

LEARNING MADE EASY



3rd Edition

Classical Music

for
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Explore classical music's
greatest hits

Meet some of the world's
greatest and boldest composers

Listen to the pieces that
changed the world

David Pogue
Scott Speck



Classical Music

3rd Edition

by David Pogue and Scott Speck

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Classical Music For Dummies®, 3rd Edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2021948879

ISBN: 978-1-119-84774-8

ISBN 978-1-119-84896-7 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-119-84878-3 (ebk)

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Introduction

By opening this book, you've taken a flying leap into the frightening, mysterious, larger-than-life universe of classical music, where 100 people dressed like 18th-century waiters fill the stage, doing some very strange things to hunks of metal and wood, filling the air with strange and exotic sounds.

We can sense the hair beginning to rise on the back of your neck already. But don't be afraid; whether you know it or not, you've experienced classical music all your life — in movies and video games, on TV, online, on the radio, and in elevators everywhere. We're willing to wager that you already know more than you need to get started.

About This Book

We know that you're a highly intelligent person. After all, you managed to select this book from among a vast catalog of highly qualified music books.

But in this vast, complex, information-overload society, you're expected to be fully conversant with 1,006,932,408.7 different subjects. (The .7 is for square dancing, which doesn't quite qualify as a complete subject.) So it's only natural that even the greatest genius doesn't know *everything*. It happens that you, O Reader, are still in the incipient stages of Classical Music Geniusdom.

That's why we use the words "For Dummies" with a twinkle in our eye. Truth be told, this book is for intelligent people who want to discover more about a new subject. And for us, it's a chance to share with you what we love.

If you've never touched an instrument or sung a song, *Classical Music For Dummies*, 3rd Edition can give you the basic understanding you need. If you want an easy-to-read reference when you hear a recording or attend a concert, this book provides it. If you want to get a thorough grounding in the subject, the book allows for that, too. Even if you're already very well versed in classical music (and a surprising number of our readers are), you can discover something in each chapter to enhance your delight even further. This book is meant to meet you wherever you are and bring you to a new level. We've even been thrilled to discover that many *teachers* have used our book as a text in classes about music history, theory, composition, orchestration, or appreciation. Works for us!

Foolish Assumptions

We, your trusty authors, have made some mighty foolish assumptions about you.

- » You have a healthy and active pulse.
- » This pulse sometimes races when you hear a surging phrase of classical music, whether on a recording, in a movie or show, in a video, or in a commercial.
- » You have a sneaking suspicion that a little more understanding of the music that makes your pulse race might add immeasurable joy and fulfillment to your life.
- » You'd love to enhance that understanding with one lighthearted, breezy, easy-to-read resource.

If we're right about any of these things (and we're hardly ever wrong), then this book is for you. It will deepen your understanding of music, make you comfortable discussing it, and help you understand its form. And although this book isn't a suitable alternative to a graduate degree in music, it's much more fun and costs about \$90,000 less.

Believe it or not, you have a great *advantage* over many of the world's classical music fanatics. You enter this amazing artistic realm unencumbered by preconditioning or music prejudice. You enter the concert hall with an open mind, a clean slate, and an empty canvas upon which the great composers can paint their emotional landscapes.

This situation is what many music aficionados often forget: In classical music, the intellect should take a back seat to emotion. More than many other arts, classical music is meant to appeal directly to the senses. In this book, we show you how to activate those senses — and unlock your capacity to experience one of life's greatest highs.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, icons clue you in about certain topics. They indicate material in which you may be especially interested, or material you may be eager to skip. Let them be your guide.



TIP

This icon clues you in on a handy shortcut, technique, or suggestion that can help you get more out of your classical music life.



REMEMBER

This icon alerts you to what we think are important pieces of information that you should stow away in your mind.



TRY IT
YOURSELF

This icon marks an opportunity for you to get up, march over to a keyboard or a sound system, and run a little experiment in real life.



PLAY THIS

If you go online to www.dummies.com/go/classicalmusic3e, you can find nine excerpts from the greatest music in the world. Whenever we discuss one of them, this icon lets you know.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Music has been around longer than most countries. This icon alerts you to the beginnings of trends and rituals that are still around today. This information isn't essential to understanding classical music, but it sure is downright interesting.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the very book you're holding in your eager little hands, we provide some delicious online goodies for your enjoyment. For example, take a look at the Cheat Sheet at www.dummies.com. Once there, just search for "Classical Music For Dummies Cheat Sheet." There you can find a quick description of the instruments and their locations in a typical symphony orchestra, as well as a timeline of classical music, for easy reference next time you attend a concert.

