



Music in the Classical Period c. 1750-1825

by Andrew Lesser, M.M.

In modern times, orchestral music has undergone a false stereotype by the use of the all encompassing term “classical music”. In this label, all western-based orchestral music has been categorized as “classical”, a name that only covers a relatively small span of years in comparison with the wide spread and variety of the whole of western music. Even the so-called “Classical Period” has been debated by scholars and musicologists, much as the labels of other eras of musical history are too one-dimensional to be an accurate representation of

music from any given period. However, significant changes in music, society, technology, and politics have given historians a reason to separate important events by classifying them into periods to better understand the major changes in history. The arbitrary date set by most as the end of the Baroque Era is the death of Johann Sebastian Bach in 1750. Bach’s sons, several of them influential composers in their own right, comprise the beginnings of the Classical Period, which also includes illustrious composers such as Gluck, Haydn, and Mozart. Ludwig van Beethoven’s legacy, however, remains split; his works straddle the gap between the Classical and Romantic Eras. It is the mature period to the end of his career that effectively ends the Classical Period at approximately 1825 (Beethoven died in 1827). The origin of what is now known as the Classical Period is marked by an upheaval of traditional European thinking, and the beginning of more scientific thought in both technology and religion. The new middle and merchant class, which had begun to establish itself in the Baroque, had now become a dominant force in socioeconomic life. The new challenge of the middle class to the old ideals held so strongly by the church and the monarchy was now being realized in the common people; great minds and exceptional talent no longer had to come from the aristocracy; they had become a possession of the layman. This great change in the fabric of western civilization came to be known as The Enlightenment.

Lighten Up!

The new attitude of the 18th century greatly differed from the ancient ideals that had previously been held for centuries. Society in general could not accept a scientific approach to religion and the laws of nature. Several of these scientists, including Galileo, Descartes, and Isaac Newton were persecuted and censored by the established government and the clergy. By the beginning of the 1700’s, however, the work of these men and other like-minded rationalists became gradually accepted by a more open-minded community. The theory of a rational universe where all nature subscribes to the laws of physics; the earth no longer being the center of the

universe, the planets revolving around the sun in a fixed orbit; all became part of the movement against superstition and toward an establishment of reasoning by observation and experience. With these revelations came a new confidence in the future and a decline in the influence of the church. Religious skepticism and even atheism increased as individuals questioned the all-powerful influence of God. In its place, the power of God in every man's soul, or divine reflection in man became the guiding principle for all "enlightened" individuals. Out of this came a new feeling of confidence in humanity and a questioning of established government and of faith. Universal education was beginning to take hold of the populace; the belief that all people are created equal led to both the American and French Revolutions during this period. Knowledge and rational understanding would undermine the dominance of absolute monarchy and religion that pervaded the Baroque.

On earth, man eventually saw himself as the steward of nature. The atmosphere in the 18th century was the belief that everything in nature could be changed by man's hands, which gave rise to the concept of seeing God in all nature. No longer did one have to seek God in the church; God was everywhere in the natural world, and it was man's duty to work with and reshape nature, eliminating all things artificial. Landscaping, gardening, and related fields blossomed with popularity, as evident in the Palace of Versailles, whose gardens span more than 4,200 acres (see picture below). It was an age where all people attempted to gather in all the knowledge they could. Travelers from foreign lands abounded; in fact, many rulers were foreign born, such as Catherine the Great of Russia (originally born in Germany!). Writers, composers, and artists freely



traveled to and from royal courts, sharing and exchanging their regional styles in a more cosmopolitan fashion. Even the monarchy began to promote social reform; freemasonry began to spread rapidly around Europe (Frederick the Great, Haydn, Goethe, and Mozart were all members) building on humanitarian ideals and brotherhood between all peoples.

Left: The Gardens of the Palace of Versailles, France.

The Musician in the Enlightenment

While most composers and performers were seeking new audiences and patrons to provide their income, money was still very difficult to come by for the majority of professional musicians. Though music publishers centered more on pieces created for amateurs looking for music to play for social events or at their own leisure, profit was to be made with the advent of the public concert series. Even though the old traditions of working for wealthy nobles continued to

persist past the Baroque (a composer could be expected to clean, valet, and even powder his master's wig in addition to his regular duties), composers soon became involved with other musical activities such as giving lessons, writing books and manuals, and free-lancing as performing artists. Though publishing music could sometimes be lucrative to a popular composer, most publishing companies allocated any funds mostly to its executives and not to the writer. In addition, copyright laws had not yet been affected, and music was freely copied without the composer's permission. "Original" versions of a composer's work had to be created by the publisher so that the public would know they were buying an "authentic" piece of work.

The most influential change in the history of music consumerism in the 18th century was the beginning of the **public concert**. All across Europe and America, the practice of selling tickets to the general public to attend concerts grew at an astounding rate. During the first few decades of establishing public concerts, however, entrepreneurs made little, if any, profit, though by 1750 its popularity began to accelerate. World capitals such as London and Paris pressed other regions of Europe to successfully implement this new tradition. For the musician and composer, the public concert put him directly in contact with a paying audience, which until this point had only been available for composers of opera.

