

Classical Music - History Overview through Top Works Syllabus-Spring 2026

Tuesdays 12:45pm – 2:15pm

Hybrid – MAB2

Ken Benson

kenbenson@earthlink.net and text at (510) 377-7015

Course Description

Experience profound joy of landmark creations by Haydn, Beethoven, and others in this survey of orchestral works considered the greatest in Western History. This semester we will follow the Great Lectures Series work of Professor Robert Greenberg Music Historian-In-Residence with San Francisco Performances. We will gain insight into what defines a great orchestral work and what makes a particular work an enduring classic. Track the history of and evolution of the orchestra from its beginnings in accompanying operas to its flowering as a free-standing artistic medium.

| Week | Topic | Notes |
|--------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Week 1 / 2/3/2026 | Week 1 Lecture 1 – Game Plan and Preliminaries Discuss/Review & Q&A (DR&Q&A) Lecture 2 Vivaldi – The Four Seasons DR&Q&A | Bach next week |
| Week 2 / 2/10/2026 | Week 2 Lecture 3 Bach – Brandenburg Concerto #2 DR&Q&A Lecture 4 Bach Violin Concerto in E Major DR&Q&A | Haydn & Mozart next week |
| Week 3 / 2/17/2026 | Week 3 Lecture 5 Haydn Symphony #104 DR&Q&A Lecture 6 Mozart Piano Concerto #24 in C Minor DR&Q&A | Mozart & Beethoven next week |
| Week 4 / 2/24/2026 | Week 4 Lecture 7 Mozart Symphony in C Major “Jupiter” DR&Q&A | More Beethoven next week |

| | | |
|---------------------|---|---|
| | Lecture 8 Beethoven Symphony #3 “Eroica” DR&Q&A | |
| Week 5 / 3/3/2026 | Week 5 Lecture 9 Beethoven Piano Concerto #4 DR&Q&A Lecture 10 Beethoven Symphony #9 DR&Q&A | Schubert & Mendelssohn next week |
| Week 6 / 3/10/2026 | Week 6 Lecture 11 Schubert Symphony #9 DR&Q&A Lecture 12 Mendelssohn Italian Symphony DR&Q&A | Schumann & Brahms in week 8 |
| Week 7 | No Class-Spring Break | |
| Week 8 / 3/24/2026 | Week 8 Lecture 13 Schumann Symphony #3 DR&Q&A Lecture 14 Brahms Symphony #4 DR&Q&A | Brahms & Tchaikovsky next week |
| Week 9 / 3/31/2026 | Week 9 Lecture 15 Brahms Violin Concerto DR&Q&A Lecture 16 Tchaikovsky Symphony #4 DR&Q&A | Tchaikovsky & Smetana next week |
| Week 10 / 4/7/2026 | Week 10 Lecture 17 Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto DR&Q&A Lecture 18 Bedrich Smetana “Ma Vlast” DR&Q&A | Dvorak and Class pick of top 5 Symphonies/Concertos Final week |
| Week 11 / 4/14/2026 | Week 11 Lecture 19 Dvorak Symphony #8 DR&Q&A Lecture 20 Dvorak Concerto for Cello DR&Q&A | Class picks their Top 5 Wrap-up (final week) |

***Content/order/concertos or symphonies/composers subject to change if necessary.**