

From Bach To The Future!

A project about classical music

By Corky Samsonovitch

(The musical genius!)

Grade 6

Student Study Guide

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Introduction

Hi, my name's Corky. That's me over there. (I hate that picture, my mom took it.) I've got an amazing story to tell you — except that I can't tell it to you yet because I have to wait until you come to the concert. But I'll ask you a question: What do you think of when someone says the words "classical music"? Boring, right? A lot of people dressed up in black suits looking really serious and playing music that maybe your grandmother would like, right? Well, that's what I thought, but not anymore, not after what happened to me when I... Oh yeah, I'm not allowed to tell you that part...yet.



Me!

Suffice it to say... (My mom always says that, It means something like, "All I'm going to tell you is...") Suffice it to say, I don't think it's so boring anymore and all because one day I went to visit my uncle Siegfried. That's him. He's the one on the left who looks even goofier than me.



Me and Uncle Siegfried

Now Uncle Siegfried is a pretty strange guy. He's some kind of scientist but not a regular scientist, you know, with test tubes and Bunsen burners and that kind of stuff. He's a sort of musical scientist. He does experiments with music and personally — I don't know if I'm supposed to say this — I think he's also a bit of a witch. Not a bad sort of cartoony witch with a pointy black hat and a broom

and that kind of stuff, I mean he dabbles in the "black arts". Yup...magic. He's a sort of magical-musical professor. He spends his whole life thinking, talking and wondering about classical music and personally I think it's made his brain a little mushy... but that's another story.

When I went into his house it was full of all kinds of stuff; junk, old pots, scraps of metal, buckets with wholes in the bottom, pieces of wood... And he hangs them up all over the place; in his kitchen, in his living room, his bedroom and even the bathroom — you can't walk around without bumping your head on something — and he sort of... well... he kind of *plays* them. He hits them with sticks and all sorts of strange noises come out. Now he gets really excited about this and he jumps up and down and dances about and frankly, it's pretty embarrassing. I'm like, "Whoa, get me out of here." but he says he's making music and I say, "That's not music, that's just a lot of banging." and then he looks kind of insulted like a dog when you yell at it and he walks around for a while with his head hanging down but then he goes back to banging the things and getting excited all over again and then... something really cool happened. He left the room and... Oh yeah, I'm not allowed to tell you that part...yet.

I think I'd better just get on with my project. So here it is, my project about classical music: "From Bach to the Future" by Corky Samsonovitch (the musical genius).

The Baroque Era

The Baroque period was the time between the years 1600 and 1750. Some people think that the word "Baroque" comes from the French word "Bizarre" - like weird. I don't know about that but what some of the artists were doing at that time was considered pretty weird, especially the architects. Before that time architects had been designing buildings that were very simple with lots of straight lines and rectangular shapes. But in the 1600's the architects became much more dramatic and they decided they could make buildings with more complicated shapes. They started using lots of curves and fancy ornaments and intricate patterns. Like the famous gardens at the palace of Versailles. If you look at this picture you can see how there are lots of different shapes but they all work together to make a beautiful design.



The Gardens at Versailles

The music in the Baroque period was sort of the same. During the Renaissance Period which came before the Baroque

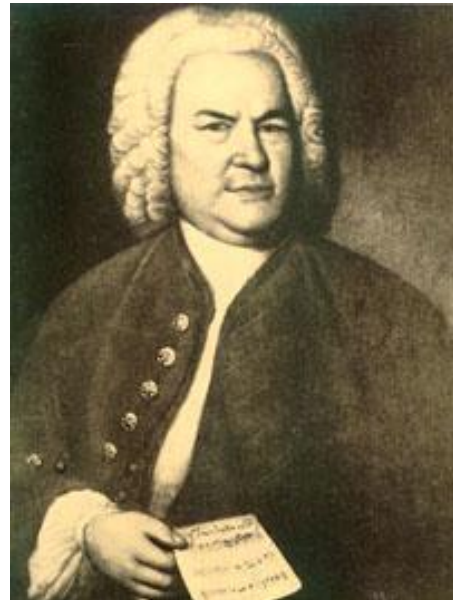
Period music was much simpler; usually just a melody with simple accompaniment by a drum or a few other primitive instruments. The Baroque composers wanted to make much more complicated music and, like the architects, to make it more dramatic and expressive. The music would still

sound good but would have much more complicated melodies and lots of different "shapes" of sound and lots of ornaments.

