

The Four Main Musical Style Periods Associated with the Piano Repertoire

Baroque

1600-1750

- **Major** and **Minor** scales. (Music before this style period was not based on Major and Minor Scales)
- **Polyphonic** approaches to composition: 2 or more melodies combined.
- **Harmony** – results from the combination of different melodies.
 - However, harmonic direction is important (as it is in most of the later style periods): Cadences show pausing/stopping points.
- **Mood** – consistent. Pieces usually didn't have more than one mood (for example: one piece might be only fast and another only slow)
- **Terraced dynamics** – a sudden shift from one dynamic level to another. (they didn't use crescendos and decrescendos)
 - Also, dynamics were not indicated in the music.
- **Rhythm** – emphasis on consistent/driving beat
- **Melody** – elaborate and not easy to remember
 - **melodic sequence** – successive repetition of a musical idea at higher or lower pitch levels.
 - **ornamentation** – a decorative element that adds expression or charm to a melodic line (such as a trill)
- **Range** – the harpsichord was the most important keyboard instrument. Nearly all baroque music that is played on the piano today was originally played on the harpsichord. The harpsichord has far fewer keys than today's piano.
- Instrumental music begins to become far more important during this style period.
- **Forms:** Binary form is very important. Also, the fugue originates during this style period and is a very important method of composition.
- **Genres:**
 - *Suites* – actually “dance suites” (these are collections of different dances)
 - *Dances* – “minuets”, “gavottes”, and other types of dance pieces were composed by themselves or as a part of a suite.
 - *Fugues* – highly polyphonic compositions based upon a “subject”. This formed the main idea of the entire piece.
 - Improvised-sounding pieces – *preludes*, *toccatas* – these were very “free”; they had no set form and they sounded “made up”.

Example of a piece from the Baroque Style Period:

Invention #8 in F Major; by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Key: F Major

Polyphonic approach: each hand has its own melody. The “motive” or “subject” of this piece is marked.

Consistent Mood/Rhythm: The rhythmic energy and drive (16th notes, etc.) is consistent throughout.

Melody: The melody is not easy to sing; it is more “instrumental” than “vocal”. Also notice the use of melodic sequence on the 2nd line.

The image displays the first system of the musical score for Invention #8 in F Major by Johann Sebastian Bach. The score is written for piano in 3/4 time, marked 'Vivace' and 'f' (forte). The key signature has one flat (Bb). The first system consists of two staves: the upper staff is the right hand and the lower staff is the left hand. A box labeled “subject” or “motive” is placed above the first three measures of the right hand, indicating the primary melodic theme. A box labeled “sequence starts here” points to the beginning of the second system, where the right hand begins a melodic sequence of sixteenth notes. A box labeled “sequence continues for next 2 measures” points to the second and third measures of the second system, showing the continuation of the sequence. The score includes various fingering numbers (1-4) and dynamic markings such as 'dim.' (diminuendo). The bottom of the page features a copyright notice: ©2006 Robert Carney, www.robertcarney.net.

Classical 1750-1820

- The word “classical” can be confusing. Keep in mind that *classical* may refer to ancient Greece or Rome or anything of lasting appeal (such as “classic cars”, etc.). When most people discuss “classical music”, they are referring to music from any of the style periods, but when *WE* use the word “Classical”, we will be referring to music only from the Classical Style Period.
- **Important goals of Classical Music:**
 - **Simplicity:** Baroque music was too complex and “brainy” for most people. Classical music tried to appeal to a broader, “middle class” audience.
 - **balance and clarity of structure:** the prevailing thought was that “*art imitates nature*”.
 - balance/symmetry in nature – for example, the human body has 2 ears, 1 nose, 2 eyes (2 of everything on the side and one of everything in the middle)
- **balance and clarity** (they called this “*taste*”) is realized by:
 - **clear forms** – such as “sonata form”
 - **melodies** – tunes are easier to sing and easier to remember than Baroque melodies. They were also more “balanced” because most melodies were usually either 4 or 8 measures long.
 - **homophonic texture** – there was one main melody (that was easy to hear) and accompaniment.
 - **ornamentation** – trills and other ornaments were used much less than during the Baroque.
- **Rhythm** – In general, the tempo must be steady and usually does not change very much during a piece or movement.
- **Harmony** – simple harmonies.
 - Harmony often involved only tonic or dominant chords, and the use of “dissonant chords” was limited.
 - Cadences were clear.
- **Texture** – more homophonic (baroque was more polyphonic) – in general: simplicity
- **Melody** – more tuneful and balanced. (also “periodic phrasing”)
- **Mood** – contrasting moods within a single piece (or movement)
 - crescendo and decrescendo are now being used
 - the goal is for music to be more expressive and “natural”
- **Forms** – new forms - such as sonata form.
 - (some old ones disappear: fugues only appear as a small part of a very large composition)
- **Fortepiano** – the early piano was much smaller than today’s 88-keyed monster, therefore classical music has a much more limited range than Romantic and Modern music.
 - Many pianos did not have pedals – those that did were typically operated by the knee (which was more difficult to use). Therefore most classical music uses very little pedal.
 - The “action” on these instruments was also much lighter than on today’s instruments so a lighter touch can help achieve a more appropriate sound
- **Genres:** the sonata (or sonatina) was now the most important genre for keyboard.

