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Content Guide
The Nineteenth Century, Part 3:
Toward Modernism

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by Joseph E. Jones and Sarah Marie Lucas
Texas A&M University-Kingsville

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Assigned Readings

Core Survey

- Joseph E. Jones, "A Topical Survey of Nineteenth-Century Music"
  Focus on the following sections:
  - Introduction
  - Innovation vs. Canon
  - Conclusion

Historical and Analytical Perspectives

- Richard Bass, "Harmony and Key Relationships in Romantic Music"
  Focus on the following sections:
  - Romantic Harmonic Materials and Procedures
  - Key Changes, Tonal Contrasts, and Large-Scale Harmonic Space
- Christopher Ruth, "Genre & Forms in the Nineteenth Century"
  - Assigned in "Content Guide: The Nineteenth Century, Part 2"; review as needed
- Jonathan Shold, "Brahms: Symphony no. 4"
- James L. Zychowicz, "Mahler: Symphony no. 1, movement 3"

Composer Biographies

- *A-R Anthology:*
  - Keith Clifton, "Claude Debussy"
  - Jacquelyn Sholes, "Johannes Brahms"

- External biographies (requires subscription):
  - Stephen Banfield, rev. Jeremy Dibble and Anya Laurence, "Samuel Coleridge-Taylor"
  - Edward A. Berlin, "Scott Joplin"
  - Marcia J. Citron, "Cécile Chaminade"
  - Fabian Dahlström and James Hepokoski, "Jean Sibelius"
  - Daniel M. Fallon and James Harding, rev. Sabina Teller Ratner, "(Charles) Camille Saint-Saëns"
  - Peter Franklin, "Gustav Mahler"
  - Bryan Gilliam and Charles Youmans, "Richard Strauss"
  - Michele Girardi, "Giacomo Puccini"

- [Paul Hawkshaw and Timothy L. Jackson, "Anton (Joseph) Bruckner"](#)
- [Jean-Michel Nectoux, "Gabriel Fauré"](#)
- [Eric Sams, rev. Susan Youens, "Hugo Wolf"](#)

Supplementary Readings

Supplementary Reading 1
Claude Debussy on *Pelléas et Mélisande*.
Reproduced from Weiss and Taruskin,
Music in the Western World: A History in Documents
(New York: Schirmer, 1984), 418–19

For a long time I had been striving to write music for the theater, but the form in which I wanted it to be was so unusual that after several attempts I had almost given up the idea. Explorations previously made in the realm of pure music had led me towards a hatred of classical development, whose beauty is solely technical and can interest only the mandarins of our profession. I wanted music to have a freedom that was perhaps more inherent than in any other art, for it is not limited to a more or less exact representation of nature, but rather to the mysterious affinity between nature and the Imagination.

After some years of passionate pilgrimage to Bayreuth, I began to have doubt about the Wagnerian formula, or, rather, it seemed to me that is was of use only in the particular case of Wagner's own genius. He was a great collector of formulas, and these he assembled within a framework that appears uniquely his own only because one is not well enough acquainted with music. And without denying his genius, one could say that he put the final period after the music of his time, rather as Victor Hugo summed up all the poetry that had gone before. One should therefore try to be a "post-Wagnerian" rather than a "Wagner follower."

The drama of *Pelléas*—which despite its atmosphere of dreams contains much more humanity than those so-called documents of real life—seemed to suit my purpose admirably. It has an evocative language whose sensibility can easily find an extension in the music and in the orchestral setting. I also tried to obey a law of beauty that seems notably ignored when it comes to dramatic music: the characters of this opera try to sing like real people, and not in an arbitrary language made up of worn-out clichés. That is why the reproach has been made concerning my so-called taste for monotonous declamation, where nothing seems melodic. First of all, it isn't so. And furthermore, a character cannot always express himself melodically: the *dramatic* melody has to be quite different from what is generally called melody. The people who go to listen to music in the theater are really like those crowds you see gathered around street musicians! There you can have your emotions-in-melody for a couple of sous! You can also be sure of a greater degree of attention than is usually found among the patrons of our state theaters, and you will even find a greater wish to understand—something totally lacking in the above-mentioned public.

