The Classical Period (1750–1820 C.E.)

ABOUT THE CLASSICAL PERIOD...

The mood of the Classical Period was one of simplicity, balance, and logic. The simple grandeur of ancient buildings discovered in Greece in the 18th century impressed Europeans. Classical architects adopted the even columns and symmetrical structure of Greek temples. Proportion and symmetry replaced the fancy, decorative styles of the Baroque Period (1600–1750).

During the Classical Period, political revolutions in America and France overthrew oppressive kings and established in their place governments run by common people. The balance of classical architecture seemed to be perfect for the new America and France, where equality and liberty were essential. For example, American politician Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) had seen classical structures on a visit to Paris, and he used this style when he designed buildings in the United States.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

During the Classical Period, the merchant class became more affluent and influential. Rule by kings and queens was being replaced by democratic governments, and the abundant wealth of the royalty that had funded composers and artists during the Baroque Period began to disappear.

The merchant class did not only spend their new-found money and spare time listening to music; they also began studying it. Composers thus began to support themselves by writing instruction books or methods, giving music lessons, and composing music that merchant class amateur musicians could play. "Chamber" music, such as quartets or quintets, was written for few enough instruments that families could play together as entertainment in their home. Important Classical Period composers include Franz Josef Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven.

CLASSICAL MUSICAL STYLE

Music during the Classical Period became less fanciful and cluttered than Baroque music. Balance, emotional restraint, and clarity governed pieces composed for the public concert halls and the homes of amateurs. The texture of Classical music was generally homophonic—a single dominant melody accompanied by chords or other secondary material. Dynamics, tempo markings, and phrasing were all written into the music so that little was left for the musician to worry about, making the music easier for amateurs to play.

Prescribed musical forms were used consistently by composers. The most popular large-scale instrumental form during the Classical Period was the symphony. Early Classical symphonies had three movements in a fast-slow-fast format. Another popular type of Classical music was the solo concerto, which evolved from the Baroque concerto grosso form. Composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) wrote concerti for many of the orchestral instruments and for the piano.

INSTRUMENT UPDATE

The Classical Period marked the birth of the modern symphony orchestra. For the first time in history, instrumental music became more important than vocal music. Instrumental music was appreciated for its own sake, not simply to accompany dancing or singing. While during the Baroque Period orchestras were very small with mainly stringed instruments, the Classical orchestra greatly increased the number and variety of instruments. Clarinets were invented during the 18th century, and they were soon added to the orchestra. The most popular solo instrument of the Classical Period was the piano, and the violin was also common. Solo recitals were rare in concert halls, but solo or chamber music performances were often held in the home or among friends.

The Tucker House in Raleigh, North Carolina, was built to imitate the style of architecture from the Classical Period.
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SIGNS OF THE TIMES (History and Culture)
The Classical Period of creativity, particularly as it relates to music, is considered a climactic point in the progressive history of the arts. This artistic period reflected a far more restrained atmosphere, giving great attention to clarity, balance, and emotional moderation than had previously been seen. As with other eras, a number of influences were brought to bear which resulted in this pursuit of a new direction of expression:

- Austria and Germany became important, extremely active centers of development and patronage;
- This new age, also known as The Age of Reason, emphasized intellect and logic, and did not value unrestrained emotional expression;
- Theaters, concert halls, and opera houses were now well established and provided a venue for the entertainment of all classes;
- Influential publishing houses were now able to impact composers and the public alike as they gave preference to some and excluded others;
- Patronage of church music was steadily declining, which inhibited any growth in religious arts.

The transition from the Baroque Period into the Classical Period probably displayed more overlap than in any preceding period. Added to this overlap was the style period known as Rococo, which was most predominantly seen in France, but also found its way into the aristocratic circles of Italy and Germany. The Rococo influence took many of the characteristics of the Baroque Period, such as flamboyant, emotional, and dramatic expression, and amplified it, reflecting the greed and exploitive nature of the society. This, in turn, led to the French Revolution. One of the greatest examples of the extremely ornate Rococo style can be seen in the Palace of Versailles.

The progress of the Classical movement was also greatly influenced by economic changes. War and inflation impacted the music on a number of levels as it limited the number of quality musicians and inhibited the move toward larger orchestras. These altered circumstances acted as a pressure, causing the Classical style to exhibit a more refined, balanced, and elegant character.

