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# Teaching Resource Materials on the Famous Composers

For these activities it will be necessary to have students refer to the complete Famous Composers Guides available as pdf. downloads from the ArtsAlive.ca website.

These documents can be found on the *ArtsAlive.ca Info Zone Publications* page located at :

<http://www.artsalive.ca/infozone/publications/>

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## Activities

### Ludwig van Beethoven

1. If you had an opportunity to interview Beethoven, list five questions you would ask. **(Language Arts)**
2. Imagine you and two other classmates are making a movie about Beethoven's life. Pick an incident and write a scene that you will perform for your class. **(Language Arts)**
3. Listen to a recording of Beethoven's music and explain to your classmates what is typically "Beethoven" about it. **(Music/Language Arts)**
4. Listen to a piece of music from the Romantic era (not necessarily by Beethoven) and paint an abstract picture in watercolours while listening to the music. How has the music influenced your painting? **(Music/Art)**
5. Listen to the audiotape or CD of *Beethoven Lives Upstairs* and write a review of it. **(Music/Language Arts)**
6. Working with a small group of your classmates, compose a piece of music using only the most primitive of instruments: noises created by your voice, your hands, or your feet. Perform the piece for your class. **(Music/Art/Drama)**
7. Organize an opportunity, along with your teacher or parents, for you and your classmates to attend a performance by a symphony orchestra.

## Activities

### George Frideric Handel

Read the complete story of Handel's life, times and music. Use that information to answer these questions.

#### **Events in Handel's Life**

On a timeline, outline the important incidents in Handel's life. Record the date of his birth at one end and the date of his death at the other end. Enter the dates of important events in chronological order. Write a word or two to describe each event.

#### **People in Handel's Musical Career**

During the growth of Handel's musical career he traveled around the world and was inspired by many people. Write about three people who influenced Handel's life and music. How did each person contribute to his life?

#### **Handel's Favourite Cities**

Plot on a map the location of all cities in which Handel lived in Europe. In which cities was he most successful? Give reasons why he was successful in some cities and not in others.

#### **Challenges to a Musician's Career**

Pretend that you are Handel in his later years. You have suffered a stroke that is making it difficult for you to perform. You are losing your eyesight. Write a journal entry describing your feelings. How would people treat you in the 1700s? Would you be treated any differently today? Name some blind musicians from the 1900s and this century.

#### **Handel's Times**

During Handel's lifetime, how concerned were people about manners, appearances and cleanliness? How was this different from earlier years? Did attitudes change? If so, why? Describe the way men and women in Handel's time dressed. How did they wear their hair?

### **Find an instrument**

Select an instrument and find out as much as you can about it. Refer to the Instrument Lab on the ArtsAlive.ca website, or find outside resources. Did this instrument exist during Handel's time? Has it changed, and if so, how? Use diagrams to inform your classmates.

### **Composing Music**

What do you think Handel's life would have been like if he had been born in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century? Would he have written the same kind of music? Keep in mind the differences between audiences then and now.

### **Musical Expression \***

Listen for the main theme in the "Hallelujah Chorus". Sing along with the theme. What does Handel do to make the word 'Hallelujah' sound different each time you hear it?

### **Music and Emotions \***

Select one movement from Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks. After listening to it a few times, draw a picture that shows a strong emotion that you feel. Compare how you feel when listening to this movement to how you feel when you listen to your favourite song.

### **Favourite Music (Music/Language Arts)**

Handel was a popular composer in his day. Who are the popular musicians of today? Interview three people – one who is your age, one who is younger and one who is older – to find out what their favourite style of music is. Have them give reasons for their choices. Share your interviews with the class. Discuss why different age groups enjoy a particular style of music.

### **Be a Composer**

You are a composer who had decided to write a piece of music for unusual instruments. Invent the instruments for your composition using materials found in the classroom or at home. Create a 45-second composition and write it down using your own set of symbols and different colours to indicate loud or soft (dynamics), high or low (pitch). Have students in the class perform your composition and record their performance.

