**Great Composers and Compositions - Day 4**

**General Notes:**

**The main periods of music history:**

Medieval: 500-1400

Renaissance: 1400-1600

Baroque: 1600-1750

Classical: 1750-1800

Romantic: 1800-1900

20th Century: 1900-present

**Terms to know:**

* **String Quartet**: A piece written for 4 string instruments - 2 violins, a viola, and a cello. The string quartet is considered “chamber music” and became popular as a form in the Classical Era.
* **Dynamic**: The aspect of music relating to the degree of loudness

Fortissimo - very loud

Forte - loud

mezzoforte - medium loud

mezzopiano - medium soft

piano - soft

pianissimo - very soft

* **Crescendo** - to become louder
* **Decrescendo** - to become softer
* **Tempo:** The speed at which a piece of music is performed
* **Movement**: Any self-contained and thus at least potentially independent section of a larger work.
* **Chamber Music:** Any written for an performed by a small ensemble, usually instrumental, with one player on a part.

**Eine kleine Nachtmusik** (A Little Serenade) or, more literally (A Little Night Music), Movement #1 (Allegro)

**Composer:** Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

* He wrote for a wide variety of ensembles and for various purposes (orchestra, small ensembles, choirs, opera, masses, etc.
* One of the first composers to at least TRY to make a living as a freelance musician, so many of his pieces were written on commission.

**The Piece:**

* Composed in 1787, so this is a classical era piece, although it was not published until 1827
* (Mozart lived in Vienna, Austria when he composed this piece
* This piece is considered “Chamber Music” or more specifically for a string quartet (one each of VI, VII, Va, C). The version we will listen to is performed by a string orchestra, meaning multiple payers on each part)
* There are four “movements” in the piece. (A movement is a shorter section of a larger work)

I. Allegro (This is the movement we listened to…)

II. Romanze: Andante (“walking” in Italian. Moderately slow)

III. Menuetto: Allegretto (Slightly less fast than Allegro

IV. Rondo: Allegro

* We will listen to only the first movement, which is the most famous and recognizable of the movements. (Allegro basically means “fast”).
* In classical music, composers used Italian terms to indicate the tempo, or speed, of a piece. Later in the Romantic Era, the metronome was invented that gave very specific indications of the speed. 60, for instance, meant that the main beat occurred 60 times per minute.

**Listening:**

* try to identify the main melodic material or themes, and how those themes determine the sections of the piece, of which there are three:

Exposition: (two themes, one very energetic, the second more melodious - both are repeated:

Development: The music uses parts of the previously heard themes, but changes them, moves them in different, unexpected directions.

Recapitulation: The two main themes are repeated from the beginning.

**Air on a G String**

(2nd movement from Bach’s Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D)

**Composer:** Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) German composer

* German composer of the Baroque era, spent the majority of his professional life as the Kantor of the Thomaskirche (Church musician for the Church of St. Thomas) in Leipzig, German (1723-1750).
* Widely considered the greatest composer of the Baroque Era (or of all time) his death marks the end of the Baroque Era, at least roughly.
* Bach wrote music for small orchestra (always using string instruments), music for choirs (almost always sacred music) combinations of choir and orchestra, solo instruments with orchestral accompaniment, but was especially well know for his organ compositions, which were most often written for church services.
* He signed all his compositions “soli deo gloria” which is Latin for “For God’s Glory alone.”

**The Piece:**

* Not the original title. A 19th century violinist named August Wilhelm. He transposed the piece down one step (lower), and as a result could play the entire melody on his G string. His arrangement is for violin and piano.
* Original suite was composed between 1717 and 1723 while Bach worked in Anhalt for Prince Leopold. Composers at this time invariably had a “patron,” some rich person who supported them, hired them as their personal entertainer, as it were. Generally this was either a church or a royal court, sometimes a town or city.
* Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D
* Five movements, most of them named after various dances of the time

Overture

Air

Gavotte

Bouree

Gigue

**Listening:**

* What is the instrumentation of this piece? (Note the harpsichord)
* How would you describe the melodic material?
* Would you say that there are many dynamic contrasts or changes in mood in this piece?
* How does it differ from Eine Kleine Nachtmusik?

**Clair de lune** (Light of the moon, or Moonlight)

3rd movement of Suite Bergamasque

**Composer:** Claude Debussy (1862-1918) French composer

* Along with Maurice Ravel is considered one of the greatest of the impressionist composers. Their music often times evokes certain images, rather than being structured in familiar ways as the music of the first two pieces we listened to today.
* Wrote much music for piano, also orchestral works, works for solo voice and piano, choral works, music for small ensembles

**The Piece:**

* This is the third movement of a “piano suite” by Debussy called Suite Bergamasque. (Bergamasque is a “rustic dance”)
* Written originally for solo piano, the music was later orchestrated by two lesser-known composers, and this is the version that is most well-known today. For instance, you would be familiar with the piece from the movie Ocean’s 11.
* The Suite bergamasque consists of four movements:

"Prélude"

"Menuet"

"Clair de lune"

"Passepied"

**Listening:**

* How does this piece differ from the Mozart or Bach composition?
* What is the orchestration? What instruments do you hear? (note the harp)
* What terms would you use to describe the sound of the music?

**Rhapsody in Blue**

**Composer:** George Gershwin (1898-1937) American composer

* Also composed the music for Porgy and Bess and An American in Paris (starring Gene Kelly) as well as numerous songs for other musicals and movies, collaborated frequently with his brother Ira, who wrote the texts to many of his tunes.
* American composer, as a result we see the influence of the jazz idiom, which could be considered the first truly “American” style of music.

**The Piece:** Rhapsody in Blue

Rhapsody in Blue (originally titled American Rhapsody) was written in 1924 for a concert featuring music that was meant to combine the classical and jazz styles of music. (Leonard Bernstein, who wrote the music to West Side Story, also had a piece on the concert. The piece was written by Gershwin for two pianos and was orchestrated by Ferde Grofé three times (we will listen to the third orchestration for full orchestra and solo piano), but the first version was actually for piano and jazz band. Gershwin actually forgot that he had agreed to write the piece; he was playing billiards with a friend and his brother Ira read an article in the New York Tribune that talked about the upcoming concert which was only 5 weeks away. Gershiwn considered it a “musical kaleidoscope of America” (some call it a musical rendition of New York City).

**Listening:**

* The opening is quite famous (the clarinet glissando) which was actually improvised as a joke during the first rehearsal by the clarinet player; however, Gershwin liked it and added it into the music.
* Much of the melodic materials occurs in the first minute or two of the piece; those melodies are then expanded upon in various ways throughout the piece. That being said, there are additional themes that are introduced quite a bit later. Note how the music is not nearly as “structured” as the Bach or Mozart piece we listened to earlier - music moves back and forth almost randomly between various melodic ideas and styles of presenting them (piano, then strings, other solo instruments)
* Note the use of the solo piano (the section a minute or so in was actually improvised, or made up, by Gershwin at the first performance and written out later).
* Listen also to how different this sounds from the earlier pieces. (“bent” notes, jazzy rhythms, improvisational style, etc.)