

# Music 111 – Music Appreciation

## Music of the Classical Period (1750-1820)

### INTELLECTUAL CHARACTERISTICS

The eighteenth century is referred to as the “Age of Reason” or the “Age of Enlightenment.” It was a period when educated people were involved in intellectual pursuits. The name “classical period” refers to their admiration for the artistic and intellectual accomplishments of the ancient Greeks. They admired the balance and symmetry of Greek art and architecture. Emotions were less important than reason in the pursuit of truth.

### MUSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

- Musical center of the period is Vienna, Austria
- Melodies are simple, pleasant, & folk-like, made up of short phrases arranged in a statement-answer pattern.
- Rhythm is metrical with a steady beat, except in recitatives.
- Dynamics now include gradual increase (crescendo) and decrease (decrescendo.)
- Harmony of the Baroque period continues but the basso continuo is abandoned and chords change less frequently.
- Timbre: the orchestra was expanded to include pairs of flutes, oboes, bassoons, French horns, trumpets, and eventually clarinets (after they were perfected mechanically.) Timpani also added to the orchestra and the piano replaces the harpsichord as the favored keyboard instrument.
- Texture is basically homophonic although there is some use of counterpoint in sections of works.
- Form: (Single movement forms) Several new and important forms are developed with composres increased interest in the development of themes in a composition: sonata-allegro, theme and variations, rondo, minuet and trio.
- New instrumental genres (Multi-movement forms) such as the symphony, solo concerto, string quartet, and solo sonata were developed.
- Continued use of important genres such as Opera, Masses, and Requiems.

### SINGLE MOVEMENT FORMS

**Sonata-allegro form** – sometimes called “first movement form,” often used in the first movements of symphonies, concertos, and chamber music pieces. Three main sections:

- **Exposition** – introduces themes
  - **First Theme** (Tonic Key) Lively, Serious or vibrant in character
  - **Bridge/Transition** (modulates)
  - **Second Theme** (new key) Lyrical in character
  - **Closing/Codetta** (same key as 2<sup>nd</sup> theme)

Exposition is often repeated.

(Concertos feature a double exposition; first for the orchestra alone and then for the orchestra with the soloist,)

- **Development** – develops themes / changes keys several time (modulatory)
  - Working over musical ideas
  - Occasionally new themes introduced
- **Recapitulation** – themes restated
  - **First Theme** (tonic key)
  - **Bridge/Transition** (can be longer than original/doesn't modulate)
  - **Second Theme** (tonic key)
  - **Closing** ( tonic key)
  - **Coda** (tonic key) An extended ending. Coda is longer than codetta and is designed to provide a convincing conclusion to the movement.) Coda means “tail.”

**Theme and Variations** – a basic musical idea, a theme, is repeated over and over and is changed each time. Each variation of the theme is usually the same length, although changes of melody, rhythm, harmony, accompaniment, dynamics, and tone color (timbre) are common. Most variations are in the same key as the original theme, although it is not uncommon to include one variation in the relative minor key.

**Rondo** – The basic idea is to contrast the return of the main theme (A) alternating with contrasting themes (B)(C). Usually in 5-part form (ABACA), or 7-part (ABACABA) although other arrangements are possible. Sometimes a form known as **sonata-rondo** is used which may be diagrammed as ABA-development-ABA. Often used as the last movement of a concerto.

**Minuet and Trio** – Originated as a dance, it features triple meter and usually has a moderate tempo. The form of the movement can be diagrammed as “A”(minuet), “B”(trio), “A”(minuet.) The contrasting trio section is often quieter, uses fewer instruments, and can include woodwind solos.

**Scherzo** – Like a minuet it features ABA form and triple meter but usually moves more quickly (faster tempo) and can have a humorous character. (“Scherzo” means joke in Italian.)

### MULTI-MOVEMENT FORMS

**SYMPHONY** – is a large, multi-movement work composed for orchestra featuring (usually) **four separate movements**. The four movements are contrasting in tempo and mood. Usually each movement uses its own set of themes. Normally the first, third, and fourth movements are in the tonic key, while the second movement can be in a contrasting key.

- The **first movement** is usually fast (although it may be preceded by a slow introduction) and is composed in sonata-allegro form which stresses the development of short motives.
- The **second movement**, generally not in the tonic key, features broad, song-like melodies and may be in sonata-allegro form, theme and variations, or ABA form, etc.
- The **third movement** is usually in a moderate, dance-like tempo. Frequently a minuet and trio or scherzo.
- The **fourth movement** is usually fast, lively, and brilliant (lighter in character than the first movement for Haydn and Mozart symphonies.) It is often in sonata-allegro or sonata-rondo form.

**CONCERTO (or Solo Concerto)** is a large work composed for solo instrumentalist and orchestra which is usually in **three movements**.

- The **first movement** is usually fast, and in “concerto sonata-allegro form” which features a double exposition. The first exposition is played by the orchestra and the second exposition is played by the soloist with the orchestra. Another feature of the concerto is the **cadenza**, which is usually heard just before the coda. A cadenza is an extended instrumental solo in which the soloist demonstrates his or her virtuosity. The orchestra is silent during the cadenza and joins in at the end of the cadenza to continue with the coda and end the movement. Cadenzas are usually heard in the first movement and sometimes in the last movement of concertos.
- The **second movement** of concertos feature beautiful, song-like melodies and slow tempos. This slow middle movement may use any of a number of different forms, often ABA or theme & variations.
- The **third movement** of a concert is usually a quick tempo piece in rondo, sonata-rondo, or sonata form. Sometimes another cadenza is heard in a third movement.

**SONATA** is a multi-movement work for solo piano or for solo instrument with piano.

**STRING QUARTET** is the name given to an ensemble of two violins, one viola, and one cello and is also the name of a multi-movement work composed for this ensemble. Usually four movements in an arrangement similar to the symphony.

**VARIOUS OTHER CHAMBER MUSIC FORMS** including piano trio, woodwind quintet, brass quintet, and various other small ensembles and multi-movement works composed for them.

**OPERA** continued in the classical period as an important musical form. Two types of opera were important in the classical period: **opera seria** was the traditional tragic opera often dealing with stories about Greek and Roman heroes and gods. **Opera buffa** (comic opera) was filled with humor and fun.

### NOTABLE FEATURES OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

**Balance and symmetry**

**Focus on form (Development of themes)**

**Absolute music (music for its own sake)**

**Sonata form developed**

**Chamber music was very important**

**Opera was very important**

**Development of opera buffa**

**Symphony orchestra was established**

**Piano replaced the harpsichord**

**Continuo no longer used**

**Tuneful melodies comprised of short phrases**

**Mostly homophonic texture**

**Careful attention to the use of keys**