



**A Short History of Music through the Ages :: 450 – 2026 AD**

*Presented by Margaret Marsh • July 2026. 07-281-2408*

# Musical Periods

## Medieval (Up to 1450)

- Mostly monophonic (one-line) music
- Church music predominates
- Beginnings of counterpoint



Guillaume de Machaut  
c.1300–1377

## Renaissance (1450–1600)

- Contrapuntal music
- Instrumental music written for consorts
- Mass settings the main form



Josquin Desprez  
c.1450–1521

## Baroque (1600–1750)

- A blend of counterpoint and harmony
- Vocal and instrumental styles separated
- Opera and concerto grosso developed



Johann Sebastian Bach  
1685–1750

## Classical (1750–1825)

- A simple harmonic style
- Sonata form developed
- The symphony and string quartet developed



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
1756–1791

## Romantic (1825–1900)

- Words influence musical style
- Highly emotional content developed
- Lieder and symphonic poem created



Clara Schumann  
1819–1896

## Modern (1900 onwards)

- Atonality develops
- Expanded use of instruments and voices
- Composers adopt individual styles



Igor Stravinsky  
1882–1971

**The Evolution of Music** has continuously shaped human history, connecting cultures and emotions across generations. As a result, music has transformed from simple rhythms into complex compositions.

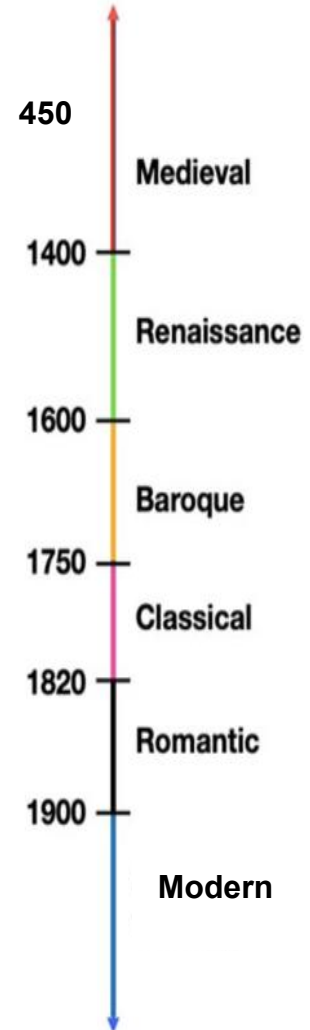
Over time, each era introduced new styles, instruments, and technologies. Consequently, these changes influenced artistic expression, social movements, and cultural identity.

Since early times, music has played a vital role in storytelling and rituals. Early musicians used natural sounds and handmade instruments to create music. Similarly, religious and ceremonial music developed unique structures, preserving traditions while inspiring future generations. Eventually, written notation allowed compositions to be shared and refined.

**Music History - The 6 Eras.** [4.00]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0w7ip24LIYM>

## Periods of Music Timeline





# THE MEDIEVAL ERA

Counterpoint



## The Medieval Era (450–1400 AD)

There were significant advancements in musical notation and composition. Before this era, music was primarily passed down through oral tradition, but with the development of written notation by Guido of Arezzo, musicians could document melodies and share them across regions.

Gregorian Chants, or Plain Song, became the dominant form of religious music. These monophonic melodies, sung in Latin, were designed for church services and liturgical purposes. Monasteries and cathedrals served as key centers for musical development, preserving sacred compositions.

**The Medieval Era** [5.21]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJy3JYkDMgl>

**Kassia** (810–880) Pelagia [1.40]. The first Byzantine female composer.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8IJ-uS\\_XSc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8IJ-uS_XSc)

**Hildegard von Bingen** (1098-1179). [1.00] <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/7rTAhGQQ3qQ>

**The Story of Guido** (991-1033) [4.00]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-JMX7tVqog>

A full list of Medieval Composers: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_medieval\\_composers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_medieval_composers)



## Secular Music in the Middle Ages

Medieval secular music refers to non-religious vocal and instrumental music, primarily performed by traveling minstrels and troubadours. It encompasses vibrant love songs, bawdy tavern tunes, political satires, and lively dance music.