Example of a piece from the Classical Style Period:

Ecosaisse; by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Periodic Phrasing: Notice how the 1st phrase sounds “incomplete” when it ends, but the 2nd phrase sounds “complete”. This could be seen as a question (1st phrase) and answer (2nd phrase). Also notice that each phrase is 4 measures long. When you combine these two 4-measure phrases, you get a “period” (hence the name “periodic phrasing”).

Texture: a clear homophonic texture: melody plus chords (the LH chords are broken up).

Harmony: simple harmony that uses only tonic and dominant chords. The chords also change rather slowly (no faster than one chord per measure)

Romantic

1820-1900

- Romanticism stresses:
 - **emotion** – characterized by the extreme outpouring of emotion (not withheld by the “taste” of the Classical Style Period).
 - **imagination** – in general, more variety and uniqueness with every piece
 - **freedom** – freedom from “old” forms
 - **individualism** – each composer has a “style” that is more uniquely his/her own. Also, there was a great emphasis on the performer, composer, etc. as an individual – each musician wanted to be unique more than ever before.
 - **Nationalism** – many composers took a special sense of national pride and wrote music that reflected their homeland.
 - **Virtuoso** – there is a great importance placed on “virtuosos” and virtuoso music. (very technically demanding music)
 - **EXTREMES** – miniature and **MONUMENTAL** – very short pieces and very LONG pieces were written. Also, composers use *pp* (or even *pppp*) and *ff* (and *fff* or *ffff*) far more often to designate a greater range of dynamics. And more extreme tempo indications are being used more often (presto and largo)
- **Rhythm** – In general, the tempo (and thus the rhythm) was much freer and less strict.
 - **rubato** – a slight holding back or pressing forward of tempo (a very important way to perform much romantic music).
- **Harmony** – In general, harmonies become more complicated as composers use more dissonant, unstable chords. Composers are more likely to use notes not found in the Major or Minor scale of the piece.
- **Texture** – although most pieces were still basically homophonic, the textures were generally “thicker” (there were more notes being played at once).
- **Melody** – melodies were tuneful and easy to remember. Romantic era melodies often relied more on the “singing” quality of improved pianos. This meant that there were fewer “runs” than in previous periods and melodies were even less ornamented than in previous style periods.
- **Mood** – even greater variety of mood than during the Classical Style Period.
- **Forms** – sonata form was used much less. If sonata form was used, it was not as clear as it was during the Classical Style Period.
- **Piano** – this is the age of the Modern Piano!
 - Piano manufacturers create instruments that are larger, louder, possess a fuller sound, have more keys (they now have 88 keys), and an improved “action” (the “double escapement” mechanism allowed the keys to be repeated more rapidly).
 - The Pedal is used extensively – composers use it to sustain sounds and enhance the resonance of the instrument.
 - The piano becomes a very popular instrument.
- **Piano Technique** – Virtuoso music changed piano technique forever. “Flashy” music had faster, more difficult scales, arpeggios, and octaves than ever before.
- **Genres** – very, very few sonatas are written.
 - **Character Pieces** – short pieces that descriptive (they are about a person, place, thing, event, or story). The character piece becomes a very important type of piano piece.

Examples of Pieces from the Romantic Style Period:

Prelude in E Minor; by Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)

Frédéric Chopin
Op. 28, No. 4

singing melody that depends upon the piano's "singing" and "sustaining" qualities!

long pedals

very non-traditional chord progressions that are not easily analyzed

Sailor's Song; by Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

thicker texture with octaves and octave chords

greater range of notes - here, very low notes

More Examples of Pieces from the Romantic Style Period:

Consolation No. 3 in D-flat Major; by Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

more extreme dynamic markings

use of "long" pedals to sustain the sound

Lento placido.

ppp

sempre legatissimo

Cantata

singing melody that depends upon the piano's "singing" and "sustaining" qualities!