Supplementary Reading 2
Excerpt from Excerpt from Alex Ross,
The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century
(New York: Picador, 3–4, 6)

When Richard Strauss conducted his opera *Salome* on May 16, 1906, in the Austrian city of Graz, several crowned heads of European music gathered to witness the event. The premiere of *Salome* had taken place in Dresden five months earlier, and word had got out that Strauss had created something beyond the pale-an ultra-dissonant biblical spectacle, based on a play by a British degenerate whose name was not mentioned in polite company, a work so frightful in its depiction of adolescent lust that imperial censors had banned it from the Court Opera in Vienna.

Giacomo Puccini, the creator of *La Bohème* and *Tosca*, made a trip north to hear what "terribly cacophonous thing" his German rival had concocted. Gustav Mahler, the director of the Vienna Opera, attended with his wife, the beautiful and controversial Alma. The bold young composer Arnold Schoenberg arrived from Vienna with his brother-in-law Alexander Zemlinsky and no fewer than six of his pupils. One of them, Alban Berg, traveled with an older friend, who later recalled the "feverish impatience and boundless excitement" that all felt as the evening approached. The widow of Johann Strauss II, composer of *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*, represented old Vienna.

Ordinary music enthusiasts filled out the crowd—"young people from Vienna, with only the vocal score as hand luggage," Richard Strauss noted. Among them may have been the seventeen-year-old Adolf Hitler, who had just seen Mahler conduct Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in Vienna. Hitler later told Strauss's son that he had borrowed money from relatives to make the trip. There was even a fictional character present—Adrian Leverkühn, the hero of Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, the tale of a composer in league with the devil.

[. . .]

So *Salome* came to Graz, an elegant city of 150,000 people, capital of the agricultural province of Styria. The Stadt-Theater staged the opera at the suggestion of the critic Ernst Decsey, an associate of Mahler's, who assured the management that it would create a *succès de scandale*.

"The city was in a state of great excitement," Decsey wrote in his autobiography, *Music was His Life*. "Parties formed and split. Pub philosophers buzzed about what was going on . . . . Visitors from the provinces, critics, press people, reporters, and foreigners from Vienna . . . . Three more-than-sold-out houses. Porters groaned, and hoteliers reached for the keys to their safes." The critic fueled the anticipation with a high-flown preview article acclaiming Strauss's "tone-color world," his "polyrhythms and polyphony," his "breakup of the narrow old tonality," his "fetish ideal of an Omni-Tonality."

As dusk fell, Mahler and Strauss finally appeared at the opera house, having rushed back to town in their chauffeur-driven car. The crowd milling around in the lobby had an air of nervous electricity. The orchestra played a fanfare when Strauss walked up to the podium, and the audience applauded stormily. Then silence descended, the clarinet played a softly slithering scale, and the curtain went up.

Summary List

Genres to understand
- operetta
- orchestral Lied
- piano rag
- spiritual

- tone poem
- vaudeville
- verismo

Musical terms to understand
- fragmentation
- funeral march
- non-directional harmony
- pentatonicism

- quartal/quintal chords
- syncopation
- variations
- whole-tone scale

Contextual Terms, Figures, and Events
- decadence
- Sigmund Freud
- impressionism
- Gustav Klimt
- maximalism
- minstrel show

- modernism
- Claude Monet
- nostalgia
- Société Nationale de Musique
- symbolism
- Oscar Wilde

Main Concepts
- Engagement with history as inspiration for new directions. Students will be able to cite examples of music that refashioned or reinterpreted compositional approaches of not only the recent past but also bygone eras, utilizing modern means (instruments, harmonic language, etc.).
- Responses to increased cross-cultural contact, rapid industrialization, and the "modernization" of everyday life. Students will be able to establish the relationships between various composers' aesthetic perspectives and broader contextual factors in the late nineteenth century.
- Compositional techniques that pushed the limits of form, genre, tonal harmony, etc. Students will be able to identify and describe works that stretch the boundaries of conventions inherited from the past, relating these pieces to comparable examples from earlier eras.
- The growth of vernacular music traditions in the United States. Students will be able to distinguish between native genres and styles and those transplanted from Europe, while discussing ways in which this music (e.g. parlor songs, marches, and rags) were experienced and disseminated.

