

The History of Music

Over the years, music in the Western world has been changing constantly and the music of today is very different from the music people made 300 years ago.

To help you understand how this music has developed, each of the books in this series will describe a different musical period. For each era, we will show you the way the people of the time lived, and the kinds of art and architecture that were typical of the period. We will discuss the important musical characteristics and describe the lives and contributions of the major composers.

The history of Western music is usually divided into six broad time-periods:

Middle Ages	Renaissance	Baroque	Classical	Romantic	Contemporary
1450	1600	1750	1825	1900	

This book presents the Classical period.

The Classical Period

The Classical period is generally taken to begin in 1750 with the death of Johann Sebastian Bach, and end about 75 years later, around 1825, when the Romantic movement was becoming predominant, and close to the year of death (1827) of Ludwig van Beethoven, the last great Classical master. It was a period of transition in which political changes were reflected by changes in the art, architecture and music of the time.

You may find the word "classical" confusing, because we use it in different ways. We talk about classical music, the music written by composers such as Bach, Beethoven and Chopin as opposed to other kinds of music like folk songs, pop music, jazz or the musical traditions of other cultures. We also talk about the Classical period, with the word "classical" capitalized, in the history of Western music. The Classical period was a particular time in Western history when people became fascinated with the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome. They admired the ideals of moderation, order and simplicity that originated in these ancient societies and tried to return to those ideals. Inspired by the perfect proportions of a Greek temple, artists tried to achieve the same satisfying balance in their own works, whether in architecture, painting or music.

The final years of absolute monarchy in France

In the 1700s, most European states were ruled by kings and queens whose power was limitless and who derived their authority directly from God. Louis XIV of France was the most powerful of them all. His court and his palace at Versailles illustrated all the excesses that were possible in an absolute monarchy. His successors, Louis XV and XVI, continued in his footsteps, and their incompetent leadership was a major cause of the people's revolt that became the French revolution.



Louis XVI of France



His wife, Marie Antoinette

Other European rulers

Other absolute monarchs of the period were Catherine the Great of Russia, Frederick the Great of Prussia, the Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, and her son, Joseph II. Some of them, like Frederick the Great and Joseph II, were more in tune with the desire for reform and introduced change without revolution.



Catherine the Great of Russia, her husband Peter III and their son Paul. Peter III was not popular with his subjects. They overthrew him and put Catherine on the throne instead.



Frederick the Great of Prussia



Empress Maria Theresa of Austria



Joseph II of Austria

The seeds of revolution



Voltaire, J.-A. Houdon, 1781.

Houdon, the famous French sculptor, captures the glint in Voltaire's eye, as though the philosopher was about to deliver one of his famous bons mots.

The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement that originated primarily in France, led by philosopher-writers like Voltaire and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Adherents to the movement believed in the power of human reason. They thought that if men could discover the underlying laws of nature, as Isaac Newton had explained the laws of gravity, they could also understand the laws governing society and human behaviour. With understanding could come change.

The philosophers of the Enlightenment wanted to build systems of government that were free from the tyranny that could exist in an absolute monarchy. In this they were influenced by the English philosopher John Locke, who held that all people were born good, independent and equal. He believed that governments derived their right to govern from the consent of the people, not from any hereditary rights granted by God.



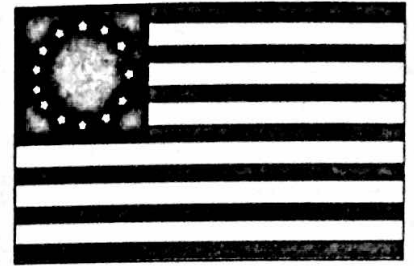
Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed that man in his natural state was inherently virtuous and therefore superior to civilized man. That is why this engraving shows him in a natural setting, which was unusual for portraits at the time.

John Locke attacked the theory of the divine right of kings which gave monarchies the authority to hold power.

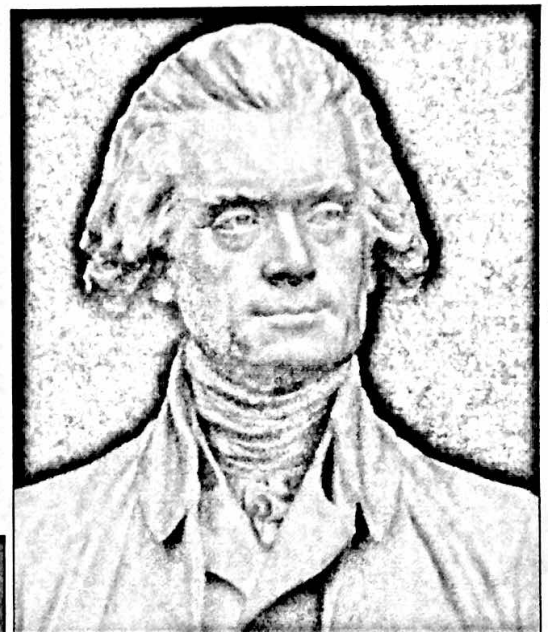


The American Revolution (1775-1783)

