A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO CARNEGIE HALL

A LIGHT-HEARTED GUIDE TO MUSICAL EXPERTISE

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A Light-hearted Guide to Musical Expertise

by Juliette de Marcellus

This book is dedicated to Mark Twain, who wrote:

"Good music isn't as bad as it sounds",

which sums up what this book is trying to say.

This inspired comment brings us first to:

Part I

Music, Generally Speaking

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Part II

What You Need to Know about The Great Composers

The Romantics:

****

Part III

What You Need to Know about Other Important Composers

Late German Romantics:

****

French Composers and Other Oddities:

****

Russian Music:

****

East European Twentieth Century Music:

****

Music in England and America:

****

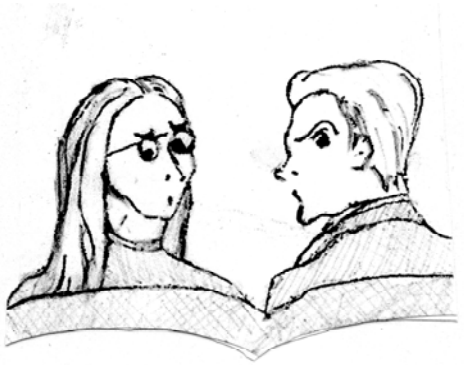
PART 1

Chapter I

What is a Symphony, Anyway?

As they say today – that is a good question.

Most people hope they are right just presuming that a symphony is a work for a full orchestra. Some would even go so far as to say it is a piece of music for full orchestra cut up into "movements", and that if you DARE clap between movements – even though you had no idea it was not over – everyone will turn around and stare at you and perhaps even the conductor will.



You will be led to believe you have broken some sacrosanct rule and are a pariah.

Actually none of the above is strictly true because a "symphony" is only a work in which the first movement is structured in a manner called 'sonata-form' and which can be adapted to any size group right down to one instrument – when it is called a "sonata".

You will sound very distinguished if you talk about “sonata-form”, so let’s lay it out right away.

It only means that the first movement is written as a drama between two opposing themes or musical ideas, that they modulate to related keys in order to add color and structure, fight it out, dramatically or romantically, and end by reconvening at the end in the same musical scale (key).

This succeeds in sounding as if a resolution to the drama has been reached.

That is all it is.

The three other movements are only there to fill out a satisfying alternation of slow (*Adagio*), unexpected or slightly amusing movement (*Scherzo*), and something zesty to end with.

Originally the composer would have been devastated if people hadn’t applauded each movement and, besides, in Beethoven’s time they would not only take a break between movements, or go out to lunch, they would often have a different piece altogether played between them.

So this outraged staring is only a way in which snobs try to make good music into a pompous esoteric art that only insiders can understand. Pay no attention if it happens to you, and stare right back.

(Fortunately this tyranny has not yet been applied to ballet, where it is quite the reverse: the insiders suddenly burst into applause at various turns and leaps rather than at others leaving the common member of the audience wondering what it is they don’t know.)

Symphonies, which were invented by Joseph Haydn, grew to immense proportions in the 19th century. Thus it is wise to read up on the one being played to know how long you must ask the babysitter to stay. If it is by Mozart it will be reasonably short – around half an hour; if it is by Mahler, tell her to bring her overnight things.

Concertos (perhaps we should advise the expert's Italian pronunciation: "*concerti*") are the half-brothers of symphonies and exactly the same except a piano, violin, cello or other individual instrument is given a starring role.

A soloist arrives on stage to create the work together with the orchestra. For some reason there are vastly more piano concertos than violin concertos – or any other kind. It is the dream of anyone who has learnt the piano to play one of these.

Don't be surprised that there are only three movements in a concerto instead of the four in a symphony. This is always so (except for Brahms' *Second Piano Concerto*), and there is no explanation for it.

The other forms of music that use Haydn's "Sonata-form" with its dramatic first movement (which you should learn to call the "Allegro" movement) and its three other movements are the *Quartet*, the *Trio*, the *Quintet*, the *Octet*, etc.

As you can see, these are named by the number of players performing them (there are also occasional *Septets* and *Nonets* – the last not a novice nun but a sonata-form four-movement work for nine instruments, as you by now are able to work out for yourself).

Chapter 2

Tone Poems

It is important to know when you are listening to a symphony as opposed to a Tone Poem. A word to the wise here:

Tone Poems describe something or illustrate a set of circumstances. As an expert it is probably better that you are a bit patronizing about these as they really are not entirely musically self-sustaining. A Tone Poem requires you to think about what the music is describing as opposed to a symphony that is abstract and doesn't bother to tell you what it is about.

This music is also called Programme Music or Programmatic Music, as, obviously, it follows a set idea or programme.

A symphony expects that its inherent architecture and harmonies describe a dramatic or spiritual scenario that each person can understand within his own experience, understanding or emotional instincts.

Now that's a long sentence, but very important for the expert to be able to explain.

Truthfully, most people who are not musical experts prefer Tone Poems to symphonies, as they are easy to follow and catch your attention with their descriptive sounds.

Tone Poems came into vogue gradually with the Romantic Movement – Liszt was the first to really develop them as a form, but he called them 'Symphonic Poems'. However even such classical sticklers as Haydn and Beethoven composed them. In fact, it is probably Beethoven who is responsible for the name: he said it was his ambition to be 'a tone-poet'. Haydn did it with humour, as anyone can hear in *The Creation*, when you can hear the little fish being created. And let's face it, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* dates from even earlier than that.

It is all right to enjoy Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* with its sounds of countryside, shepherds pipes and storms, but the *Battle Symphony* composed in honor of Wellington's defeat of the French army in Spain, is just dreadful. Later, as we shall see, many were composed by the Romantic composers, Berlioz, Liszt, the Impressionist French composers, and a host of others.

If there are some Tone Poems that you like very much, say Borodin's *In the Steppes of Central Asia*; Smetana's *My Country* – incorporating *The Moldau*, which we will discuss later; or Sibelius' *Swan of Tuonela*; Tchaikovsky's "Overture-Fantasy" *Romeo and Juliet*, or even his *1812 Overture* – or George Gershwin's *An American in Paris* – it is better to put on a slightly kindly air and say – as if the joke is on you – that you have to admit that you have a weakness for these works. Give the impression of being a little apologetic.

Tone Poems were usually composed for full orchestra, which is why you definitely have to know the difference between one of these and a symphony, but there are many for the piano also, such as Chopin's *Ballades* and many of Liszt's piano works, such as his *Dante Sonata* or *St. Francis Preaching to the Birds*, and some for violin, like the aforementioned *Four Seasons*.

As we will have a great deal to say throughout this little guide book about Franz Liszt, we should say here that he was largely responsible for the proliferation of this form of music throughout and during the Romantic Movement. Unkind people might say that these non-musical ideas were a crutch he used in composing, which may be a bit true.

He was to be followed by many others, though, but they pose another problem for the listener. You must be familiar with the literature or legend or event they are describing and many of these are not only totally forgotten but the notes in the programme aren't much help; they don't say much more than, for instance: "Saint-Saëns' *Le Rouet d'Omphale* depicts Hercules in servitude to the Lydian Princess."

I mean, do we know about this?

Then there is: "Balakirev's *Tamara* is based on a poem by Lermontov which depicts an angel-demon-queen who lures men to destruction". Well, we've seen any number of those, of course, but do we know who Lermontov is?

We will have much more to say about the Tone Poem in our next chapter: Nationalism in Music.

Chapter 3

Nationalism in Music

You will notice that very often the programme notes at a concert will tell you that there are "folk elements" used in a symphonic or concert work. This needs to be explained.

At the opening of the 19th century, or the "eighteen hundreds", as Americans usually say today, composers were looking around for something to give their music a lift when they could not come up with an abstract theme as good as those that the composers of the previous century had done.

The 19th century was developing an extremely exalted idea of Nationalism, and this gave them what they needed. This nationalism, which was confused with patriotism, was to cause more horrific battles and more gruesome deaths than any other idea in the history of Europe.

But the composers of this time were very sincere in wishing to immortalize the sounds and glories of their native lands.

Chopin set an example few could ever follow.

As we will see in Part II, *What You need to Know About the Great Composers*, Chopin was born in Poland, though his father was French. He grew up listening to the special sounds of Polish folk music, to the rhythms of the Mazurka and the proud steps of the Polonaise.

All his music is pervaded by these Polish sounds as he was dreadfully homesick throughout his entire adult life which he spent in Paris and where he considered himself as living in exile (as if anyone could consider themselves to be an exile if they lived in Paris).

Brahms, who was German, fell in love with what he thought were Hungarian dances and wrote them up as extremely successful piano works, although what he had discovered were really Gypsy melodies. No matter.

Later Franz Liszt (we will meet him everywhere) decided to strike something of a pose as a Hungarian, although he had never lived there and couldn't speak the language. He composed his *Hungarian Rhapsodies* for this reason, as well as founding a music conservatory in Budapest.

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), is known as the foremost Norwegian composer – although his family was Scottish – and there are no other Norwegian composers that one can name right off. Grieg found that seeking out and including Norwegian folk songs and dance rhythms gave his music a charming quality.

Grieg lived during a period when the ‘peasant’ was admired, and writers like Tolstoy aspired to be one. Grieg also wanted to feel one with the peasants whose music he admired.

One day he decided to wander down to a tavern much frequented by the local agricultural workers as they were celebrating some kind of harvest festival. In the tavern they had a large bowl of some kind of ale or beer that they were handing round.

But when Grieg saw the tobacco spit on the edge of the bowl he just couldn’t bring himself to share it. He felt he had failed as a would-be peasant.

Grieg composed his evergreen *Piano Concerto in A minor*, which is often described in programme notes as “filled with the sounds of Spring in Norway”.

This is one of the most popular works in the repertoire, played almost every season by every orchestra. It has also been featured in a number of movies about pianists. It is played by every pianist, professional or student, and for this reason you will hear the established experts refer to this work as a “war horse”.

Don’t try to dispute this; they will go on saying it and it will go on being played because it is beautiful.

This work is responsible for Grieg being a familiar name, even among those who have only heard classical music at the cinema.

Other great composers have also incorporated this kind of thing in their music.

In England, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) really only found two outstanding themes: *Greensleeves*, and the *Theme from Thomas Tallis*, but he edited the Anglican Hymnal and found some there – but they were not very spicy.

Vaughan Williams did better with geographical ideas such as *Sea Symphony***,** the *Antarctica Symphony* and the *London Symphony* – in which he did include some popular feeling – and I suppose we should include in his geographical category, *Toward an Unknown Region*.

You must always refer to Vaughan Williams as "Rafe", not Ralph, or you will certainly be corrected by someone.

Bedřich Smetana (1824 – 84) put Czech sounds and music on the map. Smetana was, as is almost needless to say, deeply influenced by Liszt, because as we go along we will find that practically every musician in the 19th century was helped or influenced by this amazing man.

Although Smetana was primarily interested in composing operas, he is best known for his symphonic cycle *Ma Vlast*, which means "My Country".

As mentioned earlier, it is from this cycle that his most famous work is taken – *The Moldau*.

This is a tone poem *par excellence* – the musical description of the river that runs from deep in the Bohemian woods into, and through, Prague.

This piece has become the unofficial anthem of the Czech Republic. It is fortunate it is such a beautiful work as one hears it so often.

Antonin Dvořák (1841 – 1904), who was also Czech (or 'Bohemian', which sounds more elegant) was outstanding at elaborating on folk music and became the envy of the world with his first big success, the *Slavonic Dances*. He wrote two books of these for four hands, orchestrated them and became a role model for composers looking for their musical roots.

All of his work is inspired by his love of native melody and for that reason there is a big misunderstanding concerning his masterpiece, the *New World Symphony*.

He composed this while teaching in New York, at a time during which he was wretchedly homesick, and filled it with sounds of home, sending it back to Prague with the message "*From the New World*."

However, because he was an outspoken advocate for the use of national and folk sounds in a composer's work, and admonished American composers to do the same, many have heard, and continue to hear in this symphony, reflections of Negro or American Indian sounds.

It is best not to argue about this.

Later, as we will see, George Gershwin and Aaron Copland would take his advice and incorporate what passes for indigenous American sounds in their works, but neither of them were dredging up memories of their youth in the American countryside as they were both first generation Jewish New Yorkers whose families were recent immigrants from Europe.

Added to this, Copland got his training from the famous Nadia Boulanger in Paris (see later chapter).

One should mention Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) here. Sibelius made up for the fact that his country, Finland, is probably less known for bellicose nationalistic bravado or celebrated battles than any other, which makes it particularly ironic that his most famous work is *Finlandia*.

This mighty, glorious blast of patriotism would terrify any potential enemy into surrendering before a fight.

However, some other composers picked up on folk music for various reasons, some clearly because they thought it lent a savory quality to their music and some because it became fashionable to compose as a patriot.

Louis Moreau Gottschalk, the American pianist (1829-1869), who used Creole motifs in his piano pieces, was such a one.

As we see, a relationship grew up naturally between Nationalism and Tone Poem, sometimes quite a subtle one.

Here we should mention the two descriptive works, *The Pines of Rome* and *The Fountains of Rome* by Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936). These two highly attractive and much performed works stand out as extremely successful tone poems.

Respighi was a violinist and was no doubt influenced by getting a job as a musician in the St. Petersburg orchestra where he came under the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov, whom we shall meet further on. Respighi's entire musical thinking was affected by this friendship.

In our segment on French music you will see that, having destroyed all their own folk music as part of the French Revolution, the French invented Spanish folk music instead.

Chapter 4

Conductors

Before we begin our exploration of the Great Composers in Part II, it would be as well to explain the character of those fellows who stand in front of our orchestras, baton in hand.

Conductors are legendary for the size of their egos and the length of their hair.

As far as their egos are concerned, although they compare with those of the music critics, whom we will meet in Chapter 5, they have more excuse as they have actually studied music, but they share a necessity for an elephantine memory and punctuality.

And in the past, the conductor also had to have Perfect Pitch.

The question of perfect pitch is a difficult one, as it is somewhat mysterious. Some people have it and some people don't. 'Perfect pitch', as opposed to 'relative' pitch – or just knowing when something sounds awful – means that someone can hear the exact sound of a note in their head when they look at the written note.

Or, conversely, they can name the note or write it down when they hear it. Although this can be encouraged and developed, it must be largely inherent in the musician.

In the days before recordings, a conductor would pick up the score of a symphony, comprising seventeen or so lines of instruments on each page, in a mammoth four movement work, and read it like a book, hearing the whole thing in their heads. Not only had they to read it like a book, but they had to decide in their imaginations how the work should flow and develop, reach its climaxes and layer in the various voices.

No longer.

Today anyone who has allowed their hair to grow too long can buy a CD of the work, or even several versions recorded by different conductors leading various orchestras, and – standing in front of a mirror – practice cueing in the musicians and maintaining the tempi, while listening to the recording and waving their stick in the air.

So, with the recording industry, perfect pitch became somewhat redundant. Making things even easier for the conductor of today is the fact that there are few contemporary composers producing new works that need to be premiered and for which no recording exists.

Further, those compositions that are produced today are so full of strange sounds and purposeful dissonance that it wouldn't matter if the conductor knew how it was supposed to sound or not.

Nor would he be sure that the second clarinet had got it right or not, nor, probably, would the second clarinet.

To compensate for having a much easier task today than formerly, the contemporary conductor not only grows his hair too long, but insists on an exorbitant fee and on being thought of and treated as a celebrity, if not a minor god. Usually the wives of the symphony's board will cooperate with this, but it doesn't necessarily do anything for the music.

Today, however, and because of all this, it has grown more difficult for the conductor of a symphony orchestra to prove his authority to the professional musicians he is directing. The question is always hanging in the air: who is this fellow who thinks he can tell us how to play this music? We can count and read the indications for tempo, fast or slow; and the indications for dynamics, loud or soft or in-between – so what does he think he can do to make our music any better?"

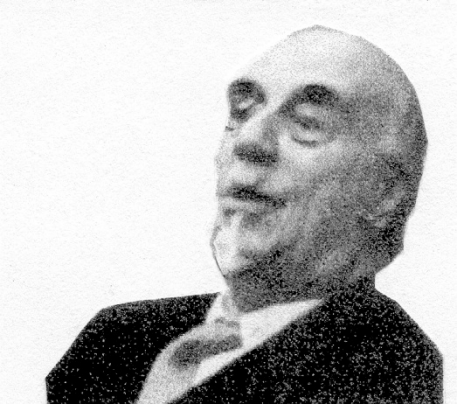
And, as the eminent French horn player Frank Gorell said in reference to conductors: "music comes out of every instrument in the orchestra but one; not one note comes out of that little stick the conductor waves about."

Despite this, conductors invariably develop a sense of omnipotence. The stick finally affects their minds. Some become megalomaniacs; some just take advantage of their power to become scathing wits at the expense of their musicians and everyone else.

A famous example of this was the English conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, who was, in fact, actually funny, unlike many other English wits, who think being rude is amusing and being insulting *really* funny.

He rivaled George Bernard Shaw, who we will meet in our chapter on music critics, for the ability to think up clever insults.

We have to give Sir Thomas credit for one very amusing and very true aphorism: He said in reference to his home audience: "The English don't really like music, but they love the sound it makes."



It cannot be said better.

In keeping with his disdain for the English audience, he also said: "There are two golden rules for an orchestra: start together and finish together. The public doesn't give a damn for what goes on in between."

Sir Thomas had come up the easy way with a career financed by his father, whose fortune was made by "Beecham's Little Liver Pills", a very successful product, made necessary by English cooking.

But despite his easy rise, he was a brilliant man who did more than conduct – which he did exceedingly well for six decades.

He was artistic director of Covent Garden opera seasons, he founded two major symphony orchestras, the London Philharmonic and the Royal Philharmonic, and, being a man of means, he often helped fund them as well.

However, like so many of the twentieth century conductors, Beecham's career was complicated by WWII.

Unlike many others Beecham decided to avoid the struggle and went to direct orchestras and opera in the United States for the duration of the war.

"They said there was an emergency, so I emerged," he said.

He was able to live this down and continue his career in Great Britain when he returned in 1944, which is quite remarkable in itself, as a number of British actors who remained in Hollywood during the conflict were snubbed by the theatre and their audiences in Britain when it was over.

Sir Thomas' wit spared no one, not even his sponsors.

One summer he was invited to conduct at the Chicago Symphony's distinguished Ravinia Festival. This takes place in a suburb of the city and is very close to a railway station. During the music making, the sounds of the trains coming and going are often heard.

In his words, "Ravinia is the only railroad station in the world with its own resident symphony orchestra."

As a result of his biting tongue and his instinct for self-preservation, Beecham was not a favorite with his contemporary musicians: Sir Henry Wood, a distinguished musician and founder of the famous 'Promenade Concerts', regarded him as an upstart, although he was envious of his success. Sir Adrian Boult, another distinguished English conductor, even thought him "repulsive" as a man, and Sir John Barbirolli felt he could not be trusted.

Another conducting 'Sir' was Malcolm Sargent, who collaborated with Beecham to found the London Philharmonic, but was nevertheless the subject of the occasional Beecham barb: he described the up-and-coming maestro Herbert von Karajan as "a kind of musical Malcolm Sargent."

Sir Malcolm was a debonair man, always with a carnation in his lapel, whom Beecham referred to as "Flash Harry".

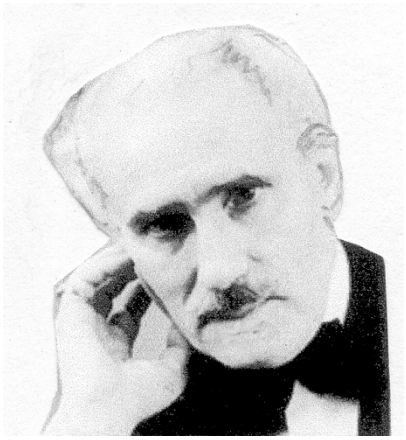
On one occasion, it was reported that a plane flying over some mid-East country had been fired upon by desert tribesmen and that among the passengers was fellow British conductor, Sir Malcolm; Beecham burst out admiringly: “I didn’t know the Arabs had such refined musical taste.”

Beecham preferred foreign conductors to home grown ones, perhaps because he couldn’t understand what they said about him, and vice versa.

Beecham was not always on top of his game, however. The story is told that upon meeting a lady at a reception who seemed somehow familiar he tried to work out who she could possibly be. Finally the lady remarked that she had been worrying as “my brother has been rather ill lately.”

“Ah”, he grabbed at this, “your brother! I’m sorry to hear that. And, er, what is your brother doing at the moment?”

“Well, he’s still the King,” replied the lady, who was Princess Mary, King George VI’s sister.



Then there was Arturo Toscanini, who behaved in the most exemplary way during the war.

Toscanini’s career leapt from that of assistant chorus master and cellist in an Italian touring opera company to conductor at the age of nineteen in 1886. Floundering in South America, conductor after conductor proved unable to conduct *Aida*, and in desperation the manager finally listened to the orchestra players, who suggested young Arturo.

He had been rehearsing the chorus and at least knew the score. With no other alternative he was asked to step in to go through with the performance. He did so entirely from memory and with such success that he completed the season's eighteen operas.

Toscanini's musicianship and astonishing memory caused the musicians who played for him to forgive him his fierce tantrums, as well as his discomforting perfect recall of their slightest mistakes after months and years, as well as his disconcerting habit of humming along with the performance.

As mentioned above, unlike Beecham, Toscanini behaved admirably during the war, although like Beecham he left his home and his career behind. In his case, however, it was not to avoid bombs, but because of his disgust with Mussolini's fascist rule in Italy.

This praise cannot be given to a number of German conductors who stuck with their careers through the Nazi era.

Of composer/conductor Richard Strauss, who tolerated the Nazi regime, Toscanini said, "To Strauss the composer I take off my hat; to Strauss the man I put it back on again."

Toscanini also said "Gentlemen, be democrats in life, but aristocrats in art."

He disliked the sentimentalizing and over-romanticizing of great works. Referring to Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, he said, "To some it is Napoleon, to some it is a philosophical struggle. To me, it is *Allegro con brio*."

In 1940, Toscanini visited the West of the United States and while in California was taken to the MGM set. Leaving the studio, he had tears in his eyes.

He said of his visit, "I will remember three things all my life – the sunset, the Grand Canyon and Eleanor Powell's dancing."

Like Richard Strauss, the conductor Herbert von Karajan also compromised with the Nazi party, having joined it as a young man in 1933 in order to get his career moving, and remained a member throughout the war years.

It was not always considered to his credit that he claimed later that he only did this to advance his career.

Von Karajan, an Austrian, conducted both the Berlin Philharmonic and the Vienna. He said, "If I tell the Berliners to step forward, they do it. If I tell the Viennese to step forward, they do it – but then they ask why."

He also said, "Those who have achieved all their aims probably set them too low." Very true.

Von Karajan was famous for an overwhelming vanity. When recording the Beethoven *Triple Concerto* with the great Russians Richter, Oistrakh and Rostropovich, he refused to retake an important passage because, he said, "we must leave time for the photographers."

The amused expressions of the soloists and Karajan's sense of self-importance can be seen on the resulting album cover.

No wonder that Isaiah Berlin said that he was a genius with "a whiff of sulphur about him."

Conducting can have an important influence on health and at times it can be dangerous. The *New York Times* once ran an article on the long lives of orchestra conductors, concluding that the aerobic effects of baton waving and the gymnastics of conducting technique made them physically fit and would increase their longevity.

Toscanini's family made him go to a doctor for a check-up for the very first time in his life when he turned eighty, and the doctor was amazed: "You have the heart of a thirty year-old man, maestro; how do you do it?" Toscanini replied, "I never use it."

Now, while the salutary effects of conducting may be indisputable, there are exceptions. Lully, Louis the XIV's court composer, had an accident while conducting the royal orchestra. In those days, conductors kept time with a long stick with which they thumped the floor to keep time rather like a tall metronome. Somewhat carried away, the Sun King's composer missed his aim and brought the thing down on his foot.

Perhaps understandably, he refused the treatment offered by the royal physician at Versailles, and died. Untreated, his foot developed gangrene. One was as likely to die of medical treatment as of the complaint in those days, so either way Lully was doomed.

Another example of the dangers of conducting happened to Joseph Strauss, younger brother of Johann Strauss, Jr., the so-called 'Waltz King'. Joseph was also a composer/conductor and also led waltz orchestras in the parks and dance halls of Vienna. One evening he stepped backward and fell off the podium and stage into the orchestra pit. He died from this.

All this stress has led to some conductors becoming very superstitious. The Polish conductor of the New York Philharmonic, Artur Rodźinski, would never go on stage until he was sure that he had his pistol in the back pocket. A Carnegie Hall concert was once delayed for forty-five minutes because he had left his pistol at home. The audience had to wait while someone went to his home in Westchester to find and rush it back to him.

One explanation for this bizarre behavior was that when Rodźinski first conducted an orchestra in Europe he was afraid his youth wouldn't allow him to command the respect he needed from the older, experienced musicians; he wanted to be able to threaten them into obedience.

However, Leonard Rose, who was principal cellist under him, said "Rodźinski was so sure that he was going to make a mess of things at his debut that he was prepared to blow his brains out if his fears were realized."

But perhaps he just wanted to be ready in case he met a critic.

Many of the 20th century conductors had reputations as tyrants. Toscanini was considered a stern, dictatorial type. Fritz Reiner was reputed to be the same, noted for his sneering insults to his musicians.

The aforementioned hornist, Frank Gorell, once wrote a brief memoir about conductors under whom he had played. "Fritz Reiner", he wrote, "was a man of many moods, all of them miserable."

As with Sir Thomas Beecham, private funding also made another distinguished career possible. Serge Koussevitzky was a determined man who entered the conservatory in Russia as a double bass player.

Koussevitzky's ambition was to play a more leading role than bottom line accompaniment in the concert hall and he had the good fortune to meet and marry a very wealthy woman. She bought him his own symphony orchestra, known as the Koussevitzky Orchestra, and it soon became recognized as a very fine ensemble.

Koussevitzky also bought the major Russian music publishing house, based in Paris, and many major Russian works bear the name 'Koussevitzky Publishing' on the title page.

With the reputation he gained leading his orchestra in Paris, Koussevitzky was soon receiving offers from various cities and in 1924 he accepted the music directorship of the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

Under his twenty-five year leadership, the Boston Symphony became one of the finest in America. There will be more about Koussevitzky later in this guide.

The summer music festival Koussevitzky established for the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood, Massachusetts, was the trend-setter for a large number of other orchestras' summer homes.

This has become an important style in the United States with orchestras taking up summer homes such as Saratoga, New York, Washington's National Symphony at Wolf Trap and the Cleveland Orchestra founded the Blossom Festival.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic has the Hollywood Bowl.

We have already mentioned Chicago's Ravinia Festival, close to the railway station.

Some of these orchestral residences are in the cities, with New York's summer music based at Lewissohn Stadium in the Bronx; later, as the Mostly Mozart Series, in Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall; and the Philadelphia Orchestra's Robin Hood Dell outdoor concerts.

Otto Klemperer was a towering talent, but, like Toscanini, a tyrant on the podium. In his book Gorell gave this version of a story found in many books on music and musicians as follows: Otto Klemperer arrived to lead the New York Philharmonic as guest conductor.

Before beginning to rehearse the orchestra in a Beethoven symphony, he began an explanatory talk about the work. The musicians had played the work countless times, so they began fidgeting as the talk went on and on.

Finally, oboist Bruno Labate, a brilliant player and a very short man, stood up and addressed Klemperer – a towering man physically as well as artistically.

Looking up at the giant figure on the podium he called out: "Klemp! You talka too much! You crazy."

The conductor turned red with fury and stormed off stage. The others gathered around the little oboist and told him he had to apologize. At first he resisted, but finally he relented and agreed to make amends.

A committee convinced him to say he was sorry; Klemperer looked expectantly at Labate, who rose to his feet and cleared his throat.

"Mr Klemp," he began, "I'm sorry!" The conductor nodded his head but Labate continued: "I'ma sorry you crazy."

Many of the great conductors of this period were Hungarians. They included such legendary names as George Szell, Fritz Reiner, Eugene Ormandy and George Solti. Their common nationality caused a sign to be prominently displayed in a major Hollywood film studio; it read: “It is not enough to be Hungarian – one must also be talented!”

Fritz Reiner is remembered for having set the sound for the Chicago Symphony. His fellow Hungarian, Sir George Solti, also conducted the Chicago, although he did not do as much as Reiner for its sound.

When Eugene Ormandy, who took over the legendary Philadelphia Orchestra from Leopold Stokowski, first arrived in the United States as a violinist from Hungary, he came under contract to go on tour with a series of solo violin recitals. The tour did not materialize and young Ormandy found himself stranded and penniless in New York.

To survive in the city, he took a job playing his violin, but the job he found was a humble one as a member of the orchestra playing in the pit of Broadway’s first-run movie theater, The Capitol.

The Capitol Theater’s music director, Erno Rapée, a fellow Hungarian, was already well established in the music world of New York and had come to Ormandy’s rescue, placing him among the second violins, and in short order, moving him up to the post of concertmaster and later to conductor.

Ormandy felt no shame in having been a pit musician. Years later, however, during his third decade as conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, he felt differently about playing in the pit.

He had met Martha Graham during the Mozart Festival in Salzburg and invited her to bring her dance company to Philadelphia to dance Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring* with the orchestra.

When the evening came, Ormandy expected the orchestra to perform onstage with the company – as a soloist does in a concerto.

"Impossible!" said Ms. Graham.

But the former movie theater pit orchestra violinist was through with playing in the pit.

"The Philadelphia Orchestra does not go down into the pit for anyone!" he said.

They danced on stage with the orchestra.

As we remarked earlier, conductors need tremendous memories – after all, they need to know each musicians part.

Toscanini had started life as a cellist, and his teacher once remarked that he always knew whether or not his student had practiced an assigned new work. If young Arturo played the piece after placing the score on his music stand, his teacher knew he hadn't practiced.

