
THE CrossFit LIFE

Classical CrossFit

Craig Nelson asks us to take a break from Eminem and DMX to try a WOD with the OGs of music: Brahms, Bach and Tchaikovsky.

By Craig Nelson

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Peter Bekke

Members of TwinTown CrossFit taking the William Tell Overture 1K Rowing Challenge.

There are many things I love about CrossFit, and a few things I hate. Among the latter are, of course, burpees. But everyone hates burpees. But I have a particular loathing for something I suspect is loved, or at least liked, by most: the music.

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My problem with the music is clearly my problem. It derives inevitably from the generational disconnect between my over-60 generation and the twenty- and thirtysomethings who represent the majority of CrossFitters.

To be clear, I absolutely endorse the idea of a soundtrack to accompany the WOD. The capacity of music to propel us forward and get us moving is well understood. This effect is so powerful that iPods are now prohibited in most elite running events.

No, it's the type of music that I object to. And what type of music is that? Actually I have no clue. I suppose it's some type of rap/hip-hop/dubstep something or other. I have no idea what these terms mean. They're just words I've heard. I've purchased two CDs in the last 20 years (Amy Winehouse and Gnarls Barkley), so my ignorance of contemporary music is comprehensive. I just know that what is typically played does absolutely nothing for me.

I'm not suggesting that my generation's music be substituted for the current playlist. Yeah, a little Beach Boys might be fun sometime, but, frankly, what's evoked by most of the stuff we listened to—The Beatles, Motown, the psychedelic stuff—is something quite different than a sweaty workout session. And anyway, I don't want to make this some kind of generational feud. So is there some common musical ground that might suit all CrossFitters? How about classical music? I'm serious.

Not just any classical music will do. Indeed, most of it, no matter how beautiful, is completely unsuited to the task of getting you through your final set of kettlebell swings. Bach? Too cerebral (with one exception—see below). Bruckner? Too slow. And Mozart, well, you'll probably want to stop working out and just listen.

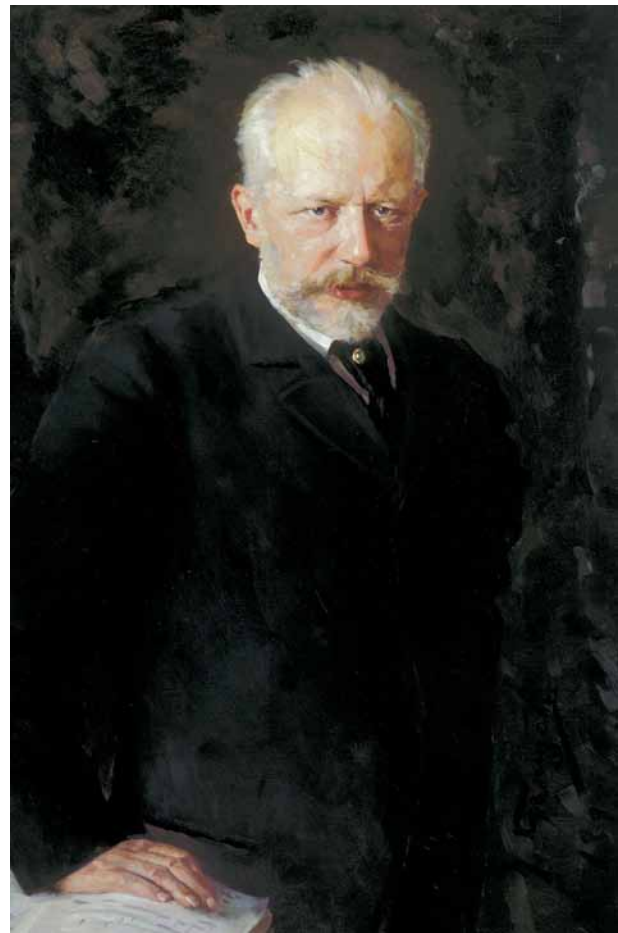
What we're looking for are the pieces that are high energy, fast and loud, with a thunderous crescendo at the end. Think Beethoven, Dvorak, Tchaikovsky.

To my mind, it would be the most fun to use these pieces in an AMRAP context, where the workout ends at the end of the piece. Thus, at the end of the workout when you're running out of gas, the final, furious crescendo will help carry you that last minute or two. If for some reason it's necessary to have precisely timed workouts of whole-minute durations, simply delay or advance the start of the piece as needed. In the list below, the length of the individual pieces varies from under 3 minutes to nearly 25 minutes. Thus, either singly or in combination, the songs can be used to create a soundtrack to almost any length of workout.

