

## Practice Questions

*Have the music open in front of you when you answer these questions.*

1. Explain what the **title** means, or why you think the composer chose that name.  
Is this title particularly associated with the work of any other composer(s)?  
If there is a subtitle or identification number, explain what it means.
2. What is the name and nationality of the **composer**?  
What was the year and place of the composer's birth (and, if applicable, death)?  
Give the names of any important teachers, mentors, influences or places of study.  
Mention two or three important events in the life of the composer.  
Did the composer hold any important musical or academic positions?  
What other pieces did the composer write for the piano? Also mention some of the composer's other important works (e.g. for other instruments, voice or orchestra).
3. Explain the **time signature**.
4. What is the main **key** (or tonality) of the piece?
5. Identify any important **modulations** (changes of key). If possible, identify the relationship of the new key to the tonic (e.g. dominant or relative minor). Try to point out a cadence to demonstrate that the new key has been fully established.
6. What is the **form** of the piece? Point to where the main sections begin and end.  
Identify the main theme, and point out any distinguishing features of its rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, articulation or accompaniment style. Briefly discuss how the theme is used throughout the piece, and describe any changes that may occur.  
Identify any other important theme(s), and the key(s) in which it is heard. Identify any points of similarity or contrast between the themes, and between the main sections.  
Is there anything unusual or unexpected about the formal structure of this piece?
7. If the piece comes from a larger work, how many movements are there?  
Mention the key or tempo plan of the work as a whole (e.g. fast-slow-fast), or the names of some of the other movements, if applicable.
8. Name the **style** or period to which the piece belongs.  
Give an approximate time frame (- - - - to - - - -, or - - th Century).  
Name two or three other composers who are representative of this style or period.  
Name some types of compositions that were common in this period.
9. Identify some characteristics of the piece that are typical of the style or period.  
If the piece is not typical, mention some general characteristics of the style or period.
10. Explain any **musical terms** that you can find in the piece.  
Give the full name of any words that are found in abbreviated form.
11. Name and explain any **musical signs** (e.g.  $\wedge$ ,  $\mp$ ,  $\odot$ ) that are found in the piece.

*Now that you have learnt the meaning of the performance instructions in your pieces, think about how you can use this knowledge to continue to improve your playing.*

# 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*).

# Form in Music

Form is a way of describing the structure or shape of a piece of music - i.e. the way it has been constructed from various smaller sections. Form is primarily determined by harmony (keys, chords, cadences etc.), although melody, rhythm, dynamics, texture and register can also be important. Some commonly used forms are:

**Binary** - AB (or AABB, AAB, ABB; occasionally  $||:AB:||$ )

Two sections. Either or both may be repeated. The first section usually ends in the dominant or relative major key, or on the dominant chord. The second section ends in the tonic key.

**Ternary** - ABA (often AABA; sometimes  $ABA'$ ; occasionally  $A||:BA:||$  or  $A||:BA':||$ )

Three sections, with the third being similar to the first. Sometimes the first and third sections are identical (e.g. a *da Capo*). Both A sections will usually end in the tonic key. If the second A section is somewhat altered, it may be designated  $A'$ . Section B is contrasting, and is usually in a different key.

**Rounded Binary** -  $A BA'$  (often  $||:A:||:BA':||$ )

A combination of binary and ternary characteristics. Falls into two main sections, often indicated by repeat signs, as in binary form. The first section usually ends in the dominant or relative major key. The opening (A) theme returns midway through the second section, which ends in the tonic key.

**Minuet and Trio** -  $||:A1:||:A2:||:B1:||:B2:||A1||A2$

A type of compound ternary (i.e. ABA with internal subdivisions). The Minuet (A) and Trio (B) are each usually in binary or rounded binary form, with two repeating sections (A1 and A2, B1 and B2). After the Trio, the Minuet is played again, without repeats. Very common in the Classical period. In the 19th Century, the Minuet was often replaced by a Scherzo (making Scherzo and Trio form).

**Sonata** -  $||:Exposition:||:Development - Recapitulation:||$

An elaboration of Rounded Binary, sometimes referred to as First-Movement or Sonata-Allegro form. The Exposition contains two thematic groups (subjects), the first in the tonic key and the second in a related key (usually the dominant or relative major). The Development is a reworking of the thematic material of the Exposition in various keys, or (less often) a contrasting episode using new material. The Recapitulation contains a return of all thematic material in the tonic key. Very common in the Classical period.

**Rondo** - ABAC...A

The main theme (A) returns at least twice, always in the tonic key, separated by two or more contrasting episodes (B, C, etc.). Very common in the Classical period.

**Ritornello** -  $ABA'C...A$

Similar to Rondo, except that the main theme returns in *various* keys, beginning and ending in the tonic, separated by contrasting episodes. Very common in the Baroque period.

**Sonata-Rondo** - ABACAB'[A]

Also called Rondo-Sonata form. A combination of sonata and rondo characteristics. The first subject (A) is heard three or more times, as in a rondo. The second subject is heard twice, initially in a related key, and later in the tonic key, as in sonata form. The development section is replaced by an episode (C). The first subject may also return as a Coda.

**Theme and Variations** -  $AA'A''A'''...$

The theme (or "air") is stated and then subjected to a number of changes - melodic, harmonic, rhythmic or textural. Popular in all periods of music from the Renaissance to the present.