**Conductor needed (Language Arts)**

The NAC Orchestra needs a conductor. What qualifications are required for this position, and what duties are the conductor expected to perform? Create a classified advertisement for the conductor's position. Given proper training, do you think you would make a good conductor? Why or why not?

**Handel in the comics (Language Arts/Art)**

Prepare a comic strip about an event in Handel's life. Your strip should tell a complete story. Look at the comic strip characters from the newspaper for examples.

- *Teachers should try to obtain a copy of these recordings for their students. Check first with your local public library.*

## Activities - Part 1

### **Franz Joseph Haydn**

Read the complete story of Haydn's life, times and music. Use that information to answer these questions.

**1. Events in Haydn's life (Social Studies)**

Plot the important events of Haydn's life on a time line. Write the date of his birth at one end and the date of his death at the other. In between, in chronological order, write the year of each event and a few words to describe its importance.

**2. People who influenced Haydn (Language Arts/Social Studies)**

List at least five people who influenced Haydn's life, musically and otherwise. What did each contribute to his development? What instruments played a role in Haydn's musical career? Why was each important?

**3. Haydn's times (Social Studies/Language Arts)**

Times change. Look through the advertisements in today's newspaper. Cut out at least five things that would be unfamiliar to someone living during Haydn's time. For each, explain why. Can you find anything that would be familiar?

**4. Haydn in the comics (Language Arts/Art)**

Prepare a comic strip about an event in Haydn's life. Your strip should tell a complete story. Look at the comic strip characters from the newspaper for examples.

**5. Be a reporter (Music/Language Arts)**

Haydn was a popular composer in his day. Who are the popular musicians of today? Interview three people – one who is your age, one who is younger and one who is older – to find out what their favourite style of music is. Have them give reasons for their choices. Share your interviews with the class. Discuss why different age groups enjoy a particular style of music.

**6. Places Haydn called “home” (Social Studies/Language Arts)**

Make a list of the cities and countries where Haydn spent his life. Locate these places on a current map of Europe. There will be places that you won't be able to find? How come? (Do some research at your school or local public library.)

**7. Make your own instrument (Music/Language Arts)**

Invent a musical instrument using materials found in the classroom or home. In which category would your instrument belong: strings, woodwinds, brass or percussion? Why? Does your instrument sound similar to any instrument you are familiar with? If so, in what ways is it constructed the same (i.e. shape, materials used, method of playing)? How is it different? Refer to the ArtsAlive.ca Instrument Lab to make comparisons.

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## Activities - Part 2

### **Franz Joseph Haydn**

#### **Trumpet trivia (Science/Music/Language Arts):**

*Note to teacher: for this exercise you will need to obtain copies of the following recordings:*

- *Trumpet Concerto*
- *Taps*
- *Reveille*

*Also, be prepared to explain the harmonic overtone series in greater detail, children may be curious.*

The trumpet in use during Haydn's time was capable of playing only the notes of the harmonic overtone series, like a bugle. In 1796, trumpet soloist Anton Weidinger commissioned Haydn to write a concerto for his new keyed trumpet that would show off its ability to play chromatically. Haydn obliged with the *Trumpet Concerto*. To get an idea of the difference between the chromatic system and the harmonic overtone series, listen first to the bugle call in *Taps* and the *Reveille*, which use only notes of the harmonic overtone series. Next, compare these melodies with Haydn's *Trumpet Concerto*. Do you hear the difference? Describe it in a short passage.

Find out as much as you can about the trumpet. How has it changed? How has it remained the same? To which section of the orchestra does it belong? List three musicians who play the trumpet?

#### **Conductor needed (Language Arts)**

The NAC Orchestra needs a conductor. What qualifications are required for this position, and what duties is the conductor expected to perform? Create a classified advertisement for the conductor's position. Given proper training, do you think you would make a good conductor? Why or why not?

