

# Classical music from 1760 to 1810



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Why is the music of 1760-1810 described as classical. Explain the meaning of the term and how it relates to the music of that time. Refer to specific composers and works.

In musical context, the term classical refers to the classical period which falls between the Baroque and Romantic period. I am going to be looking at the most well known composers of this era (J. Haydn, W. A. Mozart & L. V Beethoven) and analyse how their music differentiates from that of the Baroque period and how it led into the Romantic era.

Starting from c. 1760, the first composer I will be looking at is Haydn. At the time when the influence of church on music development was diminishing, Haydn was lucky enough to be employed by one rich family of the Austrian Empire. This proved rewarding, as it gave him the freedom to explore many different aspects of music, which led to his crucial role in the establishment of the key “ classical” forms (such as the Symphony, the String Quartet, the Sonata and the Concerto). Although versions of all these existed, Haydn standardized these into well established musical forms and promoted them.

Due to the many operas in which he wrote before this period, Haydn was well acquainted with the “ sinfonia” form. However he was not content with adhering to this Italian model and the striving for originality (which led to the success of his career) became apparent in his works from 1761. He added two oboes, two horns to his first symphony. The wind parts show nothing unexpected, while the oboes often double the strings. The horns play fan-far like figures. The melody is divided between the violins (treated as if the work were a trio sonata) although often they play in unison. The lower strings are

bound together almost entirely as their function is to provide harmony while maintaining a forward driving rhythm. There are many baroque features, as to be expected.

When Haydn ran the Esterhazy orchestra during the 1760's he had the opportunity to experiment with symphonic writing, and it was during this decade there where he produced his first great symphonies. Over these 10 years, he wrote approximately 40 symphonies, around half of which followed a four-movement form – with an added minuet as the third movement. He also composed a long list of works in other genres, including operas, oratorios and choral works.

Specifically referring to his first set of symphonies , (No. 6 – Le Matin, 7 – Le Midi, and 8 – Le Soir), Haydn used a variety of stylistic influences. The most evident quality of these works is their added richness (compared to the first symphony he wrote), which is not from the use of novel or unexpected instruments, but from the utilization of the concerto principle within the symphonic framework. In some movements the strings are scored as ripieno with a concertino of two violins and a cello. In almost all movements the wind players depart from the role of sustaining harmonies to become soloists. In all three symphonies, the trio of the minuet movement contains a prominent part for the double bass recalling baroque practices in the concerto grosso; yet Haydn, using the standard combination of flutes, oboes, bassoons, horns, and strings, creates a modern orchestra which are retained and used by him in his later symphonies. Haydn's main intention at this time seemed to be the virtuosity of his musicians, as each of these three symphonies abounds prominent solos from almost every section.

Haydn's efforts to standardize the type of symphony proved successful and for that must be credited with the far-reaching innovation of adding one of the Dance forms as a separate movement (most commonly a Minuet – although only used from the third symphony and thereafter). This was the most consistent design for a scholastic and artistic style of the Symphony.

By the early 1770's, Haydn was well known throughout Europe and in 1781 his symphonies were published in England for the first time.

One problem that Haydn gave his immediate attention to was that of unifying thematic material, it is out of such attempts his great innovation of the 1780's were evolved. Sometimes Haydn would base a whole movement upon a single melodic fragment; more often, when decided harmonic contrasts exist between theme groups, the second theme is derived from the first. Haydn seems to have not appreciated, in these early works, the importance that he would later be attached to just the element he tried to expunge, namely, the element of thematic contrast or conflict. Even in his later works the contrasts were seldom as clearly established as in the compositions of Mozart and early Beethoven. Thematic contrast is missing almost entirely in Symphonies No. 3-42 (1759-1771), and lyric themes, such as occur in Mozart repeatedly, are equally rare. Haydn was well known throughout Europe when Mozart was a child. His six string quartets (often referred to as the "Sun" quartets) were written in 1772 and are said to be the inspiration for the six string quartets that Mozart wrote during his 1773 visit to Vienna. Haydn developed the polyphonic techniques he had gathered from the previous era to provide structural coherence capable of holding together his melodic ideas. During this time, Mozart developed an

enthusiasm for violin concertos, producing a series of five which increase in their musical sophistication and technical difficulty. In 1776, he turned his efforts to piano concertos and in early 1777 his E-flat concerto was so popular, it is now considered to be his breakthrough work.