Some of the most famous and historically significant examples of medieval secular music include:

1. Carmina Burana (11th–13th Century), Germany
2. Troubadour Songs (12th–14th Century), France
3. Cantigas de Santa María (Late 13th Century), Spain
4. Sumer Is Icumen In (c. 1240), England
5. Minnesang (12th–14th Century), Germany

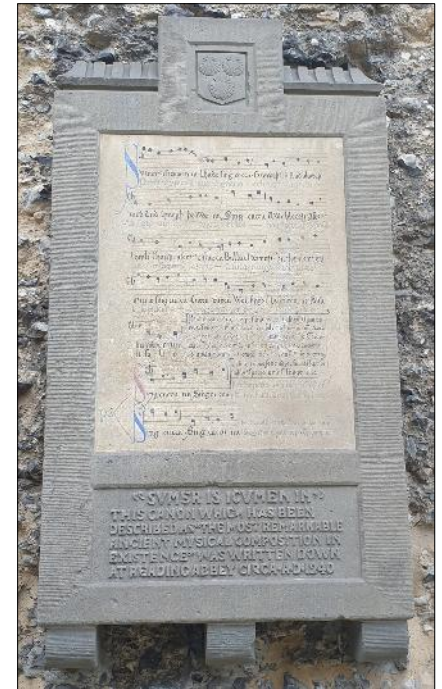
*Two of the oldest known musical compositions in the English language:*

**“Sumer is icumen in” – Summer has arrived [2.00]**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nyLXPU1xhYA>

**“Mirie it is while sumer ilast” - Merry it is while summer lasts [3.00]**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HXT4hLeatM>



## Sumer is icumen in

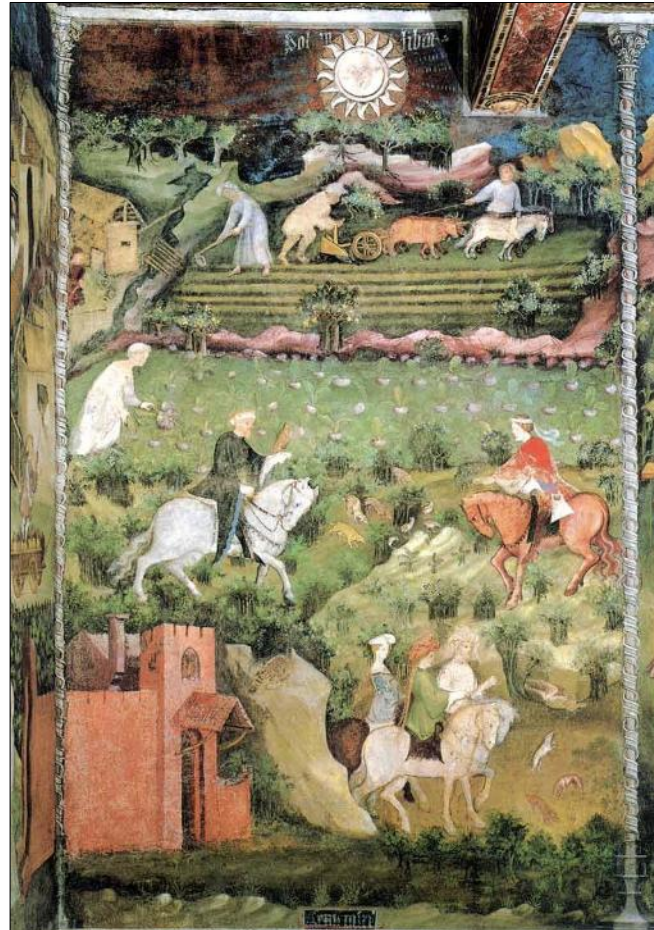
*Summer has arrived  
Loudly sing, cuckoo!  
The seed is growing  
And the meadow is blooming,  
And the wood is coming into leaf now,  
Sing, cuckoo!*

