In this new six-part series for BBC Two, composer Howard Goodall traces the story of music from the year dot to the age of dot com. Music is around 40,000 years old. It’s never ceased to be crucial for humankind. It may have come before speech. Since Upper Palaeolithic times music has played a profound part in our lives, both public and private. In the series Howard looks at the key developments in music’s extraordinary journey. The purposes for which it was used, who paid for it, and why, developments within musical structure, and the arrival of instruments and techniques we now take for granted. All of which evolved over centuries.

EPISODE ONE – THE AGE OF DISCOVERY

Starting in the “Stone Age” music has played a vital part in human evolution, and not just for our pleasure. When we lived in caves, the development of pitch awareness was a matter of life and death. Once we began to live in settled communities, music became a crucial element in religion and ritual – which it still is. Music competitions arrived with the Greeks – and then the development of professional musicians.

But not composers. The music of the ancient world is lost to us, and that’s because no-one found a satisfactory way of writing music down. But around 1000 AD an Italian monk called Guido did find a workable method. This was applied to the only form of music most people in Europe would have heard on anything like a regular basis – church music. So-called “Gregorian Chant” developed painstakingly over several centuries, from one vocal line, to men and boys singing in octaves, then two lines, and so on, arriving at the still-standard four. Armed with Guido’s notation, a new breed of musician we would call the composer could write ever more complex pieces of music, no longer relying on the singers’ power of memory.

Instrumental music began to develop into familiar patterns too, in the Twelfth century, with the arrival of the troubadour – singing songs of courtly love derived from Arabic originals. As were the instruments the songs were played on, recognisably the ancestors of our own.

After many centuries of slow development, things began to move apace as the “Middle Ages” started to give way to the Renaissance. Chords, the bread and butter of all subsequent western music, only arrived in the 14th century. Around this time, the tune in most pieces of music migrated to the top of the harmony, where it still lives today. (Up to then it was more usually handled by one of the lower voices.) After a century or more of religious wars, secular music swept across western Europe. The love song came into its own in England around 1600, just as opera began in Italy. A thousand years of musical development were realised with the great works of Monteverdi, proving that music’s tools were now capable of expressing complicated, even conflicting emotions.
EPISODE TWO – THE AGE OF INVENTION

Between 1650 and 1750 musical innovations came thick and fast, just as they did in science and technology. This was the age of Vivaldi, Purcell, Bach and Handel. It was also an age when the musical action moved north, across the Alps, to northern, Protestant Europe. It was an age whose music is firmly established in our contemporary repertoire.

In Italy the violin was born, in the 1550s. It migrated to the French court, and here musicians began to use not just one violin per line but many – earlier instruments had tended to be played ‘one to a line’. Once Louis XIVth’s court composer Jean-Baptiste Lully had the bright idea of supplementing these string bands with brass and wind instruments – normally only played outdoors – for the Sun King’s extravagant ballets, the orchestra began to emerge.

And from the instrumental introductions to the ballets, and operas, the overture emerged. From this would eventually come the symphony. In the hands of Corelli, and later Vivaldi, the concerto also established itself, not least with the Four Seasons.

There were purely technical developments. The “Equal Temperament” system of tuning allowed many instruments to play together, and in all the major and minor keys.

This was an age when the “chord sequence” also came of age, and those used by Purcell, Bach and others are still in rude health today, in jazz and popular music. All of these innovations give such richness to works like Bach’s St Matthew Passion, and Handel’s Messiah. The musical tool kit we still use now was put into place in a hundred years of relentless, and exciting invention.

EPISODE THREE – THE AGE OF ELEGANCE & SENTIMENT

Between 1750 and 1830 music went through a convulsion. It began with the elegant works of Haydn and Mozart: it ended with the tempestuous works of Beethoven, with Berlioz and the Symphonie Fantastique waiting in the wings. Music’s function changed. From glorifying God, and entertaining princes, to serving a new bourgeois audience eager for sensation and spectacle. Add the love songs of Schubert, the piano music of Chopin and the sparkling orchestral works of Mendelssohn and we have a great part of many people’s favourite classical music today.

