

Bach's Profound Influence

Module 10 of *Music: Under the Hood*

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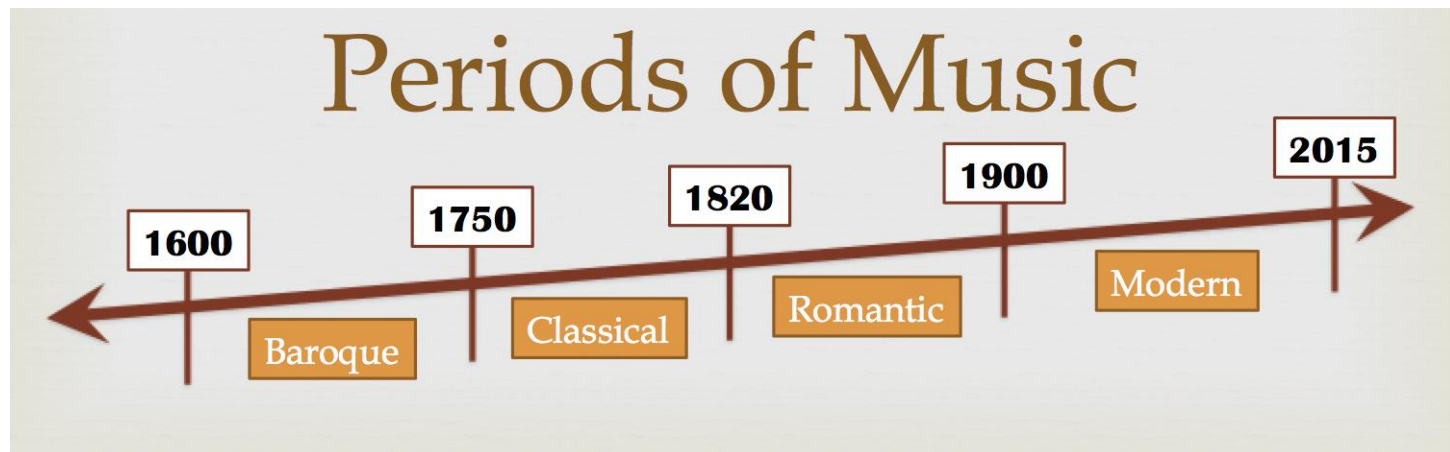
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Outline

- What is romanticism in music?
- Biography of L. van Beethoven
- Bach's legacy
- Commentary on *Moonlight Sonata*

What Is Romanticism?

- The standard musical periods are misleading
 - **Baroque, Classical, Romantic** are inspired by art and literature.
 - Music has its own developmental dynamic



What Is Romanticism?

- Baroque

- Composers developed the musical language we use today

- While trying to solve the problems posed by an abstract medium.
 - “Ornamentation” appears in music but is incidental.



What Is Romanticism?

- **Classical**

- **Abstract music simplified for easy listening**

- Music borrowed one trait from the surrounding Zeitgeist...
 - The classical style in music was **universal** across Europe
 - As inspired by the universalism of the Enlightenment



What Is Romanticism?

- Romantic

- Does not mean music is “emotional” or “expressive”

- These have been part of music since day one.

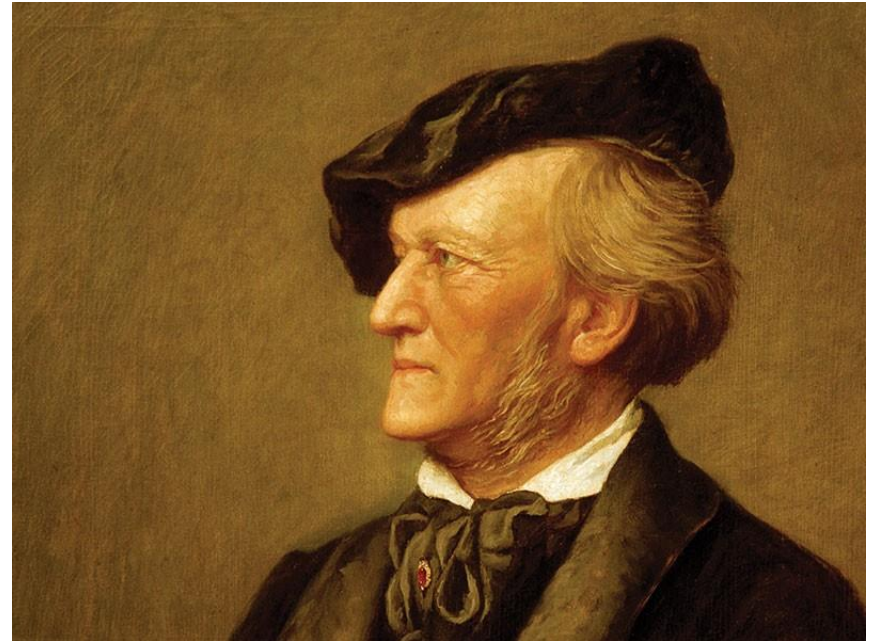


What Is Romanticism?

- Romantic

- Romantic music leaves behind the cult of simplicity
 - Reintroduces counterpoint, development of motifs (as in fugues)
 - Finds its own solution to logical structure.
 - Uses complex harmony, key relationships.
 - Even moves beyond tonality.
 - **Beethoven** does all of these, except the last.

Richard Wagner



What Is Romanticism?

- Romantic

- But Romantic music borrows two traits from its cultural surroundings

- Focus on the **individual** (or ethnic group).
- Interest in “**nature**”
- Beethoven’s music is about **him**
 - The “suffering artist”
 - He also explored natural sounds in *Pastoral Symphony*.