Best of all, we provide many, many musical examples, in the form of links to recordings online at www.dummies.com/go/classicalmusic3e. These recordings are your key to entering the world of classical music — a painless introduction to all different styles and time periods. As we describe some of the great masterpieces, you can actually listen to them right away. These recordings set *Classical Music For Dummies* apart from all the other books on the shelf.

Where to Go from Here

We design this book so that you can start reading anywhere. But to help you figure out what might excite you the most, we give you six different areas to choose from:

- » Part 1 introduces you to the world of classical music, including a brief history and descriptions of the common packages — such as *symphonies*, *string quartets*, and so on — that classical music comes in.
- » Part 2 takes you into the concert hall to experience some real music-making, and then takes you on a backstage tour of the professional classical music world.
- » Part 3 is a field guide to all the instruments that make up an orchestra.
- » Part 4 puts classical music under the microscope, explaining the creative little molecules that make it up.
- » Parts 5 and 6 take you even deeper into classical music and help you get more out of it.

You don't need to finish one part, or even one chapter, before starting another. Use the table of contents or the index as a starting point, if you want. Or, if you're in a romantic mood, turn on some sensual classics, cuddle up with a loved one, and start at the very front of the book. (You may want to skip the copyright page, however, because it can deflate that romantic mood rather quickly.)

1

Getting Started with Classical Music

IN THIS PART . . .

Discover that you've been listening to classical music all your life — on elevators, in movies, in TV commercials, in video games, and just about anywhere else sound waves are available.

Find out what separates mediocre music from humanity's greatest musical masterpieces.

Explore the different packages that classical music comes in, from symphonies to sonatas.

Meet all the lovable (and not-so-lovable) characters who collectively created the history of classical music.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding what's so great about classical music
- » Identifying the seven habits of highly effective composers
- » Accessing the audio tracks at www.dummies.com/go/classicalmusic3e

Chapter **1**

Prying Open the Classical Music Oyster

The world of classical music is a place where idealism reigns, where good conquers evil and love conquers all, where you always get a second chance, where everything comes out right in the end, and where you can have your cake and eat it, too.

Classical music is one of the few living arts. It continues to exist by being constantly re-created, live, before an audience. Unlike the visual arts, classical music envelops you in real time and comes to life before you; unlike literature or theater, it can be understood equally by speakers of any language — or no language; and unlike dance, you don't need to look good in a leotard to perform it.

Classical music is a place to come to for pure enjoyment, for solace, for upliftment, for spiritual transcendence, and — if you follow our suggestions — for less than 25 bucks.

Discovering What Classical Music Really Is

For the purposes of this book, *classical music* is the music composed in the Western Hemisphere during the past few hundred years (not including recent pop and folk music). It's the music generally composed for an orchestra or combination of orchestral instruments, keyboards, guitar, or voice.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Until very recently (at least in geological terms), people didn't make such big distinctions between "popular" and "classical" music. In the 1700s and 1800s, it was all just *music*, and people loved it. People would go to the latest performance of a symphony, concerto, song cycle, or opera just as you might go to a concert in an arena, stadium, club, coffeehouse, or bar today — to have fun! They were enticed by the prospect of seeing their favorite stars, schmoozing with their friends, and hearing their favorite tunes. They came in casual clothes; they brought along food and drink; they even cheered during the show if the spirit moved them. Classical music *was* pop music.

The fact is that classical music is just as entertaining as it ever was. But these days, it's become much less *familiar*. That's all. After you become familiar with this art form, it becomes amazingly entertaining.

Figuring Out What You Like

Not every piece of classical music will turn you on right away. And that's perfectly okay.

First of all, some pieces are, as we euphemistically say in the classical music biz, more "accessible" than others. That is, some have beautiful melodies that you can hum instantly, whereas others, on first listening, sound more like geese getting sucked through an airplane engine.

See what you like best at this very moment. There are no right or wrong answers; classical music is supposed to be fun to listen to. The trick is to find out what's most fun for you.



PLAY THIS

Play the first minute or so of each audio track at www.dummies.com/go/classicalmusic3e. Each is a musical masterpiece, each in a different musical style. The track list includes pieces from the Baroque style (roughly mid-1600s to mid-1700s), the Classical style (mid-1700s to early 1800s), early Romantic style (first half of the 1800s), late Romantic style (second half of the 1800s), and more modern, often deceptively chaotic-sounding style (20th century to the present).

