Introduction

This guide is about formatting classical composers, performers and titles consistently and in a style that will make sense to expert and non-specialist users, and that will work across all of our systems both inside and outside the BBC.

It is specifically intended to deal with information which is added to a database, such as Dira or iBroadcast, although it will be helpful for any writers of classical programme information or listings.

Composers

Always include first name and surname. Where there is an additional name by convention, use this eg Johann Sebastian Bach

Performers

A performer’s name should be entered without reference to their role eg Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau

If you include the role (baritone) in the performer field, you will block a successful match, as anything in the name field will naturally be interpreted by a database as part of the name.

Titles such as Sir or Dame should be omitted.

Do not abbreviate the names of ensembles.

eg BBC National Orchestra of Wales not BBC NOW

London Symphony Orchestra not LSO

Works

Piece Titles

There is no difficulty if the piece has a single title like a book (The Enchanted Lake, The Rite of Spring, The Sorcerer’s Apprentice), but if the title of the piece is a musical form (eg Sonata, Symphony) or it comes from a set of pieces (one of Richard Strauss’s Four Last Songs or an aria from a Puccini opera), then there are established conventions for naming pieces and excerpts.

If the title is a standard musical form (Concerto, Quartet, Sonata, Symphony, Trio etc), the form comes first, then the No number (if there is one), the key, and the opus or catalogue number:

eg Symphony No 5 in C minor, Op 67
   Symphony No 40 in G minor, K550

Some pieces also have a name or nickname. Beethoven’s Moonlight sonata is a well-known example. A nickname should be placed in single inverted commas at the end of a title, preceded by a comma.

eg Piano Sonata in C sharp minor, Op 27 No 2, ‘Moonlight’

After the title, it is standard to cite a parent work in brackets, if there is one.

eg Concerto in E, RV269, ‘Spring’ (The Four Seasons)
Instrumentation in Titles

In many cases, instrumentation does not feature in a title (The Rite of Spring) or is implicit (a piece called Symphony is usually for orchestra). But just as frequently instrumentation is part of a title (Piano Concerto) or is given after it (Duo for violins; Duet for flutes).

The instrumentation should come at the beginning of the title where possible

eg Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 58
   String Quartet No 2
   Violin Concerto in E minor, Op 64

At times it makes more sense to list instrumentation afterwards

eg Concerto for Double String Orchestra (capitals are used where instrumentation is part of the title)
   Sonata for horn, trumpet and trombone

Where the instrumentation is listed after the form of the piece, then the key precedes the instrumentation. This is because the key describes the work not the instrument.

eg Sonata in A minor for two harpsichords

You will see a variety of styles in different sources – for example not only our recommended Piano Concerto No 1 but also Concerto No 1 for piano and orchestra as well as Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No 1. Our style is not more correct than the alternatives but is as logical as any and will at least encourage consistency.

Where continuo is listed in the instrumentation for Baroque music, call it simply continuo. Avoid basso continuo and do not abbreviate to bc.

Key Signatures

Give key signatures where appropriate for music from the 19th century and earlier, not generally after that. With tonal music, the key signature is an important identifier, often helping to differentiate pieces when a composer wrote many examples of the same form.

The key signature goes after the piece title and No number, before instrumentation and opus or catalogue numbers. Only the letter of the key is capitalised; minor, sharp and flat are lower case.

There are no hyphens in key signatures that follow the piece title

eg Piano Concerto in F sharp minor
   Mass in B minor

Never use the letter b for the flat symbol – always write out flat.

Excerpts

When an excerpt is a movement, an operatic overture or a suite, list the parent work first, on the grounds that the identity of the parent work is essential to making sense of generic names like 3rd mvt, Overture, Funeral March, Suite etc.

The details of the excerpt itself follow in brackets:

eg Dido and Aeneas (Act 1, Sc 2);
   Tannhauser (Overture);
   Romeo and Juliet (Suite No 1);
   Symphony No 6 in B minor, ‘Pathetique’ (3rd mvt);
   Piano Sonata No 2 in B flat minor (3rd mvt, ‘Funeral March’).
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Refer to movements as shown in the last two examples and not by the tempo marking. Words like *Allegro* are imprecise. In the case of Beethoven's *Symphony No 5*, both the third and fourth movements are marked *Allegro*.

