

People and Culture

Lying in the central northern region of Western Europe, Germany is a country with a rich tradition of classical music that includes many great composers. A full history of Germany's compositions would fill enough books to populate a library, and it would stretch from Johann Sebastian Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier* to Beethoven's nine symphonies; from Heinrich Schütz's choral and chamber music to Richard Wagner's operas; and beyond. Other influential German composers include Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Paul Hindemith, and Karlheinz Stockhausen.



Music written for the Lutheran Church also has a strong tradition in Germany. Many of J. S. Bach's large-scale compositions, for instance, were written to be sung and played during the Lutheran church service. He wrote hundreds of cantatas (choral pieces with orchestra), each one was meant to be sung on a particular Sunday throughout the year. Bach also wrote monumental pieces with large orchestra, chorus, and vocal soloists for major feast days such as Easter (*St. John Passion*, *St. Matthew Passion*) and Christmas (*Christmas Oratorio*). For his prolific output and mastery of counterpoint and international styles, Bach is now one of the most highly regarded composers in all of Western classical music.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the symphony became an important genre for German composers. The **symphony orchestra**, made up of strings, woodwinds, brass, and sometimes percussion, was also important in Austria, a country with close cultural ties to Germany. Beethoven, who was born in Germany but spent much of his life in Austria, became the model for German composers throughout the 19th century, both within and outside the genre of the symphony. Following Beethoven, Richard Wagner sought to bring a symphonic emphasis into his operas. Wagner, in turn, had his own followers. Gustav Mahler and Anton Bruckner were two symphonists who combined Beethoven's and Wagner's influences, and Richard Strauss took up Wagner's torch and became his generation's most famous composer of German opera.

German traditional music is also greatly prized. German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) believed that the essence of a nation could be found in the customs, culture, and arts of its peasant class. This influential theory, later a part of the larger idea of Nationalism, spurred interest in the collection and study of traditional German songs. Von Herder called these songs *Volkslieder*, a term that has been used ever since, including in its English translation, "folk song." In addition to songs, German folk music includes polkas, waltzes, and ballads.

Quick Facts

Capital:	Berlin	
Location:	Central Europe	
Area:	138,000 sq. mi.	
Climate:	Temperate	
Population:	82 million	
Language:	German	
Currency:	Euro	
Government:	Federal Parliamentary Republic	

Apply Your Knowledge!

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

- 1) List at least five German composers.
- 2) What German tradition did Johann Sebastian Bach make major contributions to?
- 3) Who coined the term "Volkslieder" (folk song)?

Perform melodies by German composers on pages 2, 3, 13, 14, 18, 30, 42, and 44 of *Tradition of Excellence*, Book 2.

Instruments and Ensembles in Germany

accordion – a free reed instrument held in two hands, connected by bellows, and featuring buttons and/or a piano keyboard

symphony orchestra – a large ensemble including strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion



Symphony Orchestra Layout