Does one piece appeal to you more than all the others? If so, begin your exploration of classical music by delving into other works in that style or by that composer.

Or, if you love them all, fantastic! Our job just got a lot easier.

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Composers

Despite the incredible variety of styles within the world of classical music, certain consistent qualities make great music great. These sections examine seven of those qualities.

Their music is from the heart



PLAY THIS

Effective composers don't try to dazzle you with fake flourishes. They mean what they compose. Look at Peter Tchaikovsky: This guy spent half his life in emotional torment, and — wow! — does his music sound like it. (Listen to Track 7 at www.dummies.com/go/classicalmusic3e and you'll see what we mean.)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was an incredibly facile composer — melodies just bubbled out of his head effortlessly, and his pieces reflect that ease. Igor Stravinsky was a strictly disciplined, calculating, complex character; ditto for much of his music. Although their personalities were incredibly diverse, these composers wrote great music in a way that was true to themselves.

They use a structure that you can feel

Great pieces of music have a structure, a musical architecture. You may not be consciously aware of the structure while you're listening to a great work; but still, you instinctively feel how that work was put together. Maybe the piece follows one of the classic overarching musical patterns (with names like *sonata form* or *rondo form*, which you can read about in Chapter 3). Maybe it just has a musical idea at the beginning that comes back at the end. In any case, we'd be hard-pressed to name a great work of music that doesn't have a coherent structure.

Recent studies at the University of California show that students who listen to Mozart before an exam actually score higher than students who don't. (Of course, we suspect that these students would've scored higher yet if they'd actually

studied before the exam.) As you listen to a piece by Mozart, your brain apparently creates a logical set of compartments that process this form. These compartments are then useful for processing other kinds of information, as well. Classical music actually *does* make you smarter.

They're creative and original

You hear again and again that some of the greatest composers — even those whose works sound tame and easily accessible to us — were misunderstood in their own day. Not everyone could relate to the compositions of Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Gustav Mahler, Richard Strauss, Claude Debussy, Stravinsky, or Charles Ives in their day. (Actually, that's the understatement of the year; the audience at Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* actually rioted, trashing the theater and bolting for the exits.)

The reason for this original lack of acceptance is *unfamiliarity*. The musical forms, or ideas expressed within them, were completely new. And yet, this is exactly one of the things that makes them so great. Effective composers have their own ideas.

Have you ever seen the classic movie *Amadeus*, which won eight Oscars including Best Picture in 1984? The composer Antonio Salieri is the “host” of this movie; he's depicted as one of the most famous non-great composers — he lived at the time of Mozart and was completely overshadowed by him. Now, Salieri wasn't a bad composer; in fact, he was a very good one. But he wasn't one of the world's *great* composers because his work wasn't *original*. What he wrote sounded just like what everyone else was composing at the time.

They express a relevant human emotion

Great composers have something important to say. They have an emotion that's so urgent, it cries out to be expressed. The greatest pieces of music (*any* music, from rock to rap to today's chart-topping hits) take advantage of the ability of this art to express the inexpressible.

When Beethoven discovered that he was going deaf, he was seized by an incredible, overwhelming, agonizing frustration. His music is about this feeling. He expresses his frustration so clearly — so articulately, in a musical sense — in every note of his compositions. Beethoven's music is *intense*.

Now, this isn't to say that great composers must be intense. Joseph Haydn, for example, exuded cheerful playfulness in almost everything he wrote. Like all effective composers, *he* had something significant to say, too.

They keep your attention with variety and pacing

Effective composers know how to keep you listening. Their music is interesting throughout.

One technique that achieves this effect is variety. When composers fill their music with a variety of musical ideas, or dynamics (loudness and softness), or melodies, or harmonies, they're much more likely to keep your interest.

In this way, a great piece of music is like a great movie. An explosion near the beginning gets your attention, right? But have you ever seen a movie with an explosion every minute for two hours? Have you noticed how each explosion becomes successively less interesting, until finally you don't even notice them anymore? You need variety — something contrasting and different between explosions.

In a movie, one explosion can be thrilling if it's approached correctly, with a suspenseful buildup. Effective composers know how to use dramatic pacing, too. Their music seems to build up suspense as it approaches the climax. Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* (made famous a generation ago by the movie *10*) is a stunning example. The entire piece of music is one long *crescendo* (getting louder and louder) — the suspense builds and builds for 15 minutes, and the climax is shattering. We recommend it.

