

Historical Periods of Music

Renaissance ~

(1500 – 1600)

Byrd, William was England's most prominent composer during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. His music had great religious belief and a large emotional power of the audience. Due to the period in which he composed, he mainly composed Sacred music for the church. Before Byrd's time, sacred music consisted solely of vocals because people felt that by adding instruments, it would take away from the strength of the words. Later in the Renaissance period, instruments were introduced and they used an antiphonal effect.

I listened to William Byrd's "Pavana for the Earle of Salisbury". It is contrapuntal, which was mainly featured in this period. There are no vocals in the piece, which means that it was composed later in the Renaissance. It has a very slow tempo, which is suggested in its title suggested; "Pavana" meaning slow. There was a harpsichord, where the chords are followed closely by the main melody. If the two parts were played separately, then it highlighted the equality of the time, where there wasn't a melody and accompaniment, but two equally important lines of music.

Baroque ~

(1600 – 1750)

Vivaldi, Antonio Lucio was a composer of many famous concertos during the Baroque period. But he wrote music in all forms, which include operas, sacred music and concertos. Concertos have a solo instrument accompanied by other instruments. One of his most famous pieces was "Four Seasons", which consisted of four separate pieces; Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter.

I listened to the first of the four, "La Primavera" ("Spring"). It was very decorative and at some points the ornamentations were extremely obvious. I think that this piece was composed in a major key. The first violin appeared to be the most important string of melody compared to the accompanying lines. Another group uses a type of antiphonal effect in this concerto, where the small group of violins is being echoed and accompanied.

Although there was no harpsichord to clarify this piece as Baroque, the ornamentations were obvious for me to place it in the correct period of time. Another point that meant that "Spring" had to be a Baroque piece was that it mainly consisted of violins, therefore disallowing it to be a Renaissance piece because Baroque replaces the viols of the Renaissance with violins, which were largely featured in "Spring".

This piece was had only one mood, insuring a feeling of continuity. Nothing in specific changed dramatically through the piece.

Classical ~

(1750 – 1800)

Classical music (1750 – 1800) was renowned for its very famous composers, such as Haydn, Beethoven and Mozart. During this period there were many forms that could be classed as Classical, these were Sonata, Church Music, Oratorio, Opera, Dance Music, Chamber Music, Concerto and Symphony. The piece that I chose to look at was composed by Ludwig van Beethoven and called "Piano Sonata in C minor, Pathetique", Mvt. 3 There was a focus on the timbre, and it being graceful, but there was no feelings or emotions, so to me it felt slightly empty and as though the music was not for the purpose of listening to. Sonata music was a new concept that had been developed in this period. This type of music can be divided up into three main sections; exposition,

development and recapitulation. I could hear this in the piece, because to start with, there were two main themes, that were clearly different and then these two themes went onto to be developed into two new themes. Finally I could hear the original themes being repeated.

The tempo of the piece is constant and very fast. The tone was homophonic, which made it very precise and all movement of the music was made together. This upheld the gracefulness of the music.

Romanticism ~

(1800-1900)

Romanticism spanned for the beginning of the 1800s till the beginning of the 1900s. The music of this period was very different from the restrictions of the classical period and showed lots of emotions and feelings, giving the impression of composition purely for the composer and the way they felt.

The most important composers of this time were Wagner, Brahms, Chopin, Berlioz, Schumann, Schubert, Mahler, Tchaikovsky, Brahms and Mendelssohn.

I chose to look at "Overture '1812', Op.49" by Pyotr Tchaikovsky

It has lots of emotions and a high tempo, which helps convey the heightened feelings of the piece. There are many brass instruments, with a different timbre to that of which would have been used in previous periods of music. The sounds and dynamics tell the story of the Russians victory over Napoleon in 1812. It seems to describe the battle with the fast movement and then the defeat of Napoleon with a loud conclusion and speedy introduction of percussion. It is very passionate because it is about something the compose and the country could be proud of. There is no restraint of emotion as there would have been in the Classical period.

Overall the piece is very dramatic and seems to have no particular key, it does not seem to be interested in keeping to a musical form, rather conveying all of the desired emotions.

20th Century Modern ~

(1900-)

The music of 20th Century modern is very different to any type of music due to advances in the design of instruments and technology with which music could be composed. There were new instruments introduced into music such as the saxophone, and new technology such as electrolysis. There are many types of modern music; Impressionism, Surrealism, Neo-Classical, Minimalism, Atonalism and Electronics. The changes of the times influenced largely the music, which was produced.

I found a electronic piece of music by Karlheinz Stockhausen, called "Song of the Young Men" This type of music could only be in the class if it was composed after the 1950s due to the need for the technology that it required for it to be composed, recorded and preformed. The piece is telling a story, but it is very hard to understand it as it is very complicated and you are focusing mainly on the diversity of the sounds compared to 'normal' compositions.

There are strings, flutes and a piano, which sound polyphonic and at some points clashes, because so much is going on. Although form what we here, we maybe led to believe that the piece is being preformed by a small group, it is normally just one person playing one instrument to a track of themselves, they had previously recorded and altered. Even though the pieces sound quite complex, it is likely that they are in fact simple parts, edited and put together to give the impression of complexity.