

CLASSICAL MUSIC INTRODUCTION: PART 1 NEW STYLE

INTRODUCTION

The dates of the Classical Period in Western music are generally accepted as being between 1750 to 1820. To extend the dates of this period, the Classical Period can also encompass all Western music, especially that of the sixteenth to the nineteenth. The Classical Period of music falls between the Baroque and Romantic periods, and can also be referred to as the Viennese Classic or Classicism. Ludwig Van Beethoven is generally regarded as the composer to mark the end of the Classical Period of music, and the start of the Romantic Period.

NEW STYLE: CLASSICISM

A new style was sought in architecture, literature and the arts, which sought to emulate the ideals of Classical antiquity and especially those of Classical Greece. Composers of this style wanted “cleaner music”, music that has cleaner divisions between parts, brighter contrasts and colours, and simplicity. They wanted music to have a clear structure, and did not want music to sound dense or heavy. Therefore, a simple melody and accompaniment (homophony) was preferred, creating a clearer tonal structure.

ECONOMIC INFLUENCES

Many changes took place regarding economic order and social structure. One change was that the nobility became the primary patrons of instrumental music, and there was a rise in the public taste for comic opera. This led to two important changes in musical performance: standard instrumental groups were more prevalent and the reduction in the importance of the continuo, the harmonic fill beneath the music. Another major change was that more music was notated specifically, leaving less room for improvisation.

The quality of musicians and the balance of availability were two other changes due to the economy. Depending on the location of the musicians, the level of ability could be more fixed. In this case, the music would have to be written depending on the level of the musicians available.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

Music of the Classical Period was much more expressive than that of Baroque. Creating simpler music made instrumental detail more important and placed more importance on rhythm on establishing and unifying the tone of a single movement.

The creation of the symphony was born; as well forms such as the concerto and sonata were more heavily defined and given more specific rules. More emphasis was placed on virtuosic ability of a solo performer; in this regard, the concerto grosso (a concerto for more than one musician) was replaced by the solo concerto (a concerto featuring only one soloist), although there were works still written for the concerto grosso.

MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

As mentioned before, the texture of Classical music is less dense, lighter, cleaner, and less complex than of Baroque music. It is mainly homophonic (melody above chordal accompaniment). More expression and emotion is shown in regard to dynamics as well as frequent changes of mood and timbre. Music was also more explored in melody, use of multiple keys and rhythms. Melodies tended to be shorter than those of Baroque music, with clear-cut phrases and clearly marked cadences.

Other changes included the instruments included in the orchestra and the types of music performed. The size and range of the orchestra increased, the harpsichord continuo fell out of use (was replaced by the piano) and the woodwinds became a self-contained section. More focus was given to instrumental music. The development of sonata form was the most important form, used to build up the first movement of large-scale works, but also other movements and single pieces (such as overtures).