Historical periods, musical styles, and principal genres in western music

Students are encouraged to listen to several examples of each style at online sources available through Classical Music.net, Naxos, or other online sites and to listen for the characteristics given below.

Middle Ages (also referred to as medieval music): 800-1400.

Generally called the Middle Ages, this long historical era can be broken into several distinct developmental periods and falls between Classical Antiquity and the Renaissance.

Early medieval music to 1000: mainly plainsongs (chants) written in Latin for the church

- **sacred**: worship music for the church, always in Latin
- **texture**: monophonic
- **motion**: conjunct melodies
- **text settings**: syllabic and melismatic
- **rhythm**: free rhythms based on the syllables of the text
- **scales**: modal, based on the pitches D (dorian), E (phrygian), F (lydian), G (mixolydian)
- **ranges**: narrow, usually less than an octave
- **notation**: neumes -- groups of notes in symbols, showing the direction of the melodic patterns.
- **musical staff**: ranging from one to four lines, c-clefs, no bar lines or meters
- **accidentals**: B-flat only
- **sources**: manuscripts are hand copied on parchment
- **genres**: numerous types of chants (songs in Latin for the church services)
- **composers**: mostly anonymous

Development of polyphony: 900-1300

- **textures**: polyphonic
- **scales**: modal
- **harmony**: perfect consonances (perfect fourths, fifths and octaves)
- **harmonic motion**: parallel, then in contrary and oblique motion
- **melodic motion**: conjunct in each voice part
- **text settings**: syllabic and melismatic
languages: mostly Latin, some French
rhythm: repetitive rhythmic patterns in compound time called rhythmic modes
notation: modal; signs (neumes) show the groups of notes that form each rhythmic unit
musical staff: four to five lines, c-clefs, no bar lines or meters, no dynamics or expression marks, voice designations: tenor, duplum, triplum, quadruplum
sources: manuscripts are hand copied on parchment
genres: organum (chant combined with polyphony),
         motet (polyphonic settings with new and separate texts added to each voice chants
composers: Leonin and Perotin (Notre Dame, Paris)

Development of secular music: 1100-1300

secular: worldly music not written for religious services
texts: vernacular languages - French, German, Spanish, English
texture: mostly monophonic
motion: conjunct melodies
text settings: syllabic and melismatic
rhythm: mostly unmetered rhythms until 1250, metered for dances
scales: modal
ranges: narrow, usually less than an octave
traditions: troubadours (South French), trouvères (North French), Minnesingers (German)
           instrumental dances
instruments: organs, recorders, sackbuts (trombone), shawm (double reed), vielles (string)
composers: Bernart of Ventadorn, Beatrice of Dia, Adam de la Halle, and hundreds of others

Late medieval music: 1300-1400 —the New Art (Ars nova)

textures: polyphonic
texts: vernacular languages and Latin
rhythm: complex rhythmic patterns, simple and compound metrical groups, often syncopated
melodic motion: conjunct lines
harmony: consonances: (P=perfect) P4, P5, P8, some thirds
ranges: often an octave in each voice
**cantus firmus**: a pre-existent melody (chant, for example) used in the lower voice (tenor)

**musical notation**: mensural; early time signatures (mensuration signs), but still no bar lines

5-line staff with c and f clefs, flats and sharps used on individual notes, and flats at the beginning of a line apply throughout the line, but not as “tonal” key signatures.

**voice designations**: tenor, contratenor, triplum, cantus

**sources**: manuscripts are hand copied on parchment

**genres**: isorhythmic motets, masses, dance songs (ballade, virelai, rondeau)

**composers**: Philippe de Vitry, Guillaume de Machaut, Francesco Landini

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**Renaissance ("rebirth"): 1400-1600**

**scales**: modal

**texture**: polyphonic, often organized by imitation and canons, or homorhythmic

**motion**: conjunct lines with some wider skips

**rhythm**: regular pulses, but often without a metrical pulse in vocal music; metrical rhythms and strong downbeats in dances and instrumental music

**harmony**: triadic, cadences on perfect fifths and octaves (some Picardy thirds at cadences – the name Picardy comes from north French region where many of these composers originated)

**ranges**: expand to utilize the full SATB registers

**genres**: growth of numerous sacred and secular genres

**vocal**: predominant in sacred and secular music

**sacred music**: sung *a cappella*

**secular music**: can be sung with instruments

**notation**: mensural; early time signatures (mensuration signs), but still no bar lines.

5-line staff with c and f clefs, parts written on individual sections of the page, no dynamic markings

voice designations: tenor, contratenor, cantus, later changing to cantus, altus, tenor, bassus.

