

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Son of a musician father, gave first piano recital at 10. Lessons with Robert Schumann were arranged. Schumann championed the young Brahms, and along with his wife Clara took Brahms into their home. Brahms was very supportive of Clara during Schumann's mental collapse. After Schumann's and then his mother's death, he wrote his German Requiem. Later settled in Vienna and was the acknowledge heir of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Died not long after Clara at the age of 64.

A traditionalist. His symphonies are unsurpassed in the late Romantic era for their structure and design, yet their forms draw upon the Classical era. His most Romantic pieces were his short lyric piano works. German Requiem became his most famous piece during his lifetime.

Symphony No.3 in F Major

Didn't attempt a symphony until he was past 40, due to the daunting challenges set by Beethoven and other earlier masters.

3rd is the shortest of Brahms' 4 symphonies. Romantic in tone, but classical in structure. 1st movement is classical sonata-allegro, 2nd is Andante, 3rd is a melancholy waltz rather than a scherzo, a lyrical "song without words." 4th is a dramatic sonata-allegro.

German Requiem

Rooted in the Protestant tradition. Gentle lyricism, to console the living and lead them to gentle acceptance of death as inevitable part of life. Brahms was not religious, but moved to compose the Requiem by the deaths of Schumann and his mother. Written for soloists, SATB chorus and orchestra. Arch form in which 1 7, 2 and 6, 3 and 5 are similar with the 4th being the centerpiece.

Wagner and Music Drama

Wagner (1813-1883) born in Leipzig to a non-musical family. Almost entirely self-taught. Wrote all the librettos for his operas himself, unifying music and drama more than anyone ever had.

Sympathized with a failed revolution in Dresden that forced him to flee to Zurich, Switzerland, where he commenced his most important artistic period. Wrote much of *the Ring of the Nibelung*, *Tristan and Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg*. Years after *Tristan* was completed were dark because there were no singers or theater capable of presenting Wagner's giant music dramas.

Ludwig II ascended the throne of Bavaria and summoned young Wagner to court, produced *Tristan and Meistersinger*, and commissioned Wagner to complete the Ring cycle.

Festival Theater at Bayreuth was built specifically for the presentation of Wagner's music dramas. After his first wife passed, he married Franz List's daughter Cosima who came to live at Bayreuth. After Wagner societies raised even more funds, Bayreuth Theater was finally completed, and the full four Ring cycles finally finished then performed in 1874.

Wagner did away with the concept of separate arias, duets, ensembles, choruses and ballets. He created a continuous fabric of melody that didn't let emotions cool... "endless melody." Music drama was conceived as total artwork in which all the arts - music, drama, poetry, visual spectacle - were fused. Orchestra is the focal point, flooding the characters and the audience.

Orchestral material is fashioned out of leitmotifs (leading motives) that recur throughout the work. Leitmotifs carry specific meanings, and through continual transformation (of key, register, instrumentation, etc) trace the course of the drama. Pushed

chromatic harmony to its furthest limits, making the music intense, restless, and emotional using unstable pitch combinations.

Die Walkure

The Ring of the Nibelung centers on the treasures of gold hidden in the depths of the Rhine River, guarded by the three Rhine maidens. From this treasure is fashioned a ring that brings unlimited power but with it a terrible curse that destroys peace of mind of whoever owns it, resulting in misfortune and death. The cycle begins there and ends when the ring is returned to the three maidens. Story freely adopted from Norse sagas, and *Nibelungenlied* (medieval German epic poem). Inspired Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.

Wagner wrote the four librettos in reverse order. First came the final poem of the death of the hero Siegfried, including details his betrayal of and by his love Brunhilde, called *Gotterdammerung*.

Then came the third cycle, *Siegfried*, which explains the forces that shaped the young Siegfried.

The second cycle, *Die Walkure*, was the poem of Siegfried's parents.

And the fourth poem, *Das Rheingold*, was the preface that unleashed the workings of fate and the curse of gold out of which the entire action stems.

Die Walkure, Act III

Opens with the famous Ride of the Valkyries, a vivid orchestral picture of nine warrior maidens. They're on their way from the battlefield back to Valhalla carrying fallen heroes. *Ride...* Prelude is some of Wagner's most brilliant scoring. Rustling strings and winds give way to the memorable "Ride" theme sounded repeatedly by a huge and varied brass section through a dense range of orchestral textures that build to several climaxes beneath the warriors' voices.