Biography

- Ludwig van Beethoven, 1770-1827
 - Father wanted him to be a child prodigy like Mozart
 - Poor teacher, alcoholic, punished son for missing notes.
 - Ludwig later studied with Gottlob Neefe, who taught him composition and **introduced him to Bach.**
 - Beethoven learned the *Well-Tempered Clavier* from memory.
 - This influenced the **rest of his career.**



Biography

- **Early career**
 - First published composition, age 12.
 - Court organist in Köln, age 14.
 - Moved to Vienna, age 22
 - Initially supported by Prince Maximilian Franz.
 - Studied with Haydn.
 - Obnoxious but widely admired.
 - Began to lose hearing, about age 28.
 - Contemplated suicide.



Biography

- Middle career

- Eroica Symphony, age 35

- New type of symphony

- Fidelio (opera), same year.

- “O welche Lust,” hymn to freedom

- Several symphonies

- Including Pastoral, No. 6, with sounds of nature

- Began receiving annual grant from royalty, age 39

- On condition he would not leave Vienna



Biography

- Late career
 - Missa Solemnis, age 53
 - 9th Symphony, same year.
 - Schiller's "Ode to Joy" in last movement
 - One of the towering achievements of Western music
 - Late string quartets
 - Pathbreaking music, still challenging today



Biography

- Approach to composition & performance
 - Experimental, innovative
 - Much rewriting
 - The opposite of Mozart.
 - Overexpressive playing
 - Banged on the piano
 - Played either *pp* or *ff*
 - Extreme tempo changes



Biography

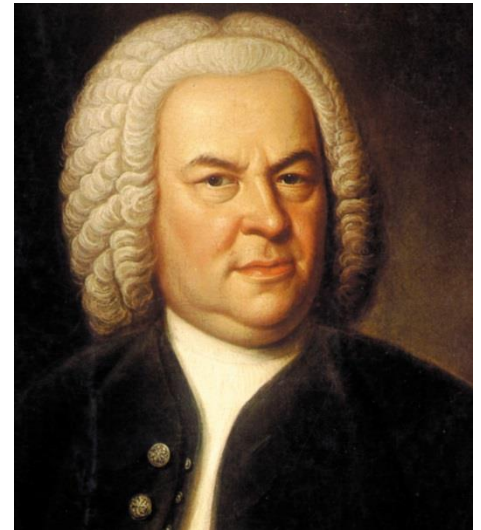
- **Illness**

- Chronic intestinal problems
- Deafness and roaring/buzzing in both ears, 24/7
- Liver disease
 - Apparent cause of death.
- His music is about him...
 - But because his problems are very human, it is about everyone.



Bach's Legacy

- Changing fashions
 - He was out of fashion after his death.
 - People wanted **easy listening**.
 - Grandsons reportedly sold some of his manuscripts as wrapping paper.
 - Mendelssohn's teacher reportedly found *St Matthew Passion* in a cheese shop.
 - Others found manuscripts being used to wrap fruit trees.
 - But a few musicians retained interest in Bach, including Beethoven's teacher Gottlob Neefe.
 - Mendelssohn “rediscovered” Bach in early 19th c.



Bach's Legacy

- Bach's influence on Beethoven
 - Development
 - Beethoven liked to develop short themes, as in a fugue.
 - For example, 5th Symphony.
 - Counterpoint
 - Beethoven strove to master counterpoint.
 - Used fugues in some of his greatest works
 - Hammerklavier piano sonata, Op 106
 - C-sharp minor String Quartet, Op 131 (used in movie *A Late Quartet*)
 - The Great Fugue (string quartet, Op 133)
 - *Moonlight Sonata...*

Moonlight Sonata

- Nothing to do with moonlight
 - *Sonata quasi una fantasia*
 - “Moonlight” was coined by a music critic after Beethoven’s death.
 - A hit even in Beethoven’s lifetime.
 - Said to be the most popular piano piece ever.



Moonlight Sonata

- **First movement**

[Audio file](#)

- **Consists mainly of arpeggios**

- Although structure is conventional, the piece seems strikingly original.
- Who would think of writing a piece consisting entirely of arpeggiated chords?

Moonlight Sonata

- **First movement**

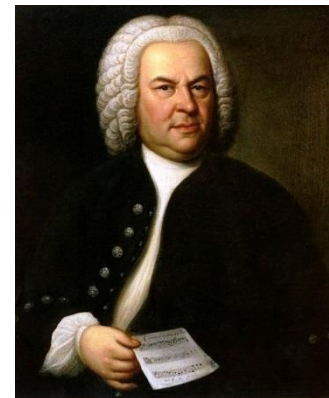
[Audio file](#)

- **Consists mainly of arpeggios**

- Although structure is conventional, the piece seems strikingly original.
- Who would think of writing a piece consisting entirely of arpeggiated chords?
- Someone did...

Audio file: [C major prelude](#), *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 1

- Another example of Bach's influence



Moonlight Sonata

- **First movement**

[Audio file](#)

- **Actually a funeral march**

- Signalled by “dotted” rhythms.
- Compare with:

[Marcia Funebre](#) in *Eroica Symphony*
Chopin’s [Marche Funèbre](#)

- **Beethoven’s life ambition is seemingly dead**



Moonlight Sonata

- Third movement

[Audio file](#)

- Anger at the world.

- Beethoven would have destroyed the piano playing this.



Moonlight Sonata

- Third movement

[Audio file](#)

- Angry at the world.

- Beethoven would have destroyed the piano playing this.

- Angry, but **defiant** – he refused to be defeated.