Once he practiced a piece it was indelibly stored in his memory and he wouldn't bother putting the printed music in front of him.

There are countless stories about Toscanini's memory. Here's just one:

In the 1940s, the aged conductor asked the NBC Symphony's librarian for a piece by the 19th century composer Raff, which he had studied as a student over sixty years before. Raff was now virtually forgotten, and there was no sign of the score he wanted to conduct.

‘No matter’, said Toscanini, whereupon he sat down and wrote out all the orchestral parts to the unknown piece from memory.

Toscanini conducted everything from memory, but not just because he had a good one – because he was short sighted and couldn’t see the music. This has been a terrible curse for all those who have come after him – all of whom feel they have to do the same with or without the memory.

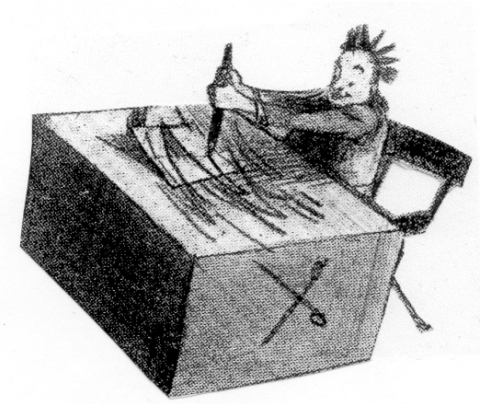
This is not always a good idea.

Some conductors feel it necessary to doctor their name to sound foreign, as ballerinas used to do. Stokowski’s family had changed their name to Stokes when they migrated to England, but when it looked as if the boy might have a career in music they changed it back to Stokowski. More recently there is Michael Tilson Thomas, descendant of the leader of the Yiddish theatre in New York, whose name was Tomashevsky.

Chapter 5

The Music Critic

These gentry are so often quoted and make themselves so self-important in the music world that we'd better deal with them now.



It is generally understood that journalistic critics – music critics in particular – are people who make a living criticizing something they cannot do themselves. Although this gives a great sense of superiority to the critic, it is a career fraught with danger, for if the subject of the criticism makes it into the history books, so does your idiotic comment.

This hazardous profession got its start in 1752 when a writer by the name of Charles Avison penned a negative article on the music of George Frederick Handel. Needless to say, this is the only thing for which Avison is remembered today.

There are several celebrated instances of the foot-in-mouth disease to which music critics are subject. One such unfortunate was Friedrich Wieck, teacher, critic and most famously the father of the pianist Clara, who became the wife of composer Robert Schumann.

He is today best remembered for his critical gaffes, as well as for his great daughter.

On the occasion of Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* being heard for the first time, Wieck gave it as his professional opinion that it was a terrible work that could only have been written by a drunk.

Wieck later tried his hand at an appreciation and analysis of Chopin's youthful work for piano and orchestra, *Variations on Là ci darem la mano*, based on Mozart's aria of that name. Wieck wrote a fulsome article of praise in the German periodical *Caecilia*.

Chopin, with his usually fastidious and dry French wit, found the article cloying and ridiculous and said "instead of being clever, it was stupid" and that he didn't want his work to "die" because of "the imagination of that obstinate German." This is unfair, of course, as the work is charming and Wieck was right to recognize it.

When Wieck's student, the emerging Romantic composer Robert Schumann, wanted to marry his daughter, he denounced him as a man without talent, took criticism a step further and forbade the marriage. When Clara went to court to get permission to marry Schumann, Wieck caused such an uproar in the court that he was sentenced to eighteen days of jail for unruly courtroom behaviour.

The court ruled in favour of Clara and Robert, not a little because their friend Franz Liszt, already a big celebrity, appeared in court and announced he would perform Schumann's music, thereby guaranteeing his success as a composer.

We will find Liszt doing this sort of helpful thing throughout this little history book.

Many critics spend their careers as wannabe wits, taking their frustrations out on the artists who have spent their entire lives studying, practicing and hoping for an engagement.

Such was the case when Neville Cardus, of *The Guardian*, wrote,

"Miss Bloggs played Brahms at the Wigmore Hall last night… Brahms lost."

Here are some other critiques made by contemporaries of Chopin:

In 1833 the irascible Berlin critic Ludwig Rellstab wrote:

"In search of ear-rending, tortuous transition, sharp modulations, repugnant contortions of melody and rhythm, Chopin is altogether indefatigable."

(Rellstab later had to revise his critical view of Chopin, when he found he was all alone).

Actually, we owe this grumpy man some credit for having been the one to say that Beethoven's most popular sonata reminded him of "Moonlight on Lake Lucerne."

From the London *Times* in 1843:

"The novelty of the evening was Chopin's *Piano Concerto in F minor*. It is the first work on a large scale which Chopin has attempted…. It was dry and unattractive."

Also from *The Times*:

"The *Concerto in E minor* is for the most part a rambling series of passages with one or two pretty motives, with which but little is done."

From the *Dramatic and Musical Review* in London of 1843:

"We cannot imagine any musician, who has not acquired an unhealthy taste for noise, and scrambling and dissonance, to feel otherwise than dissatisfied with the effect of either the *Third Ballade*, nor the *Grande Valse* or the eight *Mazurkas*."

Also from London – *The Athenaeum* in 1845:

"Cunning must be the connoisseur, indeed, who, while listening to his music, can form the slightest idea when wrong notes are played… "

Musical history is full of such critical comments; comments that must have been deeply regretted by their authors.

The French – who have never quite understood Beethoven and pronounce his name 'Bé-*tov*' – are typified by this comment on the master in 1857, when M. Oulibicheff wrote:

"Among new signs which bring about changes in Beethoven's style, this sign that is like the sign of Cain, it is nothing less than a violation of fundamental laws and of the most elementary rules of harmony – wrong chords, and agglomerations of notes intolerable to anyone who is not completely deprived of all auditory sense…"

(Though now quite *oublié*, M. Oulibicheff was actually quite useful – as a founder of a private orchestra at a time when orchestras were rare.)

But it wasn't only the French; a few years earlier, in 1853, the critic in the *Daily Atlas* of Boston wrote:

"If the best critics and orchestras have failed to find the meaning of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, we may well be pardoned if we confess our inability to find any..."

In London, where the Philharmonic Society admired Beethoven greatly and sent him much-needed monetary support, we nevertheless read in the *Quarterly Musical* magazine:

"It is not surprising that Beethoven should occasionally have entertained blasé notions of his art; that he should have mistaken noise for grandeur, extravagance for originality and have supposed that the interest of his compositions would be in proportion to their duration. That he gave little time to reflection is proved clearly by the extraordinary length of some movements in his symphonies. His great qualities are frequently allowed by a morbid desire for novelty; by extravagance, and by a disdain for rule…"

Louis Spohr was the first conductor to use a baton, and was a distinguished violinist and composer, but he had this to say of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* when he wrote his autobiography – forty years after the work's premiere:

"… the fourth (Choral) movement seems to me so ugly, in such bad taste, and in the conception of Schiller's *Ode* so cheap, that I cannot even now understand how such a genius as Beethoven could write it down."

Liszt's tremendous influence, presence, originality and, above all, star power, made him fair game for many.

From an unidentified American newspaper of 1882 describing the '*Dante Sonata*':

"There is no doubt that Liszt has satisfactorily described the Inferno. Nothing so suggestive of unceasing torment and the wails of the damned has ever been written by mortal man. Let us hope that the good Abbé will never go to a place where his own music succeeded."

Here, however, is an honest critic:

"One is still timid of calling the Liszt '*Faust Symphony*' nonsense, for fear that it might turn out in the end to be a great, if misunderstood work" – from the *Musical Review*, New York, 1880.

Of Liszt's friend Berlioz, the London *Dramatic and Musical Review* said in 1843, "Berlioz, musically speaking, is a daring lunatic; a classical composer only in Paris, the great city of quacks."

The second part of this statement is arguable; the first absolutely unquestionable.

In 1936, Pitts Sanborn wrote in the New York *World-Telegram*: "Rachmaninoff's '*Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*' sometimes sounds like a plague of insects in the Amazon valley, sometimes like a miniature of the Day of Judgment... and for a change goes lachrymose."

There are many such patronizing quotes from critics who would no doubt do anything to retract their early comments.

In New York, the leading early twentieth century American critic and writer on music Henry Krehbiel wrote in the *New York Tribune* of 1900:

"In *La Bohème*, silly and inconsequential incidents and dialogues… are daubed over with splotches of instrumental solo without reason and without effect, except the creation of a sense of boisterous excitement and confusion.

"In his proclamation of passion Puccini is more successful so soon as he can become strenuous; but even here the expression is superficial and depends upon strident phrases pounded out by hitting each note a blow on the head as it escapes from the mouths of singers or the accompanying instruments."

And of *Tosca*, just premiered, W. F. Apthorp of the Boston *Evening Transcript* wrote in 1901:

"At first hearing, much, perhaps most, of Puccini's *Tosca* sounds exceedingly, even ingeniously, ugly. Every now and then one comes across the most ear-flaying succession of chords, then the instrumentation, although nearly always characteristic, is often distinctly rawboned and hideous…"

(Incidentally, that plea, "the work cannot be judged on a first hearing," is code in musical criticism for "I have no idea what all that was about," and is a catchphrase used constantly by confused critics, especially if they are not sure *sur quel pied danser* – i.e., on which side of the fence to sit.)

Musical America in New York had this to say about Prokofiev, who despite its comments had a big success in New York in 1918:

"Crashing Siberia, volcano hell, Krakatoa, sea-bottom crawlers. Incomprehensible? So is Prokofiev."

Although these critiques are entertaining and these undoubtedly great composers survived them, some critics had an unquestioned influence over popular taste and recognition and have entered the annals of music history.

One of these – perhaps more than any other – was the critic Edouard Hanslick in Vienna.

Not only did he love to pick on Wagner, he was also one of the first to pour vitriol on another towering figure of 19th century music: the greatest of all virtuosos, initiator of the 'recital', composer, friend and sponsor to every musician of his time and all-round nice person, Franz Liszt.

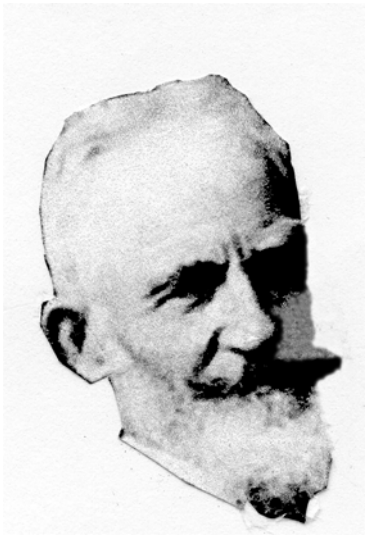
Writing in 1881, after hearing Liszt's massive and complex *Sonata in B minor*, Hanslick wrote, "It is impossible to convey through words an idea of this musical monstrosity…. Never have I experienced a more contrived and insolent agglomeration of the most disparate elements, a wilder rage, a bloodier battle against all that is musical. At first I felt bewildered, then shocked and finally overcome with irresistible hilarity. Here all criticism, all discussion must cease. Who has heard that, and finds it beautiful, is beyond help".

Here's another zinger from Hanslick:

"The Russian composer Tchaikovsky is surely not an ordinary talent, but rather an inflated one, with a genius-obsession without discrimination or taste. Such is also his latest, long and pretentious *Violin Concerto*. For a while it moves soberly, musically, not without spirit, but soon vulgarity gains the upper hand, and asserts itself to the end of the first movement."

But then, Hanslick was neither a phenomenal pianist nor composer, and perhaps was not much of a friend to musicians, either – except Brahms, whom he promoted as assiduously as he possibly could. And he is now destined to have his absurd criticisms of other composers forever quoted more than a century later.

Wagner got his own back on Hanslick in masterly fashion by using him as the model for the villain, Beckmesser, of *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*, in which he is reduced to a petty, pedantic bureaucrat who cannot follow his own rules when he tries to be a singer himself in the singing contest against the young hero.



Another music critic who was not a musician but admired for his wit, and a past master in review malice was the playwright George Bernard Shaw. "GBS", as he came to be known, inadvertently became a music critic having been given that position on the London newspaper, *The Star*, because it was obvious he knew nothing about politics, a fact which had given rise to many complaints.

To protect himself from irate performers and music lovers he took the *nom de plume* "Cornetto de Bassetto" (basset horn), telling his editor this was the name of an Italian ancestor of his.

He got away with this for some time thanks to the fact the English do not learn foreign languages.

Under this alias he was able to write of a pianist:

"Plysena Fletcher gained deserved applause by playing Brahms' *Second Piano Concerto* courageously and even aggressively, for she occasionally, in the abounding strength of her young blood, thumped the keyboard as if it was Brahms' head. And she was quite right".

On another occasion he wrote, in the London *World*, in 1893:

"To me it seems quite obvious that the real Brahms is nothing more than a sentimental voluptuary. He is the most wanton of composers. Only his wantonness is not vicious; it is that of a great baby… rather tiresomely addicted to dressing himself up as Handel or Beethoven and making a prolonged and intolerable noise."

In another display of contempt for Brahms, Shaw described his *Requiem* as "so execrably dull that the very flattest of funerals would seem like a ballet after it."

He went on to say:

"There are some sacrifices which should not be demanded twice from any man, and one of them is listening to Brahms' *Requiem*."

This was in fact the general attitude to Brahms for a very long time.

You see, in contrast to Wagner and Liszt, he was seen as a reactionary harking stubbornly back to the symphonies, concertos and chamber music of an earlier era.

In his dislike of Brahms, Shaw equaled Wieck's disapproval of Beethoven.

But it must be said, GBS was far from the only one who felt this way about Brahms: at the turn of the 20th century and well beyond, the musical world was dominated by a stand-off between the Wagnerians and the Brahmsians, just as the opera house was dominated by a war between the admirers of Wagner and those of Verdi.

Realizing that he had made a gross miscalculation, he later apologized to Brahms for this particular review, advising him in true Shavian style that now that he really knew the *Requiem* he found it "good fun".

Calling something "jolly good fun" is a favorite put-down with the British. One wonders whether Brahms' English was up to these refinements of insult and whether the apology smarted as keenly as the original attack.

One must bear in mind that unlike today, the music experts at the turn of the 20th century got very heated. It was a time when society, and even the general public, became very intense about the direction classical music was taking. Critics and would-be experts would declare all-out war between musical styles and fight it out in the press.

In justice to Shaw, however, he also turned his acerbic wit on his fellow music critics: he found their ponderous manner of analyzing the music ridiculous. (This also applies to the writers of programme notes, who have an annoying way of making the reader feel like an outsider by giving a technical analysis that reduces the music to a myriad of incomprehensible formulas. This snobbery is enhanced by the notes being printed in tiny characters, in light grey, to be read in the dark.)

GBS showed his scorn for all this by doing a mock analysis of Hamlet's celebrated suicide soliloquy in the same heavy-handed way.

"How would we like it," he asks, "if the same sort of pompous analysis was applied to a playwright – imagine '*To be or not to be*' thus under the music critic's hand:

'*Shakespeare, dispensing with the usual exordium, announces his subject at once – in the infinitive, in which mood it is presently repeated after a short connecting passage in which, brief as it is, we recognize the alternative and negative forms on which so much of the significance of repetition depends*.

'*Here we reach a colon and a pointed pository phrase, in which the accent falls decisively on the relative pronoun, bringing us to the first full stop*."

He added: "A literary critic doing something of this nature would be hauled off to Bedlam. On the other hand, the more a music critic does this, the deeper the veneration for him."

This battle became ferocious at times with musicians vituperative in their opinions and criticism.

Lieder composer Hugo Wolf had this to say in print about Brahms' *Fourth Symphony*:

"He never could rise above the mediocre. But such nothingness, hollowness, such mousy obsequiousness as in the *E minor Symphony*, has never yet been revealed so alarmingly in any of Brahms' works.

Some of the most amusing critical gaffes have come from articles written by critics who missed the concert altogether and tried to piece it together from the printed programme (critics being often paid by the review and are anxious to submit something, or anything, to get them their fee).

Such a one seeing the listing of Johannes Brahms' *Clarinet Quintet*, a work composed for string quartet and solo clarinet, wrote, "five clarinets in one chamber music work seems excessive."

Sergei Prokofiev's reputation was given a big boost by the scandal which ensued when the critic Leonid Sabaneyev wrote a violent attack on Prokofiev's abrasive *Scythian Suite* in 1916 – the review coming out despite the fact that the performance of the work was postponed, and it being obvious that the reviewer could not have heard a single note of the work. Even the rehearsals had been delayed and the score had never left the composer's hands.

Another pitfall for the critic is trying to identify an encore. This happens constantly.

On one celebrated occasion, when the brilliant but highly neurotic pianist and showman Oscar Levant was mumbling a complaint to himself over having to play an encore, the article next day identified the encore as "*I'm Going to Miss my Train*."

Once, in a recital in Gainesville, Florida, Vladimir Horowitz changed the scheduled Beethoven sonata, the replacement being duly announced as Beethoven's "*Waltz-Time Sonata*"; it was the "*Waldstein Sonata*".

Critics are not the only ones who live to regret comments on a great work or composer. Composers also often get it wrong.

One composer who shared GBS' dislike of Brahms wrote,

"I played over the music of that scoundrel Brahms. What a giftless bastard! It annoys me that this self-inflated mediocrity is hailed as a genius. Why, in comparison with him, Raff (*a minor composer and orchestrator of the time*) is a giant, not to speak of Anton Rubinstein, who is, after all, a live and important human being, while Brahms is chaotic and absolutely empty, dried up stuff."

This unfortunate quote is from the diary of Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

Another composer who set himself the task of commenting on a contemporary was Camille Saint-Saëns, who wrote in 1920, two years after the death of his younger colleague and fellow Frenchman, Debussy:

"The Prélude, '*l'Après midi d'un Faun*', has pretty sonority, but one does not find in it the least musical idea, properly speaking; it resembles a piece of music as the palette used by an artist in his work resembles a picture. Debussy did not create a style; he cultivated an absence of style, logic and common sense."

Actually, this is a rather clever description of Debussy's music, even though its amorphous beauty has given it a place among many of our greatest works.

Another famous French composer, Charles Gounod, remarked on leaving the concert hall after the premiere of César Franck's *Symphony in D minor*, "The affirmation of incompetence pushed to dogmatic lengths."

This is also a rather clever, pithy French comment.

When Gioacchino Rossini was asked about Richard Wagner – his polar opposite in musical character – he answered, "Wagner has some beautiful moments – and some awful half hours."

He also heard *Lohengrin*, and, pressed to give an opinion, said:

"One cannot judge *Lohengrin* on a first hearing, and I certainly don't intend to hear it a second time."

Perhaps the joke was on the questioner, however, who must have known that Rossini, the composer of such clever, light, sophisticated works as *The Barber of Seville*, *The Italian Girl in Algiers* and others, could hardly be expected to enjoy the fantastic affairs of Icelandic and Germanic pagan gods in a dark, forested half-world.

Rossini was not always as cruel as in his comments about *Lohengrin*. Once a young composer brought him two new works for his commentary. After he had played the first, he timidly asked the master what he thought of it. "I prefer the other one," said Rossini.

As a critic Rossini was less tactful. He said, "There are only two kinds of music: good music and boring music."

Although Rossini was Italian and celebrated everywhere for his operas, the French nevertheless considered him one of their own. France has its own ways of formalizing their affairs, however, and gave him the title '*Inspecteur Général du Chant en France*'. Having an inspector-general for singing is not so odd when you consider that the French have pastry police who monitor how pastries are made and look and how much they cost.

As far as Wagner is concerned, his vast works, with their prodigious length, rich harmonies and extraordinary tales of supernatural heroes, have always made them a tempting target for wits.

One such commentator was the critic David Randolph, who said of Wagner's last opera, *Parsifal*, "it is the kind of opera that starts at 6 o'clock and three hours later you look at your watch and it says 6.20."

Opera, with its extravagant emotions, plots, mad-scenes, death-scenes, sets and costumes are ready game for the critic.

While traveling in Europe, Mark Twain found his way to a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin* – in *A Tramp Abroad* he describes it as a horrific experience, one in which "the banging and shouting and screaming were unbearable."

He wrote, "I hadn't felt such pain since my last visit to the dentist."

These comments pale before the hysterical words of the celebrated English art and culture critic John Ruskin, who wrote,

"Of all the *bête*, clumsy, blundering, boggling, baboon-blooded stuff I ever saw on a human stage, that thing last night (*Die Meistersinger*) beat all – as far as the story and acting went – and of all the affected, sapless, souless, beginningless, endless, topless, bottomless, topsy–turviest… and boniest doggerel of sounds I ever endured, the deadliness of that eternity of nothing was the deadliest – as far as the sound went."

Wagner took no revenge on this – except to write another opera.

Mozart had not been above using his operas to take revenge on his enemies.

As a youth, albeit an extraordinary one, he had literally been kicked out of the palace of his employer, Prince Archbishop of Salzburg, Heironymus Colloredo, for insubordination. He was actually rudely booted out by the archbishop's steward, Count Arco. Of this man Mozart wrote, "I must have my revenge."

He had it in his German-language opera the *The Abduction From the Seraglio*, when he put the Count in the role of the Pasha's ragingly rude, contemptuous steward and arch-fiend (Mozart's description), and by naming him Arco, which served double duty as it was also a play on the word arch-episcopal.

So opera is ready game for the critic and has been a target of wits, from the earliest appearance of criticism.

In London, during the first part of the 18th century, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele published *The Spectator*, a weekly periodical which has survived in various forms until the present day. Addison's cutting mockery of the fashion for Italian opera in the London of that time was a major influence in reducing its popularity. In a country and society that seemed incapable of learning a second language, Addison thought the use of Italian onstage an absurd affectation.

He wrote this in *The Spectator* of March 21, 1710:

"We no longer understand the language of our stage insomuch that I have often been afraid, when I have seen our Italian performers chattering in the vehemence of action, that they have been calling us names and abusing us among themselves."

Of course, the same is true in our day when just as few understand Italian, but today we have been rescued by the 'sur-title', which has at least told our audiences when to laugh and when to cry.

Addison's disdain for England's love affair with Italian opera put it into momentary decline. It also influenced John Gay and Johann Pepusch when they collaborated on what became the rage of the London theatre season of 1728, *The Beggar's Opera*.

This was a change from the ubiquitous Greek gods and Roman warriors of Italian 17th century opera: in other words, it was a forerunner of the modern musical.

Perhaps we must credit Addison for making an opening for this racy kind of work, which no doubt influenced the Viennese promoter Emanuel Schikaneder when he produced a new opera by Mozart – using German, as Gay and Pepusch had done using English – and also including long sections of spoken dialogue.

This was *The Magic Flute*.

So, we can see that the path that began with *The Beggar's Opera* led to *The Magic Flute*, then continued on its way through Jacques Offenbach's naughty Parisian comic operas to the operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, and finally reached across the Atlantic to Broadway.

Finally, one needn't worry too much abut what critics say – it is the audience that made these changes come about, and what music will live or die, and critics have, fortunately, very little say in the matter.

PART II

What You Need to Know about the Great Composers

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685 – 1750)

It is not enough to know that Bach had twenty children. There are a few more salient facts you must know to pass yourself off as one of the *cognoscenti*.

For instance: Johann Sebastian Bach was born to a very large family of musicians in Eisenach, Germany in 1685. So many generations of the Bach family had been musicians that the name Bach became synonymous with musician. If one were to go to that part of Germany and wanted to engage a musician, one could ask the natives where one might find a Bach, it had become a brand name for a living musician – and in keeping with this tradition three of his sons became well known composers.

This can be confusing if you don't look carefully at the name of the composer on the music. Rather than Johann Sebastian Bach, it might be Wilhelm Friedmann or Johann Christian or Carl Philip Emmanuel.

Unlike the musicians who are only appreciated after their death, J. S. Bach was admired at the time. Even Haydn, who as we mentioned earlier invented sonata-form and the symphony a generation later, said that, in fact, Bach had invented it, which was taking his own modesty to an extreme.

Bach had to live with an older brother (naturally, also a musician), who forbade him to listen or play Italian music, especially that of Vivaldi, whose music was not only vivacious and frivolous, but who was a red-haired Roman Catholic priest – a definite no-no in the Bachs' Lutheran household. He did anyway, although he had to do it at night.

Bach played many instruments as well as the church organ. However, it was because he was seen sitting on the organ bench very close to his cousin Maria Barbara he was expected to marry her. That was his first wife and they seem to have been happy together.

As an organist his reputation grew to such an extent that France's 'Sun King', Louis XIV, requested that a competition should take place between his own court organist, Louis Marchand, and Bach, and boasted that his own man would be the challenger and would win hands down.

The competition was arranged and there was a lot of betting over the outcome as the date approached and excitement rose. The event, which was to have taken place in Dresden, never materialized, however.

When Marchand went to check out the organ that was to be the played during the contest, he heard his opponent practicing. He found the other's playing so brilliant, he ran away.

Bach was married twice. Maria Barbara bore him several children, but died while he was still in the prime of life. He then married Anna Magdalena, who bore him still more children, which is how twenty children were eventually born to him.

Those of his sons who became musical figures included the first-born son, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, who was a good musician and composer, but was also a drunk.

The second to become a musician, Carl Phillip Emmanuel, was a very competent and innovative composer and, unlike his brother, a sober, orderly fellow; as a result of his orderliness we have not only all his own output but fifty per cent of his father's: most of the other fifty per cent, left to his older brother, was lost, much of it, presumably going to pay for fresh supplies of the fermented beverages he consumed in such quantity.

That is assumed to be the reason why, as we will see in a later chapter, the effort to collect all of Bach's compositions launched later by Mendelssohn came up short.

C. P. E. Bach was the first great clavier – 'fortepiano' – player and composer.

Today everyone who has studied the piano knows this son, as he was the composer of the *Solfegietto*, which all young pianists learn.

The third son to become a noted musician, Johann Christian Bach, also achieved a good measure of fame, and was much younger than W. F. and C. P. E. – he was the eighteenth child born, and the eleventh son. Johann Christian went to live and work in the opera houses of Italy, then in London, where he lived for a quarter of a century.

He died there, and is known as "the English Bach".

When Mozart was brought to London during his childhood tour of the capitals of Western Europe, the family took lodgings in the very building where J. C. Bach was living, and the two became close friends.

J. C. Bach readily recognized the extraordinary genius of the seven-year old boy and was pleased to help him with his compositions.

The London climate had its effect on Mozart *père*. He became ill and had to take to his bed. Young Mozart was asked not to play anything lest his bedridden father be disturbed.

Mozart obeyed, and took to composing instead. A respectable number of instrumental and orchestral works were produced, some of them with J. C. Bach providing some suggestions and many approving nods.

J. C. Bach composed in a style that became known as '*style galant*' – very different from his father's then outmoded style; all experts have to know this when speaking of Mozart, who we will meet shortly.

W. F., C. P. E. and J. C. Bach are not to be confused with P. D. Q. Bach, who was "discovered" by Peter Schickele, Professor of Music at The University of Southern North Dakota at Hoople.

Professor Schickele has managed to attribute to P. D. Q. such hitherto unknown works as the *Sanka Cantata* (inspired by J. S.'s *'Coffee' Cantata*), the *Goldbrick Variations*, *Ode to the Common Cold*, a *Schleptet*, a *Concerto for Horn and Hardart*, none of which will confuse the expert.

Most young piano students who quit piano have been made to learn Bach's easy pieces written as a birthday present for his second wife, Anna Magdalena, to teach her how to play. These were written to make piano lessons a pleasant experience, however they may seem to a child.

Some people believe that Bach's music is healing. One of those was the cellist Pablo Casals, who said that playing Bach cured his arthritis. "It has to be Bach," he insisted. He started each day with a piece by Bach.

Albert Schweitzer, the world-famous philosopher, theologian, physician and organist felt the same, but then you must remember that Schweitzer spent many years in darkest Africa, where anything might seem healing.

Most of Johann Sebastian Bach's music was written "For the greater glory of God", in a Lutheran setting. He composed scores of cantatas for the weekly services at Leipzig's St. Thomas Church, where he was the cantor. He wrote the two great '*Passions*' for the services of Good Friday, the '*Passion of Our Lord According to St. Matthew*' (aka the *St. Matthew Passion*) and the '*Passion According to St. John*'.

Neither Bach nor his great colleague George Frederick Handel were in the least bigoted, however, and when Bach had the idea of leaving Leipzig and seeking employment in Dresden, where the king was Catholic, he composed the great *B Minor Mass*.

This either shows that music transcends petty human divisions, or that, like other composers, Bach wrote on commission.

But in the event, Bach never left Leipzig for long.

Before he died, in 1750, Bach underwent a desperate effort to restore his eyesight and allowed a doctor to operate on his cataracts with neither anaesthetic nor antibiotics. It is hard to imagine such courage, but the doctor who tried this did the same thing to Handel in London.

With all this said, one must also admit that Bach is responsible for composing the most boring piece of great music ever composed. (This was long before Phillip Glass, you understand).

In fairness, he did it on purpose – unlike Phillip Glass – on commission from a Count Keyserling, the Russian Ambassador to the court at Dresden, who couldn't sleep.

Bach fulfilled the request by composing *The Goldberg Variations,* which was far better than counting sheep and for this he received the most generous commission of his career. The work is a set of thirty variations on a simple theme, many of them inordinately elaborate and difficult.

Why were they called 'Goldberg'? Because that was the name of the harpsichordist who was to play them, one Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, who played in the count's orchestra and was responsible for performing it, and who has managed to get out of them the fifteen minutes of fame promised by Andy Warhol. When faced with the task of finding a gift for someone it is unwise to give them a recording of the *Goldberg Variations,* unless they have especially asked for one.

Bach composed another set of variations late in his life. He made the long trek to Potsdam to visit his son, Carl Phillip Emanuel Bach, who was then the court composer to King Frederick the Great of Prussia.

