

The Four Main Style Periods

Baroque (1600-1750)

Classical (1750-1820)

Romantic (1820-1900)

Contemporary (1900-now)

*These dates are general guidelines:

the Baroque did not suddenly end in 1750. Actually many argue that the Classical style period began in the 1720s. Therefore do not think that these dates are set in stone.

Composers from the Style Periods

- Baroque: J.S. Bach (1685-1750)
Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)
- Classical: W.A. Mozart (1756-1790)
Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) – his music had many “Romantic” qualities as well
- Romantic: Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)
Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
- Contemporary: Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) – his music also had many “Romantic” qualities
Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)
Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)
Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Sample Pieces by these Composers

Below is a list of the composers given above. I have listed major, representative works for each composer. In addition, when a composer’s music is typically identified using some method of identification other than Opus numbers, I have tried to explain how that system works.

Opus numbers (Opus is the Italian word for “work”) were usually how pieces were published: one piece could have its own opus number, or several different pieces could be within one opus. For example, Beethoven’s *Pathétique* Piano Sonata is Op. 13. However, in Beethoven’s Op. 2, there are three different piano sonatas: Op. 2, No. 1 is in F Minor, Op. 2, No. 2 is in A Major, and Op. 2, No. 3 is in C Major. Opus numbers were usually how pieces were published. Therefore each composer has his/her own set of opus numbers.

Johann Sebastian Bach:

Although Bach's music has been catalogued using "BWV" numbers (*Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis*: a catalogue done by Wolfgang Schmieder), most of his music can be identified without using these numbers.

Well-Tempered Clavier – there are 2 books. Each book contains 24 preludes and fugues. Therefore there are a total of 48 preludes and fugues.

from WTC Book I: C Minor, D Minor, E-flat Major, B-flat Major

from WTC Book II: D Major

Bach also wrote three main collections of "suites":

English Suites (there are 6 different English Suites): I suggest No. 3 in G Minor

French Suites (there are 6 different French Suites): I suggest No. 5 in G Major

Partitas (there are 6 different Partitas): I suggest No. 1 in B-flat Major

Also, check out his "Italian Concerto". This is a work for keyboard only (unlike most concertos)

Domenico Scarlatti:

He wrote more than 550 one-movement sonatas. These are categorized by either "K" numbers (from the cataloger: Ralph Kirkpatrick) or "L" numbers (from the cataloger: Alessandro Longo).

I suggest Sonatas: D Major-K. 491; D Major-K. 96; D Minor-L. 422

Franz Joseph Haydn:

Haydn is most remembered for his piano sonatas. Haydn's music is categorized by "Hob." numbers and "L" numbers. The "Hob." numbers are from the catalogue of Haydn's works by Anthony van Hoboken. Volumes XVI and XVII contain Haydn's keyboard music. For this reason the piano sonatas may be identified as: Hob.XVI: 20 or Hob.XVI: 40, etc. The "L" numbers are from the more recent catalogue done by Christa Landon. Since both identifiers may be used, I will list sonatas using both methods.

I suggest the following sonatas:

C Minor(Hob.XVI: 20)(L. 33)

F Major(Hob.XVI: 23)(L. 38)

C Major(Hob.XVI: 50)(L. 60)

E-flat Major(Hob.XVI: 52)(L. 62)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:

Mozart's piano music is typically identified using "K" numbers. These "K" numbers come from a catalogue of Mozart's music done by Ludwig von Köchel. Mozart's most well-known piano works include his piano sonatas and piano concertos (a concerto is a work for solo instrument and orchestra – the orchestra accompanies the soloist).

I suggest the following sonatas:

D Major(K. 311)

A Minor(K. 310)

B-flat Major(K. 333)

D Major(K. 576)

I also suggest the following concertos:

Piano Concerto No. 20 in D Minor, K. 466

Piano Concerto No. 22 in E-flat Major, K. 482

Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major, K. 488

Ludwig van Beethoven:

Beethoven was one of the first composers to make a living not working directly for the church or any one particular court. Since most of his music was published during his lifetime, Opus numbers are used for practically all of his music. Beethoven's most important works for piano include his 32 piano sonatas (these are of monumental importance in the piano repertoire) and his 5 piano concertos. As you can see below, many of the piano sonatas also have nicknames!