**sources**: music printing develops in 1501 in Italy. Manuscripts also continue to be hand copied.

**genres**: single-movement compositions, except for the Mass cycle and dance pairs

**mass cycle**: sacred choral, a capella composition with specific Ordinary sections of the Catholic service composed as a group, often with the same cantus firmus in the tenor part

**motet**: sacred choral, a capella composition with words in Latin

**chorale**: sacred hymn with words in German

**chanson**: secular polyphonic composition with words in French
**madrigal**: secular polyphonic composition with words in Italian

**Lied**: secular polyphonic composition with words in German

**ayre**: secular polyphonic composition with words in English

**canzona**: instrumental composition in the style of a chanson

**dances**: usually in pairs, like the slow pavan and the fast galliard

**musical instruments**: harpsichord (also called the virginal), clavichord, lute, viola da gamba family (also called viols), recorders, cornetto, shawm, sackbut. The violin is developed, but is mostly used outdoors. Instruments are not usually specified for compositions.

**ensembles**: called “consorts.” A whole consort is an ensemble of the same family (e.g., all recorders, SATB) and a broken consort is a mixed ensemble.

**composers**: Du Fay, Dunstable, Binchois, Ockeghem, Josquin des Prez, Palestrina, Byrd, Morley, Dowland, Marenzio, Monteverdi, and hundreds or others

**Baroque Era**: 1600-1750

**textures**: homophonic, polyphonic, and contrapuntal

**rhythms**: metrical rhythms, strong and weak beat pulses

**motives**: short ideas become the basis for continuous pitch and register manipulation, often presented without regular pauses in the music

**scales**: major and minor scales develop

**harmonic rhythm**: changes often occur on every beat or every two beats

**basso continuo**: bass line played by the harpsichord and cello or other solo bass instrument

**figured bass**: develops c. 1600; number notations that inform the continuo player of the intervals and accidentals in relation to the bass notes; the realization of the harmonies is improvised.

**terraced dynamics**: contrasting piano and forte in abrupt dynamic shifts

**ornamentation**: melodic decorations, often improvised or added from symbols given in scores

**affections**: music expresses specific emotions

**concertato style**: contrast is emphasized through alternating groups of voices and/or instruments

**polychoral**: a composition for multiple choirs or voices and/or instruments

**ritornello**: instrumental refrain that frequently returns, as in a concerto or between verses of a song

**notation**: modern symbols, time signatures, key signatures, dynamics, bar lines,
**instruments:** the violin family, horns and trumpets (without valves) are not new instruments, but begin to appear and gain importance in specific ensembles. Harpsichords, and especially organs, become more fully developed as solo instruments. The oboe and bassoon replace the shawm and the dulcian as the principal double reeds.

**ensembles:** string orchestras are expanded with individual instruments that contrast in timbre

**genres:** numerous multi-movement compositions

- **opera seria:** Italian opera, serious in nature, in which the narrative (recitative) and reflective (aria) numbers are all sung, and including staging, costumes, scenery and dramatic acting.
- **oratorio:** work for soloists, chorus and orchestra, based on a sacred story; with no acting costumes or scenery.
- **cantata:** a composition for one or more voices and accompaniment
- **chorale cantata:** soloists, chorus and orchestra, incorporating hymns into the composition
- **trio sonata:** two solo instruments, keyboard and continuous bass instrument
- **fantasia/prelude/toccata:** improvisatory compositions, often paired with a fugue
- **fugue:** paired with an improvisatory composition (fantasia, toccata or prelude)
- **suite:** a collection of dances (allemande, courant, saraband, gigue)
- **solo concerto:** a solo instrument and a chamber orchestra
- **concerto grosso:** a small group of solo instruments contrasted with a chamber orchestra. A multi-movement composition
- **overture:** instrumental movement used at the beginning of an opera or oratorio