When he arrived, the king was rehearsing some music for flute and orchestra that the younger Bach had composed for him. The King was a very competent flutist (it is no longer fashionable to say "flautist") and C. P. E. Bach wrote a number of flute pieces to be played by his royal patron.

We also know that the King did a commendable job as a composer; several concertos for flute and orchestra by him have been recorded.

Well, when news was brought to Frederick about J. S. Bach's arrival, he halted the music playing at once, announcing that "'Old Bach' has arrived and we must go to greet him."

They all trooped out to welcome the traveler and the King immediately gave him an assignment. Without giving him a chance to remove his coat and the dust of travel, Frederick asked for some improvisations on a theme.

Bach asked for a theme to improvise upon and His Majesty scribbled down a simple theme on a sheet of lined paper. This has come to be known as *The King's Theme* and Bach won the king's praise by producing instantaneous variations, which he performed on the royal keyboard.

His Majesty was delighted and even more so when Bach composed multiple additional variations, including two for flute when he got home to Leipzig. This turned into *A Musical Offering*, one of Bach's great works.

Other Royal Musicians

Having mentioned Frederick the Great this might be the proper time to remark on some other leaders of nations who were musicians.

Richard the Lion-Hearted was a celebrated troubadour and one of the songs he wrote was responsible for his being found when he was taken hostage on his way home from the Crusades by Archduke Leopold V of Austria, who then asked for an extortionate ransom

(All those familiar with the story of Robin Hood know this, especially if they have seen the movie with Errol Flynn; Leopold was later excommunicated for this breach in Chivalric behavior and made to return the money).

Richard's friend and fellow troubadour, Blondel, who was searching for him along the route he thought he had taken, recognized the song Richard was singing from the battlements of the Archduke's castle – a song he knew Richard had composed. This song is still known today.

King Henry VIII was also a flutist (flautist?). He played the old flute known in Italian as *Il Flauto Dolce* and in English as the Recorder. His inventory shows that he had a collection of several dozen artistically constructed recorders.

He also composed music very competently, and has been incorrectly credited with composing *Greensleeves* – which in fact dates from a far earlier period.

King João IV of Portugal, who reigned during the 17th Century, was not only strikingly handsome, won independence for Portugal and wrote important treatises on music, but was also a composer: his *Crux Fidelis* is still performed.

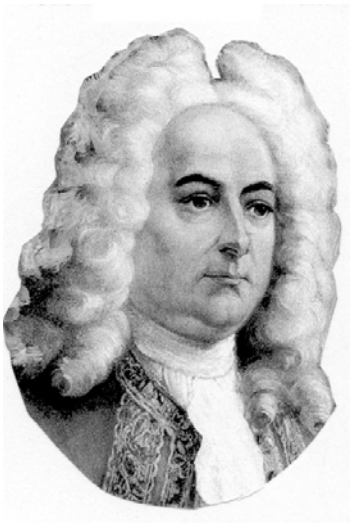
Louis XIV of France was an expert lutenist and pretty well invented classical ballet as an established art form.

Some heads of state who were known for their piano playing include Ignace Jan Paderewski, leading international piano virtuoso, who was elected first Prime Minister of Poland after World War I, President Harry Truman, who often surprised his fellow citizens by playing competent pop piano, and Richard Nixon, too.

GEORGE FREDERIC HANDEL
(1685 – 1759)

As far as Handel is concerned, one has to know more about him than that he wrote the *Water Music* and the *Hallelujah* Chorus.

Handel was born in the same year as Johann Sebastian Bach, also in Germany, and was brought up near the town of Halle. (The first full-time professional symphony orchestra in England, founded in Birmingham in 1856, is called the Hallé Orchestra, but that has nothing to do with Handel. It was the name of the orchestra's founding conductor, Sir Charles Hallé, who also came from this part of Germany, but who added the accent to seem French while studying piano as a young man in Paris with Chopin).



Both Bach and Handel made their marks composing the great contrapuntal, polyphonic (many voiced) works of that era; both grew overweight; both wore heavy wigs; both went blind at around the same stage of life – and both had the same British surgeon who made matters worse with his failed operations on their cataracts.

They knew of each other, knew each other's music although they never actually met in person, and they were both much admired. The chief difference between them was that Bach had twenty children and Handel had none. Also, Handel composed a number of operas and Bach composed none.

The year of their birth (1685) was a good one for composers. It was also the year the Italian composer Domenico Scarlatti was born. It is easy to confuse the Scarlattis – the father, Alessandro Scarlatti, was an important composer of Italian opera; the son composed some operas, but his principal writing, for which he is known, was for the harpsichord.

Unlike the other two born in that year, Handel did not come from a family of musicians. In fact, Handel's father expressly forbade his son to follow a musical career. In his opinion, it was no profession for a nice German boy. His father insisted that he make something of himself and study law. Even today this is good advice for a young man who thinks he is going to make a living in music.

The prohibition was meant very seriously, which is the reason for the famous drawing of the child Handel caught red-handed practicing the clavier in the dead of night. The picture shows the parents in their night clothes coming into the dark room holding a lantern aloft, surprising the child at the keyboard. He had muffled the sound of the instrument and was playing in the dark to avoid calling attention to the disobeying of his father's edict. This is reminiscent of what Bach did when he studied the Vivaldi forbidden by his brother.

Young George was a dutiful son and despite the fact that his father died he kept his word to him and went to law school. He had no intention of continuing on in law, however. He said goodbye to it as soon as he had passed the exams.

He went to Hamburg and took a job as violinist in the orchestra of the Hamburg Opera.

The director was a prominent musician of the period named Matheson, who composed operas, conducted the orchestra and directed the singers, and did some singing on stage himself. In one of his operas, Matheson took on the role of a man who is killed at the end of the first act. Having recognized young Handel as a major talent right at the outset, Matheson gave him the assignment of conducting the orchestra while he himself was on stage singing and dying.

Having finished his aria he would go down to the pit to continue conducting. However, one night Handel refused to relinquish his position at the podium and return to his chair in the violin section. He continued to conduct, which enraged Matheson to such a degree that he challenged the usurper to a duel.

The duel did, in fact, take place in the Hamburg Goose Market with seconds present. Handel might have been finished then as he was no swordsman. Fortunately, the tip of Matheson's sword hit a big button on the great coat Handel was wearing, which snapped it off and saved his life. Both duelists were very relieved that the contest ended without tragic results; the friendship was restored and the two men went off to a *rathskeller* to formalize the restoration, celebrating well into the night.

Music history reveals a few other dueling events. The Russian poet and dramatist Alexander Pushkin – the author of the works on which Tchaikovsky's operas *Eugene Onegin* and *The Queen of Spades*, and Rimsky-Korsakov's less known *Mozart and Salieri* – were based, died as the result of a duel, in his case the more usual cause: a dispute over a woman.

To get back to Handel – after the life-saving experience of the coat button, he traveled to Italy to study opera. He found that he had a real aptitude for it and in short order had become recognized as an outstanding exponent of this type of music.

Like Bach, and unlike most of the inhabitants of Europe at that time, Handel was not a bigot, and although a Lutheran, while in Rome he went to work for Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, the very musical vice chancellor to the Pope.

For Ottoboni, Handel composed various works for the Catholic liturgy including Vespers and an oratorio based on the Resurrection. This was performed with great *éclat*.

But it was his operas that created his reputation; he had a long series of smash hits, thus bringing himself to the attention of the Elector of Hanover back in Germany, who offered him the position of Royal Kapelmeister.

Handel very sensibly felt he couldn't refuse this offer and he was soon composing Italian operas and directing their performances at the Court in Hanover. However, an envoy came to him from London with an offer to spend a year in the English capital putting on his own operas.

At first the Prince Elector was pleased with this, boasting that people in other countries knew where to go when seeking talent at a brilliant court, but after a second season in London Handel just didn't come back.

Handel might have got away with this, only shortly afterwards the English, dissatisfied with the Stuarts, brought the Elector of Hanover in as King of England: he became 'George I'.

Handel may have felt somewhat apprehensive when he realized that the man scheduled to sit upon the British throne was none other than his old employer.

The following story is apocryphal, but everybody tells it, so we have to repeat it anyway. Here it is:

Handel now felt that he was in a delicate predicament, having reneged on his contract with George, but he was a resourceful man and prepared himself for the king's arrival. This would be by water, as the river Thames was the great highway of London in those days, the streets being narrow and full of mud.

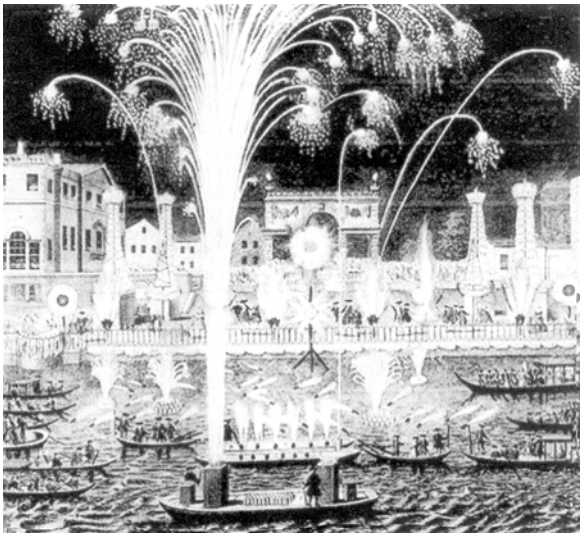
His plan worked and as the teams of oarsmen brought the royal barge up the river, another barge approached it, gaily decorated and filled with musicians playing a lively suite of dances, which Handel had composed specially for the occasion.

This is the famous '*Water Music*' that is still very popular today. Naturally, the king overlooked Handel's insubordination, and his career continued in England with great success.

Well, that's the story, but of course in reality the reconciliation between the new King and his disloyal subject had already taken place before the work was composed.

Furthermore, it was composed as a commission from the King.

When it was played, the King liked it so much he had it repeated. They say truth is stranger than fiction, but in this case the fiction is more fun.



The Royal Water Music was followed a few years later by *The Royal Fireworks Music*. This was composed to celebrate a military victory by the succeeding king, George II – the last British monarch to actually take the field in military engagements.

To celebrate the victory, an outdoors concert was planned in Green Park. A temporary Pantheon was set up there with all manner of plaster sculptures of Roman Gods among which British commanders were placed.

Italian fireworks specialists were imported to put on a spectacular display and Handel was commissioned to compose music to accompany all this.

One should always take into account the unpredictable and generally rotten weather when planning an outdoor event in London – or in any part of the British Isles, actually. Both the king and Handel were German, so they may not have realized this.

As any Englishman would have expected, the weather was so bad on the night of the celebration that it became a disaster. The rain came down in torrents and the fireworks wouldn't go off. In a desperate attempt to get things moving, the imported specialists started a fire that soon burned down the whole pantheon.

A panic began and many people were trampled, some seriously. But Handel kept the music going and was undoubtedly in large measure responsible for calming the crowd.

They had a thorough soaking, but at least it was a soaking with rainwater, not with blood.

Another good Handel anecdote to know was that he was in serious financial trouble shortly after this because the British had gradually developed a contempt for Italian opera. It must have finally come through to them that it was 'foreign' – not something that the British like at all.

Out went the Italian Opera, with their Greek gods and Roman warriors, and in came the work of John Gay and Johann Pepusch based on the type of highwaymen and ruffians you might meet any day you took a walk in 18th century London – or even today, come to think of it.

In this kind of thing you knew what was being said – as they were in English – and they didn't sing all the time. This was *The Beggars' Opera*.

However, apart from this, the British had a very hard time coming up with any composers for so long that Handel remained the number one favourite in England for many generations, and even then he was only replaced in their affection by another composer from Germany, Felix Mendelssohn – which we will explain later.

One other anecdote is worth knowing because it shows you know all about Handel: he was due to produce a new work in Dublin; it turned out to be one that would mark our Christmas season for the next three hundred years: *The Messiah*.

The effectiveness of this music is illustrated in a variety of incidents during its premiere:

When the aria *He was despised* was being sung, a certain Reverend Dr. Delaney, the arbiter of strict morals in the city, was so moved that he sprung to his feet and called out, “For this let all thy sins be forgiven thee.”

This was addressed to the singer who was known to have taken the part of Polly Peachum in *The Beggars’Opera*, and was therefore not a respectable woman.

At the London performance, George II was in the royal box. He was so moved by the *Hallelujah Chorus* that he leaped to his feet and remained standing (when the King stands, all his loyal subjects stand).

Thus the entire audience stood up and another grand British tradition was born. It is now traditional to do so; if you leap to your feet as the first notes of the chorus sound it will show you know what is going on.

This work that began life in Dublin’s Music Hall on Fish Street is today given more often and in more places than any other major piece of music.

Handel had learned his lesson. From that point on, he set his music to English texts and to stories that were familiar to his listeners. All of this shows that Handel was a shrewd politician.

Commissioned to write a work celebrating the infamous battle of Collodon, when the forces of George II crushed the heroic resistance of the Scots to English rule, he wisely set music to quite a different conflict: that of the struggle of The Maccabees against the Syrians and the Greeks.

Besides, for all he knew, the Stuarts might return to the English throne and he had to be careful. He didn't want to be caught out twice in that kind of a mix-up. Further, the Jews, expelled from England centuries earlier, had returned. Former Sephardi Dutch merchants, they were already a relatively affluent group in London, and when they heard there was a hero from the Hebrew Testament on the stage, they flocked to the theater. The performances were sold out.

Handel subsequently composed a whole series of oratorios featuring Old Testament characters: *Saul*, *Esther*, *Samson*, *Joshua*, *Solomon*, *Judith*, *Deborah*, *Israel in Egypt*, and many more. Oratorio thenceforth became the quintessential English musical form, lending itself perfectly to the uses of amateur choral societies and festivals up and down the country.

Handel was buried in Westminster Abbey beside some of Britain's most illustrious literary and musical figures. Over his tomb are emblazoned words taken from the text of *The Messiah* –

"I know that my Redeemer liveth."

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN
(1732 – 1809)

Haydn is the next great composer to know about. There are no very amusing stories about this very nice man, so scholars have tried to come up with *something* to talk about. The best they could come up with was to say that his forebears, coming from a region populated by Croatians and Gypsies as well as Austrians and Germans, may have been Croatian, or 'Bohemian', as they used to say for Czech, but this has been disproven.

So there's really nothing much to say about this professional and unassuming man – except that he invented the Symphony, which is quite enough in itself.

Haydn was born in 1732, one of the twelve children of a wheelwright in Rohrau, near the Austrian border with Hungary. He had an uncle, however, who had become a singer/musician and who thought it would be helpful if he found a profession for one of the children.

When the uncle came for a visit, he decided that little Joseph was the one who had the most promise to be formed into a musician – which was what the uncle knew how to do. So, when Joseph was still a very little boy he went to live with his uncle, who trained his voice and his ear.

The boy did so well that he took him to Vienna where little Franz Josef was accepted into what we call the Vienna Boys Choir today. Here he was given an academic as well as a musical education.

Franz Josef was mischievous – he thought it was funny to snip off the queue of hair hanging down from the black bow of the boy in front of him. In those days young men tied their hair back in that style. Unfortunately, this was at the time when his voice beginning to change, and, as his usefulness to the choir was coming to an end, he was expelled out into Vienna with nothing to live on – rather than being kept on as a teacher.

At this point Haydn did what all musicians do: he went to live with friends.

Fortunately, however, he was also found a job as summer musician to a nobleman named Count Morzin. This was such a success that the Count introduced him to his friend Prince Esterházy and Haydn spent the rest of his professional life in the employ of this princely family.

Now this is important to know as a conversational know-it-all in music: up until quite recently it has been fashionable to sneer at the fact that Haydn and musicians of his and prior generations worked for a patron, rather than starving in a garret as an independent professional.

No one sneers now.

Musicians today would sell their souls for such a patron and try like anything to find a corporation or a philanthropic organization that will act as one, rather than try to deal with mercenary and perverse managers and agents, or teach snotty children who won't practice.

There were no interesting scandals in Haydn's life. The girl he liked decided to go into a convent and he made the mistake of marrying her sister. The marriage was a failure and he did not even have the satisfaction of children. This is an inconvenience for those who want to tell anecdotes, and it has always been a frustration to writers.

The very pessimistic philosopher Friedrich Nietzche said, "So far as genius can exist in a man who is merely virtuous, Haydn had it."

Despite this, we owe him an immense debt. The Esterházy family gave him every resource he needed to compose and, as we said earlier, we owe to Haydn the development of the sonata-form system that he evolved for symphonies, concertos, string quartets and sonatas etc. This is why he is known as "Papa" Haydn. All subsequent composers owe him this debt.

Sadly for Haydn, however, his immediate successors, Mozart and Beethoven, were able to compose even more memorable music than he while using his system, which doesn't seem fair.

While acting as court composer to Prince Esterházy, Haydn lived in the rural setting of the prince's country estates and therefore spent most of his professional life away from Vienna. First there was Eisenstadt – not very far from Vienna, but far enough – and later the still more rustic Esterház. In the last years of his life he mused that since he lived so far removed from where the action was there were no influences upon him; he didn't hear other people's music and therefore had nothing to remember – or filch. Of course, one must remember, too, that it was a time when there was neither radio nor recordings.

"Perforce, I had to be original," he said.

Towards the end of his career Haydn made two trips to London, where he was an enormous success. There he was put on by Johann Peter Salomon, the very first true 'music manager' or 'impresario' (in England they still like to call managers by the old-fashioned term 'impresario').

Now this is someone who makes a fortune presenting musicians who make peanuts.

Salomon introduced Haydn with several new symphonies (the so-called '*London*' *Symphonies*) in an organized series of concerts. These were, in fact, the first such "subscription" concerts ever given in any city – the sort of presentation we take for granted today.

He was also awarded an honorary degree from Oxford University. He might have stayed, but chose to return to the Esterházys. The fact that he couldn't speak any English may have had something to do with this.

Haydn lived a long life by the standards of those days, dying at age seventy-seven in 1809.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(1756 – 91)

It is absolutely essential to know some stories about Mozart, as he is the most frequently performed classical composer in the world today.

The first fact to know might be that he always chose to sign himself by that rather annoying middle name, "Amadeus." This could be because "Wolfgang" didn't sound very aesthetic, and the German form of Amadeus – "Gottlieb" – wasn't much better.

This may or may not tell us something about him.

Mark well: Mozart has the advantage of being a composer it is safe to admit to liking. In fact, it is *essential* to say you love Mozart, however you may actually feel about hearing his works played almost to the exclusion of all else. For some reason – this marks you as an expert.

Modern composers might take note of the fact that Mozart's on-going popularity is due to the charm of his music, the cleverness and sweetness of his melodies and the subtle intelligence of his harmonies and structures; this may account for his music still being more popular than theirs.

Also, one reason he is a favorite with musical specialists may be that it gives them a soothing rest from the other music they are supposed to consider interesting.

In a magazine article about the Glyndebourne Festival in England, John Christie, the owner of the famous country opera house – where cows are very much in the picture – said, "When Stravinsky is being played, the cows move away. When it is Mozart they always come closer."

Of all the things to know about Mozart, the first is, of course, that he was the most astonishing child prodigy on record and unlike many of these children, did not fizzle out, but went on to become a composer of truly amazingly beautiful music as an adult.

A word here about musical children:

One hears many exclaim with wonder when they hear that a musician could play very young, say four or five years old. But this is the *rule*, not the exception, and should not surprise anyone.

The number of outstanding musicians who came to music in a serious way in their teens or early twenties are extremely few and far between.

In fact, there are only four who come readily to mind; we might as well name them here: Berlioz, Schumann and Tchaikovsky – who were not pianists – and Ignace Paderewski, who became one. These are very much the exceptions to the rule.

Let it be understood: it is *children* who can do this. Adults are only coasting on co-ordinations learnt or developed as children under the age of ten – co-ordinations of ear, hand and eye that cannot be learnt later.

Even with this in mind, Mozart was truly extraordinary.

For instance, it was told by his father, Leopold Mozart, an expert violinist and teacher, that he came home one evening to find his four year old son bent over some music paper filled with notes, ink blots, and areas made damp by tears. The child told his father as he leaned down to see what he was up to, that he was composing a concerto, and indeed, he was.

The father picked up the top sheet and saw to his amazement that not only was his tiny offspring creating a concerto but that it seemed to be so difficult a work that few could play it. Leopold was overcome by emotion over this miracle and shed tears.

Although this may be a true story, one must bear in mind that Leopold Mozart was an expert at public relations and promotion and subsequently was able to organize a tour involving his little son and daughter in performances before many of the crowned heads of Europe.

The tour was carried out in the age-old show business tradition: Leopold was skillful in the use of the promotional activity known as ‘ballyhoo’, and each time the touring family arrived in a city he would print and distribute announcements that would have impressed P. T. Barnum.

It was promised that the two children would play difficult music together; that the boy would improvise, play blindfold, play with his back to the piano; and identify immediately any note, whether played on a musical instrument or struck on a goblet or a pot from the kitchen (the little boy could actually do all this).

At a performance for Austria's Empress Maria Theresa in Vienna's Schönbrunn Palace, young Wolfie played a work by the composer Wagenseil, who was present. At the boy's request, this composer turned the pages of his music, and the sight-reading and playing of difficult passages were so impressive that the man was moved to tears (You will note that these Austrians all cried a lot).

The Empress was thrilled by the little fellow's feats of ear, memory and dexterity and took him on her lap, kissed him affectionately, and ordered gifts brought in. The little fellow, already a fop, was particularly overjoyed with some glittering clothes from the imperial wardrobe.

He showed his pleasure by leaping off the empress's lap and running exuberantly all around the room. The floors at Schönbrunn are made of polished marble and sure enough, the celebratory gamboling came to an abrupt end when Mozart slipped, skidded, and crashed down on the floor. He fell hard and the tears began to gush, but the Maria Teresa's daughter, a young princess a year older than the boy wonder, rushed to comfort him.

She helped him to his feet, dried his tears with her kerchief, and said something soothing. He thanked her gravely, saying: "You are very kind. When I grow up I will marry you."

The young princess was Marie Antoinette, later the ill-fated Queen of France. Everyone laughed, but it might have actually been a better fate for Marie Antoinette.

The Mozart family continued on their tour and had great success in France when they performed at Versailles.

Again, everyone was stunned by the abilities displayed by the Mozart children. They were particularly taken by little Wolferl and vied with each other in showering him with affection.

Only one person remained coldly aloof: King Louis XV's mistress, Madame de Pompadour, who turned away disdainfully when the lad approached her for what he was sure would be a show of affection.

"Who is this woman who will not kiss me?" he wanted to know. "Even the Empress kisses me," he added proudly.

La Pompadour, it would seem, found him a spoiled brat, and there's a good chance that he was.

When the touring Mozarts reached London, George III was king and his Kapellmeister was Johann Christian Bach, youngest son of Johann Sebastian, who, as we saw earlier, was known as the 'London Bach'. He and young Wolfgang developed a close friendship and the admiration was mutual. Johann Christian was a great influence upon Mozart's compositional style, as we explained earlier.

Before leaving Paris, the boy had published four violin sonatas, and had them with him when he reached the British capital. Johann Christian was impressed by the well-crafted works and by the first Mozart symphonies.

He arranged to have the lad give several concerts at London's Vauxhall Gardens. These were very successful and usually consisted exclusively of music composed by the young lad, who was just reaching his tenth birthday.

A little over a year later, they returned to Vienna. This time it was not the heady, triumphal reception of the prior visit. The city was in mourning over the death of a member of the imperial family from smallpox, a young princess who was carried off just as she was about to be married. Smallpox hit Mozart himself and, although he recovered, he was laid low for a time.

Despite this, the Emperor commissioned an opera – the result was *La Finta Semplice,* brought to life with impressive rapidity. Performers at the Imperial Opera, however, resented being asked to sing in an opera composed by a child and saw to it that the work was kept off the stage.

That was also the fate of a charming little comic opera called *Bastien et Bastienne*. The Imperial Opera people made sure it wasn't done at the opera house. It was performed, nevertheless, but in another hall.

The patron in that instance was Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer, who had a very lucrative medical practice in Vienna and was established in a splendid palace. The opera was presented there, was very well received and has been performed regularly ever since. You will note that we get the word '*mesmerize*' from this man as he healed his patients by hypnosis; he also coined the term personal 'magnetism'.

The success of Mesmer's treatments were explained by him as his ability to pass his 'animal magnetism' into the body of his patients, magnetism being the key element.

Mozart paid his debt to this man many years later in his opera *Cosi Fan Tutte*, in which the maid, Despina, who wears several disguises during the course of the piece, makes an entrance as a doctor.

To make sure everyone knows exactly which doctor, the directions in the libretto require that she wear a large magnet. This is an excellent in-joke for the expert to know.

By the time Mozart was thirteen, he was capable of turning out operas of top quality. Papa Leopold thus decided to take him to the homeland of opera, Italy. The time spent there was filled with noteworthy feats, such as the one in the city of Bologna, where he responded to a challenge involving the composition on the spot of some contrapuntal music. He amazed his examiners by completing the test in record-breaking time.

In Milan, he was commissioned to compose a new opera, and in short order his *Mitridate, Re di Ponto* was ready for presentation. Superstitious Neopolitans were certain that his superhuman abilities were the result of magic, suspecting the source to be a ring he wore on a finger.

His most stunning achievement took place in Rome during Holy Week, 1769. At the beginning of the week, on the day after Palm Sunday, the Mozarts attended a musical performance in the Vatican's Sistine Chapel. The work being performed was Gregorio Allegri's *Miserere*.

A papal decree forbade this removal of this music from the chapel or its performance elsewhere. The penalty was excommunication, and the Mozarts, like most Austrians, were Catholics.

Despite the prohibition and possible punishment, Leopold Mozart was delighted to inform his wife that their son had taken the music with him back to their lodgings – in his head, you understand – and quickly put down the entire work with pen and ink on ruled paper.

Later in the week, on Good Friday, the *Miserere* was repeated and the Mozarts returned to hear it again. Arriving with the score inside his three-cornered hat, he surreptitiously slipped the papers out and compared what he had put down with the music being played. Only three corrections were needed and carried out as soon as they were back in their rooms.

News of this phenomenal feat soon began making the rounds in Rome and the word was that the Mozarts would be excommunicated. Indeed, a summons soon arrived to appear before the Pope and to bring along the boy's written score of the work. When father and son arrived, they were ushered into the Pope's presence where they found three Vatican music experts who proceeded to examine what the thirteen year-old had recorded.

There was tension in the air before the verdict, which was given very shortly. The verdict was that the youngster had captured the music 100%. He hadn't missed a single note. The work, we must realize, was no simple Protestant hymn: the *Miserere* is most intricate contrapuntal music with eight interweaving lines.

Then came the judgment. Far from being excommunicated, the boy was honored with the Papal Order of The Golden Spur.

Another good story to know is the following:

When Mozart was older and had settled in Vienna, he impressed everyone with his brilliant performances at the keyboard. Then suddenly the new European sensation of the keyboard, Muzio Clementi, arrived in Vienna to give some concerts.

The Emperor, Joseph II, came up with the idea of staging a contest between Mozart and the Italian pianist and composer Clementi, renowned for his dazzling dexterity (Clementi and Mozart are rivals for the title of first ever composer for the new instrument, the 'piano' – then called 'fortepiano' – this being a huge improvement on the harpsichord).

The competition took place and Mozart was declared the winner. Clementi, composer of such standard piano exercise sets as *Gradus ad Parnassum,* and many little sonatinas and sonatas, was a gracious loser and congratulated his rival on his victory.

Mozart had a host of admirable qualities but graciousness and diplomacy were not among them. His post victory comments were that his opponent was "a charlatan, like all Italians."

Clementi later moved to England and became a manufacturer of pianos. This has to be explained:

Something to know about Clementi:

London was becoming increasingly affluent, which made it attractive to musicians. Clementi knew England and decided to try his fortune there, where he already had a friend and patron, but on his arrival he found that the English understanding of music and musicians was nothing like that on the Continent.

In London, rather than being treated as a celebrity and a distinguished artist, he was thought of as a professional on the level with tradesmen and was expected to enter the house by the servant's entrance.

This situation inspired him to abandon piano playing and go into business manufacturing pianos and publishing music, which was considered more socially acceptable, even though the English upper classes looked down their noses at "Trade".

Even Trade, it seems, was preferable to being a musician.

Clementi did extremely well with his pianos and married a wealthy widow – or two – and ended his days as a country gentleman, respected in 'society', eventually being buried in Westminster Abbey!

However, missing music, he had a pavilion built in the garden, where he could go and play as much as he wished. His young colleague who ran the Clementi piano company with him was called Collard, and as Clementi had no heir, Collard inherited the business, which was known for many years as 'Collard and Collard'.

Clementi also employed the young Irish pianist / composer John Field, who toured Europe and Russia with him as salesman and demonstrator of his pianos. They did particularly well in St. Petersburg, and Field decided to remain there, eventually becoming 'Court Pianist'.

Field is also known as having developed the musical form known as the *Nocturne*. Sadly for Field, Chopin appropriated the form with such genius that few remember that it was Field's idea.

Mozart, continued:

As a young adult Mozart continued to compose operas, three of which were collaborations with an extraordinary librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte.

Now this man was a defrocked priest who had had to leave Italy in a hurry because of unpriestly behavior. He found refuge in the Emperor's court in Vienna, where he was much sought after by the group of composers there.

The three operas he did with Mozart are the three that the expert must seem the most knowledgeable about: *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Cosi Fan Tutte*. Do not, under any circumstances, ever admit to *not* being enamoured of these three works.

Because the reasons for his defrocking persisted after his flight from Italy, da Ponte became friendly with none other than Giacomo Casanova. In fact, to learn more about what Don Giovanni's comportment should be in certain situations, he brought in Casanova as an expert consultant on matters of illicit love-making and seduction techniques. ('Don Giovanni', we must recall, is Italian for the fabled Spanish womanizer, Don Juan.)

