

THE PERIODS OF MUSIC HISTORY

BAROQUE

Dates: 1600–1750, a time of glittering royal courts in Europe, wigs on men, and the colonization of America.

Style: The word “Baroque” describes a very decorative style of art and architecture. Music of the Baroque period is often “decorated” with trills, turns, and other added notes.

Composers: Johann Sebastian Bach is the most famous of the Baroque composers. This book includes a piece from the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena Bach*, a set of pieces written by J.S. Bach and his friends and family. Another famous Baroque composer is Jean-Phillippe Rameau. He was a French composer and harpsichordist who wrote an important text on music theory.

Performance: The harpsichord, clavichord, and organ were the keyboard instruments used during the Baroque period. (The piano was not invented until the early 1700s.)

CLASSICAL

Dates: Approximately 1750–1830, the time of the French and American Revolutions, Thomas Jefferson, and the rise and fall of Napoleon. Men still wore wigs and lace, bowed politely, and danced the minuet.

Style: The Classical period sought a return to simplicity and to what is “natural.” The music is generally elegant and melodic.

Composers: Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven were the major composers of the Classical period. This book includes a piece by Johann Christian Bach, one of J.S. Bach’s sons. His music is very different from that of his father because he wrote in the new Classical style. J.C. Bach was an important teacher of the young Mozart.

Performance: The early piano was called the fortepiano. It became popular because it allowed the performer to play loud (*forte*) or soft (*piano*) tones by varying the touch. The fortepiano was a delicate instrument with a light, clear tone.

ROMANTIC

Dates: Approximately 1830–1910, a time of industrial growth in Europe and America, the Civil War in the United States, and Queen Victoria’s reign over the British Empire.

Style: Romantic composers tried to express deep personal feelings in their music. As a result, harmonies, rhythm, and musical form became more complex.

Composers: Two important Romantic composers featured in this collection are Robert Schumann (Germany) and Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (Russia). Tchaikovsky composed the music for the famous ballet *The Nutcracker*.

Performance: Many consider the 19th century (1800s) to be the high point for solo piano music. The instrument, now called the pianoforte, was very similar to the piano of today. The performer could create “colors” at the piano through shadings of touch and pedal. A tasteful “give and take” in the rhythmic pulse, called *rubato*, is characteristic of the Romantic style.

CONTEMPORARY

Dates: 1900 to the present, the time of World Wars I and II, the development of the automobile and phonograph, putting man on the moon, and the invention of the computer.

Style: Modern music is wide and varied. Characteristics include dissonant harmonies, exciting rhythms, and a wide range of dynamics.

Composers: Russian and American composers are featured here. The Russian composer Rebikov was one of the earliest composers to experiment with 20th century musical ideas.

Performance: Experimentation has been a powerful force in 20th century music composition. For instance, today’s pianist is sometimes asked to pluck the strings inside the piano, or to play clusters of notes with the palm of the hand. It is an exciting time for musicians as today’s composers draw from the wealth of the past and set new trends for the future.

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