



Composers

Bach - Handel - Purcell
Sheet 7

Name

Henry Purcell - 1659 - 1695

his early years

When Henry Purcell was a little boy, he would have played in the cobble-stone lanes around his home in London with his little brother, Daniel, who was only one year younger than Henry. He grew up to be a composer as well.

Some sad things happened during their childhood years. Henry was only about six years old when the Great Plague spread to London. This was a terrible disease that killed about a hundred thousand people in only one year. When Henry was seven years old he lived through the great fire of London as well. It lasted for five days and destroyed most of the city because most of the buildings were made of wood.

After that, Henry saw the city being rebuilt, but this time the buildings were made out of brick and stone so they were much safer and better looking.

Henry had a fine singing voice. This was not surprising because both his father and uncle Thomas were musicians and Gentlemen of the Royal Chapel, where musicians who played for the king were trained. When he was about nine years old, Henry became one of the Children in the Chapel Royal and was taught to sing properly by a man named Henry Cooke. Mr Cooke used to be a captain in the army and he disciplined the boys in his care and made sure that they practiced as much as they needed to and studied all the subjects that they had to learn.

The boys didn't only learn to sing. They had to work at all their usual school subjects as well, and they also had to learn how to read and write music and to play all sorts of musical instruments like the violin and the lute and the organ and the harpsichord. Henry Purcell was a very good student and learned faster than many of the older boys. He was particularly good at writing music.

When Henry was only thirteen years old, his teacher, Henry Cooke, died. Mr Cooke's son-in-law, Pelham Humphrey, who was a very clever musician, took his place and taught Henry a lot about writing different styles of music. Mr Humphrey had been to the continent of Europe and had learned about the French and Italian styles of music and he taught Henry as much as he could.

Henry had to leave the choir when his voice broke, but he then became an apprentice to the keeper of the royal instruments and also had the job of tuning the organ in Westminster Abbey while he continued his studies and began seriously writing music.

Can you answer these questions?

What was the name of the city where Henry Purcell was born?

Name one terrible thing that happened when he was a boy?

Who was Henry's first teacher?

What subject was Henry particularly good at?

Who taught Henry after Mr Cooke died?

Which two styles of music did Henry learn about?

What job did Henry have in Westminster Abbey?

True or False	
Henry had a fine singing voice	Henry learned music in France
His father and uncle were musicians	He was good at writing music
He taught Henry Cooke to sing	He tuned the piano in Westminster Abbey
	His first teacher was Mr Humphrey



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his later years

When Henry Purcell was eighteen years old, Matthew Locke, who was the composer for Court Violins, died. Henry was appointed to take over this role. This was the real beginning of his work as a composer. He became composer to the Kings Band two years later and soon after that he began writing music for the stage as well. He also wrote a lot of music for the church.

It was an interesting time to be a composer in London because so much had changed in a short space of time. All the great buildings in London had to be planned and rebuilt after the great fire of 1666. All the houses and shops had to be rebuilt. Also when Charles II became the king of England there had been no king before him for eleven years. The previous king (Charles I) was beheaded in 1649. Charles II intended to bring music and joy back to England and he certainly achieved this goal. London became a bright, merry place that was alive with music and theatre.

Purcell's first attempt at writing music for the theatre was the music to a play called 'Theodosius,' which was written by Nathaniel Lee. After this he was asked to write the music for many other plays. A well known man called John Dryden wrote a play called 'King Arthur' in 1691 and he asked Henry Purcell to write music for it. Henry wrote a great deal of music for public entertainment.

When he was twenty two years old, Purcell married his wife, Frances. They had six children but three of these died. One of his children, a son named Edward, also grew up to be a musician. During his life, Purcell produced over one hundred songs. He became very well known for his song writing. He also continued to write music for special occasions like coronations, funerals and Saints Days.

In 1689 he wrote his only true opera, which was called 'Dido and Aeneas.' It was a miniature opera that was intended to be performed at a girls' school in Chelsea. It was a great success.

He was writing music for a semi-opera called 'The Indian Queen' but he suddenly became so ill that he couldn't complete it. His brother Daniel had to take over for him.

Henry Purcell died at his home in London on November 21, 1695.

Can you answer these questions?

Who did Purcell take over from when he was 18?

Name a play that Purcell wrote the music for?

At least how many songs did Purcell write?

Name his only true opera.

Name a special occasion he might have written music for.

Which of his children grew up to be a musician?

What was his final work (completed by his brother)?

True or False

Henry wrote music for the stage

He wrote coronation music

He wrote over 1000 songs

His first opera was called 'King Arthur'

He wrote no church music

He wrote music for John Dryden

His completed 'Indian Queen' and then died