### **Be a music critic (Language Arts)**

You have been named the new music critic at your local newspaper. Your first assignment is to write a review of a Haydn recording. Don't forget to give the important facts about the recording – who performed the music, who conducted it and what exactly you listened to. Give your thoughts about the recording. What did you like? What did you not like? Be sure to explain why you felt this way. If you want to listen to something by another composer as well you can make a comparison. This can also be done for an actual live concert as well! Even better!

## Activities - Part 1

### Peter Tchaikovsky

Read the story of Tchaikovsky's life, times and music.  
Use that information to complete these exercises.

1. Find a map of Russia (an atlas or a globe will do). How many of the following places can you find: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Votkinsk, Tiflis. Explain to your classmates why each of these places is important in the life of Tchaikovsky. (Geography)
2. Create a time line showing the significant events in Tchaikovsky's life. Display your time line in the classroom. (Social Studies)
3. Choose a work by Tchaikovsky that is outlined in the section about his music. Listen carefully to a recording of that piece. What elements can you identify in that piece that make it special? Play the recording for your classmates, stopping at appropriate moments to point out these elements to your audience. (Music)
4. Choose an event from Tchaikovsky's life that interests you. Draw a picture of it. Post your picture in the classroom. (Art)
5. Tchaikovsky traveled a great deal in his later years. Choose one place that he visited; create a postcard such as he might have sent to a friend or relative. On one side draw a picture of the place; on the other, write your message. Display the postcards in the classroom. (Language Arts/Art)
6. Russia has produced several excellent composers besides Tchaikovsky. These include among others, Glinka, Borodin, Mussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky and Rachmaninoff. Select one of these and do a little research to learn more about him. Make a speech to your classmates, telling them what you have learned. Bonus: Play a recording of some music your composer has written. (Research/Music)

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7. A number of famous composers and musicians have had movies made about their lives. Pretend that you are going to make a movie about the life of Tchaikovsky. List five really significant events you would want to include. Now list five of the most important characters you would want to include. Name the actors and actresses you would want to play those parts. Tell a classmate about your ideas. (Language Arts)
  8. Design a poster to promote a concert of Tchaikovsky's music. Display your poster in the classroom. (Art)
  9. Create an acrostic poem about Tchaikovsky. In an acrostic poem, you write the name vertically. Next to each letter write a word that describes that person and that starts with that letter (see example). Because Tchaikovsky's name is so long, you may invite a classmate to help you. Post your poem in the classroom. (Language Arts)

Talented  
Creative  
Handsome  
Artistic  
I  
K  
O  
V  
S  
K  
Y

10. Tchaikovsky kept a diary for most of his life. Choose an important event and write a diary entry for Tchaikovsky. (Language Arts)

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## Activities - Part 2

# Peter Tchaikovsky

### *Newspaper Activities*

1. Assume that as a reporter for the newspaper you have the opportunity to interview Tchaikovsky for an article you are writing about him. List five questions that you would ask him. Role-play the interview with a classmate. Write your article based on the answers your classmate, in the role of Tchaikovsky, provided.
2. All through his career, Tchaikovsky had trouble with the music critics. Read a review in the newspaper of a concert or recording. Did the critic like the concert or recording? Do you think that the critic's comments were fair? Why or why not? Tell your teacher what you think.
3. Tchaikovsky's engagement to Desiree Artot and his marriage to Antonina Milyukova were unhappy episodes in his life. Choose one of these events and compose a letter from Tchaikovsky to your newspaper's advice columnist (like Ann Landers of Dear Abby). Give your letter to a classmate. The classmate, in the role of the advice columnist, will compose a reply. Post both letters on the bulletin board in your class.
4. Tchaikovsky's life unfolded against a period of change, often violent, in Russia's history. Choose one of these events (you may wish to do a little research) and create either a dramatic front-page headline, or short news article, based on it. Share your work with a small group of your classmates.
5. Check a copy of your local newspaper for articles originating (datelined) in Russia. Read them all carefully. How is Russia different now from how it was in Tchaikovsky's time? List all the differences you can think of. Share your ideas with a classmate.
6. There were some amusing incidents in Tchaikovsky's life – for example, his fear that his head might fall off while conducting. Find one of these incidents and draw a cartoon strip or panel illustrating it. Post your cartoon in the classroom.

