

Chamber music repertoire summary

Composer	No. of pieces for standard ensembles*	Notable other works
Mendelssohn	6, 2, -, 2, -, 3	1 string octet; many duets and other works, including <i>Konzertstück</i> (for clarinet, corno di bassetto and piano)
Schumann	3, -, -, 3, 1, 1	Several duets
Brahms	3, 2, 2, 3, 3, 1, 1	1 horn trio, 1 clarinet trio, 1 clarinet quintet, 7 sonatas
Tchaikovsky	3, -, 1, 1, -, -	
Borodin	2, -, 1, -, -, 1	
Dvořák	13, -, 1, 4, 1, 1	Terzetto for 2 violins and viola, 2 violin
Smetana	2, -, -, 1, -, -	Various duets
Franck	1, -, -, 4, -, 1	1 violin sonata
Fauré	1, -, -, 1, 2, 2	4 sonatas and various duets
Debussy	1, -, -, -, -, -	<i>Première Rhapsodie</i> (clarinet and piano); sonatas for violin and cello, and for flute, viola and harp
Ravel	1, -, -, 1, -, -	Introduction and Allegro for harp, flute,

*Number of pieces for standard ensembles is listed in the following order: string quartets, string quintets, string sextets, piano trios, piano quartets, piano quintets.

Other wind chamber works

- ▷ Mixed ensemble: Schoenberg, *Pierrot Lunaire* (singer, flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano) and *Herzegewächse* (soprano, celesta, harp, harmonium); Nielsen, *Serenata in vano* (clarinet, bassoon, horn, cello, double bass)
- ▷ Wind ensemble: Reicha, 24 wind quintets; Ewald, 4 brass quintets; Gounod, *Petite Symphonie* in B♭ for nine wind instruments; R. Strauss, *Serenade* in E♭ for 13 wind instruments and *Suite* in B♭ for 13 wind instruments
- ▷ Chamber orchestra: Wagner, *Siegfried Idyll*; Schoenberg, *Chamber Symphony No. 1*, Op. 9 (15 instruments); Dvořák, *Serenade in D minor* (wind, cellos and bass); Spohr, *Nonet in F* (wind quintet and string quartet).

Practice essay questions

Composer/performer/audience

1. Assess the importance of the contribution of a composer of your choice in the development of chamber music, referring to two specific works to reinforce your argument.
2. Chamber music was a medium in which composers of the period from Mendelssohn to Debussy produced their most ambitious and innovative music. With reference to the chamber works of two composers, explain whether or not you agree with this statement and why.
3. 'Chamber music of this time was conservative and dull compared to what else was happening in music.' Discuss, referring to the works of two composers.

Occasion/time/place

1. Give an overview of the different circumstances in which chamber music-making took place during the period from Mendelssohn to Debussy. Drawing on specific examples from the music of the period, explain how these circumstances might have influenced the compositions that resulted.

Musical language

1. Choose two contrasting chamber works by two different composers from the period between Mendelssohn and Debussy. Referring to at least three of melody, harmony, tonality, rhythm, timbre and structure, explain how the composers' musical languages differ.

Generally speaking, developments in the musical language of chamber music reflect those happening in music as a whole, though are perhaps less radical and tended to lag behind. One reason for this was that the more radical composers, such as Liszt and Wagner, tended to favour the mediums of opera, orchestral and solo piano music. Debussy wrote the bulk of his most innovative music for these mediums before returning to chamber music at the end of his life. It was only after about 1908 that chamber music became an important medium for experimentation, led by composers such as Bartók and Schoenberg.

2. The formal innovations of Beethoven's late string quartets both intimidated composers away from formal experimentation and spurred them on. Describe ways in which composers of the period from Mendelssohn to Debussy explored different aspects of musical structure.

Instrumentation

1. Chamber music of the period between Mendelssohn and Debussy tends to be dominated by stringed instruments and piano. What reasons, both practical and musical, might there have been for this? Refer in your answer to two specific works from the period.
2. Referring to two works from the period, explain some of the different ways in which composers have exploited the instrumental forces in one of the following ensembles: string quartet; string ensembles of five-eight players; piano trios, quartets and quintets; ensembles that combine wind and strings (for example clarinet trio, horn trio, clarinet quintet, flute viola and harp).

Styles/genres

1. Chamber music is generally thought of as the most pure and abstract of the 19th-century mediums, largely escaping the influences of Nationalism, Programmaticism, Romanticism and Impressionism. Citing examples from the chamber music repertoire of this period, explain whether or not you agree with this statement and why.
2. Write an account of an important chamber work that you have studied, explaining what features of the work show that it was written between 1830 and 1918.

Suggestions for further study

Pieces

- ▷ Ravel, String Quartet in F major, second movement, and Dvořák, *American String Quartet* in F major, Op. 96, first movement – aural and score-based questions on these works, together with printed extracts (and answers), appear in Classroom Music spring term 2 2008/09 and on the Rhinegold website respectively. These will help familiarise students further with the Romantic string quartet and with these composers' musical languages.
- ▷ Brahms, Horn Trio, Op. 40; Clarinet Quintet, Op. 115 – these works are useful for showing how Brahms integrated wind instruments into his chamber ensembles.
- ▷ Schoenberg, *Verklärte Nacht* (string sextet version) – this is a good example of a late-Romantic string sextet, illustrating a vast range of textures, string effects such as tremolo and a complex, chromatic harmonic language.

Resources

Individual tracks can be downloaded cheaply on the internet. Miniature scores of the extracts discussed are published by Eulenberg (Mendelssohn, ETP7; Schumann, ETP77; Brahms Piano Quintet, ETP212; Brahms Horn Trio, ETP249; Brahms Clarinet Quintet, ETP239; Tchaikovsky, ETP161). Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* is published by Universal Edition, UE3662 and the Debussy by Dover, ISBN: 0-486278131.

Radio 3's 'Discovering Music' website (www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/discoveringmusic/listeninglibrary.shtml) contains downloadable programmes on Romantic chamber music, including Mendelssohn's Octet, Schumann's Piano Quintet and Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir de Florence*.