

## Classical Music

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The **Classical period** in Western [music](#) occurred in the second half of the [18th century](#). Although the term [classical music](#) is used as a blanket term meaning *all* kinds of music in a certain tradition, it can also occasionally mean this particular era within that tradition. Commonly given beginning and ending dates for the period are 1750 and 1820, although there was considerable overlap at both ends with preceding and following styles, as was true for all musical eras.

The Classical period falls between the [Baroque](#) and the [Romantic](#) periods. Amongst its [composers](#) were [Joseph Haydn](#), [Muzio Clementi](#), [Johann Ladislaus Dussek](#) and [Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach](#), though probably the best known composers from this period are [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart](#) and [Ludwig van Beethoven](#).

### The Classical style

In the middle of the [18th century](#), Europe began to move to a new style in the arts, [architecture](#) and literature. While still tightly linked to the court culture and absolutism, with its formality and emphasis on order and hierarchy, the new style was also a cleaner style, one that favored clearer divisions between parts, brighter contrasts and colors, and simplicity over complexity. The ideas of "natural philosophy", which had established itself in the public consciousness with [Newton's](#) physics were taken as an example: structures should be axiomatic, articulated and orderly. This taste for cleanliness worked its way into the world of music as well, moving away from the layered [polyphony](#) of the [Baroque](#) period, and towards a style where a melody over a subordinate harmony — called [homophony](#) — was preferred. This meant that playing of chords, in unison, became a much more prevalent feature of music, and this in turn made the [tonal](#) structure of works more audible.

The new style was also pushed forward by changes in economics and social structure. As the 18th century progressed, the nobility more and more became the primary patrons of instrumental music, and there was a rise in the public taste for comic [opera](#). This led to changes in the way music was performed, the most crucial of which was the move to standard instrumental groups, and the reduction in the importance of the ["continuo"](#), the harmonic fill beneath the music played by several instruments. One way to trace this decline of the continuo and its figured chords is to see the decline of the term ["obbligato"](#), meaning a mandatory, instrumental part in a work of [chamber music](#). In the Baroque world, additional instruments could be added in as continuo; in the classical world, all parts were noted, though not always notated, so the word ["obbligato"](#) ceased to have any meaning. By 1800, the term was virtually extinct, as was the practice of conducting a work from the [harpsichord](#).

This change in the economic situation altered the balance of availability and quality of musicians. While in the late Baroque a major composer would have the entire musical resources of a town to draw on, the forces available at a hunting lodge were smaller, and more fixed in their level of ability. This was a spur to having primarily simple parts to play, and in the case of a resident virtuoso group, a spur to writing spectacular, idiomatic parts for certain instruments, as in the case of the [Mannheim](#) orchestra. In addition, the taste for a continual supply of new music, carried over from the Baroque, meant that works had to be performable with, at best, one rehearsal. Indeed, well into the 1790's Mozart writes about "the rehearsal", to imply that his concerts would have only one.

Since polyphonic texture was no longer the focus of music, but rather a single melodic line, there was greater emphasis on notating the music for [dynamics](#) and phrases. The simplification of texture made instrumental detail more important, and also made the use of characteristic rhythms, such as attention-getting opening fanfares, the funeral march rhythm, or the minuet, more important in establishing and unifying the tone of a single movement.

This led to the classical style's gradual breaking with the Baroque habit of making each movement of

music devoted to a single "affect" or emotion. Instead, it became the style to employ contrasts between different emotional sections, by contrasting major and minor, strident rhythmic themes with longer, more song-like themes and making movement between different harmonic areas the principal means of creating dramatic contrast and unity. Moments of transition became more and more important, as moments of surprise and delight. Consequently composers and musicians began to pay more attention to them, making their arrival more distinct, and making the signs that pointed to them, on one hand, more audible, and on the other hand, more the subject of "play" — that is, composers more and more created false expectations, only to have the music skitter off in a different direction.