I would suggest the following Sonatas. The ones with an asterisk* would be the best place to start:

- Sonata in F Minor, Op. 2, No. 1
- Sonata in C Major, Op. 2, No. 3
- Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 7
- *Sonata in C Minor, *Pathétique*, Op. 13
- *Sonata in C-sharp Minor, *Moonlight*, Op. 27, No. 2
- Sonata in D Major, *Pastoral*, Op. 28
- Sonata in D Minor, *The Tempest*, Op. 31, No. 2
- *Sonata in C Major, *Waldstein*, Op. 53
- *Sonata in F Minor, *Appassionata*, Op. 57
- Sonata in F-sharp Major, Op. 78
- Sonata in E-flat Major, *Les adieux*, Op. 81a
- Sonata in E Major, Op. 109

All five of his piano concertos are excellent, but perhaps Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, and Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major (nicknamed *Emperor*) are the best ones to check out first.

Franz Schubert:

Schubert was one of the few Romantic composers to write a great number of piano sonatas – many of which have retained their popularity. His Impromptus and 6 Moments Musicaux are also very popular “character pieces”. Most of Schubert's works can be identified with Opus numbers, however many people also use his “D” numbers as another means of classification. The “D” numbers come from a catalogue of Schubert's music that was put together by Otto Deutsch.

I would recommend the following Sonatas:

- Piano Sonata in A Major (D. 664)(Op. 120)
- Piano Sonata in A Minor (D. 784)(Op. 143)
- Piano Sonata in B-flat Major(D. 960) – this is his last piano sonata

I would also recommend anything from either of his two sets of Impromptus (Op. 90 or Op. 142), but the most popular one is Op. 142, #3 in B-flat major.

His most well known piece from the Moments Musicaux (D. 780) is #3 in F Minor.

Felix Mendelssohn:

Mendelssohn's most performed pieces are his *Songs Without Words* (*Lieder ohne Worte*, in the original German). Although he wrote piano sonatas, they are not played much. This is common during the Romantic style period: the piano sonata lost its popularity as composers began composing “character pieces” – shorter works that may be descriptive.

Songs Without Words: There are eight total groups of “Songs Without Words”. Each group has its own Opus number and there are six different “Songs Without Words” within each group. This gives us a grand total of 48 “Songs Without Words” (6 x 8 = 48). The eight opus numbers are: Op. 19, Op. 30, Op. 38, Op. 53, Op. 62, Op. 67, Op. 85, and Op. 102. Some of these pieces have nicknames (such as: Venetian Gondola Song, or Hunting Song).

I would recommend the following “Songs Without Words” as a starting place:

From Op. 19:

#3 in A Major (*Hunting Song*), #4 in A Major (*Confidence*), and #6 in G Minor (*Venetian Gondola Song #1*)

From Op. 30:

#1 in E-flat major, and #6 in F-sharp Minor (*Venetian Gondola Song #2*)

From Op. 62:

#1 in G Major (*May Breezes*), and #5 in A Minor (*Venetian Gondola Song #3*)

Other piano works:

Rondo Capriccioso

Variations Serieuses – an excellent set of “theme and variations”

Also, his Piano Concerto No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 25 is an excellent work that I would highly recommend.

Frederic Chopin:

Chopin was one of the few composers to write almost entirely for the piano (he did also write a few pieces for the cello). Many pianists consider Chopin to be their favorite composer. He wrote many different types of pieces. Some of these pieces come from dance styles found in Poland (which is his home country, although he spent most of his life in Paris) such as his Mazurkas and Polonaises (It’s hard to find other composers that wrote pieces by these names). Chopin did however write three piano sonatas. The first one is rarely played and not nearly as interesting as the 2nd and 3rd. Chopin’s works are usually identified with opus numbers.

Scherzos: Chopin wrote 4 Scherzos. I would recommend any of them, although the 2nd Scherzo in B-flat Minor is probably the most popular.

Ballades: Chopin also wrote 4 Ballades. Once again, I would recommend any of them, although the 1st Ballade in G Minor and the 4th Ballade in F Minor are probably the most popular.

Impromptus: He also wrote several Impromptus, but the “Fantasie-Impromptu” in C# Minor is by far the most popular.

Preludes: Chopin’s 24 Preludes are enormously important pieces that are well worth checking out. The more popular preludes include: #4(E Minor), #6(B Minor), #7(A Major), #15(D-flat Major), #20(C Minor).

Nocturnes: These are Chopin’s “Night Pieces”. They are very beautiful and soothing. Probably the most popular are: Op. 9, #2(E-flat Major), Op. 27, #2(D-flat Major), Op. 48, #1(C Minor)

Polonaises: These are Polish dances in ¾ time based on the rhythm of eighth, 2 sixteenths, then 4 more eighth notes. The more popular ones are: Op. 26, #1(C# Minor) and Op. 40, #1(A Major – *Military*).

