

Alex Aitken's Potted History of 600 years of Music

Medieval: codifying of notation, experimenting with multiple vocal lines, drones, role of perfect intervals, creation of part-books and tomes of sacred music. Poetry rhythms used in music, troubadours / folk song separate from religious music. Organum explored, and separate schools of thought emerge on the correct way to notate and perform music: *Ars Nova* in France, *Trecento* in Italy, *Ars subtilior* (French + Italian) and *Contenance Angloise* in England. Further codifying of notation, more experimenting, more florid vocal lines, cadences appear within music, Church modes spread. All with a dose of plague.

Renaissance: strict counterpoint codified, English music rises and spreads to Europe (Tomkins, Dunstable), polyphony established, notation standardised, music printed/published (Tallis/Byrd and Elizabeth I), harmony as a byproduct of horizontal line, music for the Church increases (masses and motets – Palestrina), secular madrigals incorporate folk music (Monteverdi), experiments with major and minor result in *musica ficta* and general woe, Henry VIII sits on and wipes out church music, before leaving behind Christ Church Oxford, Trinity Cambridge and King's College Chapel. Madrigals become more dramatic and raunchy after wine (fa la la la la). Gabrieli meanwhile was slamming choirs and brass ensembles together in various corners of St Marks in Venice.

Baroque: instruments become more integral, harmony envisioned from the bass up instead of floating, ensembles standardised (strings and woodwind), instrument manufacture improves beyond meh, figured bass and inversions standardised, opera appears (trying to revive Greek drama), forms are clarified, counterpoint thrives, Bach rocks up, Music further entwines with Art and Architecture, lines are ornamented, music blossoms under emerging aristocratic/dynastic patronage, music used for social occasions (dances, fireworks, peasant baiting, etc.), tuning solutions are proposed with some success, circle of fifths is theorised (Corelli jumps on it), harpsichord gets modified, programme music appears (Vivaldi's notation of birdsong and shepherds in *The Four Seasons*, etc.), virtuosi appear, people still talk at 'concerts', brass begin to appear in sacred or royal music, Vivaldi dies and is largely forgotten, Handel becomes English and battles Scarlatti (probably), Telemann does his own thing, Bach aces life, formalises the chorale and fugue, puts organ music on the map (with Buxtehude) and writes a fugue with all 12 semitones in before saying bye. $A = 415\text{Hz}$ give or take a minor 3rd.

Classical: reaction to the extreme ornamentation and perceived ostentatiousness of Baroque, with more emphasis placed on order, balance and refinement, Enlightenment seeking purity by channelling Ancient Greek principles of proportion and order, ornamentation stripped back, emphasis on clear melody and accompaniment, rise in domestic music making, String Quartet and Chamber music rises, helped by continued patronage of wealthy aristocrats, Baroque dance forms are modified or expanded, the sonata and symphony appear in renewed forms, texture becomes more transparent, tuning systems are proposed and experimented with, pianos begin to appear and be manufactured widely, but people still talk at concerts. Horns and clarinets appear in the orchestra and as soloists, and opera becomes funny, tailored for a wider audience, and a tool for political and social satire. Haydn lives to 77 continuously writing music. Teaching pieces and studies are written for the emerging amateur market, Mozart aces musical life but squanders his wealth and fails actual life, and Beethoven becomes a git but can still hear (for now).

Romantic: harmony and texture experimented enriched, music's emotive power returned to and deepened, melodies become longer and more emotionally saturated, forms are enlarged, tuning still experimented with (much to the annoyance of strings), more keys used, piano is more commonplace, is stronger/louder and has wider range. The virtuoso rises (again) but with added ego, audiences go to concerts to actually listen, the orchestra gets enlarged and added to at both pitch extremes, there's an emphasis on the very big or the miniature, music is seen as a gateway to the soul/divine, philosophers continue to wrestle with what existence is and composers offer answers in music. More extreme states of emotion are depicted, domestic music making is in its prime, publishing houses pop up throughout Europe, nationalism rears its head, opera becomes more real/truthful and hard-hitting, the solo recital becomes a thing, lights are dimmed at recitals and concerts when Liszt realised it shut people up, and programme music appears (again). The sinister and the macabre become a fascination at one extreme, and nature and the divine at the other, Beethoven's hearing declines and his isolation yields the most powerful music yet heard, and Mendelssohn rediscovers Vivaldi. Wagner lightly redefines the motif, takes the baton of grumpiness from Beethoven, goes back to Greek mythology and attempts to unify into thirteen operas the extremes of art, music, love, death, the soul, drama and human existence that have happened ever since. Chopin goes back to Bach and Baroque forms or his native Poland to redefine most of the miniature genres as works in their own right, nationalism becomes a big thing thanks to beef in Europe, the Russians shout