**composers:** Monteverdi, Schütz, Corelli, Couperin, Handel, Vivaldi, J. S. Bach

**Classical Era: 1750-1800**

**aesthetic:** balance, symmetry and formality, reflecting the rational objectivity of the Enlightenment

**melody:** sometimes tuneful and folk-like; at other times motivically constructed; lyrical themes contrast with dramatic ones

**phrasing:** periodic, multiples of 4, usually separated by rests; balanced antecedent-consequent phrases

**tonality:** major and minor keys, with major more prevalent

**texture:** homophonic, with occasional counterpoint, especially in developmental sections

**harmony:** triadic with 7th chords used for color and tension; primary chords (I–IV–V–I) predominate

**harmonic rhythm:** slow, changing every two to four beats

**modulations:** to closely related keys (e.g., to IV or V in Major; to III in minor).
accompaniments: broken triadic patterns (Alberti bass); repetitive broken octaves (murky bass)

instrumentation: homogeneous sounds (orchestras with doubling of winds), musical material organized by families; standardized combinations of instruments within a genre; piano and clarinet (both invented in the Baroque) added to the repertory

forms: standardized sonata form, theme and variations, minuet & trio, rondo, concerto-sonata

dynamic gradations and expansions: crescendos, diminuendos, piano and forte dynamics (pp & ff very occasionally); occasional accents on off-beats, sforzandos

genres:
- opera seria
- comic opera
- oratorio
- mass
- Lied
- sonata, especially keyboard sonatas
- string quartet
- symphony
- solo concerto

composers: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven

Romantic Era: 1800-1900, or nineteenth-century music

aesthetic: freedom from boundaries, including those that separate the arts: music becomes more programmatic, merging with literature, art, and philosophy; programmatic elements reflect this trend; interest in the subjective, including the emotions and the supernatural, in contrast with the more objective and rational Classic.

melody: long, emotional, and memorable, using wide leaps for expression

phrases: of irregular lengths, with less symmetry than those of the Classic

rhythm: displaced accents, shifting and overlapping of duple and triple patterns

texture: homophony predominates, highlighting the melody, but counterpoint appears at times

harmony: more extensive, with chord extensions and greater dissonance

tonality: tonal, but with distant chord progressions and modulations; chromaticism is used extensively; key areas often change freely within movements; minor mode predominates, in contrast with the
Classic accompaniment: complex, sometimes contrapuntal, with wide ranges and disjunct intervals

**dynamics**: dramatic, at extremes of the dynamic range; tempi use expressive terminology

**meter and tempo**: freer meters and tempi

**forms**: less clearly defined by sections and tonality

**instrumentation**: larger forces of the orchestra, with a greatly expanded range of timbres that demanded instrumental evolution (valves for brass instruments, more keys for winds, larger and stronger pianos, pedaled harps; new instruments, including the tuba, saxophone, and celeste); inclusion of voice and chorus in later symphonic works

**scale**: on one hand, short, intimate compositions for piano (character piece) or voice and piano (lied, chanson); on the other, expansion of proportions of the symphony, chamber music, concerto, sonata, mass; opera roles demand bigger voices to match more grandiose dramatic concepts

**genres**:
- cyclic symphony
- symphonic poem/tone poem
- symphonic suite
- concert overture
- concerto
- ballet
- chamber music
- Lied and chanson
- song cycles
- music drama
- nationalistic opera
- lyric opera
- mass and oratorio
- piano sonata
- single-movement character pieces and dances for piano

**composers**: Schubert, Robert and Clara Schumann, Verdi, Brahms,

**Twentieth-century music: 1900-2000**

- wide range of tonal, modal, whole tone, atonal, serial, and approaches to composition
- wide range of harmonic structures: triadic, quartal, clusters
- rhythms: polymeters, asymmetrical meters
melodies: disjunct, Sprechstimme (half sung/half spoken)

timbres: non-traditional uses of instruments, global instruments, electronic sounds

mixed media: music combined with film, art, theater

form: traditional and non-traditional structures

expression: ranges from subdued works (Impressionism) to excessive exaggeration (Expressionism)

nationalism and folk elements

return to musical characteristics of earlier periods: Neo-Classicism (including Neo-Baroque elements)

and Neo-Romanticism

minimalism

jazz and other African-American influences

composers: Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Debussy, Bartok, Ives, Barber, Copland, Cage, and Glass.

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