ARTISTIC PURPOSE
More than ever before, the arts, and particularly music, functioned primarily as entertainment for all classes. With the popularity of concert halls and theaters, entertainment was now a public pursuit. For the aristocracy and nobility, musical performances in exclusive salons were a fashionable pastime. A direct result of the increasing growth of publishing companies was the availability of quality music for the amateur performer (both vocal and instrumental) in the home. Though it was now only a secondary venue for the arts, the Church employed composers and artists to create sacred music that reflected the tastes of the secular culture.

CREATIVE CHARACTERISTICS
Simplistic form and symmetry were the hallmarks of music in the Classical Period. The ornamentation of the Baroque Period was steadily phased out and emphasis on a lyrical melody over a clean, uncomplicated harmony became the predominant structure. One of the most interesting characteristics to take shape in Classical music was a new importance given to silence as an element of the rhythm. Composers began using rhythmic silence as a way to enhance the pulse of a composition. Another noteworthy development in this period was the shift in interest to instrumental forms of music over vocal music. This was seen particularly in the increasing popularity of the new musical forms of the symphony and the concerto.

INSTRUMENT UPDATE
With the invention of the clarinet, wind ensemble music became increasingly popular as composers began mixing and blending instrumentation to develop new tone and color for their pieces. The fashionable Harmonic groups sprang up in many of the courts of Europe's nobility as kings, princes, and counts all considered it necessary to maintain an "in-house" Harmonic group. Although these groups typically included eight players, several courts sought recognition for themselves by employing additional musicians. Later in the period, additional instruments were used, perhaps to accommodate more complex harmonies as the Classical Period transitioned into the Romantic Period.
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SIGNS OF THE TIMES (History and Culture)
The 18th century was an interesting dichotomy of systemized, formalized intellectual processes in the cultural influences of the times—politics, religion, industry, art, music, and literature—juxtaposed with an age of revolution beginning with the American Revolution and climaxing with the French Revolution. At some level, this dichotomy was seen specifically in the music of the times, as composers began embracing more and more structure in their music forms while seeking to break free from the highly ornamental, emotional music of the Baroque Period. Many small courts of nobility and aristocracy that formed the primary base of patronage for musicians and artists sought to maintain their status and position through the arts and social standing rather than through political and economic influences.

Several significant developments in the world of music took place during the Classical Period from a social and a business standpoint. Music became a much more international venture with publication and touring rapidly growing, crossing borders and oceans. Concert societies became very fashionable venues for the promotion of particular composers or styles of music. Another development of this period came with the introduction of folk music and its themes into serious music. This was most likely due to the wide class range of the 18th century audience. With the increase in venues for public concerts, musical entertainment was available to almost every class of people. This and the fact that music was the primary form of entertainment caused composers to turn their attention to themes that would ring familiar to their audiences.

ARTISTIC PURPOSE
Music saw several significant changes during this period, particularly at an instrumental level. The structure of the orchestra changed, increasing in size and range. More important than these basic changes, however, was a shift in the way pieces were orchestrated and the way instruments were used. This new orchestration technique created clear divisions as to which instruments became devoted to melody and which would carry the supporting harmonies. Subdivisions between the various instrumental choirs were also born in this time, such as Violin I and Violin II, Trumpet I and II, etc.

Vocal music continued to progress through opera, oratorios, and choruses. Great importance was given to these forms and they gained the most popularity among the people who loved the elegant spectacle of theatrical music. Music for dancing also became increasingly popular as the aristocratic society pursued their love of gaiety and entertainment.

CREATIVE CHARACTERISTICS
The clean, symmetrical forms of the Classical Period created a very simple texture to the music, which allowed for a greater demonstration of dynamic and phrasing expression. While simplicity was important to composers of this era, variety was equally important. Diversity in the use of keys, rhythms, moods, and timbres characterized music of the Classical Period as composers strove to achieve dramatic results. Also, with the simplification of overall texture, detail became more important and allowed for rhythmic nuances such as opening fanfares, funeral march rhythms, or minuet form. These details also assisted in providing the unifying tone of a given movement.

Form structure also became more defined as the era progressed. Concerto grosso (concerto for more than one musician) was slowly evolving into the more popular solo concerto (concerto featuring only one soloist). The most well-known composers of the day—Haydn, Mozart, Gluck, and Beethoven—all contributed to the development of the style that is most clearly identified as that of the Classical Period.

INSTRUMENT UPDATE
Military bands continued to evolve during the Classical Period, as two different types of groups developed. One style of band was very much like the popular Harmonie groups, consisting of eight instruments and frequently performing Harmoniemusik. The second type of band included the basic octet along with some Turkish instrumentation that included heavy brass, percussion, and piccolos.