It was around 1783-84 that Mozart met Haydn in Vienna when Mozart's reputation was on the rise. His opera "the abduction from the seraglio" had premiered with great success in Vienna and was in the process of being performed in many other cities. Mozart's "Haydn" quartets were written during the early years of their friendship and were published in 1785. These works are thought to be stylistically influenced by Haydn's Opus 33 series which were released in 1781. This series was Haydn's next important breakthrough, where melodic and harmonic roles segue among the instruments and often it is unclear what is melody and what is harmony.

While Haydn spent much of his working life as a court composer, Mozart wanted public success in the concert life. This meant opera, in a virtuoso style. Moreover, Mozart also had a taste for chromatic harmony (and greater contrasts in harmonic language generally). In Mozart, Haydn found a greater range of instrumentation, dramatic effect and melodic writing. Their learning relationship worked both ways.

Mozart's works, like Haydn's stand as an archetype of the classical period. He was a versatile composer, and wrote in every major genre (symphony, opera, solo concerto, chamber music and the piano sonata). These forms had been well established by Haydn, but Mozart advanced the technical

sophistication and emotional reach of them all. He almost solely developed and popularized the Classical piano concerto.

The main features of the classical style are all present in Mozart's music. Clarity, balanced phrases, and transparency are the hallmarks of his works, but any simplistic notion of delicacy masks the exceptional power and force of his finest masterpieces, such as his Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, his Symphony No. 40 in G minor and the opera Don Giovanni.

During Mozart's last decade as a composer, he exploited the use of chromatic harmony with remarkable confidence, which was rare at the time, but with great effect.

At the peak of the classical period, composers were faced with a dilemma: enlarging the classical forms or simply abandoning them for a new musical paradigm. The political and social context around this time was calling for a major reshape of musical expression. When the age of revolutions began in 1789, the growing role of middle-class saw an increasing involvement by a new generation of artists and composers and this was reflected in the music that they wrote. Amongst this new generation of composers was Beethoven, who was the most crucial figure in this transitional period between the Classical and Romantic period, specifically his early years, which is known as his heroic period (up to 1812).

From Beethoven's first set of three piano trios, some of Mozart's techniques are evident – such as avoiding the expected cadence. Haydn and Mozart were his strongest influences, but he explored new directions and gradually expanded the ambition in his works. He did this through a number of

techniques: a downward shift in melodies, increasing durations of movements, and the shift from “vocal” writing to “pianistic” writing. Also the increasing importance of varying accompanying figures to bring “texture” forward as an element in music became evident in his Symphonies. Slowly, direct influences of the Baroque period continued to fade: the figured bass grew less prominent as a means of holding performance together. The late classical period was demanding music that was internally more complex. The growth of concert societies and orchestras, marking the importance of music as a part of the middle class lifestyle, contributed to a booming market for pianos, piano music, and virtuosi. Furthermore, due to the growing number of performances where the composer was not present, it led to increased detail and specificity in scores. The transition became apparent with Beethoven’s 3rd Symphony (written in 1804), given the name Eroica – which is Italian for Heroic. As with Stravinsky’s Rite of Spring, it may not have been the first in all of its innovations, but its aggressive use of every part of the classical style set it apart from its contemporary works: in length, ambition, and harmonic resources.

## Conclusion

During the Vienna years, when Mozart was influenced by Swieten to take up the study of Baroque counterpoint, Haydn loaned him his personal copy of a textbook by Fux, a copy which was heavily annotated, a copy which was heavily covered with Haydn’s personal annotations.