

## BALLET

Ballet is the dance form most closely connected to classical music. It primarily developed in the Renaissance courts of Italy and then in France during the reign of Louis XIV. It was around Louis XIV's time that the dance master Pierre Beauchamp, the choreographer who worked with the composer Lully, codified the five principle positions of the feet, which dancers still use today, centuries later.

From its early beginnings as a *ballo*, simply meaning a dance, ballet developed to become part of an operatic spectacle, usually occurring as an interlude during the opera, with especially composed music. From this integrated form, ballet gained a following and, subsequently, its independence. The Paris Opera, in particular, became a pioneering stage for stand-alone ballet.

From the 1700s onwards, ballet had its own stories, characters and, of course, music. By 1800, people were watching the sort of ballets that we still appreciate today. As well as Lully, composers such as Gluck were important in its development. Gluck applied his pioneering style, which had done much to revolutionise opera, to ballet. Much later in the 1870s, Delibes, a former Paris Opera rehearsal pianist, had big hits with *Sylvia* and *Coppélia*. Others worthy of mention include Ferdinand Herold (his *La Fille Mal Gardée*, with its popular Clog Dance, endures perhaps better than does its composer), as well as Adolphe Adam, who wrote, amongst other ballets, *Giselle* and *Le Corsaire*.

During the 19th century, the centre of the ballet world shifted, with Russia emerging as the power-house for great new works. *Swan Lake*, *Nutcracker* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, Tchaikovsky's three full-length ballets, were written between 1876 and 1892. They soon became cornerstones of the repertoire, a position they maintain to this day, often still employing the original choreography of one of the world's masters, Marius Petipa.

During the 20th century, classical ballet continued to prosper, but now alongside contemporary dance, a form which relied less on traditional *en pointe* (tiptoes) work and more on free-form, varied movement



– sometimes with music to match. When Diaghilev's Ballets Russes produced Stravinsky's major three ballets between 1910 and 1913 (*The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*), the company was touring Europe and the rest of the world as one of the biggest paying attractions of the day. The combination of Stravinsky's unconventional music and Nijinsky's iconoclastic choreography for *The Rite of Spring*, in particular, caused an infamous riot on the occasion of its premiere in Paris.

Today, the fruit of home-grown talents, such as Sir Kenneth Macmillan and Sir Frederick Ashton, continue to pull in crowds, although many ballet companies cast their musical nets much further, from Verdi to Vangelis.

### TEN FAVOURITE BALLETS:

- |    |              |                            |
|----|--------------|----------------------------|
| 1  | Tchaikovsky: | <i>Swan Lake</i>           |
| 2  | Tchaikovsky: | <i>The Sleeping Beauty</i> |
| 3  | Tchaikovsky: | <i>Nutcracker</i>          |
| 4  | Adam:        | <i>Giselle</i>             |
| 5  | Prokofiev:   | <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>    |
| 6  | Massenet:    | <i>Manon</i>               |
| 7  | Herold:      | <i>La Fille Mal Gardée</i> |
| 8  | Prokofiev:   | <i>Cinderella</i>          |
| 9  | Stravinsky:  | <i>The Rite of Spring</i>  |
| 10 | Delibes:     | <i>Coppélia</i>            |

## BARBER, SAMUEL

1910-1981

Barber's music contrasts sharply with that of his contemporaries Schoenberg, Webern and Berg. While they championed the new atonal sound, Barber's music remained lyrical and heartfelt in style. Although still modern in feel, it achieved popular success by being massively approachable.



# C

## CALLAS, MARIA

1923-1977

Arguably the greatest soprano of the 20th century, Callas lived her life in the glare of publicity. Incredibly talented, with an unforgettable voice and great acting ability, her glamour made her a worldwide star. American-born of Greek parents, she made her debut at La Scala, Milan, aged 27 and at the Royal Opera House in London's Covent Garden two years later, quickly becoming the most talked about soprano of her day. She looked and behaved every inch the diva and became known for her fiery temperament and a tendency to cancel her scheduled performances if she felt that she was not on top form. The myth and hype that grew up around her is second to none, but the recordings she left behind testify to her unique abilities. Her fans nicknamed her La Divina – 'the divine one'.

