

The Classical Period (1750 – 1820)

We hear people today use the term *classical music* to mean any type of Western art music. In music history, we use this term to refer to a specific type of Western art music, namely the works of **Haydn**, **Mozart** and **Beethoven**. The time during which these composers were active is what we call the **Classical Period**. Music of this era is obsessed with structural clarity, balance, and form.

In the Baroque and Classical periods, there was a growing emphasis on a single melody placed in the upper part of a composition and accompanied by chords in the lower part. This produced a **homophonic texture** with a clear tonic-dominant **functional harmony**. The melodies typically consist of short themes, in four or eight measure phrases. Cadences occur with more frequency and typically closed with the IV-V-I progressions.¹

Before we move on however, it is important to look at the cultural currents of the time in order to understand why composers of the Classical era composed the way they did.

This was the period where the **Age of Enlightenment** (1687-1793) really began to take hold.² The Enlightenment emphasized that reason (i.e. logic, mathematics, and the scientific method) was the key to human knowledge and progress. While it tolerated religion, it criticized superstition, the Church, and monarchies. These political philosophies were embraced by the supporters of the **American Revolution** (1775-1783) and incorporated by America's Founders into the **United States Constitution** (1787). The result was the first national government in history to be founded upon *representative rule by the People* instead of rule by a monarch, deity, or religious institution.

This is not to say that the Enlightenment is all logic and no fun. It merely provided a structure through which individuals could practice freedom of thought and imagination while still working together in a society. This is the purpose of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

It is also one of the best ways to describe the music of the Classical Period. It provided structural clarity and form as a framework with which composers could let their imaginations run free. To put it another way, it is a balance between *reason* and *emotion*.³

Sonata form

No form illustrates this balance better than the **sonata form**. It is in fact THE form of classical music. If you learn nothing else in this guide, learn how to identify sonata form! It is everywhere. It is used in piano works, orchestral compositions, trios, quartets, etc. While it is true that an entire multi-movement composition for piano is called a sonata, sonata form generally refers to the first movement (although the *second* and *fourth*

¹ Did you ever wonder how you could sometimes predict what chord was going to come next in a piece of music you had never heard? It is because much of the music shared the same chord progressions.

² The dates of the Age of Enlightenment begin with the publication of Isaac Newton's book on mathematics and ends with the **Reign of Terror** during which *populist mob rule* slaughtered thousands of people during the French Revolution.

³ When we classify something (like I am doing in this guide), we put it into a structure or category to gain understanding, a reference point. Imagination and emotion is the "...exception to the rule."

movements can also be in sonata form). Of course the terms of what we call sonata form was invented and developed later by mid-19th century music scholars.

Sonata form has *three* (3) essential elements, the **exposition**, the **development**, and the **recapitulation**.

The **exposition** is the first section which presents *two opposing themes*. The **primary theme** is introduced in the tonic (I) and is connected to a **secondary theme** which is in the dominant (V). These two themes are connected by way of a **transitional bridge**. Following the secondary theme are a series of **closing themes**. The entire exposition is usually repeated so that the listener has another chance to remember the themes.

The **development** is the middle part of sonata form. This is where all the really fun stuff happens. Now that the listener knows the themes, the composer starts to disassemble them, reassembles the smaller parts in different ways all while modulating through different keys.

The **recapitulation** (literally return to the ‘head’) is a restatement of the exposition. It is replayed but this time both themes are played in the tonic and often adds new thematic material and variations.

Sonata forms are sometimes sandwiched between an *introduction* and a *coda*. The **introduction** occurs before the exposition and usually moves at a slower rhythmic pace before the allegro exposition. The **coda** appears at the tail end of the work. It sometimes uses earlier material in an effort to “tie up the loose ends.”

When taken as a whole, sonata-allegro form is structured much like one would write an essay: *introduction, thesis, body, conclusion, closing remarks*.

| Sonata Form | Intro (optional) | Exposition (A) | | | | Development (B) | Recap (A') | Coda (optional) |
|------------------------------|------------------|----------------|------------|--------------|----------------|--|---|-----------------|
| | | First theme | Transition | Second theme | Closing themes | | | |
| Harmony in <u>major</u> keys | Anything | I | (I-V) | V | V | Fragments of themes Anything goes but often cycle of 5ths | 1 st , 2 nd , closing themes I | Loose ends I |
| Harmony in <u>minor</u> keys | | i | (i-III) | III | III | anything | i | i |
| Essay form | Intro | Thesis | | | | Body | Conclusion | Remarks |

You may have also noticed that sonata form is really just an elaborate **rounded-binary form** (i.e. A-B-A') - A' is a modified version of A.

