Baroque Keyboard Composers

9 Influential Composers and Their Keyboard Music
Girolamo Frescobaldi
(1583-1643)

- First important composer of keyboard works – one of the first composers to focus on purely instrumental music.
- Worked as organist at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.
- First written use of the theme & variations form.
- Self-published his music (printed and sold it himself).
- Here is a *Toccata* (show off work) by Frescobaldi.
Girolamo Frescobaldi

- Here is a Courante – a type of dance done by royalty.
- Played on a harpsichord.
Dieterich Buxtehude
(1637-1707)

- German organist and composer – his organ works are still widely performed today all over the world.
- Although he is primarily known for organ works, he wrote around 100 cantatas (a series of songs that tell a story, usually sacred).
- One of the first to have organ recitals – JS Bach, Handel & Telemann attended some of these performances.
- Here is a Passacaglia (work with a bass line that repeats) for organ.
Here is a *Toccata* for organ.
A ‘toccata’ is a piece meant to ‘show off’ your skills.
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

- Considered one of England's greatest composers.
- Although he is best known for his opera (esp. *Dido & Aenas*), he wrote an enormous amount of songs and keyboard music.
- Many of his keyboard works are played by keyboard students all over the world.
- Here is one of his simple works (probably for a student) played on the clavichord.
François Couperin (1668-1733)

- French composer, organist & harpsichordist – nickname ‘Couperin the Great’
- Spent his career as a court composer, giving weekly concerts – writing several works for these concerts.
- Most famous book ‘The Art of Playing Harpsichord’ is one of the first pedagogical (teach how to teach) books for keyboards.
- Most known for his harpsichord, he left behind a large amount of chamber works & sacred vocal works.
- Here is Soeur Monique, a work from his 3rd harpsichord book, played on a double harpsichord.
François Couperin

- Here is the work *Les petits moulins à vent* (The Little Windmills) from his 3rd Harpsichord Book.
- It is played on a modern piano.
Georg Phillip Telemann (1681-1767)

- German composer and multi-instrumentalist.
- For many years, was considered the most prolific composer of all time – as mentioned in Guinness Book of World Records. Wrote LOTS of music.
- He wrote over 3000 works!
- Spent his life as a professional musician, teacher & court composer. His various jobs required him to write lots of music.
- Although mentioned here as a keyboard composer, he wrote operas, cantatas, chamber works and concertos for every instrument available at that time.
- Here is a keyboard Fantasia in C played by an 8 year old student on a modern piano.
Here is another performance of a Telemann keyboard work – Overture No.4 in E minor.

Played on a clavichord.
Jean Phillipe Rameau (1683-1764)

- French composer and music theorist.
- Wrote one of the first modern music theory book ‘Treatise on Harmony’
- Before 50, he spent his life as a keyboardist & church musician, writing several books of harpsichord music, *Pièces de clavécin*, (‘Works for Keyboard’) and some vocal cantatas & motets.
- After 50, saw his greatest success as a French opera composer.
- Here is one of his keyboard works - *L’Entretien des Muses* (Conversation of the Muses) from his Works for Keyboard, played on a double harpsichord.

Jory Vinikour, harpsichord

*L’Entretien des Muses*
Jean-Philippe Rameau

French double harpsichord by Cucchiara and Pierce

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Jean Phillipe Rameau

- This is another Rameau keyboard tune – one of his most famous melodies – *Tambourin* – played on a harpsichord.

Tambourin

J.-Ph. Rameau
Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

- Italian composer – spent most of his time in Spain & Portugal.
- Best known for his 550 Keyboard Sonatas (Works to be played on an instrument)
- Although classified as a Baroque composer, his work in Sonatas foreshadowed the compositions of the Classical period.
- Spent his life as a court composer, teacher and master harpsichordist.
- Wrote other genres as well, including operas & church music.
- Here is one of his Keyboard Sonatas – played on pipe organ.
Domenico Scarlatti

- This is another Scarlatti Keyboard Sonata – this one in C major, played on the harpsichord.
Some consider Handel to be one of the greatest composers of all time.

Best known for his operas, oratorios & orchestra compositions.

Wrote over 200 keyboard works and several organ concertos.

Probably wrote his keyboard works as part of his keyboard teaching.

Here is a movement from a *Suite* – a group of dances – played on a modern piano.
George Fredric Handel

- Here is another movement from a Keyboard Suite – a Passacaglia (composition built on a specific bass line) – played by a student on a modern piano.
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

- One of the greatest composers of all time.
- During his lifetime, he was best known as an organist.
- Between working as a church organist, court composer & keyboard instructor, he revolutionized keyboard music.
- Wrote LOTS of keyboard music!
- His ‘Well-Tempered Clavier’ is a set of 24 preludes and fugues that proved that a keyboard can play in any key without the need for a retuning.
  - **Prelude** – a introduction type work.
  - **Fugue** – means ‘to chase’ – skillful manipulation of melodies to make an extended composition.
- The life of JS Bach is an extensive topic that will be covered in a different section of this class. 😊
Here is one of Bach’s keyboard teaching works, his *Two Part Invention in F maj* played on a 2 panel harpsichord.
Here is one of Bach’s works from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* – this is Prelude in C minor, played on a 2 panel harpsichord.
This is the last performance of the day, one of Bach’s most famous compositions – *Little Organ Fugue in g minor* played on a big honkin pipe organ. 😊
Next topic – the Baroque Orchestra