## **History of the Classical period**

### **Beginnings of the Classical style (1730-1760)**

At first the new style took over baroque forms - the ternary "[aria da capo](#)" and the "[sinfonia](#)" and "[concerto](#)" - and simply composed with simpler parts and more emphatic sections. However, over time, the new aesthetic caused radical changes in how pieces were put together - the basic layouts changed. (See [Sonata Form](#)). Composers from this period sought dramatic effects, striking melodies, and clearer textures. One important break with the past was the radical overhaul of opera by [Christoph Willibald Gluck](#), who cut away a great deal of the layering and improvisational ornament, and focused on the points of [modulation](#) and transition. By making these moments where the harmony changes more focal, he created the ability for powerful dramatic shifts in the emotional color of the music. He used instrumentation, melody and changes in mode to highlight these moments. Among the most successful composer, [Gluck](#) spawned many emulators, for example [Antonio Salieri](#). Their emphasis on accessibility was hugely successful in opera, and in vocal music more widely: songs, oratorios and choruses. These were considered the most important kinds of music for performance, and hence produced the highest public estimation for success.

The phase between the baroque and the rise of the classical, with its broad mixture of competing ideas and attempts to unify the different demands of taste, economics and idea, goes by many names. It is sometimes called "galant", "rococo", or "pre-classical", or at other times, "early classical". It is a period where composers still working in the baroque style are still successful, if sometimes thought of as being more of the past than the present - Bach, Handel and Telemann all compose well past the point where the homophonic style is clearly on the rise. Musical culture was caught at a cross roads, the masters of the older style had the technique, but the public hungered for the new. One of the reasons why C.P.E. Bach was held in such high regard: he understood the older forms quite well, knew how to present them in new garb, with a variety of form, and soon after as far as overhauling the older forms from the baroque.

### **The early Classical style (1760-1775)**

By the late 1750's there are flourishing centers of the new style in Italy, Vienna, Mannheim and Paris, dozens of symphonies are composed, and there are "bands" of players associated with theatres. Opera and vocal music is the feature of most musical events, with concerti and symphonies acting as instrumental interludes and introductions, for operas, and even church services. The norms of a body of strings supplemented by winds, and of movements of particular rhythmic character are established by the late 1750's in Vienna. But the length and weight of pieces is still set with some baroque characteristics: individual movements still focus on one affect, their length is not significantly greater than baroque movements and there is not, yet, a theory of how to compose in the new style which is clearly enunciated. It was a moment ripe for a breakthrough.

Many attribute this breakthrough to be made by C.P.E. Bach, Gluck, and several others. In addition, C.P.E. Bach and Gluck are often considered to be founders of the classical style.

The composer who was the first great master of the style was [Joseph Haydn](#). In the late 1750's he began composing symphonies, and by 1761, and composed a tryptich "Morning", "Noon" and "Evening" which were solidly in the "contemporary" mode. As a "vice-kapellmeister" and later "kapellmeister", his output expanded, he would compose over 40 symphonies alone in the decade. And while his fame grew, as his

orchestra was expanded and his compositions were copied and disseminated, his voice was only one among many.

While overshadowed by Mozart and Beethoven, it is difficult to overstate Haydn's centrality to the new style, and the future of Western concert music, at the time, before Mozart and Beethoven, with [Johann Sebastian Bach](#) known primarily to connoisseurs of keyboard music, Haydn reached a place in music which set him above all other composers except perhaps [George Friedrich Handel](#). Some have pointed out that he occupied a place equivalent to perhaps the Beatles in the history of Rock and Roll. It was he who, more than any other single individual, realized that the new style which had evolved, needed to be written according to new ideas and principles. He took existing ideas, and radically altered how they functioned — earning him the nicknames "father of the [symphony](#)" and "father of the [string quartet](#)". One might truly say that he was the father of the [sonata form](#) — which, in its classical incarnation, relied on dramatic contrast, tension of melody against harmony, rhythm, and required the audience to follow a dramatic curve over a larger span of time than was previously necessary.

Strangely enough, one of the forces that worked as an impetus for his pressing forward was the first stirrings of what would later be called "romanticism" - the " [Sturm und Drang](#)", or "storm and struggle" phase in the arts, a short period where obvious emotionalism was a stylistic preference, which was the fad of the 1770's. This caused him to want more dramatic contrast and emotionally appealing melodies which had more character, more individuality. This period faded away in music and literature — however, it would color what came afterward, and eventually be a component of aesthetic taste in coming decades.

