



INTRODUCTION TO

CLASSICAL MUSIC



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Introduction to Classical Music

Classical music is probably more familiar than we might at first imagine. Indeed, nowadays it is all around us, whether it be in restaurants, supermarkets, lifts, for advertising or as theme and incidental music on television. A great deal of film music either directly uses or draws from the 'classical' tradition; a good example of the former might be '2001: Space Odyssey', and of the latter, the many scores [John Williams](#) has composed in over the years for such blockbusters as the Star Wars and Indiana Jones trilogies.

In the vast and wide-ranging world of 'classical' music there is truly something there for everyone - pieces which once discovered represent the start of an exciting and irresistible journey which will provide a lifetime's listening pleasure. For example, those who are particularly excited by hearing instrumentalists working at full stretch will thrill to the likes of [Liszt](#) and Paganini, or if something a little more reserved and self-contained is required, the chamber music of Haydn or [Mozart](#) would be a good starting point. If a full symphony orchestra in overdrive is more to your taste then [Tchaikovsky](#) or [Richard Strauss](#) could well fit the bill, whereas those who have already warmed to Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' might well try the music of some of the great Italian's contemporaries such as Handel, [Johann Sebastian Bach](#) or [Domenico Scarlatti](#). Whatever your tastes may be, there has never been a better time to start building a 'classical' music collection on CD.

Any attempt to define what is meant literally by the term 'classical' music is fraught with difficulty. How does one encapsulate in just a few words a musical tradition which encompasses such infinite varieties of style and expression, from the monastic intonings of Gregorian chant to the laid-



back jazz inflections of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, from the elegant poise of Mozart's Eine kleine Nachtmusik to the despairing, heightened emotionalism of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique" Symphony? One is treading on very dangerous ground indeed if one pre-supposes that it is simply 'superior' to other musical types such as popular, jazz, rock and the like, let alone the music of other cultures.

In general 'popular' music may be as clear in expression as the longer examples of 'classical' music. One important difference, however, lies in the logical connection that exists in 'classical' music between the beginning and end, with the latter a logical extension and development of the former. 'Popular' music, on the other hand, tends to present its material without development, the music ending when interest is exhausted.

Sadly, whilst 'classical' music is socially undivisive in itself, it has unfortunately become associated in most people's minds with the intellectual elite. Even now, and with certain honourable exceptions, the attending of a 'live' concert can be an intimidating (not to say costly) experience for the uninitiated, especially in that most jealously guarded of establishments, the opera house. The wonderful thing about the technological age in which we live, and particularly the advent of the compact disc, is that we can bypass all irrelevant social and intellectual pretence, and enjoy in the comfort of our own home (often at far less cost) some of the finest music ever composed.

With such a breathtaking variety of material available, it is an awesome task to know just where to begin your disc collection, and as a result expensive mistakes are often made as tempting looking purchases turn out to be something of a disappointment. This is where the Naxos catalogue really comes into its own, and where it is hoped this guide will



help prospective purchasers to make an informed choice about the kind of music they are likely to enjoy.

The [Naxos label](#) provides a library of high quality performances of music by the great masters in modern digital sound; accompanied by authoritative and user-friendly booklet notes and at the lowest possible price. There are already hundreds of thousands of titles from which to choose, and with [new releases](#) being added every month, even the enthusiastic collector is well and truly catered for. With every historical period and genre covered, there is something in the Naxos catalogue for everyone, especially those who wish to build a truly representative collection of the central masterworks in the 'classical' tradition.



Music Categories

Over the last 1,000 years, ‘classical’ music has been composed in a variety of genres which are themselves worthy of investigation; indeed many seasoned collectors gradually move towards a particular preference after a time, be it violin concertos, piano sonatas, string quartets, religious music or opera. Whatever the form or description of any given piece, it usually falls comfortably into one of five broad categories: orchestral, chamber, solo instrumental, choral or opera.

Orchestral Music

The typical orchestra as we know it today, consisting of upwards of eighty players, can be traced back roughly to the middle of the 17th century. By this time the string section already formed the basis of any large ensemble of players, with brass, woodwind and percussion being added variously as the situation demanded. By the end of the Baroque period (c.1750) this was still very much the case, so that it was not until the end of the eighteenth century when the Classical period was at its height that a full woodwind section had become more or less established, often with the addition of horns, trumpets and timpani. It was finally during the mid-1800s that the orchestra settled into a regular, basic pattern of strings, woodwind, brass and percussion, with various ‘exotic’ instruments being introduced from time to time.