Waltzes: Chopin wrote many waltzes (the tradition European dance in ¾ time). The more well-known ones include: Op. 18 in E-flat major, Op. 64, #1 in D-flat Major (*Minute*), Op. 69, #1 in A-flat Major, Op. 69, #2 in B Minor, and Op. 70, #2 in F Minor. Another well-known waltz is the E Minor Waltz from 1830 – it does not have an opus number.

Mazurkas: These are also Polish dances in ¾ time. A couple of the more well-known ones include: Op. 7, #1 in B-flat Major, Op. 7, #2 in A Minor, and Op. 68, #3 in F Major.

Etudes: The word “etude” is the French word for “study”. Etudes typically address one specific technical problem (such as thirds or octaves). Most of Chopin’s etudes are found in two sets of 12: Op. 10 (Nos. 1-12) and Op. 25 (Nos. 1-12).

The more popular ones are:

from Op. 10: #3 in E Major, #4 in C-sharp Minor, #5 in G-flat major (*Black Key*), #8 in F major, and #12 in C Minor (*Revolutionary*)

from Op. 25: #1 in A-flat major (*Aeolian Harp*), #7 in C-sharp Minor (*Cello*), #11 in A Minor (*Winter Wind*), and #12 in C Minor.

Chopin also wrote 2 Piano Concertos. Both are excellent – at least from the pianist’s point-of-view.

Franz Liszt:

Liszt was known as a composer of various types of music (including piano music) and also as one of the first in a line of great piano virtuosos. He could be described as being the “father” of modern virtuoso piano playing and is also credited with developing the concept of having “recitals” of nothing but solo piano music. His piano music is mostly very advanced and technically brilliant. However, just because his music can be very impressive-sounding, does not mean that it was composed primarily for “showing off”.

B Minor Sonata – Liszt only wrote one piano sonata, but this one is incredible. Apparently Brahms dozed off when he first heard it, but I certainly can’t imagine out why!

Etudes: Liszt wrote many etudes. His etudes are typically much larger works than Chopin’s (though not necessarily more difficult). There are several different sets of etudes. I have made a few recommendations from every set:

Transcendental Etudes: *Mazeppa, Feux Follets*

3 Concert Etudes: “*Un Sospiro*” (#3 in D-flat Major)

2 Concert Etudes: *Gnomenreigen*

6 Grand Paganini Etudes: #2 in E-flat Major, #3 in G-sharp Minor (“*La campanella*” – probably his MOST popular), #6 in A Minor

Années de Pelerinage: (“Years of Pilgrimage”) These are very interesting, descriptive, and diverse pieces.

There are three “books” of the *Années*. The first two books are the most popular. Book one (subtitled “Switzerland” – since it deals largely with things he encountered during his travels in Switzerland) contains 9 pieces. Book two (subtitled “Italy” – since its pieces are about various works of art he encountered in Italy – some of these works of art include literary works) contains 7 pieces. Book three (no subtitle – although some are very “spiritual” in nature) contains 7 pieces. Below I have listed recommendations from each book:

Book I: *Au bord d’une source* (Beside a Spring), *Vallée d’Obermann* (Obermann’s Valley)

Book II: *Sposalizio* (Marriage – a Raphael painting), *Sonetto 104 del Petrarca*, *Dante Sonata*

Book III: *Les jeux d’eau à la Villa d’Este* (The Fountains of the Villa d’Este)

Hungarian Rhapsodies: Liszt may have been born in Hungary, but he didn’t spend much time there. However he did compose 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies. The most famous one is certainly #2 in C-sharp Minor.

Other Works:

Transcriptions: Liszt “transcribed” (piano transcriptions involve the process of taking something that was not originally written for piano and doing an “arrangement” of it for solo piano) numerous songs, symphonies, and operas. His transcriptions of Schubert’s songs and various operas are probably the most well-known.

Consolations: Liszt wrote 6 “Consolations”. #3 in D-flat Major is certainly the most popular.

Liebesträume (Dreams of Love): He wrote 3 of these. #3 in A-flat Major is the most popular.

Mephisto Waltz #1 – This piece deserves every bit of its immense popularity. Check it out!