Sadly, one doesn't learn much about these techniques watching the opera.

Da Ponte married later on, having fallen madly in love with a young lady who refused to grant her favours without the benefit of clergy. Obviously, this was difficult to arrange, as da Ponte was himself clergy in an outcast state.

However, the young woman was Jewish, and as his own background was originally Jewish, he decided to return to it.

His family had converted to Catholicism when he was a youngster, but having reverted to Judaism he was able to go into a marriage service with the traditional Hebrew rituals: *chupa,* broken wine glass**,** and the rest.

Da Ponte felt such embarrassment over abandoning all the free love and libertinism that he had once advocated and practiced, he attempted to conceal his new respectable marital status from his old comrade-in-arms Casanova.

He took his bride to England, where he ran into such financial trouble that Debtor's Prison loomed as too probable an outcome.

They avoided this by managing to make their way to the New World where they settled for a while in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and for a time he also operated a distillery in backwoods Pennsylvania.

He made his mark in New York City by starting the Italian literature section of the library at Columbia College (later Columbia University) and also at the New York Public Library, and finally of the Italian department of the newly founded New York University.

We are not making this up.

Three decades after Mozart's death there was an amusing last chapter in da Ponte's long life: the first opera company to come from Europe for a season in New York City took place in a theater on Lower Broadway.

Under the leadership of the celebrated Spanish tenor Manuel Garcia, the freshly arrived Italian opera company's first offering was *The Barber of Seville*. This was followed the next night by Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. (opera *cognoscenti* will know that these two operas are twinned).

Imagine Garcia's surprise when an old man walked into the theater during a rehearsal of the latter work and announced that he had written it.

"What do you mean?" Garcia asked. "You're not Mozart!"

"He set it to my words."

Mozart's last opera was *The Magic Flute* – an opera sung in German. Knowing this shows that you are knowledgeable about opera – it is one of those much loved and often repeated facts that experts like.

Mozart's only other opera in German was *The Abduction from the Seraglio* – in German this is '*Die Entführung aus dem serail*', which explains why composers preferred Italian.

The commission for *The Magic Flute* came from the singer/impresario Emanuel Schikaneder, whom we met earlier in the chapter on critics.

This man could not afford the Imperial Opera House, only a small popular theater in what was then a suburb of Vienna. The audience thus consisted of common folk rather than aristocrats, and the presentations staged there reflected popular taste. Mozart was persuaded by Schikaneder to try this new approach to his musical stage works and accepted the commission.

The Emperor thought this all very odd, and that using German for opera was somehow incorrect, but is best remembered for having told Mozart that his music had "Too many notes!"

Mozart's response was that there were just as many notes as were needed – no more, no less. Courtiers present were shocked by this frank retort.

The Magic Flute was a great success and remains one of the most popular operas in the repertoire; it set a style for musical theatre somewhat in the manner of *The Beggar's Opera* that we mentioned earlier.

However, it deeply offended Mozart's best supporters as it exposed and ridiculed the secret goings on of the Masonic Order, members of which had lent him money.

Mozart never had any tact.

Among the most frequently played works by Mozart are his piano concertos, of which he composed twenty-seven. He composed them at a time when he was short of money – which was most of the time, as he and his wife had extravagant tastes, to say nothing of liking to gamble. He self-produced these concerts, banking on his fame as a keyboard virtuoso.

Although this was the sad result of trying to make a living without a patron, we are beneficiaries of Mozart's financial problems, as these are among his most beautiful works and those most easily programmed.

Now we come to all the stories about Mozart's death.

These are: first, that he died a pauper; second, that Antionio Salieri poisoned him; third, that Death itself came and commissioned the *Requiem Mass*, and fourth, that he was thrown into a pauper's grave.

None of these are true.

Firstly, Mozart was perennially short of money, as we mentioned earlier; he was extravagant, as was his wife, Constanze, who, like Mozart, enjoyed gambling.

Secondly, Salieri did not hurt him; he was an important and influential man in Vienna, teaching everyone from Mozart's own sons, to Beethoven, Schubert and young Liszt.

Salieri himself started this unfortunate story concerning Mozart's death as he was a really nice man and he felt that had he been more helpful to Mozart (who was annoying and difficult to help) the great genius may have lived longer.

Rumors of Salieri's supposed act of homicide have persisted because of this and the fact that the 18th century medical diagnosis was pathetic.

Alexander Pushkin, the Russian poet and dramatist, wrote a one-act poetic drama that ends with Salieri slipping poison into Mozart's wine glass. Rimsky-Korsakov converted this into an opera entitled *Mozart and Salieri*, as we mentioned in an earlier chapter. And since then we have had Peter Schaffer's versions, both play and movie.

Thirdly, Mozart was superstitious and because the commission for the *Requiem* was anonymous, he thought perhaps an angel of death had come to warn him that he wouldn't live much longer. Over a hundred theories have been suggested for his premature death including a rare kidney disease; the most recent is an acute attack of rheumatic fever.

The mysterious commission, was, in fact, brought by a man who appeared at his door giving Mozart a sum of money, saying that his master, name withheld, wanted a Requiem Mass in memory of his recently deceased wife. The remaining payment of an equal sum would be given to the composer when the work was finished.

This didn't happen, of course, because Mozart died before it was finished. The Requiem was finished by his student, Franz Xaver Süssmayer, a twenty-five year-old Austrian opera composer.

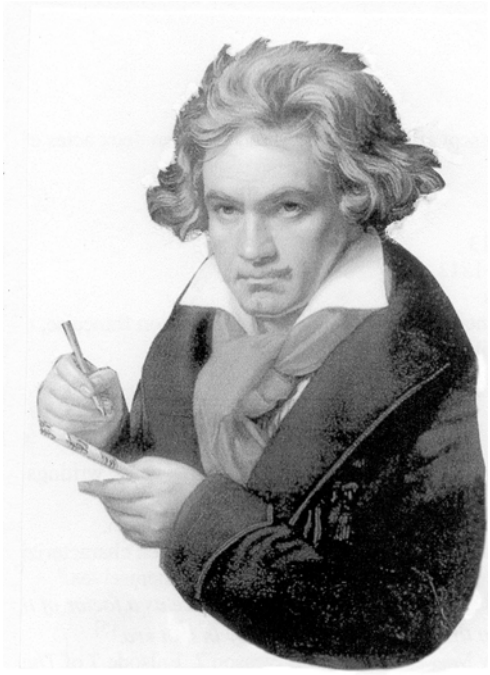
The man of mystery who had paid to have the work done was a character called Count von Walsegg who had planned to pass the work off as his own – it was something he had done before.

Lastly, Mozart was not thrown into a 'pauper's grave'; rather, at that time there had been a general order in Vienna that all dead were to be buried in common unmarked graves. This unpleasant decree was later revoked.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770 – 1827)

The most common fact usually told of Beethoven is that he was deaf. He is usually depicted with wild hair. It is also often told how he had a secret love to whom he wrote a long letter of renunciation, known as the letter to the "Immortal Beloved". It is also generally said that no one knows who she was.



Most of this is true, but not all of it.

Beethoven is usually thought of as German or Austrian, which has no truth – and you can often make quite as stir by pointing this out, as it is a common misconception that all Classical composers were German.

Because of this misunderstanding his name is often given wrongly as "von" Beethoven when in fact it's Flemish and written "van" Beethoven.

Also, Beethoven's father is usually described as being a drunk, which is a little unfair. He only started to drink when his wife died and he was overwhelmed.

This man was a relatively obscure musician in the pay of the Archbishop-Elector of Cologne. He was knowledgeable concerning the world of music, and was aware, as was everyone, of the sensational career of Mozart, once a stupendous child prodigy, now a well-known composer in Vienna.

He and his wife had four children – our Beethoven was the second, and named Ludwig, the name by which an earlier child, who had not survived, was also called.

As Beethoven *père* knew all about Mozart, he reasoned that he, too, had a talented son, and he, too, could promote him as a boy prodigy. He gave young Ludwig an exhausting schedule of keyboard practice and it has been said that he was often pulled out of bed late at night and dragged half asleep to the piano, made to practice for hours and severely punished for bad playing.

When he was finally judged ready, some time had gone by and his father altered his birth date to strengthen the precocity appeal that added to the confusion of birth dates. To the end of his life, Beethoven was never quite sure of his correct age. So you could say he was not sure about when he was born, and, with the recycling of his name, who he was born.

Finally, the hoped-for tour never amounted to much and the boy didn't get to play for the crowned heads of Europe.

Beethoven grew up at a time marked by the French Revolution and he readily took up the principles of liberty, fraternity and equality on which it claimed to be based and applied them to his own life.

He also applied them to his career and adopted a new style of being an independent musician, one who would make his own way without serving a wealthy patron.

Although this sounds all very well, it meant that he was always horribly short of money and that his aristocratic friends had to go to a great deal of trouble getting money to him tactfully, without ruffling his independent spirit, which they understood very well.

His remarkable talent had been recognized early on by some young, cultivated aristocrats who remained his friends and supporters throughout his lifetime, no matter how bad his manners became. The most active of these was Count Waldstein, to whom the *Waldstein Sonata* was dedicated.

However, Beethoven was conflicted about his democratic principles, because although he didn't want to bow or take his hat off to anyone, he made sure that everyone knew that his name was *van* Beethoven, as the "van" seemed to indicate some kind of aristocratic origin, and he took full advantage of this.

Further, as a young man he was very good looking in a rugged sort of way, with his hair cut in the accepted style of the day. However, like many young people, he often confused having an independent spirit with being very rude. On one occasion, a group led by Count Waldstein was listening to him play, but apparently they weren't listening attentively enough and began talking among themselves. Beethoven slammed the lid down on the keyboard, turned and exclaimed something like "I won't play before such swine!," and stormed out of the room.

There were many such instances; another took place in the palace of Prince Lichnowsky, one of his most important benefactors, in whose home many of his works were first performed. Walking past a mirror, Beethoven spat at it, thinking it was an open window.

Beethoven was able to get away with all this because he was lovable and his music was awe-inspiring.

Count von Waldstein, eager to help launch Beethoven's career not only bought him his first grand piano but arranged for his trip from Bonn to Vienna, where he hoped Beethoven could study with Mozart.

By that time the celebrated boy wonder had become a thirty-one year-old man and had only four years to live; Beethoven was seventeen.

However, the trip to Vienna to see Mozart was far from a success. Mozart had a taste for fashionable dress and was unimpressed by the young Flemish lout who came to visit him. He was untidy and inelegant.

Nonetheless he was invited in and Mozart asked him to play. Beethoven played well but after a few minutes he became aware that Mozart's mind was elsewhere.

At that point, so the story goes, Beethoven began to improvise on a simple theme and developed it into a series of intricate, dazzling arrangements.

Beethoven has been called the greatest improviser of all time.

Mozart was duly impressed and said that he was sure that Beethoven "would make a noise in the world."

Later, Beethoven's pupil, Carl Czerny – the one who composed all those exercise books young piano students are assigned but never play – wrote that Beethoven improvised in a way one couldn't believe unless one was there. He said that he saw grown men cry over the superhuman quality of the extemporaneous invention.

That was Beethoven's last encounter with Mozart, however. His mother became very ill and he rushed back to their home in Bonn. He didn't get back to Vienna for five years – 1792 – by which time Mozart had died.

Another anecdote that is repeated in all programme notes tells how on his return to Vienna after Mozart's death, Beethoven turned to Joseph Haydn as a teacher of harmony and counterpoint, but that they didn't get along. This is largely what we call today an "urban myth". It is true, however, that Haydn was essentially an 18th century personality, with all the refinements and formality that entailed, while Beethoven was to become a symbol of the 19th century with its freer, more robust, style.

The story goes that Haydn thought Beethoven crude and that Beethoven went secretly to have lessons elsewhere. It is true that Beethoven felt the need to get help from others in his basic training as Haydn was bored with basics, but also this was the time Haydn was away a lot in London, being a celebrity.

Among those he went to for help was the ubiquitous Antonio Salieri. In fact, however, Beethoven's early symphonies, piano sonatas, and chamber music sound very Haydnesque, and his first piano sonatas are inscribed as "*Dedicated to his teacher, Franz Joseph Haydn*."

And it may actually be true that when Beethoven came to visit Haydn during his final illness and offered to play for him, Haydn accepted, but asked him not to play anything he had written himself.

As explained earlier, despite the bad reputation that has been given him by writers looking for a drama, Salieri was, in fact, an important and respected member of the musical establishment and many eminent composers went to him to learn. Apart from Beethoven, notable students included Franz Schubert, and at the end of his long life, the boy Franz Liszt. There were also Mozart's sons sons, as we explained in the Mozart chapter, and many others.

It was in 1802, at the age of thirty-two, after having established a reputation in Vienna, that Beethoven learned that he was becoming deaf. He was given suggestions by his doctor for some therapeutic treatment that mainly involved giving his ears a rest from the big city noise and hubbub of Vienna.

We now come to the famous *Heiligenstadt Testament*, which one must know about to show one has understood Beethoven. Beethoven went into the country, making a short stay in the rustic village of Heiligenstadt, at that time a quiet spot although now it has become a part of greater Vienna.

While there, in the depths of depression, he wrote what has come to be known as *The Heiligenstadt Testament*. It reads like a suicide note intended for his brothers. He thought better of it, fortunately, and either he never sent it or he kept a copy, as it was found later among his papers. (In those days, people copied their letters out in a "fair hand" and it is hard to know whether letters were sent or not; in any case we can read it today.)

In this letter we see his distress over the one affliction a composer would most dread: loss of his hearing.

"*O ye men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn, or misanthropic, how greatly do you wrong me*. *You do not know the secret cause... For me there can be no recreation in the society of my fellows, refined intercourse, mutual exchange of thought... I must live like an exile*," he wrote.

But, oddly enough, his misfortune did not dim the robust and rather clumsy sense of humour that we hear throughout his *oeuvre*. The work he produced in 1802, the year he learned his fate and the hopelessness of ever restoring his hearing, was his *Second Symphony*, which is full of his rather galumphing high spirits. Beethoven is certainly one of the great characters of history.

Here is an important fact to know. Programme listings are always referring to 'Scherzos'. What is this? Musical experts love to talk about *Scherzos* – or '*Scherzi*', even better. So you have to know the following:

Scherzo means 'jest' in Italian, but with a slightly mocking or even grotesque character. Beethoven invented this idea, and it was adopted by succeeding generations of composers, many of whom wrote Scherzos (or Scherzi) as separate pieces.

Beethoven thought of it to replace the stately minuet and trio that had been the standard third movement of Haydn and Mozart symphonies – as well as the third movement of his own *First Symphony* – as he thought the minuet was beginning to sound too dainty for the new generation.

Next, to appear knowledgeable, one must know about the third symphony – the '*Eroica*', or the '*Heroic*'. Beethoven's political views, which, as we have seen, were somewhat contradictory, now received another blow. Believing Napoleon Bonaparte to be the great hero who would spread Republican freedom and equality throughout Europe, he dedicated this work of nobility, courage and victory to him.

What was his disgust when he heard that Bonaparte had declared himself an *Emperor*! Scratching out the dedication he exclaimed in a rage: "He is only an ordinary man after all and he will turn tyrant," which was quite true, after all.

He rededicated the symphony to Prince Lobkowitz, who certainly deserved it – he was an aristocrat with a non-heroic career, but he maintained Beethoven on a retainer as well as offering his palace as a venue for many performances of his works, as did Prince Lichnowsky. Certainly, Beethoven's Republican sympathies were severely stressed by having devoted, kind friends like this.

Beethoven had another reason, later on, to be annoyed with Napoleon. After his defeat following the great retreat from Russia, the European powers came together in the great Congress of Vienna in an effort to put their countries' borders and governments back in order. Beethoven had the greatest moment of his career when he was invited to organize an "academy" – a 'festival', as we would call it today – of his own works and others for the entertainment of these highly important men. These included Tsar Alexander of Russia, the Duke of Wellington, Talleyrand and many others.

During this 'academy', Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* (the one with the "fate" theme) and his *Fourth Piano Concerto* were among the works performed. However, Beethoven was not able to capitalize on this success as half-way through the Congress word came that Napoleon escaped from Elba and was gathering another army. Suddenly all these influential people left overnight to organize a defence against him. As we all know, this all ended with the battle of Waterloo.

However, Waterloo was not the occasion of Beethoven's composing his pot-boiler, *Wellington's Victory,* sometimes called '*Battle Symphony*'. That was composed in a hurry on hearing the news that Napoleon's army in Spain, led by the emperor's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, had been defeated in June, 1813, by the Duke of Wellington.

In this piece Beethoven signaled the entrance of the British troops onto the field by incorporating into the score *God Save The King* and *Rule Britannia*. With these, even the least sophisticated listeners easily get the message.

This served as a precedent for Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, composed much later and which also celebrates a defeat of Napoleon and his armies.

The aforementioned critic Wieck wasn't the only listener who thought Beethoven's symphonies sounded wild and shocking. The French composer Hector Berlioz said that a colleague of his had attended a Beethoven symphony while in Vienna and was walking up the aisle utterly bewildered. In fact, he felt so bewildered that when he went to put his hat on his head, he could not find his head.

Although Beethoven was disappointed by Napoleon, he always admired heroes and also composed works to praise people of courage in their fight for independence. One such was the hero of Goethe's historical drama, *Egmont,* for which Beethoven wrote the incidental music.

The Flemish hero Count Egmont fought valiantly during the 16th century to free the Netherlands from the occupying Spaniards, led by the Duke of Alba. This is a great fact to know and let drop during intermission – people today haven't heard of any of these things.

The great German poet Goethe and Beethoven admired each other. Goethe once told him: "With our artistic achievements we have both achieved immortality. Because of what we have created, we will be remembered forever."

Perhaps that was talking too soon. Today everyone all over the world has heard Beethoven's music all of their lives, whereas few read Goethe – have you?

Goethe made another mistake: he agreed with the composer in his egalitarian attitudes but pleaded with him to do the acts of courtesy that wouldn't necessarily be seen as an abandonment of principle. The empress and her party happened to be approaching from across the plaza at that very moment and Goethe begged him to be reasonable and remove his hat as they passed. Beethoven didn't do it.

We have to say something now about Beethoven's one opera, *Fidelio*. It is not an opera to which you should take the young or the inexperienced opera-goer. It is long and heavy. It is not surprising he only wrote one.

The story of this opera appealed to him as it concerned yet another brave man, Florestan, and his faithful wife Leonora, resisting a powerful tyrant. Beethoven, knew he was having problems with *Fidelio* because he composed three overtures for it, *Leonore Overtures 1*, *2*, and *3*, and only with his fourth effort found what he was willing to use to introduce his opera.

In an effort to make the opera more dramatic, one orchestra conductor decided to have his trumpeter go off stage and play his part on cue from the wings, coming even closer the second time. To that conductor's embarrassment, when the time arrived, the trumpet was silent. It was silent again after the cue for the repetition.

Afterwards, offstage, the furious conductor asked the player why he had failed to come in. The unhappy trumpeter explained that just as he raised the trumpet to blow, a burly stage-hand had rushed over and ripped the trumpet from his hands. "You can't play that here," he hissed. "There's a concert going on!"

(Note: this happens to horn players. On another occasion, the famous horn-player of the London Symphony, Barry Tuckwell, was sent to play an offstage horn-call; the conductor, Andre Previn, asked for him to go further, then further again; finally there came "the most ethereal sound he had ever heard, absolutely perfect for that moment in the score." But when he waited for it to be played again, sound came there none. A couple of minutes later, an out-of-breath Tuckwell came rushing in: the search for the perfect sound had backed him into an open elevator; then someone on a lower level had pressed the button.)

Beethoven, the rebel and nonconformist, was also Catholic and a very moral man. He considered his sister-in-law a loose woman (he referred to her as 'The Queen of the Night', after the character in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*) and after his brother's death took over the upbringing of his nephew. It was an unhappy situation with such a strong uncle and such a weak boy. The young man tried to take his own life when he was sixteen. A great grief for Beethoven.

Beethoven's moral standards were applied to music as well as to life. He believed that the role of art was to uplift and elevate, and if it failed to do this it wasn't really art.

He even expressed himself in the strongest terms on the subject of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* – he was appalled that such magnificent music should be employed to accompany the story of a wretched cad – even though, as we pointed out earlier, none of Casanova's techniques of seduction are actually illustrated in the piece.

We now have to deal with his love life. Among Beethoven's papers was found another of those letters which we assume he sent and kept the copy, or perhaps not – we do not know. This letter was addressed to someone he called his "Immortal Beloved." Out of discretion he did not put a name on the letter and for over a century and a half no one knew who it may have been.

Posterity is so curious about the love life of great men that endless speculation has been spent on this and the names of almost every woman with whom Beethoven ever came in contact have been suggested.

However, today, thanks to some sophisticated detective work with exact dates and poking around among the police records of those staying in hotels at the time, we can be reasonably sure who she was.

The lady was Antonia Brentano, the charming, musical wife of a banker, one of Beethoven's friends and supporters.

It appears that from a social friendship Beethoven and Antonia had fallen in love with each other and due to Beethoven's respect for the fact that she was married to a friend, and she being an honorable woman in any case, they renounced their love and ceased to see each other.

This kind of thing certainly doesn't add up to much for voyeuristic fans and historians. There is nothing salacious or immoral in this, and so the whole business will no doubt cease to excite interest.

We are left with the fact that he seems to have blamed his deafness on some youthful indiscretions for which he thought he might be being punished.

In fact, Beethoven's deafness was due to a condition that can easily be cured today – the bones of the ear growing too close and blocking the channel.

However, the conventional wisdom is that being cut off from the world and the music of other composers was very important to the development of Beethoven's own originality, and had he had normal hearing he might never have become the unique master he was.

This was a little bit like Haydn's being stranded in the countryside out of ear-shot of other people's music.

One writer once questioned whether Beethoven tried to establish a relationship with God (people will say anything – that person had evidently never heard the *Ninth Symphony* or the *Missa Solemnis*).

Other things one should know about Beethoven includes the fact that he moved lodging dozens of times in Vienna and, however annoying and uncomfortable that may have been at the time, it has given tourism a boost as dozens of people today can claim that he lived in their building and charge for showing you his rooms.

Beethoven was consistent in being a rebel and a fighter to the last. It was said that when the many ailments that afflicted him finally got the better of him and he had slipped into coma, a fierce thunderstorm blew in over Vienna.

There was one peal of thunder that was so intense it shook the rafters. It awakened Beethoven, who rose up and, raising his face to the heavens, shook his clenched fist in the direction of the loud blast, then sank back onto his pillow and died. You can believe this if you like.

As for his music: what you really need to know is that his compositions fall into 'Early', 'Middle' and 'Late Beethoven'.

Everyone prefers and plays Middle Beethoven, but they pretend to prefer Late Beethoven.

No-one prefers Early Beethoven over the other two because it just sounds like Haydn or bad Mozart.

This is a very hard thing to deal with, as in preferring Middle Beethoven you condemn yourself to being a non-expert.

But it is probably worth it, because with Middle Beethoven you get the *Appassionata Sonata*, the *Emperor Concerto*, the *Violin Concerto*, and many, many other of those works that fulminate with magnificent, turbulent, up-lifting sounds that only Beethoven could make.

Who wants to be introverted and esoteric, anyway? (Stravinsky limited his musical interests in the last years of his life exclusively to the private study of Beethoven's late string quartets, which he claimed contained everything – but we are not Stravinsky).

But it is better to keep these thoughts to yourself.

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797 – 1828)

It is customary to believe that in going into music the great composers were: a) opposed by their parents, b) unappreciated during their lifetime, and c) they died young. As we have seen, this was far from the rule.

However, ALL these three factors were present in Franz Schubert's life, which is where this legend may have started. His life has given all fathers, all contemporary audiences and all medicine a bad name.

Granted, at least three of those we call "great" composers died young, but hardly any were unappreciated in their time, and for a number of them it was the family business.

Schubert's father had founded a small school as a private business and he expected his sons to work in the school and carry on with it. He had done this during the period of economic depression that followed the Napoleonic wars and he deserves a great deal of credit for finding a way to support his family while the country was in deep recession.

These were difficult times: Franz was born in 1797, just at the end of the French Revolution, and would die in 1828, only fifteen years after Napoleon stopped attacking Austria and was finally sent off to St. Helena.

This is a period that the in-crowd calls the “Biedermeier” Period, because of the furniture. This is definitely a thing to know.

As a child, Schubert, like Joseph Haydn before him, was accepted into the choir of the Royal Chapel, or Vienna Boy’s Choir as we call it today. There he not only received an education, but a thorough grounding in music. When he left the choir, as all boys did when their voices broke, he, like Haydn, also went to live with his friends. This was to avoid having to teach at his father’s school.

Living with your friends is an occupational hazard of being a musician, as noted earlier.

Unlike Haydn, however, he did not grasp at the opportunities offered by working for an aristocratic patron in the summer months. He tried this and didn’t like it – even when the family was (as usual) the Esterházy family. He hated being employed – even such a pleasant job as being a summer teacher at the country estates of the Esterházys.

Even Beethoven would take this kind of summer job, as long as he was treated like a guest. During these periods in a country manor house they could make friends, a few thalers, and have their music heard. But Schubert only did this once.

Here we have to say something about the Esterházy family.

Anyone would think, reading this account, that we were putting in the name Esterházy as a sort of generic term for generous, aristocratic arts patrons. Not at all. Each time it is actually the same Esterházy family, and they will crop up again.

To be fair to Schubert, his head was so full of music that he was an appalling teacher and of little use in his father's school; so he spent his life in coffee houses and other night spots where he ended by contracting syphilis, which was the major reason for his early death, although typhoid seems to have helped.

During his short life he composed over five hundred musical settings of outstanding poems – many by Goethe, who hated the idea.

He also did this with many, many poems by Wilhelm Mueller and Heinrich Heine, but fewer and fewer people have heard of these poems – let alone read them – although those who enjoy these songs have heard of them because of Schubert, of course.

This is important:

To pass as a musical expert you must call these '*lieder*', speak about them in a hushed voice and hide the fact that you don't understand a word of German and have no idea what the singer, however famous, is on about.

You also have to know that Schubert's unique contribution to music was evolving the piano accompaniments of these songs into an equal partnership between pianist and singer in the creation of miniature musical dramas, and it takes an excellent pianist to do it.

Now, if you don't understand German, but you are intrigued by this music, it is strongly advised that you listen to the piano solo arrangements made of a number of these by Franz Liszt.

But this is another of the things to which you should never admit.

Schubert composed twenty piano sonatas, but to sound like an expert you need only mention being an enthusiast of the last three – all of which are very long, very beautiful, and permeated with an aura of death.

He also composed chamber music and nine symphonies – symphonies there was no one to play. A couple of his really great symphonies were given a run-through by his friends with an amateur orchestra, but were otherwise totally unknown until some time after his death. The greatest of all, the ninth, now known as "*The Great*", was discovered by a young Robert Schumann in a musty old library when he was still a student.

Schubert would compose at an amazing rate and play his works for his groups of friends. In historical hindsight, these gatherings have become known as *Schubertiades*.

Other than living off his friends and being a poor syphilitic, Schubert was a lovable, dear, short-sighted fellow who endeared himself to everyone who knew him, and his music is beautiful, timeless and moving, but often suggestive of the presence of death.

He was shy, and although he saw Beethoven occasionally in Vienna, a very small town at that time, he never dared speak to him.

However, he was a pall-bearer in his funeral procession.

The Romantic Era and the Piano

SCHUMANN, MENDELSSOHN, CHOPIN and LISZT

This era is for those who love just plain beautiful music. Most people are ashamed to tell anyone this.

It is also for those who prefer piano music to any other kind.

By an extraordinary quirk of fate these four pianist-composers were all born within an eighteen-month span: 1809 – 11.

They all knew each other and were close friends, they all composed principally for the piano, they were all exceptionally attractive, and they were all exceptionally nice people.

Further, their youth coincided with the development of the modern piano. For them, the new piano was something like the computer is for the young today. It was new technology and it opened up a broad horizon for the imagination.

With them came the development of virtuoso piano technique, piano repertoire, the piano recital and the pianist as superstar.

In other ways they were not at all alike. Although they were friends, their personalities were very contrasting and they came from totally different worlds.

We have already mentioned Robert Schumann (1810 – 56) and his marriage to Clara in our section on critics. He was German – born in a Saxon town called Zwickau. As we know, he would cripple his hand, and his piano works were made known to the world by his wife and by his friend Franz Liszt, as we shall see.

Robert Schumann came to music late, through no fault of his own. His father, an author and publisher, was not opposed to his son's musicality and encouraged him as a child, but he died young, and Schumann was forced to cooperate with his widowed mother, who insisted that he study law – just as Handel's father had demanded (everybody who had any pretensions in society studied law in those days).

He followed legal studies in Leipzig to please his mother, but hated it; he began to associate with musicians and furthermore to study music with that old grouch we mentioned earlier, Friedrich Wieck, the father of the Clara he was to marry.

After further efforts at law in Heidelberg he threw in the towel; he told his mother that he had been assured by Wieck of his talent and that he was going to devote himself to becoming a concert pianist.

We have already seen what happened with that. He damaged his hand, was thrown out by Wieck, and was forced to continue as a composer only.

We should explain here what he did to his hand as you will then be something of an expert on piano playing:

Not understanding that the fourth finger is hampered by being attached to the fifth at the base, he thought he could give this weakest finger strength and independence by straining it. He tied a string to his finger from a contraption above, so that every time he used it he would pull against it. This did not strengthen the fourth finger – it destroyed its ligaments. This was probably Wieck's fault for not explaining his hand and how to use it correctly. No piano student has tried this since.

Clara played his music, however, as well as giving him eight children and nursing him through his bouts of melancholia until his mind gave way. We already explained how they managed to marry in the chapter on Music Critics.

Schumann's early – and most characteristic – works are for the piano, and much of it comprises collections of very short 'character pieces' grouped under names such as *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana*, *Fantasiestücke*, *Etudes Symphoniques* or *Papillons*.

