

TYPES OF MUSIC ("WORKS")

anthem

Originally, a choral composition to an English religious text sung in church services (a hymn, begun with the Church of England). Since then, the term has evolved to mean a song of celebration, usually acting as a symbol for a certain group of people, as in the term "national anthem."

aria

Italian for air; an expressive melody, usually performed by a singer. Arias can be found in operas, oratorios and cantatas. Some composers also wrote individual "concert" arias.

canon

A piece of music that contains repetitions. An instrument or voice begins with the melody and after a number of tones, a second instrument or voice imitates the first while the first continues playing. (Rounds like "Row Your Boat" are a perpetual canon.)

cantata

Musical stories, sung indoors by a choir as an act of worship, often including different variations of hymns.

chamber

Music written for a small group of instruments usually with one performer to a part. The word "chamber" signifies music performed in a small room in an intimate atmosphere.

concerto

Written for complete orchestras, but include soloists in the piece. Concertos are divided into pieces called "movements." Each movement has its own theme or emotion expressed through speed and style. Some are lively, cheerful and fast, while others are slow and calming. Concertos usually contain these three movements:

1st movement - fast and upbeat (usually beginning with the entire orchestra and later joined with the soloist)

2nd movement - slow and calming

3rd movement- again fast, lively and cheerful

concerto grosso

Written to help a small group of instruments stand out (solo, main part, etc.) while a larger orchestra acts as the accompaniment.

dance

Music inviting participation through dance. A famous dance called the minuet was included in several composers pieces. ("Minuet in G" by Bach or Beethoven, for example.)

opera

Musical dramas using costumes, actions and scenery. Almost all of the words in the play are sung, usually in a foreign language (German, Italian, or French). Different aspects that affect the emotion in an opera are speed, volume, tone, and a rich vocabulary.

operetta

Literally a "little opera," often less serious than opera, dealing more with comic plots rather than the caliber of music. A short, light-hearted work, the operetta intersperses musical segments with unaccompanied spoken dialogue.

semi-opera

The combination of spoken drama with a significant element of music.

opus

A Latin word that means “work.” Seventeenth Century composers began to number their works as they were published (i.e. Opus 1, Opus 2, etc.) Oftentimes a single opus number was given to a group of pieces published together into one book. Each piece within that one work was also given a number. (i.e. op. 1, no. 3) Although some composers gave their pieces titles, oftentimes titles were added by others after the composer had died.

oratorio

Literally means “hall for prayer”; an oratorio is a sacred text or religious story sung by a chorus with no actions, costumes or props. An oratorio includes a part called “recitative” where a person sings talk lines, usually quite rapidly on a single note.

orchestral

Music played by an orchestra. Usually in the form of concertos, overtures, serenades, suites, symphonies, etc.

overture

Taken from the French word, “ouverture,” meaning “opening,” usually the musical introduction to a dramatic production (like an opera). Earlier use of the word “overture” also referred to a collection of suites.

serenade

Generally, a musical composition performed in someone’s honor. In music history, there were three categories of serenades:

1. (Earliest) Performed by a lover under a balcony or window.
2. (Baroque) Referred to as a Serenata, it was a type of cantata - *performed outdoors*, in the evening, with mixed vocal and instrumental forces.
3. (Classical / Romantic) Related to the divertimento, a serenade was for a large instrumental ensemble in multiple movements with the character of the work played in lighter mood.

sonatas

Written for keyboard instruments (organs, harpsichords, pianos, etc) and at times include other instruments like the violin or the guitar. Sonatas contain either three movements, as described in concertos; or these four movements:

- First Movement - pretty fast, lively and cheerful
- Second Movement - slow and calming
- Third Movement - contained a dance tune (like the minuet)
- Fourth Movement - lively, fast and cheerful

suite

An organized set of instrumental or orchestral pieces, normally performed at a single sitting. In the Baroque era, the pieces were all performed in the same key. In the eighteenth century, suites were also referred to as overtures.

symphonies

Music written for complete orchestras containing four movements, as described in sonatas.