What is the "Classical" Style?

The major difference between the musical styles of the Baroque and Classical ages was the changing attitude that music, like the other arts, should embody the qualities of the Enlightenment. A movement developed toward more "naturalness" in music, prompting composers to dispense with needless technical complications and elaborate ornamentation so freely expressed in the Baroque. If any ornamentation was to be created, it was only to complement the natural melodic line. According to these principles, music also had to symbolize nobility as well as entertain within the boundaries of what was considered tasteful. Around 1730, compositions such as the operas of Giovanni Pergolesi, the sonatas of C.P.E. Bach, and the symphonies of Giovanni Battista Sammartini were being written in the new style, now called **style galant**. Style galant, a term from the French, essentially meant "good taste", and is generally referred to as any music that was modern, or the latest fashion. It mirrored the same movement going on in the art world, promoting simplicity, perfection in its form, and seriousness while maintaining a sense of freedom. Its objective was to create universal appeal and bring the musician and audience together in its natural state. More simplistic compositional devices, such as the Alberti Bass, in which the supporting harmony creates a pattern outlining a chord (see below), was favored by many composers over other techniques such as imitative counterpoint, which was completely abandoned.

The image shows a musical score for the first movement of Mozart's Sonata K.545. The tempo is marked 'Allegro'. The score is in C major and 3/4 time. The top staff is the treble clef (melody) and the bottom staff is the bass clef (bass line). The bass line features a repeating eighth-note pattern: C4-E4-G4-A4-G4-F4-E4-D4, which outlines a C major triad. A fermata is placed over the first measure of the bass line. The title 'SONATA K.545, W.A. MOZART' is written above the second staff.

Left: In this example by Mozart, the Alberti bass line outlines the triad below the melody.

The greatest change between the music of the Baroque and Classical periods was in the melodic line itself. In the Baroque, a melody would normally be elaborated as in a fugue, challenging the performer to heed the technical demands of the piece. On the contrary, music in the 18th century featured melodies in more regular non-elaborate phrase structures that tended to be short with many cadences establishing the key. Different sections were separated by more obvious transitions, leading to formal structures that continue to this day, such as the binary, sonata, and rondo forms. This simplification was extremely popular with the public, which explains its longevity through the centuries. This is exhibited mostly in the music of Gluck, Haydn, and Mozart, who are sometimes viewed as the main composers of the “Viennese school”, primarily because music in Vienna was considered at the forefront of the modern world.

Another style of music similar to the style galant originated in Germany under the title of *empfindsamer stil*, meaning “the sensitive style”, or “the style of sensibility”. It is translated mostly as a style rooted in emotion, derived from the German word *empfinden*, or “to feel”. Of its many composers, **Carl Philipp Emanuel (C.P.E.) Bach** is considered one of its greatest practitioners; his works are laden with changing rhythmic figures and harmony in a quiet, refined understated manner (see Composer Profiles for details). Another influential composer in the Bach family to achieve success in this style was C.P.E.’s older brother Wilhelm, who was trained by his illustrious father from the age of ten and held a number of positions throughout his career before resigning from his posts and moving to Berlin, where he spent the remainder of his life.

Right: Wilhelm Friedemann Bach (1710-1784)

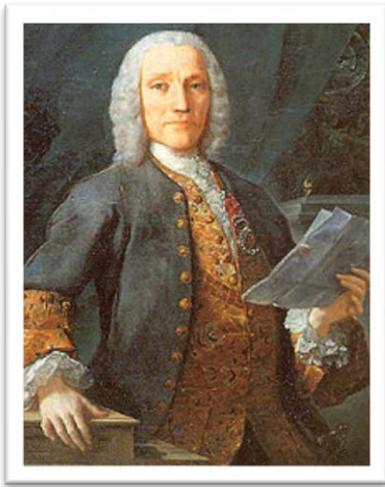
Early Classical Forms

Many of the musical forms orchestral composers use today reached their maturity in the Classical period. Both small and large scale instrumental music was written by composers of all European nations, mostly because of the development of the public concert and the demand of the middle class. In music composed for smaller audiences, known as **chamber music**, the trio sonata form of the Baroque gradually transitioned into the solo or duet sonata we are more familiar with in modern times. Though trio sonatas were still being composed, most composers abandoned writing them by 1750. While larger orchestral forms, such as the symphony, were being written for concert audiences, the solo keyboard sonata gained prominence in the home and mirrored the symphony in terms of importance and popularity. The word “**sonata**”, meaning “sound”, was the term accepted by composers to label a piece for one to three instruments, and usually contained a binary form structure. **Binary form** consisted of an opening melody establishing the key with frequent cadential motifs. The simplest kind of binary form then **modulates** (changes key) to the V chord, which then repeats from the beginning. The second section then usually stays in the V key until it eventually modulates back to the I chord where it finishes, sometimes with a brief coda. The binary form gave composers a definite



structure in which to create pieces, with could be modified in variations according to one's personal taste. In the 19th century, the term "sonata form" could be used for the first movement of symphonies, or any ternary structure involving an exposition, development, and recapitulation (more on that later).