*The ewe is bleating after her lamb,  
The cow is lowing after her calf;  
The bullock is prancing,  
The billy-goat farting,  
or the stag cavorting  
Sing merrily, cuckoo!*

*Cuckoo, cuckoo,  
You sing well, cuckoo,  
Never stop now.*

*Sing, cuckoo, now; sing, cuckoo;  
Sing, cuckoo; sing, cuckoo, now!*

.....  
This canon which has been described  
as “the most remarkable ancient  
musical composition in existence”  
was written down at Reading Abbey,  
circa AD 1240.



## Mirie it is while sumer ilast

*Merry it is while summer lasts  
With birds's song.  
But now nears the wind's blast  
And weather strong.  
Oh, oh! How this night is long!  
And I with very much wrong  
Sorrow and mourn and fast.*

.....  
This is one of the oldest  
13th-century secular songs  
in the Middle English language.

It describes the longing for  
summer as the harshness of  
winter approaches.

<https://earlymusicmuse.com/mirie-it-is-while-sumer-ilast/>

<https://earlymusicmuse.com/sumer-is-icumen-in>



# THE RENAISSANCE ERA



## The Renaissance Era (1400–1600)

The Renaissance Period was a vibrant time when knowledge and fine arts flourished. This was an era of European musical "rebirth" characterised by the rise of complex polyphony, the invention of the [music printing press](#), and a shift toward expressive, humanistic melodies. It bridged the gap between the Medieval and Baroque eras. Music became more expressive, structured, and harmonically rich.

Composers experimented with different vocal arrangements, creating intricate choral compositions. One of the most significant developments was the use of imitative polyphony, where musical phrases repeated across different vocal parts.

Composers like **Josquin des Prez** and **Palestrina** mastered this technique, producing elegant and balanced compositions.

Other composers of this period:

Tallis, Byrd, Morley, Dowland, Monteverdi, Lassus, Gabrieli, Dufay, and La Rue.

**The Renaissance Era. [5.00]**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xl3dhrojohg&t=122s>

A full list of Renaissance era composers: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Renaissance\\_composers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Renaissance_composers)



## The Renaissance Era (1400–1600)

### Major Genres:

**The Mass:** Sacred, elaborate, multi-part vocal settings of the Catholic liturgy:

Agnus Dei Mass, by William Byrd. [3.12]

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_f0ojuFuAjs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_f0ojuFuAjs)

**The Motet:** Shorter, sacred choral music that allowed greater expressive freedom:

Apostolo Glorioso, by Guillaume Dufay. [3.13]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=11wbe5GKGCI>

**The Madrigal:** Secular, unaccompanied vocal music set to poetry often featuring lively, amorous, or playful themes:

Now is the Month of Maying, by Thomas Morley. [2.00]

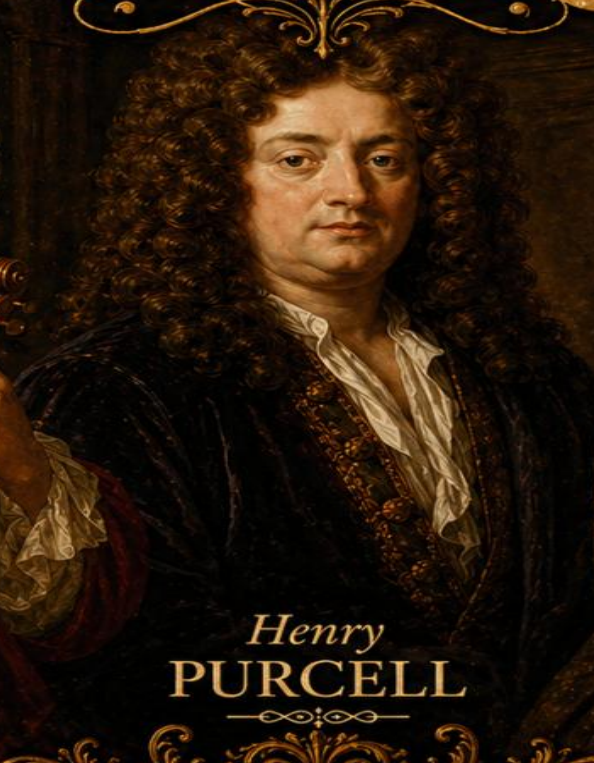
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzRM4gyy6o0>