The "[Farewell](#)" [Symphony](#), No. 45 in F# Minor, exemplifies Haydn's integration of the differing demands of the new style, with sharp surprising turns, and a long adagio which ends the work. In 1772, Haydn completed his Opus 20 set of 6 string quartets, where he uses the polyphonic techniques he gathered from the previous era to provide enough structural coherence to hold together his melodic ideas. For some this marks the beginning of the "mature" classical style, where the period of reaction against the complexity of the late Baroque begins to be replaced with a period of integration of elements of both Baroque and classical styles.

### **The middle Classical style (1775-1790)**

Haydn, having worked for over a decade as the music director for a prince, had far more scope for composing than most, and also the ability to shape the forces that would play his music. This opportunity was not wasted, as Haydn, beginning quite early on his career, restlessly sought to press the technique of building ideas in music forward. His next important breakthrough was in the Opus 33 string quartets (1781), where individual parts changed from melody to harmony and back again, and worked their way between dramatic moments of transition, and climactic sections where music flowed smoothly and seemingly without interruption. He would then take this integrated style and begin applying it to orchestral and vocal music.

Haydn's gift to music was a way of composing, a way of structuring works, which was, at once, within the new style, and rooted in principles of the old style which he drew primarily from [CPE Bach](#). It would, however, be a younger contemporary, [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart](#) who would bring his genius to Haydn's ideas, and apply them to two of the major genres of the day: opera, and the virtuoso concerto. Whereas Haydn spent much of his working life as a court composer, Mozart wanted public success in the concert life of cities. This meant opera, and it meant performing as a virtuoso. Haydn was neither a virtuoso at the international touring level, nor was he seeking to create operatic works that could play for many nights in front of a large audience - Mozart wanted both. Moreover, Mozart also had a taste for more chromatic chords, and greater contrasts in harmonic language, a greater love for creating a welter of melodies in a single work and a more Italianate sensibility towards music as a whole. He found, in Haydn's music, and in a study of the polyphony of Bach, the means to discipline his gifts.

Mozart rapidly came to Haydn's attention, who hailed the new composer, studied his works, and considered the younger man his only true peer in music. Their letters to each other are filled with the kind of asides that only two people working at a higher plane than their contemporaries, can share. From Mozart, Haydn found

a greater range of instrumentation, dramatic effect and melodic resource - the learning relationship moved in two directions.

The arrival in Vienna by Mozart in 1780 marked the acceleration of the development of the classical style, here, Mozart absorbed the fusion of Italianate brilliance and Germanic cohesiveness which had been brewing for the previous 20 years. His own taste for brilliances, rhythmically complex melodies and figures, long cantilena melodies, and virtuoso flourishes was merged with an appreciation for formal coherence and internal connectedness. Strangely enough, it is at this point that war and inflation halted a trend to larger and larger orchestras and forced the disbanding or reduction of many theatre orchestras. This pressed the classical style inwards: towards seeking greater ensemble and technical challenge. For example, scattering the melody across woodwinds, or using thirds to create a melody between them. This process placed a premium on chamber music for more public performance, giving a further boost to the string quartet and other small ensemble groupings.

It was during this decade that public taste began, increasingly, to recognize that Haydn and Mozart had reached a higher standard of composition. When Mozart arrived at age 25, the dominant styles of Vienna were recognizably connected to the emergence of the early classical style in the 1750's. By the end of the decade, changes in performance practice, relative standing of instrumental and vocal music, technical demands on musicians and stylistic unity had become established in the composers who imitated Mozart and Haydn. During this decade Mozart would compose his most famous operas, his six late symphonies which would help redefine the genre, and a string of piano concerti which are still among the pinnacle works of the form.