The most common genres the collector is likely to come across may be summarised as follows:

- *Symphony*
commonly in four, but occasionally only in three, contrasting

movements, the outer ones often being vivacious in character, with a more reflective slow movement and contrasting minuet or scherzo.

- ***Symphonic Poem***

a one-movement work popular during the nineteenth century, with a story-line or programme often detailed by the composer.

- ***Overture***

usually the orchestra-only curtain-raiser to an opera, often used to open concerts. During the nineteenth century it became increasingly fashionable to compose independent concert overtures, occasionally with picturesque titles.

- ***Concerto***

evolved from various forms of works using a solo instrument throughout the Baroque era and by the end of the eighteenth century denoted a work invariably in three movements (fast-slow-fast). It was designed principally as a work to demonstrate the virtuosity of the soloist, and was often written for the composer's own use as a soloist.

- ***Ballet***

evolved from passages of dance music, usually in an operatic context, into the popular, full-scale Romantic classics of [Adam](#), [Delibes](#), [Tchaikovsky](#), early [Stravinsky](#) and beyond.

- ***Incidental Music***

usually composed in short sections, often with recurring themes, for a particular stage production.

- ***Suite***

usually a selection of short movements taken from a ballet or incidental music, sometimes orchestrations or another composer's work, although quite often an entirely original set of pieces.



[See all Orchestral Music](#)

Chamber Music

Normally understood to be any type of music composed for a small ensemble of between two and approximately fifteen players. Larger groups are usually referred to as a chamber ensemble/orchestra.

The most basic form is a work for solo instrument with keyboard accompaniment. There are countless miniatures of this type, particularly for flute, violin, cello, oboe, and clarinet, often with descriptive titles. For slightly larger appetites, there are also numerous accompanied sonatas dating from the Baroque period onwards, typically in three or four movements, and after about 1750 corresponding roughly to symphonic structure. Duets also exist typically for two instruments of the same family (e.g. violin and viola, or flute and clarinet) although pieces for almost any duo combination may be encountered.

Other chamber works which normally fall into multi-movement structures are the string trio (violin, viola, cello), piano trio (piano, violin, cello), string quartet (2 violins, viola, cello), piano quartet (piano, violin, viola, cello), string quintet (typically 2 violins, viola, 2 cellos, or 2 violins, 2 violas, cello), and piano quintet (typically piano, 2 violins, viola, cello). Examples of sextets, septets, octets and even nonets are rather less plentiful and can be for a variety of different combinations.

[See all Chamber Music](#)



Solo Instrumental Music

Into this category falls any music composed for a single, unaccompanied instrument. Although distinguished examples exist for every conceivable instrument (including various works for percussion), the bulk is composed either for the organ (in a vast variety of styles and genres), keyboard (piano, harpsichord, clavichord, spinet, virginal), guitar (mostly miniatures/arrangements in the popular Spanish idiom) or lute (mostly dating from the Renaissance and early Baroque periods).

[See all Solo Instrumental Music](#)

Vocal Music

The oldest genre of all, for what is humanity's oldest 'instrument'- the human voice. Anyone wishing to trace a stylistic [history of classical music](#) could do no better than to examine vocal music, for every composer worthy of the name wrote at least something which involves singing of some description.

In its simplest form vocal music consists of a single, monodic line, as in Medieval Gregorian chant for example. From this was derived all music for unaccompanied [choir](#), so that as one moves further forward in time, more and more independent parts are gradually added, and the musical language and texturing becomes correspondingly more complex. The great majority of texts of pieces for unaccompanied and accompanied choir (masses, motets, psalms, canticles, vespers etc.) had a religious basis until the turn of the present century, although there are notable exceptions, especially regarding the secular madrigalists of the sixteenth century.



If choral music in the 'classical' tradition tends towards the sacred, then the accompanied song, chanson, ballade, virelei, lied or melodie is almost invariably secular in origin or intentions. Indeed there are Medieval and Renaissance songs which are positively ribald in terms of their chosen texts. The most popular form within this category is, however, the keyboard accompanied art song, particularly the [German Lied](#) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[See all Vocal Music](#)

Opera

An Italian invention, opera was born right at the beginning of the Baroque era (shortly before 1600), and although stylistic approaches to the genre have been many and varied, the basic outlines have remained remarkably consistent.

