

# Musical Styles

## Baroque (c.1600 - c.1750)

Keyboard instruments used: harpsichord, clavichord.

Popular keyboard compositions: dance suites, preludes, fugues, toccatas.

Popular forms: binary, ternary, ritornello.

Composers: Purcell (English), Couperin (French), Telemann (German), Rameau (French), J. S. Bach (German), Handel (German), Scarlatti (Italian).

Chief characteristics: Baroque music is ornate and elaborate.

- There is generally one main mood, one main theme, and one main rhythmic pattern used throughout a Baroque composition.
- It is usually performed with a constant rhythmic pulse.
- *Counterpoint* (the simultaneous sounding of different melodic lines) and *imitation* are frequently used, so both hands are often of equal importance. The texture is often *polyphonic*.
- Ornamentation is common, particularly in slow movements and at cadences. Performers were often expected to add their own ornaments, especially at cadences or during repeats. Trills usually begin on the upper note in the Baroque period. Larger chords are often *arpeggiated*.
- Baroque music is performed with a clearly articulated sound, often using detached notes. There is no sustaining pedal on a harpsichord, and the tone dies away quite rapidly.
- Dynamics were usually left to the performer to determine. Where they are indicated by the composer, they are often “terraced” (i.e. changing immediately from one level to another), although this does not imply that *crescendo* or *diminuendo* should never be used.
- Baroque music often contains long phrases, with few internal cadence points.
- Modulations are generally to closely related keys, typically up or down a 5th. Pieces in minor keys often end with a *tierce de Picardie*.
- Sequences are common. *Hemiola* rhythm is sometimes used before important cadences.

## Classical (c.1750 - c.1810)

Keyboard instruments used: fortepiano.

Popular keyboard compositions: sonatas, rondos, variations.

Popular forms: sonata, rondo, minuet and trio, theme and variations.

Composers: Haydn (Austrian), Clementi (Italian), Mozart (Austrian), Beethoven (German), Hummel (Austrian), Schubert (Austrian).

Chief characteristics: Classical music is light, elegant and restrained.

- It is usually performed with a steady pulse, but this should not imply a rigid or mechanical feel. Discreet *rubato* is sometimes used in slow movements, but never to excess.
- The texture is usually *homophonic*. This means there is one clear melody line (usually in the upper voice), with a subordinate accompaniment. The accompaniment often consists of simple chordal or broken chord figures, such as an *Alberti bass*.
- Ornamentation is common, particularly at cadence points, but is not used as extensively as in the Baroque period. Trills usually begin on the upper note in the Classical period.
- Classical music is performed with a clearly articulated sound. Short slurs, rests and detached notes are frequently used. The sustaining pedal may be used discreetly.
- Dynamics contrasts are important, but extreme dynamic levels are not appropriate. Expressiveness is essential, but sentimentality or emotional excess should be avoided.
- Classical music often contains short, balanced phrases. The melodies often use motives that are based on scales or broken chords, and which can be developed.
- Modulations are generally to closely related keys, typically up or down a 5th. Harmonies tend to be straightforward and triadic, and are mostly *diatonic* (i.e. without accidentals).

## Romantic (c.1810 - c.1900)

Keyboard instruments used: pianoforte (still undergoing development).

Popular keyboard compositions: descriptive or character pieces, études, impromptus, rhapsodies, short lyrical pieces (e.g. intermezzo, prelude, song without words, romance), nationalistic dances (e.g. mazurkas, malagueñas).

Popular forms: ternary, through-composed (free form).

Composers: Mendelssohn (German), Schumann (German), Chopin (Polish), Liszt (Hungarian), Brahms (German), Tchaikovsky (Russian), Grieg (Norwegian), Albéniz (Spanish).

Chief characteristics: Romantic music is passionate and expressive.

- It should be performed with a sense of spontaneity and deep personal involvement. Most Romantic compositions require the use of *rubato* (expressive fluctuations in tempo, at the performer's discretion). There are often a number of tempo changes marked in the score.
- The texture is usually thicker than in the Classical period, with large chords, widely-spaced accompaniments and a wide keyboard range. Pedal is essential in most Romantic works.
- Detailed expressive instructions are usually indicated by the composer, and a wide dynamic range is often called for.
- Romantic melodies have long, lyrical phrases, and should be played with a warm *cantabile* tone. The melodies usually remain intact throughout the piece, rather than being developed, but they may be embellished or transformed. Expressive dissonance often creates a sense of yearning.
- Romantic harmonies are rich and often chromatic, using many 7th and some 9th chords. Modulations extend beyond the closely related keys; modulations by 3rds are common.
- Virtuosity and the quest for a transcendent technique were often important elements.

## Impressionist (c.1890 - c.1918)

Keyboard instruments used: pianoforte.

Popular keyboard compositions: descriptive pieces, often involving water images.

Popular forms: through composed (free form).

Composers: Debussy (French), Ravel (French), Delius (English), Scott (English).

Chief characteristics: Impressionist music is delicate and misty.

- Rhythms are delicate and supple, avoiding any feeling of strong, regular accent.
- The texture is usually light and ethereal, and dynamic levels are generally soft; the tone required is often that of a piano without hammers. Use of the sustaining pedal is essential, and the *una corda* pedal is also needed at times.
- There is a deliberate vagueness or lack of direction in the harmony. Dominant-tonic cadences are avoided. Unrelated triads are often juxtaposed. Modal, whole-tone and pentatonic scales are often used. Bitonality is sometimes used.
- Chords are often used for their sonority rather than their harmonic function. Parallel chords (including discords and consecutive 5ths) are common. 7th and 9th chords are frequently used, sometimes in parallel motion. Chords with added 2nds or 6ths are sometimes used.
- Pedal points and ostinati are common.

## 20th/21st Century

During the 20th Century, a great diversity of styles emerged. At times, the musical principles of the "common practice" era (c.1600 - c.1900) were abandoned. Some of the music from this period is very dissonant, with no clear sense of key. Composers such as Schoenberg used *serial* techniques, so that all twelve chromatic pitches were treated equally. The piano was often used percussively, particularly in the music of Bartók and Prokofiev, with strong accents, driving rhythms, and a very wide dynamic range. Some composers wrote in a combination of traditional and modern styles (the *neoclassicists*), while others rejected modernism altogether (the *postmodernists*).