For the normal listener these are almost incomprehensible as all the segments run together in what sounds to the non-expert like a great, long, pianistic jumble. You must never inadvertently let anyone know this is how they sound to you! In any case, it takes a truly remarkable pianist to make these clear, and in lesser hands they really do fall into a jumble.

Of course, if pianists paused for a moment or two between all these pieces to indicate where one stopped and the next began it would be quite different, but for some reason the same great, faceless, nameless authority that tells us not to clap between movements forbids this.

Mind you, it takes a really outstanding interpreter to make sense of these, anyway, as they are abrupt, quirky, and sometimes a bit sappy even when played well.

The best solution is to look wise and say you prefer his masterwork the *Fantasy in C major*, a monumental piece anyone can enjoy, and which he quite understandably dedicated to Franz Liszt.

Franz Liszt, whom we will visit soon, did his very best to promote his friend's music, but found that he got less applause when he played the *Carnaval* than when he played his own compositions. Rather than trying the pauses between micro-pieces, he would add his own dash to Schumann's music, which, though it infuriated Clara, not only got him all the applause he could have hoped for, but the audiences seemed to like it.

Then he went one better and made his own arrangements of Schumann's music – one such is Liszt's piano arrangement of Schumann's song *Widmung*, or "Dedication", which is fabulous.

Schumann wrote many songs, and later four symphonies, encouraged by Felix Mendelssohn, who we will also discuss shortly. His most popular work, however, is the piano concerto he wrote for his wife. There is a movie about this with Katherine Hepburn and Paul Henried called *Song of Love*, which puts it all in a charming perspective.

During his career as composer and journalist Schumann met and befriended all the musicians of his time and wrote about them in his magazine *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. An unusual critic, he was generous as well as perceptive, and never stingy in his praise.

All musical experts know that perhaps the most famous quote from this journal was when he first saw music by the then unknown Chopin and wrote a review with a headline that said "*Hats off Gentlemen – a Genius!*" Schumann, like Chopin, was only twenty-one at the time, which shows how perceptive he was, recognizing a genius from nothing but a printed score and no advance marketing men.

Another thing one must know about Schumann was that his mental instability, which was to destroy him, began gently, giving him the impression of having two distinct and independent personalities.

He was fond of these, giving them names and whole personalities: one was pensive – 'Eusebius'; the other tempestuous – "Florestan". He wrote his piano pieces as if by one or the other – which explains why his pieces are either pensive or tempestuous with not much middle ground.

He also frequently signed newspaper articles by one or the other. In character they were rather like Good Cop and Bad Cop.

Schumann's friends not only included Mendelssohn and Liszt, but many others whom he helped. The most famous of these was young Johannes Brahms, who came to his door as a young composer of twenty, and who became his lodger and his friend. Brahms helped their family when Schumann was ill and also fell in love with Clara.

This attachment between and Clara Schumann – his elder by fourteen years – has fascinated the historical voyeur almost as much as Beethoven's Immortal Beloved, as we shall see.

As noted earlier, Schumann died in a mental hospital – where, tragically, he committed himself for his last two years, refusing to see Clara. Only Brahms came to visit him regularly. Poor Clara did not know what to make of this. He was deeply mourned by all his friends.

Next we come to Schumann's – in fact just about *everyone's* – friend, Felix Mendelssohn:

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809 – 47)

*U*nique among the great composers, Mendelssohn's family was immensely rich and he grew up with everything that money could buy.

Mendelssohn was born in Hamburg in 1809. He died at age thirty-eight in 1847 in Leipzig, thus being, with Chopin and Schubert, one of those composers who did, in fact, die young.

Someone once said, "What great music he could have composed had he only been poor and miserable!"

That music is produced by misery is one of those annoying myths that will not go away. It is your role as an expert to point out that some of the most robust and happiest music was composed at times when we know the composer was ill or unhappy. Beethoven is an example of this, but Mozart also and many others. After all, these were professionals.

Great music, as opposed to third-rate efforts, is neither self-serving nor self-concerned. It is inspired by a variety of superior emotions, such as piety, romantic love, patriotism, or just by the idea of sheer beauty. This is true even when the music has been commissioned and the composer ill or unhappy – or just a well trained artist.

When there are no higher emotions there is no music. Today we see a clear manifestation of this. (Now, this is a really good thing to say if you want to energize the conversation at a dinner party.)

That Mendelssohn was both rich and happy is beyond dispute. His father, Abraham, was a wealthy banker and his celebrated grandfather was the much admired Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Moses was the scholar on whom Lessing based a famous play, *Nathan the Wise* – the playwright and the protagonist were close friends.

Moses' banker son, Abraham, once remarked that he had first been known as his famous father's son, then when Felix became celebrated, he became known as his son's father. "I am a hyphen between the two."

Felix grew up in a large home with servants, tutors and a loving family. He was especially close to his sister, Fanny, who was also exceptionally gifted. She played the piano beautifully and was a competent composer herself. When, in her thirties, she suddenly took ill and died, Felix suffered a similar stroke on hearing the news; he went into a rapid decline from which he never recovered.

This has always been told as a touching story in evidence that they were deeply devoted to each other, but today modern medicine judges that they both suffered from the same physical weakness.

When children, their parents were extremely supportive and could afford to provide a small orchestra to perform at Sunday afternoon musical parties in the family garden. Both of them performed with the orchestra, often music composed by Felix.

At sixteen he composed two works that remain favorites in the repertoire to this day and are typical of all his music: the *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the *Octet For Strings*.

Sixteen years after the *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Mendelssohn received a royal commission for music to go with a performance of the Shakespeare play. This gave him the opportunity to add the rest of the music, which is known as '*Incidental Music to A Midsummer Night's Dream*' and which includes the familiar *Wedding March*.

It is often a surprise to those who hear this much played wedding march to learn it was composed for fairies.

Felix Mendelssohn's grandfather, the writer and philosopher, had urged the Jewish community to integrate themselves into the culture of the countries in which they lived after centuries in ghettos. He postulated that the time had come for them to familiarize themselves with the artistic and scientific literature of the contemporary world, and to begin to integrate with the wider community.

Abraham, Felix's father, took this a step further. Instead of merely integrating, he chose the path of assimilation and had his family converted to Christianity.

They all became Lutherans, but in order not to offend other members of the Mendelssohn family, he added 'Bartholdy' to their name. One must not be confused by seeing the composer's name written 'Mendelssohn-Bartholdy' on older music and LPs.

The next important fact to know about Mendelssohn is that it was he who revived and restored the music of Johann Sebastian Bach after many decades of neglect.

For two generations the only works of Bach with which most musicians were familiar had been his *Preludes and Fugues*, used in training keyboard performance.

Once young Felix's curiosity and interest was piqued concerning Bach's great choral music, nothing would content him until he had convinced his family to get him copies of these long lost and neglected manuscripts.

Not content with that, he wanted to put on performances of this music.

At one of his youthful garden parties he conducted Bach's *The Passion of Our Lord According to St. Matthew* (the "*St. Matthew Passion*").

Then, wanting a public performance of this work, he overcame many difficulties to achieve it.

This was a very expensive project. He was determined, however, and the resulting performance in Berlin had an enormous impact. "It was a great day in the history of music", said his overcome sister Fanny.

A friend, the actor Édouard Devrienne, helped him with this arduous production, which included financial difficulties and the need to copy the scores for each member of a large body of musicians and singers.

Édouard said, "Isn't it strange that it took an actor (actors were not considered respectable at that time) and a Jew to bring back this most Christian work of music?"

Most people of the period were totally unaware of Bach's monumental role. They had no idea of his enormous output or the superlative quality of his work.

It was Mendelssohn who followed his success with the *St. Matthew* by organizing an international search involving eight countries and a huge sum of money, finally putting together the scattered work of the German master. It fills an entire room in the building where it is housed and it is estimated that it represents only fifty percent of Bach's output.

The other fifty percent could never be found (as mentioned earlier, this was probably due to Bach's son who drank, losing or selling the music).

Now we must get to the voyeuristic part of his private life, as everyone always wants to know the scandals and love affairs of great men. The closest we can get to this with Mendelssohn was the fact that he had all his friends whispering about the fact he called so very often on a beautiful lady by the name of Mme. Jeanrenaud, widow of a Huguenot Protestant clergyman.

Disappointingly, however, this came to nothing as a scandal, because it was announced that he was engaged to the seventeen year-old daughter of Mme Jeanrenaud. He married Cecile and not only were they very happy together but produced a family of five.

In everything – from the even quality of his music, to his friends and his marriage, it seems he was just always really nice.

Mendelssohn was appointed conductor of the only regular standing orchestra in Europe, the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra ("Gewandhaus", which experts say with a flourish, and with such an air of knowledge, actually means "Cloth Guild Hall").

From this position as one of the first orchestral conductors, he not only developed the art and techniques used by future conductors, but also introduced the music of composers he knew, such as his friend Schumann.

Another good anecdote to know is the following: while on a trip to Paris, he and Frederic Chopin decided to perform a joint recital.

(We should say here that the word "recital" had heretofore applied only to those who recited poems or dramatic prose; it was coined as a musical term by their friend Franz Liszt to describe his own solo performances. These were the first in which a pianist would play a whole programme by himself. Up until that time all performances would consist of a mixed programme with singers and others taking turns.)

To continue: Mendelssohn and Chopin prepared their music with Chopin doing his best to show Mendelssohn how to do trills properly. They had invitations prepared, but when they came to perform they found to their dismay that no one had come. No one except a few penniless Poles whom Chopin had run into in a favourite coffee shop.

Mendelssohn dashed off to the Rothschilds, who were having a grand dinner party at their smart new *hôtel particulier* at 15 rue Lafitte, off Rue Lafayette (where you can still go shopping in the Galéries Lafayette near the Opéra), and begged everyone to come along.

Later, Chopin found all the invitations on his desk, as he had forgotten to mail them.

The English, who had no composers of their own, but who have always loved choral music, took a great liking to Mendelssohn as they had done with Handel, the 'London Bach', and Haydn.

He became a firm favorite and friend of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, with whom he would stay every year at Windsor Castle, ten years in a row.

You see, Prince Albert was very different from other members of the Saxe-Coburg Gotha family to which he belonged. For one thing, he was an excellent musician and pianist and the three of them would entertain each other with duets and songs in the evenings.

Prince Albert went on to found the Royal College of Music and was responsible for the Royal Albert Hall – as its name suggests.

(It has often been rumoured that Prince Albert was actually the son of the Jewish tutor, the lover of his mother, Princess of Saxe-Coburg Gotha, whose turbulent marriage ended in divorce when Albert was five; this would explain a lot.)

To complete the story: Princess Victoria was supposed to choose Albert's elder brother Ernest as her consort and everyone was somewhat surprised and disconcerted that she chose Albert.

The Queen – who was, after all, virtually German herself – would refer to Mendelssohn as "a model English gentleman" because of his refined manners, his moderation in all things, and his modesty.

This is what is known as British reasoning.

After his early death, the British musical community established the Mendelssohn Fellowship at The Royal Academy of Music. It was to be awarded to the most promising young composer in the United Kingdom. The winner would then receive the funds to go to Leipzig to study at the conservatory that Mendelssohn had founded.

Most people, when told the name of the British student in composition awarded the first grant, are surprised.

The winner was Arthur Sullivan, who later was to join William Gilbert in that series of light operas that include *HMS Pinafore, Pirates of Penzance* and the *Mikado*.

But when he was young – in fact, all his life – Sullivan wanted and intended to compose serious music. He did, indeed, begin his career with a dramatic operatic treatment of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (this is a great fact to know, as it is not only a forgotten opera, but the music is too), and his serious efforts never took off as did his Gilbert and Sullivan operettas.

Sullivan would later be irritated by his success with the G & S shows, as he had wanted to be known as someone with musical solidity when he set out for Leipzig in the middle of the 19th century. There, he found himself in the same class as a pleasant young Norwegian, who turned out to be Edvard Grieg.

Grieg had more luck with his serious compositions, but the friendship was a lasting one.

Here is a more recent anecdote about Mendelssohn:

In 1937, Sir Thomas Beecham took the London Phiharmonic to Leipzig to pay tribute to Mendelssohn. You will remember from our earlier chapter on conductors that Sir Thomas thought himself very clever by not staying in England during the war.

Nor, as you will see, did he size up Hitler with any degree of accuracy, thinking a glib verbal put-down of "the old boy" sufficient.

They were scheduled to play in Mendelssohn's old venue at the Gewandhaus. After the concert was over, the plan called for a ceremony outside the building, where a floral wreath would be placed on the pedestal of a large bronze statue of the composer. This would be accompanied by some appropriate speeches.

The concert went off very well and earned long drawn-out applause from the listeners. When the cheering came to an end, they all went outside to place the flowers on the base of the statue of Mendelssohn, but to their amazement it was gone.

This was 1937, and during the concert Brown Shirts had removed the statue and hacked it to bits. Despite his family's conversion to Lutheranism, Mendelssohn was very much still regarded as a Jew in Nazi Germany.

FREDERIC CHOPIN
(1810 – 49)

One must not be fooled by the fact everyone says Chopin was 'Polish'. His father was French, his name was French and he lived his entire mature life – that is to say, from the age of twenty-one until his untimely death at thirty-nine – in France.

Chopin is considered Polish, however, because his mother was of an aristocratic Polish family, because he was born in Poland, and because he always thought of Poland as home.

More importantly, however, Chopin is considered a 'Polish' composer because his music is suffused with Polish themes, harmonies, rhythms and an elusive, unique bittersweet nostalgia the Poles call '*żal*' – all of which is true.

However, it is also elegant, precise, refined, clever and unexpected – which is French.

He is therefore unique in being both – and neither – Polish *and* French. Furthermore, as neither France nor Poland have ever produced a composer anything like him it leads one to suppose that it took a blend of both nations' traits to create this one-of-a-kind genius.

Chopin was born in a charming country place near Warsaw called Żelazowa Wola (never try to pronounce this) and he grew up in Warsaw.

His ambition to develop a virtuoso technique was fired on hearing the legendary Italian violinist Paganini on tour in Poland. Paganini promoted his performances by allowing it to be believed he had sold his soul to the devil for his astonishing skill at playing the violin. He wore black and grew his hair long – he was the first great self-promoter in music. He gathered huge crowds in arenas like the *Three Tenors* did in our time. Further down you will see who else had the Paganini experience.

Interestingly, Chopin's unique and quite revolutionary ideas about piano playing technique and his likewise unique harmonies were the result of having two supportive teachers who did not know how to play themselves. One was a violinist who could play the organ, but not the piano – Adalbert Żywny (don't try to pronounce this either); the other left him alone and allowed him to ignore he required courses in orchestral composition at the conservatory in Warsaw – Joseph Elsner.

During his short life, Chopin exponentially developed the virtuoso's use of the hand at the keyboard, postulated in his Twenty-Four *Etudes* – it is the "technique" that all great pianists need to know.

Chopin left Warsaw to seek fame and fortune, first in Vienna and then in Paris. This was almost impossible, for the political climate of the time had made it difficult for any Pole. Warsaw was occupied by Russians and the country partitioned between other European powers (does this sound familiar?).

Twenty years old, Chopin found himself leaving Vienna *en route* to Paris and London, thinking perhaps he should consider going to New York (people thought this way even in 1830).

However, at the urging of a family friend, the head of the Polish community in Paris, Prince Czartoryski, he stayed in Paris long enough to meet the dashing Franz Liszt, whom we will get to know better soon.

Even at the age of twenty, Liszt was considered a star who created despair among all pianists and desperation among the ladies. Always princely in his generosity, Liszt was the first to recognize the timeless, rare charm and beauty of his new friend's music; he also quickly adapted to himself the brilliant new ideas Chopin had developed for playing the piano. Liszt introduced him to everyone in Paris.

After that it was a love affair between Chopin and the city's high society. This was all during the reign of Louis Philippe, the 'Citizen King'.

Unlike Franz Liszt, Chopin did not like playing in public; but he did like going into society, keeping his own carriage, and wearing expensive *glacé* gloves and elegant clothes. He made a living by teaching countesses and princesses, who would leave a *Louis d'or* on his mantelpiece after their lesson, and by publishing his music.

Chopin was pleased that Franz Liszt wanted to perform his music – as long as he added no fancy runs – and when he dedicated his *Etudes* to him, he said he could "*assomer les gens*."

Now this is a pun, because in French '*assomer*' means to 'stun', but it can also mean to 'bore,' so we think he understood his friend very well and enjoyed teasing him.

The kind of friends and supporters Chopin made among the aristocratic women who studied piano with him is exemplified by the events of his last year of life.

One of Chopin's students was a remarkable Scottish lady, the sister of Lord Torpichen of Stirling, the family of Stirling Castle.

This impressive lady, Jane Stirling, seeing him depressed and wishing to broaden his horizons – shortly before his death at the age of thirty-nine – organized a trip for him to England and Scotland.

Although he was universally admired, he did not take to life away from Paris, and returned there, very weak and ill with aggravated lung disease.

Understanding his predicament, Jane Stirling sent a very large sum of gold to Chopin's apartment in the Place Vendôme (this apartment is opposite the present-day Ritz Hotel and you can visit it today).

This was for his sister to use for whatever he might need – his sister having come to Paris on hearing how ill he had become.

However, as no one who knows Paris will be surprised to hear, the *concierge* kept the package. It was only when Miss Stirling wrote to see if the package had been received that it was traced, found and the gift used.

The sum was so large that it not only paid Chopin's last bills, but it paid for a tremendous funeral mass at the Madeleine, for the famous singers who sang the Mozart *Requiem,* for his burial in the Père Lachaise cemetery (where you can see his grave today – always covered with flowers) – and for sending his heart to the Cathedral in Kraków, as he had asked for it to be sent (you can see that place, too).

One is also supposed to know all about Chopin's celebrated nine-year liaison with a very tedious *divorcée* known as George Sand – a pseudonym for her real name, Aurore Dudevant.

Unlike the way in which she is depicted in movies, such as *A Song to Remember*, Sand was somewhat plump, five foot nothing, had a big nose, smelt of tobacco and was some six years older than Chopin. She wrote uniquely boring books in which she pictured herself the heroine cast in various disguises with various romantic sounding names.

Not surprisingly, Chopin did not like her at first.

However, she was persistent and he grew to care for her. She also had a lovely country house, called Nohant, to which she invited many celebrated artists for weeks at a time in the summer.

(This house can be visited today, and presents recitals of his music.)

This tiresome woman quarreled with Chopin shortly before his death – they separated and only glimpsed each other once or twice before his death.

For Chopin, who was ill, and who thought of Sand and her children as family, this was bitter.

To explain:

Solange had married the talented but somewhat ham-fisted sculptor Jean Clésinger, whose temper and debts had quelled Sand's initial enthusiasm for him, to say the least. After a flaming row with her mother at Nohant over his spending and their finances, Solange had written to Chopin in Paris to ask for the use of his carriage in order to leave. Innocently, he had said yes.

As Sand had spent most of her adult life living with various artists, she should have known that they were difficult and never had money of their own. In any case, she accused Chopin of disloyalty over the matter of the carriage and abruptly ended their eight-year friendship.

But, in fact, George had been growing tired of Chopin for some time and had written a *roman à clef* in which he was depicted, under a very thin disguise, as cold and distant, and herself as passionate and ill-used. She was really a pill.

As an expert, you will note that the graceful monument with the grieving muse that stands guard over his grave in the Père Lachaise cemetery was sculpted by Clésinger; we also owe him the plaster cast of Chopin's hand, which is of interest to all pianists.

Chopin's youthful love had been a nice Polish girl of very good family, Marie Wodźinska, to whom he considered himself engaged – an engagement ended by her family when it seemed clear he was tubercular. We know all about this because he kept all her letters, found in his desk after his death, tied with a pink ribbon, and labeled, in Polish, *My Sorrow*.

Chopin wrote almost exclusively for the piano. However, his wit and reserve caused him to publish all his music – the most speaking and poetic ever composed – under abstract names, such as *Préludes*, *Etudes*, *Ballades*, *Scherzos*, *Mazurkas* and *Polonaises*.

For this reason it often seems as if musicians are speaking in a secret code when they refer to the "*G minor Ballade*" or the "*A flat Polonaise*" or the "*E major Etude*", and know something that you don't.

However, some of his pieces have acquired names with time, as if they had broken out from behind their opus numbers: the "*Raindrop Prelude*", the "*Revolutionary Etude*", the "*Heroic Polonaise*", the "*Aeolian Harp Etude*", the "*Ocean Wave Etude*", or the "*Winter Wind Etude*".

And it would have probably annoyed him a little.

A good quote for the expert to know concerning Chopin is Schumann's description of his music: he said it was like "cannon buried beneath roses." Quoting this will certainly attest to your knowledge and is, in fact, a very good description of his music.

During his final illness many of Chopin's friends came to see him and play for him, and after his death Liszt wrote a touching book about him.

But then, Liszt was one of the very nicest people in the history of music.

FRANZ LISZT
(1811 – 86)

Liszt was Hungarian. His family worked for the Esterházys (as explained earlier, the name Esterházy crops up continually – we remember them from Haydn's career and Schubert's summer holiday; so many musicians were the recipients of the generosity of the Esterházys that you can easily become confused).

The Esterházys felt that it was their responsibility to see that this amazingly beautiful boy with genius fingers should have a proper training and they put together a fund with other members of the Austro-Hungarian aristocracy to send him, accompanied by his father, to Vienna, where he could study with Czerny.

Yes, that is the same Czerny who wrote all those boring exercises. Czerny took young Liszt to meet his own master, Beethoven – already very grumpy – but Liszt pleased him very much by playing a piece of his own and transposing a Bach *Prelude and Fugue***,** which we assume he was able to hear, despite his deafness.

Liszt was eleven years old at this time, and performed in Vienna's Redoutensaal. Beethoven forgave him for being a child prodigy (he disliked them as a breed) – and, reportedly, embraced him.

Liszt repaid Beethoven by making sure that his music did not go out of style with the coming of a new generation of musicians.

In fact, in later life Liszt made piano transcriptions – solo and duet versions – of all of Beethoven's symphonies, so that those in the provinces, far from any orchestra, could get to know them.

He also paid for the very costly statue of Beethoven in Bonn when everyone else who had promised financial help fell through.

From Vienna Liszt went to Paris. There he found that the French were already the rather difficult, bureaucratic people we know them to be, and would not allow him to enter the Paris *Conservatoire* because he was not born in France.

The French have been sorry for this ever since, as without their help he became the world's leading pianist from that day to this; the great innovator, performer, composer, teacher and all-round good guy of 19th century music, and they cannot claim him in any way.

They take their revenge in always mispronouncing his name 'Liets' – and even mis-spelling it as 'Litz' on occasion (there is a street in Paris named after him spelt in this way!).

He stayed in Paris, which had once again become the center of the art world after the effects of the Napoleonic Wars had somewhat worn off, and he began to be famous when still very young.

However, in his teens Liszt was thrown into a great depression. He had fallen desperately in love with one of his piano students, a sixteen year-old girl, the daughter of a distinguished family.

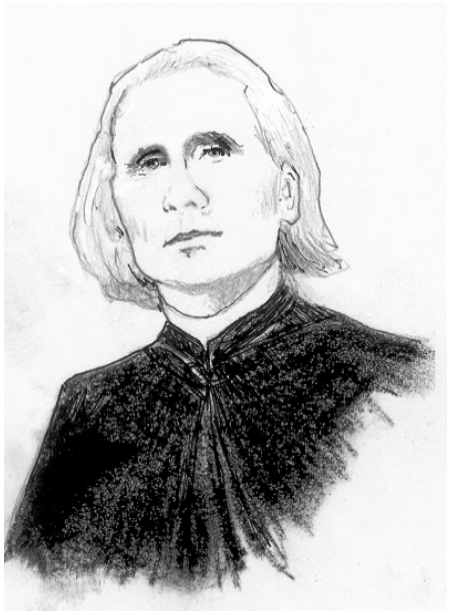
Her parents quite understandably would not hear of an engagement – after all, they were still children and he was as yet only a penniless Hungarian pianist, albeit a dashing and handsome one.

And, of course, the girl's father soon arranged for her to marry a titled young man.

As a result, he gave it all up and decided to study for the priesthood.

Fortunately for him – and the Church – before this came to anything he heard Paganini, the great violinist (does this sound familiar?).

That did it – he threw over all notions of Holy Orders and decided to do for the piano what Paganini had done for the violin. In a way, we owe both Liszt and Chopin to Paganini. You will think of this when you hear Liszt's piano version of Paganini's *La Campanella* or the *Caprice #24* ("*Paganini Etude No. 6*").



To be totally knowledgeable about Liszt, you must know that he relented in middle age and took Holy Orders after all, becoming a Franciscan *abbé* (a degree of priesthood taken by those who are only going to teach) and spent the last years of his life teaching almost everyone and anybody who asked, for free.

Before that happened, however, he had quite a life.

His chief romance was with the wife of rather weak-kneed French count: le Comte d'Agoult. The Comtesse, who was six years older than young Liszt, was a woman who had her own money (always dangerous), and who, like George Sand, wrote extremely boring books, calling herself "Daniel Stern".

This rather rapacious woman, Marie d'Agoult, and Liszt went off together to live in Switzerland and had three children.

One of Liszt's children would disappear into a respectable marriage; another, Daniel, died at twenty while a law student in Vienna; and the third became the famous Cosima Wagner, who left her husband, the pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow, to live with Richard Wagner.

They later married, but this was a huge scandal.

His daughter's behaviour was a great embarrassment to Liszt, at this point in Holy Orders, but he had not exactly given a good example and it was the fashion in those days to throw everything up for a great love.

In those days people didn't just "have sex" – they had great loves as well. There is some kind of difference.

Liszt also tried to marry a young woman he met while touring in Russia – the Princess Carolyne zu Sayn-von Wittgenstein – but she was married to another man, which was a real obstacle.

With time, however, she grew very eccentric: she also took to cigar-smoking, never opened the windows and also wrote interminable and boring books.

All these women seem to have done this kind of thing.

It is not possible to read the life of any composer of the 19th century without finding that Franz Liszt was instrumental in their careers.

This is unique in the history of music.

His first effort was for Frederic Chopin when they were twenty and twenty-one, when Liszt met Chopin, friendless, in Paris, as described in the preceding chapter. However, this story is so charming that it is worth telling in full and unlike so many of the much repeated anecdotes, this one appears to be true:

The story goes that Chopin had given up on Paris but was convinced by Prince Czartoryski to give it one more try. He went to see the Parisian music publisher and manager, Camille Pleyel. There he was told to sit and wait.

In came Liszt, saw music lying on a piano in the showroom and started reading it off at sight. They say he turned to the depressed character sitting against the wall and said,

"If this is yours come and shake my hand; I don't want to stop playing to come over there" – or words to that effect.

Liszt not only told Pleyel to publish his new friend's music, but also introduced him to at least thirty of the leading hostesses of fashionable *salons*, in which he met everyone who mattered in Parisian society.

This was, in fact, a very big gift, and in return, Chopin repaid him by showing him his *Etudes* and dedicating them to him. Chopin was glad to show his friend his discoveries for virtuoso playing, for he disliked performing in concerts himself, as we explained earlier.

That was Liszt's first success at this type of friendship, but, as we will see, there were so many after this – we have already mentioned Schumann, and there would be countless others. There was no jealousy in Liszt.

You can therefore feel pretty safe when referring to any composer of the 19th century in saying that he owed his career to Liszt.

During his long career Liszt not only composed an enormous amount of music – including pioneering the orchestral Tone Poem as we described in an earlier chapter – but virtually created the career of the touring 'concert pianist'. Liszt went everywhere – from London to Lisbon, St. Petersburg to Constantinople, Kiev to Rome (all by horse and carriage which must have been quite bumpy).

Also, as we have already noted, he invented the solo piano "recital", and he initiated the custom of turning the piano sideways so that the raised piano lid would send the music out into the hall. Jealous musicians said that this was to show off his profile, but he was only being practical.

This arrangement had become necessary as ticket-buying events became the custom on the stages of theatres and concert halls, rather than in private ballrooms.

As time went along he felt he had neglected his Hungarian roots and founded the music conservatory in Budapest as well as composing *Hungarian Rhapsodies*.

All in all, he was thoroughly envied and complained about by legions of jealous musicians and musicologists towards whom he felt no animosity whatsoever.

As we have explained, in later life Liszt took vows of poverty as a Franciscan *abbé* and taught everyone and anyone for free, promoting the many composers who came to him for help. We will meet many of these further along.

This is also unique in the history of music.

Now we come to Liszt's friend Berlioz, who did for the orchestra what Liszt did for the piano.

HECTOR BERLIOZ
(1803 – 69)

(Always pronounce the 'z' at the end of Berlioz's name, even though he was French.)

Although we do not always see Berlioz in the common short lists of great composers, the stories about him are so amusing and his influence was so great that we have to list him here. Berlioz was a little older than the other composers we have been discussing – all of whom were his friends; he was born in 1803.

He was a slight, energetic young man from the South of France with an amazing head of bushy red hair (as you can see in this caricature by Vernet) and rather pointy features.

Berlioz had been sent to Paris by his father to study medicine. Uniquely among composers, he could play no musical instrument – unless you count failed efforts at trying to teach himself the guitar or the flute when a teenager.

In Paris, however, he found that studying medicine consisted of cutting up dead bodies in a disgusting hall full of rats, and that going to musical events was a lot pleasanter. This convinced him to give up medicine and become a composer.

No one took him seriously. However, by a fluke of fate, Hector had perfect pitch and could compose music without needing a keyboard, so it made very little difference to him that he was not a pianist, or even a violinist, and he insisted on being a student at the *Conservatoire*, much to the annoyance of everyone there – they could not claim he was not French, so after some hesitation on their part he enrolled as a student composition.

Then, by going on and on at it, he finally won the *Prix de Rome* – the Rome Prize – the Holy Grail for any young French composer.

