



MUSIC FUNDAMENTALS: What is a TOCCATA?

Age Range:	Elementary, Middle School; Grades K-8
Learning Objective:	Students will listen to several toccatas written for keyboard instruments and reflect on what techniques the performers must use.
Total Video Time:	29:41
Total Lesson Time:	Approximately 40 minutes

INTRODUCE the toccata

1. A toccata (tuh-KAH-tah) is a piece of music that shows off some of the many skills a musician needs to play a piece. Try saying that word: toccata. Today we will focus on toccatas that were written for keyboard instruments, including the piano, the harpsichord, and the organ.
2. "Toccata" literally means "to touch." Think about all the ways a pianist (or harpsichordist, or organist) must touch the keys to create different sounds. Musicians must develop something called *technique* in order to play their instrument well. Technique is basically all the stuff you need to do with your body to make a great sound come out of the instrument. For keyboard players of any kind, this has a lot to do with how you use your fingers to touch the keys.
3. Can you think of a few other jobs or hobbies that require technique? Look at [this chart](#) and think about what techniques you need to be a chef, a surgeon, a woodworker, a gardener, or an athlete.

LISTEN to toccata examples

Listen to some or all of the following toccatas for keyboard instruments. Sometimes you will see the performer playing, and sometimes you will just hear the music. If you don't see the performer playing the piece, imagine what they might look like when they play.

1. The first toccata is [Toccata V from Six Piano Etudes by Unsuk Chin](#) (video approx. 3 minutes).
2. The second toccata is simply called [Toccata by Aram Khachaturian](#) (video approx. 5 minutes).
3. The third toccata is [Toccata by Sergei Prokofiev](#) (video approx. 4.5 minutes). You will see all the things the performer's hands need to do in this video.
4. The fourth [toccata is by Francis Poulenc](#) (video approx. 2 minutes). Do you notice or hear any different techniques in this one?
5. The fifth performance is [Toccata by Maurice Ravel](#) (video approx. 3.5 minutes).
6. The sixth toccata is performed on the harpsichord, a relative of the piano. It's by [Geraldino Frescobaldi and is called Toccata Seconda](#) and it was written way back in 1615 (video approx. 5 minutes).
7. The seventh toccata is played on the organ. It's called [Toccata and it is part of a suite \(or group\) of pieces called Suite Gothique by Leon Boellmann](#) (video approx. 3.5 minutes).
8. The eighth [toccata is by Franz Liszt](#) (video approx. 1 minute)
9. The ninth is the [Toccata from Four Piano Pieces by Marion Bauer](#) (video approx. 2 minutes).

Suggested reflection questions are on the next page.

- ✓ Follow along with this lesson online! www.classnotes.org
- ✓ Broken link? Need help adapting a lesson? Contact [Katie Condon](#), education specialist



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REFLECT on toccata examples

As you listen, journal or reflect on what kinds of techniques the performer must use. Here are a few questions to help get you thinking:

- Do they need to move fast?
- If they are moving fast, what part of their body needs to move fast? Their fingers, wrists, or arms?
- How do you think a performer must move their fingers to hold some keys down while letting others go?
- Do you notice that the organist must also use another body part? What is it?

After you listen, reflect on the following questions:

- How would you describe a toccata to someone?
- What music vocabulary words would you use?
- How many hours do you think a musician needs to practice to play some of these pieces?