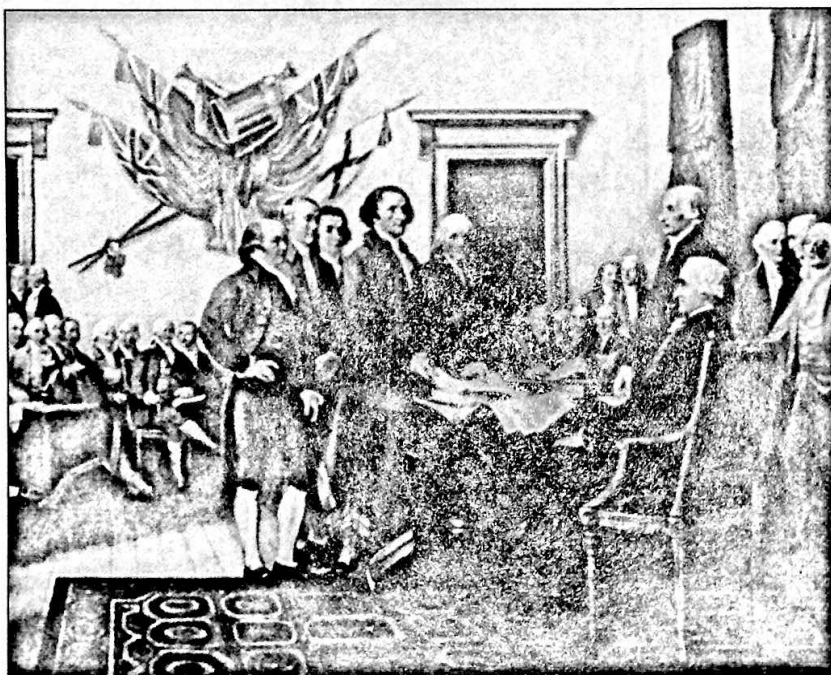
It was under the influence of Enlightenment ideas that the American Revolution was born. The original 13 colonies established in North America were under the control of Britain. As they became richer and more solidly established, the colonists began to resent the rule of the British monarchy and to think that they had the right to decide their own destiny. With the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the American colonists announced their independence. The British government retaliated by sending in the army, but the war that resulted was won by the Americans. Their victory created a new country, the United States of America, a republic governed by the people's elected officials. The new country was based on the idea that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." These rights guaranteed the citizens freedom of thought, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and the right to trial by jury, protecting them from the arbitrary rule of any monarch.



The first American flag, with 13 stars and 13 stripes representing the original 13 colonies.



Thomas Jefferson, by Houdon. Jefferson was the architect of the Declaration of Independence.



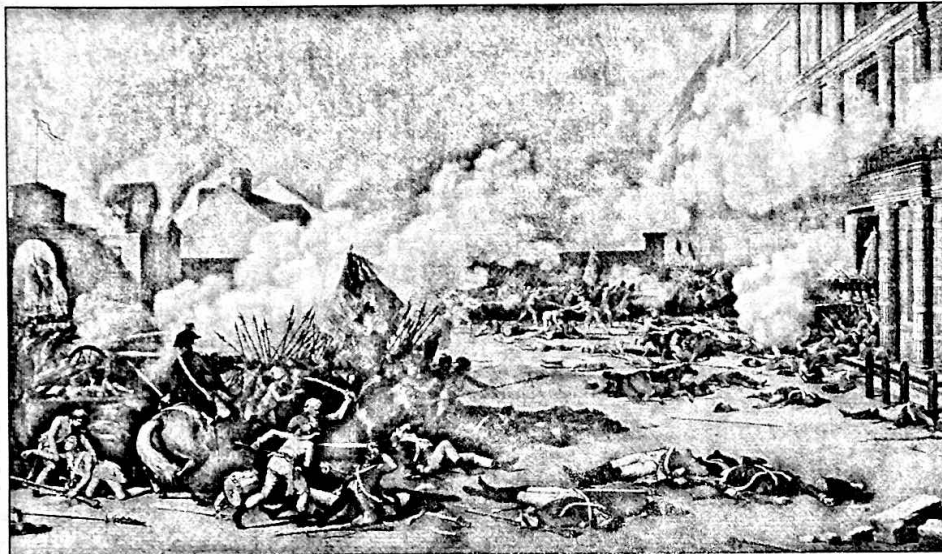
The Declaration of Independence was signed on July 4, 1776.