The most influential composer of solo keyboard sonatas in the early 18th century was the Italian **Domenico Scarlatti** (1685-1757). Embracing the new style of the sonata, Scarlatti (pictured below) achieved an enormous amount of success in the service of the king of Portugal. When his student, the princess of Portugal, was married to Prince Ferdinand of Spain, Scarlatti followed her to Madrid, where he remained for the rest of his life. Most of Scarlatti's sonatas are in binary form,



and all 555 of them are composed in a single movement. They utilize the entire range of the instrument, and the musical material is usually repeated constantly to promote a sense of rhythm and phrasing. At times, Scarlatti would often employ unconventional modulations to distant keys, and even climaxes that would include all of the notes of a given key sounding together. While the clavichord and the harpsichord remained in popularity from the Baroque period, the new **pianoforte**, so named for its greater command over dynamics, replaced both of them around the middle of the century.

Left: The Italian composer Domenico Scarlatti

The single most influential large-scale musical form was the **symphony**. Nowhere else in western orchestral music is there a more popular genre. The earliest symphonies were simply scored like a trio sonata, often for two violins and bass. An extra part for violas was eventually added, forming the four-part string structure that is common by today's standards. The true origins of the symphony reside in the operatic overture, which normally had nothing to do with the opera as a whole. The typical operatic overture of the early Classical period contains three movements, in the order of fast-slow-fast. The first movement was usually an Allegro, followed by a slow lyrical Andante movement, and ending with a fast dance-like movement, usually a gigue or minuet. Since these overtures could be performed as separate pieces in concerts, it was natural then for composers to start writing these pieces independently of the stage. The city of Milan was known to house the earliest group of symphonic composers, the most famous of which was **Giovanni Battista Sammartini** (1700-1775), having composed around seventy. Germanic regions, such as Mannheim and Vienna, were also considered major centers for the development of the symphony orchestra. The Mannheim orchestra in particular was known for their extreme dynamic effects, such as the "Mannheim Steamroller", which was a crescendo passage building over several measures. Even Mozart could not help but comment on how impressed he was by the musicians' high level of talent. The symphony orchestra of the Classical period was much smaller than today's orchestras. A normal sized ensemble would consist of about four parts for strings, two oboes and two horns, a slow movement for strings alone, and no percussion. While

Sammartini was the earliest voice of the symphony, it was Joseph Haydn that would eventually become its champion.

The other large scale form that gained popularity in the 18th century was the **concerto**. Equally presentable in both the concert hall and in chamber music, the solo concerto replaced the *concerto grosso* made famous by Antonio Vivaldi and his contemporaries. Like the symphony, the concerto was also written in three movements, and usually utilized the keyboard, flute, or violin as its subject. A major composer of keyboard concertos in the mid-18th century was **Johann Christian Bach** (see Composer Profiles), J.S. Bach's youngest son. His sonatas and other works were prized by the young W.A. Mozart and were some of the first pieces he arranged. Johann Christian (J.C.) Bach's career eventually took him to England, where he known as "the London Bach". Other combinations of chamber music included the keyboard with one accompanying instrument, usually a violin. Most composers living during the years 1760-80 wrote for this combination, and soon other combinations entered the repertoire. Pieces for two violins, two violins and cello, and the string quartet (two violins, viola, and cello) came to form a welcome addition to the small chamber groups of the mid-18th century.

Vocal and Church Music

While instrumental music developed considerably in the 18th century, vocal music continued to hold popular influence in both the sacred and secular fields. Because the song was meant to be performed by both professionals and amateurs, composers made sure that their vocal works were deliberately kept simple for maximum accessibility. It was considered essential in the education of women in particular to have a thorough grounding in music in order to effectively entertain in the home. Singing was becoming more of a public art all over Europe. In Germany, vocal music, known as **lieder**, were organized into collections which were published and sold to fit existing melodies for mostly dances and marches. The accompanist was also given more independence as the 18th century progressed, paving the way for the art songs of the Romantic period.

The changing attitudes toward the church in the Enlightenment prevented the archaic musical styles of all that came before it to fasten a hold on the current society. Instead, the church, in order to keep its religious influence with the populace, had to adapt to the changing times. The predominant music of the *style galant* conformed to the ideals of a secular society, so music of the church reflected more of the operatic style. The *de capo* aria, recitative, and the use of orchestral accompaniment gave previous genres like the oratorio and anthem more of a theatrical quality until the two were nearly alike. People all over Europe were trying to diminish the influence of the church in the second half of the century, and the lack of sacred music during this time is apparent. Very little church music, both Catholic and Protestant, is performed today with the exception of some hymns and oratorios. It would not be until the time of Mozart and Haydn that a more "serious" style capable of providing deeper emotional music appropriate for worship would become available.

What's Opera, Doc?

