Name: Class:

Classical Music - What Is Classical Music?

If we want to know what classical music is, we first have to understand some basic things about the way music is written. First, all music uses standard notation. That means that even though every piece (song) sounds different, they are all written the same way. Different notes are written on the staff. The staff is a series of horizontal lines with spaces in between them. You can tell how a note is supposed to sound based on where it is placed on the staff. High notes are written higher on the staff. Low notes are lower down. Most pieces of piano music are written on two staves. The first is the treble clef, which is on the top and contains the higher notes of a song. The second is the bass clef, which contains the lower notes and is placed below the treble clef. You read the treble and bass clefs at the same time as you read across the page – so you have to look at two sets of notes at once!

Sounds tricky, right? But that is not all you need to know to read or write a piece of music! You also need to know how fast to play it. That is called the tempo. And each song has a particular meter. The meter helps the person reading the music know how the notes should be played in relation to each other and which ones should be **emphasized**. The meter is a pattern determined by the number of beats (rhythmic units) in each measure. A measure is a standard-sized "chunk" of the music. Each piece is broken up into many measures of only a few beats each to make it easier to read. On top of it all, you need to know the dynamics of a song. In other words, you need to know how loudly or softly different sections (or phrases) of a song should be played.

Now that we know something about the basics of music notation, it should be easy to **define** classical music, right? Wrong! Many people think of classical music as songs that were written hundreds of years ago and played by orchestras. Orchestras are large groups of musicians. The musicians play instruments like the violin, flute, trombone, and clarinet. However, classical music is a lot more than that. A piece of classical music can be played by a quartet, a group of four musicians. It can be sung in an opera, a play in which the characters **act** and sing. It might have been written three hundred years ago, or yesterday. It can be slow and quiet, or fast and **dramatic**. One person can play it with a cello. Someone with an electric guitar can even play it!

So what is classical music? In general, it is music in which there is not much improvisation. In jazz or hip-hop, the way a song sounds depends very much on who is playing it. Often, the performer will make up different parts. He or she might not follow exactly what is written on the page. In contrast, a piece of classical music usually sounds similar no matter who performs it. This is because the musicians playing it stick to the exact meter, tempo, dynamics, and notes as written.

It is difficult to **define** classical music precisely because, as in any musical genre, there is a broad range of music that can be considered classical. Listening to classical pieces is probably the best way to learn what "classical music" means. After a while, you will just know it when you hear it!

LIVEWORKSHEETS

- What is used to write all music, including classical music?

- The author contrasts classical music with jazz and hip-hop, because classical music:

- What can you conclude about classical music after reading the passage?

- The most important reason that a piece of music is written in standard notation is probably

- What is the main idea of this passage?

- Read the following sentence: "The meter helps the person reading the music know how the notes should be played in relation to each other and which ones should be **emphasized**."
  The word emphasized means:

- Choose the answer that best completes the sentence:
  _____, it is difficult to identify classical music simply by reading a definition because there is a broad range of music that can be considered classical.

LIVEWORKSHEETS