The document proclaimed the natural rights of man in an age of absolute monarchy. It had a tremendous impact in America and in Europe.

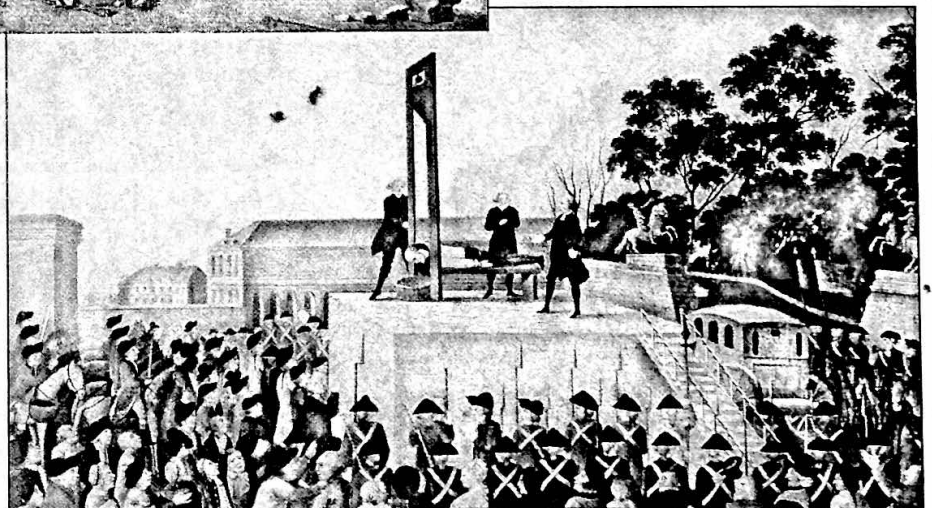
The French Revolution (1789–1799)

The *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* [The declaration of the rights of men and citizens] was directly inspired by the American Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights, and the ideas of the Enlightenment. It declared the natural right of man to freedom, equality, property and security, and the right to resist oppression. The new French society was to be built on the will of the people.

The French Revolution was inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment and the American Declaration of Independence. Opposition to the monarchy spread from the property owners and the middle classes to the peasants, and resulted in a bloody uprising. The motto of the revolutionaries was "Liberty, equality, fraternity." The monarchy was abolished and many aristocrats were put to death by guillotine, including Louis XVI and his queen, Marie Antoinette. During the 10 years of the revolution, there were a series of governments that developed the laws by which the new republic would rule itself. Aristocratic privilege was destroyed, and land was redistributed. Taxes now applied to everyone, not just the middle and lower classes.



Prise des palais des Tuileries, le 10 avril, 1792, Jean Duplessis-Bertaux. Here we see the revolutionaries capturing Marie Antoinette's palace, called the Tuileries, where the king and queen were hiding.



This painting shows the execution of Louis XVI, the reigning monarch in France at the time of the Revolution.

Some famous faces from the French Revolution



Jean-Paul Marat (1743–1793)

Marat was a journalist and the editor of a radical newspaper that advocated violence against the supporters of Louis XVI. He was stabbed to death in his bath by Charlotte Corday, who held him responsible for the Reign of Terror.



Georges Jacques Danton (1759–1794)

Danton was a member of the Committee for Public Safety, the ruling body of the revolutionary government. His inclination to compromise caused him to be accused of being an enemy of the revolution and sent to the guillotine.



Maximilien de Robespierre (1758–1794)

As the most powerful member of the Committee for Public Safety, Robespierre tried to eliminate everyone he considered to be an enemy of the revolution. Thousands were sent to the guillotine in what became known as the Reign of Terror. In the end he was overthrown, and executed.



Rouget de Lisle, the composer, sings the song he called the War Song of the Army of the Rhine, later to become known as the Marseillaise. Sung by revolutionary soldiers from Marseilles as they entered Paris, the song became the national anthem of the new republic and has remained so ever since.

The working-class heroes of the French Revolution were called *sans culottes*, meaning "without breeches," because they wore the trousers typical of the labouring classes.