The Italian musical theater tradition of the 18th century was divided into two main categories: **opera seria** and **opera buffa**. While opera buffa, otherwise known as comic opera, preceded opera seria, a change in its general content had to be effected so it would be fully accepted by the changing tastes of the public in the Enlightenment. While it generally was performed as a full-length work with six or more singing characters, it also served a moral purpose by making those characters the archetypes of important figures in society. They usually resemble a clever servant or maid, a corrupt lawyer, a miserly old man, and incompetent government figures. In Italy, the composer **Giovanni Pergolesi** (1710-1736) uses these characters in his opera *La Serva Padrona* (The Maid as Mistress) where the character of the maid cleverly tempts the naive aristocratic noble into marrying her. Operas such as these were not confined to Italy; in London, John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* was a huge success and prompted a large amount of composers to write in the same vein. *The Beggar's Opera* remained such a large success in England that a modern television version was created in the 1980's with The Who's Roger Daltrey in the lead role of Macheath. These characters would later form the basis of a country's national identity using models from folk stories and regional lore.

Though opera seria was generally considered the "serious" and more refined side of opera, the lighter elements from opera buffa slowly crept into the mainstream. While much of the focus of operas in the Baroque revolved around the primary singer, who would take the liberty of supplanting any given aria into every performance, regardless if it had nothing to do with the plot, composers now concentrated on increasing the drama of their operas, making the storyline just as important as the musical content. Many of the plots of opera seria came from the Italian playwright Pietro Metastasio, whose dramas were set hundreds of times by countless composers, including Mozart. Morality also plays a role in opera seria; most of the time the lead character faces a moral dilemma at the end of the opera, choosing duty and honor over love and personal gain. Even the aria itself was altered to conform to the demands of the *style galant*. Songs became shorter with the elimination of melodic embellishments and needless cadenzas, which were only composed in the first place to showcase a singer's vocal abilities. An aria's form started to become more like the form of a concerto, with specific key changes and a more formalized structure. These changes were all part of an "opera reform" that composers used to bring opera more in line with the principles of the Enlightenment, particularly in the works of Christoph Gluck.

Christoph Willibald Gluck, born in Bavaria (see Composer Profiles), began writing his operas in the traditional Italian style, but in the 1750's was strongly affected by the opera reform movement. Gluck wished to serve the poetry of his librettos by seeking "a beautiful simplicity" and avoided all showings of virtuosity and difficult technical passages. Once again, the idea of a more natural and "noble" melody inspired Gluck to write his operas *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Alceste*, both of which became permanent members of the operatic repertoire. The tradition of simple, natural melodic lines paired with the expressive emotions bound within the plot inspired many composers to imitate Gluck's works in the following decades through to the Romantic period.

Industry and the Concept of “Genius”

Just as the Enlightenment took hold of the idea that man had the ability to communicate with God directly, without the need for grand cathedrals or superstitious religious services, throughout the mid to late 18th century man's role gradually changed from an agricultural to a more technological function. Man's ability to create machinery to do his bidding changed fields of business from laborers to repairers, from farmers to inventors. In 1779, the first steam engine was built by James Watt. In 1794, the cotton gin was patented by Eli Whitney. The first telescope, lightning rod, hot-air balloon, and the chemical battery were created in the Classical period. As man saw himself able to remake the world of nature, science too extended man's reach over his world. This period in history is generally known as the **Industrial Revolution**, and is characterized by the sudden explosion of technology and industry all around Europe and America. Textiles and cotton mills, metallurgical and iron factories sprang up everywhere, granting man new sources of power and commerce. This was not always popular; several mills in England during 1779 were destroyed by people who believed the machines would put them out of work. Industrial accidents were also common; workers were hired under grueling conditions with little to no safety precautions. But technology and the power of industry were too powerful to be slowed down. The face of the earth was changing, and in the wake of these new achievements, man would see himself become God.

In the arts, this led to a new emphasis that goodness should come out of entertainment and the practice of music. The idea that “art imitates life” lay at the foundational belief that feeling and emotion should always be at the core of art. Since man gained a new confidence over their futures and their ability to remake their world, artists strove for ways to bring powerful emotions into their art which could still sway the public beyond the power of rationality. The artist who could accomplish this would be seen above his peers as a possessor of exceptional talent, otherwise known as a genius. Under this concept, the genius was not made and refined by training, as other composers in the past had been seen. Instead, the genius possessed a natural ability that was born within them and could not be trained. It is now what we may call the “X” factor, describing a human being with significant natural ability over everyone else in their field. Genius had now become a gift from nature.