Essentially a play set to music, the typical opera will open with an overture or prelude designed to set the scene or even introduce some of the most important themes to appear later on. The action will be split into acts and scenes, and within these the principal vehicles for expression are (a) the aria, duet, trio, etc. for the soloists; (b) the 'chorus', to allow a larger group to join in with or more usually comment on the action; and (c) recitative, a formal device similar to sung conversation, where the plot typically moves at a faster pace before the next set piece allows greater contemplation on the chain of events.

French opera also typically makes provision for an extended balletic interlude, and from middle-period Wagner onwards (c.1865), the general tendency is to interweave the various elements as seamlessly as possible,



thereby avoiding the heavily sectionalised procedure which had then dominated the genre for over 250 years.

[See all Opera](#)

[See Naxos Instrumentalists, Singers, Conductors, Choirs, Orchestra, Ensembles](#)

Musical Instruments

The great majority of musical instruments fall readily into one of six major categories: bowed strings, woodwind, brass, percussion, keyboard, and the guitar family, the first four of which form the basis of the modern symphony orchestra.

Bowed Strings

The four principle orchestral string instruments are (in descending order of overall pitch) the violins (usually divided into two sections, playing individual parts), the violas, the cellos and the double basses. Each have four strings arranged in order of pitch, can be played by means of a bow (arco) or plucked (pizzicato), but whereas the violin and viola are played with the instrument resting between the shoulder and the chin, the larger cello (or, to give it its full title, violoncello) is placed facing outwards between and slightly behind the knees, and the bulky double bass is played standing up or seated on a high stool.



Enthusiasts of Medieval, Renaissance and early Baroque music will encounter earlier varieties of bowed instruments known variously as vielle, viol, or in its earliest form, fidel (hence the modern nickname for a violin, 'fiddle'). The most popular member of the viol family is the cello's precursor, the viola da gamba (literally 'viol of the legs').

Woodwind Instruments

The four principle woodwind instruments of the orchestra all work by means of a system of keys (usually silver-plated) which when variously depressed and released allow air to pass through differing lengths of the

instrument resulting in notes of different pitch. In order of descending overall pitch, these are:

Flute

The flute is normally silver-plated (or in more extravagant cases, gold), narrow-bored instrument, held horizontally just under the mouth, and activated by blowing air across an aperture at one end of the instrument. Its higher-pitched cousin, the piccolo, is often encountered, although the lower alto flute rather less so. Early forebears include the unkeyed fife. The most popular close relation is the recorder family, largely unkeyed and end-blown in the vertical position.



Oboe

The oboe is a narrow-bored wooden instrument descended from the medieval shawm, held vertically, and activated by means of placing the end-positioned double-reed in the mouth, and blowing under high-pressure so as to force air between the two bound reeds, causing them to vibrate. Other members of the oboe family include the lower pitched cor anglais (or English Horn), and (far more rarely) baritone oboe and heckelphone (bass oboe). The instrument's most famous predecessor is the Baroque oboe d'amore, often used by [Johann Sebastian Bach](#).



Clarinet

The clarinet is usually wooden, played vertically and held in the mouth, but with a wider bore and consisting of a single reed which when activated vibrates against a detachable mouthpiece. The standard instrument can be pitched in B flat (usually) or A, and the family is unusually extensive including the higher-pitched E flat, the B flat bass, the rarely-used C, the alto (a modern relative of the basset horn), and the



even more obscure double-bass or 'pedal' clarinet. Occasionally the clarinet's 'popular' cousin can be seen in the concert hall, the saxophone.

Bassoon

As the name would suggest, the bassoon is the bass member of the woodwind family, and by far the largest, especially its lower-pitched relation, the extremely bulky double or contra-bassoon. Like the oboe, it is a double-reed instrument, although to facilitate the playing action (the instrument is normally held across and in front of the body) it is connected to the bassoon via a silver-plated, curved crook. Its most notorious cousin is the Baroque serpent, shaped very much as its name would suggest.



Brass Instruments

Brass instruments are also activated by blowing into them, although instead of using a form of reed over which the mouth is placed, the lips are placed against or inside the cup of a metal mouthpiece, and made to vibrate against its inner rim. In order of descending pitch, these are:

Trumpet

The trumpet is one of the most ancient of all instruments. Played horizontally via a series of valves on the top of the instrument which are opened and closed in various combinations to create different pitches. Occasionally, the piccolo (higher) or bass (lower) trumpets are heard (and the trumpet's 'popular' cousin, the cornet), although more common nowadays in 'authentic' Baroque orchestras (which use instruments of the correct period or copies thereof), is the 'natural' or valveless trumpet.



