

## So what is music, anyway? – A historical survey

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### Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance

- Aristotle: an artist plans and executes an act of catharsis (*Poetics*, 335BC)
- St. Basil the Great: useless because it does not last (4<sup>th</sup> century AD)
- St. John Chrysostom: shameful (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Music represents and reinforces the harmony of the world
- Saint Isidore of Seville: “Nothing exists without music, for the universe itself is said to have been framed by a kind of harmony of sounds, and the heaven itself revolves under the tone of that harmony.” (6<sup>th</sup> century)
- Gift from God
- St. Basil the Great (4<sup>th</sup> century)
- Martin Luther: Music is “the excellent gift of God.” (16<sup>th</sup> century)
- Baldassare Castiglione: a means of showing one’s skill, refinement, and culture (*The Book of the Courtier*, 1528)

### Baroque

- René Descartes: music moves the passions and the soul (*Passions of the Soul*, 1645-46)
- J.S. Bach: music reaffirms the order in the universe created by God
  - “...the end and ultimate cause of all music... should be none else but the glory of God and the recreation of the soul. Where this is not observed, there is no real music but only a devilish blare and hubbub.” (18<sup>th</sup> century)
  - Music is “everything that creates harmony, that is, order. And in this sense it is used by those who assert that the whole universe is music.”

### Classical

- Charles Avison: music is expressive because of its combination of melody and harmony (*An Essay on Musical Expression*, 1752)
- Thomas Jefferson: “Music [is] the favorite passion of my soul.”
- Charles Burney: “it is itself the language of the heart and of passion, and speaks more to both in a few notes, than any other language... can do in a thousand [words]” (*A General History of music*, 1789)
- Thomas Twining: music delights the sense of hearing, raises emotions, and raises ideas (1789)
- Immanuel Kant: must be beautiful (*Critique of Judgment*, 1790)
- Wilhelm Wackenroder: holy mystery (1790s)

### Romantic

- ETA Hoffman: ““Music is the most romantic of all the arts. Music unlocks for man an unfamiliar world having nothing in common with the external world that surrounds him.” (1810)
- Johann von Goethe: “Architecture is frozen music, and music is flowing architecture.” (1836)

- Napoleon Bonaparte: “Music, of all the liberal arts, has the greatest influence over the passions.” (early 19<sup>th</sup> century)
- Ludwig van Beethoven: an artistic and moral obligation (early 19<sup>th</sup> century)
- Richard Wagner: “An artwork is religion brought to life.” (late 19<sup>th</sup> century)
- Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910), “What is art?” (1896): “To evoke in oneself a feeling one has once experienced and having evoked it in oneself, then by means of movements, lines, sounds, colors or forms expressed in words so to transmit that feeling that others experience the same feeling – this is the activity of art.”

## 20<sup>th</sup> century

- Claude Debussy: “Music is made up of rhythm and color” (1907)
- Soviet newspaper *Pravda*: “[Music should resemble] symphonic sonorities or with the plain language of music that can be understood by all... [not] only appeal to aesthetes and formalists who have lost all healthy taste.” (1936)
- Arnold Schoenberg: a medium for saying something new that is worthy of being said, and doing so in a new way (*Style and Idea*, 1946)
- John Cage (*Silence*, 1950): Music is a period of time in which a composer or performer convinces you that certain sounds are meaningful; “I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry as I need it.”
- Aaron Copland (*Music and Imagination*, 1952): The freest, most abstract, least fettered of the arts; “At no point can you seize the musical experience and hold it... This never ending flow of music *forces* us to use our imaginations, for music is in a continual state of becoming.”
- Bernstein: inexplicable and obscure (*The Joy of Music*, 1959)
- Charlie Parker: “They teach you there’s a boundary line to music. But man, there’s no boundary line to art.” (1977)
- Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi: “the ordering of sound”, “organized auditory information” (*Flow*, 1990)
- Toru Takemitsu: music allows for exploring the great expanse of human experience and is a way for humanity to come to understand our different cultures (*Confronting Silence*, 1995)
- Jennie Dorris: cutthroat, competitive, requires years of exhausting dedication; “give me success or take this desire away from me” (“The Audition,” 2012)
- Jennifer Rivera: “music is meant to make you feel something”, and every element of music came from a previous era of music history (“Shouldn’t you be fatter?”, 2012)
- A means of communicating identity (gender, sexual orientation, place, time, class)
- Leonard Bernstein: “Any composer’s writing is the sum of himself, of all his roots and influences”