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MUSIC

Pachelbel's Canon

BY CURT WOODMAN — 2024-07-23



This is the second entry in our series of articles that explores the connection between modern pop, rock and metal songs with the world of classical music. In this article we will explore the influence of Pachelbel's Canon¹ on some modern pop and rock songs.

Watch: <https://youtu.be/Pppexz-KKig?feature=shared>

How Pachelbel's Canon left a mark on modern pop and rock

Johann Pachelbel² was a German composer, organist, and teacher. During his lifetime, Pachelbel was best known as an organ composer. He wrote more than two hundred pieces for the instrument. Although his music enjoyed enormous popularity during his lifetime, the majority of Baroque and pre-Baroque composers were virtually forgotten as the style went out of fashion during the 18th century.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachelbel%27s_Canon

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Pachelbel

Pachelbel's Canon³ was written sometime in the late 17th or early 18th century. It was largely forgotten by history for hundreds of years. In 1968, the Jean-François Paillard⁴ chamber orchestra made a recording of the piece that would change its fortunes significantly. Subsequently the piece became very influential to other artists.

WHAT IS A CANON?

A canon⁵ is a piece of music where several instruments play the same thing but are slightly delayed to each other. Canons were already popular in the 14th century. Probably the greatest writer of canons in the eighteenth century was Johann Sebastian Bach⁶. Many of his organ works have canons.

A canon can also be done with voices. Below is an example of the song Frère Jacques⁷, which many will have encountered at school, sung in canon.

Watch: <https://youtu.be/W211aTHMVYg?feature=shared&t=35>

In July 1968, Greek band Aphrodite's Child⁸ released the single *Rain and Tears*, which was a baroque-rock adaptation of Pachelbel's Canon. Despite their short existence and lack of hit singles outside of Europe, they are still regarded as a cult band. Two of their members, Vangelis⁹ and Demis Roussos¹⁰ would go on to achieve fame as solo artists.

Watch: <https://youtu.be/5HP1DdiqEs?feature=shared>

In 2002, pop music producer Pete Waterman¹¹ described Canon in D as *almost the godfather of pop music*. He claimed that Kylie Minogue¹²'s debut hit *I Should Be So Lucky* was inspired by it. Another example is the 1990 song *All Together Now* by the UK band The Farm¹³). It became a hit again in 2004 when it was adopted as the official anthem of the England National Football Team.

The chord progression of Pachelbel's Canon also features in hits like *Don't Look Back in Anger* by Oasis¹⁴), *Go West* by the Pet Shop Boys¹⁵, *Welcome to the Black Parade* by My Chemical Romance¹⁶ and *Basket Case* by Green Day¹⁷. It's safe to say we will see this theme return in many more songs in the future.

Watch: <https://youtu.be/cmpRLQZkTb8?feature=shared>

--- @youtube(<https://youtu.be/GER396B6M7w?feature=shared>)

Watch: <https://youtu.be/RRKJiM9Njr8?feature=shared>

--- @youtube(<https://youtu.be/NUTGr5t3MoY?feature=shared>)

With special thanks to Bettsi for the idea.

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pachelbel%27s_Canon

⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-François_Paillard

⁵[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canon_\(music\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canon_(music))

⁶https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Sebastian_Bach

⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frère_Jacques

⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aphrodite%27s_Child

⁹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vangelis>

¹⁰https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demis_Roussos

¹¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pete_Waterman

¹²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kylie_Minogue

¹³[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Farm_\(British_band\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Farm_(British_band))

¹⁴[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oasis_\(band\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oasis_(band))

¹⁵https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pet_Shop_Boys

¹⁶https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Chemical_Romance

¹⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Day

