

German Classical Music from Bach to the 20th Century

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3-5 units

Overview

In this course, students will do an in-depth study of six major vocal works in the German musical tradition, including pieces by Beethoven, Bach, Schubert, Wagner, Mahler, and Weill. To facilitate the understanding of German classical music, crucial to understanding German culture as a whole, we will study each of these pieces musically, lyrically, and in their historical context, using letters and writings by the composers, their contemporaries, and later musicologists to shed light on these five major moments in German cultural history.

We will start with an introductory week of Beethoven's *9. Sinfonie* (1825), arguably the most famous work of classical music ever written. The last movement, which was the first major instance in which a chorus of voices was used in a symphonic work, sets the text of Friedrich Schiller's *An die Freude*. Then we'll jump backwards to Bach and continue chronologically from there. J.S. Bach's *Matthäuspassion*, composed in 1727, is considered a pinnacle of Lutheran church music. Combining texts from the Gospels, early modern chorales, and a contemporary poet, the *Matthäuspassion* introduces several musical innovations while illustrating all the emotional power of early modern polyphony. Next, we consider Franz Schubert, who wrote over 600 Lieder and was one of the two most important early Romantic composers (alongside Beethoven). In his song cycle *Winterreise* (1828), written near the end of his tragically short life, Schubert offers a dark meditation on loneliness, mortality, and the Romantic Wanderer. The cycle of 24 songs includes "Der Lindenbaum," one of Schubert's most famous pieces.

Next we have Richard Wagner, who revolutionized German opera (or, as he called it, "Musikdrama") with his theatrical inventions, harmonic innovations, and monumental stories taken from medieval German mythology. *Das Rheingold* is the first opera in his major life work, the massive tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1876). In *Das Rheingold* we see the beginning of the end when the dwarf Alberich renounces love, steals the gold from the Rhine river and forges the powerful magic ring that is destined to bring about the downfall of the gods. With Mahler, we come to the highpoint of Viennese Modernism. Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* was technically the composer's ninth symphony but, superstitious of the "curse of the 9th," Mahler titled it a *Lied*. Composed in 1908-1909 following several personal disasters in Mahler's life, *Das Lied* was based on Hans Bethge's *Die chinesische Flöte*, itself a translation of an ancient book of Chinese poetry. Finally, we will look at Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, who collaborated on the commercially successful

Dreigroschen Oper before they veered even further to the radical left with *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*, a political, satirical opera about a town in which the only crime (punishable by death) is poverty. Premiered in 1930, the opera’s haunting score and themes illustrated public fears and unrest in the lead-up to the Nazi takeover in 1933.

The course will be taught in German, with reading selections in German and English.

Course Structure and Logistics

All course materials will be available on the course website, hosted by lacunastories.com. You can use this platform to read and annotate the texts, make connections, and ask questions. There’s also a “translate” annotation, with which you can question a translation or make up your own.

After Beethoven in the first week, each of the five works will be studied in a 3-session unit. Each unit will follow this pattern:

| | In preparation | During class |
|------------------|---|--|
| Session 1: Text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen to or watch the piece and focus on the text - Make comments on the annotation website as you read - Pick and highlight a section you want to discuss in class, and come prepared with some questions about that section | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Go over the piece, focusing on the text sections students highlighted - Probe deeper into certain sections with questions and activities on form, style, and theme - Get comfortable with necessary new vocabulary |
| Session 2: Music | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rewatch or listen to the piece, focusing on the music - Make comments on the annotation website as you listen - Pick and highlight a section you want to discuss in class, and come prepared with some | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Go over the piece, focusing on sections highlighted by students - Discuss some central musical concepts at play in the work - Play or sing through a short section of the work |

| | questions about that section | |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Session 3: Context | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read the critical, theoretical, or historical readings available on the website (~30 pages) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creative and critical writing assessments (describe how you would set a certain piece of text, write a series of letters between the composer and librettist, give program notes for a recording, write a newspaper review, summarize the dramatic or musical development of a scene, analyze a certain effect the composer or librettist employs, react to discussion questions based on the readings). - Peer-edit or respond to classmates' writing exercises - Have a short takeaway discussion of the work: what will be your lasting impression of it? |

