

People and Culture

France has played a major part in the development of Western classical music. In the Medieval Period, French monks helped to develop music notation and guard the tradition of Gregorian chant. In the 12th and 13th centuries, a school of early composers of polyphony gravitated to the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. The troubadours and trouvères also came from Medieval France. Like singer-songwriters of today, troubadours were singer-poets who wrote songs about love and sang them for audiences, sometimes kings and queens. After the troubadours, the traditional French chanson (“song”) was typically monophonic and strophic. This means that it had only a single melody (monophonic) repeated several times with new lyrics each time (strophic). In more formal settings, the chanson could have more voices. Renaissance composers such as Guillaume du Fay (1397-1474) and Josquin des Prez (1450/55-1521) wrote chansons with three or four voices singing simultaneously. In folk and popular music today, the **violin** and **accordion** are popular throughout the country. Two other traditional instruments, the **hurdy gurdy** and the French bagpipes, are associated with the regions of Auvergne and Brittany, in northern France.



Louis XIV (r. 1661-1715) cultivated a strong community of composers, singers, and ballet dancers at his court. Known as the Sun King, Louis lavished resources and opportunity on his musicians. In return, he required his musicians and artists to conform to his own artistic vision for France. The king was a skilled dancer, and he sometimes even appeared on stage during ballet performances at court. His chief musical officer was Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632-1687), who created the genre of tragédie lyrique, a French version of opera.

Like the Austrian city of Vienna, Paris has always been a magnet for composers, even those who are not from France. Mozart lived there for a short time, and other composers spent much of their lives with Paris as a home base, including Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849), Franz Liszt (1811-1886), and Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868). In the early 20th century, many modernist composers such as Claude Debussy (1862-1918), Erik Satie (1866-1925), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), and Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) lived and worked in Paris. Many famous pieces, such as Stravinsky’s ballet, *The Rite of Spring*, were premiered in the city. Whether in the concert halls of Paris, the cathedral of Notre Dame, or on the streets of France, French musicians have exerted a long-lasting influence on the music of Europe.

Quick Facts

Capital:	Paris		
Location:	Western Europe		
Area:	260,000 sq. mi.		
Climate:	Temperate/Mediterranean		
Population:	65 million		Language: French
Currency:	Euro		Government: Republic

Instruments of France

- violin** – the soprano member of the strings family, with four strings, bowed or plucked
- accordion** – a free reed instrument held in two hands, connected by bellows, and featuring buttons and/or a piano keyboard
- hurdy gurdy** – a string instrument bowed by turning a crank-wheel; the non-crank hand creates melody by depressing keys

Apply Your Knowledge!

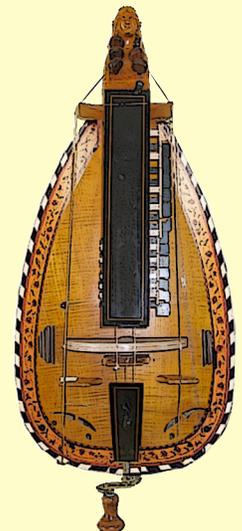
Write your answers on the back or on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1) What are two ways that French monks have influenced the development of Western classical music?
- 2) Who were the troubadours?
- 3) What was Louis XIV’s nickname, and who was his chief musical officer?
- 4) Name at least three composers who lived and worked in Paris.

Perform French folk songs on pages 4, 10, and 12 of *Tradition of Excellence*, Book 2. Perform pieces by a French composer on pages 26 and 29.



Notre Dame de Paris



Hurdy Gurdy