# Brilliant BAROQUE



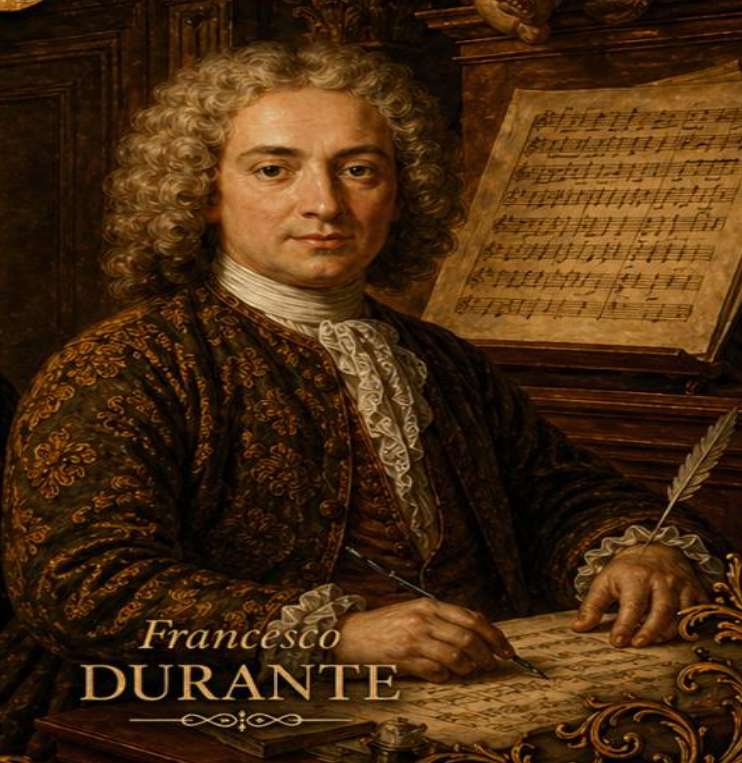
Antonio  
VIVALDI

A portrait of Antonio Vivaldi, an Italian Baroque composer, violinist, and priest. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a voluminous white wig and a red cloak over a white shirt. He holds a violin in his left hand and a bow in his right. The background features an ornate archway looking out onto a Venetian canal with the St Mark's Campanile tower in the distance.



Henry  
PURCELL

A portrait of Henry Purcell, an English Baroque composer. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark, patterned robe over a white shirt with a ruffled collar. He has long, dark, curly hair. The background is a dark, wood-paneled interior.



Francesco  
DURANTE

A portrait of Francesco Durante, an Italian Baroque composer. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a patterned robe over a white shirt with a ruffled collar. He is seated at a desk, writing on a sheet of music with a quill pen. A large sheet of music is visible on a stand behind him. The background is a dark, wood-paneled interior.



## The Baroque Era (1600–1750)

This era is characterised by complex melodies, intricate ornamentation, and the use of basso continuo (a continuous bass line), and it established the foundation of classical forms eg: the concerto, fugue, and opera. It forms a major portion of the "classical music" canon, and continues to be widely studied, performed, and listened to.

### Key Baroque composers include:

Albinoni, Bach, Corelli, Durante, Handel, Lully, Marcello, Monteverdi, Pachelbel, Peri, Purcell, Scarlatti, Schutz, Stradella, Telemann, Vivaldi.

### Famous women composers of this era:

Francesca Caccini, Barbara Strozzi, Isabella Leonarda, and Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre.