Music at this time started to utilize the idea of creating powerful emotional material to shake man's sensibilities. In Germany, the simplest language of creating powerful feelings on both sides of the emotional spectrum was called **sturm und drang** (storm and stress). Its most basic principal was that if feeling equaled goodness, then intense emotion should lay at the heart of every piece of art. This also became a literary movement, particularly in the works of Goethe (*“The Sorrows of Young Werther”*). Architecture also changed dramatically with the rediscovery of ancient ruins in Greece and Rome. From the widespread resurgence of Roman art came the term “Classical”, which was applied to the architectural style of the late 18th century. Even colonial American architecture contains these features; the White House, the Capitol Building, and the Library of Congress, among others are considered “Neo-Classicism”, which also was symbolically reminiscent of the early Roman democratic government. All of the creative arts aimed to move the public through the power of their expression. From pity to horror, the emotional gamut of art

was explored. J.H. Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1780) shows how strongly the artist wished to convey horror to the 18th century audience. With its basis in how music affects the imagination and the concept of the genius, there was a strong psychological and philosophical interest in the power of music. As a result, we now begin to see the first examples of the composer regarded as genius in the Classical period.

Haydn, Master of the Classical Period

Franz Joseph Haydn (see Composer Profiles for a more detailed biography) would come to be the first symbol of the Classical Period with his prodigious output and his simplified but mature compositional style. Known as the father of the modern symphony, Haydn had no formal training, yet managed to attain a position as court composer to the most powerful family in Hungary, the Esterházy, where he worked for nearly thirty years. He was good friends with Mozart, and even Beethoven studied with him at one point. Though he was never the performance virtuoso that Mozart and Beethoven would become, Haydn's establishment of the symphony as the most dominant orchestral form placed him in a position of extreme wealth and influence. The earlier symphonic Classical form, which is present in Haydn's early works, consisted of a three movement structure opening with an Allegro movement, followed by an Andante in the parallel or relative minor, and ending with a fast dance-like movement in 3/8 or 6/8. Haydn replaced this form with the modern four movement symphony, which became the current standard from the Classical Period onward. The four movements were composed as follows: I. Allegro; II. Andante or Adagio; III. Minuet and Trio; and IV. Allegro or Presto. Haydn later applied this form to his string quartets, which greatly influenced his young pupil Beethoven in his later works. Of the four movements, special consideration must be mentioned of the first movement, which Haydn composed in what is now called **sonata form**. This title comes from the early structure of the trio sonata, pioneered by Arcangelo Corelli and his contemporaries from the Baroque Period and subsequently improved thereafter, though the name "sonata form" was not used until the Romantic Period. Sonata, or **first movement form** because it is usually present in the first movement of a symphony, is composed in three sections, known as the exposition, the development, and the recapitulation.

The **exposition** begins by establishing the key of the movement and proceeds to briefly travel to other keys before making a transition to the dominant, or V chord of the relative major or minor, depending on the opening key of the movement. The transition usually introduced a secondary theme in the new key which is more harmonically stable than the opening section. The exposition then repeats itself after a closing section that would be based on a cadence played by the entire orchestra, or *tutti*. This section would normally be separate from both the primary and secondary themes, and would sometimes include completely new material. The **development**



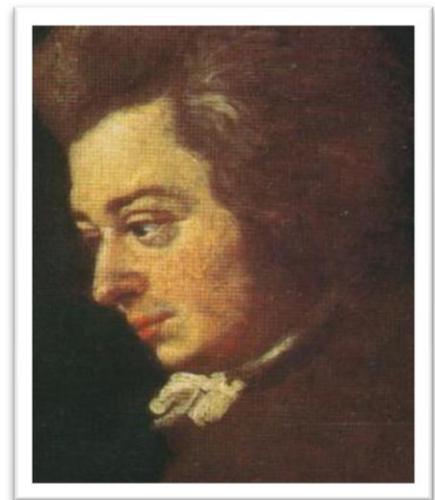
J.H. Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1780)

section is characterized by extreme instability of the key and would begin by a restatement of the primary theme. This would quickly be expanded and transformed with earlier material from the secondary theme, and would be put through twists and turns of different keys and rhythms, including sequences, fugues, or other counterpoint techniques. When the **recapitulation** occurs, all of the opening material is restated (sometimes verbatim) in the original key. The secondary theme this time around is also played in the original key, which could also be intensified by adding abrupt silences, greater rhythmic motion, or fuller orchestration to add suspense and energy. The first movement could also contain a closing section, known as a **coda**, to finish the movement, usually with a *tutti* establishment of the key in a final burst of energy. Haydn, however, did not usually write a coda to end the first movements of his symphonies; instead, he simply expanded the closing section of the recap and orchestrated it for a greater drive to the conclusion of the movement.

While the first movement became the most influential movement of the symphony, the second movement, the Andante, provided the listener with a period of relaxation (except in the second movement of Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony, proving Haydn's penchant for practical jokes!). The third movement was a light Minuet and Trio, written in the popular dance style, and the fourth movement, usually an Allegro or Presto, brought the listener back to the energetic intensity that was introduced in the first movement. Haydn would adorn this movement with little tricks of abrupt silences, sudden changes of key, and unpredictable alterations of thematic material, rhythm, and orchestration. His symphonies are considered one of the greatest achievements of music history and served to inspire countless composers throughout the ages, resulting in the symphony taking its place as the most dominant orchestral form through to modern times.