Scores and Recordings

Johannes Brahms
- o Scores
  - • [Symphony No. 4, movement 1](#)
  - • [Symphony No. 4, movement 2](#)
  - • [Symphony No. 4, movement 3](#)
  - • [Symphony No. 4, movement 4](#)
- o [Complete video recording](#)

Anton Bruckner
- o *[Virga Jesse](#)* ([recording](#))

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor
- o *[Symphonic Variations on an African Air](#)* ([recording](#))

Scott Joplin
- o *[Maple Leaf Rag](#)* ([recording](#))

Gustav Mahler
- o [Symphony No. 1, movement 3](#) ([recording](#))

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky
- o [Symphony No. 6, IV. Finale: Adagio lamentoso](#) ([recording](#))

Hugo Wolf
- o ["Anakreons Grab"](#) ([recording](#))
- o ["Gesang Weylas"](#) ([recording](#))
- o ["Prometheus"](#) ([recording](#))
- o ["Mignon" ("Kennst du das Land")](#) ([recording](#))

Exercises (click here for key)

1. Match the composer/work on the left with the corresponding term on the right.

1.	Gilbert and Sullivan	A.	funeral march
2.	Mahler	B.	impressionism and symbolism
3.	Joplin	C.	tone poem
4.	*Don Quixote*	D.	piano rag
5.	Puccini	E.	African American spiritual
6.	Saint-Saëns	F.	orchestral Lieder
7.	Symphony No. 4, IV	G.	operetta
8.	Symphony No. 1, III	H.	variations
9.	Coleridge-Taylor	I.	Société Nationale de Musique
10.	Debussy	J.	verismo

2. For artists throughout history, interest in and engagement with the past often served as inspiration for new directions. Consider the ways in which Brahms's output reflects a blending of tradition and innovation. What genres did he compose? Were those genres new to his time or inherited from an earlier age? In what ways is his Symphony No. 4 similar to earlier symphonies? How is it different? Does it "sound like" music of the Classical or Baroque era? Does it "sound like" Bach or Beethoven? If not, why?

3. Compare a symphony from around 1800 with one composed closer to 1900. What elements or features are consistent? In what ways did the genre evolve over the course of the nineteenth century?

4. The critic Eduard Hanslick (introduced in Content Guide: The Nineteenth Century, Part 2) often disparaged overtly programmatic compositions, arguing that musical beauty is independent from and has no need of extra-musical content. Reviewing a performance of Richard Strauss's tone poem *Don Juan* in 1900, he wrote,

> The younger generation has developed a virtuosity in the creation of sound effects beyond which it is hardly possible to go. Color is everything, musical thought nothing. . . . The tragedy is that so many of our younger composers think in foreign languages—philosophy, poetry, painting—and then translate their thoughts into the mother tongue, music.[1]

But that same year, following a performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 1 for which no descriptive program was distributed, Hanslick's colleague, Theodor Helm, lamented,

> In my humble opinion the music of his First Symphony is not well served by this veil of mystery. With its entirely puzzling design, the symphony

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[1] Eduard Hanslick, "Der 'Moderne Oper,' VII. Teil," in *Fünf Jahre Musik, 1891-1895* (Allgemeiner Verein für Deutsche Literatur, 1896).

literally screams for an explanatory program . . . . [It] was cruel of the composer to deprive his unprepared audience of not only the program book but also any technical guide to this labyrinth of sound.[2]

Consider the potential benefits and pitfalls of composers sharing their programmatic conceptions. In what ways might a written program aid the audience? In what ways might it impede the listening experience?

5. Compare these settings of "Kennst du das Land?" by Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Hugo Wolf:

Schubert: Score / Recording
Schumann: Score / Recording
Wolf: Score / Recording

 Identify some similarities and differences in (1) their musical forms and (2) how each composer depicts Mignon, the character who speaks this text in Goethe's original novel.