The more notationally limited bugle is rarely heard away from its traditional military context.

French horn

The French horn is another ancient instrument, descended from the use of animals' horns (hence the name) in pre-historic times. The modern instrument is the most outwardly complex, consisting of a basic tube, rounded into a compact shape culminating in a conical bore or bell, into which a series of valves are centrally set. Before the valve system had been developed, the changing of basic pitch was facilitated by the insertion of a variety of crooks which altered the length of the basic tube, and the changing of certain notes by holding the hand in a variety of subtly differentiated positions within the bell. In a popular context the term 'horn' invariably refers to the saxophone, and for the cor anglais see 'oboe' under the woodwind section above. Traditionally, the French horn section is seated away from the rest of the brass family.



Trombone

Descended from the medieval sackbutt, the trombone is the only popular orchestral wind instrument which operates without the use of a valve or key system. The trombone is easily recognisable by its extended elliptical shape culminating in a conical bore, and its distinctive use of a hand-operated slide held out in front, in order to change pitch. The slide can be moved to any one of seven main positions, each of which facilitate a different series of notes. The tenor and bass trombone are occasionally seen (especially the latter), although the alto and double-bass are extreme rarities.



Tuba

Not unlike the French horn in basic construction, the Tuba is only more

oval in shape and much bigger. The piston valve action is similar to the trumpet, only the valves themselves are situated in the middle of the instrument. A variety of types and sizes exist aside from the typical concert instrument in F (bass tuba), including the tenor tuba (higher), and double-bass tuba (lower), often referred to as a bombardon in a military or brass band context.



Percussion Instruments

A percussion instrument is probably best defined as one where a resonating surface is struck by the player, either by hand or by some form of stick. These divide roughly into tuned instruments which have a definite pitch or series of pitches, and those of indefinite pitch. Popular examples of both types are:

Tuned

Timpani or kettle drum, xylophone, glockenspiel, tubular bells, vibraphone, marimba. Occasionally, the piano and celesta (see left) are included in scores as part of the percussion section.



Indefinite pitch

Triangle, gong, castanets, whip, rattle, anvil, tambourine, cymbals (struck and clashing), and a variety of drums (side, tenor, bass, tabor, bongo etc.) fall under this category.



Keyboard Instruments

Conveniently collected together as any instrument which is operated by means of a standard keyboard, the differences in operation are wide-ranging and carry obvious associations with certain of the above categories. These break down into four main types:

Plucked

These include mostly instruments emanating from the 17th/18th centuries where a series of stretched and tuned strings are plucked by a quill or plectrum (e.g. harpsichord, virginal, spinet).

Struck

These include instruments where the strings are actually hit, either by a tangent (e.g. 17th/18th century clavichord), or hammers (e.g. piano, celesta).



Aerated

These include instruments where the notes are activated by a column of mechanically propelled air within a series of tuned pipes (e.g. organ).

Electronic

These include instruments where a number of effects approximating to those derived from any of the above instruments, as well as totally original sounds, can be achieved (e.g. electronic organ, synthesizer).

Guitar Family

The 'classical' guitar is typically a Spanish-derived, six-stringed instrument played using a plectrum or the finger-nails, with frets set into





the fingerboard. Popular music tends to use amplification for both six-stringed instruments and the four-string bass guitar. The guitar family gradually supplanted the lute which had come to prominence during the Renaissance.

History of Classical Music

Medieval (c.1550 – c.1400)

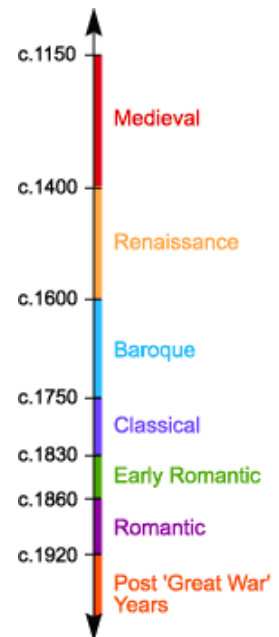
This is the first period where we can begin to be fairly certain as to how a great deal of the music which has survived actually sounded. The earliest written secular music dates from the 12th century troubadours (in the form of virelais, estampies, ballades, etc.), but most notated manuscripts emanate from places of learning usually connected with the church, and therefore inevitably have a religious basis.