In the last half of the Eighteenth century the orchestra expanded (introducing new instruments like the clarinet) and the Symphony was developed. In the hands of Haydn, and later Mozart and the young Beethoven, the symphony’s structure was built around taking tunes and developing them. Nobody ever did this better than Mozart, with his sublime roll-call of melodies. But this emphasis on the melody changed the nature of the music. Instead of the complex layers of the music of Bach, the works of this period – going into the French Revolution – were mostly sweet and elegant. What’s more, the underlying music was much more simple, based on three chords – I, IV,V – that still underpin much rock music today.

Beethoven revolutionised this form of music, making the orchestra ever bigger, and the symphony ever longer. Music now became “Romantic”, a portrait of the composer’s inner life, with Nature used as a metaphor. And with Beethoven’s Ode To Joy, music was now written, not to make life more bearable, but to change the world.
From the middle of the Nineteenth century to the fin de siècle, Europe saw a craze for operas and music that dealt with Death and Destiny. Inspired by Berlioz and his *Symphonie Fantastique*, music written about witches, ghouls, trolls and hellish torment became the norm. Even Italian opera succumbed to the Death and Destiny obsession, with Verdi’s *La Traviata*. The tragic death of its heroine was also a comment on the hypocrisies of the wider society.

The composer who was the most influential figure of the mid nineteenth century was the cosmopolitan Hungarian-born Franz Liszt. Little wonder that he wrote pieces about two of the mythical figures that obsessed the composers of the period – Faust, the superior, brooding intellectual who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for esoteric knowledge and earthly pleasures, and Prometheus, who is punished for all eternity by Zeus for giving mankind the gift of fire. It was at this time that the image of the composer as a moody, misunderstood genius, apart from other men, was cemented in the public imagination.

One of Liszt’s many innovations was music that – seemingly – “sampled” the folk music of his native land. In the second half of the nineteenth century, this “Ethnic Heritage” musical movement gathered pace. But what we hear, in Liszt, Brahms and Dvorak, is rarely genuine peasant forms. This was music for a middle class audience, with exotic flavourings added. (The question of whether it is right to “appropriate” the music of other cultures is still a hot potato today.)

The composer Liszt most influenced, though, not least in terms of musical nationalism, was his own son-in-law, Richard Wagner. Wagner reinvented opera, and introduced into it darker, more unstable harmonies, that were to change the music that followed him. Derived, ultimately, from experiments already made by Liszt. Wagner’s operas are a towering achievement. But they had a dark side. Wagner’s operas – and his political writings – were later to act as an inspiration for Hitler. The swirling, nationalistic, romantic, nihilistic undercurrents of the music of this period is still troubling today.

In the last years of the Nineteenth century, modernism in music arrived, and the birth of recorded sound changed the way music was heard, played, and sold, forever.

After the death of Richard Wagner in 1883 came a series of developments that in many ways were in opposition to his monumental achievements. In France the uncluttered and relaxed music of Gabriel Faure, Erik Satie and others was like a long hot lazy afternoon. The symphonies of Gustav Mahler invited all forms of music, including Jewish folk music, into their generous embrace.

Elsewhere folk music was beginning to make an impact on musical form and texture. The self-taught Mussorgsky actually sounded Russian – unlike Tchaikovsky, the most famous Russian composer of the day! When Mussorgsky’s music came to the Paris World Fair in 1889 it astonished non-Russian composers, especially Claude Debussy. Debussy was also greatly influenced by the music of Java, also show-cased at the World Fair. These influences from abroad were to change mainstream music and prefigure what we’d now call “World Music”. And when Diaghilev and Stravinsky collaborated on a series of ballets, using Russian folk forms, with revolutionary rhythms attached, the results terrified and scandalised the audience in equal measure, in works like the ground-breaking Rite of Spring by Stravinsky. So too, the extraordinary dissonant and erotic operas of Richard Strauss, especially Salome. Modern music had begun.
Meanwhile another crucial building block of modern music was sliding into place. More than anything the ability to record and play back sound, in 1874, brought music - particularly the American folk idioms of African Americans, Chinese, and Irish and Scottish labourers - into the mainstream as the blues, ragtime and then jazz developed, and then swept the planet. Classical music – for a time – retreated into a golden summer of nostalgia, exemplified by the enduring appeal of Elgar’s Enigma Variations, written as the 19th century drew to a close and before the First World War ripped Europe apart.