Debussy and Impressionism in Music

Impressionism surfaced in France at a time when the possibilities of the major-minor system started to feel exhausted.

Debussy and his followers attracted to other scales such as Middle Ages church modes, and non-Western music i.e. Moorish strains from Spain, Javanese and Chinese orchestras that performed in Paris during World Expo (1889).

Classical harmony looked at dissonance as momentary disturbance in need of resolution = composer began to use dissonance for its own sake, freeing it from the need to resolve.

Similar to Impressionist painters who taught people to see colors in sky, grass, and water that had never been seen before.

Used whole tone scales, scales without half steps that don't feel a pull to a tonic. They used parallel motion, prohibited in Classical harmony. Introduced Ninth chords, expanding the octave, thereby hovering between tonalities... creating elusive effects similar to the misty outlines of Impressionist painting.

Orchestral color changed yet again. Having grown immensely from Classical to Romantic orchestras, now "a veiled blending of timbres" occurred: flute and clarinet low registers, mute brass, shimmering harp and percussion.

Rhythm advances influenced by non-Western music as well. Freed from Classical/Romantic strong downbeats on every measure, rhythm started floating over bar lines, creating a dream-like state and obscuring the pulse.

Impressionists preferred short lyric forms to large Austro-German tradition.

Debussy and Impressionism (1862-1918)

He achieved his greatest success in the 1890s, and where he had previously been attacked for obscure melodies audiences and critics now began to appreciate his incredible use of nuanced timbre.

Outbreak of WWI in 1914 robbed him of his interest in making music. Died in March 1918 during the bombardment of Paris.

Considered art to be a sensuous experience. Felt Romanticism too grandiose. Turned against sonata-allegro form. Instead of Romantic grandeur that left nothing unsaid, he turned to an art of subtlety.

Because he worked slowly, his fame rests on a comparatively small output. In his scores, he allows individual instruments to stand out against the ensemble, and makes the melodic lines widely spaced, the texture light and airy. His piano music continues to be highly influential, and is his vocal and chamber music.

Prelude to "The Afternoon of the Faun"

Debussy's best-known orchestral work, it was inspired by Symbolist writer Stéphane Mallarmé, and evokes a landscape of antiquity.

Follows familiar pattern of statement departure return (vaguely ternary). Movement is fluid and rhapsodic, dreamlike, across-the-bar line rhythmic writing. Low register flute and harp glissandi had never been heard before quite like this.

A more decisive motive emerges, then another theme, then the first returns in an altered guise... "blue" chords (with lowered thirds and sevenths) are heard on muted horns and violins, sounding "infinitely remote." The work finally dissolves into silence, reinforcing the dreamlike state.

Stravinsky (1882-1971) and the Revitalization of Rhythm

Born near St. Peteresburg, grew up in a musical environment.

Success came early. Commissioned by Diaghilev of the Paris-based Russian Ballet to write *The Firebird*, 1910, followed a year later by *Petruschka*. And in 1913 came the most spectacular of all, *The Rite of Spring*. On opening night one of the revolutionary score touched off a near-riot. A year later it was received enthusiastically as a masterpiece. The outbreak of war in 1914 ended the way of life that had nurtured Diaghilev's ballets. What followed for Stravinsky was life in France and eventually Los Angeles. Through his extensive later concert tours he became the most celebrated figure in twentieth-century concert music.

Style evolved continuously throughout his career. A leader in the revitalization of rhythm in European art music. Unparalleled in their dynamic power, furious yet controlled. NO matter how daring or chromatic, he retained a sense of key. Considered one of the greatest orchestrators. Nationalism predominates in the early ballets, particularly *Rite of Spring*.

The Rite of Spring (subtitled Scenes of Pagan Russia)

Not only embodies the cult of primitivism that shocked audiences, but also sets forth a new language of percussive use of dissonance as well as polyrhythm and polytonality.

As a ballet it had a brief life, but the music survived independently as a concert piece. Hugely expanded orchestra... often uses the full force of the brass and percussion to create a barbaric, primeval sound.

Ignores the natural lyric qualities of the strings, giving them percussive material such as pizzicato and successive down-bow strokes.

Melodies modeled after Russian folk songs. Harmonies derived from whole tone and octatonic scales, polytonality and dissonance.

Interaction between rhythm and meter is the most innovative aspect of the piece. Stravinsky freed Western music from the traditional constraints of metric regularity.