One composer who was influential in spreading the more serious style which Mozart and Haydn had formed is [Muzio Clementi](#), a gifted virtuoso pianist who duelled Mozart to a draw before the emperor in playing compositions. His own sonatas for the piano circulated widely, and he became the most successful composer in [London](#) during this decade. The stage was set for a generation of composers, having absorbed the lessons of the new style earlier, and having clear examples to aim at, who would take the classical style in new directions. Also in London at this time was [Johann Ladislaus Dussek](#), who, like Clementi, encouraged piano makers to extend their instruments and made full use of the possibilities. The importance of London in the classical period is often overlooked - but it served as the home to the Broadwood's factory for piano manufacturing, and as the home base for composers who, while less famous than the "Vienna School" would have a decisive influence on what came later, and were composers of a number of fine works in their own right. London's taste for virtuosity may well have encouraged the complex passage work and extended statements of tonic and dominant.

### **The late Classical style (1790-1820)**

When Haydn and Mozart began composing, symphonies were played as single movements between other works, and many lasted only 10 or 12 minutes, instrumental groups had varying standards of playing and the "continuo" was a central part of music making. In the intervening years, music had seen a dramatic change, international publication and touring had grown explosively, concert societies were beginning to be formed, notation had been made more specific, more descriptive, schematics for works had been simplified, and yet made more varied in their exact working through. In 1790, just before Mozart's death, his reputation was spreading rapidly, and Haydn was poised for a series of successes, including his late oratorios and "London" symphonies. Composers in Paris, Rome and all over Germany turned to Haydn and Mozart for their ideas on form.

The moment was ripe for a dramatic shift. The decade of the 1790's saw the emergence of a new generation of composers, born between around 1770, who while they had grown up with the earlier styles, found in the recent works of Haydn and Mozart a vehicle for greater expression. In 1788 [Luigi Cherubini](#) settled in Paris, and in 1791 composed "Lodoiska", an opera that shot him to fame. Its style is clearly reflective of the mature Haydn and Mozart, and its instrumentation gave it a weight which had not yet been felt in the grand opera. His contemporary [Etienne Méhul](#) extended instrumental effects with his 1790 opera "Euphrosine et Coradin", from which followed a series of successes. Of course, the most fateful would be Ludwig

van Beethoven, who launched his numbered works in 1794 with three Piano Trios, which remain played even today. Somewhat younger than these, though equally accomplished because of his youthful study under Mozart and virtuosity, was [Johann Nepomuk Hummel](#), who studied under Haydn and Mozart, was friends with Beethoven and Schubert, and a teacher to Franz Liszt. He concentrated more on the piano than any other instrument, and his time in London in 1791 and 1792 saw the composition, and publication in 1793 of a three piano sonatas, opus 2, which idiomatically used Mozart's techniques of avoiding the expected cadence, and Clementi's sometimes modally uncertain virtuoso figuration. Taken together, these composer can be seen now as the vanguard of a broad change in style and the center of gravity in music. They would study each others works, copy each others gestures in music, and on occasion behave like quarrelsome rivals.

The crucial differences with the previous wave can be seen through the shift in gravity of the melody downward, the increasing length, the acceptance of Mozart and Haydn as paradigmatic, the greater and greater use of keyboard resources, the shift from "vocal" writing to "pianistic" writing, the growing pull of the minor and of modal ambiguity and the increasing importance of varying accompanying figures to bring "texture" forward as an element in music. In short - the late classical was seeking a more complex music internally. The growth of concert societies, amateur orchestras and the importance of music as part of middle class life contributed to a booming market for pianos, piano music, and virtuosi who could provide examples. Hummel, Beethoven, Clementi were all known for their improvising.

One explanation for the shift in style was advanced by Schoenberg and others: the increasing centrality of "theme and variations" in compositional thinking. Schoenberg argued that the classical style was one of "continuing variation", where a development was, in effect, a theme and variations with greater continuity. In any event, theme and variations replaced the fugue as the standard vehicle for improvising, and was often included, directly or indirectly as a movement in longer instrumental works.

The influence of the baroque directly continued to fade: the figured bass grew less prominent as a means of holding performance together, the performance practices of the mid 18th century continued to die out. However, at the same time, complete editions of baroque masters began to become available, and the influence of baroque style, as the classical period understood it, continued to grow, particularly in the more and more expansive use of brass. Another feature of the period is the growing assumption that the composer would not be present at many performances: and therefore more and more would have to be written down. There were fewer and fewer "optional" parts that stood separately from the main score.

