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**STUDY GUIDE:  
MUSICAL COMPOSERS AND ERAS**

**MUSICAL PERIODS OR ERAS:**

1. Baroque Period (1600 to 1750, 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries)
2. Classical Period (1750 to 1825, mid 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries)
3. Romantic Period, or Romanticism (19<sup>th</sup> century)
4. Impressionism (late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries)
5. Modern (20<sup>th</sup> centuries)

**The Baroque Period:**

Major forms developed during this time were the oratorios, cantatas, and fugues. Oratorios were concert productions based upon Bible stories, but without staging or costumes, as in an opera. The Messiah, by Handel, was an oratorio. Cantatas were vocal compositions for soloists and choruses, which were used in churches. In a fugue the subject was introduced by a solo voice (instrument) and then developed by many voices (instruments).

Most music of this time was religious in nature and used the harpsichord as the major string instrument.

**Main composers include Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frederic Handel.**

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### The Classical Period:

Music was still more instrumental than vocal, and it was still based upon religious text. The orchestra was larger than the Baroque orchestra and was divided into four distinct sections: strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. The string section predominated, followed by the woodwinds, which included flutes, oboes and bassoons. (Clarinets were added later.)

The harpsichord was no longer used. The piano was invented during this period.

Much music was written in sonata form. This was music consisting of three distinct divisions. In the **exposition**, the two main contrasting themes were presented. During **development**, the themes were explored in different ways, and in the **recapitulation**, the themes from the exposition were restated.

The string quartet was also started during this period. Music for the quartet was written for the first and second violins, the viola, and the cello. **Chamber music** was the name of music written for small ensembles such as the string quartet, and it became very popular.

**Main composers included Franz Haydn and Wolfgang Mozart.**

### The Romantic Period (Romanticism)

Music of this time was based strongly on personal feelings and emotions. Composers were concerned with self-expression, and the music even suggested scenes. Many composers expressed love of their country (patriotism) in their music.

Melodies were long and had many changes in temp (speed), and contrasted between major and minor keys.

The orchestra was greatly enlarged and similar to our orchestra today. Many instruments were added during this period: the piccolo, the English horn, the bass clarinet, the contrabassoon, three trombones, the tuba, the harp, trumpets, the French horn, and a variety of percussion instruments. The string section was enlarged greatly. The piano was the favorite instrument of the composers.

**Main composers include Franz Schubert, Ludwig Van Beethoven, Johann Strauss, Felix Mendelssohn, Frederic Chopin, Robert Schumann, Franz Liszt, Johannes Brahms, and Franz Liszt.**

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### IMPRESSIONISM:

This era began toward the end of the Romantic Period. It refined the Romantic music, and captured a dreamlike quality, which seemed to bring everything to a central theme. Much of the music was based upon literature and art of the time.

**A main composer includes Claude Debussy.**

### The Modern Era:

Music of this era employs a much greater use of the woodwinds and brass. More percussion was added. Rhythms become more complex, and harmonies were often dissonant. There were fewer lyrical melodies than in music of former periods.

Arnold Schoenberg developed a composition technique called the “twelve tone” system, where all twelve tones of the octave were of equal importance.

**Main composers include Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland.**

### MAJOR COMPOSERS:

#### 1. Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) Baroque Period

He was a German composer and organist, who wrote nearly 300 cantatas and over 40 fugues. Most of his works were religious and filled with spiritual intensity. He was known as **the master of the fugue**.

Best-known works:                      Fugue in G Minor  
    Brandenburg Concerto  
    The Well-Tempered Clavier

#### 2. George Frideric Handel (1685 – 1759) Baroque Period

He became England’s national composer, and he was well known for 18<sup>th</sup> century operas and his 30 oratorios. He became blind in later years.

Best-known works:                      The Messiah  
    Jeptha (His last oratorio that records the progress of his blindness.)

#### 3. Franz Joseph Haydn (1732 – 1809) Classical Period

This Austrian composer has been called **the father of the symphony**. Although he did not write the first symphony, he developed it into a longer form for orchestras, and he composed over 144 symphonies of his own.

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He was also known for his **string quartets** (music arranged for two violins, a viola, and a cello). He wrote a few operas, but was not nearly as accomplished in the opera composition as Mozart.

Best-known works:                    London Symphonies  
   The Surprise Symphony  
   The Clock

### 4. Wolfgang Mozart (1756 – 1791) Classical Period

Mozart was an Austrian musician who lived to be only 35 years old. However, he composed over 600 works before his death. He had composed his first four symphonies by the age of eight. He composed a wide variety of works, such as chamber music, church music, symphonies, arias, piano compositions, and 22 different operas.

Best-known operas:                    The Marriage of Figaro (Italian words)  
   Don Giovanni (Italian)  
   The Magic Flute (German words)

Best-known symphonies:            E Flat Major  
   G Minor  
   C Major

### 5. Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) Romantic Period

Beethoven was a German composer who started to lose his hearing when he was 28 years old, and he eventually became totally deaf. Despite this handicap, he composed a wide variety of music. He wrote nine symphonies. **His best-known symphonies** were his third symphony, called Eroica, which he dedicated to Napoleon; his fifth symphony with its unforgettable opening of da-da-da-DAH; and his ninth symphony, called Choral which took eight years to compose.

