

The following is an alphabetical list of important classical composers. Following the composer's name is the birth and death years and the composer's nationality. At the end of the list, I have mentioned some important groups of composers which you need to know. These are *standard* groupings, and the composers are often referred to in these manners.

A word of caution: some of the names – particularly the Russians – you will often find spelled in a variety of ways. For example: Tchaikovsky, Tchaikofsky, Chaikofskii, Tchaikovskii, etc.

Similarly, some works are known under various names (e.g., in translation and/or in the original language). Some are known equally well by *both*! (For example, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*). Some of the more common translations I have provided for you (not all). Keep in mind as you build your recording collection that you might have to look for something under a different title!

Though the list goes from 1098 to the present, it is ridiculously incomplete, and in fact is not *meant* to be complete. Many, many fine – and even important – composers are not listed. These include, for example, Alexander Zemlinsky, Leonard Bernstein, Luigi Nono, Fanny Mendelssohn, Josquin des Prez, and Alma Mahler, to name only a very few.

There are two ways that a composer got onto the list. Either they are so important that they were categorized as a “no-brainer” inclusion (e.g., Beethoven, Mozart, Brahms), or they are not tremendously important, but wrote some work or works which are MAJOR repertoire staples (this is how Dukas and Franck, for example, made the list). Where appropriate, I have added some small comments.

After certain composers, some works are listed. These are particularly important works by that composer or works which are especially representative of the composer's output. Anything in **bold** should be considered as an absolute *must-know* work. If a composer's name is in bold, just assume that any major work should be known (saves me from listing them all, though I'll list some to get you started).

MANY important works have been left off. THIS LIST IS MEANT AS A “STARTER KIT.” Just because a work is not listed here, does not mean it is not an important work. Also, keep in mind that a complete absence of works could just as easily indicate that no *one* specific work could be singled out.

By definition, this list is based on my opinions. Some of my opinions are certainly debatable. Some are not! (You *need* to know the Beethoven Symphonies. A musician who tells you otherwise is *not a musician*). That said, any other serious musician making a similar list would have a very different list. Please bear all of this in mind as you peruse the list.

Enjoy!  
Dr. Chernov

**Bach, Johann Sebastian** (1685-1750) German

B minor Mass; 6 Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin; 6 Cello Suites; St. Matthew Passion; St. John Passion; Goldberg Variations; various Cantatas; The Art of Fugue, The Well Tempered Clavier; Brandenburg Concertos

Barber, Samuel (1910-1981) USA

Piano Concerto; Adagio for Strings; Knoxville, Summer of 1915

**Bartók, Béla** (1881-1945) Hungarian

Concerto for Orchestra; Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta; 6 String Quartets; Contrasts; Mikrokosmos; Bluebeard's Castle; The Miraculous Mandarin; Sonata for 2 Pianos and Percussion

Beach, Amy (1867-1944) USA

**Beethoven, Ludwig van** (1770-1827) German

9 Symphonies; 5 Piano Concertos; Fidelio; 32 Piano Sonatas; String Quartets; The Ruins of Athens; other chamber music, solo works, etc. The list is *almost* all-encompassing.

Berg, Alban (1885-1935) Austrian

**Wozzeck**; **Lulu**; Lulu-Suite; Lyrische Suite

Berlioz, Hector (1803-1869) French

**Symphony Fantastique**; Harold in Italy; Benvenuto Cellini; Les Troyens; The Damnation of Faust (especially, the "Rákóczi March")

Berio, Luciano (1925-2003) Italian

**Sinfonia**; **Sequenzas**

Bizet, Georges (1838-1875) French

note: name pronounced Be-zay.

**Carmen**

Bologne, Joseph, Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799) Guadeloupean / French

Bonds, Margaret (1913-1972) USA

Boulez, Pierre (1925-2016) French  
note: name pronounced Boo-*lez*, not “Boo-lay.”