7. Tchaikovsky supplemented his income for a new years by writing music reviews for a Moscow newspaper. Check the career advertisements in your local newspaper. Are there any calling for a music critic or reviewer? Write a letter such as Tchaikovsky might have written the editor of your newspaper, applying for a job as music critic or reviewer. What are his qualifications? Read your letter aloud to your classmates.
  
8. Assume that Tchaikovsky is going to visit your town and you are responsible for showing him around. Using a copy of your newspaper as your source of information, make a list of five places you would take him to. Explain your choices to a small group of your classmates.

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## Activities - Part 1

### Antonio Vivaldi

Read the complete story of Vivaldi's life, times and music. Use that information to complete these activities.

**1. Events in Vivaldi's Life (Social Studies)**

Plot the important events of Vivaldi's life on a time line. Write the date of his birth at one end and the date of his death at the other. In between, in chronological order, write the year of each event and a few words to describe its importance.

**2. Vivaldi's Times (Social Studies/Language Arts)**

Times change. Look through the advertisements in today's newspaper. Cut out at least five things that would be unfamiliar to someone living during Vivaldi's time. For each, explain why. Can you find anything that would be familiar?

**3. Vivaldi in the Comics (Language Arts/Art)**

Prepare a comic strip about an event, actual or imaginary, in Vivaldi's life. Your strip should tell a complete story. Look at the comic strip characters from your newspaper for examples.

**4. Be a reporter (Music/Language Arts)**

Vivaldi was a popular composer in his day? Who are the popular musicians of today? Interview three people – one who is your age, one who is younger and one who is older – to find out who their favourite musicians are and what their favourite styles of music are. Have them give reasons for their choices. Share your interviews with the class. Discuss why different age groups enjoy a particular style of music.

**5. Who's Who (Language Arts/Social Studies/Art)**

Make a "Who's Who" poster of important artists and musicians in Italian history. Include names, dates, specialties and major influences on society. Illustrate your poster and display it in class.

## **6. Vivaldi – A Moving Experience (Social Studies)**

During his lifetime Vivaldi traveled to different cities and countries. What modes of transportation do you think he used to get from place to place? Check your answers by doing research. What modes of transportation do you use in your day to day life? If you were to travel to a different city or country today what kinds of transportation might you use? What is your favourite mode of transportation? Why? In general how has the transportation industry changed since Vivaldi's time?

## **7. Paying the Piper (Research)**

In Vivaldi's time the arts were generally funded by the royalty, who were the heads of state, or the church. Music was written for church services or small private concerts sponsored by the nobility. The music and concert scene is not the same now as it was then. How has it changed? Discuss issues such as ensemble size, variety and concert venues.

Today, many groups play important roles in sponsorship of the arts. Investigate the contributions of government agencies, churches, corporations and private citizens in the funding and support of the arts in your area.

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## Activities - Part 2

### **Antonio Vivaldi**

#### **1. Make your own instrument (Music/Language Arts)**

Invent a musical instrument using materials found in the classroom or at home. To which instrument category would our instrument belong; strings, woodwind, brass or percussion? Why? Does your instrument sound similar to any instrument you heard before? If so, how is it similar?

#### **2. Conductors Needed (Language Arts)**

The NAC Orchestra needs a conductor. What qualifications are required for this position and what duties can the conductor be expected to perform? Create a classified advertisement for the conductor's position. Given the proper training, do you think you would make a good conductor? Why or why not?

#### **3. You're the Music Critic (Language Arts)**

You have been named the new music critic at your local newspaper. Your first assignment is to write a review of Vivaldi's music. Give your thoughts about the recording. What did you like? What did you not like? Be sure to explain why you felt this way. If you have attended a Vivaldi concert, you can include a review of that as well, as a comparison.