Their music is easy to remember

In the pop music world, the word *hook* refers to the catchy, repeated element in a piece of music. Beatles songs are so catchy because nearly every one of them has a hook. Think “Help!” or “A Hard Day's Night” or “She Loves You” (“Yeah, Yeah, Yeah!”). Catchiness is not a scientifically measurable quality; still, you know a hook when you hear it.

In classical music, the same concept applies. A hook helps you remember, and identify with, a particular piece of music. The compositions of Mozart, Tchaikovsky, Frederic Chopin, Sergei Rachmaninoff, Georges Bizet, Antonin Dvořák, George Gershwin, Edvard Grieg, and Franz Schubert have hooks galore — so many hooks, in fact, that several of them have been pilfered for the melodies of today's rock songs. For example, Maroon 5's hit song “Memories” is thinly disguised version of Pachelbel's Canon (that is, Johann Pachelbel's “Canon and Gigue for 3 violins and basso continuo”); Maroon 5 didn't write the original tune. Elvis Presley's hit “It's Now or Never” is repurposed from the old Neapolitan song “O Sole Mio” by Eduardo di Capua. And “Midnight Blue” is sung to the tune of

Beethoven's *Pathétique* sonata. The music of the most effective composers is full of elements that stick in your mind.

They move you with their creations

The most important habit of highly effective composers is their ability to change your life. Ever walk out of a movie or play and suddenly experience the world outside the theater differently? You know, when the real world just after the movie seems to have a feeling of danger, or sadness, or happiness, or just plain wonder, that it didn't have before?

A great musical masterpiece may give you a greater appreciation for the potential of humankind, or enhance your spirituality, or just put you in a great mood. Nothing is more triumphant than the end of Mahler's Second Symphony; after you hear it, you emerge reborn, refreshed, and somehow more prepared to face the world.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Blaming it on the monks
- » Recognizing the Hopeless Romantics — and Baroque and Classical
- » Viewing the gallery of the greatest composers who ever died
- » Accessing the audio tracks at www.dummies.com/go/classicalmusic3e

Chapter 2

The Entire History of Music in 80 Pages

Every great composer was once a living, breathing human being with a unique personality, family history, and personal hygiene regimen. Knowing about the lives of the great composers makes listening to their music a hundred times more meaningful and interesting.

With very little effort and an inexpensive forklift, you can get your hands on a really fine, comprehensive, 800-page history of music. We, however, intend to fit the entire history of music in Western civilization into about 80 pages. Without using a smaller type size, either. Sometimes we amaze even ourselves.

Understanding How Classical Music Got Started

Music has been around since the Dawn of Humanity — or at least since the Breakfast of Humanity. Primitive humans expressed themselves vocally, and the sounds that came out were often musical. (These earliest recordings aren't, however, available on Spotify.)

Over the millennia, music became more complex. People invented musical instruments to produce the sounds they couldn't sing. Pipes and whistles reproduced the sounds of birds and the wind; drums amplified the sound of a heartbeat. Musical scales became standardized. Unions were formed. Classical music was born.

The first songs were probably religious. Humans, awed and scared by their surroundings, sang prayers and made offerings to the elements. When the wind howled, they howled back; when the skies rained on them, they sang in the shower. They also used song to boast of their conquests, give thanks for a good hunt, and remove stubborn stains.

Rhythm appeared early in the history of music to echo the regular beats of walking, running, and pounding one another on the head with rocks. Dances were invented to appease the gods, and music was performed for the dances.

In those early years, music was passed on orally. Indeed, in some Eastern cultures, music still survives in this way. Only in the past thousand years or so have people thought to write music down.

Chanting All Day: The Middle Ages

The period known as the Middle Ages was an era of plague, pestilence, and self-flagellation, but otherwise it was a rollicking good time. Inside the walls of European monasteries, monks were busy developing one of the greatest achievements of music. No, no, not Lady Gaga — *sheet music*. Here's what you need to know about the musical Middle Ages.

Gregorian chant

Many a millennium of music-making madness passed before anyone had the notion to get the music down on paper. But around the year 600 A.D., Pope Gregory I ("The Great") created a system to explain the musical scales that had been in use in church music up to that time. He gets the credit for giving the notes such imaginative letter names as A, B, C, and D — the same ones that we use today!

