

The Classical Period

(ca. 1750-1825)

Characteristics of the Classical Period

- ▶ Simpler, singable melodies presented in balanced phrases (instead of an ongoing spinning-out of motives)
- ▶ Simple homophonic “melody-and-accompaniment” textures (rather than complex contrapuntal textures)
- ▶ The principle of *balance* in musical form and structure
- ▶ The use of thematic contrasts and clear tonal plans, with a firm sense of tonality
- ▶ Clarity and simplicity of expression with an objective attitude towards emotional expression
- ▶ The supremacy of instrumental music (rather than vocal), resulting in a fairly universal musical language

Composers

- ▶ **Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) [Austria]**
 - ▶ An influential composer of symphonies and string quartets
- ▶ **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) [Austria]**
 - ▶ A child prodigy and very talented composer in Vienna
- ▶ **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) [Germany]**
 - ▶ Extremely influential German composer—often viewed as the first “Romantic” composer
- ▶ **Other Classical Era composers:**
 - ▶ Carl Philipp Emanuel (C.P.E.) and Johann Christoph (J.C.) Bach (Germany), Christoph Willibald Gluck (Germany), Johann Stamitz (Czechoslovakia), Leopold Gassmann (Czechoslovakia), Louis Gossec (Belgium), Muzio Clementi (Italy), Luigi Boccherini (Italy), G. B. Sammartini (Italy), Ditters von Dittersdorf (Austria)

Principal genres and forms

- ▶ **Genres**
 - ▶ **Sonata:** a piece for solo keyboard or solo instrument with keyboard accompaniment
 - ▶ **Symphony:** a multi-movement work (usually 4 movements) for strings, winds, brass, and timpani
 - ▶ **String quartet:** a chamber work for 2 violins, viola, and cello
 - ▶ **Concerto:** a multi-movement work (usually 3 movements) for soloist and orchestra
 - ▶ **Opera:** a large-scale dramatic work for singers and orchestra
- ▶ **Forms**
 - ▶ **Sonata form:** the most pervasive form, used in many genres
 - ▶ **Rondo form:** features a recurring rondo theme