## CELESTA

This unusual instrument looks and sounds a little like a baby's piano. Invented in 1886 by Auguste Mustel, it uses metal plates struck by hammers to make its heavenly sound. As soon as he saw the new instrument in Paris, Tchaikovsky was desperate to be the first Russian to use it and it featured in *The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* from his ballet *Nutcracker*. Mahler was the first composer to use the celesta in a symphony (his sixth). It is widely employed by modern-day film composers, such as John Williams, who used its magical sound in the hit tune *Hedwig's Theme* from his *Harry Potter soundtrack*.



## CELLO

An abbreviation of the word violoncello, this member of the strings family is bigger than a viola and violin, but smaller than a double bass. It is played between a performer's knees, which has spawned a whole host of double-entendres down the years from conductors ('Madam, you have between your legs a fine instrument which could bring pleasure to a lot of men and all you can do is scratch it' from Sir Thomas Beecham particularly comes to mind). The composers Boccherini and Offenbach were both masterly cellists and the 20th century produced such greats as England's Jacqueline du Pré, Spain's Pablo Casals, France's Paul Tortelier and Russia's Mstislav Rostropovich. We are lucky to have a string of modern-day masters including Julian Lloyd Webber, Yo-Yo Ma and Steven Isserlis performing today.

### † Recommended Listening:

*Elgar's Cello Concerto*

## CHAMBER MUSIC

Chamber music is written for small groups of musicians. It has its origins in the French word *chambre* (room) and started life as music made by friends and families, keen to play for their own pleasure or the pleasure of a small audience, invited into their home.

Nowadays, chamber music is more common in the concert hall although, by its nature, these tend to be smaller halls. The most common combinations of instruments are quartets, quintets and trios. Generally, solo performance tends not to be regarded as strictly chamber music. This is partly because it lacks that one key ingredient from the origins of chamber music – namely playing with other musicians. Alongside this, how the players sound together is of the utmost importance. The musicians are playing as a team, not as a soloist with other instruments in support. Most definitions of chamber music exclude a soloist playing with an accompanist, too, although two soloists playing together would be considered chamber. Vocal music tends not to be included either.



# O

## OBOE

A member of the woodwind family, the oboe is the instrument to which all others in the orchestra tune. This is because it can easily be heard above the rest and also because it holds its note well. It gets its name from the French words *haut* (high) and *bois* (wood). To play, the oboist blows through a double reed, uncovering or covering the six holes on the instrument's body. The metal attachments (which look a little like jewellery) allow the player to open and close the holes with ease. The oboe's interior chamber is conical, rather than cylindrical like flutes and clarinets, and this gives it its unique sound.

The instrument has been a popular choice for concerto composers; Vivaldi, Albinoni and Mozart wrote particularly fine examples. In more modern times, Ravel wrote a starring role for the oboe in his celebrated *Boléro*, while Richard Strauss's *Oboe Concerto* was one of his last masterpieces.

### † Recommended Listening:

*Malabar Jasmine* from *The Flower Clock* by Jean Françaix

## OFFENBACH, JACQUES

1819-1880

Offenbach's musical career started in 1833 at the age of 14 when his father took him to Paris and got him admitted as a cello student at the Conservatoire. It was at this time that the teenage Offenbach changed his first name from Jacob to Jacques. His surname was not his original one either. Offenbach's father, a cantor at a Cologne synagogue, altered it when he renamed himself after the town of his birth.



After completing his studies, Offenbach junior became a cello virtuoso, before turning to conducting and becoming a prime mover in the development of operetta (he wrote more than 100 of them). In the process, he cemented his position as one of the most popular composers of the 19th century, churning out crowd-pleasing music with memorable tunes.

### † Recommended Listening:

*Barcarolle* from *The Tales of Hoffmann*

## OPERA

The word opera is the plural of the Latin word *opus* (work). It originates from the phrase *opera in musica*, which means 'musical works', but over the years it has been shortened.

Put at its simplest, opera is the combination of singing, drama and musical accompaniment, a genre whereby the music and the plot are as one. This is what differentiates them from musicals, which generally speaking are dramas with breaks for musical numbers. In an opera, the drama and the music are not separated in the same way.

Opera in the form that we know it began to take shape in the dying years of the 16th century. It was the idea of a group of arts-loving intellectuals known as the Florentine Camerata. They wanted to resurrect Greek drama, with music, and the first offering came from a composer and singer called Jacopo Peri. Most musical historians consider his work *Dafne*, written around 1597 and now lost, to be the first real opera. Peri went on to write the second ever opera, *Euridice*, which is not lost, but simply no longer performed.