From Pope Gregory, we get the name for *Gregorian chant*: a simple, meandering melody, sung in unison with Latin words by a bunch of guys in brown robes. Pope Greg would've popped his little pointy pope hat if he'd known that, late in the 20th century, Gregorian chant would become a smash hit worldwide, when a recording called *Chant* — sung by some hitherto unknown brothers from a monastery in Spain — hit the top of the charts in 1994.

This comeback was for a reason: Gregorian chant has a true spiritual depth. If you close your eyes and listen to Gregorian chant, all your daily cares seem to float away. Your breaths become longer and deeper. Your metabolism slows down. Eventually, you gain weight and balloon up like a pig.

But we digress.

A monk named Guido

Guido of Arezzo (“a-ret-so”) was a genius monk (not to be confused with Thelominous Monk) who devised numerous musical innovations, such as singing, “do, re, mi, fa . . .” for the notes of the scale. (You may remember Julie Andrews paying homage to Guido in *The Sound of Music* when she sang, “Doe, a deer, a female deer; ray, a drop of golden sun . . .”) This system of singing standard syllables on certain notes of the scale, a centuries-old skill practiced by opera singers and music majors worldwide, is called *solfège* (pronounced, more or less, “sol-fedge”).

Guido of Arezzo also devised a new music notation system, using a rudimentary version of the musical staff used today (see Chapter 11).

It’s hard to imagine what would have happened to the world of music without the innovations of Guido of Arezzo. Luckily, we don’t have to. Guido existed; his musical staff still thrives; and, to this day, scholars everywhere have the pleasure of pronouncing the funniest name in the history of music (with the possible exception of Engelbert Humperdinck).

Mass dismissed!

But monks weren’t the only factors influencing the course of musical history. Their system of worship did, too — especially the Catholic mass. Some of the greatest choral and orchestral works ever written have been masses.

The Catholic mass (or *missa* in Latin) got its name from the closing words of all Latin masses in the old days: “*Ite, missa est*” (rough translation: “Scram, you’re dismissed!”). Every mass and musical piece based on the Catholic mass has the same set of lyrics. Even if you’re not Catholic, you’ve probably heard some of them before: *Kyrie eleison* (“Lord have mercy” — another ancient piece that was reincarnated as a disco hit single); *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (“Glory to God in the highest” — familiar from many a Christmas carol); *Credo* (“I believe”); *Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus* (“Holy, Holy, Holy” — another Christmas fave); and *Agnus Dei* (“Lamb of God”). If you listen to a musical mass of practically any time period from the Renaissance to the present, you can hear these words.

The First Composer-Saint

The first female composer whose reputation has survived throughout the ages is Hildegard von Bingen. Born in 1098, she was more than a composer — she was a brilliant writer, philosopher, visionary theologian, abbess, botanist, naturopath, and possibly the founder of scientific natural history. Hildegard even distinguished herself in death by becoming a saint.

As a composer, Hildegard wrote a prodigious number of Gregorian chants, composing both the lyrics and music, which was highly unusual for the time. She actually wrote more surviving chants than any other composer of the Middle Ages.

Born Again: The Renaissance

About 300 years after the death of Hildegard and her saintly cohorts, society entered the phase now known as the *Renaissance* (French for “rebirth”), which lasted roughly from 1400 to 1600. The arts flourished during the Renaissance, funded by art-loving rich folks and royalty with no taxes.

One of the most famous Italian composers of the Renaissance was Giovanni da Palestrina (1525–1594), who’s pictured in Figure 2-1. A great favorite of the pope — a veritable pope’s pet — Palestrina was known for his songs written for voices alone, without instrumental accompaniment. Unlike Gregorian chant, the music of Palestrina wasn’t just a melody sung *in unison* (everyone singing the same notes at once). Instead, he explored amazing harmonies that resulted from singing several simultaneous independent melodies. And thus it was that Palestrina helped build the on-ramp for the long road to the Beach Boys and Pentatonix.

Palestrina was a great composer of masses and other religious music. But around the same time, composers looked beyond the church for words they could set to music. They turned long passages from great Roman poets, nonreligious writing — even Dante’s *Inferno* — into tunes. Here are some of the ways they turned words into music.

The madrigal takes off

The most popular musical form for these songs was the *madrigal* (“*mad-drig-gull*”). A madrigal is a piece for at least three voices, usually without accompaniment. During the Renaissance, families or groups of friends would get together and sing these madrigals, each person taking a different vocal line and elbowing one another when they hit wrong notes.