

AN INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC HISTORY 1: DEFINING MUSIC HISTORY

The evolution of music is so vast and has going through alterations and changes that one cannot imagine to think all that has taken place since the beginning of time. Changes in forms, styles, rhythmic devices, instrumentation used; the possibilities are endless. Ask any musicologist (one who makes his or her career out of studying music), any musician, or lover of music for their definition of what they believe and perceive music to be: each definition will be different. No two people are the same; likewise, no two definitions of music will be exactly the same.

Think of the beginning of time, when no technology or tools were available to make instruments from. Using bones with holes etched in, we blow into these holes, creating noise, sound. Blowing different holes at different times, we create different sounds, and therefore, shape time itself. We cannot comprehend or understand exactly how this artist created the holes in this instrument so as to create several notes that could be played. The combination of sound and time is the start of music, as we know it.

Music is not just time itself, it is a vehicle for both composers and performers. Composers write down their compositions to last forever, and performers perform the music for others to listen and achieve all sorts of emotional states of being, at any given point in time. Again, not one performance of a specific work will be the same; each performer will add his or her own emotions and feelings into music that is already written down.

We expect to listen to music, as familiarity; when we listen to something that doesn't make sense, we are caught off guard. We expect music to have certain criteria, but not all music does. Although the evolution of music is a good thing, we have developed music in many different styles, instrumentation, etc., we still need to have standards to measure this music against. New music is created all the time. We need to appreciate music on a deeper level, and accept music as having change, being change, and continuing to change. When we do this, we won't have any expectations when we listen to a Chopin Nocturne, a Beethoven Symphony, or a Rachmaninoff Prelude, for example.

Musical standards change all the time, but the basis of music still remains: melody and rhythm. Composers want and need to have certain criteria as a basis of composition for the type of piece they write, but they also want to have freedom, to express their creativity and unlock their own imagination. Within imagination lies emotion, and within interpretation lies knowledge.

We have to try to put ourselves in the composers' shoes at the time the piece was being written, thinking about their own knowledge, and experiences. Thinking outside the box and being comfortable in doing so helps us to gain knowledge from the music itself. We also have to think does it make sense, and whether the composer wanted originality (rule based) or innovation (imagination, or free based).

Many composers and musicians try to recreate works that have previously been written. In one way, we are able to use our own knowledge of music to create new sounds, emotions, etc. On the other hand, we may take away the composers original intent of the piece, the original emotion(s) that the composer wanted the music to share and evoke.

One does not need any instruments to produce music; the combination of vocal sounds and clapping and stamping of feet will create both a melody (notes) and a rhythmic (time) pattern. We are able to control, with our own bodies, a sense of time and melody; we are vehicles of music in our own right. My own definition of music would include two elements: sound, and time. Music is immaterial, I believe very much like love. You feel it and sense it.

WHAT IS MUSIC HISTORY?

The history of music is all music from the beginning of time, up to and including the 21st century. It is difficult for one book to sum up the entire history of music. Likewise, it is difficult for one person to collect music that spans the entire history of music. From early beginnings of chanting and ancient church works to 21st century electronic music, rock and jazz, music has come a long way.

Musical interpretation can be difficult, even for a musician, of how the composer wanted the piece to be played, or sung. Because of this, musicians will try to interpret as best they can to that of the composer, or how they believe the music is to be played or sung. Many people listen to music just for enjoyment, but for musicians, it is about interpretation and in some ways, creativity.

Composers often search for new ways of expressing themselves when performing traditional pieces. Interpretation of a score, therefore, can be difficult. What works for the performer may not work for the listener. What I have given when providing listening examples is basic information concerning the piece, such as the key and time signature (if known), form of the piece, voice parts and instrumentation, and generic characteristics of the piece to listen to. If you are able to obtain a copy of different scores of various works, you will be able to follow along when listening. Also, keep in mind, styles of playing will be different. For example, if one listens to various performers play the same piece, such as a Bach prelude and fugue, differences will be noted in the performance.

Note: As mentioned, this site will not give enough information for one to do a full analysis of any piece of music, unless they are confident in their ability to recognize chordal and harmonic structures, melodic changes, changes in form, etc.