

Lesson Plan Grades 4 - 8: Classical vs. Modern Music

Media Control by Pascal le Boeuf

Key Words

Melody: the main part of a song, usually the part of a song that is naturally sung.

** Sing *Happy Birthday*. The part that you sing is the melody! **



Harmony: the chords and rhythms that are usually played along with a melody.

Consonant: Harmonies that are pleasant to the ear.

Dissonant: Harmonies that clash and are sometimes considered unpleasant to the ear.

Instrumentation: The instruments that are used in a piece of music.

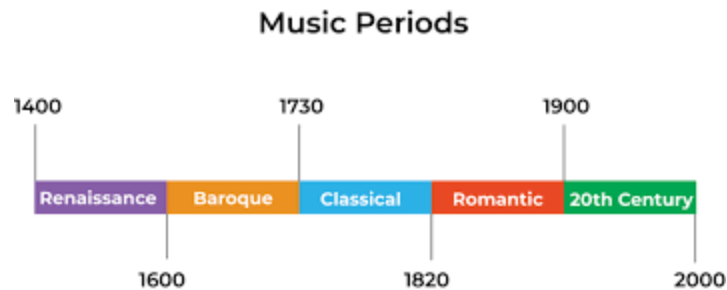
Chamber Music: A piece of music that is written for a small group of musicians, usually between 2 and 8 musicians.

Classical Music

“Classical Music” is a general term that we use when we refer to Western European instrumental music from centuries ago. You might have heard the terms [Renaissance music](#) (pronounced Ren-ay-sonce, from around 1400-1600), [Baroque music](#) (pronounced Buh-roke, from around 1600-1750), or [Romantic music](#) (from around 1825-1900) . These are all styles of music from hundreds of years ago that are all part of the “classical music canon”. However, [Classical music](#) also has a very specific time period that musicians refer to, from around 1750-1825. The melody and harmony of classical music are usually much more predictable to our ears now. The melody is usually fairly easy to sing along with, and the harmonies are consonant.

You have also probably heard of plenty of composers from all of these musical time periods. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Joseph Haydn are from the Classical period.

Johannes Sebastian Bach and Antonio Vivaldi lived during the Baroque period.
Johannes Brahms and Pyotr Tchaikovsky both lived during the Romantic time periods.



Remember that we're talking about Western European music specifically, and eventually certain music from the United States and Canada. Other countries and communities have their own types of music! [China](#), [Japan](#), [India](#), and lots of different types of [Native American](#) music are some examples. There are hundreds, if not thousands of different styles of music from all over the world. Music from different countries include lots of different sizes of ensembles, from large ensembles and orchestras, to smaller chamber music and solos. Chamber music doesn't have to be just Western European Classical music. Jazz, Flamenco, and Bluegrass are just a couple of different types of music that are often programmed!

Instrumentation

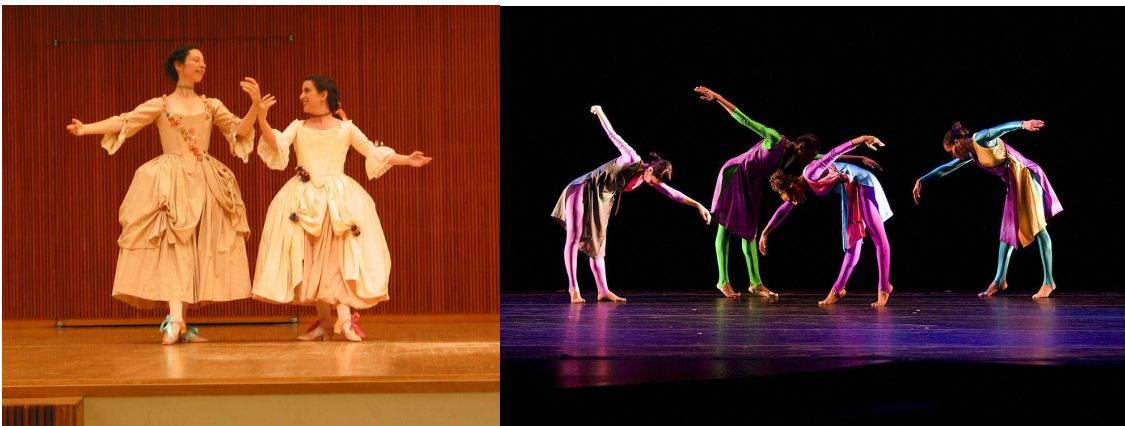
Chamber music within classical music from the eras mentioned above usually consisted of 2 to 8 musicians. Sometimes, you can figure out how many people are playing from the name of the piece. For instance, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's [String Quartet No. 19](#) tells us that this piece was written for stringed instruments. The Quart in Quartet tells us that there are four players - think quarter... 4!



To figure that out, look at the root word of the ensemble. A duo is two, a trio is three, a quartet is four, or an octet is eight! How many players are in this chamber ensemble?

Dance

Dancing to classical music is usually very choreographed and pattern oriented. You can see a typical [Baroque dance here](#). What do you notice about the dancer and how she moves? Are her motions controlled and planned, or do they appear to be more improved and made up on the spot? This particular style of dance is a predecessor for our modern ballet.



Which of the images above could represent Baroque or Classical dance? Which is more like modern dance? Why do you think so?

Modern Music

Modern chamber music looks very different now than from years past. Throughout 1900's, the styles of music began to develop and shift very quickly. While each of the other eras of music discussed above changed about every 75 years, modern music changed and overlapped at a much faster rate. Melodies are sometimes much harder to sing along with, and harmonies are far more complex and sometimes dissonant. Remember that just like "classical" music, modern music can have lots of different styles - jazz, Latin music like samba or salsa, and bluegrass are just a few examples!

Instrumentation

Let's take a look at Pascal le Boeuf's chamber piece, *Media Control*. This piece was written for flute, clarinet, violin, and cello. It can also be played with either piano or percussion, or both if they are all available! Because of this, le Boeuf wrote this piece to have a flexible instrumentation.

[Listen to a recording of *Media Control* here.](#) What do you notice about the melody? Is it easy to sing, or does the music seem a bit choppy? What about the harmonies? Are they consonant harmonies (comfortable and pleasing), or do they seem to be more dissonant, (harsh or tense)?

Dance

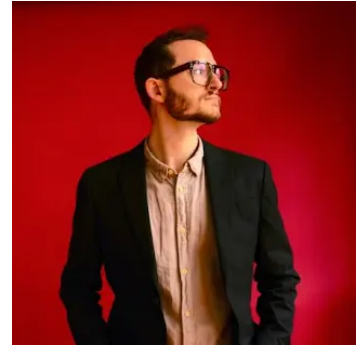
Music for a Great Space included *Media Control* on a concert in April 2024 and collaborated with Dance Project of Greensboro to include dance. The style of dance is called *contemporary*. This is in contrast to other styles, such as ballet or tap. [Watch the MGS performance of *Media Control* here.](#)



How does this dance compare to the one you watched earlier? How do the movements compare to the Baroque dance?

About Pascal le Boeuf

Pascal le Boeuf was born in 1986. He is a jazz pianist, composer, and electronic artist (meaning he uses electronic instruments in some of his compositions and performances). His music has been performed all over the world! He is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton University, and teaches at Vanderbilt University.



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