

## CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC: 1600-2000

### BAROQUE MUSIC: 1600-1750

The term *Baroque* describes not only the music of the period but also the qualities found in the architecture, painting and literature of the time. This was very ornamental and heavily decorated. The music is ornamented by trills and lots of quick grace notes.

Musical characteristics:

- Polyphonic or contrapuntal style - Polyphonic literally means "many voices". In this style of music you would look for 2 or more fast-moving tunes (quavers or semi-quavers). The musical lines may imitate each other (a tune might be heard in the right hand and then in the left hand).
- Homophonic style - This is a chordal style where the tune is really a series of chords. Very thick harmony and texture.
- Dances - Usually in 3/4 or 6/8. Look out for a very rhythmic piece with a tune and an accompaniment in the bass line. Types of popular dances are *Gigue*, *Sarabande*, *Allemande* and *Courante*.

### CLASSICAL MUSIC: 1750-1800

The Classical period coincided with the movement known as the *Enlightenment*. This was a revolt against the heavily ornamented Baroque period and made a return to simple, clean melodic lines and harmonies.

Musical characteristics:

- Basic tunes, no ornamentation and nothing that sounds too complicated. The harmony is very basic; chords consist of the main harmony notes (tonic triads) and can often feel predictable, i.e. you can almost know what's coming next.
- Phrase structure - Phrases are musical "sentences". Classical phrase structure is very basic and mainly in sections of 4 bars.
- Texture is often in the form of a melody and an accompaniment.

### ROMANTIC MUSIC: 1800-1900

Romantic music introduced the idea of a story or a theme which the music describes.

### Musical characteristics:

- Descriptive music - look out for themes like *Nature* (storms, birds singing, raindrops), *Marches* (Funeral Marches, Military Marches), *Emotions* (anger, joy, tranquility, sadness, tragedy).
- More instrumental colour - melodies are more chromatic, harmony is not predictable (you feel like the piece will end on a certain chord but it may go to a different one) and is more complex.
- There is a wider range on the piano. You may hear very high or very low notes.
- Towards the end of the century, the music got very complex indeed. You may hear huge leaps in the melody.

### TWENTIETH-CENTURY MUSIC: 1900-2000

The twentieth-century was a time of experimentation. Composers tried many different and diverse methods of composition. There was also an increase in world-wide communication so, for the first time, composers were readily able to hear music from distant countries.

### Musical characteristics:

- Nationalism. This was a revolt against the cosmopolitan atmosphere that prevailed with the advent of more sophisticated travel. For a long time (since 1600 in fact), music had been dominated by the styles of Germany and Italy and other countries tried to free themselves of this domination by incorporating folk music into their compositions. For example, Russian composers would use Russian folk songs in their symphonies or Russian heroes as the subject of their operas. Look out for tunes that conjure up images of Finland, Denmark, Russia, Spain, etc.
- Impressionism. This is a principally French movement in music and takes its name from the painters of the same period. Look at pictures of Monet and Manet. Impressionist composers are mainly concerned with colour in music and by giving an "impression" of a scene or subject rather than a description. There is no real tune - more likely you will hear bits of tunes. The texture is "shimmering" and full of chords that are there purely for their colour, not for any sense of harmony.
- Pre-war music. Music became more radical before the First World War. This reflected the growing tensions in world government. Look out for *primitive* and *savage* rhythms. Melodies gradually became based on 12 tones

- (all the notes of the chromatic scale) rather than on an ordinary scale of 8 notes. These sound very dis-jointed and seem to make no sense at all.
- Post-war music. After the First World War, resources were scarce. People could not afford big orchestras and so pieces were composed for much smaller groups of instruments.
  - Electronic music. New advances in technology introduced new sounds into musical compositions. Composers experimented with electronic instruments and sounds - buzzing, swooping notes, rattles etc.
  - Neo-Classicism. Watch out for this one. It sounds very much like Classical music - very simple lines and harmonies but with a few surprises as befits the twentieth-century experience of music.
  - Jazz. The three main *grooves* in jazz are *Swing*, *Latin* and *Rock*. You should be able to spot this straight away!