You must know what the Prix de Rome signifies:

The Rome Prize was founded by Cardinal Richelieu, better known as the foe of the Three Musketeers, in 1648. It was originally just for artists and sculptors; subsequently musicians were also included.

The *Prix de Rome* survived all the drastic changes of government undergone by the French nation and was, until it was dropped in 1968, the most coveted award ever instituted in Europe. The winning student was given a two or three-year period of residence and training in Rome, and it marked them for life.

Originally, the young artists would be in residence in the Palazzo Mancini at the expense of the King of France, but after a short hiatus during the Revolution it was reinstated by Napoleon who arranged that the winners be resident at the Villa Medici – the 'French Academy' – atop the Spanish Steps.

It seems that in 1968 the minister of culture, André Malraux, felt that Rome no longer had a monopoly on artistic knowledge and it was no longer an advantage to send students there.

Despite Malraux, there are still today some students who are sent to the Villa Medici for eighteen-month or two-year periods. If you follow the stories of many French composers you find that the awarding, the striving for, the publicity, the debates and the hullabaloo that surrounded the Rome Prize has been on-going since its inception.

However, before Berlioz went to Rome he went to the theatre. Now, the drama being presented was *Hamlet*, performed by an English company – in English. Hector couldn't speak a word of English, but that did not stop him from falling madly (we use the word advisedly) in love with the girl playing Ophelia, Harriet Smithson (pictured here as she appeared in that role).

Hector became so passionately despondent and suicidal over the fact that Miss Smithson did not respond to his feelings that he went out into the countryside while it was raining, hoping, if possible, to die of pneumonia (in those days this was termed "an inflammation of the lungs") and his friends, Liszt and Chopin, had to go out to find him and dry him off.

They also had to explain to him that it was hard for Harriet to respond to his feelings when he had never met her and she didn't know that he existed.

During this one-sided, and therefore unrequited, romance he composed a huge symphonic work, inspired by his mad dreams of Harriet and of life and death – and you will sound like an expert if you know all about it: he called it *Symphonie Fantastique* ('*The Fantastic Symphony*'), subtitled *Episode in the Life of an Artist*.

This work was indeed fantastic as it was written for an orchestra larger than had ever been put together before, with extra woodwind and brass for colour.

It had an unprecedented five movements, all of which made use of the same musical motif to describe his various fantasies about Harriet. These included not only his murder of her, his march to the gallows, but a witches' Sabbath, in which she appears as a she-devil in Hell.

The 'motif' – or obsessional little tune – is called the "*idée fixe*" because that was the effect she had had on him (we call it 'fixation').

Almost by accident, Berlioz had invented an entirely new kind of symphony – a cross between a symphony and a tone poem.

In one way or another, this idea was to influence many, if not all, composers who came after him – even if they did not know or care about Harriet Smithson.

Amazing as this may sound, five years after the *Fantastic Symphony*, Berlioz married Harriet Smithson.

Not so amazingly – the marriage was a total failure. She soon took to drink and got fat after losing her career as a celebrated actress.

Before he married her, however, Hector tried being in love with another young lady, a promising eighteen year-old pianist by the name of Marie Moke (that was actually her name).

While he was in Rome on his *Prix de Rome* scholarship, however, believing himself engaged to Marie, her mother wrote and told him she had become engaged to another – none other than the ubiquitous manager, piano manufacturer and music publisher, Camille Pleyel. This was a good move for Marie's career, as you may recognize this Pleyel as the same character in whose office Liszt and Chopin met.

Furious, Hector decided to go to Paris to shoot them both, but by the terms of the Rome Prize he was not to leave Italy before his fellowship was up, and if it was known he had left it would be forfeited. To get round this he got hold of woman's clothing as a disguise, and a gun. When he reached Nice (or 'Nizza' – as it was still Italian in those days), Berlioz got tired of the clothes; he also thought better of the intended murder, and went back to Rome.

During his lay-over in Nice, he went up on a hill to compose some music, which he did in a notebook on his knee. As we have explained, he had perfect pitch and didn't need a keyboard. Seeing him there scribbling away, the Italian border police arrested him and took him to jail, accusing him of being a spy and making notes in code.

It was some time before they could find a musician to affirm that his code was musical notation. They found this difficult to believe as "everyone knew" that composers sat ruffling their hair at keyboards.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given his excitable nature, he became tired of the whole business of the Rome Prize with all its disciplines and left before finishing his three years after all.

It was a little while after this that Harriet Smithson returned to Paris, was finally introduced to Hector, and, touched by his devotion, embarked upon their ill-fated marriage (Liszt was the best man).

Berlioz always wanted to compose enormous works for huge symphony orchestras, and sometimes vast opera companies. As a result, even with a great deal of help from Franz Liszt, only some of his works became at all known and still cost a ridiculous amount of money to perform.

One often hears his concert overtures *Roman Carnaval* and *Le Corsaire*, and very occasionally a really big opera house can afford to put on *The Trojans*, or just one act from it.

Berlioz actually made a living as a music critic, and became a witty, charming, worldly-wise – perhaps more world-weary – man. In his last years he wrote his *Memoirs*, in which we find all these stories and many others.

This is a book that makes experts of us all as it vividly describes the Paris of his time.

Finally, he tells how, when old and retired, he met once again a first love called Estelle, a girl whom he had idolised when he was fourteen. He took to seeing her every day. She was astonished at this attention from someone she had not seen for fifty years and could hardly remember, at that. But you must remember this was the Romantic Period and people still had Great Loves.

As far as Marie Moke is concerned, her marriage to Pleyel was definitely not a success. Extremely successful as a professional pianist, she was not only extremely pretty, but known for the passion and drama of her interpretations at the keyboard. Unfortunately, these attributes seem to have entered her private life as well, and Pleyel divorced her amidst great scandal.

None of this affected her career, however, which took her touring almost as much as her friend Franz Liszt.

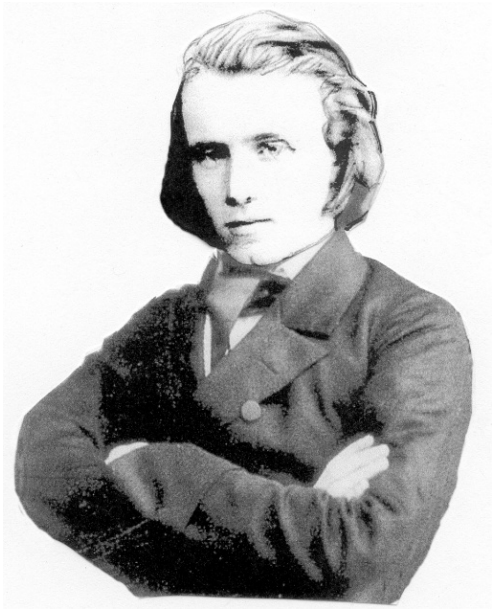
We should add that, not very surprisingly, she never got very good reviews from Berlioz whenever she played in Paris.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833 – 77)

We are used to seeing pictures of Johannes Brahms as a portly man, somewhat slovenly in dress, with a long, straggly beard and a suspicion that his vest is covered with food stains or cigar ashes.

It is a surprise, therefore, to discover that this picture is far from accurate and only due to the fact that photography came into common use when he was an older man.



As a young man, Brahms was extraordinarily handsome. One can read about women reacting to him as their descendents reacted to Elvis. Despite this, he was never able to establish a relationship with a respectable woman, unless you count his long devotion to Clara Schumann. The mature Brahms looks like such a solid homebody that this comes as a surprise, too.

Modern psychologists like to say that this avoidance of commitment was due to the fact that as an adolescent he had been an entertainer in the lowly bars of Hamburg's red-light district and had, as a result, developed a 'Madonna Complex' that marked him for life.

It is true that the part of Hamburg in which the Brahms family lived was the infamous St. Paul District, and so it is likely that the first women he knew were not ladies.

Music historians like to quote something he said to a friend about his early conditioning and "how could I possibly develop normal relationships with the opposite sex?"

As if to prove his point, as he walked along the streets of Vienna, it would happen that the women we now refer to as working girls would approach him in the most familiar manner and ask for loans or gifts. More often than that he would grant their requests.

However, one must be careful of interpreting this kind of anecdote; as you will have noticed – very few of the musicians we have discussed had normal middle-class marriages and the most common reason was money – or the lack of it – and many were attracted to women who were above them in social class.

Brahms' father was a minor musician in a theatrical orchestra in Hamburg, where Johannes was born in 1833. His mother was a seamstress seventeen years older than his father.

In his early twenties Brahms was done a very big favour by a young violinist by the name of Édouard Rémény, who took him along as his accompanist when he toured Hungary.

This tour gave him the opportunity to hear Hungarian folk music, which inspired some of his most successful works, his two sets of *Hungarian Dances*. This was actually Gypsy music, but no matter.

Then there was the violinist, Joseph Joachim, who was responsible for Brahms being received in Weimar by the great Franz Liszt. As Liszt was by far the most influential musician of the age, this was a huge opportunity.

Unfortunately, when Liszt welcomed the young man to his studio, showed an interest in his work, and then – as an unusual honour and courtesy – played him his own newly completed *B minor Sonata*, Brahms fell asleep.

(As far as the *B minor Sonata* is concerned, we hope, as new experts, you recognized this as the work so despised by Hanslick in our chapter on music critics.)

Joachim also organized for Brahms to meet Robert Schumann, and his wife, Clara. Schumann became the young composer's sponsor and friend. When Schumann met Brahms, he was only twenty-one and at his handsomest. Schumann was so impressed by Brahms as a musician that he announced his discovery in the journal he edited. He told his readership, in somewhat overwrought romantic terms, that the Hero to save music had arrived.

A much discussed question has always been: was Brahms in love with Clara – even though she was older than himself by fourteen years, very like his mother was to his father, as well as being the mother of eight children – or *vice versa*. The question arises as Brahms became her moral and financial support during her husband's final illness and incarceration in a mental asylum.

The answer to this is that nobody knows. Nor, really, is it any of our business.

They did not marry, they did not have an affair, but remained very close friends and colleagues until their deaths, and as they burnt their correspondence, we will never know. It seems reasonable to suppose that Clara had noticed how handsome, kind and brilliant he was.

The movie mentioned earlier in reference to Robert Schumann, *Song of Love*, deals with this romantic question.

When Clara Schumann died, Brahms tried to take the train from Vienna to her funeral – took the wrong connection, missed the funeral, caught a chill – and soon after died. That was in Vienna in 1897.

Much of this may be just talk as biographers report that there were many women with whom Brahms became infatuated. There was talk among the insiders at the time of a possible wedding in each case; there was never a marriage, however, nor even an attempt at one.

And one must remember that when Brahms joined with two friends to write a sonata, his section, the *Scherzo*, was based on the letters FAB, which stand for *Frei Aber Einse* (*Free But Lonely*).

Brahms had a ready wit, which could be acerbic.

On one occasion, he was listening to a string quartet playing one of his compositions. When the playing was finished, the viola player turned to the composer and asked him how he liked the tempo.

As they had been unable to play together at all, he answered, “Oh, splendid, splendid indeed – particularly that of the viola!”

There was a civil war in the music world between the admirers of Brahms and those of Wagner, as mentioned earlier.

Wagner, about whom it is hard to find anything nice to say as a person, allowed savage warfare to be waged by his acolytes, who wrote vicious attacks on Brahms. Brahms rarely allowed himself to be provoked into responding and comported himself in a cool, gentlemanly way.

His reaction to the news of Wagner's death is an example of this: Brahms, conducting a choral group when this news was brought to him, laid down his baton and announced they would play no more that day, and with bowed head gravely stated, "A master has died!"

Hans von Bülow, who was a great pianist and conductor and whose Meiningen Orchestra was one of the finest in the world, had been one of Wagner's most important musical supporters. He had also been Liszt's student, and had been married to his daughter, Cosima, as you will remember. After Cosima left him to live with Wagner, however, he not surprisingly left the Wagner camp and became a Brahms supporter instead.

It was von Bülow who first referred to Brahms' First Symphony as '*Beethoven's Tenth*'. This is a quote that all experts know and quote unnecessarily often, so it is better to be ready for it.

This naming of Brahms' *First Symphony* 'Beethoven's Tenth' is clearly understandable to all those who hear it, but, in fact, it took Brahms many years before he dared produce a symphony – due to his awe of Beethoven.

When asked whether he would ever write a symphony he would say, "How could I, with the shadow of Beethoven behind me?"

In reference to the doubts Brahms' contemporaries had about his symphony, and the fact it was based on almost nothing as a musical theme, Leonard Bernstein said, "How could Brahms' critics have missed this resemblance to Beethoven's work?… Hadn't they learned yet from the great works of Beethoven that 'almost nothing' can evolve into musical structures of incredible power and beauty?"

Brahms went on to compose three more symphonies, but among his most played and admired works are his two piano concertos, which are massive, dramatic, very beautiful, and extremely hard to play.

Brahms had a masculine, sonorous way of playing and composing for the piano; among these works is a set of twenty devastatingly difficult and amusing *Variations on Paganini's Caprice #24 in A minor*.

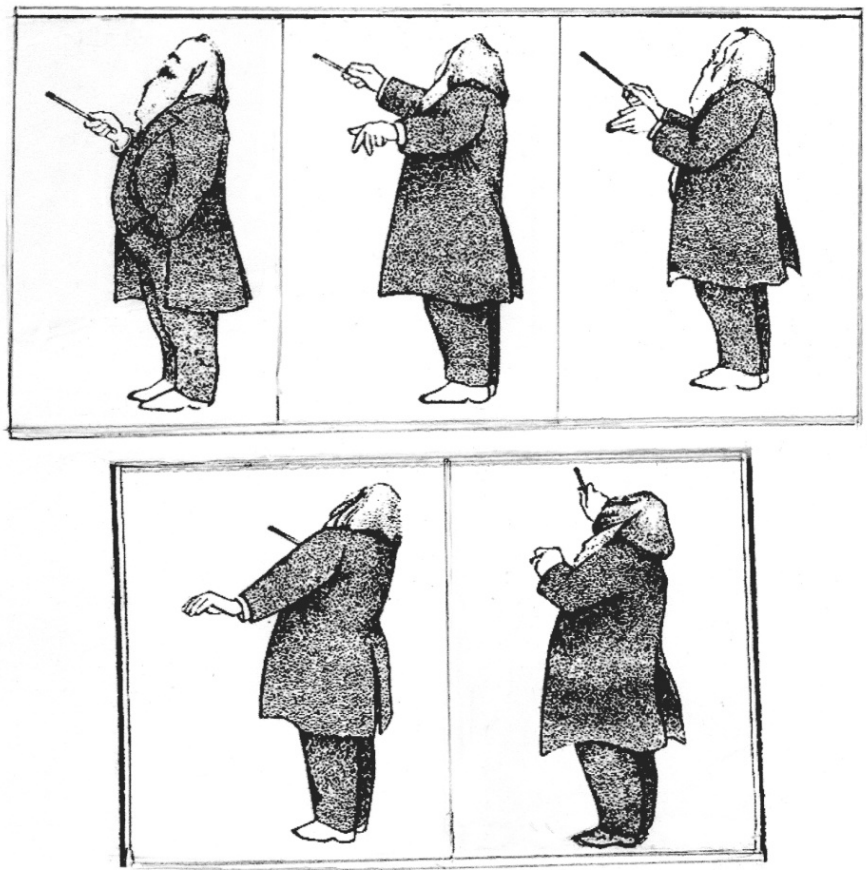
As an expert, you will recognize this musical joke, as it is the same theme that Liszt had used years before for the set of variations he wrote when he first heard Paganini and gave up his idea of taking Holy Orders.

We will meet this theme by Paganini again when we come to Rachmaninoff, who surpassed even himself when he composed his own *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini* for piano and orchestra. Whereas most people know Brahms' *Lullaby*, you are far ahead if you know this story.

Brahms was once invited to dinner by a proud wine connoisseur, who brought out his best bottle saying, "This is the Brahms of my cellar." After sniffing the wine Brahms said, "Better bring out your Beethoven."

Here's a more recent anecdote: in the 1940s, the pianist Artur Schnabel was always amazed to read in programme notes for his concerts in America that 'Brahms had thought highly of my playing'! At thirteen Schnabel had, in fact, met the great man, but all he remembered him ever saying was 'did you enjoy your lunch?'

In these later years Brahms did grow stout, with a beard, and didn't notice when he had crumbs on his jacket, but those who were close to him knew him to be kind, with a twinkle.



RICHARD WAGNER

(1813-1883)

We have already mentioned this man many times. So we had better give a complete picture.

As we have indicated, a great many people become enamoured of the intoxicating grandeur of Wagner's music and its lush harmonies. They listen raptly to his enormous operas, swept away by their own emotions – and then they grow out of it.

Although Wagner composed operas, which are outside the scope of this guide, we include him because this was the experience of almost every composer of the second half of the 19th century, whether they composed operas or not.

For instance, Friedrich Nietzsche – a passable amateur composer as well as influential philosopher – was a disciple and friend of Wagner as a young man, then turned just as passionately against him, feeling that his attraction to Wagner and his world was dangerous for his mental well-being. Nietzsche ended up insane in any case.

This is what happened: in 1888, five years after Wagner's death, Nietzsche wrote *The Wagner Case*, at the same time he was working on his major philosophical work *The Will to Power*, and *Twilight of the Idols* (the last of Wagner's iconic *Ring* cycle is *Twilight of the Gods*).

It was after this that, not surprisingly, he suffered a complete mental breakdown from which he never recovered.

This was the kind of effect Wagner had on all the younger generation of musicians and artists in the late 19th century.

However, one does quite often hear orchestral excerpts from some of his operas in the concert hall. One you are likely to hear is the '*Prelude and Liebestod*' from *Tristan and Isolde*.

If you want to be *really* expert, tell people that Wagner himself never called the final scene of this very symphonic opera '*Liebestod*' ('Love-Death'). That name was given to it by Liszt when he made a piano transcription of it.

Needless to say, Liszt's transcription became a favourite showpiece for virtuoso pianists long before most people heard the opera.

A footnote about Wagner: his most famous operas are all based either on medieval legends or are about Icelandic power-mad gods from some strange prehistoric era. As none of these contain any ethnic ideas, and are chiefly about non-humans, they have nothing to do with the fascist and racist ideas attributed to them thanks to his greatest fan, Hitler, whose admiration has given Wagner an even worse name than he deserves.

Wagner offended almost everyone, but one must be fair.

PART III

What You Need to Know about other Important Composers

Some of the composers included from here on are certainly in the category of Great Composers, but some are perhaps only Important Composers or Influential Composers – only time will tell whether their music will survive the ups and downs of fashion and continue to lift the hearts of listeners. These include:

Late Romantic Germans

ANTON BRUCKNER
(1811-83)

Bruckner was an exception to the many musicians of this time who became instant and passionate devotees of Wagner, but who then swung just as passionately in the opposite direction.

A modest, pious, profoundly musical man, an organist and almost entirely self-educated, he became a disciple of Wagner, whom he idolized, and remained so all his life.

He did not compose huge operas, however – only huge symphonies (eight, with the *Ninth* unfinished). He never married, but late in life took to suddenly proposing marriage to amazed and unsuspecting young ladies.

His recognition came late, but today Bruckner is very fashionable among the 'in-crowd' of composers and connoisseurs.

As an expert, you must tread carefully here if you actually find his works numbingly long. It is best to say you enjoy his *Eighth* and talk about it being 'all about a man's argument with his Fate, represented by the dotted rhythms', and how much you appreciate 'the motif emerging threateningly from the basses and mercilessly subduing the imploring sighs that are emitted by the woodwinds'.

This sort of thing is normal music-speak for music critics and programme-note writers and is highly acceptable.

GUSTAV MAHLER
(1860-1911)

*M*ahler was an integral part of late German Romanticism. He was, not surprisingly, therefore, affected by such fellow Viennese as Sigmund Freud. He, too, wrote huge symphonies – ten of them – and great song cycles like *Songs of A Wayfarer* and *Youth's Magic Horn*.

Song of the Earth is sometimes thought of as a song cycle, but it is actually a symphony. It was intended to be his tenth symphony, but Mahler was superstitious of exceeding the magic number 'nine' set by Beethoven, fearing he would die if he composed a symphony No.10.

So he named his tenth symphony *Das Lied von der Erde*, ('*Song of the Earth*'). Happy to have cheated death, he proceeded on to compose his official 'Tenth Symphony', whereupon he died before completing more than one movement.

It is good to know that despite his enormous influence as a musician, Mahler is also known for having married a famous beauty called Alma Schindler, who also married Franz Werfel, a novelist well known at that time, and thirdly the architect Walter Gropius, who was to design the Pan Am building in New York in the 1950's.

Mahler was also famous for being one of the greatest conductors and music directors of the early twentieth century, mainly of the Vienna State Opera, and later of the Met in New York, together with two seasons as chief conductor of the New York Philharmonic. Conducting was his main occupation; composition was in fact his summer activity.

He died at fifty, of heart failure as the result of rheumatic fever when young.

Many people will tell you they are going to a full cycle of Wagner's *Ring*, or to a full cycle of Mahler symphonies or to a cycle of Bruckner symphonies. Just smile and say how nice. They will only do it once.

RICHARD STRAUSS
(1864-1949)

Strauss came a little late in the German Romantic school and composed ten Tone Poems that we hear very often.

These include *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* – known to movie-lovers as *2001 A Space Odyssey*.

He then moved on to orchestrally brilliant, luridly dramatic operas such as *Elektra* and *Salome*. The latter was banned from several opera houses for indecency and profanity.

In all of these, anyone can detect his huge admiration of Wagner, even without being an expert. His complete mastery of the orchestra – for which he entirely credited Wagner, is also heard in the opera *Der Rosenkavalier* – which isn't indecent, just a bit immoral.

Always say that your favourite among Strauss's works are the *Four Last Songs*. These really are beautiful, but are – like so many of the works of these later Germanic composers – really depressing.

In the 1930's Strauss allowed himself to be used by the Nazis, agreeing to be made president of the 'Reichsmusik-kammer', though he endangered himself by objecting to the banning of his Jewish librettist Stefan Zweig.

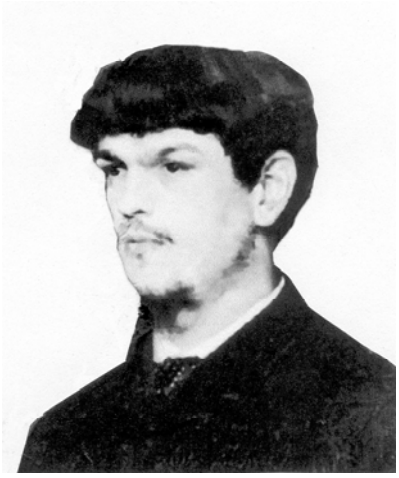
In the end, he did resign from his official post, and managed to get exonerated by the "De-Nazification Tribunal" after the war.

French Composers and Other Oddities

*including **CLAUDE DEBUSSY** and **MAURICE RAVEL***

Usually it is enough to know that Claude Debussy (1862 – 1918) and Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937) are termed "Impressionists", like their contemporary painters. Although it is almost annoying how often they are called "Impressionists" it is still OK to do this, and it is actually quite true.

They are known as "Impressionists" because, like the painters, they were not interested in strict forms but in impressions of light and mood and innovative harmonies.



It would be unkind to remind the reader of what Saint-Saëns said about Debussy in an earlier chapter, but there was much truth in it. Although he was a trifle harsh in saying Debussy 'did not create a style, but cultivated an absence of style, logic and common sense', you could say that Debussy was the true founder of "modernism" – by making *sound effects* take the place of music.

It is not difficult to remember what to say about Debussy, as being a French composer it is safe to say he won the *Prix de Rome*.

Ravel's five efforts to win the Rome Prize caused a huge *affaire* among the press and musical *cognoscenti* of Paris, a city that loves an uproar – it was a scandal that made him famous and caused the resignation of the director of the *Conservatoire*.

Ravel failed to win the Rome Prize year after year, even though at the time of his first application he had composed three of his most enduring works: the piano piece *Jeux d'Eau*, the haunting *Pavane for a Dead Infanta*, and the song-cycle, *Schéherézade*. His music seemed overly iconoclastic to the judges.

Looking around for interesting and novel sounds, both Debussy and Ravel virtually invented Spanish music, although neither of them ever bothered to go to Spain. Parisians leave Paris as little as possible.

They did this with the help of another French composer, whom we will describe shortly, Bizet; subsequently musicians from Spain would come to Paris to learn how to do it. This is really good to know because even established experts are not all aware of this French invention of Spain.

Debussy, who was inspired in this by a postcard someone sent him from a holiday in Spain, created a sound that has been accepted as "Spanish" ever since. This can be heard in the piano pieces *Soirée dans Grenade* and *La Puerta del Vino*, as well as the orchestral *Images*.

Meanwhile, Ravel was the son of a Swiss inventor, and approached music with a watch-maker's precision in both his sound effects *and* his structures.

Like Debussy, he never left Paris if he could help it, but he composed a number of works with Spanish themes, including *Alborado del gracioso*, the one-act opera *l'Heure espagnole*, the *Pavane pour une Infante Défunte*, *Rapsodie espagnole*, and, of course, *Boléro*, which continued to bring in huge royalties for half a century after his death.

Note: Ravel had slightly more excuse than Debussy or Bizet to develop a Spanish ethos as his mother's family was of Basque origin and when he was a baby they lived near the border with Spain.

At the time this Spanish inspiration caused another Parisian *furore*, as critics claimed that in working with this idea, Ravel was imitating Debussy. But no one was at all concerned when Manuel de Falla and Enrique Granados came to Paris to find out how to achieve this Spanish sound, nor when they were subsequently imitated by a host of other composers from Spain. But that is very French.

We should remind the reader that Georges Bizet had preceded these two by a whole generation with this idea when he composed *Carmen* – without ever having been to Spain, either (He did, however, as you may have guessed, win the *Prix de Rome*).

This is all actually true about Spanish music and you can always get a lot of attention by pointing it out, as we explained above.

There were many differences between Debussy and Ravel, however. Debussy was extremely disagreeable, and had a number of 'relationships' – including bad marriages – while Ravel was neat, intellectual, loved cats and never married anyone.

But to continue with the similarities between them: they both composed music that was featured by the celebrated Russian impresario Diaghilev, founder of the Ballets Russes.

Debussy's offering was *l'Après-Midi d'un Faune*. This is really a Tone Poem, which, choreographed a bit salaciously, made his lead dancer, the celebrated Nijinsky, notorious.

Ravel, meanwhile provided *Daphnis and Chloé*, the *Boléro*, and a troubling, magnificent work known as *La Valse*.

Diaghilev did not want to produce *La Valse*, though, as it was obviously a musical depiction of the end of European civilization as they had known it. This tortured waltz rushes toward the self-destruction of World War I and the final years of the century, but it is frequently heard in the concert hall today.

Debussy's private life, while unattractive, certainly makes up for the lack of scandal in so many composers' lives. He first lived in a small apartment in Montmartre, surrounded by the artistic community, with a girl by the name of Gabrielle Dupont. His small income did not keep her happy and this affair came to an end.

He replaced Gabrielle with an artist's model, a tubercular girl called Lilly Texier, whom he married. This did not last either.

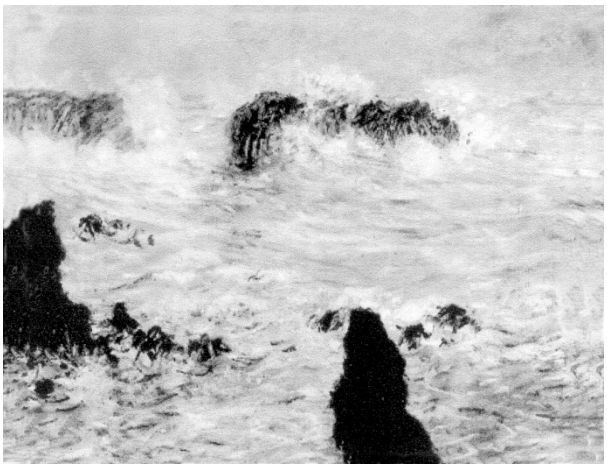
Next he took up with Emma Bardac, the wife of a banker and former girlfriend of the composer Gabriel Fauré, his teacher; they eloped to Jersey, where poor Lilly tried to shoot herself. This gave Debussy a bad name in Paris; this marriage was evidently full of strain as he tried to make an income adequate to her needs when they returned to the capital.

Other than a great deal of music for piano, Debussy also composed the opera *Pélléas et Mélisande*. This is a work it is much better to know about than go to. It is advisable that you find you are busy on the night you are invited to go, although this is another of those things you must not admit to.

As a musical expert you are expected to go into raptures over this seemingly aimless and lengthy work and know the names of all the singers who have tried to make sense of it. You can always mention Mary Garden, the young American soprano who was the sensation of Paris in 1900 and who premiered the role of Mélisande in 1902.

In fact, Debussy nearly had to fight a duel with the writer of the poem on which *Pélléas et Melisande* was based, Maurice Maeterlinck, who was expecting his wife, the soprano Georgette Leblanc, to sing the leading role. On the other hand, Debussy produced a large, magical three-movement work for symphony orchestra called *La Mer*. ('*La Mer*' should not be confused with *la mère* – as in Ravel's *Ma mère l'oye* – which means 'mother'. *La Mer* means 'the ocean'.)

Debussy's *La Mer*, which depicts the ocean during the course of a day, is of course a Tone Poem. It is a work you can very safely praise.



Debussy died during the final year of WWI. Ravel, meanwhile, lived on into the 20th century and became a friend of George Gershwin in the 1920's, going as far as to put a taste of jazz into several of his own works.

We must admit, however, that these two most famous French composers were preceded, and followed, by a number of others one hears very little about outside France. This is the world's revenge on French chauvinism, as there is nothing wrong with their music.

Among the great French composers before Debussy and Ravel – between the Romantic Berlioz and the 'Impressionists' – there were César Franck, Camille Saint-Saëns and Georges Bizet.