Rhapsodie Espagnole (Spanish Rhapsodie)

Liszt also wrote 2-3 piano concertos. The supposed third concerto appeared only recently. It was premiered in New York recently, but is probably something that Liszt wrote and then discarded – never intending to publish it. This work is certainly not as interesting as the 1st and 2nd piano concertos.

Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat Major – very exciting and more popular than the 2nd

Piano Concerto No. 2 in A Major – very beautiful and less virtuosic than the 1st

Robert Schumann:

Schumann could have had a remarkable career as a pianist had he not wrecked his hand with a strange contraption that he invented in order to try and better his piano technique. This should be a lesson to us all: listen to your piano teacher – injury IS possible on the piano! Schumann is most remembered for his collections of “character pieces”. He did write three piano sonatas, but these are probably not the most notable works he composed. Of the three sonatas the one in G Minor is probably played most often.

Carnival, Op. 9 – his most famous work. It is a set of 21 character pieces. These pieces draw their inspiration from the party atmosphere that takes place just before Lent (generally known in Europe as the carnival season – think of Mardi Gras in New Orleans).

Phantasiestücke, Op. 12 (Fantasy Pieces): A set of 8 character pieces.

Check out: #1(*Des Abends* – In the Evening), #2(*Aufschwung* – Soaring)

Kinderszenen, Op. 15 (Scenes from Childhood) – 13 character pieces. The most famous is certainly: #7, *Träumerei*.

Fantasy in C Major, Op. 17 - a sonata-like work that contains an especially passionate first movement.

Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op. 26 (Carnival Jest from Vienna)

Schumann also wrote a piano concerto. It is performed frequently and certainly worth checking out.

Johannes Brahms:

Brahms wrote three sonatas, several sets of character pieces, and several sets of variations. His largest and most performed sonata is #3 in F Minor.

Variations: There are two main sets that are played most often:

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24

Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 35 – books I and II

Character Pieces: There are many sets of character pieces. I'd recommend the following:

Op. 79: Two Rhapsodies (B Minor, G Minor) – G Minor may be slightly more popular, but both are excellent!

Op. 116, #2 in A Minor, #3 in G Minor, #4 in E Major

Op. 118, #2 in A Major – a beautiful work that is probably his most well-known.

Op. 119, #4(E-flat Major)

Brahms also wrote two monumental piano concertos. No. 1 is very difficulty. No. 2 is insane! However these are both exquisite works of enormous beauty.

Claude Debussy:

Debussy is THE “Impressionist” composer. If you’re not sure what Impressionism is all about, take a look at a painting by Monet.

Suite bergamasque – contained within this set of four pieces is the famous “Clair de lune” (“Moonlight”)

Preludes: Debussy wrote two books of Preludes. Each prelude has a descriptive title. I would suggest starting with the following:

Book I: #2, #7, #8, #10, #12

Book II: #3, #12

Etudes: Debussy wrote 12 etudes. You may enjoy investigating: #1, #4, and #7.

Estampes (“Prints” or “Engravings”) A wonderful set of three piano pieces. Definitely check these out!

Images: There are two sets of “images”. In each set there are three pieces, each with descriptive titles.

Deux Arabesques – the first Arabesque in E Major is the most popular from this set of 2 (deux).

Children’s Corner – a delightful set of 6 pieces that includes a “Cakewalk”.

Pour le Piano – a set of three pieces “for the piano”

Individual pieces:

L’isle Joyeuse, Rêverie, Le petit nègre

Maurice Ravel:

Ravel is also often categorized as being Impressionistic although he was not as Impressionistic as Debussy.

Gaspard de la Nuit – this is one of the most difficult pieces in the entire piano repertoire! A truly remarkable performance of this work does not sound “difficult”, but instead “poetic”.

Sonatine – although titled “sonatine” (most sonatinas are considered easier), this work is certainly not easy.

Jeux d'eau (“Fountains”) – one of Ravel’s major one-movement works. It sounds very “impressionistic”.

Miroirs – a set of five pieces, each with descriptive titles.

Of Ravel’s Piano Concertos, the one in G major is the most popular. This is an exciting work that you must check out!

Alexander Scriabin:

Scriabin’s early piano music is most closely associated with the style of Chopin. He was an eccentric Russian composer that was immersed in “theosophy” – a strange mixture of various different belief systems. This element of “mysticism” found its way into his music in many ways including his special “mystic chord” (C, F#, B-flat, E, A, D).

Sonatas: He wrote 10 piano sonatas. The first 4 sonatas have “keys” and numbers 5-10 do not. I would recommend starting with either his fourth sonata in F-sharp Major, Op. 30 and his fifth sonata, Op. 53.

