

ABRSM AURAL TESTS

AN INTRODUCTION TO IDENTIFYING STYLES AND PERIODS IN GRADES 5-8

BAROQUE

Typical composers: Bach, Handel, Vivaldi

- Plenty of decoration (ornamentation)
- Clear phrase structures
- Continuous pulse - feels like the music is constantly driving forward
- **Repeated Patterns**
(good words to use: 'sequences' and 'imitation')
- Often **polyphonic** textures
(lots of equally important individual voices)
- Harmonically simple
- Either loud or quiet (block dynamics)
(Before the 1700s, keyboard composers didn't really use dynamics as the instruments of the time couldn't play them. Most harpsichords played at a set volume, although some could be made louder by pulling a little lever.)
- Technically no sustain pedalling

Listen to Bach's Invention No. 3 in D Major (BWV 774) for an example of Baroque music.

CLASSICAL

sometimes described as 'polite' music

Typical composers: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven

- Elegant and balanced phrasing
- Often lively and cheerful
- More dynamics than in Baroque
- Trills common, but otherwise not generally as much ornamentation as in Baroque
- Light, clear **homophonic** textures
(melody with an accompaniment)
- Not much sustain pedal, if any
- Lots of scales and arpeggios used

Listen to the beginning of Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 10 in C (K. 330) for a good example of the Classical style.

ROMANTIC

Typical composers: Chopin, Schumann, Liszt

- Music is now about emotion and expression
- Frequent tempo changes (**rubato**)
(an Italian word that basically means no strict tempo)
- Long and strong melodies
- Usually homophonic and thick (luscious-sounding)
- Rich chromatic harmonies
- Extremes of **dynamics** very common
(*pp* to *ff* and gradually moving between them)
- Sustain pedal very often used

Take a listen to the short Eb Major Prelude from Chopin's 24 Preludes (Op. 28) - it's just over a minute long and features lots of the above characteristics.

20TH CENTURY

(This is a very broad category, meaning anything that doesn't fit into the other three! It's music from around 1910 to the present day, including jazz)

Typical composers: Stravinsky, Bartók, Gershwin

- Shorter melodies, or fragments of melodies (called 'motifs')
- A range of textures, from very thin to very dense
- Often dissonant or extended harmony (standout feature)
- Can be hard to work out the time signature (complex rhythms)
- Sudden dramatic contrasts are common
- Might use entire piano range
- Swung rhythms and syncopation

Try Bartók's *From the Diary of a Fly* (No. 142 from his 'Mikrokosmos' suite). For something jazzier, treat yourself to Gershwin's *The Man I Love*.