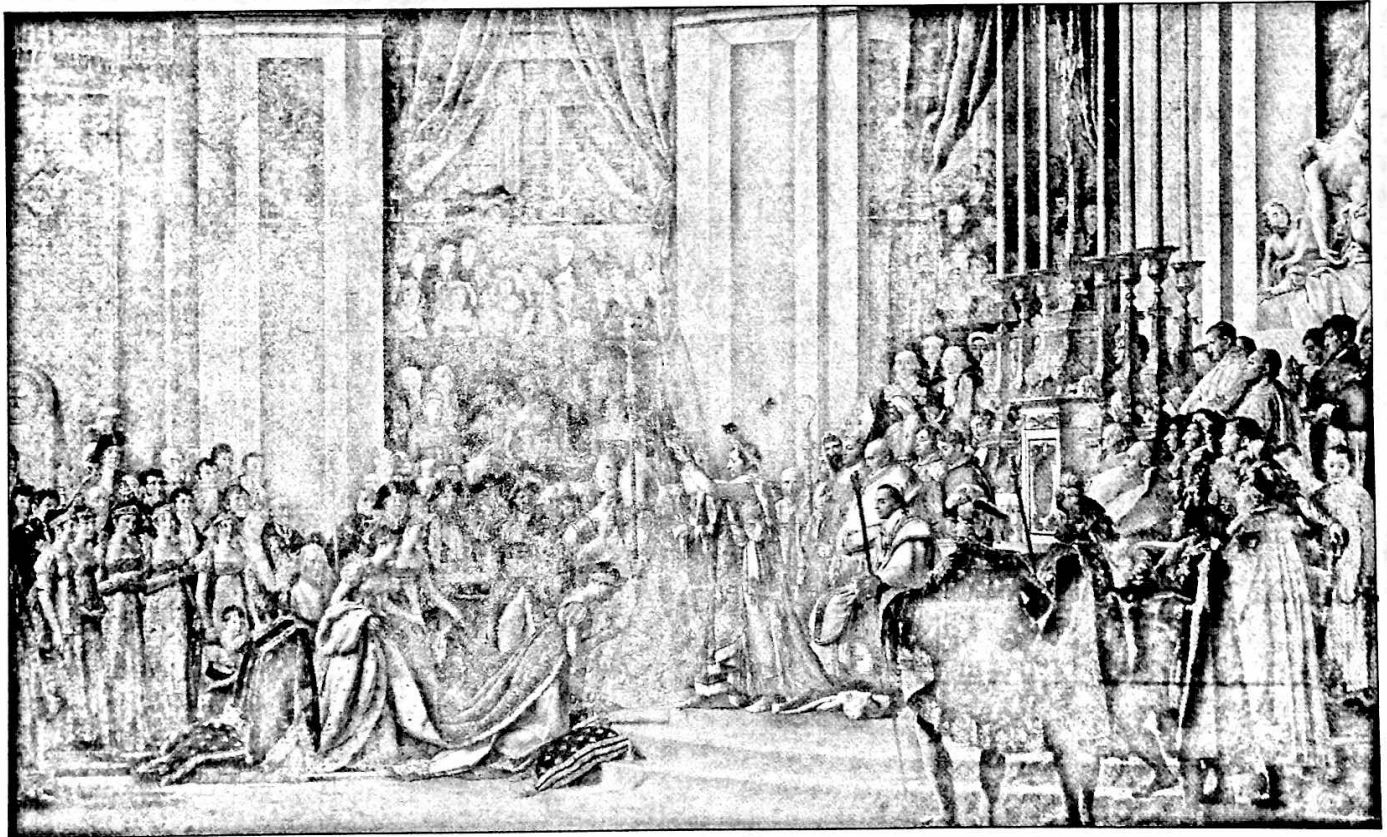
Napoleon Bonaparte

In 1799, dissatisfaction with the ineffectiveness of a series of revolutionary governments reached a peak. A group led by a young general and hero of the French army, Napoleon Bonaparte, seized power by force. They set up a government called the Consulate, with Napoleon as First Consul. Napoleon did many good things. He established the Bank of France, the French education system and the Napoleonic Code, incorporating in law many of the changes introduced during the revolution. But in 1804, he crowned himself Emperor of France, returning the country to the absolute monarchy the people had fought a bloody revolution to remove.



Emperor Napoleon I,
painted by Ingres

The Coronation of Napoleon and Josephine,
Jacques-Louis David, 1805–1807



The Political Situation

The Napoleonic Wars

Napoleon's primary genius was as a military commander. By 1812, France had conquered most of Europe. His downfall was his ambition, which led him to invade Russia. His army was forced into retreat, and was virtually wiped out by the terrible winter conditions. Then the armies of all the countries he had conquered rallied to fight against him, and the leaders of his own army refused to follow his orders. In 1814, he was forced to step down as Emperor, and banished to the Mediterranean island of Elba. All Europe breathed a sigh of relief. A year later, though, he escaped and returned to France. His old soldiers flocked to his side as he marched toward Paris. In the end, however, he was defeated on the fields of Belgium by the British army under the Duke of Wellington. This time he was banished to St. Helena, a distant and more isolated island in the South Atlantic. He died there of stomach cancer in 1821.

Napoleon at Arcole,
Antoine-Jean Gros, 1796



The famous French painter David's conception of Napoleon as hero