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[2] Theodor Helm. Quoted "The First Symphony," in *Mahler and His World*, ed. Karen Painter (Princeton University Press, 2002), 292.

Key to Exercises

1. **Match the composer/work on the left with the corresponding term on the right.**

   1–G; 2–F; 3–D; 4–C; 5–J; 6–I; 7–H; 8–A; 9–E; 10–B

2. **For artists throughout history, interest in and engagement with the past often served as inspiration for new directions. Consider the ways in which Brahms's output reflects a blending of tradition and innovation. What genres did he compose? Were those genres new to his time or inherited from an earlier age? In what ways is his Symphony No. 4 similar to earlier symphonies? How is it different? Does it "sound like" music of the Classical or Baroque era? Does it "sound like" Bach or Beethoven? If not, why?**

   A sampling of Brahms's oeuvre includes symphonies, concertos, sonatas, intermezzos, string quartets, piano trios, art songs, and various choral works. Virtually all genres to which he contributed existed in the previous century. He is known to have intensely studied the output of Bach and Beethoven, and Brahms's works rarely "sound" Baroque or Classical, or even like they could have been written in the early Romantic era. Responses might touch upon broad developments, such as the novel harmonic language and expanded orchestra of the later 1800s, but more to the point is Brahms's application, or reinvention, of historical models. For instance, the first movement of Symphony No. 4 features several deviations from the standard sonata form (while also quoting Beethoven's Op. 106 in the opening theme), and the finale features a passacaglia (a form inherited from seventeenth-century Spain) based on a tune by Bach, which serves as the basis for a massive set of variations.

3. **Compare a symphony from around 1800 with one composed closer to 1900. What elements or features are consistent? In what ways did the genre evolve over the course of the nineteenth century?**

   Possible selections from the *Anthology* include Haydn's "London Symphonies" from the Classical unit, Beethoven 3, Schubert's "Unfinished" symphony, or even Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. Options from the latter decades of the century include Brahms 4, Mahler 1, and Tchaikovsky 6. Students may comment on the number and pattern of movements, the expansion of the orchestra, the scale of each work, absolute vs. programmatic elements, and changing harmonic practices. Comments on venues, intended audiences, and the role of critics are also welcome.

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Consider the potential benefits and pitfalls of composers sharing their programmatic conceptions. In what ways might a written program aid the audience? In what ways might it impede the listening experience?

Responses might touch upon some of the following potential benefits: (1) programs can help listeners grasp how sections of a larger work fit together; (2) knowing the composer's vision provides context for understanding how and why a piece of music was written, and what it "means"; (3) programs can help audiences follow along during a performance, thereby encouraging attentive listening; (4) modern audiences are already accustomed to pairing music with visual media—e.g., through film, television, and video games, so written programs for classical works can make a non-visual art form more accessible.

Comments on potential pitfalls might mention: (1) there is no guarantee listeners will match descriptions in a program with what they are hearing; (2) programs might distract audiences from fully engaging in the listening experience; (3) programs might imply there is only one way to "understand" a piece, and thus they risk stifling the listener's imagination.

5. **Compare these settings of "Kennst du das Land?" by Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, and Hugo Wolf:**

   Schubert: **Score** / **Recording**
   Schumann: **Score** / **Recording**

Wolf: **Score** / **Recording**

Identify some similarities and differences in (1) their musical forms and (2) how each composer depicts Mignon, the character who speaks this text in Goethe's original novel.

Schubert
(1) this is an example of a modified strophic form: the first two verses feature the same music centered around A major while the third begins in A minor; all three verses end with the same refrain; (2) the largely consonant setting, simple rhythms, and high range suggest a sweet, innocent character.

Schumann
(1) this is a standard strophic form: all three verses are set to the same music, although the mood darkens in response to the text; (2) the heightened chromaticism relative to Schubert's setting focuses attention on Mignon's feelings of longing as she recalls her native land.

Wolf
(1) as with Schubert, this is a modified strophic form, which helps to capture the varied moods of each stanza; (2) in general, Wolf's setting brings out more intense emotions, ranging from calm introspection to agitation and sorrow.