More information: <https://kaitlinbove.com/the-classical-era>

A full list of Baroque composers: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Baroque\\_composers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Baroque_composers)



## The Baroque Era (1600–1750)

**Bach's Badinerie** is the final, lively movement of his *Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B minor* (BWV 1067), meaning "jesting" or "play" in French. Written around 1739, the piece is famous for its brisk tempo, demanding rapid flute technique, and its lighthearted, mischievous character. A analysis of Baroque Style and Structure. 3.00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-5yf67vQKfo>

**Monteverdi:** L'Orfeo Toccata. 1.40.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjpFi9bn1do>

**Purcell:** Rondeau from Abdelazer performed on original instruments. 2.30.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVivtti-n-w>

**Vivaldi:** Storm, Winter, The Four Seasons. 2Cellos. 2.37.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUBQPIk9Wh8>

**Telemann:** Trumpet Concerto in D Major. 2.40.

A cornerstone of the Baroque trumpet repertoire showcasing the instrument's brilliance.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkCuB7w7tHY>

**Francesca Caccini:** "La liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola di Alcina." 1625 comic opera. 2.37.

"Ruggiero's Liberation from the Island of Alcina". [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6ND6O\\_4a-A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6ND6O_4a-A)

Full opera, 1.33.00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WumlwtCOs28>

### Baroque Orchestra Instruments





# THE CLASSICAL ERA



## The Classical Era (1750-1820)

***All Classical Era Music Is Classical Music ...  
But not all Classical Music is from the Classical Era !***

Music of the Classical period differed from that of the Baroque by becoming less complex and more elegant, and having a lighter, clearer texture. The notion of melody became more prominent, over simple chordal accompaniment.

The orchestra began to increase in size too, meaning more variety in timbre was possible, and also greater power and range.

Whilst vocal music such as comic opera gained popularity, it was instrumental music that dominated this period. A significant development of the classical period was the replacement of the harpsichord by the piano, as the predominant keyboard instrument.

60 Second Guide to the Classical Period.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeoCPoU36\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeoCPoU36_s)

### **Key composers:**

Boccherini, Clementini, Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, and Salieri.

### **Famous women composers of this era:**

Marianna Martines, Maddalena Sirmen, Maria Paradis, Helene de Montgeoult



## The Classical Era (1750-1820)

### Understanding Beethoven's Symphony No. 1 - Movement 1. 3.28.

Composed in 1799, Beethoven uses sonata form, featuring an introduction, exposition, development, and recapitulation; exploring the contrasting themes, key changes, and dramatic dynamics that make this piece a masterpiece. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNW7xjQOkzY>

### Christoph Gluck - German Composer and Operatic Reformer. 2.40.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Vz6Jefi5Q>

### Jascha Heifetz plays Melodie from Orfeo ed Euridice by Gluck. 2.42.

The opera was first performed in Vienna in October 1762, in the presence of Empress Maria Theresa. It is the first of Gluck's "reform" operas, in which he attempts to replace the arcane plots and overly complex music of serious opera with a "noble simplicity" in both the music and the drama.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tenI\\_FyFeZ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tenI_FyFeZ0)

### Antonio Salieri - The Musical Maestro and Mozart's Rival. 2.36.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPAr\\_q1cyTI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPAr_q1cyTI)

**Salieri's De Profundis.** 3.46. A stunning choral setting of Psalm 129 in G minor ("Out of the depths I have cried to you, O Lord"). Composed around 1810, it contrasts sharply with the large orchestra works of his later years. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W86XH05Nk6g>

### Marianna Martines (1744-1812) - The Viennese Virtuosa, who wrote over 200 works.

The Woman Mozart Admired. 2.55. <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Wmgkce18VJU>

The Viennese Virtuosa. 1.00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xra93ky403U>

The Complete Keyboard Works. 1.18. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO6XihFkRSo>

**Longer works: Missa solennis** (1765): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Chu94DsOqGk>

**Dixit Dominus** (1774): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqldAw1FL2s>



# THE ROMANTIC ERA



## **The Romantic Era (1820-1900)** *The dates vary 1780-1910 !*

Moving away from the strict styles and forms of composition found in and before the Classical Era, Romantic composers created music that was dramatic, emotional, and individualistic in nature. Compositions were inspired by love, nature, literature, poetry, folk stories and historical legends, with a greater emphasis on nationalism.