It is an opera by Monteverdi that is the oldest still to hold the stage. By coincidence, it is on the same subject as Peri's second opera: the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. Monteverdi simply called it *La favola d'Orfeo*. It was the real starting point for a brand new genre of music which continues to thrive to this day.



### BAROQUE OPERA

The elder Scarlatti, Lully and Rameau all quickly got to grips with the new format. Scarlatti alone wrote well over 100 different operas. He is considered the father of the Neapolitan opera school. Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, from 1689, is a landmark in English opera. For some people, no composer has ever bettered the hauntingly beautiful aria *When I am Laid in Earth*. Handel, having learnt the operatic trade in Italy, wrote 40 or so operas for Britain in his 30s. Many of them were premiered at London's Covent Garden.

### MOZART OPERAS

To Mozart, opera was the finest medium in which a composer could operate. It is not surprising, then, that he contributed works which are still thought of as being the creation of a genius. He wrote three works with the librettist Lorenzo da Ponte (*The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan tutte*). Many musical historians believe that these operas have never been bettered for the synthesis of singers and orchestra, not to mention melodic beauty and level of invention.

### BEL CANTO

Bel Canto opera is generally considered to be opera in the Italian style, written in the early 19th century, a time when singers became superstars. It seems as if audiences of the time could not get enough of these showy, coloratura classics, where sopranos were given the chance to impress with their fast, agile singing. Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Bellini's *Norma* are both masterpieces of this type of opera.

### VERDI, PUCCINI AND WAGNER

The three towering figures in late Romantic opera all specialised in their chosen discipline and rarely wrote anything else. Verdi's work is in a direct line from that of Donizetti, with an emphasis on increased drama and a huge wealth of tunes. Puccini's brand of *verismo* opera (telling real life stories) was often considered near scandalous; as late as the 1950s,



his *Tosca* was described by one critic as 'a shabby little shocker'. Wagner is a standalone giant in the opera world, taking the form to its absolute limit. He did away with the idea of having a recitative (a form of speech-like singing) and then an aria, instead blending the whole opera into one continuous, overflowing bath of musical delight.

### ORATORIO

The word comes from the Latin word *oratio* (prayer). Today, oratorio means a work for chorus, soloists and orchestra, usually, though not always, with a religious text and intended to be performed in church or in a concert hall.

What is generally reckoned to be the first true oratorio, Emilio De'Cavalieri's 'sacred opera' *Rappresentazione di Anima et Di Corpo*, dates from 1600, though the story is 50 years or so older. St. Filippo Neri, an Italian priest, had the idea of what can best be described as moral musical entertainments. He won the backing of the Jesuits for his notion. After De'Cavalieri, Giacomo Carissimi, another Italian, developed the form; one of his pupils, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, took it to France. In Germany, Heinrich Schutz was oratorio's foremost pioneer.

Some great oratorio composers include:

**Handel:** He was chiefly known as a composer of Italian-style operas when he wrote his first oratorio in 1707. From that point on, he became a master of the genre. His most famous work, *Messiah* – written for a 1742 Dublin premiere – is just the tip of the iceberg. Handel wrote 29 oratorios on religious and secular subjects, ranging from *Saul and Solomon* to *Susanna and Samson*.

**Mendelssohn:** Although he only completed two oratorios, Mendelssohn was at the forefront of an oratorio revival in the 19th century. His oratorios *St. Paul* and *Elijah* are still in the repertoire today.

**Elgar:** Oratorios flourished in late Victorian Britain, with Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* quite possibly the jewel in the imperial crown. He also wrote *The Apostles*, *The Kingdom* and *The Light of Life*.



## ORCHESTRA

The word 'orchestra' did not originally mean a group of people playing music at all. Instead, it was the place where the group stood or sat. In a Greek amphitheatre, the natural slope of the seats was called the 'Koilon', the backdrop to the stage was known as the 'Scena', and the semi-circular piece of flat ground between the two was the 'Orchestra'. Eventually, it came to mean the people who played there, too.