Prelude, Op. 232, No. 1; by Isaac Albeniz (1860-1909)

Effects imitate Spanish guitar music (Nationalism)

pp

2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

marcato il canto

v 5 (1 2 3 1 3) v 5

v 5 1 2 3 1 3 1 4 3 1 4 3

5

Modern 1900-present

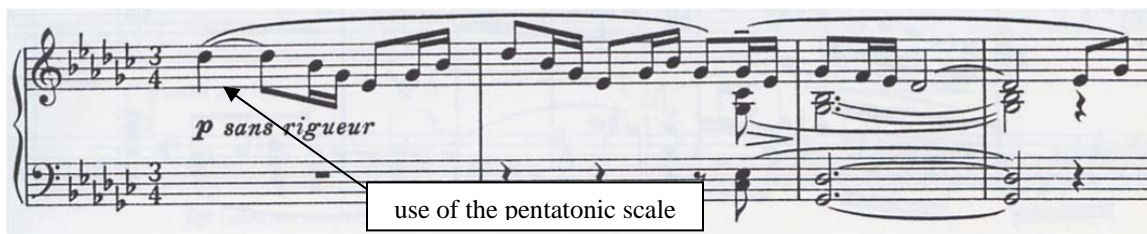
- Each piece sets its own rules:
 - the harmonies can be based on unusual scales, or on no scale at all.
 - each piece may be in a particular form (such as sonata form) or in no form at all.
 - basically: anything goes!
 - after World War II, some pieces even began using nuts, bolts, screws, and other objects placed inside the piano to alter the sound (this is called: **prepared piano** – the sound of a grand piano is altered with objects)
- There are many different trends in 20th century music. Below are listed two of them:

Impressionism

- This movement originated in painting (with artists such as Monet). With music, this trend was most prominent from 1900-1920.
- Predominantly a French style of music associated with the French composer: Claude Debussy.
- Like the Impressionistic paintings of Monet, Impressionistic music is not intended to give a clear image of something.
- Chords don't function as part of a harmonic progression, but provide "color"
- The pulse of the music (and therefore the time signature) is often extremely vague
 - Provides a "suspension in time"
- Use of whole-tone (harmonically this creates a sense of wondering since tonic is very hard to hear) and pentatonic scales (which were first heard when musician from the far east came to perform in Paris at the first World's Fair).
- Words that come to mind when listening: Blurry, misty, easy on the ears, dreamy

An Example of an Impressionistic piece:

La fille aux cheveux de lin (The girl with the flaxen hair); by Claude Debussy



The image shows a musical score for the piece 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' by Claude Debussy. The score is written for piano and is in 3/4 time. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The music is marked 'p sans rigueur'. A box with an arrow points to a specific melodic line in the right hand, which is identified as the 'use of the pentatonic scale'. The score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef.

Another Example of an Impressionistic piece:

Voiles (Sails OR Veils); by Claude Debussy

uses the whole tone scale (all whole steps).

Serialism

- Music that is not based on any scale, rather it is based on a “tone row” (like a “subject”) that uses all 12 pitches before repeating any of them.
- Much of this music is also called: expressionistic. This means that it stresses intense emotion (that is even neurotic) and is characterized by harsh dissonances.
- Arnold Schoenberg was the first to develop this “12-tone system” in the 1920s. Two of his students: Alban Berg and Anton Webern followed his lead by composing 12-tone music of their own. Many composers after them also used his techniques.

An Example of a Serialist piece:

the main “tone row” (or P-0) for this piece is:
 B-flat, F, C, B, A, G-flat, D-flat, E-flat, G, A-flat, D, E
 (written in only flats)

Look for these notes in the first measure (they are distributed between the notes in the chords).

This piece (as most “12-tone” music does) uses more than one “form” of the row. Rows are usually changed by repeating the row backwards (retrograde), inversion (if the first two notes go up by a 5th, then inversion of that would be going down by a 5th), transposition, and a combination of retrograde and inversion (called “retrograde-inversion”). These different procedures are often done at various different levels of transposition.

This particular piece by Schoenberg uses the I-5 (inversion of the first row transposed 5 half-steps higher), RI-5 (retrograde of I-5), R-0 (retrograde of the initial “P-0” row). His selection of these versions of the row is based upon the “combinatorial” potential of these row forms. This means that the “collection” of notes in the first half of the initial row can be found in a collection of the last six notes of I-5 (and R-0 but this is “trivial”). RI-5 has the same collection but since it is the first six notes and not the last six this is called “invariance”.

Piano Piece, Op. 33a; by Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

Look for the P-0 row form here (see the “main” row listed above).

Look for the RI-5 row form starting in the 2nd measure and here:
 A, B, F, G-flat, B-flat, C, G, E, D, D-flat, A-flat, E-flat

Look for the R-0 row form starting here:
 E, D, A-flat, G, E-flat, D-flat, G-flat, A, B, C, F, B-flat

An Another Example of Modern Piece:

Sonatina in A Minor; by Dmitri Kabalevsky

use of dissonant chords (7ths)

“Parallelisms” – chords being moved by parallel motion without much regard to their harmonic implications

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features several chords with a seventh interval, highlighted by an annotation. The second system starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and shows a sequence of chords moving in parallel motion, as noted by another annotation. Fingerings and articulation marks are clearly visible throughout the score.