**Le marteau sans maître**; Pli selon pli; Éclat; Le soleil des eaux;  
Le visage nuptial

**Brahms, Johannes** (1833-1897) German  
4 Symphonies; various piano works; Variations on a Theme by Haydn;  
Variations on a Theme by Handel; German Requiem

Britten, Benjamin (1913-1976) English

Carter, Elliott (1908-2012) USA

**Chopin, Frédéric** (1810-1849) Polish  
note: name pronounced Show-*pa(n)*.

Mazurkas; Waltzes; Ballades; Impromptus; Nocturnes; Polonaises; Sonatas

Clarke, Rebecca (1886-1979) English / USA  
Viola Sonata

Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel (1875-1912) English

Copland, Aaron (1900-1990) USA  
Billy the Kid; The Tender Land; Rodeo; **Appalachian Spring**; Our Town; Piano  
Concerto; El salón México; Symphonies; Fanfare for the Common Man; Lincoln  
Portrait; 12 Poems of Emily Dickinson; Old American Songs (2 Sets); Piano  
Sonata

**Debussy, Claude** (1862-1918) French  
Pelléas et Mélisande; Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune; La mer; Images;  
Nocturnes; Première rapsodie; Syrinx; String Quartet; Fête galante (2 Sets);  
Préludes for piano (2 books)

Dufay, Guillaume (c1400-1474) French

Dukas, Paul (1865-1935) French  
The Sorcerer's Apprentice

Dvořák, Antonin (1841-1904) Czech  
note: name pronounced Dih-vor-jhak.

Symphony #9 (From the New World); Cello Concerto

Elgar, Edward (1913-1976) English  
Variations on an Original Theme (aka **The Enigma Variations**); Cello Concerto;  
Pomp and Circumstance Marches (esp. #1, with "Land of Hope and Glory")

Fauré, Gabriel (1845-1924) French  
Pelléas et Mélisande; La bonne chanson; La chanson d'Eve; Requiem

Franck, César (1822-1890) French (born Belgian)  
Symphony in D minor;  
Violin Sonata (also transcribed for various other instruments, notably cello)

Gershwin, George (1898-1937) USA  
**Porgy and Bess**; **Concerto in F**; An American in Paris; Rhapsody in Blue;  
Cuban Overture; 3 Preludes for Piano; Oh, Kay!; Girl Crazy; Of Thee I sing

Gesualdo, Carlo (c.1561-1631) Italian

Ginastera, Alberto (1916-1983) Argentinian

Grieg, Edvard (1843-1907) Norwegian  
**Piano Concerto**; Peer Gynt

Gubaidulina, Sofia (b. 1931) Tartar

**Handel, George Frideric** (1685-1759) German / Naturalized English  
Agrippina; Giulio Cesare in Egitto; **Messiah** [often incorrectly called "The"  
Messiah]; Israel in Egypt; Ode for St Cecilia's Day; Orchestral concertos;  
Trio Sonatas; **Water Music**; **Music for the Royal Fireworks**; Overtures; various  
keyboard works

**Haydn, (Franz) Joseph<sup>1</sup>** (1732-1809) Austrian

Symphonies, especially numbers 6, 7, 8, 44, 45, 53, 82-87 (the “Paris” symphonies), 92, and 93-104 (the “London” symphonies); String Quartets; Keyboard Sonatas

(Saint) Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) present-day German

note: though not officially a Saint (yet), Hildegard is often referred to as such. She *has* been beatified, though not canonized.

Hindemith, Paul (1895-1963) German

**Symphonic Metamorphosis after Themes by Carl Maria von Weber**; various Kammermusik; **Mathis der Maler** (several forms); 6 Rilke Songs; Der Schwanendreher

Holst, Gustav (1874-1934) English

The Planets

**Ives, Charles** (1874-1954) USA

Songs; Symphonies, especially #4; Violin Sonatas; Piano Sonatas, especially #2; String Quartets; **Three Places in New England**; **The Unanswered Question**

Janáček, Leoš (1854-1928) Czech

note: name pronounced: *Yahn-ah-check*.