Roundtable discussions

At two roundtable discussions, in weeks 5 and 10, students will have the opportunity to investigate and present a work not covered in the course, giving a short (5 minute) presentation. Handouts are helpful, but power point is not encouraged. Your presentation should:

Introduce the piece and composer
Narrate a synopsis of the whole piece
Explain one or several main themes (in the text or the music)
Go into detail on one interesting section

A respondent will then ask 3-5 impersonal questions (not “what do you like about the piece?”) based on your presentation. The respondent will know your piece beforehand and have the chance to familiarize themselves with it. Possible questions include:

Why did you pick this work rather than another by the same composer?
Please narrate the plot of Act II.
What instrumentalists or singers are necessary to play the piece?
Explain how the piece relates to other pieces we’ve studied.
Situate the piece in its cultural context (musical movement, time period, genre, concurrent movements in art and literature if relevant)

Each student will then advocate for which pieces should receive funding by a “Friends of Music” organization and be performed. A structured debate will continue until a consensus is reached.

Final Exam

The final exam will be held on the last day of class. It will consist of a reading, speaking, and listening section. A practice final exam will be available on the course website after week 6.

Reading: You will receive 2 short texts about music written between 1750 and 1935. With each text, you can spend as long as you like reading it. Then you will be asked to write out as much of it as possible from memory, in English.

Listening: There will be 5 musical excerpts from pieces we’ve studied (including up to 2 covered in roundtable discussions). Identify the piece, composer, and the context (where we are in the work, who is speaking to whom, etc.).

Speaking: Modified (or official) OPI, to be administered the last week of the quarter or finals week.

Language and Interpretive Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able

- 1) To comfortably discuss classical music in German, in writing and speaking, at the paragraph level.
- 2) To place works and composers into historical, cultural, and musical context, and understand the way these pieces interacted with German culture at the time.
- 3) To narrate the plot of a piece of music and include details when appropriate.

- 4) To state their own opinions about a work and support those opinions with specific examples from the piece.
- 5) To gain familiarity with some of the most important works and composers in German music.

Tasks

- 1) Before each class period, complete the “in preparation” tasks for that day and make notes on the annotation website (20%)
- 2) Participate in class activities (20%)
- 3) Roundtable discussions week 5 and week 10 (20%, 10% each)
- 4) In-class writing assessments (20%)
- 5) Final exam (20%)

Schedule

Introductory Unit: Ludwig van Beethoven & Friedrich Schiller, 9. Sinfonie in d-Moll op.125 (Finale)

Text: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ode_to_Joy

Recording: Beethoven, Ludwig van, et al. *Symphonies*. [Leeuwarden, The Netherlands]: Brilliant Classics, 2005.

Score: Beethoven, Ludwig van, Friedrich Schiller, and Carl Reinecke. *An Die Freude : Schlusschor Der Symphonie Nr. 9 Op. 125*. Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 200.

Selections from:

Parsons, James. *Ode to the Ninth : the Poetic and Musical Tradition Behind the Finale of Beethoven's "choral Symphony"*. 1992.

Unit 1: J.S. Bach et al, Matthäuspasion

Text: http://www.gbt.org/music/St_Matthew_text.pdf and Bach, Johann Sebastian, and Michael Marissen. *Bach's Oratorios : the Parallel German-English Texts with Annotations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jm1os4VzTgA>

Score: Bach, Johann Sebastian, et al. *Matthäus-passion =: St. Matthew Passion : Bwv 244*. 10. Aufl. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2003.

Selections from:

Lederer, Victor. *Bach's St. Matthew Passion : a Closer Look*. New York: Continuum, 2008.

Applegate, Celia. *Bach In Berlin : Nation and Culture In Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005.

Unger, Melvin P. J.s. *Bach's Major Works for Voices and Instruments : a Listener's Guide*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2005.

Unit 2: Franz Schubert & Wilhelm Müller, *Winterreise*

Text and Recording: Schubert, Franz, Matthew Rose, and Gary Matthewman. *Winterreise*. [United Kingdom]: Stone Records, 2012.