The modern orchestra, like the ancient one before it, was also born in the theatre, originally to accompany plays and operas. The Dresden Staatskapelle is the world's oldest, tracing its origins back as far as 1548. It was soon joined by others, as churches, courts, cities and towns across Europe founded their own orchestras over the next couple of centuries. The virtuoso Mannheim orchestra (run by the local Elector) was particularly important in advancing the cause. The UK's oldest surviving symphony orchestra is the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, which was founded in 1840 and became a fully-professional band in 1853.

## ORCHESTRATION

Orchestration is the part of a composer's job that comes after the initial composing itself. Once the central ideas have been created, the art of sorting out who plays what is called 'orchestration'. Many composers consider it a completely separate procedure, and some are thought of as being greater masters of the process than others. Ravel, Berlioz and Dukas, for example, are all considered experts in the field.

Rimsky-Korsakov was another such expert, making a habit of superbly orchestrating virtually everything that he laid his hands on. He was already strong in the area of orchestration while he was still at college, writing musical arrangements for the student band. He perfected his craft while he was in the navy, when he made a point of learning how to play just about every instrument of the orchestra.



Wagner is worthy of a mention in this section, too. When he could not get quite the right combination of orchestral colours to do justice to the sound that was in his head, he simply invented his own instrument to create it. The 'Wagner Tuba' was the result. It is, in fact, more of a big horn than a tuba. Wagner employed it to great musical effect in his mammoth four-opera cycle, *The Ring*.

## THE MAKE-UP OF THE ORCHESTRA

The biggest section of an orchestra is made up of string instruments. In a standard-sized symphony orchestra, you might find around 30 violinists, a dozen or so violas, maybe ten cellos and around eight double basses. That is a total of around sixty or so players in all – roughly two thirds of the band. The reason that these numbers are not exact is that different composers call for slightly different musical configurations for each of their works.

The brass section typically comprises three trumpets, three trombones, four French horns and a tuba – allowing the composer to paint musical pictures in with three high, four middle, three low and one very low brush. The brass section is undoubtedly loud: these 11 players alone can often drown out the entire string section because of the sheer volume of sound that their instruments produce.

Next up are the woodwind instruments, which are not necessarily made of wood these days. This section is made up of two or three flutes, a piccolo, a couple of oboes, four clarinets and perhaps a bass clarinet, two bassoons and possibly a contra-bassoon. The final part of the orchestra is a percussion section of three or four players, playing various instruments such as timpani, cymbals, side drums, bass drums, xylophones and triangles. One or sometimes two harpists and a pianist, who might play the celesta when required, more or less completes the complement of a full standard symphony orchestra.



**SCHUBERT, FRANZ**

1797-1828

Schubert's father was a schoolteacher in Vienna, who taught the youngster the basic rudiments of music. After being spotted by the eminent composer Salieri when he was only seven, Schubert was enrolled into the Stadtkonvikt (the imperial boarding school) as a boy soprano. He also played violin in the school orchestra, while Salieri himself taught him musical theory and the principles of composition.

The family was always short of money, so, when Schubert left the Stadtkonvikt, he was forced to combine his musical activities with teaching in his father's school. This did not stop him composing. By 1814, he had already produced some piano pieces, songs, some string quartets, his first symphony and a three-act opera. The following year, he wrote *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (*Gretchen at the spinning-wheel*), *Der Erlkönig* (*The Earl King*) and many other great songs, plus two more symphonies, three masses and four stage works.

It was a remarkable display of creativity by any standards. 'I compose every morning', Schubert once said, 'and when one piece is done, I begin another'. Aged 20, he gave up teaching in order to compose full time. At first, things went well for him. He produced more overtures, symphonies, theatre music, chamber music and songs and his works began to be performed in public. Then, he suffered some major setbacks. Strained friendships, financial pressures and serious illness – in 1822, he almost certainly contracted the syphilis that eventually killed him – were the causes. Nevertheless, he soldiered on composing. In his last two years alone, he produced an unparalleled profusion of wonderful music, including *Die Winterreise* (*The Winter Journey*), his last and most amazing song cycle.

† **Recommended Listening:***Trout Quintet***SCHUMANN, ROBERT**

1810-1856

Robert Schumann was born in Zwickau, some 50 miles south of Leipzig and not far from the Czech border. He started studying the piano at the age of seven, entering the Zwickau Gymnasium four years later. Once in school, his bookish nature blossomed alongside his musical one; he eventually went on to study law at Leipzig and Heidelberg universities.