'hey' and emerge with The Mighty Five, choosing to channel the East as an expression of their national power against Europe. Mahler and Strauss take music to instrumental, formal and harmonic extremes without agreeing, extreme keys in the circle of fifths become more possible with tuning advances (A now = 440Hz give or take a minor 2nd and a southerly breeze), and tonal colours are exploited with less used keys. Harps, glockenspiels and more percussion are added to the orchestra, with yet more violins for the giggles, music ascends in status, forms become undetectable, the music critic rocks up uninvited, keys and the relationships between them dissolve, as do traditional modulation relationships and harmony. Henry Wood starts the Proms in London to bring music to all, and twelve semitones become equal (unconnected to Proms). Schoenberg formalises experiments with melodies where all twelve notes appear only once (too bad that Bach beat him by several hundred years), and mathematical combinations and permutations give one last push at the extremes of harmony. Meanwhile pointillism and impressionism infuse themselves into music (Debussy, Ravel, etc.) and the sustain pedal gets sellotaped down. And out on a limb opera and ballet become more adventurous, risqué and provocative (Stravinsky Rite of Spring, Debussy Jeux). Nationalism gets worse and WWI breaks out. Bad.

Twentieth Century: WWI decimates Europe, music goes from expressing anger or other emotional extremes to being a tool to express grief, or escapism (vaudeville, music hall, cabaret). At the other extreme mathematical combinations and permutations become REALLY useful in removing the emotional impact of music in light of world grief (Schoenberg, Berg, Webern). Textures clear again, harmony is a free for all, opera seeks stories far removed from world turmoil (the Bible, legends, fairytales, Greek mythology again), the microphone is invented, recording begins, jazz begins to infiltrate Western Music and be seen as good (expression of freedom and all that), and miniature forms rise again. Nationalism comes back with a vengeance and composers are persecuted again (Shostakovich, Schoenberg). WWII breaks out, music gets to its lowest ebb (Messiaen Quartet for the End of Time, Shostakovich Leningrad Symphony, etc.), the English have a cup of tea and try to keep national spirits up (Vera Lynn, etc.), and music becomes a tool of propaganda (utility music, Pathé news, marches) with Europe divided. Russian creatives flee to Europe (Prokofiev, Rachmaninov, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Ballet Russe), pacifism rises post WWII (Britten and his War Requiem), nature gradually becomes a metaphor for healing and appears back in music again (Messiaen birdsong), English pastoralism appears (Elgar, Vaughan Williams, Delius, Finzi) and English choral music rises from the ashes (Stanford, Parry, Vaughan Williams, Howells). Scarred from war Vaughan Williams and Gurney go back to Tudor music and combine it with folksongs for escapism. Composers either begin to pick and choose elements of twelve-tone music to use (Hindemith, Bartok, Prokofiev) or, having experimented with every element by now, start experimenting with sound and playing techniques, with works composed to be analysed or make a statement rather than be performed (Xenakis, Dallapiccola, Boulez). Film music develops, Neoclassical music seeks to return to earlier happier times, musicals appear and jazz influences creep into 'classical' music via Tin Pan Alley (Rachmaninov Fourth Piano Concerto, Gershwin Rhapsody in Blue, Ravel Piano Concerto). The touring musician becomes a thing again (troubadours with a bigger band?), jazz, swing and ragtime become expressions of free spirit in face of rationing, with increased immigration bringing more jazz along with Reggae, Ska and Dub. America wades in with Motown and Stax, records become widely distributed, and a race to record ALL the classical canon helps bring 'more traditional' music back. Hippies appear (The Beatles?!), music becomes political again (Eurovision also starts – connected?!), and an agent for social protest (helped by Top of the Pops and Pan's People). The other BBC (Bernstein, Barber and Copland) put America on the map musically, multitrack recorders, synthesisers and effects unit appear and open up a new sonic palette. America gives us Rock 'n' Roll and Elvis; we give them Glam Rock, Queen and Status Quo. Disco wades in, as does Funk and Soul. Wizard begin to think Christmas happens every day, Club and Electronic music become popular, America gives us Rap and Hip Hop for round 2; we give them Oasis. Meanwhile Goehr, Knussen and Adès have been proudly holding the baton for new British music, whilst Michael Jackson and David Bowie have been fighting for top spot in the charts. Someone thinks it's a good idea to form the Spice Girls and in retaliation Louis Walsh creates Boyzone. They fight (with Harry Hill commentating). America offloads gives us Grunge and Punk, we give them Chumbawamba. Barry Manilow is still writing the songs that no-one wants and Britney Spears is singing the songs that no-one needs. Amy Winehouse breaks through before making everyone sad, Adele is discovered and James Blunt enjoys brief success with one song. X factor appears after Pop Idol is flogged to death, and Ed Sheeran is sent as the new messiah (allegedly).