Score: Schubert, Franz, Wilhelm Müller, and Susan Youens. *Winterreise : the Autograph Score*. New York: Pierpont Morgan Library in association with Dover Publications, 1989.

Selections from:

Ritter, Hans Martin. *Winterreise : Wilhelm Müller Entdeckt Das Lyrische Monodram*.

Suurpää, Lauri. *Death In Winterreise : Musico-poetic Associations In Schubert's Song Cycle*.

Schubert, Franz, and Walter Obermaier. *Brief an Die Freunde =: Letter to His Friends : Faksimile*. Wien: Doblinger, 1979.

Winterreise, Matthias Loibner

Unit 3: Richard Wagner, *Das Rheingold*

Text: Wagner, Richard, Kurt Pahlen, and Rosemarie König. *Das Rheingold : Der Ring Des Nibelungen*. Originalausg., 1. Aufl. München: W. Goldmann , 1982.

DVD recording: Wagner, Richard, et al. *Das Rheingold: Prologue to Der Ring Des Nibelungen : Music Drama In Four Scenes*. [Halle/Saale]: Arthaus Musik, 2009.

Score: Wagner, Richard, and Karl Klindworth. *Das Rheingold*. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1899.

Selections from:

Windsperger, Lothar. *Das Buch Der Motive Und Themen Aus Sämtlichen Opern Und Musikdramen Richard Wagner's*. Mainz: Schott, 19.

“Das Rheingold : Inspiration und Assoziation” from Schaefer, A. T, et al. *Richard Wagner, Schauplätze : Bilder Und Briefe*. Mönchengladbach: B. Kühlen Verlag, 2013.

“Dichtkunst und Tonkunst im Drama der Zukunft” from Wagner, Richard. *Oper Und Drama*. Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1852.

Millington, Barry, and Stewart Spencer. *Wagner In Performance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Unit 4: Gustav Mahler (& trans. Hans Bethge), *Das Lied von der Erde*

Text: <http://www.mahlerarchives.net/Archive%20documents/DLvDE/DLvDE.htm>

Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plPriJ3NY3U>

Score: Mahler, Gustav. *Das Lied Von Der Erde : In Full Score*. New York: Dover Publications, 1988.

Selections from:

Hurwitz, David. *The Mahler Symphonies : an Owner's Manual*. Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2004.

Mitchell, Donald, and Andrew Nicholson. *The Mahler Companion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Mahler, Gustav, and Alma Mahler. *Briefe, 1879-1911*. Berlin: P.Zsolnay, 1924.

Adorno, Theodor W. *Mahler : Eine Musikalische Physiognomik*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1985.

Unit 5: Kurt Weill & Bertolt Brecht, *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*

Text: Weill, Kurt, et al. *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. Boston: D. R. Godine, 1976. AND Brecht, Bertolt, Kurt Weill, and Joachim Lucchesi. *Aufstieg Und Fall Der Stadt Mahagonny : Oper In Drei Akten : Textausgabe*. 1. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013.

DVD Recording: Weill, Kurt, et al. *Aufstieg Und Fall Der Stadt Mahagonny: Opera In Three Acts*. West Long Branch, NJ: Kultur, 1998.

Score: Weill, Kurt, and Bertolt Brecht. *Aufstieg Und Fall Der Stadt Mahagonny : Oper*. Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963.

Selections from:

Schrader, Bärbel, and Jürgen Schebera. *Kunstmropole Berlin 1918-1933 : Dokumente Und Selbstzeugnisse : Die Kunststadt In Der Novemberrevolution, Die "goldenen" Zwanziger, Die Kunststadt In Der Krise*. 1. Aufl. Berlin: Aufbau, 1987. 335-342.

Brecht, Bertolt, Kurt Weill, and Joachim Lucchesi. *Aufstieg Und Fall Der Stadt Mahagonny : Oper In Drei Akten : Textausgabe*. 1. Aufl. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2013.

Hinton, Stephen. *Weill's Musical Theater : Stages of Reform*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Bertolt Brecht, "Episches Theater."