The force of the shift would be made abundantly apparent with Beethoven's 3rd Symphony, subtitled "Eroica". As with Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, it may not have been the first in all of its features, but its aggressive use of every part of the classical style set it apart from its contemporary works: in length, ambition and harmonic resources.

### **Classical influence on later composers**

Musical eras seldom disappear at once, instead, features are replaced over time, until the old is simply felt as "old fashioned". The classical style did not "die" so much as transform under the weight of changes.

One crucial change was the shift towards harmonies which center around "flatward" or subdominant keys. In the classical style, major was far more common than minor, chromaticism controlled through the use of "sharpward" introduction of keys, and minor sections were for contrast. Beginning with Mozart and Clementi - there began a creeping colonization of the subdominant region. With Schubert, it became a full fledged land rush: with subdominant moves being substituted in places which previous composers would have used strictly dominant regions. (For a fuller discussion of these terms see [Tonality](#)). This created a darker color to music, strengthened the minor mode and made structure harder to maintain. Beethoven would contribute to this, by his increasing use of the fourth as a consonance, and modal ambiguity - for example the opening of the D Minor Symphony.

Among this generation of "classical romantics" [Franz Schubert](#), [Carl Maria von Weber](#), [John Field](#) are

among the most prominent, along with the young works of [Felix Mendelssohn](#). Their sense of form was strongly influenced by the classical style, and they were not yet "learned", imitating rules which were codified by others, but directly responding to works of music which they knew by Beethoven, Mozart, Clementi and others. The instrumental forces at their disposal were also quite "classical" in number and scope, leading them to compose parts which were similar in the way they were played.

However, the forces which would end the hold of the classical style grow in the works of each of these composers. The most commonly cited one is, of course, harmony. However, also important is the increasing focus on having a continuous rhythmically uniform accompanying figuration. Beethoven's [Moonlight sonata](#) would be the model for hundreds of later pieces - where the shifting movement of a rhythmic figure provides much of the drama and interest of the work, while a melody drifts above it. As years wore on, greater knowledge of works, greater instrumental expertise, increasing range of instruments, the growth of concert societies, the spread of the piano - which created a huge audience for sophisticated music - all contributed to the shift to the "Romantic" style.

Drawing the line exactly is impossible: there are sections of Mozart's works which, taken alone, are indistinguishable in harmony and orchestration from music written 80 years later, and composers continue to write in classically normative styles all the way into the 20th century. Even before Beethoven's death, composers such as [Louis Spohr](#) were self-described romantics and incorporated more and more chromaticism in their works. However, generally the fall of Vienna as the most important musical center for orchestral composition is felt to be the moment where the classical style, with its continuous organic development of one composer learning in close proximity to others, finally ended. [Franz Liszt](#) and [Mendelssohn](#), as well as [Frederic Chopin](#), visited Vienna when young, but they then moved on to other vistas. Composers such as [Czerny](#), while deeply influenced by Beethoven, also searched for new ideas and new forms to contain the larger world of musical expression and performance in which they lived.

### **Composers of the Classical era**

- [Jean-Baptiste Masse](#) (c1700 - c1756)
- [Michel Blavet](#) (1700 - 1768)
- [Johan Agrell](#) (1701 - 1765)
- [Giovanni Battista Sammartini](#) (1701 - 1775)
- [Johann Ernst Eberlin](#) (1702 - 1762)
- [Johann Gottlieb Graun](#) (c1702-1771)
- [Carl Heinrich Graun](#) (c1703-1759)
- [Giovanni Battista Pescetti](#) (c1704 - c1766)
- [Antonio Domenico Viraldini](#) (1705 - 1741)
- [Baldassare Galuppi](#) (1706 - 1785)
- [Georg Reutter](#) (1708 - 1772)
- [Michel Corrette](#) (1709 - 1795)
- [Giovanni Battista Pergolesi](#) (1710 - 1736)
- [Domenico Alberti](#) (1710 - 1740)
- [Thomas Arne](#) (1710 - 1778)
- [Wilhelm Friedemann Bach](#) (1710 - 1784)
- [William Boyce](#) (1711 - 1779)
- [John Stanley](#) (1712 - 1786)
- [Johann Ludwig Krebs](#) (1713 - 1780)
- [Per Brant](#) (1714 - 1767)
- [Gottfried August Homilius](#) (1714 - 1785)
- [Christoph Willibald Gluck](#) (1714 - 1787)
- [Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach](#) (1714 - 1788)
- [Georg Christoph Wagenseil](#) (1715 - 1777)
- [Hinrich Philip Johnsen](#) (1716 - 1779)
- [Johann Wenzel Anton Stamitz](#) (1717 - 1757)
- [Leopold Mozart](#) (1719 - 1787)