Mozart, the Great Prodigy

Joannes Chysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart, known to us today as **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**, remains the archetype of the composer-genius personified by the Classical Period, the quintessential gifted child whose talents seems to have been granted by God himself. While only reaching the age of 35 (see Composer Profiles for a more detailed biography), W.A. Mozart created during his short lifetime some of the most recognized and beloved music in history. Who cannot say they have heard the opening bars of the Serenade No. 13 in G, known by the more popular name *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*? While many stories and myths have been told about Mozart's life, many of them center on his incredible talent at such a young age. It is true that he did begin composing around the age of five, but most of his works are very basic and had been improved by his father to showcase in performances. It is also a myth that



*An unfinished portrait of Mozart
by Joseph Lange, 1782*

Mozart learned music without formally studying, and while Mozart did possess perfect pitch, allowing him to have entire works thought up before even writing them down, Mozart did comprehensively study the contemporary music of his day while traveling around Europe with his family. Most notably, he was influenced by the chamber music of J.C. Bach and the large scale symphonies of Joseph Haydn, both of which he developed friendships with. He later discovered J.S. Bach's music during his final decade, which considerably influenced his contrapuntal technique in his later works. Finally, thanks to the 1984 movie *Amadeus*, starring Tom Hulce as Mozart and F. Murray Abraham as Antonio Salieri, Mozart's image was portrayed as a spoiled man-child that, while having been given the great gift of musical genius, was immature and emotionally stunted. From the considerable amount of correspondence with his father that has



Tom Hulce as W.A. Mozart in the film *Amadeus* (1984)

survived, we learn that Mozart was deeply caring about his family and though uneducated about financial matters and plain “street smarts”, he was not the foolish clown that *Amadeus* describes him. For example, it is doubtful that Mozart and Salieri even met, let alone cultivated a rivalry that would eventually result in Mozart's death. Unfortunately, *Amadeus* is not the first piece of popular culture that exaggerates the circumstances of Mozart's life. The Russian composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov wrote the opera *Mozart and Salieri* based on a drama by the famous novelist Alexander Pushkin in 1830. In the opera, Salieri dines with Mozart and subsequently poisons him, comparing him to

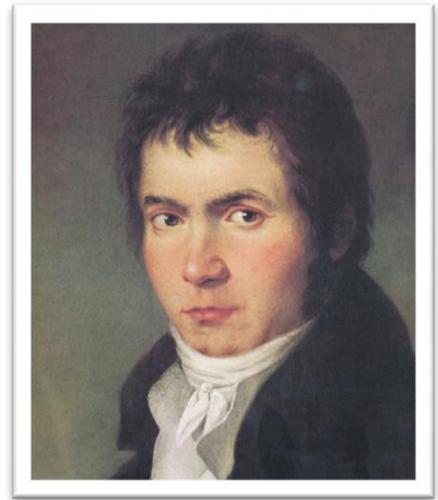
Michaelangelo as Mozart leaves, his death being implied. Once again, the Romantic notion of dying for one's art obscures the truth, that Mozart died having not taken proper care of himself and in the absence of proper medical care combined with his financial situation at the time, led to his early demise. Many theories by modern medical professionals have been offered to explain Mozart's death, but the most common is acute rheumatic fever, an inflammatory disease that affects the heart, joints, and brain.

Mozart's music, though while popular in the first few years of his time in Vienna starting in 1781, was for the most part not fully appreciated by his contemporaries, leading to his eventual downfall. His music was not rediscovered until the 20th century, where it is now played throughout the world and is easily represented as the highest form of orchestral music in the Classical Period. Mozart wrote and mastered every genre of music of his time: symphony, string quartet, oratorio, chamber music, concerto, sonata, and opera. His greatest achievements were the development of the classical concerto and opera, of which most of them have entered into the permanent orchestral repertoire. His music is chiefly characterized by clarity of harmonic progression, balance of form, and simplicity of thematic material that demonstrates an abundance of imagination and industry. His catalogue consists of over six hundred original works and arrangements. His influence on the young **Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827) was profound, as was his influence with subsequent generations. As a teenager, Beethoven (see Composer Profiles

for a more detailed biography) left his hometown of Bonn, Germany to study with Mozart, and the story goes that after hearing Beethoven improvise on the piano for the first time, Mozart leaned over to his companion and said, “Watch out for that boy. Someday he will give the world something to talk about”. Unfortunately, news of his mother’s ill health forced Beethoven to return to Bonn, and by the time he was able to travel again to Vienna, Mozart had passed away. When Beethoven had begun to establish himself as a successful composer, many of his contemporaries began to refer to him as Mozart’s successor. Mozart’s works played a considerable role in Beethoven’s compositions; his Symphony No. 5 is directly influenced by Mozart’s Symphony No. 40, and Beethoven even arranged and set cadenzas to several of Mozart’s works. It is with these two composers that we begin to see the development between the Classical and Romantic Periods, with Mozart firmly symbolizing the height of the Classical and Beethoven receiving the torch and taking it into the future.