Káťa Kabanová; Věc Makropulos [The Makropulos Case; aka, the Makropulos Affair]; Z mrtvého domu [From the House of the Dead]; Její pastorkyňa [better known as Jenůfa]; Příhody Lišky Bystroušky [The Cunning Little Vixen]

Lassus, Orlande de [aka Orlando di Lasso] (c.1532-1594) Franco-Flemish

Ligeti, György (1923-2006) Hungarian

**Liszt, Franz** (1811-1886) Hungarian

various works for piano.

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<sup>1</sup> He was never referred to as “Franz” in his lifetime, but you’ll often see now included. I put it here so you know it refers to the same person.

Lully, Jean-Baptiste (1632-1687) French / of Italian birth

Lutosławski, Witold (1913-1994) Polish

**Machaut, Guillaume de** (c.1300-1377) French

Notre Dame Mass; Ma fin est mon commencement; various ballades, rondeaux, and virelais.

**Mahler, Gustav** (1860-1911) Bohemian / modern Austria

9 numbered Symphonies; Das Lied von der Erde (symphony); Kindertotenlieder [Songs on the Deaths of Children]; Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen [Songs of a Wayfarer]

Mamlock, Ursula (1923-2016) German / USA

**Mendelssohn [Bartholdy], Felix** (1809-1847) German

Symphonies, esp. #3 (“Scottish”) and **#4** (“Italian”); A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and especially the **Overture**, written 17 years before the rest (Mendelssohn was 17 when he wrote it); Hebrides Overture; Lieder ohne Worte [Songs without Words] (8 books); Octet; **Violin Concerto**

Messiaen, Olivier (1908-1992) French

Monteverdi, Claudio (1567-1643) Italian

**Mozart**, (Johann Chrysostom) **Wolfgang Amadeus** (1756-1791) Austrian

Like Beethoven, the list of truly important works is virtually endless.

Here are a few:

Operas:

Idomeneo, re di Creta; Die Entführung aus dem Serail [The Abduction from the Seraglio]; Le nozze di Figaro [The Marriage of Figaro]; Così fan tutte [All (Women) are Like That]; Don Giovanni; Die Zauberflöte [The Magic Flute]

Symphonies:

Especially numbers 25, 29, 33, 35 “Haffner”, and *most especially* the last three: #39, #40, and #41 “Jupiter”

Concertos, especially for piano and orchestra; String Quartets; Piano Sonatas and Fantasies; Various Divertimenti and Serenades, especially “Eine kleine Nachtmusik” [A Little Night Music]; Requiem

Mumford, Jeffrey (b. 1955) USA

Musgrave, Thea (b. 1928) Scottish / USA  
Mary, Queen of Scots; Triptych

Mussorgsky, Modest (1839-1881) Russian  
Boris Godunov; Pictures at an Exhibition [for piano]

**Palestrina, Giovanni Pierluigi da** (c.1525-1594) Italian  
Masses; Motets

Price, Florence (1887-1953) USA

Prokofiev, Sergei (1891-1953) Russian  
War and Peace; Romeo and Juliet; Lieutenant Kijé; Symphonies, especially #1 “Classical” and #5; Piano Concertos; Piano Sonatas

**Puccini, Giacomo** (1858-1924) Italian  
Manon Lescaut; La bohème; Tosca; Madama Butterfly; Gianni Schicchi; Turandot

Purcell, Henry (1659-1695) English  
**Dido and Aeneas**; Songs; Odes

Rachmaninoff, Sergei (1873-1943) Russian  
**Kolokola** [The Bells]; **Vsenoshchnoye bdeniye** [All-night Vigil; better known as “Vespers”]; 3 Russian Songs; **Piano Concertos** and **Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini** (piano concerto); Symphonies; Cello Sonata; **Piano Preludes, Moments musicaux, Sonatas**, Variations on a Theme of Corelli.

