

PERIODS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

Early Music

Medieval - characterised by Gregorian chant, mostly religious
Renaissance - increase of secular music, madrigals and art song

Baroque composers include JS Bach, Handel and Vivaldi. Like Baroque architecture, the music was highly decorated and fussy, but written within very strict rules – like following the instructions to build a complex Lego model. Pieces tended to be fairly short, five minutes or so, and often performed in groups of contrasting movements called “Suites” which later evolved into what we now call the symphony.

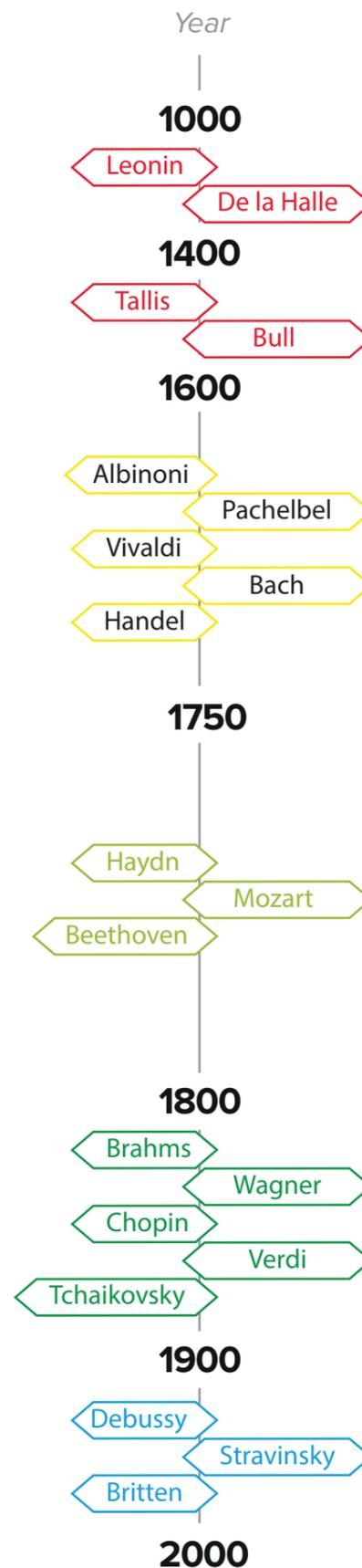
Classical

Approx 1750 – 1800
balance and structure

Romantic music includes many of the big name composers that we often mistakenly call ‘Classical’: Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Chopin, Rachmaninoff and Brahms to name but a few. Technological advancements allowed the development of new instruments which gave a better pitch range to write for. The orchestra doubled in size. The music became freer, more emotional, longer, faster, louder and more complex with lots of contrasting instrumental parts playing simultaneously. The longer symphonies lasted up to an hour, concert halls were built for those pieces to be played in.

20th Century

Beyond 1900 – 20th Century
limitless



Many composers lived across more than one era. Haydn was very much a ‘Classical’ composer, even though his timeline includes Baroque and Romantic on either side of Classical. Some adapted to new styles, others remained with what was familiar.

‘Early’ music covers everything from around the 14th century up to approximately the mid-17th century, before instruments such as the piano had been invented and long before what we know as the symphony orchestra. It was generally performed by small groups of ‘gentlemen’ musicians using instruments such as recorders, lutes, viols and a range of now obsolete wind instruments.

Baroque

Approx 1600 – 1750
known for its intricate ornamentation

Classical music was more relaxed, simple and clean, often a lovely melody with an accompaniment underneath. Haydn and Mozart were the two leading Classical composers, though Beethoven appeared right at the end of the period. Classical composers tended to be in the employment of local aristocracy and much of their music was written to order for court performance. The piano was now in use though it was far more limited than the modern one. The orchestra was gradually being developed though some instruments were much simpler than their modern counterparts, particularly woodwind and brass. Valves and keys were yet to be invented! Symphonies lasting fifteen to twenty minutes were developed, concertos for solo instruments and orchestra (usually piano or violin) and string quartets came into being.

Romantic

Approx 1820 – 1900
emotional, large, programmatic

20th century onwards. Composers include Benjamin Britten, Edward Elgar, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Aaron Copland, Dmitri Shostakovich, John Williams and dozens of others. This runs in parallel with the development of Popular music.