

Music History: The Basics

Just like all art forms, music has a long and diverse history that has led us to where we are today. Is it important to memorize all the dates and every important figure that has contributed to music history? No. But it is important to get a general idea of how these time periods contributed to western classical music.

To get started, there are **FOUR** main eras in music history:



BAROQUE
(1600-1750)



CLASSICAL
(1750-1820)



ROMANTIC
(1800-1910)



20TH
CENTURY
(1900-1999)

Baroque

The Baroque era began in 1600 and ended in 1750, which also happens to be the year Johann Sebastian Bach died. This era saw a rise of drama in all art forms. Theater, painting, architecture, and music were all characterized by grandiose concepts, magnificent gestures, ornate designs, and an overall theatrical quality.

Characteristics of the Baroque period are:

- Terraced dynamics
- Drastic contrasts between loud and soft
- Ornamentation
- Long flowing melodic lines
- Basso continuo (mostly with harpsichord)
- A contrapuntal texture where two or more melodic lines are combined

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ufehp7gULA>

Classical

The Classical era was from 1750 to 1820. This era was during one of the most influential times in European history. European art became largely secular (or non-religious), sought to find a "natural" balance and order, and was accessible to large groups of people of all classes like never before.

Characteristics of the Classical period are:

- Less complex (than Baroque music)
- Variety and contrast within one piece
- Shorter melodies with clear-cut phrases
- Most importance on instrumental music

<https://youtu.be/C6EOb86YdIs?t=28>

(Listen till 3:30)

Romantic

The Romantic era was from 1800 to 1910. Many characteristics of the Romantic era appear before the 1800s just as many aspects of the Classical era appear after 1820. Composers during this time period begin to explore more abstract concepts and their music becomes more subjective and emotional.

Characteristics of the Romantic period are:

- Freedom of form and design - music was more personal and emotional
- Dramatic contrasts in dynamics and pitch
- Big orchestras
- Programmatic music - music that tells a story
- Mastered technical ability
- Nationalism

<https://youtu.be/Nzo3atXtm54?t=16>

20th Century

The 20th Century was from 1900 to 1999. This was a time of musical expansion in every meaning of the word. New styles and forms emerged almost every decade, some continued on while others died out that same decade. The 20th Century seems to combine all the ideas of past eras and either use them or drastically reject them.

Characteristics of 20th Century music:

- Musical styles rely on national or regional characteristics
- The incorporations of new developments into musical styles rooted in the past
- A return to audience-pleasing music established from earlier styles
- A radical attempt to reject Romantic past and its characteristics.

<https://youtu.be/dYdDYSTEuWo?t=27>