Gregorian chant and plainsong which are monodic (i.e. written as one musical line) gradually developed during the 11th to 13th centuries into organum (i.e. two or three lines moving simultaneously but independently, therefore almost inadvertently representing the beginnings of harmony). Organum was, however, initially rather stifled by rigid rules governing melody and rhythm, which led ultimately to the so-called Ars Nova period of the 14th century, principally represented by the composers de Vitry, [Machaut](#), and [Landini](#).

Recommended Recording:

- [Adorate Deum: Gregorian Chant from the Proper of the Mass](#)
[Nova Schola Gregoriana](#)
[Naxos 8.550711](#)

[See Medieval Period Catalogue List](#)





Renaissance (c.1400 – c.1600)

The fifteenth century witnessed vastly increased freedoms, most particularly in terms of what is actually perceived as 'harmony' and 'polyphony' (the simultaneous movement of two or three interrelated parts). Composers (although they were barely perceived as such) were still almost entirely devoted to choral writing, and the few instrumental compositions which have survived often create the impression (in many cases entirely accurately) of being vocal works in disguise, but minus the words.

There is obvious new delight in textural variety and contrast, so that, for example, a particular section of text might be enhanced by a vocal part dropping out momentarily, only to return again at a special moment of emphasis. The four most influential composers of the fifteenth century were Dunstable, Ockeghem, Despres and Dufay.

The second half of the 16th century witnessed the beginnings of the tradition which many music lovers readily associate with the normal feel of 'classical' music. Gradually, composers moved away from the modal system of harmony which had predominated for over 300 years (and still sounds somewhat archaic to some modern ears), towards the organisation of their work into major and minor scales, thereby imparting the strong sensation of each piece having a definite tonal centre or 'key'.

This was also something of a golden period for choral composition as a seemingly endless flow of a capella (unaccompanied) masses, motets, anthems, psalms and madrigals flowed from the pens of the masters of the age. In addition, instrumental music came into its own for the first time, especially keyboard music in the form of fantasias, variations, and



dance movements (galliards, pavaues etc.). Composers of particular note include [Dowland](#), [Tallis](#), [Byrd](#), [Gibbons](#), [Frescobaldi](#), [Palestrina](#), [Victoria](#), [Lassus](#), [Alonso Lobo](#), [Duarte Lobo](#), [Cardoso](#) and [Gesualdo](#).

Recommended Recordings:

- Byrd: Mass for Four Voices; Mass for Five Voices; Infelix ego
[Naxos 8.550574](#)
- Gesualdo: Sacred Music for Five Voices (Complete)
[Naxos 8.550742](#)
- Lamentations
Music by Tallis, White, Palestrina, Lassus and de Brito
[Naxos 8.550572](#)
- Lassus: Missa super entre vous; Infelix ego; Missa imitationem moduli susanne un tour
[Naxos 8.550842](#)
- Lobo: Missa pro defunctis / Cardoso: Missa pro defunctis
[Naxos 8.550682](#)
- Palestrina: Missa Papae Marcelli; Missa aeterna Christi munera
[Naxos 8.550573](#)
- Palestrina: Missa hodie Christus natus est; Hodie Christus natus est; Stabat mater / Lassus: Missa bell' amfitrit' altera
[Naxos 8.550836](#)
- Tallis: Mass for Four Voices; Motets
[Naxos 8.550576](#)
- Victoria: Missa O magnum mysterium; Missa O quam gloriosum / A. Lobo: Versa est in luctum
[Naxos 8.550575](#)

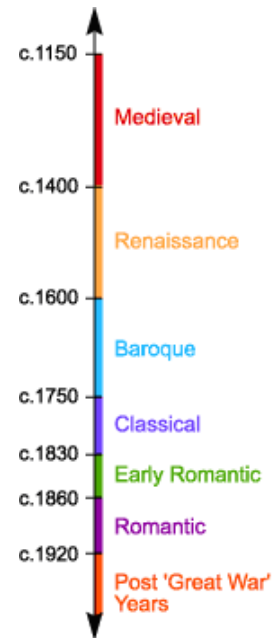
[See Renaissance Period Catalogue List](#)

Baroque (c.1600 – c.1750)

During the Baroque period, the foundations were laid for the following 300 or so years of musical expression: the idea of the modern orchestra was born, along with opera (including the overture, prelude, aria, recitative and chorus), the concerto, sonata, and modern cantata. The rather soft-grained viol string family of the Renaissance was gradually replaced by the bolder violin, viola and cello, the harpsichord was invented, and important advances were made in all instrumental groups.

