as an evil clown as he treads through the desert to deliver an ultimatum to one of the Rebellion's allies. His outward demeanor and his musical theme (simply called "Kefka") does nothing to inspire fear or respect. Set in the **march style**, Uematsu favors high winds and minimal instrumental accompaniment, creating a very thin texture. The result is a comically unthreatening villain's tune: [watch this clip of Kefka's initial appearance](#) in the game and you'll get a sense that although he may not be a "good guy," he certainly poses no true threat.

As the story progresses, players learn how evil Kefka truly is. He poisons the entire city of Doma including his own soldiers, and eventually murders the Emperor to absorb the magical abilities housed by the three Statues of the Warring Triad (pictured below). Watch these two scenes, paying close attention to the musical accompaniment: [during the poisoning of Doma](#), we hear his light-hearted leitmotif, suggesting that Kefka actually derives pleasure from his crimes. [During the scene where we witness Kefka murdering the emperor](#), we hear another track called "Catastrophe," which establishes a much darker tone, reflecting the weight of his actions.



(left): Kefka gleefully murders the people of Doma by poisoning their water supply (Screenshot taken from [YouTube](#)).

(right): Kefka murders his emperor and absorbs the magical abilities from the statues of the Warring Triad (Screenshot taken from [YouTube](#)).

The Final Battle: "Dancing Mad."



After killing the emperor, Kefka absorbs the magical power of the statues, becomes a demigod, and nearly destroys the entire planet, causing the heroes to scatter. Players must regroup their allies and finally confront Kefka and put an end to his madness. In this final battle, players must fight their way through the 3 statues one by one before finally reaching Kefka himself. As you can see in the picture to the left, players (in the far bottom right) must travel up one by one before reaching Kefka, who is adorned as a fallen angel.

The picture from the left is taken from the actual gameplay, and is riddled with religious symbolism. Each statue from the bottom resembles a different stage of Dante's trilogy *The Divine Comedy*, which depicts the narrator traveling from Hell (*Inferno*), through Purgatory (*Purgatorio*), and then finally Heaven (*Paradiso*).

When examining the statues, we can see how the bottom statue resembles a devil or a demon with its red horns and claws, depicting the *Inferno*. The second statue contains human figures—one dressed in red looks like it resembles the crucifixion, and resembles Earth or perhaps Purgatory, the "halfway" point between our physical existence and Heaven according to traditional Catholic faith (according to the faith, sinners atone for their sins in Purgatory before moving to Heaven). The top statue resembles Christ and the Virgin Mary, adorned with wings and a halo, depicting Heaven, or *Paradiso*. Upon defeating the 3 statues, players then move to Kefka, who has become a perversion of God.

For the musical accompaniment to this piece, Nobuo Uematsu wrote a massive 17-minute long track consisting of 4 different sections, depicting the four different tiers of the of the battle. The music is called "Dancing Mad," perfectly befitting the madness that the villain exhibits. Here, Uematsu combines the **religious topic** (through the use of organ and choir) with the **rock music topic**, which incorporates electric guitar, drum kit, and lots of distortion. Because rock music has a traditionally rebellious aura about it, Uematsu musically suggests that the players are rebelling against this false god! [Listen to "Dancing Mad,"](#) and follow along with the different timestamps of the various "tiers" (or sections) of the music:

Tier 1 (0:00-4:33). This music is based on his 'Catastrophe,' which was heard the first time Kefka destroyed the world. We hear electric organ and choir in this section, blending

both the **religious** and **rock** topics as mentioned above.

Tier 2 (4:33-8:12). This is a silly-sounding march, based loosely off of Kefka's leitmotif. All we hear is the church organ and the choir (synthesized, of course!). It almost sounds like the choir is laughing at the player!

Tier 3 (8:12-12:04). Hear, we hear an organ solo in the style of J.S. Bach. As you listen, pay attention to lowest notes -- you'll be able to hear a short fragment of Kefka's own theme!

Tier 4 (12:04-end) Here, we finally get Kefka's leitmotif played in many different instruments with lots of rhythmic excitement.

When you're finished listening, [listen to the fully-orchestrated performance](#) of this same piece, played by live orchestra, rock band, and choir. The text was written in the Latin language to further reflect the religious topics. As you listen, follow along with the handout below on the music's form, which follows a structure that looks like "Intro, A, B, C, outro." In many respects, this music resembles the **sectional form** from the **Romantic** era (19th century). When you're done listening to the music, [watch the video presentation](#) on this unit for a more in-depth discussion on this character and his music.

(above): "Kefka's Tower" shared by [Phead on DeviantArt](#).

Sectional Form in Nobuo Uematsu's *Dancing Mad* (orch. arr)

Intro

0:00-4:40
Based on "Catastrophe"
Contains 3 smaller sections
Organized in ABA form:
A: 0:00-0:54 (Catastrophe melody)
B: 0:55-1:51 (Latin lyrics)
A: 1:52-2:31 (Lyrics with Catastrophe melody)

A

2:32-3:59
Organ and choir
Organ has a playful accompaniment
(Based on 2nd part of Kefka's theme)
Choir sings "ha" (laughing because Kefka is an evil clown)
4:00-4:40
Organ closes this section out

B

4:41-6:40
Organ solo
Played in the style of Prelude and Fugue (homage to JS Bach)
5:13 has Kefka's theme played in organ pedals (bass) in the Major Mode!
5:25 has Kefka's theme played in the organ pedals in minor mode!
6:35 ends the whole section with a Major chord the way Bach would have

C

6:40-8:22
Kefka's theme
Played by rock organ
(rock music is 'of the devil')
7:22 has heavy distortion in rock instruments

Outro

8:23-end
Choir and orchestra and rock band all play together

Latin Text

Obita vices oblivio
Die caelutis
O sedae e temporii
Dannus ex dies domnis es te
Tabes...
Die terrore
Die tyranno
Die tibites
Die ab e mortuos
Di-diem fla-flammeus
No-nova Cae-caelum
Dies magnifica dies
Irae tabi notaba
Ex habeo non ex for etiam
Incidit fama
Torriss etiam
In terra lux

English Translation

(Death and oblivion)
(Heavenly day)
(O, calmed out of transitory)
(Forget from those days, I am your master...)
(Disappear...)
(Day of Terror)
(Day of the Tyrant)
(This Day is for you...)
(The Day of counting the dead)
(Day of Flames)
(Star of the Heavens)
(Magnificent days, days...)
(...erased by rage, marked...)
(...From no valiance, not even speech?)
(Cut the short talk...)
(...is rushing forth, even still!)
(Dawn of a new world)

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