#### **4. Share Your Review (Language Arts)**

Exchange your review with those of your classmates. Use a classroom discussion to compare similarities and differences of opinion and attempt to understand the views of others. Reflect on any changes in your opinions after the discussion.

#### **5. Your Inner Thoughts (Language Arts)**

As you prepare for the Vivaldi concert keep a response journal to record your thoughts, feelings and questions, include reactions to the newspaper articles, related class activities and the concert itself.

#### **6. Your Favourite Instrument (Research/Art)**

What is your favourite musical instrument? What is it about this instrument that makes it appealing to you? Spend some time

researching interesting facts about your instrument. Design a display for your classroom. You should include important names and dates in the instrument's development, materials used to make the instrument, how it has changed throughout history, important pieces written for the instrument and list of four musicians who play your instrument. Be sure to include pictures or illustrations.

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## Activities

### George Gershwin, Maurice Ravel and Igor Stravinsky

Read the complete stories of the life, times and music of Gershwin, Ravel and Stravinsky. Use that information to complete these activities.

1. Stravinsky was born in Russia, Ravel in France, and Gershwin in the United States. Look on a map of the world and circle these three countries. **(Geography)**
2. Stravinsky's ballets are modeled on folk tales he liked. Choose either the story of *The Firebird*, *The Soldier's Tale*, or *Pulcinella*. Create a comic strip or series of comic strips. **(Language Arts/Art)**
3. All three composers used the piano as their main instrument of performance and composition. Check the classified advertisements in the newspaper. How much would it cost to buy a used piano? What is the most expensive? The least? Check your newspaper as well for stores advertising new pianos. What information does the advertisement give you? **(Research/Language Arts)**
4. Pretend that Ravel, Stravinsky and Gershwin all had an opportunity to meet, perhaps at a party. What do you think they might say to one another? Working with two classmates role-play the conversation as you imagine it. Present your role-play to the class. **(Drama)**
5. Choose one composer who interests you the most. Read the material presented about him. You take the part of the composer, while a classmate takes the part of a reporter. Have your classmate interview you. Afterwards, write an account of the interview as it might have appeared in the newspaper. Or you can enact it as if it were a television or radio interview. **(Language Arts/Music/Drama)**

6. After reading carefully an account of the life of one of the composers, write an obituary for him, such as might have appeared in a newspaper on the occasion of his death. **(Language Arts/Music)**
7. Design a poster to promote a concert featuring the music of one of the three composers. **(Art)**
8. Design and sell the somersaulting car invented by Maurice Ravel's father and brother. Include a drawing of the car. **(Language Arts/Art)**
9. Read the account of Stravinsky's encounter with the customs officials who confiscated his Picasso drawing. Write a brief news story about this event. **(Language Arts)**
10. George Gershwin as a boy was something of a problem at school. Prepare his report card, as you imagine it might have appeared. What kind of message would his teacher have written to his parents? **(Language Arts)**
11. World War I had a major impact on the lives of Stravinsky and Ravel. Similarly, the stock market crash and Great Depression affected the life of George Gershwin. Do a little reading about these major world events. Give a little talk to your classmates about them. **(Reading/Public Speaking/Language Arts)**
12. Read about George Gershwin's "mating call." Design a valentine that he might have sent, leaving a place to insert a name. **(Language Arts)**
13. You've read a little about the lifestyles and homes favoured by all three composers. Check the real estate listings in the newspaper or online and find a home (or condominium) that you think would be suitable for one of them. **(Research/Language Arts)**
14. Read about the life of one of the composers. Create a collage based on his life. You may choose to use newspaper clippings, or magazines. **(Art)**

15. After attending the concert at the National Arts Centre, compose a letter to Ravel, Stravinsky or Gershwin, telling how you felt about their music that you heard. **(Language Arts)**