



Music: Classical

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The term "classical music" is a convenient shorthand that refers to the body of Western art music, as distinguished from popular or folk music, composed from approximately 800 A.D. to the present.

The field is divided into large stylistic periods with subdivisions based on the kind of piece or genre. These periods are Medieval (up to 1400), Renaissance (1400-1600), Baroque (1600-1750), Classical (1750-1830), Romantic (1830-1914), and Twentieth Century (1914-present), with genres including chant, madrigal, motet, cantata, mass, requiem, concerto, quartet, symphony, opera, and song, to name only the most popular.

Although the terms "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transsexual" are modern terms and anachronistic when applied to early modern periods, in almost every period there are composers and musicians who were attracted to their own sex or who wrote music that can now be understood as having particular interest for glbtq people, as well as one genre, opera, that has captured the hearts especially of gay men.

The presence in music of people whom we would now identify as gay or lesbian in earlier periods is apparent primarily through contextual clues rather than hard evidence or explicit documentation, hence the identification of individuals as attracted to his or her own sex is sometimes highly controversial.

Classical music is an important component of Western culture, both high art and middle-brow, to which glbtq people have contributed a great deal. Much classical music has also been assimilated into modern popular culture, often as background music for commercials and films, which explains why many of these pieces are well-known and recognized even by people who are not fans of classical music.

Pre-Baroque Music

Because of unfamiliar aesthetics, subject matter, and languages, the music of the periods prior to the Baroque is the least known and appreciated by modern listeners. A few pieces, however, have been used in movie soundtracks (as in Ismail Merchant and James Ivory's film of E. M. Forster's *Maurice*) or appear on novelty Christmas CDs (as in the popular *Chant Noël*).

The earlier the period the slighter the evidence that survives to reveal the sexual orientation or affectional preference of a particular composer or musician, and the more difficult it is to construct a case for anyone's same-sex attraction.



Top to bottom:
1) An image of Hildegard of Bingen from a medieval manuscript.
2) A portrait of Frédéric Chopin by Eugène Delacroix.
3) A portrait of Pyotr Ilich Tchaikovsky.
4) A portrait of Dame Ethel Smyth by John Singer Sargent.