

The Classical Period

Hey! What's going on here? We've got classical music, and now we've got the classical period. What's all this about? This is confusing!

Yes it is. And like so many confusing things, it's all the fault of history. When the term 'classical music' was invented, the two 'classical' things were the same. Classical music was music from the classical period—just like baroque music is music from the baroque period. In fact, this is what some really serious musicians still mean by classical music. For these people, classical music is music from the classical period.

The classical period is between the baroque and romantic periods. This means that music from the classical period is music composed between about 1750 to 1820.

The greatest composers of the classical period are

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791).

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827).

It is important to note that the classical period ended before Beethoven died. This is because Beethoven was the one who ended it! At the end of his life, Beethoven's music was so new that it had to be called something completely different.

Other famous composers of the classical period include

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809).

Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach (1714–1788) [son of the great J. S. Bach].

So what is music from the classical period like?

Music from the classical period has a particular style. Like other styles, it is not easy to describe. The best way to understand what the style is, is to listen to the great classical composers—especially Mozart and Haydn.

Here are some of the common features you will hear in music of the classical period:

- A tune! Most music of the classical period has a clear tune. There is little of the weaving together of different tunes that you get in baroque music. This means that music from the classical period often sounds much simpler than baroque music.
- Loud one second, quiet the next (but not as much as romantic music). Music from the classical period keeps changing volume. It keeps changing in many other ways as well. You will notice these as changes of mood.
- The name! The same names keep coming up over and over again in music of the classical period. For example, you will see lots of symphonies, sonatas, and concertos. Each of these is a style all of its own!
- Another trait of the classical period was the idea of following music precisely as written and not too much improvisation. After the Baroque period, composers started to follow strict rules of music theory. Musicians were not expected to deviate from the written scores (some purists will not deviate at all – everything was performed exactly as written).