EPISODE SIX - THE POPULAR AGE

In the last hundred years “classical music” – as it is now generically styled – seemed to many to be in retreat, in crisis or even in terminal decline. Howard Goodall believes that rumours of its death have been exaggerated. While some cutting edge works proved too challenging to win the hearts of a mainstream audience, the DNA of classical music, as it had been constituted since the time of Monteverdi in the 1600s, is alive and well. In the musical theatre, in the cinema and in much popular music. Beginning with Gershwin's *Rhapsody In Blue*, a jazz-classical hybrid, first performed in 1924, that became a much-loved standard – despite its sniffany reception by highbrow critics at the time.

Indeed it was popular music, after the First World War, that was more likely to comment directly on the things that were on most people’s minds – the rise of fascism, and the racism aimed at African-Americans in the USA. Works like *The Threepenny Opera*, *Porgy and Bess* and Billie Holiday’s signature song *Strange Fruit* (and later, *West Side Story*) pushed the boundaries of the seriousness that popular styles could convey.

And it was popular song, after the Second World War, that was more likely to protest about racism and inequality, and the Vietnam War, in the hands of Bob Dylan, Marvin Gaye and others.

The Beatles, meanwhile, had utilised a bewildering variety of different styles and techniques, some rediscovered, some invented by themselves. With George Martin and the engineers at Abbey Road, they explored and instituted new possibilities offered by recording technology. And, thanks to albums by The Beatles and others, styles from other cultures began to become better known in the west – India, Cuba (Stevie Wonder) and Paul Simon (South Africa). “World music” had begun, gloriously so, and is still going strong.

In the Second World War classical music had once again connected with a mainstream audience, in works like Shostakovich’s *Leningrad Symphony* – written as his home city endured an apocalyptic siege – and Aaron Copland’s optimistic ballet, *Appalachian Spring*. The circle was complete with the arrival in the 1960s and 1970s of Minimalism. Composers like Steve Reich, Philip Glass and John Adams. Reich became the godfather of “sampling”. Glass wrote a *Low Symphony* based on music by David Bowie. The exchange of musical ideas was now a two-way street, and what’s more it was an exchange between equal partners. The century-long split between “classical” and “popular”, “western” and “world” is, at last, being eradicated.
Story of Music on BBC Radio 3 Programme Information

In Tune

7TH January 2013, 16:30 – 18:30, BBC Radio 3

BBC Radio 3’s In Tune, BBC Learning and the BBC Philharmonic have teamed up for a special project inspired by Howard Goodall’s Story of Music. Presented by Suzy Klein, an In Tune Special will broadcast live from Salford featuring Howard Goodall and an audience of young people with a passion for classical music.

Extracts from key works featured in Howard Goodall’s Story of Music have been offered to GCSE and A Level music students as a stimuli for their own 3 minute compositions and the BBC Philharmonic have been running workshops for the students to help them develop their compositions. Some of the best compositions will be performed by the BBC Philharmonic in an In Tune special live from Salford. Also in the programme, the BBC Philharmonic will perform works by Bach, Monteverdi, Mendelssohn, Saint-Saens, Stravinsky and John Adams which have inspired the young composers.

BBC Learning will be filming the students’ progress from the first session, to the final performance of their work in the Philharmonic Studio, as part of a Learning Zone special for BBC Two – designed to inspire all music students with their compositions. The films will give top tips for writing original music as well as specific points about style, technique, textures, instrumental ranges, compositional devices and patterns that will help them to create their own pieces.

Presenter/Suzy Klein
AH/EH

Story of Music in 50 Pieces

From Monday 28th of January – Friday 1st March BBC Radio 3

In Essential Classics at 11am and in In Tune at 5.30pm

From the 28th of January, Howard Goodall will join Suzy Klein in discussion of fifty seminal works whose innovations had a huge impact on the development of music through time. These features will be broadcast on weekdays in Essential Classics and on In Tune and will be made available as downloads from the BBC Radio 3 website. Through discussion and hearing of the music, BBC Radio 3 will provide a further in-depth look into the history of music.

Presenter/Suzy Klein
AH/EH

Story of Music Question Time


In the intervals of Live In Concert, from 19:30 on BBC Radio 3

Each Monday, from the 28th of January, Sue Perkins and Tom Service will present Story of Music Question Time. In the intervals of Live In Concert (starts from 7:30pm) Sue and Tom will answer audience questions on music’s past, present and future in five weekly episodes.

Presenters/Sue Perkins and Tom Service
AH/EH