With a form like this in place, composers could use any number of techniques to relate natural feelings and subjective expression. A move toward expression set the groundwork for the period of Romanticism which dominated the 19th century.

Creating Classical Melodies: Musical Period and Sentence

Two essential forms dominate the structure of melodies and themes. One is called the **period**, the other is called the **sentence**.

A **period** is a complete musical thought made up of two phrases. It is likened to a question and answer in language. In music, the *question* is called the **antecedent** and the chordal harmony moves from I-V. This is called a **half-cadence** (it indicates that the *thought* is unfinished, it is half way through). The *answer* is the **consequent phrase**, and it typically moves from V-I. This is called an **authentic-cadence**. In the perfect textbook example, if the antecedent is 2 measures long, the consequent will be 2 measures long. Add them together and the period, in this example, equals 4 measures.

| | Antecedent | | Consequent | |
|----------------|------------|----------|------------|----------|
| Chord | I | V | V | I |
| Example | C | G | G | C |

A **sentence** is slightly more complicated. It starts with a short **motif** (i.e. the smallest unit of musical material) on the **I chord** which is transposed and repeated immediately on **V chord**. After this a sort of “mini-development” occurs until the entire theme closes off with a **V-I** authentic cadence.

| motif | motif (repeated) | mini-development | cadence |
|-------|------------------|------------------|---------|
| I-V | V-I | I-anything | V-I |
| C-G | G-C | C- | G-C |

Familiarizing yourself with these forms will greatly aid you in listening to music. The more practice you have at listening, the better you will understand.

Classical Period ca. 1750-1820

| Date | Events in Music | Other Events in History |
|------|--|---|
| 1750 | J.S. Bach dies 1750 W.A. Mozart born 1756 Symphony no. 1 (Haydn) 1759 | Benjamin Franklin builds lighting conductor 1752 <i>Candide</i> written by Voltaire 1758 |
| 1760 | Essay on the True Art of Keyboard (C.P.E Bach) 1762 Concertino in D (Albrechtsberger) 1765 | George III King of England (1760-1820) Slave trade attracts criticism |
| 1770 | Beethoven is born 1770 <i>History of Music</i> published by Burney 1776 | American War of Independence (1775-1783) <i>Declaration of Independence</i> signed 1776 |
| 1780 | Mozart moves to Vienna <i>Don Giovanni</i> (Mozart) 1787 | <i>Memorial and Remonstrance</i> by James Madison, advocating separation of Church and State. (1785) <i>U.S. Constitution</i> replaces the <i>Articles of Confederation</i> (1787) |
| 1790 | <i>The Magic Flute</i> (Mozart) 1791 Mozart dies 1791 Beethoven moves to Vienna 1792 <i>Sextet in Eb</i> (Beethoven) 1797 | French Revolution begins 1789 <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Women</i> by Mary Wollstonecraft, 1792 Napoleon seizes power in France (1799) |
| 1800 | <i>Symphony No. 2</i> (Beethoven) 1802 <i>Choral Fantasy</i> (Beethoven) 1808 | Louisiana Purchase (1803) Vienna invaded by Napoleon’s forces (1805) Goethe begins writing <i>Faust</i> (1808-1832) |
| 1810 | Haydn dies 1809 Symphonies 7 & 8 (Beethoven) 1812 | Napoleon forced to abdicate 1814 <i>Frankenstein</i> written by Mary Shelley (1815) |
| 1820 | Symphony No. 9 (Beethoven) 1824 | <i>The Rosetta Stone</i> is deciphered (1822) |

Johann Georg Albrechtsberger

Concertino in D

Name: Johann Georg Albrechtsberger
Pronunciation: Yo-hahn Gay-org Al-brecks-burger
Dates: February 3, 1736 – March 8, 1809
Nationality: Austrian
Testable Title: *Concertino in D*
Date Composed: ca. 1765
Genre: Classical Concertino
Instrumentation: Orchestra, Jaw Harp, Guitar
Listen for: ritornello form, theme 1 and theme 2
Compare with: Mozart, Saint-George, Morricone, Baroque



Patience, diligence, persistence, and sincerity will lead to success - Beethoven

When Beethoven moved to Vienna he met **Franz Josef Haydn** with whom he briefly studied. As the story goes, Haydn recommended that if Beethoven REALLY wanted to learn how to compose, that he should study with the best composition instructor in Vienna. That man was Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, the Kapellmeister and Organist of **St. Stephen's Cathedral**.