César Franck (1822-90) was a scholarly, nice man, humble and unassuming, who spent most of his life as the organist at the church of Sainte Clothilde in Paris – where you can see a sculpture of him as a young man in the courtyard.

Franck was actually born in Belgium, but grew up and lived in Paris, giving music lessons as well as playing the organ. He is best known for his *D minor Symphony*, and a very often heard violin sonata that can be variously played on the cello, viola and flute – which doubles up how often one hears it. He also wrote visionary organ-sounding works for the piano and a magnificent Piano Quintet. A good thing to say about Franck's works is that they have a haunting quality.

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

(1835-1921)

We have already mentioned that Saint-Saëns was an amazing child prodigy. His life spans the Romantic period, as he was born when Chopin and Liszt were still young, gave his first recital at age ten when they were still in their prime, and yet he lived into the 1920s. This means he lived long enough to play Chopin's music for an impressed young Arthur Rubinstein.

He was not only a child prodigy; he continued as a fabulous pianist. He composed five piano concertos as vehicles for his own concert performances, but with the exception of the *Second*, which is really beautiful, these are rarely played today.

He actually made a living, like Franck, as the organist at one of Paris' major churches, in his case the Madeleine. Franz Liszt, no mean organist himself, said that Saint-Saëns was the greatest organist in the world.

As a student, Saint-Saëns made two attempts to win the *Prix de Rome*. The first time he was considered too young, the second time he was considered much too successful already. Further, his first symphony was performed when he left the *Conservatoire* and was passed off as the work of a German. He could get away with this as the French took it for granted that symphonies were German. This may have had something to do with his not getting the Rome Prize.

A Saint-Saëns work one often hears is his third symphony, which features the organ in its finale and is known as the '*Organ Symphony*', but perhaps his greatest work was the opera *Samson and Delilah*.

This opera's production was banned for many years in several European countries, including France, because of its unsavory biblical subject, much as *Salome* was also. In its richness of sound it seemed very heavy to the French – even Wagnerian – but Liszt, as usual, came to the rescue, and organized its first production in Weimar, where he had been music director, and still had influence.

Most people are familiar with Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*, which was used in Walt Disney's film *Fantasia*. They also know the *Carnival of the Animals*, which Saint-Saëns tossed off to amuse some friends at a children's party. There's lots of French wit in this.

Saint-Saëns has not been considered a very important composer. Maybe the reason lies in his own words:

"*The artist who does not feel completely satisfied by elegant lines, by harmonious colours and by a beautiful succession of chords, does not understand the art of music*."

Music critics have never known what to make of this, with the result that he has not had the press he deserves.

He also wrote books on philosophy, literature, painting, the theatre, studied astronomy, physics, natural history, archaeology and mastered several languages. This kind of mind is very French.

Berlioz said of his young protégé, "Saint-Saëns knows everything, but he lacks inexperience."

The charm of Saint-Saëns' music hides a saddened life, however. An early marriage collapsed after the sudden deaths of his two infant children within six weeks of each other.

Sadly, he considered his young wife negligent, as one had fallen out of a window. Disillusioned, he packed his bags and left; he never saw his wife again.

He spent the remaining forty-three years of his life traveling, visiting practically every country on earth, from Europe to Ceylon and the Far East, two tours of the United States, and South America. He died while holidaying in Algeria in 1921.

GEORGES BIZET

(1838-1875)

A word concerning Georges Bizet, born three years after Saint-Saëns.

He is best known – and really only known – for *Carmen*.

The myth that he died of a broken heart because Carmen failed when first produced is entirely false.

The truth was that he had a weak heart, having had rheumatic fever earlier in his life, and although *Carmen* was not a flop at its première, it is true that no-one could have imagined its future success.

Well, no-one but Tchaikovsky, who heard it while on a visit to Paris and confidently predicted that it would become the most popular opera in the world. He was, of course, absolutely right.

And it is also true that the opera did benefit a great deal by the addition of sung dialogue after the first run.

There were no scandals in Bizet's life. After winning the *Prix de Rome* at nineteen with his composition *Clovis and Clotilde*, he subsequently married into the operatic business – his father-in-law was the lyricist and composer Jacques Halévy, whose grand opera *La Juive* was a huge success, becoming a starring role for Caruso.

So, although it was not a failure at its premiere, it is true to say that Bizet would have enjoyed a big breakthrough with *Carmen* had he lived just one month longer.

In addition to these there was Charles Gounod, who composed grand operas, such as *Faust*, and Gabriel Fauré, who was out-distanced by his student Debussy, but also composed with a lot of atmosphere. There was also Erik Satie, a café performer, who had quite an influence on the young Parisian composers with strange little pieces.

These had even odder titles, such as '*Pièce en forme de Poire*' – '*Piece in the Shape of a Pear*' (Satie was an 'Absurdist'), and the better known, and hauntingly beautiful, *Gymnopédies* – whatever that means.

The music of all these composers is regularly performed in France, so the expert should be aware that even though it only occasionally crosses the Atlantic, everyone knows about it.

Russian Composers

Russian composers are in a class by themselves. It is hard to go to a symphonic concert, still less a ballet, without hearing a work by Tchaikovsky, for instance, or a piano concerto by Prokofiev or Rachmaninoff.

And there are so many others: for instance there are the five great self-styled 'amateur', nationalist, composers: Borodin, Balakirev, Rimsky-Korsakov, Mussorgsky and Cui, described below.

Then there are Igor Stravinsky, Sergei Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich and Alexander Scriabin, all of whom come under the heading of "Great Composers," even though we have titled this chapter Important Composers.

Such an explosion of talent and ability is overwhelming and hard to deal with, but here are some important things to know about those most often heard:

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

(1840-1893)

(It is sometimes thought snobbish to spell the name as 'Tschaikowsky', or even Chaijkovski; however, as in Russian it is written in the Cyrillic alphabet anyway, one needn't worry overly about this).

To start with, like Berlioz, Tchaikovsky only began to become a composer as a grown young man, having completed a law degree at Moscow University, and could only play the piano somewhat.

He was the protégé of the famous Rubinstein brothers, Anton and Nicholas, outstanding pianists and founders of the great Moscow and St. Petersburg Conservatories. These two encouraged him, had his works heard, and tried to stop his lifelong tendency to be depressed.

Tchaikovsky is well known to audiences through his *First Piano Concerto*, which Nicholas Rubinstein – for whom he composed the work – said was 'unplayable', and the *Violin Concerto*, composed for the great violinist Leopold Auer – who said that it couldn't be played.

Generally, his music falls into two types – first there is the music he composed based on a story, such as his *Romeo and Juliet Overture*, *Francesca da Rimini*, or the immortal ballets *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*, and operas like *Eugene Onegin*, in all of which the music is colourful, lyrical, beautiful and always captivating.

Secondly, there is the music he composed when he was supported on a generous yearly stipend from an eccentric rich widow, Nadezhda von Meck. This peculiar lady specified that Tchaikovsky must never try to meet her, but she kept very closely in touch with him through almost daily correspondence over a period of thirteen years – on every detail of his work and life.

We are now talking about his symphonies, which he wrote while on his stipend. Unlike his ballets, they are dramatic, tragic, introverted and long. This must mean something, and can be used for conversations into which you can mix some psychology.

As far as Mme. von Meck is concerned, that relationship was really odd. Although they weren't supposed to meet it did nearly happen: Once, while they were both staying in Florence, she asked him to visit her, but this invitation came so unexpectedly that Tchaikovsky was taken aback and couldn't bring himself to go.

She later broke off the connection with no explanation and nobody knows why – nor did Tchaikovsky.

All this was very strange, but also very Russian.

His only other effort at a relationship, before the long stable association with Mme. von Meck, was an ill-fated very brief marriage to a mentally unbalanced admiring student, which left both Tchaikovsky and the young woman on the verge of nervous breakdowns. The woman did eventually end up in an asylum.

Tchaikovsky later traveled to the United States where he conducted the opening concert of Carnegie hall in 1891. Tchaikovsky was a sensation in America, where he was more celebrated than at home, which amazed him.

His death was a sad one, it being often believed today that he committed suicide by deliberately drinking un-boiled water during one of the periodic cholera epidemics in St. Petersburg; they say someone warned him that his secret tendency towards homosexuality was about to be exposed.

This seems a desperate way to die for whatever reason and it may well have been a coincidence.

According to Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky "was one of the most charming artists and men I ever met. He had an unequaled delicacy of mind. He was modest, as all really great people are, and simple, as very few are."

Next:

THE RUSSIAN 'FIVE'

The aforementioned famous '*Russian Five*' were all 'amateur' composers who disliked Western influence and believed that composers should be self-taught and natural; that they should keep to Russian themes, which often meant somewhat colourful Asiatic ones.

Obviously they disapproved of Tchaikovsky who they considered a slave to Western Europe's tastes and dogmatic musical traditions.

The *Five* were particularly partial to Tone Poems.

Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) – a naval officer – is best known for his exotic *Schéhérézade Suite*, which was later choreographed for the Ballets Russes in Paris, and also for the opera *Le Coq d'Or*. This opera was to turn out to be a fore-runner of Igor Stravinsky's *Firebird*. As Stravinsky was Rimsky-Korsakov's student perhaps this is not surprising. He also composed many operas – all richly coloured show pieces.

Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) – an army officer – is best known for *Pictures at an Exhibition*, which is played all the time both in Mussorgsky's original solo piano version and the version Ravel created for orchestra. However, his opera *Boris Godunov* is regarded as extremely important, and you can't go wrong by claiming a liking for it, even though it is somewhat heavy going.

Boris (if you are a real connoisseur you always refer to it by its first name only) was considered *so* heavy that Mussorgsky's fellow member of The Five, Rimsky-Korsakov, re-orchestrated the whole thing after Mussorgsky's death.

This was not the end of people trying to help Mussorgsky out, however – there was a later version made by Shostakovich, which reinstated some of the original harshness and brutality, but these days Mussorgsky's own version is most often heard. To say you prefer Mussorgsky's original version, or even know about it, marks you out as a definite expert and connoisseur.

Alexander Borodin (1833-1887) was a prize-winning chemist and professor of chemistry; he also founded a school of medicine for women in St. Petersburg, which was a great success.

He composed the opera *Prince Igor* and the *String Quartet No. 2*; the latter is recognizable to everyone as the music that was adapted for the Broadway musical *Kismet*.

The illegitimate son of a Georgian prince, Borodin loved his scientific work; he was a professor at the Academy of Medicine in St. Petersburg, where he had an apartment with his wife, and called himself "a Sunday composer." His friends, notably Balakirev, had to push him to compose (*Prince Igor*, his only opera, was left incomplete at his death). An excerpt from the opera – *Polovtsian Dances* – is often heard, having been turned into a balletic showpiece by Diaghilev.

Mili Balakirev (1837-1910) – a law student – composed *Islamey* for the piano. In doing this he thought he had succeeded in writing the most difficult virtuoso work ever composed, but it was later outranked in difficulty by Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*.

His piano works are brilliant, in the style of Liszt (naturally).

Then there was César Cui. Cui, the son of French officer who settled in Russia and a Lithuanian mother, rose to the rank of general in the Russian army.

No one has ever heard anything by Cui. The neophyte expert is well advised to silence all others by remarking casually that he loves to listen to César Cui's *Twenty-Five Preludes* for the piano.

Few will say anything after this.

As for conversational anecdotes that sound expert, there is quite a selection. For example:

Rimsky-Korsakov, after starting life as naval officer, moved over into composition slowly. He kept up his association with the military, however, as an inspector of naval bands. When asked to head the composition department at the conservatory of St. Petersburg, he accepted, but actually attended class with the students to fill in what he didn't know.

Eventually, Rimsky was the orchestration teacher of every great twentieth century Russian composer, and some not Russian.

Mussorgsky drank (a lot). The portrait done a few days before his death by the painter Repin shows a man unrecognizable from the photos of the debonair dandy army officer of a few years earlier.

Here's a cute curiosity: Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov, their friend Liadov, and Liszt composed a once-famous set of variations on *Chopsticks*.

Then we come to the later batch of Russian composers, starting with the *enfant terrible* of them all:

IGOR STRAVINSKY

(1882-1971)

Stravinsky's name was largely made by his work with Serge Diaghilev and later George Balanchine, both of whom set his music to innovative dance. He was a clever, industrious man; a survivor, who made the most of his talent, eking it out with brilliantly clever rhythms and witty noises. Try as he would, he could not come up with any beautiful themes as others such as Rachmaninoff could.

He also had the good sense not to go back to Russia – a mistake made by Prokofiev, as we will see.

Stravinsky's most popular works by far are the ballets he created as a young man for the Ballets Russes. Everyone likes these, whatever they think of Stravinsky's later works. When Rimsky-Korsakov was too busy to compose something for Diaghilev, the impresario agreed to try out Rimsky's student – young Igor.

That was how his first commission came about; it was *The Firebird*, which we have already mentioned.

This was a big success and others soon followed, such as *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*. Diaghilev had commissioned *The Rite* for the great dancer Nijinski, who also was told to choreograph it as he had done for Debussy's *l'Après Midi d'un Faune*.

Nijinsky did this by incorporating really weird steps suggesting the pagan violence of some distant age and human sacrifice.

The premiere took place in Paris' Théâtre des Champs Élysées and a real riot ensued. Nijinsky had to be held back forcibly from jumping off the stage to engage in fisticuffs with a jeering member of the audience.

The police arrived. The Princess de Pourtalès stood up in her box and announced in loud, cold tones that she had survived to a grand old age and up till then nobody had tried to make a fool of her.

It was reported by various eyewitnesses that there were faces slapped, cards exchanged and assignations for duels made. The results of the matters of honor are not known, but it wouldn't be surprising to learn that at least one of them was actually carried out.

What was most surprising was that all the hot tempers of the first night performance were absent the very next night. But that is typically Parisian.

(To comment cleverly on this piece and its imagery one must refer to the work of painters of the time such as Augustus John, and the set designer Nicolas Roerich.)

As everything came to an end in Europe in 1914, Stravinsky wisely decided not to go back to Russia, becoming a true international celebrity through the 20's and 30's, and his name becoming synonymous with everything clever and new – much like Picasso, his exact contemporary and close parallel in the art world.

But then, Picasso was also a discovery of Diaghilev's, like almost everyone at that time. They were also alike in being exactly the same age and living until the 1970's.

After that, Stravinsky's career found new scope in New York, where he went with so many other European musicians, as we have seen. He had the advantage of having known George Balanchine (or Balanchivadze, as his Georgian name was originally spelt) in Paris with the Ballets Russes.

Together they created the major works we know for the New York City Ballet.

Although no "oil painting", as they say (see the Picasso caricature at the top of this section), Stravinsky was a success with the ladies. He married his young cousin and early sweetheart, Katerina Nossenko, the mother of his children. Later he took as his second wife his life's soul-mate, Vera de Bosset – although there seems to have been some serious over-lapping of those two ladies during mid-life.

As an expert, you must have something to say about this iconic man who was so much part of his time and a forerunner of Modern Music (to be discussed below).

Try to memorize the following quote from a paper by a Californian academic in reference to the *Rite of Spring*. This quote will bear witness to your expertise, but it must be learnt by heart, as this kind of thing doesn't spring naturally to the mind of the regular music lover:

"*Questions may linger about the completeness of the octatonic record in Part II, and in particular about the rapid collectional shifts and consequent* "*outside*" *pitch elements*. *Could the approach at this point benefit from, say, certain set-theoretic formulations? The answer here seems to be Yes, but only up to rather limited point*."

Nor does it matter if you don't know, or anyone know, what any of this means. It is the just result of allowing music to be taken hostage by acadaemia.

SERGE PROKOFIEV

(1891-1953)

Prokofiev also came to Paris and composed ballet scores for Diaghilev, including *Le Pas d'Acier* ('The Age of Steel') and the better known *Prodigal Son*, but, unlike Stravinsky, he made the grave mistake of returning to Russia well after the Bolshevik Revolution.

He went back just before Stalin began his murderous purges, having been enticed home with promises of an exalted position in the Soviet state. He did this despite having established a fine reputation in the West.

Also, he was a dazzling pianist, which Stravinsky was not.

He went through some harrowing times when the regime took against him. In 1948, during one of Stalin's periodic paranoid phases, a terrified state musical establishment declared that "Prokofiev's creative style was formed during his years in the West, where the external novelty of his manner pleased the narrow, bourgeois circle of aesthetes for whom he wrote his music."

Prokofiev responded. "In my new opera I intend to write trios, duets and choruses and make use of some interesting Russian folk songs.

He was promptly awarded the Stalin Prize in 1951 for '*On Guard for Peace*', a paean to "the Soviet international peace movement."

And it certainly was not true that Prokofiev's creative style had been formed in the West. On the contrary, in 1911, when he was still a student at the Moscow Conservatory, everyone had been shocked by the aggressiveness of his compositions, with their startling harmonic changes and rhythms.

Later, his career was launched in the West when he made a tour of America in 1918, sponsored by the Koussevitzky Foundation (you will notice how often we will have to mention the name Koussevitzky).

As well as composing five piano concertos, with which he could exploit his marvelous pianistic ability, Prokofiev composed seven symphonies and two violin concertos. He could compose music with humor, *espièglerie*, strange moods and fireworks. But he could also write sweet music, as we hear in his *Classical Symphony*.

However, he also composed a famous Tone Poem that every child has heard: the mini-musical narrative *Peter and the Wolf*.

In Russia he continued to write for the ballet, including much performed works such as *Cinderella* and *Romeo and Juliet*. He also composed operas, including *The Love of Three Oranges* and *War and Peace* and marvelous film scores: *Ivan the Terrible*, *Alexander Nevsky* and *Lt. Kijé*.

Reminiscent of *Dr. Zhivago*, one anecdote illustrates life in Russia during the Soviet era.

Prokofiev's wife, Lina, was arrested on trumped up charges of spying and sent to a labour camp. By then Prokofiev had formed a liaison with a Communist Party member, Mira Mendelson, with whom he lived the rest of his life.

One suspects something questionable in Ms. Mendelson's party influence in this, *n'est-ce pas*?

DIMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

(1906-1975)

Shostakovich also lived in Russia through its Soviet period, and was also disapproved of by Stalin, but unlike the much tougher Prokofiev, he became a complete nervous wreck.

These Soviet composers couldn't sleep at night dreading that any moment they would be accused of "Decadent Formalism". Stalin considered himself a music lover (being a Georgian, he was), but he knew what he liked, and liked what he knew, and modern music was never a part of that.

He would relent if a case could be made for 'Socialist Realism' – meaning lite-modern rousing music for the proletariat, with banal tunes and marches – but that was it.

While Shostakovich's music is neither "decadent" nor "formalistic," whatever that means, it is OK to say that it can be "troubling," as all his music is thought-provoking and full of character.

In concert programmes you will notice his most often performed work is his *Fifth Symphony* – a dramatic, brilliant work that got him back into the Soviet establishment's good books – not that he didn't remain very nervous.

As an expert, you can be safe in knowing that like so many of these Russians, he was a dazzling pianist.

ALEXANDER SCRIABIN

(1872-1915)

Although Scriabin falls more definitely into the category of Important Composer than Great Composer, some of the stories about him are very amusing.

He was a classmate of Rachmaninoff's, and similarly his most enduring works are those he wrote for the piano; he was also, of course, a fabulous pianist.

Unfortunately, he was taken up with occult ideas and his music can be very strange. This is a good thing to know, because although it is rare to hear his music, when you do, you will hear that his piano works are very pungent.

In addition to this, Scriabin was a huge egotist and developed a theory of the future of music and of the world, with himself at the center of it, naturally. He adopted some 20th century notions of a rather spooky kind of mysticism and planned one great work – '*The Mystery*'.

This was to combine music, poetry, dance, colours, perfumes, and a new language consisting of sighs and exclamations. It was to be performed only once – in India – in a great domed temple beside a lake (he even made travel arrangements with a travel bureau in Moscow for this). The audience was to consist of 'worshippers' who would yield to a "supreme final ecstasy".

He was convinced that his artistic vision was coming to pass – that there was to be a cataclysm from the ruins of which he would appear as a kind of Messiah 'to reunite the human race with the Spirit.'

Oddly enough, Scriabin was not only allowed to walk around the streets, but was celebrated as a composer and performer. Koussevitzky hastened to sign him up for his publishing house and conducted his three symphonies, '*The Divine Poem*', '*The Poem of Ecstasy*', and '*Prometheus*', which was a trial run for the *Mystery*.

In his personal life, Scriabin was an obsessive hypochondriac and a wobbly sort of husband to wife Vera, a piano student who played his music and gave him children.

He was later asked to leave the United States on the grounds of "moral turpitude" when he went there with number two, Tatiana – another young Moscow Conservatoire piano graduate who also played his music everywhere, and gave him more children, and with whom he was traveling and living, though they were not actually married.

After all this, he died of an infected carbuncle on the lip from a shaving cut in 1915.

Here is an entertaining anecdote about Scriabin:

“Who is your favourite composer?,” Scriabin asked of a young Arthur Rubinstein over tea at the Café de la Paix.

When, without hesitation, Rubinstein answered “Brahms”, Scriabin banged his fist on the table and screamed, “What, what? How can you like this terrible composer and me at the same time? When I was your age I was a Chopinist, later I was a Wagnerian, but now I can only be a Scriabinist!,” and, enraged, took his hat and ran out of the café, leaving poor Arthur with the bill.

“He was a bit strange, Scriabin, but I still admire his music”, recalled Rubinstein, who didn’t seem to mind about the bill.

Although Scriabin seemed very exciting at the beginning of the twentieth century, he might have been totally forgotten were it not for the efforts of Vladimir Horowitz.

Horowitz, who couldn’t get over having met him as a child and being told by the great man that it was more important to go to museums and read than to practice, made a big effort to keep his music alive.

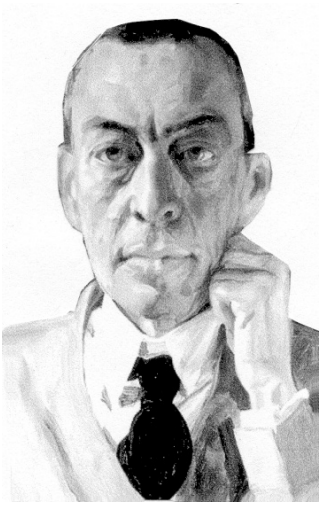
“You will always be a pianist,” was the astute judgment of the otherwise odd Scriabin, when the 12 year-old boy played for him. “Don’t worry about it; learn all the rest about life and culture instead.”

The new expert can stun people with some of this.

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

(1873-1943)

Now we come to Sergei Rachmaninoff, certainly a Great Composer, whom even established experts secretly adore, though they are embarrassed to admit it. Although he lived until 1943, dying rather incongruously in Beverly Hills, California, Rachmaninoff is absolutely not thought of as a "Modern Composer".



This made it hard on critics to know what to say, and it took time and huge audiences to make his music clear to them.

His music is so beautiful it confused them for a very long time, especially when it was used in films – notably *Brief Encounter*.

Was it, they asked themselves, really movie music?

Now they have largely got over it, but it is still a problem, and even if you never miss a performance of any of his fabulous works for piano and orchestra it is really better not to say so.

As for the anecdotes, it is good to know that Rachmaninoff was of good family; he studied with the composer Glazunov, who was for many years director of the St. Petersburg Conservatory; he then studied at the Moscow Conservatory, and, finally, he was mentored by Tchaikovsky.

More importantly, however, you must know that he composed and published very successfully before he was twenty, and before he was able to ask for royalties – copyright then non-existent.

All experts know also that he went through a period of terrible depression when the premiere of his first symphony was a disaster; Glazunov, who was conducting, was drunk – this was not unusual – and the performance was a shambles. Rachmaninoff was so upset he shelved the work, and it was not discovered till after his death, fifty years later.

As a result of this shattering failure, Rachmaninoff felt he could no longer compose. In consequence of his breakdown he did something very new at the time: he consulted a psychoanalyst.

This was Dr. Nicolai Dahl (have you ever noticed how many Russians are called Nicolai? – however, Dr. Dahl was in fact a Swedish import to Moscow, a practitioner of the new Freudian technique of hypnotherapy). Dahl treated Rachmaninoff with hypnosis, repeating over and over, "You will compose again; you will write a piano concerto; you will compose with great facility."

It worked! He did! The piece was the *Second Piano Concerto,* probably the most loved work for piano and orchestra in the repertoire. The dedication of the concerto is '*To Nicholas Dahl*'.

He made a happy marriage and left Russia as soon as he could after the Revolution. He was celebrated, grew quite rich and was much admired.

For the rest of his life he lived in Switzerland, New York and California, feeling homesick.

Rachmaninoff's tall, gaunt figure was rather like that of Abraham Lincoln – taller than everyone else, thin and shy. He was unsmiling in public to the point of apparent severity. Stravinsky called him "a six-foot scowl."

But in private, with intimate friends, like the great basso Chaliapin and the young Horowitz, he would laugh to the point of tears with stories of Russia and Russians, and he had a fondness for 'Jewish jokes'.

He was loved everywhere and recognized universally as the greatest pianist of the century as the public knew that a soft heart lurked beneath the austere appearance. His concerts at Carnegie Hall through the 1920's and 30's were always sell-outs (at $2.50 a ticket).

Here's an example that shows his personality: living in California not far from Stravinsky in 1942, they both had children who were caught in war-time France. He wrote to a mutual friend:

"I am eager to meet someone whose family, like mine, is over there, and with whom I could discuss ways to send money and other things.

"As I know how much Igor Fyodorovich has always disliked my compositions, even though he respects me as a pianist, and he must know my attitude to modern music, I'm not sure whether I could invite him and his wife to my house – which I'd love to do – because I don't know how he would receive my invitation. Would you be so kind as to send out a feeler to gauge his reaction to such an idea?"

Stravinsky was of course delighted to accept.

Here, we must remind you of Paganini and his *Caprice #24* that you got to know with Liszt and Brahms:

In his later years, Rachmaninoff found it increasingly difficult to come up with themes as beautiful as those he composed when young. Looking around for a subject for yet another work for piano and orchestra – these being his specialty – he took up this theme.

The result is the *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*, which comes very near to being as popular as his *Second Piano Concerto*. Always remember to make reference to those earlier works by Liszt and Brahms when this is played. This is a musical insider's piece of knowledge that you will look good knowing.

You will remember that we said earlier that he had not understood about royalties as a young man. He had in fact been famous as a composer since the age of twenty, when one little piano piece became popular all over the world – the *Prelude in C sharp minor*.

Everyone loved this piece. Had he received even the smallest royalty he would have been a rich man very young, and what is more, he was asked to play it everywhere he went for the rest of his life. He called the Prelude "It" and came to dread being called upon to play "It" when audiences clamoured to hear the piece at every concert. He claimed he preferred to hear the dance band version popular in the 1920's and 30's, especially when performed by "that fine pianist" Eddie Duchin.

He went on being homesick and died of smoking.

NICOLAI MEDTNER

(1880-1951)

Medtner is not nearly as well known, or known at all, but he had an early career similar to that of Rachmaninoff and Prokofiev, i.e. he was a brilliant pianist who turned to composition.

In Medtner's case, however, it is music we hardly ever hear, and he can only just be considered an Important Composer. However, his name does crop up on piano recital programmes from time to time, and he was very much in the circle of Rachmaninoff and the other pianistic giants of that era.

He ended by abandoning the career of concert pianist, but nevertheless wrote music that consistently involved the piano, including three piano concertos.

Like Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff, Medtner left Russia for the United States. Unlike them, however, he found, in the end, that he was more comfortable in the old world and moved to England, where he lived out the last part of his life.

Medtner's personal life was a bit unique: while his brother was interned in a work camp in Germany, Medtner fell in love with his sister-in-law. The brother must have been generous and forgiving (and, of course, absent) – he sent word she was free to go, and they were subsequently married.

Very Russian.

Eastern European 20th century Composers

BÉLA BARTÓK

(1881-1945)

Another composer of that generation, Bartók shared a number of characteristics with his contemporaries: he was a first rate pianist (coming second to Wilhelm Backhaus in the Anton Rubinstein Competition in Paris in 1905); he brought folk music and pungent rhythms to his music; he strongly advocated Nationalism in music, and he went to America – in his case to avoid the Fascists.

It is largely due to Bartók and his efforts to record folk music from Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, in the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, that the term "ethnomusicology" was coined.

This is a great word for experts to know.

From 1905 till the First World War, Bartók traveled around with a phonograph, often together with his friend Zoltán Kodály, recording 6,000 examples of folk music of a type then unknown, though it had been there in the countryside all along.

You can really impress people with knowledge of folk music. Most people think folk music is rather jolly, whereas some of this Eastern European music has a strange, twangy, rather sour sound due to its use of ancient modes. You won't need to explain what "modes" are as no one really wants to know.

Bartók also liked to use irregular rhythms, which imitate the rhythms of speech. He put these into his compositions too.

Sadly, when he went to America in the 1940's, he felt himself to be in "a wild, free, savage in a cold, hostile land." (This was not at all the way all those other Hungarians felt – but they were conductors, and perhaps that made a difference.)

Now that you know who Koussevitzky is, we will add that it was he who came to Bartók's rescue when the composer was living very frugally in a small apartment on 57th street. Koussevitzky arranged a commission from the Boston Symphony for '*Concerto for Orchestra*'. (Note: this is not really a 'concerto' at all but a five-movement *symphony* that makes a point of featuring individual instruments from all over the orchestra.)

Two years later, in 1945, as he lay dying, Bartók raced around the clock to finish his *Third Piano Concerto* by inventing a system of notational shorthand, reducing whole chords to single strokes. This is one of his best works, one where the aggressiveness of his earlier music is softened by his genuine love of the folk sounds of his country.

As an expert you must have seen his opera *Bluebeard's Castle* at least once. This was written as a wedding present for his second wife – which seems an odd choice of subject under the circumstances. This opera was a statement of "spiritual isolationism" that he fell into through a series of agnostic misadventures. It was originally hated and banned. A strange piece, it was beautifully recorded by Jesse Norman.