The workout should fit the tone of the music. Here are a few programming ideas:

At about 3:30, the frantic *William Tell Overture* would be perfect for, say, a rowing sprint. Can you break 1K before it's over?

Rimsky-Korsokov's *Marche Slav* (9:30) has a hypnotic, propulsive rhythm that would work nicely with a repetitive, heavy-lifting WOD. Another in this category is the third movement (8:25) of Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony*. But God's sake, whatever you do, don't use the fourth movement of this piece. After all, the name of the symphony is *Pathétique*, and this movement will make you put down your weights, sit in the corner and try to think of a good reason to go on living. Not the effect we're looking for.



Nikolai Dmitriyevich Kuznetsov - public domain

Tchaikovsky: noted composer and powerlifter?

Joseph Karl Stieler - public domain



Historians believe Beethoven hated burpees too.

Perfect for accompanying Fight Gone Bad is the 1812 *Overture* (with chorus), which clocks in at around 17 minutes. Get a version with real cannon shots.

Although not technically a classical piece, *The Song of the Volga Boatmen* (4 minutes) is ideal for our purposes. This Russian folk tune celebrates the efforts of the workmen who would pull barges up the Volga River. Imagine climbing a rope or, better yet, pulling a rope (as did the Russian peasants) to its two refrains: *Yeshcho razik, yeshcho da raz!* ("Once more, one more time!") and *Ey, ukhnem!* (Heave ho!).

And finally, at nearly 25 minutes, there's the fourth movement of Beethoven's mighty *Ninth Symphony*, the most sublime piece of music ever written. (Is it blasphemous to use this music for the purpose of helping us throw around a bit more iron?) Save this for the most grueling WOD. It's inspiring throughout, and the final 2 minutes will make you want to run through walls.

There are many, many suitable classical pieces. On the right is a list of my favorites, sorted by duration (the timings are approximate and will vary by recording).

So how about it, affiliates? Put aside one hour per week for The Classical Hour—a deceptively serene-sounding name for the gut-busting WOD that will ensue.



Orff: <i>Carmina Burana—O Fortuna</i>	2:50
Puccini: <i>Dorma</i>	3:00
Brahms: <i>Hungarian Dance No. 5</i>	3:10
Rossini: <i>William Tell Overture</i>	3:30
Balakirev: <i>The Song of the Volga Boatmen</i>	3:55
Wagner: <i>Ride of the Valkyries</i>	5:20
Mendelssohn: <i>Violin Concerto in E Minor (Third Movement)</i>	6:00
Tchaikovsky: <i>Piano Concerto No. 1 (Third Movement)</i>	7:00
Beethoven: <i>Symphony No. 5 (First Movement)</i>	7:15
Dvorak: <i>Symphony No. 9 (Third Movement)</i>	8:10
Tchaikovsky: <i>Violin Concerto in D Major (Third Movement)</i>	8:15
Tchaikovsky: <i>Symphony No. 6 (Third Movement)</i>	8:30
Bach: <i>Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor</i>	8:45
Rimsky-Korsakov: <i>Marche Slave</i>	9:25
Rachmaninoff: <i>Piano Concerto No. 3 (Third Movement)</i>	9:30
Dvorak: <i>Symphony No. 8 (First Movement)</i>	10:30
Gershwin: <i>An American in Paris</i>	10:40
Mendelssohn: <i>Violin Concerto in E minor (First Movement)</i>	10:50
Beethoven: <i>Symphony No. 5 (Fourth Movement)</i>	10:55
Dvorak: <i>Symphony No. 9 (Fourth Movement)</i>	11:10
Beethoven: <i>Symphony No. 9 (Second Movement)</i>	11:50
Ravel: <i>Bolero</i>	13:45
Gershwin: <i>Rhapsody in Blue</i>	14:00
Tchaikovsky: <i>Violin Concerto in D Major (First Movement)</i>	15:45
Tchaikovsky: <i>1812 Overture</i>	16:45
Tchaikovsky: <i>Piano Concerto No. 1 (First Movement)</i>	19:45
Beethoven: <i>Symphony No. 9 (Fourth Movement)</i>	24:40