He wrote one opera, Fidelio.

**His best-known sonata:** Moonlight Sonata

His only religious composition (or oratorio) was Missa Solemnis.

### 6. Gioacchino Rossini (1792 – 1868) Romantic Period

He wrote 30 operas in a ten-year period. **His most famous opera** was The Barber of Seville. He is also known for a mass which he composed called "Little Solemn Mass."

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### 7. Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828) Romantic Period

Schubert created over 1,000 compositions, nine of which were symphonies. He is best known for his lyrical melodies.

His best-known symphonies: The Unfinished Symphony  
Great in C Major

He also wrote the popular, “Ave Maria.”

### 8. Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847) Romantic Period

Mendelssohn wrote much chamber music for a variety of instrumental groups. He is also known for his Italian and Scotch symphonies, the Violin Concerto and his Concerto in G Minor for the piano.

He also wrote “Songs without Words,” which is composed of 48 pieces of piano music collected in eight volumes.

Best-known works: The Midsummer Night’s Dream Overture  
(for his favorite Shakespeare play)  
The Wedding March (which came from A  
Midsummer Night’s Dream)

### 9. Frederic Chopin (1810 – 1849) Romantic Period

He was considered the greatest Polish composer and one of the greatest pianists of his era. Unfortunately, he died of tuberculosis before he was 40 years old. He wrote some dance music; waltzes, polonaises, and mazurkas.

His famous Polonaise in A Major was the last piece of music heard over the Warsaw, Poland, radio station before the Nazi’s took over the area. He also wrote Revolutionary Etude to help bolster the spirits of the city when it was being continuously bombarded by Nazi bombs.

His most famous works: Polonaise in A Major  
Funeral March  
Revolutionary Etude

### 10. Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886) Romantic Period

This Hungarian composer wrote Hungarian Rhapsodies.

His best-known symphonies: Faust  
Dante

He also composed “Liebestraum” (Love’s Dream) for the piano.

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### 11. Richard Wagner (1813 – 1883) Romantic Period

He wrote the opera, The Flying Dutchman.

He also composed “The Bridal Chorus” (Lohengrin), which is commonly referred to as “Here Comes the Bride.”

### 12. Johann Strauss (1825 – 1899) Romantic Period

He was known as **the waltz king**. His two, best-known waltzes were “The Beautiful Blue Danube” and “Vienna Woods.”

Besides his waltzes, he composed over 30 operettas.

### 13. Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897) Romantic Period

This German composer has been regarded as the leading composer of romantic symphonies, concertos, and chamber music. He is best known for his famous Brahms Lullaby.

### 14. Peter Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893) Romantic Period

This Russian composer composed the Romeo and Juliet Overture.

He is probably best known for his three ballets:

- 1) Nutcracker Suite
- 2) Swan Lake
- 3) Sleeping Beauty

He also wrote six symphonies.

### 15. Edvard Grieg (1843 – 1907) Romantic Period

He tried to create a Norwegian national style of music. He composed a popular 10-volume work called Lyric Pieces for the piano, and he is probably best known for his Peer Gynt Suite and his Piano Concerto.

He founded the Norwegian Academy of Music, located in Oslo, Norway. That same year he married his cousin and wrote the love song, “I Love Thee,” for her.

His music brought so much fame to Norway that the Norwegian government gave Grieg a yearly income for life.

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### 16. Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856) Romantic Period

This German composer was best remembered for his piano pieces, including “Traumerei” and “Lieder.”

### 17. Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918) Impressionism Period

This French composer was probably the most important Impressionist. He is known for his free rhythms, and he based much of his music upon poetry, literature, and works of art.

Best-known works:                    Clair De Lune (for the piano)  
   La Mer (meaning the sea)  
   Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun

### 18. Aaron Copland, Modern Twentieth Century Period

He is known for his use of American folk rhythms and melodies.

Best-known works:                    Billy the Kid (a ballet)  
   Rodeo (a ballet)  
   Appalachian Spring (a ballet)  
   A Lincoln Portrait (a work for speaker and  
   orchestra, which was based on the writings of  
   Abraham Lincoln.)

### 19. Igor Stravinsky, Modern Twentieth Century

He was one of the greatest twentieth century composers, and his music has had a great influence on modern music.

His best-known work: The Rite of Spring (This was written for ballet, and it depicted a pagan ceremony celebrating the beginning of springtime.)

**CHECK YOURSELF:** Can you name the composers of the following musical selections? If not, look back in the study guide for the answers.

1. Clair de Lune
2. Nutcracker Ballet
3. Unfinished Symphony
4. The Wedding March
5. The Lullaby
6. Moonlight Sonata
7. The London Symphonies
8. The Messiah
9. The Rite of Spring
10. The opera The Marriage of Figaro
11. The Barber of Seville
12. Here Comes the Bride
13. Billy the Kid
14. Polonaise in A
15. A Midsummer Night's Dream
16. Hungarian Rhapsody
17. The Beautiful Blue Danube
18. Peer Gynt Suite
19. The opera: Don Giovanni
20. Songs Without Words