One of the most important things that happened in Baroque music was the invention of something called counterpoint. What the heck is that? you might ask, and well you may. (My Mom says that, "and well you may.") Counterpoint means: "Two or more independent melodies performed at the same time." That's like if you sang a song and I sang a different song at the same time and it still sounded good. Or if we both sang the same song but starting at different times. Like those songs we learned when we were little: "Frère Jacques" or "Row, row, row your boat" or "Three blind mice". Those are called rounds and they are examples of counterpoint. And that brings us to the greatest composer of the Baroque era,... the one,... the only,... Johann Sebastian Bach.

Bach (1685-1750)

Johann Sebastian Bach was born in Germany into a very musical family. His father was a well-known musician and two of his children became famous musicians. Personally, I think he needs help with his hairdo.. but that's another story.. Bach learned music very fast and by the time he was 18 he was already a church organist. He loved music! He loved it so much he once walked two hundred kilometers to hear a famous man play the organ. Bach composed tons of music and he did it really fast. They say that if someone



Johann Sebastian Bach

today was going to write out all the music Bach wrote it would take them 70 years to do it!

Bach was a master of counterpoint. If you listen to his music you can hear that he often has several melodies going at the same time. They weave in and out and all around each other but they always sound good together.

Bach's life was like his music; very dramatic. He got angry really easily and so he'd often get mad at the people he was working for and quit. Then he'd get hired by someone else and he'd get angry at them and quit and then he'd... You get the idea. And he was working for some pretty important people. He wrote music for kings and princes and for dukes and emperors. Sometimes he could be very happy and write music that was full of life and sounded very lively and happy but at other times his music was very sad. Maybe because he was sad. His mom died when he was only 9 years old and then just a year later his dad died too. And then later his first wife who was really nice and pretty, I guess, died suddenly when she was still young. Bach got married again and you know what the weirdest thing is? He had 20 children!! Yup. 20 CHILDREN! Can you imagine trying to get into the bathroom if you had 19 brothers and sisters who also needed to go?

The Classical Era

So why do they call it the classical era? Isn't all this kind of music classical music? Personally I think they did it just to confuse us. But there is one thing that makes sense. When we say that something is "classic" we mean that it is of the best or of the highest quality or "class" and that certainly makes sense for this period of music because two of the best composers of all time lived in the classical era: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven.

Mozart (1756-1791)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a pretty amazing kid. When he was only three years old he was listening to his older sister practice the piano one day and when she had finished he climbed up on the piano bench and played the exact piece he had just heard her play. Perfectly! every note!!



*Mozart playing with his sister
and father*

By the time he was six he was playing concerts in the palaces of kings and queens all over Europe including the palace at Versailles. His father took him around to all the royal palaces and he performed like a trained monkey: playing the piano with a blindfold on or listening to a piece of music and then saying exactly what each note was. And he could always get it right. By the time he was my age, or your age, he was already composing whole symphonies and operas!

But there was a bad side to all the attention he got when he was a kid. When he grew older he was still writing beautiful music, in fact it got more and more beautiful, but people didn't find him so cute anymore and they didn't like him showing off all the time. He rubbed people the wrong way, (My mom says that. It means he bugged people) so he didn't have an easy life. He never got the best jobs and he never had enough money. Even at the height of his career when everybody knew he was the greatest composer of all time, he had to beg money from his friends just to pay his bills.

