

## Classical Era (1750–1820)

### I. Transition period (1730–1770): overlaps with end of Baroque

#### *A. Development of style galant: rejection of complex polyphony in favor of lighter, homophonic style*

1. Contrast of mood and theme within the movement
2. Focus on graceful melody
3. Emphasis on balance and clarity of structure, unity and logic
4. Sons of J.S. Bach influential in developing new styles: Carl Philippe Emanuel Bach (1714–1788) and Johann Christian Bach (1735–1782)

#### *B. Instrumental music begins to take precedence over vocal music*

1. Basso continuo gradually abandoned in favor of more flexible orchestral texture
2. Johann Stamitz (1717–1757), conductor and composer in Mannheim, develops early symphony orchestra style
3. Secular, as opposed to sacred, music predominates

## II. Stylistic and technical characteristics of Classical Era music

- A. Flexibility of rhythm: rhythmic flow changes within a movement, in contrast to continuous, driving rhythms of Baroque*
- B. Elements of drama and surprise introduced via dynamic changes, rhythmic and textural contrast, harmonic tension, and thematic contrast within a movement*
- C. Changes of texture used to delineate form: texture is basically homophonic with many free polyphonic elements intermingled as style develops*
- D. Influence of folk music evident in tuneful and rhythmically vital themes*
- E. Dynamic changes for dramatic effect, especially crescendo and decrescendo*

## III. Historical developments: instrumental music

- A. Instruments modernized, orchestra becomes standardized*
  - 1. Bartolomeo Cristofori invents pianoforte (Italy, c. 1709); pianoforte (piano) replaces harpsichord around 1775 as preferred keyboard instrument
  - 2. Orchestra of 35–40 players with standardized instrumentation: strings, woodwinds (flutes, oboes, bassoons—later, clarinets), brass (French horns, trumpets, trombones in opera and church works), percussion (timpani)

***B. Instrumental forms and genres developed that remained in play for over 200 years***

1. Four-movement symphony standardized, formal structure for symphonic movements develops
  - a) First movement—fast (Sonata form, A B A)
    - (1) *Exposition (theme 1, modulation to dominant or relative major, theme 2, closing theme, all repeated)*
    - (2) *Development (theme fragments and motives from exposition are moved through a range of keys, textures)*
    - (3) *Recapitulation (themes from exposition recur, this time remaining in tonic, coda)*
  - b) Slow movement, often A B A or variation form
  - c) Minuet, in dance form: Minuet (A A B B), Trio (C C D D), Repeat of Minuet
  - d) Finale (often sonata form, variation, sometimes with fugal elements)
2. Chamber music: string quartet, woodwind quintet, piano trio follow formal plan of symphony, idiomatic writing for instruments becomes highly developed
3. Solo concerto, especially for piano (same form as symphony, but omits minuet; sonata form of first movement modified to allow separate exposition of themes for solo instrument)
4. Solo keyboard works (sonatas, variations) gain importance

#### IV. Historical developments: opera and vocal music

*A. Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714– 1787) writes “reform” operas (Orfeo ed Euridice , 1762; Alceste, 1776; Iphigénie en Aulide, 1774), to correct excesses of late Baroque operatic practices and bring more dramatic integrity back into opera*

*B. In Mozart’s hands, opera reaches new dramatic heights, orchestra plays greater role in defining drama; themes and plots move from abstract (Greek mythology) to everyday life*

## V. Representative composers and works

*A. Vienna seat of much activity, home to three major composers of classical era: Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven (transition to Romantic)*

*B. Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809): Influential in development of string quartet and symphony, enjoys long, productive career*

1. 104 Symphonies, for example, No. 94 in G (“Surprise”), No. 104 in D (“London”), No. 101 in D (“The Clock”)
2. 68 string quartets, notably Opus 20, Opus 33, Opus 64, Opus 76
3. Oratorios: *The Creation* (1798), *The Seasons* (1801)
4. Piano sonatas, piano trios, concertos

*C. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791): Great creative genius, wrote in all forms popular at the time*

1. Operas: *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), *Così fan tutte* (1790), *Die Zauberflöte* (1791)
2. Over 40 symphonies: for example, No. 35 in D (“Haffner”), No. 38 in D (“Prague”), No. 39 in G, No. 40 in G minor, No. 41 in C (“Jupiter”)
3. Solo concertos for piano, as well as concertos for other instruments: violin, flute and harp, flute, bassoon, French horn
4. String quartets and quintets, clarinet quintet, flute quartets, and other chamber music
5. Solo piano music: sonatas, variations, and other works

*D. Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) influential throughout nineteenth century, prototype of Romantic composer*

1. Nine symphonies: ninth incorporates chorus and four soloists in Finale
2. 32 piano sonatas, many shorter works for piano
3. 16 string quartets: for example, Opus 18, Opus 59, Opus 131
4. 5 piano concertos, violin concerto, other works for solo instrument and orchestra
5. Many other solo piano works, and a wide range of chamber music and works for orchestra
6. *Fidelio* (opera, 1805), *Missa solemnis* (1823)
7. Within his career, transition to Romantic era evident in increasing focus on personal expression of emotion, expanded forms, heightened emotional tension; daring departures from traditional forms in late works

VI. Developments in related arts and society

*A. Voltaire, Diderot, French Encyclopedists lay intellectual groundwork for French Revolution*

*B. Social upheaval as middle class begins to assert rights against aristocracy*

1. American Declaration of Independence (1776)
2. French Revolution (begins 1789)
3. Napoleonic Wars (1803–15)

***C. Role of musicians changes as middle class gains influence***

1. Musicians gradually break away from total dependency on court patronage
2. Public concerts begin, providing new sources of revenue
3. Amateur music gains in importance as middle class advances
4. Music publishing develops to meet demands of more educated populace

***D. Visual arts***

1. Rococo style in arts (light colors, curved lines, graceful ornaments): Jean-Honore Fragonard, François Boucher
2. Neoclassical style in art influenced by Greek and Roman art (firm lines, clear structure, moralistic subject matter): Jacques-Louis David, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres

***E. Literature—first English novels appear***

1. Samuel Richardson, *Pamela* (1740)
2. Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (1749),
3. Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1809)
4. Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe* (1819)