**A Guide to the Romantic Era.** 6.20: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsmXaO38wP4>

### **Key composers:**

**Beethoven** (1770-1827): Bridged the Classical and Romantic eras, known for his symphonies, piano sonatas, and concertos.

**Schubert** (1797-1828): Prolific composer of lieder (German art songs), symphonies, and chamber music.

**Chopin** (1810-1849): Polish composer known primarily for his piano music, including nocturnes, polonaises, and études.

**Schumann** (1810-1856): German composer known for his piano music, lieder, and symphonies.

**Mendelssohn** (1809-1847): German composer, pianist, and conductor, known for his symphonies, concertos, and chamber music.

**Liszt** (1811-1886): Hungarian composer and virtuoso pianist, known for his piano concertos and Hungarian Rhapsodies.

**Wagner** (1813-1883): German opera composer known for his epic works like “The Ring Cycle”.

**Verdi** (1813-1901): Italian opera composer famous for works like “La traviata”, “Rigoletto”, and “Aida”.

**Tchaikovsky** (1840-1893): Russian composer known for his symphonies, ballets (eg “Swan Lake” and “The Nutcracker”), and concertos.

**Brahms** (1833-1897): German composer known for his symphonies, concertos, and chamber music.

**Mahler** (1860-1911): Austrian composer known for his large-scale symphonies and song cycles.

**Debussy** (1862-1918): French composer associated with Impressionism, known for his piano music and orchestral works.



THE MODERN ERA



## The Modern Era (1900 - 2026)

Modern Era classical music encompasses a vast shift in style from the early 20th century to the present day. It breaks traditional rules by introducing atonal harmonies, experimental rhythms, minimalism, and electronic elements, while blending orchestral sounds with pop, jazz, and cinematic influences.

**Introducing the Modern Era.** 5.15: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5DKHHsdv0M>

Key composers include:

### **Early Modern Era (1900–1950s):**

**Stravinsky:** Renowned for his rhythmic complexity in masterpieces like “*The Rite of Spring*”.

**Debussy:** Pioneered musical impressionism, moving away from rigid classical structures.

**Schoenberg:** Creator of the twelve-tone technique, fundamentally changing harmonic structure.

**Ravel:** Master orchestrator known for Boléro and his lush, distinct harmonies.

**Shostakovich:** Russian composer known for deeply expressive and politically charged symphonies.

**Bartók:** Utilized folk music to influence and drive his modernist compositions.

**How to Analyse Bartók.** 3.19: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ninO\\_wNn4ul](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ninO_wNn4ul)

**Gershwin:** Successfully bridged the gap between classical and jazz idioms.

### **Late 20th Century to Present (1950s–2020s):**

**Glass:** One of the most influential minimalist composers, known for his repeating, hypnotic structures.

**Reich:** A pioneer of tape phasing and rhythmic minimalism.

**Pärt:** Developed a minimalist, bell-like sacred style known as “*tintinnabuli*”.

**Adams:** Wrote iconic 21st-century orchestral works and operas like “*Nixon in China*”, for the 1972 meeting between Nixon and Mao Zedong, a score marked by its rhythmic pulse, shimmering colours, and lyricism.

**Nixon in China.** 1.00: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xcrQ1uu8Cnw>

**Full opera.** 2.43.00: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G72JjpMEdKs>

**Saariaho:** Late Finnish composer celebrated for incorporating electronics and spectral music.

**Richter:** Known for neo-classical compositions, merging ambient music with traditional classical instrumentation.



THE END

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