When he was in his early thirties he started to get sick. One day while he was working on an opera, "The Magic Flute", a strange man knocked on his door and told Mozart he would pay him lots of money if he would write a "requiem" - a mass for the dead. Although he was sick and weak Mozart started writing the requiem but he knew that it was for his own funeral. In a letter to a friend he wrote: "I am on the point of death... I must finish my funeral song."

But he never quite finished it. He died when he was only 35 and so poor he was buried in a "paupers" grave without even a tombstone or a cross to mark the spot.



Wolfgang Amadeus

Mozart

Beethoven (1770-1827)

A few years before Mozart died a teenage boy asked to play the piano for him. When Mozart heard the young man play he said: "Someday you will make a big noise in the world.."

And he was right. The young man was Ludwig van Beethoven and he did make a big noise, not only with his music but with his voice. Boy, could he yell! Everyone who knew him talked about the crazy things he did when he got angry. Once, he was playing for a prince and his guests at the royal palace and someone talked during the



Ludwig van Beethoven

music. Beethoven jumped up from the piano, slammed the lid and shouted "I will not play before such pigs!" Then he stormed off. Another time he was eating at a restaurant and the waiter brought him the wrong food. So what does Beethoven do? Does he politely say: "Excuse me sir, but you brought me the wrong food.?" No. He takes the plate of meat and gravy and dumps it on the waiter's head!

But Beethoven was probably angry a lot because his life was very hard. His father was an alcoholic and when Beethoven was a little boy his father used to come home from the bar in the middle of the night as drunk as a skunk (My dad says that which is weird because I doubt that skunks really

get drunk a lot. I mean , what would they do? Go to the local skunk and raccoon bar?) and he would drag Beethoven out of bed and make him practice the piano for hours and hours and hit his hands with a ruler when he made mistakes which happened often because Beethoven was so sleepy he couldn't even keep his eyes open.

And he didn't have a lot of friends when he was little. He was very shy and kind of weird, I guess, and he looked sort of funny. He wasn't like Mozart who played music without even trying. Beethoven had to work hard to learn music and practice a lot before he became "the greatest piano player alive!" That's what people called him.

But the saddest thing about Beethoven's life is that when he was only 28 years old he realized that he was starting to go deaf!! Can you imagine composing some of the most beautiful music ever written and not being able to hear it? When his last symphony was performed for the first time two years before he died, Beethoven conducted it himself even though he couldn't hear anything at all. When it was over the audience jumped to their feet cheering and clapping and yelling but Beethoven couldn't hear them. One of the musicians had to turn him around so that he could see the audience and see how much they loved his music.

That's one thing that was different about Mozart and Beethoven's lives. People during Beethoven's life knew that he was great, they appreciated him. When he died all the schools in the city were closed, nobody went to work and thousands of people came out into the street to see his coffin go by.

The Romantic Era

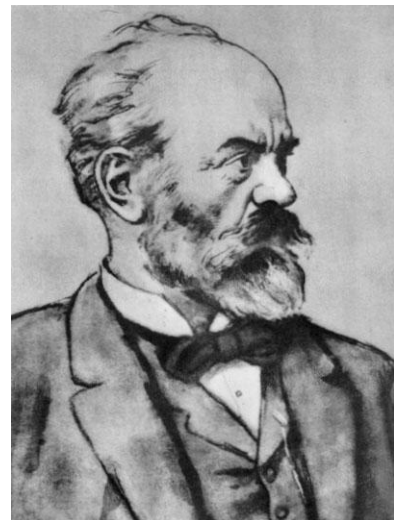
When Beethoven died the Classical Era was over and then began another era: the Romantic era. Now that doesn't mean that they were all writing music about love and kissing and boys-and-girls stuff (although they did quite a lot of that too!) It means that the composers started getting more interested in emotions and feelings and were inspired by the people they saw around them, the people in their own country. And no one did that more than the Bohemian composer... Antonin Dvorak

Dvorak (1841-1904)

First of all, how do you pronounce that? Like this: DVOR (like "Door" with a "v" in the middle) and SHACK. DVOR-shack.