Preludes and Etudes: There are two main sets of etudes (Op. 8 and Op. 42) although his early Op. 2, No. 1 etude is quite popular and appealing. His most popular work is undoubtedly the Etude in D-sharp Minor, Op. 8, #2. There are many sets of preludes.

Sergei Rachmaninoff:

Many people claim to be huge fans of Rachmaninoff but know nothing about his music. Because of the movie “Shine”, his 3rd Piano Concerto (now nicknamed the “Rock 3”) is his most popular work. This concerto (along with Balakirev’s *Islamey* and Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit*) is certainly one of the most difficult works written for piano. Although many people consider Rachmaninoff a contemporary composer, his music is written in a largely romantic style. You should know however that he wrote much more than just piano concertos (of which he did write 4). He also wrote preludes, etudes, sonatas, and other works. The Sonata #2 in B-flat Minor is a massive work that comes in several versions. This is certainly a work worth checking out.

Preludes: there are two main sets (Op. 23 and Op. 32)

Op. 3, #2(C# Minor)

Op. 23: #2(B-flat Major), #4(D Major), #5(G Minor) – the most popular Prelude

Op. 32, #5(G Major)

Etudes Tableaux: there are two sets of etudes

Op. 33: #6 in E-flat Major, #8 in C-sharp Minor

Op. 39: #3 in F-sharp Minor, #4 in B Minor, #5 in E-flat Minor

Rachmaninoff wrote 4 piano concertos. Although all four concertos are played from time to time, the 2nd and 3rd concertos are certainly the most popular with the 4th being the least popular.

Sergei Prokofiev:

Prokofiev’s music has a very distinct quality. At times, the music may sound like what some describe as being the turning wheels and gears of the modern industrial world. This quality is largely the result of how Prokofiev conveys rhythm in his music. Prokofiev’s melodies also have a unique quality: often times they may leap incredible distances, yet somehow they still retain a singing quality. Prokofiev’s most important piano works are his 9 sonatas and 5 concertos. However, his “Toccata”, Op. 11 is also a very popular work.

Sonatas: #3 in A Minor, #7

Concertos: #1 in D-flat Major, #3 in C Major (probably Prokofiev’s most popular piano work!)

Béla Bartók:

By collecting recordings of folk music from his native country, Hungary, Bartok became one of the first “Ethnomusicologists”. He wrote an enormous number of teaching pieces. Of his more advanced pieces, I would recommend his Sonata, Allegro Barbaro, Op. 14 Suite, and Three Rondos on Folk Tunes.

Getting Started!

Here's a list of a few pieces you might want to get first in order to start building your CD library! As you begin listening to music by different composers, you'll probably discover that you enjoy the music of some composers more than others. At that point you can use the more detailed list to check out more music by your favorite composers!

I have also given the names of pianists that record the works listed below. These are pianists I would recommend.

1. Chopin: Nocturne in E-flat major, Op. 9 #2
Etude in C Minor, Op. 10, #12
Fantasie-Impromptu in C-sharp Minor
Scherzo #2 in B-flat minor

pianists: Murray Perahia, Artur Rubinstein, Maurizio Pollini

2. Liszt: "Un Sospiro" in D-flat Major from 3 Concert Etudes
"La Campanella" – third etude from the "Grandes Etudes de Paganini" (or Paganini Etudes)
Mephisto Waltz (NOT the Mephisto Polka)
Piano Concerto No. 1 in E-flat major – Sviatoslav Richter's recording is great; Rubinstein is also good

pianists: André Watts, Earl Wild

3. Beethoven: Sonata in C Major, Op. 53 (*Waldstein*)
Sonata in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2 (*Moonlight*)

pianists: Richard Goode, Alfred Brendel, Emil Gilels

4. Mozart: Sonata in B-flat Major, K. 333
Sonata in D Major, K 311

pianists: Mitsuko Uchida (breathtaking clarity), Alicia de Larrocha

5. Bach: Partita No. 1 in B-flat Major – Dinu Lipatti's recording is hard to find, but worth the effort
English Suite No. 3 in G Minor – Murray Perahia's recent recording is excellent and easy to find!

otherwise pianists: Maria João Pires, Glenn Gould

6. Debussy: *Clair de Lune* from Suite bergamasque
Arabesque #1 in E major from Deux Arabesques
Children's Corner

pianists: Walter Gieseking, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Maurizio Pollini