Johann Georg Albrechtsberger was born in the town of **Klosterneuberg** near Vienna. He became a noted music theorist and contrapuntalist (i.e. he really knew how to write and improvise fugues!). In fact Beethoven's famous **Grosse Fuge** string Quartet is based upon an Albrechtsberger thematic subject.

Albrechtsberger was also considered the best living organist in Europe. His many works include vocal works, sonatas, preludes, fugues (and a lot of them) and concerti. His *Concertino in D* is one of at least seven known Concerti he wrote for Jaw Harp, Guitar and string orchestra. Although this concertino is often today performed on the trumpet, it is nice to be able to hear it as Albrechtsberger intended it. After you have gotten over the novelty of this instrumental choice, listen as you did with the monophonic chant and medieval songs – In other words pay attention to how the mouth shape affects the resonance, timbre, and other musical elements.

This concertino pre-dates the type of concerto associated with Mozart and owes much to Baroque concerto forms and therefore might be considered a transitional piece bridging the Baroque and Classical eras. The **ritornello** is the “return” the equivalent of the exposition which introduces the musical themes to be addressed. Notice that in the final ritornello, all of the instruments trade the themes.

| Ritornello | Solo Episode 1 | | Ritornello 2 | Solo Episode 2 | Ritornello 3 |
|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Strings and Guitar | Jaw Harp Theme 1 | Guitar Theme 2 | Strings | Jaw Harp & Guitar | Tutti |
| 0:00 | 0:58 | 1:14 | 1:38 | 2:24 | 2:58 |

Joseph-Boulogne Chevalier de Saint-Georges

Symphony in D

Name: Chevalier de Saint-Georges
Pronunciation: Sahn-zjorj
Dates: December 25, 1745 – June 10th, 1799
Nationality: French
Testable Title: *Symphony in D*
Date Composed: 1787
Genre: Classical Symphony
Instrumentation: Orchestra
Listen for: sonata form
Compare with: Albrechtsberger, Mozart, Beethoven



Joseph-Boulogne Chevalier de Saint-Georges was a world class athlete, virtuoso violinist, composer and conductor. He was born on the French island colony of **Guadeloupe** in the Caribbean to a French official and a slave of African descent. His father spared no expense in providing his son with every opportunity available to further his son's education and social status, so in 1749 they moved to Paris. Here Saint-Georges took up horseback riding and fencing and soon became regarded as the best swordsman in Europe putting on demonstrations for royalty.

Saint-Georges was known equally for his prowess in military affairs, leading a black militia during the **French Revolution** only to be himself the subject of hatred when Napoleon tried to reinstitute slavery in the French colonies, as he was for his role as a conductor and composer of opera, symphony and violin concerti – the latter to suit his demands as virtuoso violinist.

His *Symphony in D* later served as the overture to his Opera, *L'Amant Anonyme*. It is in three movements the first in sonata form:

| Exposition | | | | Development | Recapitulation |
|------------|---------|----------------|--------|-------------|----------------|
| Theme 1 | Theme 2 | Closing Themes | repeat | | Theme 2 |
| 0:00 | 0:24 | 0:47 | 1:05 | 2:10 | 2:39 |

2nd movement: Andante (3:24) – notice the call and response between the upper and lower voices, it also leads unbroken into the third movement.

3rd movement: Presto (5:00)

The 3rd movement is organized with a rounded binary form (cdc) sandwiched between the a binary (ab) creating a larger rounded binary form (ABA).

| A | | B | | | A | |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| a | b | c | d | c | a | b |
| 5:00 | 5:16 | 5:41 | 5:58 | 6:32 | 6:51 | 7:06 |

Notice the pizzicato (plucking the string instead of bowing) in the c section.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

O Zittre Nicht from *Die Zauberflöte*

Name: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Pronunciation: VOOLF-gong ah-mah-DAY-oos MOH-tsart
Dates: b. January 25, 1756; d. December 5, 1791
Nationality: Austrian
Testable Title: *O Zittre Nicht*
Date Composed: 1791
Genre: Aria
Instrumentation: Orchestra and Coloratura
Listen for: Recitative and Aria
Compare with: Baroque, Saint-Georges, Albrechtsberger



Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is undoubtedly one of the most recognized names in classical music. He was born in **Salzburg**, (now in Austria) in 1756. His father, **Leopold**, a respected court musician in the service of the **Archbishop of Salzburg**, taught music to him and to his elder sister Maria Anna (“**Nannerl**”) from an early age.

