

CLASSIC *f*M

**EVERYTHING YOU EVER  
WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT  
CLASSICAL MUSIC  
BUT WERE TOO AFRAID TO ASK**



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**DARREN HENLEY AND SAM JACKSON**



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# INTRODUCTION

**C**lassic FM is the UK's only 100 per cent classical music radio station. Since we began broadcasting 20 years ago in September 1992, the station has brought classical music to millions of people across the UK. If you've yet to discover for yourself the delights of being able to listen to the world's greatest music 24 hours a day, you can find Classic FM on 100–102 FM, on Digital Radio, online at [www.classicfm.com](http://www.classicfm.com), on Sky channel 0106, on Virgin Media channel 922 and on FreeSat channel 721.

As we're celebrating 20 years since we turned on our transmitters for the very first time, we thought that we would put together the guide to classical music that we would rather have liked to have produced for our new listeners when Classic FM began its life. Of course, we didn't know quite as much about classical music back then as we do now, given that we've been able to enjoy a further two decades of accumulated listening.

We've also learned a lot about what our listeners like to hear – as well as some of the music that they are a little less keen on. Since 1992, we've researched hundreds of weeks of programming and listened to the thousands of new recordings that arrive at our studios each year. This book is the result of just some of the best things that we have learned during our first 20 years on air. Parts of it were first published a few years back as *The Friendly Guide to Music*, but this

brand new edition has been considerably expanded to provide you with a far fuller guide to immersing yourself in all aspects of the world of classical music.

So, if you are standing in a bookshop reading this, wondering whether to buy a copy of this book, then please allow us to help you decide.

If you flick through the next 200 or so pages, you will quickly discover that there are a lot of things that this book is not. It is not the most detailed and learned book about classical music that you will be able to lay your hands on in any high street bookshop. It is not packed full of impenetrable musicological arguments about contrapuntal syncopation, or microscopic analysis of a long-forgotten composer's unpublished work. In short, it is not going to be much help to you if you are already an expert in the subject, busily researching your PhD thesis.

Instead, this is the book about classical music for everyone else – and especially for people who wouldn't normally consider buying a book on the subject, but who are, nonetheless, interested in developing a greater understanding of classical music.

If that sounds like you, then you will be pleased to hear that, just like Classic FM itself, this book is mercifully free of the jargon that is sometimes associated with the classical music world. At the same time, we will try to explain some of the terms that those in the know tend to use when they're talking about classical music, so that you can confidently join in with conversations. We've also found that a working knowledge of the terminology can be helpful in getting a little bit more out of listening to the tunes.

The advent of pop music meant that, for a significant part of the 20th century, classical music came to be regarded as the preserve of a cultural elite. Those people inside the classical club didn't seem to want to share the musical delights that they had discovered with those people who were outside the elite. For people looking in, classical music seemed to be surrounded by an impenetrable ring of steel.

The Three Tenors' concert in Rome during the World Cup finals of 1990 marked a resurgence in popular interest in classical music.



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The belief that classical music can be enjoyed by everybody, no matter what their age, class or geographical location, is one of the cornerstones on which Classic FM was founded in 1992. It is an ideal to which we have remained absolutely true in the two decades since.

It is worth remembering that classical music was in fact the popular music of its day. In the days before radio, television, the internet and any recordings, what we now consider to be classical music was played in churches, palaces, coffee houses, concert halls and ordinary homes across Europe. The composers who created it were writing music that would be performed at specific occasions and enjoyed by audiences or congregations far and wide. Music and the arts were regarded as having a civilising effect on society, whether the particular works were religious or secular in their nature.

### **SO WHAT EXACTLY IS CLASSICAL MUSIC?**

This is one of the questions that is most often asked of us at Classic FM. And we thought it was something that we ought to tackle up front, before we really get going.

The strictest definition of classical music is everything that was written in the Classical period (between 1750 and 1830), but today we understand classical music to be much more than music composed in just those 80 years.

Calling a piece of music ‘classical’ is sometimes done as a means of generically distinguishing it from ‘popular’ music. One of the major tests of whether a tune is or isn’t classical music has traditionally been whether it has a sense of ‘permanence’ about it, in that it is still being performed many years after its composition. This argument begins to fall down as the heritage of pop music becomes ever longer, with hits from the 1950s still being played on the radio today, well over half a century after their original release. It is also hard for us to tell whether a newly written piece of classical music will indeed attain that level of ‘permanence’ in the future.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music* offers the following as one of its definitions of classical music:

## EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT CLASSICAL MUSIC

*Music of an orderly nature, with qualities of clarity and balance, and emphasising formal beauty rather than emotional expression (which is not to say that emotion is lacking).*

It is true to say that much of classical music follows specific rules of style and form, which we will discuss further in Chapters 4 to 9. However, this definition is still not quite a catch-all.

One of the most striking differences between classical and pop music is the different way the two genres place their emphasis on the relative importance of the composer and the performer. In pop music the performer is all, but in classical music the composer is the star of the show. It is his or her name that tends to come first in the credits and it is he or she who is remembered by history. Take Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* as an example. Not many people remember Anton Stadler, the clarinetist for whom it was written, but everyone knows Mozart's name. Conversely, if you ask most music fans whom they would most associate with that hardy perennial 'White Christmas'; they would reply 'Bing Crosby', rather than the song's composer, Irving Berlin.

Some of those self-appointed members of classical music's ruling elite like to claim that film scores sit outside the world of classical music. Yet the first dedicated soundtrack was composed by Camille Saint-Saëns for the 1908 film *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise*. Since then, Copland, Vaughan Williams, Walton, Prokofiev and Shostakovich have all written music for the cinema. If we go back to the time of Beethoven, we find him composing incidental music for the theatre of the day. Had cinema been invented in his lifetime, he would undoubtedly have written this genre of music too. Throughout classical music's history, composers have always written music for those who pay, whether their patrons were rich noblemen or rich film studios.

Today, film soundtracks are among the most popular symphonic works being composed, with pieces by the likes of John Williams, Hans Zimmer, Howard Shore and James Horner providing an excellent gateway into wider listening to classical music.

Whatever the definition of classical music to which you personally

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subscribe, we think that the great jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong had things just about right, when he said: ‘There’s only two ways to sum up music: either it’s good or it’s bad. If it’s good you don’t mess about it – you just enjoy it.’

We hope that you enjoy uncovering the rich tapestry of sounds, emotions and stories that go together to make up classical music. And we hope that you will come to share our view that this is truly the greatest music ever written.

Darren Henley  
Sam Jackson  
April 2012