Schumann began taking piano lessons from Friedrich Wieck when he was 19, having met his teacher's daughter the year before. His plans to become a concert pianist suffered a setback when, at the age of 22, he began to suffer from problems with his right hand, probably a symptom of mercury poisoning (he was being treated with the chemical to combat syphilis). By now, though, he was emerging as a music critic of note.

At the same time, Schumann was pursuing the hand of Clara Wieck, totally against the wishes of her father. Determined not to be beaten, Schumann went to court to fight Wieck's objections to the marriage, but, in the end, the couple had to wait until she was old enough to marry without her father's consent. They were blissfully happy together, a state of mind reflected in the wonderful compositions Schumann was now producing. They included many glorious songs and piano pieces, followed by symphonies, other chamber music and some choral works.

When he reached 33, Schumann started teaching at the conservatory Mendelssohn had founded in Leipzig, though he found time to journey with his wife on a concert tour of Russia (in one instance being asked by a concert goer 'Are you a musician, too?'). Soon after this, Schumann suffered his first bout of severe depression. These attacks were to become more serious as time went by until, when he was 44, he tried to drown himself by jumping off a bridge into the River Rhine. Upon being rescued by some passing boatmen, he asked to be taken to an asylum. He remained there for two years until his death.

† **Recommended Listening:***Piano Concerto in A Minor*

**CLARA SCHUMANN**

Clara Schumann must have been a formidable woman. She resolutely fought her father when it came to her marriage to Robert, and stuck by him until his sad end. At this point, she became the chief interpreter of his music, bringing it to as wide an audience as possible, while holding his memory dear enough to stave off the advances of Schumann's last protégé, the young Brahms.

After her husband died, in 1856, Clara continued to tour for more than 30 years. She also found time to be head of piano studies at the conservatoire in Frankfurt, as well as, eventually, caring for a number of her grandchildren and her children (tragically, her son Ludwig ended his days insane like his father). Her own compositions have become increasingly popular in recent years, a fitting turnaround for someone whose music played second fiddle to that of her husband during her lifetime.

**SCORE**

A score is a printed or handwritten copy of a piece of music, which shows all the parts necessary for a complete performance, arranged on different staves. A full orchestral score is a mass of around 30 or so separate lines, each allowing the conductor to see the music played by a certain instrument or group of instruments of the orchestra.

Scores often come in reduced formats, one of the most common being a piano score, where the full orchestral part has been reduced down to be playable by a pianist, a task often undertaken by the composer himself.

**SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA**

A relative newcomer in musical circles, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra was founded in 1974. It performs throughout Scotland, touring the Highlands and Islands as well as the southern part of the country each year. Further commitments to the Edinburgh, East Neuk and St. Magnus



Festivals have ensured that it is heard by a wide fan base. Conductors have included Jukka-Pekka Saraste and its Conductor Laureate, Sir Charles Mackerras. The orchestra's present principal conductor is London-born Robin Ticciati.

**SCOTTISH OPERA**

Founded in 1962 by the conductor Sir Alexander Gibson, Scottish Opera originally presented seasons in Edinburgh and Aberdeen (even travelling as far afield as Newcastle). The company moved into the newly refurbished Theatre Royal, Glasgow, in 1975. In 1980, the Orchestra of Scottish Opera was founded. Having achieved notable successes with premieres, such as Ines de Castro by James McMillan, it continues to champion the widest range of opera, of the highest standard, in front of the largest possible audience right across Scotland.

**SCRIABIN, ALEXANDER**

*1872-1915*

Born in Moscow, Scriabin was the son of a lawyer and a pianist. Unsurprisingly, he excelled in piano from a young age and, despite being enrolled at military cadet school in early boyhood, managed to keep up his playing. When he was 16, he switched to studying music at the Moscow Conservatoire, tackling composition with the composer Arensky as well as continuing his piano studies. A publishing deal he made while still at college allowed him to tour his own works when he was just 24.

Scriabin became piano professor at his old conservatoire aged 26, but gave it up to settle in Switzerland in 1903. He was increasingly attracted to theosophy and other mystical philosophies, composing his works from this time onwards as heralds, so he said, of a forthcoming disaster. He also had synaesthesia – that is, he ‘saw’ musical keys in colour.