All ballet goers have seen his equally strange and gruesome ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin*, which centers on a prostitute and some murderers.

Although one almost only hears the *Concerto for Orchestra* these days, it is still considered elegant to admire Bartók's piano and violin concertos and many short pieces for piano.

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY

(1882-1967)

A close friend and associate of Bartók, Kodály was another Hungarian composer of this same generation.

Before the First World War, Kodaly went along with Bartók on some of his trips around Transylvania with the phonograph and manuscript paper, as we explained above; he also composed using the kind of folkloric material they found in the countryside.

The *Háry Janos Suite*, which is about a teller of tall tales, is the most often heard of his works; it begins with a giant orchestral sneeze, which in Hungary means you don't have to believe any of it.

Finally, when the subject of Kodály comes up, the expert should look knowing and say he particularly favors the *Psalmus Hungaricus,* which he based on sixteenth century texts and wrote in 1923 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the union of Buda and Pest.

Very few people you meet will know anything about this.

LEOŠ JANÁCEK
(1854-1928)

The Czech composer Janácek composed chiefly opera and choral works that aren't done that often, but the expert can look serious and explain that Janácek's music 'grew out of the inflections of Moravian peasant speech'.

If you are still on the subject of the inflections of Moravian peasant speech, bring out your taste for the '*Glagolithic Mass*' – now there's a conversation stopper.

This will mark you as a great expert even if you have never been to see his *Jenůfa* – which concerns infanticide in a rural village, or his *From the House of the Dead*.

With all that, however, we have to say that Janácek's handful of piano works sound haunting and are well written – they are 'pianistic'.

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ
(1890-1959)

Martinů, a Czech, who also came to the United States, is mentioned more often than his music is heard.

He was very prolific, however, writing six symphonies and fourteen ballets, none of which you are likely to see or hear performed.

On those occasions when you do hear a work by Martinů, though, you must be very careful to say very little. He went through so many musical forms it is easy to say something foolish. He tried expressionism, constructionism, jazz, neo-classicalism, Moravian folk melodies and just plain music.

(Note: the 'u' at the end of his name should have a tiny circle over it, but this is beyond most printers).

Music in England and America

The British came to music slowly.

Up until the latter half of the 19th century they had to rely wholly on German imports. Their last great composer was Purcell, who died in 1695!

As we pointed out earlier, they adored Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn.

However, finally they were rather relieved and grateful for the emergence of:

EDWARD ELGAR
(1857-1934)

*I*n fact, Sir Thomas Beecham said, "Until Elgar came along, music was generally supposed to be as sparse as the sun in England."

To his distress, Elgar became best known for his stirring *Pomp and Circumstance* marches, which were heard a great deal during the Great War. This saddened him as the war grieved him terribly, no doubt because his musical culture, like so many at that time, had come from Germany and Austria.

However, the serious expert doesn't mention these, and will have to say which recording they prefer of the *Cello Concerto* (it is safe to say the Jaqueline du Pré version).

As well as being admired for the *Cello Concerto*, Elgar is admired for a work called *The Enigma Variations*, a work which describes a group of his friends – this was his first big success – and also for *The Dream of Gerontius*. Based on a poem by Cardinal John Newman, *The Dream of Gerontius* is really an oratorio, which as we now know is an English specialty. It is composed for orchestra, soloists and chorus and describes the journey of a soul from death to judgment.

There is nothing else quite like this.

You could say that Elgar was the English Brahms: his music is masterful, tasteful, dignified and noble, but perhaps not everyone would understand quite what you meant.

Largely self-taught in music, Elgar had none of the advantages (or disadvantages) of an expensive education; he drifted around in minor musical circles in the English countryside until he was taken over by a masterful wife, Alice Roberts, who organized him, advised him, copied out all his music, and made him go to London.

(Alice was eight years older than Elgar; have you noticed how many of these musicians became attached to women older than themselves? We do not know what this means exactly, but it is an interesting fact to bring up).

His success dates from this period. When Alice died after thirty years of a happy, productive marriage, Elgar lost the will to compose.

Elgar was extremely handsome in the English style, and well liked, but he was Roman Catholic, which made him seem a bit of an outsider.

He died of English medicine.

GUSTAV HOLST
(1874-1934)

Holst is principally known for *The Planets*, which by now the new expert will realize is a Tone Poem, since this familiar symphonic work describes them.

The most recognizable part of this is *Mars*, which is exciting and very effective. (Note: Holst's very un-English sounding name is due to the fact that although his mother was English his father was Swedish – nevertheless, he definitely counts as an English composer).

Be that as it may, *The Planets* is about the only work of his that anyone has ever heard of, although like everyone at that time, he was interested in finding folk music.

In addition to this, for some years prior to the First World War Holst had a 'Sanskrit Period' during which he composed opera and choral works based on Hindu literature – there was a big vogue for things Indian in English artistic circles around that time. This is just a fact for the expert to know – you are not going to be asked to hear any of these.

The rest of the time he was a teacher at a girls' school and college.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

(1872-1958)

Vaughan Williams has already been described in the chapter on Nationalism in Music. There we explained how he, like his friend Holst, sought after English folk music, but how he only found *Greensleeves* and borrowed the *Theme from Thomas Tallis*. We explained how he edited the Anglican Hymnal and, as we said, he found some there, but they were neither strange nor rhythmic. We also explained about his symphonies (nine, of course) based on geographical ideas.

Aside from editing the hymnal, he was basically a church musician. However, despite being a quiet, unassuming man, he went to Paris in his thirties, which must have seemed rather a daring, if not a naughty, thing to do, and there he studied with Ravel, although Ravel was three years his junior. Like Ravel, he loved cats.

Vaughan-Williams loved choral music, like all the English do, and he conducted that kind of thing at a festival he founded near his home at Dorking, in Surrey. You can't be more English than that.

At eighty he married his secretary, Ursula. When he was eighty-six, and Sir Thomas Beecham was recording his symphonies in London, Ursula phoned through one morning to say that she was terribly sorry but her husband wouldn't be coming in to the session that day, as he had died.

And that is very English too.

WILLIAM WALTON
(1902-1983)

Walton is perhaps best known for his wartime film scores, such as those to Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*, and *Spitfire*.

But he was a big success in America, as well as England, well before those. His oratorio *Belshazzar's Feast*, of 1931, was the rival of Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* for best English oratorio since Handel – not that that was hard, there having been next to no music by English composers for almost two centuries.

During the 1920s Walton lived with the Sitwells, a well-known literary family – having become friendly with them at Oxford.

You will see that this is in the tradition we pointed out earlier of musicians living with their friends.

In 1926 he composed *Façade*. This was a theatre-piece for seven instruments – a musical setting for a series of twenty-one abstract, absurdist poems written by Edith Sitwell.

The performances, in a small London theatre, with Edith's disembodied voice reading the poems over a loudspeaker, was a huge success. Later, this fun theater piece gained a new life as a popular ballet for The Royal Ballet.

Walton's viola concerto, also premiered in 1931, was likewise a great success, and as a result, Jascha Heifetz commissioned a violin concerto from him.

The premiere of this work was scheduled with Heifetz and the Cleveland Orchestra for Dec. 7th, 1939. Walton was due to attend, but didn't show up – war had been declared and he had immediately enlisted in the British army.

Unlike Holst and Vaughan Williams, Walton's music was not influenced by folk music at all, nor did he pay any heed to the various twentieth century formulas that developed, from polytonality to serialism. As a result, his well-crafted scores sound – more often than not – like film scores. This is not all surprising as he wrote those too, as noted above.

After the war, Walton married a young Argentinian who adored him. They spent the last thirty years of his life living on Ischia, where he composed very little, making only the occasional trip back to London for the receipt of some honour or other.

Then, in 1956, Gregor Piatigorsky commissioned a cello concerto from him. When asked if he would accept, Walton replied,

"I'm a professional composer: I'll write anything for anybody if he pays me" – adding with a twinkle, "I write much better when they pay me in dollars."

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(1913-1976)

The British are especially proud of Britten, as he made a big success early on, and everyone likes prodigies!

Britten became in turn a Radical in politics, a Pacifist and Conscientious Objector during the war, and later, back in England, a friend of Soviet composers.

During the early war years, which he spent in the United States, he shared an apartment in Brooklyn with the English poet W. H. Auden. It was a hotbed for artists and poets that we would call "liberals" today. He later moved to Amityville, Long Island.

He returned to England in 1943.

He wrote a number of celebrated but extremely depressing operas – the most famous being his first, *Peter Grimes*, commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation (where would we be without Koussevitzky?) as well as lots of songs for his life companion, tenor Peter Pears. Together they founded the Aldeburgh Festival – which is almost as smart as Glyndebourne.

For all these reasons it is politically correct to say appreciative things about the man and his music, whether you like it or not, in order to show you are open minded.

Shortly before his death Britten was made a Lord – which is another thing that is very English. This may have been in recognition of his *War Requiem*, appropriate enough for a conscientious objector.

He also died of English medicine.

Things were very active in the United States, meanwhile, where talent poured in from Europe – which is, after all, cheating, *n'est-ce pas*? We will come back to the first generation American composers, such as Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, but start with a very traditional if unexpected American character:

CHARLES IVES

(1874-1954)

*I*ves composed amusing, slightly crazy, irreverent, music.

He was a New Englander who hated pomposity, studied at Yale, and composed for fun. He wrote works such as *Variations on America*, *Three Places in New England* and the long and complex *Concord Sonata* for piano.

Some people take his music seriously as it gives the impression of dabbling in the polytonality of the future, but he would have thought anyone taking his music this seriously was a real thigh-slapper.

In real life Ives was an executive in an insurance company, from which he became a very rich man. In this he is probably unique in the history of music.

*W*e mentioned earlier the pianist/composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk, from New Orleans. A child prodigy pianist, Gottschalk went to Europe, met Chopin and Liszt, created quite a fuss there for several years, then came back to America to compose and perform.

Gottschalk incorporated Creole sounds of the South as well as Caribbean rhythms into his piano works.

A point to know is that the symphonic reworking of his piano pieces, *A Night in the Tropics*, sounds as if it was composed for a 1930's Fred Astaire film score though it was composed in the 1860's.

Gottschalk played for soldiers during the Civil War, then toured South America, where he died in Rio of something he caught – probably drinking the water.

America also produced a composer called:

EDWARD MacDOWELL

(1860-1908)

Though he did not come from Europe, MacDowell did his best to sound as if he had. He worked hard, but his music is played very little today. He went to Paris where he was allowed to study at the *Conservatoire*, though not a Frenchman. This must mean something.

He is best known for his *Second Piano Concerto*, which used to be very popular, and is still occasionally played.

He wrote quite a bit for the piano and for many years his *Woodland Sketches* were popular drawing-room pieces.

Piano students were all made to play a saccharine little piece called *To a Wild Rose* and its companion piece, *To a Water Lily*. These tended to choke off musical enthusiasm in little boys.

In Europe he met Liszt, like everyone else, and played for him, but we do not know what Liszt concluded.

MacDowell was a gentlemanly man with a nice wife, but his life was cut tragically short by dementia after being run over by a hansom cab. This happened in New York, and those who came to his support at this time included Victor Herbert, Arthur Foote, George Whitefield Chadwick, Frederick Converse, Andrew Carnegie, J. P. Morgan and former President Grover Cleveland, which shows just how much everyone liked this man.

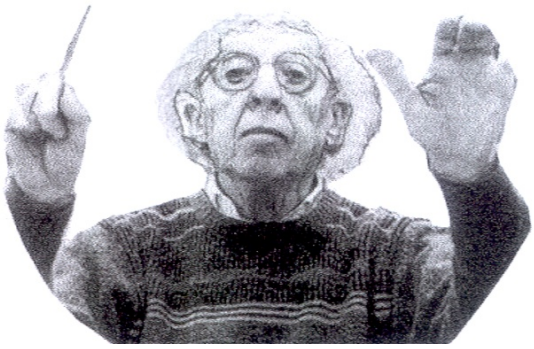
(In his memory his widow founded the MacDowell artist's colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire. There, each year, twenty to thirty aspiring and distinguished artists from several disciplines are given room and board for four to five weeks in order to work in peace. So far, six thousand such artists have taken part in these residences, which is a very nice thing.)

This leaves us with three first-generation Americans – Aaron Copland and George Gershwin, both of Jewish background, who brilliantly incorporated the sounds of America into their music, and Gian Carlo Menotti, an Italian, who created a new genre of short opera.

AARON COPLAND

(1900-1990)

Copland made American sounds absolutely central to his music (*Appalachian Suite*, *Rodeo*, etc.), but he actually learnt his skills in France.



This is an excellent thing for the expert to know.

Copland was one of those – the first, and best known – who "studied with Nadia Boulanger" in Paris. We will have quite a bit more to say about this lady below.

As a boy growing up in Brooklyn Copland had little to go on, and little encouragement at home. One day in 1920, he saw an advertisement for an 'American Academy' to be started in Fontainebleau, near Paris, and he thought he would give it a try.

Copland thus was continuing the tradition of Americans who made the pilgrimage to Europe – and Paris especially – to study composition or art.

When he returned to America in 1925, Copland tried to compose symphonies, with a Koussevitzky commission (here's this man again) and chamber music, but didn't really find his niche until Martha Graham was looking for a score to go with an American ballet.

He came up with *Appalachian Spring*, following on from the earlier *El Salón México*, *Billy the Kid* and *Rodeo*. With those thoroughly populist American stage works, Copland became the chairman of the board of American music.

In keeping with this position, he astutely added a work of appropriate gravitas, *A Lincoln Portrait*. However, the only work by Copland one hears often nowadays is *Appalachian Spring*. His most ambitious work, the Symphony No. 3 (sponsored by the Koussevitzky Foundation, of course), was dubbed by the critic of the Boston *Post* 'Shostakovich in the Appalachians'.

From his first trip to Mexico in 1932, with a couple of concerts devoted to his works, Copland wrote to his colleague Virgil Thomson, "I begin to feel as famous as Gershwin!"

GEORGE GERSHWIN

(1898-1937)

Gershwin also went to Paris, and wanted to study with Nadia Boulanger. She didn't think him "serious enough," and rejected him as a student. That was all right because he was befriended by Ravel instead.

Gershwin, like Copland, was also to excel at making American sounds central to his music as we hear in his jazz, in *An American in Paris* and in *Porgy and Bess*, America's great opera.

He really didn't need any cultural stimuli or context, though the publicity that came with them made him a rich and famous man; whatever he did turned to gold: Broadway, Carnegie Hall, opera – the melodies he produced in all these fields were gems.

Gershwin became a Carnegie Hall composer when Walter Damrosch introduced his *Piano Concerto in F* in 1925 with the New York Philharmonic, then, in 1928, *An American in Paris*, which you will now be able to identify as a Tone Poem. Koussevitzky (here he is again) thought him a genius, introducing *Second Rhapsody* with the Boston Symphony. Toscanini tried his baton at *Rhapsody in Blue* with pianist Earl Wild, but the result lacked Gershwin's own sparkle by a long shot.

With all his success he was modest, and would constantly seek advice from acknowledged masters of composition. Besides Boulanger and Ravel, he consulted the most unexpected "modern" masters of music theory and practice – from Stravinsky to Alban Berg to Arnold Schönberg.

In the California of the 1930s, Schönberg became his good friend and neighbour and, like Ravel, declined to teach him; he just wanted to play tennis with him. One good anecdote concerns Schönberg's immensely complex, twelve-tone, long and heavy-going *String Quartet No. 2* which was premiered one night at a private house concert in Hollywood.

The next day, on the tennis court, Gershwin told Schönberg he had been inspired to want to write a string quartet himself – "but something simple – like Mozart." Schönberg was not amused, responding awkwardly that "times were different then."

For the expert there are a few things to be familiar with at this point; one is a name we have just mentioned and which you must know when to drop: Nadia Boulanger.

Almost all recent composers studied in Paris with this legendary figure at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau and the *École Normale de Musique* in Paris.

We say 'legendary' because so many Americans claim to have studied with this exacting French lady that she has become nearly mythical, and were she to have actually taught anything to all who place her name in their biography, she would have had to live well beyond her actual lifetime (1887 – 1979).

Boulanger was a teacher of composition and the elder sister and teacher of an even more talented musician, Lili Boulanger, a very promising composer who died tragically young at twenty-four, and who – you guessed it – won the Rome Prize while still a student. After Lili's death, her big sister continued to carry the torch.

An American musicologist, Lisa Cook, has compiled a list of all the American composers who studied with Nadia Boulanger. It is a very, very, very long list, which even includes present-day names such as Philip Glass and Elliott Carter.

Madame Boulanger (she was very prim and always insisted on the formalities) might not have claimed responsibility for all of them.

It explains why the composer and critic Virgil Thomson said, "Every town in the USA had a Five and Dime Store and someone who studied with Nadia Boulanger."

The high level of talent in these two sisters may perhaps be explained by the fact that their mother was Russian.

GIAN CARLO MENOTTI

(1911 – 2006)

Menotti, a generous and clever man, created brilliant short operas, such as *The Medium*, *The Telephone*, *The Consul* and *Amelia Goes to the Ball*.

He also founded the celebrated festival at Spoleto, but he was not really very American, though his career was mainly based in America. He was Italian – very Italian.

Menotti came to America to study at the Curtis Institute. While still practically a student, he was taken up by none other than Arturo Toscanini, and a lot of expectation was heaped on his young shoulders: he was widely expected to be the last great hope for opera.

Menotti's friend and companion, Samuel Barber, was from an old New England family.

A good piece of trivia to know is that his aunt was the great American star of the Met, Louise Homer, a frequent partner of Caruso, and young Samuel grew up listening to his aunt singing traditional American songs on the porch.

Barber is known almost exclusively for his *Adagio for Strings*, which was composed when he was a student; it is the slow movement of a string quartet and it quite rightly became famous when it was played by full string orchestra and conducted by Toscanini.

But he is also known for a very problematic opera called *Vanessa*. This opera is musically very hard on the would-be expert. The plot, written by his friend Menotti, opens with Vanessa refusing to show her face until her old beau – returned after some years – says he loves her. He does, but when she shows her face, it was not him after all. It goes on from there.

Like Tchaikovsky, Barber suffered from depression.

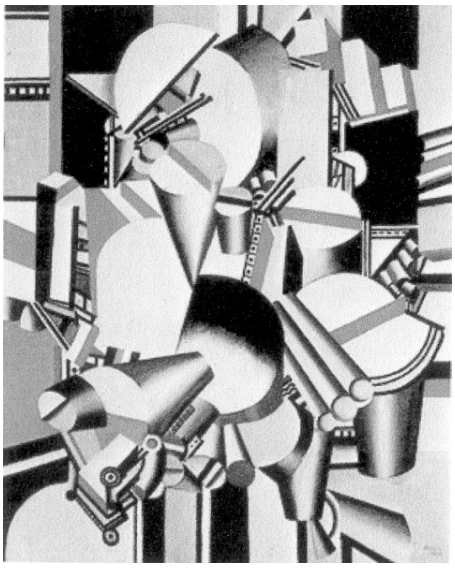
Now we come, unavoidably, to:

Modern Music

This rather childish term reflects the disorder that attacks the minds and vocabulary of those confronted by dissonant sounds, music without discernable themes, or still more: that which you must learn to call "Twelve Tone" harmony or "serial music".

None of this is "modern" at all – most of this is approaching its 100th anniversary.

These sounds are called "modern" because very little of the music that is actually performed has been composed since the time during which these sounds were first introduced, about a century ago. Because of this it still ranks as "new". You will hear people say, "I just don't 'get' modern music", or words to that effect, and they are usually referring to music that was composed around the time of the First World War.



Just as Debussy and Ravel have been compared to the Impressionist painters, the Modern Composers can be compared to Picasso and the abstract painters since that time.

There is truth in this.

However, it is also true that the human nervous system can tolerate clashing lines and colours more easily than clashing sounds and rhythms.

They are referring to composers like Arnold Schönberg, Paul Hindemith, Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Elliott Carter, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and even to parts of poor old Stravinsky.

The fact is, until very recently you could not possibly admit you didn't like these sounds.

To get back to 'modern music': the original protagonists of these sounds have had many imitators – so *many* of them! Can it be that it is easier to imitate these seemingly disconnected sounds than to write a jolly good tune?

Pierre Boulez was one of these, even though he was born in France rather than Germany like most of the others. Boulez tried twelve tone and "total serialization"; he composed works with names such as *Le marteau sans maître*, which means "the hammer totally out of control", and that describes it perfectly. It's a moot point if it qualifies as a Tone Poem.

So you see, in using the term 'modern', the experts are not referring to George Gershwin and certainly not to Rachmaninoff, both of whom composed quite recently, and whose music sounds normal and invariably sells tickets, as we have pointed out.

The new expert must have something to say about all this.

The proper thing to say about "modern music" is that it was a reaction to 19th century Romanticism – to the themes, melody and harmonies of that century.

This is expert jargon, but it is also quite true.

You will hear very serious people say that music made up entirely of random notes, unexpected rhythms and a wide range of squeaks and whistles, is refreshing – or better still, "interesting", or "stimulating".

They might say it is "*piquant*", or "creative", or "thought provoking" (you will never hear them say it is beautiful).

Don't argue with them. And don't worry, you won't actually hear very much of this music performed, and you can always use one of those above adjectives if forced to be polite.

You absolutely must not say anything critical about any of this. To say something negative out loud would be almost as bad as saying your favourite composer is Rachmaninoff.

Modern music was born out of late 19th century Germany and they had a lot of problems to work through, to put it mildly.

For one thing, they had just spent half a century adoring Wagner; they also had produced Wagner's acolyte, Bruckner, as well as Mahler. These composers had never heard the saying that "brevity is the soul of wit."

If you had to listen to half a century of these enormous, rich, romantic, endless works you would have invented "modern music" too.

Some of the imitators of the original “modern composers” compose music that sounds like the jungle at night, some like angry cats, some repeat the same set of notes over and over and over and over – this is either because they didn’t think you got it the first ten times, or because they assume you will go to sleep anyway.

Do not point out to anyone that it is easier to compose this sort of thing than to compose music of the simplicity, complexity, beauty, meaning or charm of Chopin or Mozart.

For some reason, while you are considered obliged to sound like an appreciative expert on the early 20th century modern composers, you are under far less obligation to say you have ever listened to the newest contemporary efforts – or to like them at all.

At least, not to the same extent that you are expected to submit to the fellows who invented “twelve-tone” harmony, abolished themes and functionally audible harmonies early in the twentieth century.

The established experts refer to standard harmonic laws we all can hear and understand as “common practice”, as if it was something to be discarded.

Don’t allow yourself to be intimidated. When this happens you can look sadder and wiser and say your favourite composer was the unknown tutor to Boccherini in the 18th century.

This will take care of the matter and establish you as a supreme expert.

There is one aspect to contemporary "modern music" which is quite encouraging.

Much, if not most, of this music is programmed because of underwriting from various kinds of trusts, established so that "young composers" can have their works premiered. The symphony orchestras are grateful for the money, and these pieces are usually heard only once, and no one ever remembers anything about them.

If you are expected to sound really knowledgeable, you should point out that contemporary composers are chiefly to be found in acadaemia, where technicalities can be interesting to the professors who have salaries, tenure and retirement benefits – they do not have to starve or live with friends, as did most of the Great Composers.

After all, the great composers were forced to come up with music that communicated something ennobling or charming to their patrons, their friends and the listening public.

Postscript

One more word of caution to the new expert:

Chamber Music!! What is this??

Faced with a first experience of Chamber Music, the new expert may just give up.

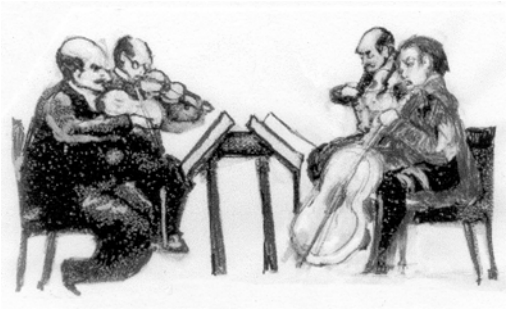
The grand sweep of a full orchestra or the fabulous dexterity of a virtuoso pianist is one thing, but what is this? Four chubby middle-aged men huddled over their strings scrubbing away, and an audience of solemn auditors, who listen with the kind of awe normally reserved for religious occasions.

You are right to be perplexed.

Because what you need to understand is that this kind of music is not some kind of strange rite for the initiated.

Indeed, the whole thing is a misunderstanding: it was never meant to be listened to – it was meant to be *played*.

Composers created this music for home consumption, for an evening among fellow musicians, not for show or for a recital hall – it was for a few intimate friends on a winter night.



Even archdukes in the Vienna of 1800 commissioned these works of composers like Beethoven to play with their cronies. Count Rasumovsky, the Russian ambassador in Vienna, commissioned three of Beethoven's most famous string quartets for this very purpose.

Concert halls were still rare and a thing of the future.

In the evenings, princes and paupers, musicians and amateurs, fathers and sons, foursomes or fivesomes, would sit around together reading through music and experiencing the clever cross-weavings of themes and rhythms. Sometimes Nanny or an eldest sister would play a part for piano.

They did this *for fun!*

We are used to this relegating of simple pleasures to professionals in the world of sports: those who might be out taking a walk or playing ball in the street with their children sit goggle-eyed watching gladiatorial combatants inflated beyond normal human dimensions by steroids and padded costumes – combatants who make millions a year playing in their stead.

Everyday wit – that used to create home limericks for all occasions, clever toasts and lively dinner conversation – has disappeared, having been turned over to late night comedians.

Perhaps by the same token we are drifting toward a situation where rather than normal people playing cards there will be only professionals doing so in front of a reverent audience. This has long since already happened to chess.

That chamber music was a form of home entertainment, like doing a jigsaw, may help the new expert understand what is going on here – he might even think it looks like fun and wish he had learnt an instrument himself.

This brings us to the basic tenet of this book:

Music is not a business; music is not an academic subject; music is not a spectator sport. Music is the natural response to higher feelings that make you want to dance and sing.

And so we come to the:

Conclusion

It is hard to say what will happen now, but the sad state of good music today is yet another rich topic of conversation for the would-be expert.

One sign of hope for good music is that the internet has knocked a hole in the profitability of pulp pop music so this tidal wave of junk sound may die away, leaving us with our native instinct to turn to music for the expression of the higher thoughts and feelings mentioned above, with beauty of line and richness of harmony.

If, that is, these higher thoughts and feelings can first be retrieved from the re-cycle bin.

Perhaps we should give Shakespeare the last word on the subject. He puts these words into the mouth of Lorenzo in Act V, Scene 1 of *The Merchant of Venice*:

"The man that hath no music in himself, nor is not moved with sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils. The motions of his spirit are dull as night and his affections dark as Erebus. Let no such man be trusted! Mark the music!"

Is this *The End* of Music?

No, just of

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Carnegie Hall

Juliette de Marcellus is a musician, teacher, writer, lecturer and a prize-winning journalist who was named best music critic of the South-Eastern sector of the United States by the *Chicago Times* several times. She has contributed to *Opera News* and other magazines from Palm Beach to London to the Edinburgh Festival.

Juliette lectures at The Society of the Four Arts in Palm Beach on *How to Listen to Classical Music*, as well as *The Legacy of French Culture*. She wrote *Rose and Henri*, an absorbing account of the dual culture of her parents – French aristocratic and Edwardian English – and their life in America, and edited, translated and published *The Atlas of Man*, the unique anthropological masterwork of her father Count Henri de Marcellus.

Juliette has collaborated with a number of distinguished musicians. She was co-creator, with the Swedish composer and conductor Ulf Bjőrlin, of the symphonic narrative *The Snow Queen*. She also created a unique narrative version of Prokofiev's *Lt. Kije Suite* at the request of Neeme Järvi, chief conductor of the Detroit Symphony. She was a friend and associate of the conductors Paul Csonka and Anton Guadagno, and the composer Gian Carlo Menotti.

Juliette co-produced *Schubertiades* at Sotheby's with the pianist Alan Kogosowski. She also collaborated with Kogosowski on the narrative script of his television series *Chopin, A Life to Remember*, which is available on DVD, and was also instrumental, with Menotti, in encouraging Kogosowski to produce his acclaimed orchestration of Rachmaninoff's *Trio Elégiaque*, thereby creating the *Concerto Elégiaque*, the recording of which, on Chandos, is an international best-seller.

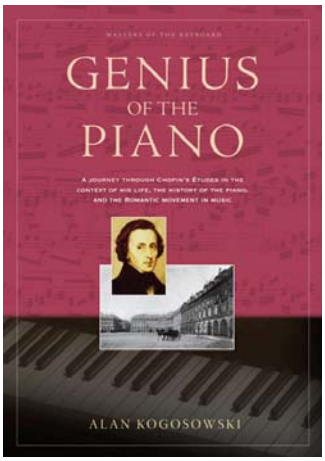
Juliette's comprehensive knowledge of the musical world has given her a sharp and incisive insight into its attitudes, practices, foibles and preconceptions, as well as the joy and uplifting spiritual qualities which have made it one of the highest of human pursuits since time began.

She is not jaded, as someone might have a right to be, who has seen musicians from Beecham, Bernstein and Rubinstein to Pavarotti, Perlman and all the latest competition winners, come and go, together with their entourages of press agents and managers.

Juliette's all-embracing knowledge of music and the music world is always succinctly and wittily expressed, according laymen the same respect and empathy as professionals and invariably enhancing everyone's understanding and enjoyment of this profound and affecting yet quirky and often amusing world.

Suggested further reading:

For those of you who enjoyed the central chapters of this book, the author recommends ***Genius of the Piano***, an in-depth look at the life, times and accomplishment, of the greatest composer for the piano, Frederic Chopin, with comprehensive detours to his friends Liszt, Schumann, Berlioz, and many of the other great composers covered lightly in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Carnegie Hall*.



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