Until about 1700, the old modes still exerted themselves from time to time by colouring certain melodic lines or chord progressions, but from the beginning of the 18th century the modern harmonic system based upon the major and minor scales was effectively pan-European. Choral music no longer dominated, and as composers turned more and more to writing idiomatic instrumental works for ensembles of increasing colour and variety, so 'classical' music (as opposed to 'popular') gradually began to work its way into the very fabric of society, being played outdoors at dinner parties or special functions (e.g. [Handel's Water Music](#)), or as a spectacle in the form of opera. On a purely domestic level, every wealthy lady would have a spinet to play, and at meal-times the large and rich houses would employ musicians to play what was popularly called *Tafelmusik* in Germany, of which [Telemann](#) was perhaps the most famous composer.

Of the many 17th century composers who paved the way for this popular explosion of 'classical' music, the following were outstanding: [Monteverdi](#), [Corelli](#), [Alessandro Scarlatti](#), [Schutz](#), [Buxtehude](#), [Purcell](#) and [Lully](#). Yet, the most popular composers of the period, indeed those who seem to define by their very



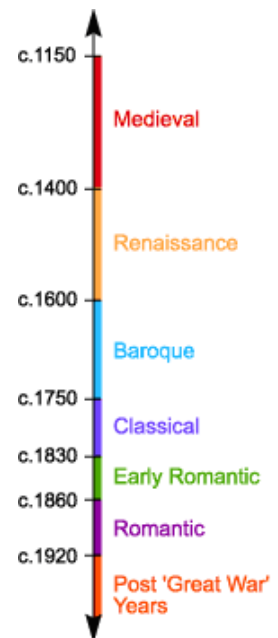
names the sound of Baroque music at its most colourful and sophisticated are [Johann Sebastian Bach](#), [Handel](#), [Telemann](#), [Rameau](#), [François Couperin](#), [Domenico Scarlatti](#), and [Vivaldi](#), all of them at their creative peak during the first half of the 18th century.

[See Baroque Period Catalogue List](#)

Classical (c.1750 – c.1830)

The Baroque era witnessed the creation of a number of musical genres which would maintain a hold on composition for years to come, yet it was the Classical period which saw the introduction of a form which has dominated instrumental composition to the present day: sonata form. With it came the development of the modern concerto, symphony, sonata, trio and quartet to a new peak of structural and expressive refinement. If Baroque music is notable for its textural intricacy, then the Classical period is characterised by a near-obsession with structural clarity.

The seeds of the Classical age were sown by a number of composers whose names are now largely forgotten such as Schobert and Honnauer (both Germans largely active in Paris), as well as more historically respected names, including [Gluck](#), [Boccherini](#) and at least three of Johann Sebastian Bach's sons: [Carl Phillip Emmanuel](#), [Wilhelm Friedmann](#) and [Johann Christian](#) (the so-called 'London' Bach). They were representative of a period which is variously described as rococo or galante, the former implying a gradual move away from the artifice of the High Baroque, the latter an entirely novel style based on symmetry and sensibility, which came to dominate the music of the latter half of the



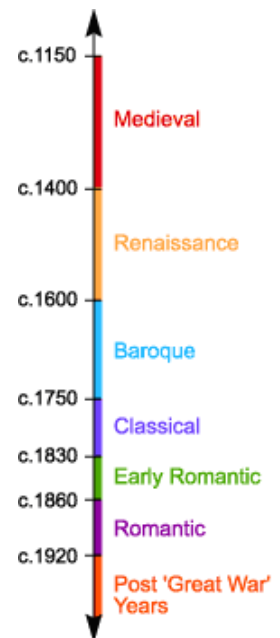
18th century through two composers of extraordinary significance: [Joseph Haydn](#) and [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart](#).

[See Classical Period Catalogue List](#)

Early Romantic (c.1830 – c.1860)

As the Classical period reached its zenith, it was becoming increasingly clear (especially with the late works of [Beethoven](#) and [Schubert](#)) that the amount and intensity of expression composers were seeking to achieve was beginning to go beyond that which a Classically sized/designed orchestra/piano could possibly encompass. The next period in musical history therefore found composers attempting to balance the expressive and the formal in music with a variety of approaches which would have left composers of any previous age utterly bewildered. As the musical map opened up, with nationalist schools beginning to emerge, it was the search for originality and individuality of expression which began here that was to become such an over-riding obsession in the present century.