Rameau, Jean-Philippe (1683-1764) French

**Ravel, Maurice** (1875-1937) French

L'heure espagnole [The Spanish Hour]; **L'enfant et les sortilèges** [The Child and the Sorceries]; **Rapsodie espagnole**; **Daphnis et Chloé**; Pavane pour une infante défunte [Pavane for a Dead Princess]; Ma mère l'oye [Mother Goose]; Valses nobles et sentimentales; Le tombeau de Couperin; **La valse**; **Piano Concerto in G**; Concerto for the Left Hand; Bolero; **Shéhérazade** [not to be confused with either Ravel's early overture or the Rimsky-Korsakov work]; Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé; Chansons madécasses; Violin Sonatas; **String Quartet**; Tzigane; **Jeux d'eau**; **Miroirs**; **Gaspard de la nuit**; Ravel's **Orchestration of Mussorgsky's "Pictures at an Exhibition"** (even better known than the original, it is a staple of the orchestral literature).

Revueltas, Silvestre (1899-1940) Mexican

Rimsky-Korsakov, Nicolai (1844-1908) Russian

Sheherazade; Capriccio Espagnol; Russian Festival Overture

Rossini, Gioachino (1792-1868) Italian

Il signor Bruschino; L'italiana in Algeri; Il turco in Italia; **Il barbiere di Siviglia** [The Barber of Seville]; Semiramide; Guillaume Tell [William Tell]; the **overture** is extremely famous: thank you, Lone Ranger and Bugs Bunny!

**Saariaho, Kaija** (b. 1952) Finnish

Saint-Saëns, Camille (1835-1921) French

note: name pronounced Sa(hn)-sons.<sup>2</sup>

Carnival of the Animals (especially **The Swan**); **Cello Concerto**; Symphony #3

**Schoenberg, Arnold** (1874-1951) Austrian / USA

also as: Schönberg

**Moses und Aron**; Erwartung; Die glückliche Hand; **Gurre-Lieder**; Friede auf Erden; **Verklärte Nacht**; Violin Concerto; Piano Concerto; Phantasy; String Quartets, especially #2; **Das Buch der hängenden Gärten**; Ode to Napoleon; Several collections of piano pieces; **Piano Suite**; **Pierrot Lunaire**

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<sup>2</sup> Many English speakers are taught (incorrectly) that the final "s" in his name is not pronounced.



**Schubert, Franz** (1797-1828) Austrian

**SONGS**, but especially: “**Erkönig**,” “**Ganymed**,” **Gretchen am Spinnrad**,” “Die Vögel,” “**Die Forelle**,” “Schwanengesang,” “**Du bist die Ruh**,” **Winterreise**; **Die schöne Müllerin**.

Many piano works, but perhaps especially the sonatas and impromptus. Symphonies, especially C Major (D944) and B minor “unfinished” (D759).

**Schumann, Robert** (1810-1856) German

4 Symphonies; **Piano Concerto in a minor**; Piano Sonatas; Papillons; Davidsbündlertänze; **Carnaval: scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes**; Fantasiestücke; **Kinderscenen: Leichte Stücke für das Pianoforte** (esp. “Traumerei”); **Kreisleriana**; Album für die Jugend; Waldscenen; Many **SONGS**.

Seeger, Ruth Crawford (1901-1953) USA

Shostakovich, Dmitry (1906-1975) Russian

Symphonies, esp. #5 which is the most performed; Preludes for Piano; Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District

Still, William Grant (1895-1978) USA

Stockhausen, Karlheinz (1928-2007) German

Strauss, Richard (1864-1949) German

note: not to be confused with the waltzing Johann Strausses.

**Salome**; **Elektra**; **Der Rosenkavalier**; Ariadne auf Naxos; Don Juan; Tod und Verklärung [Death and Transfiguration]; Macbeth; **Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche** [Till Eulenspiegel’s Merry Pranks]; **Also sprach Zarathustra** [Thus spake Zarathustra] (especially well-known, thanks to Stanley Kubrick’s “2001”); **Ein Heldenleben**; Metamorphosen

**Stravinsky, Igor** (1882-1971) Russian / France / USA

**L’oiseau de feu** [The Firebird]; **Petrushka**; **Le sacre du printemps** [The Rite of Spring]; Les noces; **L’histoire du soldat** [Soldier’s Tale]; Pulcinella; Oedipus rex; **The Rake’s Progress**; **Agon**; Concerto ‘Dumbarton Oaks’; Symphony in Three Movements; Ebony Concerto; Zvezdolikiy [Star-Faced]; **Symphony of Psalms**; Mass; **Requiem Canticles**; Abraham and Isaac; Elegy for J.F.K.; Several piano sonatas.