Beethoven and the Passing of an Age

In 1804, Napoleon Bonaparte declared himself emperor of France and set in motion events that would change the course of history. In Vienna, a then-34 year old Ludwig van Beethoven was completing the final touches of his Third Symphony, titled “*Eroica*”, or “heroic”. On the title page of his new work was a dedication to Napoleon, who at the time was First Consul. According to his pupil and assistant Ferdinand Ries, when Beethoven discovered that Napoleon had crowned himself supreme ruler of France he “broke into a rage and exclaimed: ‘So he is no more than a common mortal! Now, too, he will tread under foot all the rights of man, indulge only his ambition; now he will think himself superior to all men, become a tyrant!’ Beethoven went to the table, seized the top of the title-page, tore it in half, and threw it on the floor”. Beethoven’s prophetic assessment of Napoleon would ring true, as Napoleon would grant titles of nobility to his family and close friends in an attempt to conquer all of Europe. Beethoven, however, had a different idea of what constituted nobility. In the wake of the French Revolution, which had ended not more than five years before Napoleon’s rise to absolute power, Beethoven saw Napoleon as the embodiment of those ideals of liberty and brotherhood, ushering man into a new golden age. As a commoner himself, Beethoven saw genius and industry as the one true measure of nobility; the popularity of his music allowed him to sit next to the crowned heads of Europe, and Beethoven saw himself not only as their equal, but even their superior. This attitude is what sets Beethoven so far apart from composers such as Mozart and Haydn; while both these composers would serve the nobility with humility, Beethoven believed that the nobility should serve *him*. Whatever price he asked for the completion of a work, publishers paid. Whatever Beethoven would charge for piano and composition lessons, people paid, no matter their station. And while Beethoven embodied the qualities that many people of his day would call



Beethoven at age 34; portrait by Joseph Willibrod Mähler in 1804

arrogant, argumentative, and even anti-social, it reflected that changing tide that would reshape the political and social structure of Europe.

Upon the onset of Napoleon's rule, it became clear that he intended to establish a dynasty by placing his family and friends upon several important thrones of Europe. The kings who had not sworn allegiance to him began to feel very insecure upon their thrones, and in order to retain popularity and loyalty among their people, began to promise several political reforms, such as a constitutional government, free elections, and other concessions that would be implemented when the threat of Napoleon's expanding empire was eliminated. When the Napoleonic Wars ended with Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, and his subsequent exile to the island of St. Helena where he would remain until his death, those promises of liberty was quickly abandoned. France restored the monarchy and the power of the Roman Catholic Church, while independence movements in Germany, Austria, and Italy were quickly censored and suppressed. The damage had been done, however, and in the transition to the Romantic Era a new class system divided society, setting the worker against the aristocrat, not unlike the blue collar/white collar division in our own present-day society. These trends would have their counterparts in the arts, with Beethoven at the forefront of the revolution.

In 1824, Beethoven completed his Ninth Symphony, which to this day stands as one of the crowning achievements in all of music. While completely deaf and having to resort to notebooks so his friends could communicate with him, Beethoven placed all his confidence in mankind in his final symphonic work. It is a stark contrast from his personal life; he was involved in a custody battle for his nephew, his health was continuously deteriorating, and he was becoming more anti-social and introverted. Yet this is the same period where the famous "Ode to Joy" theme, written by Friedrich Schiller, symbolizing hope and brotherhood makes its first appearance. The story of its premiere is equally legendary; apparently Beethoven had taken the liberty of standing behind the conductor for the entire performance (he had given up conducting years before, as it consistently resulted in disaster due to his deafness). When the symphony had concluded, Beethoven was so lost in the music that he did not recognize the performance was over. One of the performers had to take him by the arm and turn him around to face the wildly cheering audience, which gave him five standing ovations. It is the Ninth Symphony which fully characterizes Beethoven's inner psyche; the desire to rise above class and in the words of Schiller's poem, "*All men become brothers*". The final word of the symphony is "Godly-spark", once again symbolizing Beethoven's belief that all people have the divine inside them, regardless of birthright or social circumstances. It is no small wonder that the "Ode to Joy" portion of the symphony was chosen by the European Union in 1985 to be the National Anthem of Europe.

The legacy of the Classical Era points firmly what is to come in the latter half of the 19th century. The works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven among others introduced the world to the concept of original genius, which countless composers would strive to imitate and create their own unique voice. Of course, it is always problematic to place a label on dates and time periods; many scholars are divided on where to place Beethoven based on his wealth of material. Most historians place him squarely between the Classic and the Romantic, bringing an end to the Classical forms of Haydn and Mozart and ushering in a new age that many other composers would follow. With that, the Classical Era did not simply vanish, but merely transformed under

the auspices of change. Many Romantic composers after Beethoven, including Schubert, Mendelssohn, and Weber, shared similarities with the Classical style of Haydn and Mozart, and even composers of the 20th century including Stravinsky and Prokofiev experimented with a “Neo-Classic” sound. While the forces of the 18th century were influential, the increased repertoire of symphonic and instrumental works, increasing variety of instruments, and changes in length and harmonic technique all led to change that signaled the end of the Classical Period.