The Romantic era was the golden age of the virtuoso, where the most fiendishly difficult music would be performed with nonchalant ease, and the most innocuous theme in a composition would be developed at great length for the enjoyment of the adoring audience. The emotional range of music during this period was considerably widened, as was its harmonic vocabulary and the range and number of instruments which might be called upon to play it. Music often had a 'programme' or storyline attached to it, sometimes of a tragic or despairing nature,



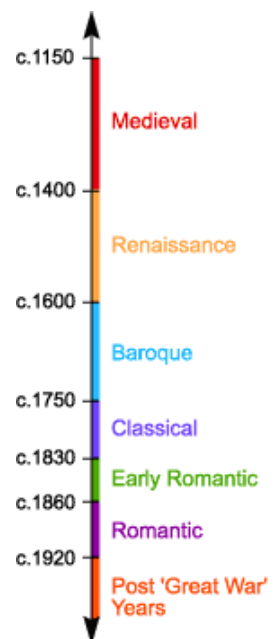
occasionally representing such natural phenomena as rivers or galloping horses. The next hundred years would find composers either embracing whole-heartedly the ideals of Romanticism, or in some way reacting against them.

Of the early Romantic composers, two Nationalists deserve special mention, the Russian [Glinka](#) (of *Ruslan and Ludmilla* fame) and the Bohemian [Smetana](#) (composer of the popular symphonic poem *Vltava* or 'The Moldau'). However, the **six leading composers** of the age were undoubtedly [Berlioz](#), [Chopin](#), [Mendelssohn](#), [Schumann](#), [Liszt](#) and [Verdi](#).

[See Romantic Period Catalogue List](#)

Late Romantic (c.1860 – c.1920)

With the honourable exceptions of [Brahms](#) and [Bruckner](#), composers of this period shared a general tendency towards allowing their natural inspiration free rein, often pacing their compositions more in terms of their emotional content and dramatic continuity rather than organic structural growth. This was an era highlighted by the extraordinarily rapid appearance of the national schools, and the operatic supremacy of Verdi and [Wagner](#). The eventual end of Romanticism came with the fragmentation of this basic style, composers joining 'schools' of composition, each with a style that was in vogue for a short period of time.





Recommended Recordings:

- Albéniz: Iberia
Falla: Three-Cornered Hat; El Amor Brujo; La Vida Breve
[Naxos 8.550174](#)
- Balakirev: Islamey
Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition (piano version)
[Naxos 8.550044](#)
- Bizet: Carmen
[Naxos 8.660005-07 \(3 CD's\)](#)
- Borodin: Symphonies Nos. 1-3
[Naxos 8.550238](#)
- Brahms: Hungarian Dances (Complete)
[Naxos 8.550110](#)
- Brahms: Symphony No. 1 ; Tragic Overture ; Academic Festival Overture
[Naxos 8.557428](#)
- Brahms: Symphony No. 2 ; Hungarian Dances
[Naxos 8.557429](#)
- Brahms: Symphony No. 3 ; Haydn Variations
[Naxos 8.557430](#)
- Brahms: Symphony No. 4 ; Hungarian Dances Nos. 2, 4-9 (orch. Breiner)
[Naxos 8.570233](#)
- Brahms: Symphonies Nos. 1-4; Tragic Overture; Haydn Variations; Academic Festival Overture; Serenades Nos. 1 & 2
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- Brahms: Violin Concerto
Bruch: Violin Concerto No. 1
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- Bruckner: Symphony No. 4 'Romantic'
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- Debussy: Suite Bergamasque; 2 Arabesques; Images; Préludes; La plus que lente
[Naxos 8.550253](#)
- Delibes: Ballet Music (Coppélia; Sylvia; La Source); Le Roi s'amuse; Kassya - Trepak
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- Delius: Brigg Fair; In a Summer Garden
Elgar: Enigma Variations; Pomp and Circumstance Marches Nos. 1 & 4; Salut d'amour
[Naxos 8.550229](#)
- Dvořák: Slavonic Dances (Complete)
[Naxos 8.550143](#)
- Symphony No. 9 'New World'; Symphonic Variations
[Naxos 8.550271](#)
- Franck: Symphony; Prelude, Choral and Fugue
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- Grieg: Peer Gynt, Suites Nos. 1 and 2 / Sigurd Jorsalfar / Bergliot
[Naxos 8.553397](#)
- Holst: The Planets; Suite de Ballet
[Naxos 8.550193](#)
- Janáček: Sinfonietta; Taras Bulba; Lachian Dances
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- Kodály: Peacock Variations; Dances of Galánta and Marosszék
[Naxos 8.550520](#)
- Lalo: Symphonie Espagnole
(with works by Saint-Saëns, Sarasate and Ravel)
[Naxos 8.550494](#)

