Your notes

GCSE Music: revision notes

Western classical tradition 1650 to 1910

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Baroque (about 1600 to 1750)

- Composers: Bach, Handel and Vivaldi.
- Features: a **harpsichord** and a **basso continuo** (a bass line with chords filled in), ornamentation, terraced dynamics, and polyphonic textures.
- Forms include the **concerto** grosso and the solo **concerto**, where a soloist contrasts with the orchestra, often in three movements (fast, slow, fast).

Classical (about 1750 to 1820)

- Composers: Haydn, Mozart and early Beethoven.
- Features: balanced, question-and-answer phrases, mostly homophonic textures, the **Alberti bass** (a broken-chord accompaniment), clear cadences, and the piano replacing the **harpsichord**.
- The **symphony** and sonata form became important; the orchestra grew, with clarinets added.
- Dynamics use crescendos and diminuendos rather than only terraced changes.

Romantic (about 1820 to 1910)

- Composers: Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Verdi and Fauré.
- Features: expressive melodies, chromatic harmony, rubato, wide dynamics, and larger orchestras with more brass and percussion.
- Piano music (such as Chopin's nocturnes and études) and **programme music** (music that tells a story) became popular.

The strands (AQA)

- The strands are the Baroque solo **concerto**; the orchestral music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven; the piano music of Chopin and Schumann; and the **Requiem** of the late Romantic period (such as Fauré's). Check AQA's current study pieces.

Key terms

Basso continuo	A bass line with chords filled in, used in Baroque music.
Harpsichord	A keyboard instrument whose strings are plucked.
Alberti bass	A broken-chord accompaniment in the left hand.
Concerto	A piece for soloist and orchestra.
Symphony	A large piece for orchestra, usually in four movements.
Programme music	Music that tells a story or describes a scene.
Requiem	A setting of the Mass for the dead.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Which period used the harpsichord and basso continuo?
2. What is an Alberti bass?
3. Which composer is from the Classical period?
4. Which composer is known for Romantic piano music?
5. What is a concerto?
6. What are typical features of Classical phrases?
7. What is programme music?
8. Which feature is typical of Romantic music?

Answers

1. Baroque
2. A broken-chord accompaniment in the left hand
3. Mozart
4. Chopin
5. A piece for soloist and orchestra
6. Balanced, question-and-answer phrases
7. Music that tells a story or describes a scene
8. Chromatic harmony and wide dynamics

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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