For Review:

- The **Classical Period** generally spans the years 1750 to 1825, and is marked by the death of Johann Sebastian Bach in 1750, culminating around Ludwig van Beethoven’s death in 1827.
- The beginning of the Classical Period is known as **The Enlightenment**, and is characterized by rational thinking over superstition, a decline in the aristocracy and the church, and man’s ability to reshape nature and create a heightened sense of brotherhood.
- Music in the Enlightenment strove to attain a quality of “**naturalness**” and also attempts to attain a more cosmopolitan style that could be practiced throughout the whole of Europe.
- Music publishing and the beginnings of the **public concert** were extremely influential in bringing composers closer to their audience and paying consumers.
- The Classical style exhibited a move toward “naturalness”, away from elaborate technical ornamentation. Simplistic tools, such as the **Alberti Bass**, were embraced by many composers.
- A major stylistic difference between the Baroque and Classical Periods was a more “noble” and “tasteful” quality known as the **style galant**, or the “modern style”.
- Early classical forms included the **symphony**, **concerto**, and **solo sonata**. The most influential composers of keyboard sonatas included **C.P.E. Bach** and **Domenico Scarlatti**, while **Giovanni Battista Sammartini** was a master of the early Classical symphony.
- Smaller influential forms included the solo **keyboard sonata**, which gradually added the accompaniment of another instrument, usually a violin. From there other forms were created, including the string trio and string quartet.
- Vocal music continued to be popular in the home, but sacred music needed to be altered due to the changing tides of the Enlightenment. Church music started to sound more like music of the theatre, and the formalistic devices of the sonata and concerto started to take hold.
- Opera music, both **opera buffa** and **opera seria**, started to make the plot more of the general focus. Composers such as **Giovanni Pergolesi** and **Christoph Willibald Gluck** advanced opera reform using the principles of the *style galant* and *empfindsamer Stil*.
- The **Industrial Revolution** gave European and American society a new role as technology increased at an accelerated rate. This led composers to use extreme emotion in

their works to wake the imaginations of the public through **Sturm und drang**, or “storm and stress”.

- The new concept of the “genius” also changed society’s view of the artist, claiming that true genius was born, not made, and that the geniuses towered over normal society with the power of their art.
- Known as the “father of the symphony”, **Joseph Haydn** perfected the four movement form that composers use today, including the first movement **sonata form**, made up of three sections: the **exposition, development, and recapitulation**.
- **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** is considered the greatest composer of the Classical Period. He composed in all major genres and epitomized the concept of genius with his technique of simplified harmonies, rhythmic variations, and song-like themes that symbolize the compositional technique of the late 18th century.
- **Ludwig van Beethoven** was a crucial figure in the transition to the Romantic Era, and is considered one of the greatest composers in all history. His music reflects his personal views of mankind, and is one of the first composers to make himself the hero of his own music.

Suggested Listening:

Domenico Scarlatti: *Sonata in D*, K. 119; other keyboard sonatas

Giovanni Battista Sammartini: *Symphony No. 32 in F*, other symphonies

Giovanni Pergolesi: *La serva padrona*

John Gay: *The Beggar’s Opera*

C.P.E. Bach: *Keyboard Sonata in A, H. 186, Wq. 55/4*; other keyboard sonatas

J.C. Bach: *Keyboard Concerto in E-flat, Op. 7, No. 5*; other keyboard sonatas and concertos

Christoph Willibald Gluck: *Orfeo ed Euridice, Alceste*

Joseph Haydn:

Symphonies: No. 45 “Farewell”; No. 92 “Oxford”; No. 94 “Surprise”; No. 96 “Miracle”

String Quartets: Op. 33, No. 2 – “The Joke”, others

Oratorios: *The Creation; The Seasons*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:

Symphonies: No. 35 “Haffner”, K. 385; No. 38 “Prague”, K. 504; No. 40 in G minor, K. 550; No. 41 “Jupiter”, K. 551

Operas: *The Marriage of Figaro*, K. 492; *Don Giovanni*, K. 527; *The Magic Flute*, K. 620

Chamber Works: “Haydn” String Quartets, No. 14-19; Serenade No. 13 in G: “*Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*” K. 525

Concertos: Piano Concerto No. 26 in D, K. 537; Horn Concerto No. 4 in E flat, K. 495;

Clarinet Concerto in A, K. 622

Ludwig van Beethoven:

First Period: Symphonies No. 1 & 2; String Quartets, Op. 18;

Piano Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13, "*Pathétique*"

Second Period: Symphonies No. 3-8; *Fidelio*; *Rasumovsky* Quartets, Op. 59; Piano Sonata Op. 53 in C major: "*Waldstein*"; Piano Sonata Op. 27: "*Moonlight*"; Bagatelle No. 25 in A minor: "*Für Elise*"

Third Period: Symphony No. 9, *Missa Solemnis*; *Diabelli* Variations, Op. 120

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