- [William Walond \(1719 - 1768\)](#)
- [Johann Philipp Kirnberger \(1721 - 1783\)](#)
- [Sebastián Ramón de Albero y Añaños \(1722 - 1756\)](#)
- [Karl Friedrich Abel \(1723 - 1787\)](#)
- [Armand-Louis Couperin \(1727 - 1789\)](#)
- [Florian Leopold Gassmann \(1729 - 1774\)\[1\]](#) (<http://www.hoasm.org/XIIC/Gassmann.html>)
- [Giuseppe Sarti \(1729 - 1802\)\[2\]](#) ([http://100.1911encyclopedia.org/S/SA/SARTI\\_GIUSEPPE.htm](http://100.1911encyclopedia.org/S/SA/SARTI_GIUSEPPE.htm))
- [Antonio Soler \(1729 - 1783\)](#)
- [Joseph Haydn \(1732 - 1809\)](#)
- [François-Joseph Gossec \(1734 - 1829\)](#)
- [Johann Gottfried Eckard \(1735 - 1809\)\[3\]](#) (<http://www.hoasm.org/VIIIE/Eckard.html>)
- [Johann Christian Bach \(1735 - 1782\)](#)
- [Johann Georg Albrechtsberger \(1736 - 1809\)](#)
- [Michael Haydn \(1737 - 1806\)](#)
- [Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf \(1739 - 1799\)](#)
- [Johann Baptist Vanhal \(1739 - 1813\)](#)
- [André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry \(1741 - 1813\)](#)
- [Giovanni Paisiello \(1741-1816\)](#)
- [Luigi Boccherini \(1743 - 1805\)](#)
- [Franz Nikolaus Novotny \(1743 - 1773\)](#)
- [Carl Stamitz \(1745 - 1801\)](#)
- [Joseph Schuster \(1748 - 1812\)\[4\]](#) (<http://www.operone.de/komponist/schuster.html>)
- [Domenico Cimarosa \(1749 - 1801\)](#)
- [Antonio Salieri \(1750 - 1825\)](#)
- [Antonio Rosetti \(c1750 - 1792\)](#)
- [Dmytro Bortniansky \(1751 - 1825\)](#)
- [Muzio Clementi \(1752 - 1832\)](#)
- [Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart \(1756 - 1791\)](#)
- [Joseph Martin Kraus \(1756 - 1792\)](#)
- [François Devienne \(1759 - 1803\)\[5\]](#) ([http://www.haydn.dk/mhc\\_devienne.php](http://www.haydn.dk/mhc_devienne.php))
- [Luigi Cherubini \(1760 - 1842\)](#)
- [Franz Danzi \(1763 - 1826\)](#)
- [Franz Xaver Süssmayr \(1766 - 1803\)](#)
- [Wenzell Muller \(1767 - 1835\)](#)
- [Ludwig van Beethoven \(1770 - 1827\)](#) (Classical/Romantic bridge)
- [Antoine Reicha \(1770 - 1836\)](#)
- [Johann Nepomuk Hummel \(1778 - 1837\)](#) (Classical/Romantic bridge)
- [Fernando Sor \(1778 - 1839\)](#)
- [John Field \(1782 - 1837\)](#)
- [Carl Maria von Weber \(1786 - 1826\)](#) (Classical/Romantic bridge)
- [Franz Schubert \(1797 - 1828\)](#) (Classical/Romantic bridge)