Sullivan, Sir Arthur (1842-1900) English

note: famous for his work with W.S. Gilbert as “Gilbert and Sullivan” and for a few standard hymns (for example, “Onward Christian Soldiers” and “Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain”)

Trial by Jury; HMS Pinafore; The Pirates of Penzance; Patience; Iolanthe; The Mikado; Ruddigore; The Yeomen of the Guard

Tallis, Thomas (c.1505-1585) English

Spem in alium

Tchaikovsky, Pyotr Il'yach (1840-1893) Russian

note: name pronounced Chay-*kof*-skee.

Symphonies, especially numbers **4, 5, and 6 “Pathetique”**; Eugene Onegin; **Romeo and Juliet**; **The Sleeping Beauty**; Pique Dame [The Queen of Spades]; **The Nutcracker**; Violin Concerto; Piano Concerto #1; Capriccio Italien; Variations on a Rococo Theme; Les saisons; Album pour enfants

Varèse, Edgard (1883-1965) USA / born French

note: name pronounced Vah-*rez*.

Intégrales; Arcana; **Ionisation**; Déserts; **Density 21.5**; Poème électronique

**Verdi, Giuseppe** (1813-1901) Italian

**Requiem**; Quattro pezzi sacri; String Quartet; Nabucco; I Lombardi; Macbeth; Luisa Miller; **Rigoletto**; **Il trovatore**; **La traviata**; Simon Boccanegra; Un ballo in maschera; La forza del destino; Don Carlos; **Aida**; **Otello**; **Falstaff**

Vivaldi, Antonio (1678-1741) Italian

**Wagner, Richard** (1813-1883) German  
note: name pronounced *Vag-ner*.

Der fliegende Holländer [The Flying Dutchman]; Tannhäuser; Lohengrin;  
Tristan und Isolde; Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg [The Master Singers of  
Nürnberg]; Parsifal

Der Ring des Nibelungen [The Ring of the Nibelungs]:  
I. Das Rheingold [Rhine-Gold]  
II. Die Walküre [The Valkyries]  
III. Siegfried  
IV. Götterdämmerung [The Twilight of the Gods]

Walker, George (1922-2018) USA

Webern, Anton (1883-1945) Austrian  
note: name pronounced *Veh-bern*.

## SOME SPECIAL GROUPINGS

The “Three Bs” (from a comment by Hans von Bülow):  
Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms.

The “First Viennese School” of Composers  
Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven.

The “Second Viennese School” of Composers  
Principals: Schoenberg, Berg and Webern.

“Les Six” (Name given, in 1920, by music critic Henri Collet)  
Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honegger, Georges Auric,  
Louis Durey and Germaine Tailleferre.

“The Russian Five” (also known as “The Five” or the “Mighty Handful”)  
Mily Alexeyevitch Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, Cesar Cui, Rimsky-Korsakov,  
and Mussorgsky.

The Darmstadt School  
Principals: Aldo Clementi (1925-2011), Franco Evangelisti (1926-1980),  
Stockhausen, Messiaen, and Boulez

note: Please don't confuse Clementi with Muzio Clementi (1752-1832)

## SOME IMPORTANT CATALOGUES and ABBREVIATIONS

<u>Relevant Composer</u>	<u>Catalogue</u>	<u>Abbreviation</u>
Mozart	Köchel	K.
Haydn	Hoboken	Hob.
J.S. Bach	Bach-Werke-Verzeichnis	BWV
Schubert	Deutsch	D.
[ALL]	Opus	Op.