Mozart began playing piano by ear at age four after witnessing the lessons his father gave to Nannerl. In the following year he began composing, and by six he performed for the **Empress of Austria**. From here he began a thirteen-year touring schedule which took him across Europe, absorbing the styles of French composers, Italian opera, and even traveled to England to study with **Johann Christian Bach** (one of J. S. Bach’s sons).

Leopold secured a position for his son in the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg, but Wolfgang’s independent nature rejected the idea of being a servant to another man. He decided to strike out on his own and moved to the great musical city of **Vienna** in 1781. He had some success as a piano teacher, performer, and composer but his inability to manage his finances resulted in illness and ultimately his death.

Mozart completed over 600 compositions and his most innovative stem from the years he spent in Vienna. In the 19th century, Ludwig von **Köchel** (KUH-shall) made the first attempt to catalogue Mozart’s compositions in chronological order. Because of this, the letter K is used to distinguish the compositions.

Die Zauberflöte

Premiering in Vienna on September 30, 1791, *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte*) is one of the last works Mozart composed for the stage. It is a **singspiel** (sing-speak) that is play with both spoken dialogue and a large number of musical works such as arias, recitatives, ensemble numbers and choruses. These forms have been used in opera, oratorios and cantatas for many years before Mozart, but a quick review.

For this work Mozart collaborated with his friend **Emanuel Schikaneder** who wrote the text. Although much has been made in the past that the *Die Zauberflöte* is a work full of Masonic metaphors and secret messages (both Mozart and Schikaneder belonged to the

same Freemason Lodge), noted musicologist David Buch has convincingly shown that assertion to be overblown. His research demonstrates that the work owes more to the tradition of fantasy / folk plays staged in Vienna around the same time. Nevertheless it is a pretty ‘trippy’ work.

The role of the **Queen of the Night** contains the highest notes in the standard vocal repertoire. To sing this role effectively, artistic directors must employ a singer who is a high note specialist. In other words they need to be able to sing florid-melismatic runs above high c with no effort. These vocalists whose range is higher than the average virtuoso soprano are called **coloraturas**. There is nothing quite like hearing the beauty of a coloratura live (fortunately I married one) but since they have such a rare quality I am providing you with the next best thing, an early 1950s live performance from Salzburg.

O Zittre Nicht (O Fear Not) is a difficult aria for even the most accomplished singer/actresses to pull off. We tend to get spoiled from recorded music where every detail has been corrected and (“sterilized”) that we miss the human effort it takes to go one pass through.

In this aria, the Queen (coloratura) enlists the aid of **Prince Tamino** to rescue her innocent daughter, **Pamina**, from the clutches of the evil **Sarastro** (bass). In this aria she desperately pleads with him as any loving mother would. Funny thing is, up through Mozart’s time, the roles of the good heroes and heroines were typically sung by tenors and sopranos, and in this aria it seems that he is doing just that. The Queen sings super high and therefore must be good. Mozart however turns this whole idea on its head and we later find out things and people aren’t always who they seem to be...as we find out in Act II with her famous aria of vengeance, *Der Holle Rache*.

| min:sec | genre and text indicators | Key area |
|---------|--|--------------------|
| 0:00 | Intro – Allegro Maestoso | Bb |
| 0:23 | Recitative – <i>O Zittre Nicht...</i> | Bb modulates to... |
| 1:24 | Aria – <i>Zum leiden bin...</i> | g minor |
| 4:00 | Allegro Moderato – <i>Du, du, du...</i> | Bb |
| 4:34 | Coloratura passage (“dann”) (f above high C) | Bb |

An **aria** is typically a strophic composition based upon a metered (poetic) text. It usually serves as the vehicle to express a characters emotion.

A **recitative** is typically a through-composed composition often accompanied by a continuo instrument (**dry recitative**) or with the orchestra (**accompanied recitative**). It usually serves as the vehicle to further the plot or express everyday ordinary speech in a “recitation” style. It is also a very usefully way to modulate from one key to another. To think of it another way, open up any text book and sing the words.

Arioso is a slightly more melodic passage than the recitative and often serves as the transitional bridge between the recitative and the aria.