Antonin Dvorak was born in a small town called Nelahozeves and I have no idea how to pronounce that but that's how you spell it. Nelahozeves is outside of Prague in what we call the Czech republic but what was then part of Bohemia.

Dvorak's father wanted him to be an inn-keeper but Antonin wanted to be a musician. Whenever a traveling gypsy band would come through their town Dvorak would sit for hours listening to them play. He especially liked hearing the older Gypsies sing their folk songs and that's what inspired him to write his own music: the songs of the people of his country. In fact he wrote a whole series of dances for



Antonin Dvorak

orchestra called the Slavonic Dances which are based on the songs and dances of the Gypsies.

Later he moved to the United States where he was also inspired by the songs he heard, especially the Gospel songs of the black people and the music of the Native Americans. He wrote a whole symphony called the "New World Symphony" which is full of melodies that sound like American songs.

There's one melody in the symphony that's really slow and sort of sad or lonely and you know what? I wrote words to it! Yup, me, Corky. I wrote a song. It goes like this.

ANTON DVOŘÁK

Largo (♩ = 62)

DAY IS DONE, NIGHT IS COME

STARS ARE SHIN-ING BRIGHT; COME SWEET SLEEP
MY SOUL TO KEEP, TAKE A-WAY MY FRIGHT

ALL THE CARES OF THE DAY MELT A-WAY WITH SLEEP. TOIL AND FEAR DIS-AP-PEAR

SOOTHED IN SLUMBER DEEP. WITH THE MORN, HOPES RE-BORN WOR-RIES HAVE ALL PASSED.

DAY WILL BREAK, I'LL A-WAKE NIGHT-MARES CANNOT LAST. I'LL BE HOME AT

LAST.

Music for Largo

Dmitri Shostakovich and the Modern Era

Dmitri Shostalovitch (That looks hard to pronounce but you actually just say it like it looks: SHOS-ta-KO-vitch) was born in Russia two years after



Dmitri Shostakovich

Dvorak died at the start of what is called the Modern era. Shostakovich, like a lot of the modern composers, was sick and tired of all the old ways of writing music and started fooling around with new sounds. The modern composers started mixing all sorts of weird notes together which older composers would have said were just wrong 'cause they sounded strange, not like the pretty sounds people were used to hearing. But the new composers listened to the sounds

around them — all the new machines that were being invented and the sounds of guns in the war — and they made music that sounded like the world they lived in. At first people didn't like the new kind of music, in fact it sometimes made the audience very angry. When a ballet called "The Rites of Spring" was played for the first time in Paris in 1913 there was a riot in the audience with people yelling and punching and ripping each other's clothes! But eventually everyone started to like the music and now that ballet is considered one of the most important pieces of the Modern era.

Not only did the composers mix weird notes together to get strange sounds but they also used sounds that weren't even notes at all like the noise of traffic and banging doors. One composer named John Cage even wrote a piano piece where the pianist came onto the stage, sat down at the piano and

didn't play anything at all for five minutes. Then he got up and left. That was the whole piece!

Now that may seem pretty weird but when you think about it it's not any weirder than rap music. You know how rap music started? It started when Jamaican disc jockeys began talking in rhythm over the music they were playing. Then they started mixing music from different records playing at the same time or scratching the records with the needle of the record player while they spoke to make interesting and cool sounds. That's pretty weird too!

Conclusion

I liked doing this project. I liked it a lot more than I thought I would. I liked learning about the composers' lives and finding out what made them write the music they did and how the music that happened in one era affected the music that happened in the next era.

What did I learn? I learned that musicians in all times had to struggle to create their music and to have people listen to it. And I also learned that if your uncle tells you not to touch something and you go ahead and do it anyway you might...

Oh yeah, I can't tell you about that... YET!