**When the excerpt has a unique name (like an operatic aria),** follow it with the parent work in brackets:

eg *Nessun dorma*! (*Tosca*)

*Polovtsian Dances* (*Prince Igor*)

Songs from a collection fall into this style:

eg *Auch kleine Dinge* (*Italian Songbook*)

Likewise a recitative from a Bach cantata

eg *Wer aber hort, da sich der grossste Haufen* (*Cantata No 76, 'Die Himmel erzahlen die Ehre Gottes*)

If you are playing only a **subsection** of a piece – part of a movement, for example – use a colon to mark off your fragment:

eg *Concerto in B flat, Op 9 No 8* (1st mvt: excerpt)

This situation with subsections frequently arises with operatic excerpts.

eg *Norma* (*Act 1, Sc 1: Casta diva... Ah! bello a me*) means that only a part of Act 1, Scene 1 of Bellini's opera is being performed, specifically from the aria *Casta diva* up to the end of the aria *Ah! bello a me*.

**Punctuation**

Use a **comma** to indicate that two bits of information are in **parenthesis** – ie mean the same thing. *Symphonie fantastique* (2nd mvt, *'Un bal') means that you are playing the whole of the second movement which is also called *Un bal*.

Use a **colon** to mark off a **subsection**. If you were playing only a fragment of the movement, you would write *Symphonie fantastique* (2nd mvt: excerpt) or even (2nd mvt, *'Un bal': excerpt*).

Use single **inverted commas** when you follow a piece’s main title with its nickname (*String Quartet No 1, 'From My Life') or with the first line of the lyrics (*Cantata No 82, 'Ich habe genug'). But drop the inverted commas when a lyric can stand alone as the title of an excerpt: *Dove Sono* (*The Magic Flute*).

**Diacritics**

As a general rule, **accented characters in French, German, Italian and Spanish** should be retained. Other accents can be used where necessary for pronunciation or disambiguation

eg Arvo Pärt

Michael Bublé
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Capitalisation

**English piece titles** capitalise all words except articles, prepositions and conjunctions:

*eg* The Rite of Spring  
War Requiem  
A Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra

However, pieces known by their first lines (hymn titles, operatic arias) are treated as running text

*eg* In the bleak midwinter  
Tell me the truth about love

Borderline cases, where it is unclear whether a title is also a first line, may be treated either way.

**Foreign language titles.** After the initial word, cap as in running text. The English *headline style* is not followed in other languages that use the roman alphabet. German capitalises all nouns. French capitalises only proper nouns (*La Bohème*).

**Musical abbreviations** such as *arr, mvt, No, Op, rev* and *transcr* are not followed by a full point. They are capped or lower case as shown here.

Some Particular Cases

**Concert overtures** may dispense with the word *overture* or simply include it as part of the title, depending on convention:

*eg* Le corsaire  
Helios Overture  
1812 Overture

(Beethoven's *Leonore Overtures Nos 1–3* fall into this category, having been withdrawn from their original operatic context.)

**Operatic overtures** are mentioned in the section on *Excerpts.*

**Cantatas, motets** and *oratorios.* When the first line of the sung text forms part of the piece's title, it goes in single inverted commas: *Bach: Cantata No 215, 'Preise dein Glücke, gesegnetes Sachsen'.* Making the first line part of the title for Bach cantatas helps identify them as he wrote so many. But when the form of a cantata, motet or oratorio is nonessential, omit it.

*eg* Tallis: *Spem in alium* (a motet)

Similarly, Handel's *Theodora* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah* (both oratorios).

**Masses.** When it begins a title, the Latin word *Missa* is by convention always run together with the name of the mass, without punctuation. The word following *Missa* is capped

*eg* Missa Alma redemptoris mater

unless *Missa* is part of the meaning of the title, in which case the name of the mass itself begins with a lower-case letter

*eg* Missa in tempore belli (Mass in Time of War)
Prefer English Titles

Give titles in English when there is an accepted English version that is at least as well known as the original, including oratorios and operas sung in another language.

This does not mean that every non-English title should be translated. In everyday use, many are retained.

eg Richard Strauss Four Last Songs (not Vier Letzte Lieder)

but his late piece for strings is always called Metamorphosen, even though the word itself translates easily.

Similarly Stravinsky Les noces, but The Firebird.
The Flying Dutchman, but Gotterdammerung

Simply, pick an English alternative when it looks as natural as the original.
The titles of German lieder and other non-English vocal music will usually only be viable in the original.