- Leoncavallo: Pagliacci
[Naxos 8.660021](#)
- Mahler: Symphony No. 1 in D
[Naxos 8.550120](#)
- Mascagni: Cavalleria Rusticana
[Naxos 8.660022](#)
- Puccini: Tosca
[Naxos 8.660001-02 \(2 CD's\)](#)
- Rachmaninov: Piano Concerto No. 2; Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini
[Naxos 8.550117](#)
- Ravel: Boléro; Daphnis et Chloé; Ma mère l'oye;
[Naxos 8.550173](#)
- Respighi: Pines of Rome; Fountains of Rome; Roman Festivals
[Naxos 8.550539](#)
- Rimsky-Korsakov: Sheherazade; Tsar Saltan Suite
[Naxos 8.550726](#)
- Saint-Saëns: Carnival of the Animals
(coupled with Prokofiev: Peter and the Wolf; Britten: Young Person's Guide - see below)
[Naxos 8.550499](#)
- Satie: Piano Works (Selection)
[Naxos 8.550305](#)
- Sibelius: Finlandia; Valse Triste; Swan of Tuonela; Karelia Suite
[Naxos 8.550103](#)
- Johann Strauss II: Famous Waltzes, Polkas, Marches and Overtures Vol. 2
[Naxos 8.550337](#)

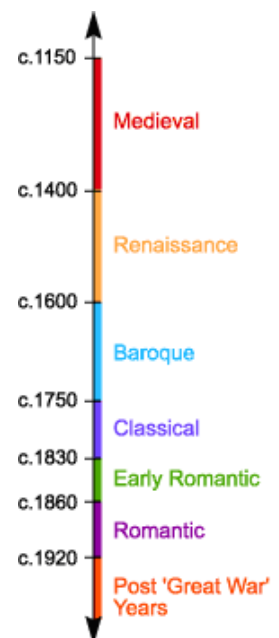
- Richard Strauss: Also sprach Zarathustra; Salome's Dance;
Der Rosenkavalier (Waltzes)
[Naxos 8.550182](#)
- Tchaikovsky: Capriccio Italien; 1812 Overture; Romeo and Juliet
Overture; Marche Slave
[Naxos 8.550500](#)
- Tchaikovsky: The Nutcracker (Highlights)
[Naxos 8.550515](#)
- Wagner: Orchestral excerpts from the operas
[Naxos 8.550136](#)

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Post 'Great War' Years (c.1920 – Present)

The period since the Great War is undoubtedly the most bewildering of all, as composers have pulled in various apparently contradictory and opposing directions. Typical of the dilemma during the inter-war years, for example, were the Austrians, Webern and Lehar, the former was experimenting with the highly compressed and advanced form known as 'serial structure', while simultaneously Lehar was still indulging in an operetta style which would not have seemed out of place over half a century beforehand.

So diverse are the styles adopted throughout the greater part of the present century that only by experimentation can listeners discover for themselves whether certain composers are to their particular taste or not. However, the following recordings serve as an excellent introduction and will certainly repay investigation:





Recommended Recordings:

- Antill: Corroboree ; Outback Overture
[Naxos 8.570241](#)
- Britten: The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra; Prokofiev:
Peter and the Wolf; Saint-Saens: Carnival of the Animals
[Naxos 8.550499](#)
- Copland: Rodeo; Billy the Kid; Appalachian Spring; Fanfare for
the Common Man
[Naxos 8.550282](#)
- Gershwin: Piano Concerto; Rhapsody in Blue; An American in
Paris
[Naxos 8.550295](#)
- Orff: Carmina Burana
[Naxos 8.550196](#)
- Prokofiev: Romeo and Juliet (Highlights)
[Naxos 8.550380](#)
- Shostakovich: Symphonies Nos. 5 & 9
[Naxos 8.550427](#)
- Stravinsky: Jeu des cartes; Rite of Spring (1947 version)
[Naxos 8.550472](#)

[See 20th Century and Modern Catalogue List](#)



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